

Difficult Hand: where will the 9th trick come from?

North

♠ A 8 3

♥ A 6 4

♦ 8 6 5

♣ 6 5 4 3

South

♠ K 5 4

♥ K 3 2

♦ A Q 4 3

♣ A K Q

The whole world ends up in 3NT in this hand, but not many would make it.

The opening lead is the ♣ J. East follows with the ♣ 7.

There are eight top tricks with a chance for a ninth in clubs if they break 3-3, something you can discover later. Your main concern is securing two diamond tricks, it looks easy enough. If East has the ♦ K, you can take at least two diamond tricks via a finesse. If diamonds are 3-3, you can always establish a second diamond trick no matter who has the king by playing diamonds three times. But there is a “best” way to go for two diamond tricks with this combination.

Play a low diamond from both hands at trick 2.

Say they win and shift to a heart. Win the king, cash the ♦ A and (assuming the ♦ K hasn't dropped) cash a second club. If both follow, try a third club. Assuming clubs are not 3-3, cross to the ♠ A and lead a diamond towards your Qx.

Why is this so great? This plays wins whenever diamonds are 3-3, whenever *East* has the ♦ K (any length) and also wins when *West* has a singleton or doubleton king (the reason why this play is better than an immediate finesse) - and let's not overlook an unlikely 3-3 club split.

The full deal:

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

You can apply somewhat the same technique with the following combination if you need *three* tricks and have a side suit entry to dummy.

	A J x x	
??		??
	K x x	

Place the ace and king and then lead low to the jack. You score three tricks whenever West has the queen, whenever East has Q x , or whenever the suit breaks 3-3.