



Pat Harrington

Play & Learn

Third hand high

The bidding and partner's opening lead are shown (you are East). What play will you make on the first trick? What plan do you have for the entire deal?

♠ A K 10
♥ 2
♦ Q 5 4 2
♣ J 9 5 3 2

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|---|-----------|
| | ♠ 7 6 4 3 |
| N | ♥ J 10 6 |
| W | ♦ K 9 8 3 |
| S | ♣ 7 6 |

Opening lead: ♥ 5.

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| | | | 1NT |

| | | | |
|------|-----|----------|--|
| Pass | 3NT | All Pass | |
|------|-----|----------|--|

With this lousy East hand, your plan may be to get things over as quickly as possible. But you have an important role to play, starting with the first trick. Partner has led a low card and hopes you have some help in the suit. As third hand, your job is to do your best to try to win the trick — play “third hand high.” What card will you play?

The saying should be “third hand as high as necessary.” Play the ♥ 10. We'll see how playing the lower of touching honors helps partner later.

A good declarer will not begin his quest for his contract without a plan. Similarly, the defenders should also have some idea of how they will find

the setting tricks. Both sides will consider the same aspects of the particular deal.

As a defender, you should start by reviewing the bidding. What does it tell you about the location of high cards? South has from 15 to 17 points, and you see dummy with 10 HCP. You have only 4. There is room for partner to have between 9 and 11 HCP.

Analyze partner's opening lead (declarer should be doing so as well). A common opening lead in notrump is fourth best from a long suit, so you can expect partner to have at least four hearts. Could partner have a longer heart suit? Yes, since there are two missing cards lower than the 5 led by partner (rule of 11 — remember it?).

Could partner have high cards in hearts? Yes, but not a sequence of three touching or nearly touching high cards. We lead the top of the touching cards with that holding. So declarer must have at least one high heart. What tricks will your hand provide? Not many — maybe the ♦ K. Most of the tricks for the defense will come from partner's hand, and the best way to get them is probably to keep leading hearts in the hope of setting up partner's long suit.

If you get the lead, you will return partner's suit. Now you have a plan. You may not take enough tricks to defeat the contract, but you hope to take all the tricks you are entitled to, and that is often enough to give you a good score at duplicate pairs.

Now here's a problem for the defender on opening lead against 3NT on the same bidding sequence referred to earlier.

Choose your lead holding:

♠ 9 5 2 ♥ A Q 7 5 3 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ K 8.

With little information from the

bidding, you lead the ♥ 5.

Here's what you see:

♠ A K 10
♥ 2
♦ Q 5 4 2
♣ J 9 5 3 2

♠ 9 5 2
♥ A Q 7 5 3
♦ J 7 6
♣ K 8

You started with the ♥ 5, dummy played the 2 and partner contributed the 10. Declarer won the ♥ 10 with the king.

Do you have a plan?

When you review the bidding, you realize that partner can't have much in the way of high cards — 4 or 5 HCP at the most. That means the majority of the tricks for the defense will be up to you. How many tricks can you count if declarer has to play clubs to make 3NT? You'll win the ♣ K and have some heart tricks to win. How many heart tricks are you sure of taking? If you cash the ♥ A and ♥ Q, you can only be sure of two heart tricks because declarer could have a fourth heart. But what did partner's play to trick one tell you? It looks like partner has the ♥ J. If declarer had that card, it would be foolish to spend the king and make your ♥ Q good. So lead the ♥ 3 to partner's jack. Partner will return your lead to set the contract!

The complete deal:

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| ♠ A K 10 | |
| ♥ 2 | |
| ♦ Q 5 4 2 | |
| ♣ J 9 5 3 2 | |
| ♠ 9 5 2 | ♠ 7 6 4 3 |
| ♥ A Q 7 5 3 | ♥ J 10 6 |
| ♦ J 7 6 | ♦ K 9 8 3 |
| ♣ K 8 | ♣ 7 6 |
| | N |
| | W |
| | S |
| ♠ Q J 8 | |
| ♥ K 9 8 4 | |
| ♦ A 10 | |
| ♣ A Q 10 4 | |

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