

About Those Horses  
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You and partner reach 3NT on the auction P - 3C - P - 3NT; All Pass:

♠ A Q  
♥ Q J 4  
♦ K Q 10 5 4  
♣ Q 7 3



♠ 10  
♥ A 10  
♦ J 6 2  
♣ K J 10 8 6 5 2

This is a hand slightly modified from the Saturday June 15, 2024 STaC game at BCoH.

As West, Declarer, you get the lead of the heart 3. What's your plan?

### Planning

First, we count our tricks.

In top tricks, we have one spade and one heart – only two! But the heart lead gives us a potential heart trick, we can take the spade finesse, and of course, we have that long club suit that seems to provide six tricks after we knock out the ace. Diamonds will likely develop four tricks if we knock out the Ace (unless they're 5-0, but that's only 4% of the time).

So, we craft a likely path to nine tricks: We'll duck the heart (maybe North has led away from the King?), and when in, work on clubs, hoping to take at least these tricks: six clubs, two hearts, and the spade Ace.

### Playing

The Ten of hearts loses to the King, and the Nine of hearts comes back, with North playing the Deuce. We win the Ace perforce, but our Queen is a second stopper, and we're not in immediate danger from the heart suit.

We feel a bit sad that opps led a heart; that takes out our only certain entry to the club suit, should clubs split 3-0 and an opponent choose to hold up his club Ace until the third round.

We note that the heart 9 looks like South started with two or three hearts (he would lead back his original 4th best to give his partner the count of the heart suit, had he started with four or more), and the play of the three followed by the two makes it look like North started with five hearts and had led 4th best, so hearts are likely 5332 around the table.

We lead a club to our Queen at trick 3 and are disappointed when North shows out. We lead a second club to dummy's King, and South ducks again. What now?


### **Revisiting the Plan**

First, let's face reality: the club suit is dead. If we lead another club, the suit will be established when South takes his ace, but we have no entry to the suit to cash the four winners we need (we would have one spade, two hearts, and only two clubs established and cashable). If North has the diamond Ace, he will get in, and the defense will take three hearts, the club Ace, and the diamond Ace, for a one-trick set!

So, what can we do? In the old proverb, we're told, "Don't switch horses in the middle of the stream," but we know that the horse of the club suit won't get us across the stream (leads to -1), so we have no choice but to alter our plan.

We have these tricks: Ace of spades for one, the Ace of hearts in and the good Queen established for three, and two clubs for five total tricks. Where can we get four more tricks? When dummy first hit, we noted that we had the chance to develop four diamond tricks, joyfully we note that four diamond tricks are just what we need!

So, at trick five, we abandon clubs and lead a low diamond to the King. If both opponents follow, diamonds split, and we'll continue with a diamond to the Jack and then more diamonds until they take their Ace. The spade Ace is a certain entry to the remaining diamonds and the heart Queen. We take our nine tricks and go home happy. The complete deal is:

	♠ 9 5 4 2 ♥ 8 7 6 3 2 ♦ A 9 8 3 ♣	
♠ A Q ♥ Q J 4 ♦ K Q 10 5 4 ♣ Q 7 3		♠ 10 ♥ A 10 ♦ J 6 2 ♣ K J 10 8 6 5 2
	♠ K J 8 7 6 3 ♥ K 9 5 ♦ 7 ♣ A 9 4	

As declarer, don't be afraid to switch horses when it's clear that Plan A won't work!

### The "real life hand"

I modified this hand from the actual played hand by transferring a club from S to E, and a spade from E to S to make the above points clear. The hand as it was dealt is below; note that West can always make 3NT on a heart lead by counting his tricks: one spade, two hearts, two clubs, and four diamonds.

- It's easy if declarer works on diamonds first, knocking out North's entry to the hearts, but that is strictly a guess, and could be wrong if the aces are switched.
- If South ducks the club Ace, West must abandon clubs after two rounds and then develop his four diamond tricks.
- If instead, South takes his club Ace on the first or second round and knocks out West's last heart stopper, declarer must fall back on the spade finesse (two spades, two hearts, and five clubs), abandoning playing on diamonds, which leads to down one.

It takes an original spade lead to guarantee N/S can set 3NT:

Dir: North Vul: None	♠ 9 5 4 2 ♥ 8 7 6 3 2 ♦ A 9 8 3 ♣ - -	Optimum NS -100 NS 4S*-1																																		
♠ A Q ♥ Q J 4 ♦ K Q 10 5 4 ♣ Q 7 3	NORTH WEST EAST 17 SOUTH	♠ 10 3 ♥ A 10 ♦ J 6 2 ♣ K J 10 6 5 2																																		
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W	3	3	-	-	2																															

Send comments or questions to me at [PlayBridgeWithThomas@GMail.com](mailto:PlayBridgeWithThomas@GMail.com)  
 I welcome hands that would be fodder for future columns, as well as other bridge questions.