

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

	♠ A K 6 3		
	♥ 10 8 6		
	♦ Q 10 9		
	♣ A K 7		
♠ J 10 9 4		♠ Q 2	
♥ K Q 5		♥ J 9 4 3 2	
♦ 8 7 3		♦ A 6	
♣ 10 4 3		♣ J 8 5 2	
	♠ 8 7 5		
	♥ A 7		
	♦ K J 5 4 2		
	♣ Q 9 6		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 NT	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

Auction Commentary: Should be the same auction at every table.

Opening Lead: ♥ 3 (4th best from East's better major)

Planning the Play: Whether you win the first or the second round of hearts, you will set up your diamonds and hope for the best. You need the hearts to be split 4-4, or to hope for a defensive error.

Defensive Commentary: West needs to think about the opening lead before playing to the first trick. Since East led low, it should be 4th best from an honor. If they started with 5 hearts to the Jack, the defense can take 4 heart tricks total. What can go wrong? Well, if West still has either the King or the Queen as their last heart, when East wins the ♦ A, they will play a heart to West's high honor, and then....well, then that's it. East's remaining two good hearts will die on the vine.

If we want to get all of our tricks in this layout, we have to play one of our heart honors under the Ace in South's dummy. It's counter-intuitive, but we must unblock. Unblocking plays have to be thought of in advance, before the critical moment passes you by. PLAN PLAN PLAN!

Takeaway: It's the same old story; you have to pause at trick 1 and consider the possibilities. Sometimes, your high cards are liabilities, rather than assets!

Board 4

West Deals

Both Vul

♠ A K 10 2	♠ 9 6	♠ Q 8 7 5 4
♥ 8 6 4 2	♥ A 10	♥ J 9 7
♦ K Q	♦ J 10 9 7 6	♦ 5
♣ A K Q	♣ 8 7 6 5	♣ J 10 9 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ J 3	
	♥ K Q 5 3	
	♦ A 8 4 3 2	
	♣ 3 2	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 NT	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	3 NT	Pass
4 ♠	All pass		

Auction Commentary: Opening 2 NT does not promise a stopper in every suit, only 20-21 HCP in a balanced hand. When East transfers, West very nearly has a hand worth a super-accept, and could hardly be faulted for jumping directly to game. Consider an East hand as weak as ♠ xxxxx ♥ xx ♦ xxx ♣ xxx. A Yarborough, and East needs only spades to be 2-2 to make a game. Some Easts will make a conservative pass over 3 ♠ with only 4 HCP and poor trumps, as 3 NT will likely be a poor contract when West has a doubleton spade.

Opening Lead: ♦ J. We have a sequence to lead from, which is usually better than trying for a ruff with honor doubleton.

Defensive Commentary: When South wins the ♦ A, he can count North for having 4 or 5 more HCP. (West showed 20-21, there are 14 between South's hand and the dummy, and we've already seen partner's ♦ J.) If partner has the ♥ A, we can likely take 3 more tricks to set the contract. When we lead the ♥ K at trick 2, North needs to overtake and return their other heart. This behavior ALWAYS shows a doubleton; with 3 or more pieces, North can just encourage. South wins the 2nd heart and returns a 3rd one for partner to ruff. One down.

If partner fails to win the first heart, they will win the second and be unable to get to partner for the last heart. Declarer will eventually pitch dummy's last heart on a diamond and make the unmakeable contract.

South should NOT underlead the ♥ KQ as a measure to prevent a sleepy North from blocking the suit. If North doesn't have ♥ A, West can win with the ♥ J, and now the defenders may not be able to take a heart trick.

Takeaway: Sometimes you go down. Try not to worry about it too much.

Board 8

West Deals
None Vul

	♠ 6 3		
	♥ Q 5		
	♦ Q 10 5 4		
	♣ K Q J 3 2		
♠ K Q			♠ 10 8 7 5 4
♥ A 10 8 7 3 2			♥ J 9
♦ 6 3 2			♦ A 9 8
♣ 9 8			♣ 10 6 5
	♠ A J 9 2		
	♥ K 6 4		
	♦ K J 7		
	♣ A 7 4		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♥	Pass	Pass	2 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

Auction Commentary: 2 NT in the balancing seat after an opening weak two-bid shows 14-16 HCP, with a stopper in the opponent's suit. North has a good 5-card minor and a piece of the heart suit and bids a game.

Opening Lead: ♥ 7

Play Commentary, version 1: If we play small from the dummy and win our King, the Queen will fall under the Ace on the next round. Without further thought, we play the Queen.

Third Hand Commentary: Using the rule of 11, East imagines partner as either ♥ AKxxxx, ♥ KT87xx or ♥ AT87xx. In the first instance, there is nothing we need to do, and in the second instance, there is nothing we can do. What about the third? What happens when East plays the ♥ 9 at trick 1, wins the ♦ A later, and returns the ♥ J? Unless you are luckier than I am, South will play low, and West has no winning option because the heart suit is blocked. What if East plays the ♥ J on the first trick, and later, returns the ♥ 9? Totally different story. Whatever South plays, West can win the trick cheaply and run the rest of the hearts. Just like when we are declarer, on defense, we still have to consider, at TRICK 1, whether or not we need to unblock to reach partner's hand. Speaking of declarer thinking at trick 1.....

Play Commentary, version 2, (the Ted version): Remember Ted from Tuesday? When Ted played this hand, he saw the same thing I did about the ♥ Q. The difference is, Ted reasoned that East was far more likely to have the ♦ A than was the pre-empting hand in the West. In that case, he realized he needed to execute the deadly hold-up play we learned about last time by playing LOW from BOTH dummy and declarer's hand at trick 1. East played his second heart, and West cleared the suit. Now, however, when East gets in with the ♦ A, it doesn't matter which heart he played at trick 1, because he was out-foxed by Ted.

Takeaway: If West had held the ♦ A, Ted would have looked foolish by not playing the ♥ Q at trick 1. You have to go with the percentages (e.g., an opening weak two bid is unlikely to hold two aces.)