

Crashing honours

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How would you play this 3NT? The deal turned up on Monday 30 September.

♠7653
♥AJT9
♦J
♣QT95

♠AQ2
♥K
♦AK9862
♣K84

Your auction was pretty straightforward: 1D-1H-3NT. Your LHO led ♠J and when you played low from dummy, RHO played ♠K, so you won with the ace. What now?

As declarer, one of the first things you need to do in a notrump contract is count your tricks. You have 2 spade tricks, 2 top diamonds, a heart and potentially another one if you can reach dummy in clubs, plus perhaps 2 club tricks. That's still short of the 9 tricks that you need. What's more, you only have one more spade stopper, so if that king was a singleton and LHO has a 5-card suit, things could get awkward.

Perhaps you should have ducked the first trick to find out more about the lie of the land ... anyway you didn't, so now you have to find a source of additional tricks.

Diamonds are unlikely to break 3-3 but if they are 4-2 with a doubleton honour, things will be easy – cash ♦AK, then play ♦9 to force out the remaining honour and you will have 5 diamond tricks. On that line you will have at least 9 tricks.

However, when you play ♦A, LHO drops the queen! Clearly RHO has 5 diamonds and your source of tricks now isn't ...

What about those hearts? You can't take a heart finesse so is there a better way to tackle the suit?

Yes, there certainly is – play ♥K from hand and overtake with the ace! Then play ♥J to give up a heart. When you reach dummy in clubs, which will surely be possible given the holding of ♣Q1095, you will be able to score 3 heart tricks (rather than just 2) to go with 2 spades, 2 diamonds and eventually 2 club tricks. All you have to hope for is that LHO doesn't have *both* the ♥Q and the ♣A to go with a 5-card spade suit. If s/he does, then after your spade stopper is knocked out, LHO will be able to cash 3 winning spades, which is one too many.

Fortunately for you, the two critical cards are split between the two hands. When RHO comes in with ♥Q s/he has no spade to return, as you can see from the full deal, now in its correct orientation:

BD: 30 ♠K		Dlr: E	
♥Q54		Vul: None	
♦T7543			
♣J763			
♠7653		♠AQ2	
♥AJT9		♥K	
♦J		♦AK9862	
♣QT95		♣K84	
♠JT984			
♥87632			
♦Q			
♣A2			
♣♦♥♠		N	
		T	
N			6
S		8	19
E	4 4 2 3	4	7
W	4 4 2 3	4	

There were lots of crashing honours on this deal but the most significant crash was deliberate by you, to get to dummy in hearts. That's a play worth remembering ...

