

Defence

Sitting West you pick up the following:

♠ K 9 6 5 3 2 ♥ 6 2 ♦ A 8 3 ♣ J 8

The opponents have the following auction: West North East South

| | | | |
|------|------|------|--------------|
| | | | 1NT (15-17) |
| pass | 2♣ | pass | 2♦ |
| pass | 3♦ | pass | 3NT |
| pass | pass | pass | |

You see no reason not to lead your fourth highest spade and the following dummy appears:

♠ J 10 8
♥ K Q 8 7
♦ K 10 7 5 2
♣ 7

♠ K 9 6 5 3 2

♥ 6 2

♦ A 8 3

♣ J 8

The first trick goes ♠5, J, Q, A. What are you thinking about at this point?

You should be thinking about dummy's long suit diamonds. Your major problem will be when to play the diamond ace, seeing as it is your main card outside spades and is in the suit that declarer is likely to play soon to establish some tricks.

At trick 2, declarer plays the ♥ 10 over to dummy's ♥ king in order to lead a low diamond to partners ♦9 and their ♦Q. Do you duck or do you win? What is declarer's likely diamond holding?

Solution:

In general, we like to play our aces on opponent's kings or queens, but there might be more to think about here. Given how many spades we can see, if we take our ace and set up spades, partner won't have any more to play to us later.

It also looks like partner has the ♦ J – otherwise, why would declarer bother to cross to dummy in hearts when they could have led diamonds from their hand?

The defence's best chance is surely to hope to establish the spades while you still have an entry. It's not clear what will happen next, but you must duck your ♦ Ace *smoothly* and duck again if declarer plays another diamond.

As long as partner gets in before you do and has a spade to play, the defence will be in good shape.

The full deal:

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

If you are able to duck smoothly twice, declarer is very likely to finesse the ♦ 10 on the second round, on the assumption that you might have taken the ace if you had it. In with the ♦ J, partner can return their spade and establish the suit while you still have the ♦ A.

If you take the ♦ A, that is the end of the defence no matter how declarer plays the diamond suit.

Point to remember: it is often easy to foresee the major decisions you will have early in the defence. Advance planning at trick one can help you make the best play without giving anything away.