

♠♥♦♣ THINKING AHEAD ♠♥♦♣

You have dealt yourself this !NT opener:

S	South
♠	KQ4
♥	A62
♦	K73
♣	A742

Partner raises you to 3NT and West leads the ♥4. What is your plan?

N	North
♠	J1065
♥	K75
♦	QJ4
♣	K83

West leads ♥4

S	South
♠	KQ4
♥	A62
♦	K73
♣	A742

You count your top tricks – those you can take without losing the lead. You only have 4 top tricks. You can get three more spades and 2 more heart tricks once you have knocked out the aces of each suit.

You have two stoppers in West's long suit, so if you win the initial lead and lead one of the pointed suits, you play a guessing game. If the first suit is won by East, he will return another heart, using your last stopper. Then, if the second ace is in West, he will be able to clear the heart suit, taking 3 hearts to go along with the 2 aces.

On the other hand, if the first ace is won by West, he will use up East's last heart to knock out your last stopper. Then, if the second ace is won by East, he will have no more hearts to return, giving you the tempo to take your nine tricks.

This scenario is dependent on the spade and diamond aces being split, or both in East. This is more probable than both aces being in West. If they are both in West's hand, there is no way to make the hand.

Now consider how you can almost guarantee success with this hand. If, instead of winning the first heart, you hold up and let East win, he will return a his last heart which you will win. Now when you knock out the ace in the first pointed suit that East holds, he will have no more hearts. Unless both aces are in West, you will always make your contract.

Of course, if East does hold another heart, that means he started with 3 hearts; thus West started with only 4 hearts, and they can only win 2 hearts. These two tricks and the two aces are not enough to set your contract.

There is a rule that will help you figure all this out. Whenever you have two top cards to knock out, hold up on the first trick.

Look at the entire deal:

11 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ J1065 ♥ K75 ♦ QJ4 ♣ K83	P 3NT P P P
W West	E East	
♠ 32 ♥ Q10843 ♦ A852 ♣ J6	♠ A987 ♥ J9 ♦ 1096 ♣ Q1095	
	S South	
	♠ KQ4 ♥ A62 ♦ K73 ♣ A742	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/y34wtgqn> or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.