

# TIPS FOR TOPS

BY JANE JENNINGS



- Take-out Doubles
- To Duck or Not To Duck

*All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on March 2nd, 2021, (Game 25816.)*

Bd: 17 Vul: None Dir: North	♠ KQ85 ♥ K ♦ KQ984 ♣ A43	Optimum NS 3N+1: +430
♠ JT64 ♥ T73 ♦ AT72 ♣ Q8	N W 17 E S	♠ 97 ♥ AJ9 ♦ 65 ♣ JT9765
17 7 HCP 6 10	♠ A32 ♥ Q86542 ♦ J3 ♣ K2	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 1 4 3 4 4 S 1 4 3 4 4 E - - - - W - - - -

There is a lot to consider on Board 17 this week. Let's start with the bidding. N has 17HCP, but it's not balanced, so it isn't a NT opening bid. I might as well take this opportunity to say: opening 1 NT with a singleton is not illegal, as long as the singleton is an A, a K or a Q. Anything smaller, and it is illegal. But there's no reason to stretch the rules on this one; you have 2 fine suits which you can easily show if you bid naturally. So you open 1D, and S replies 1H. Now N must show the Ss - 1S. A couple of players rebid NT, but that distorts the hand even worse than opening 1N. A 1NT rebid says it's balanced, but not strong enough for 1NT; it's the exact opposite of that. And a 2NT rebid says it's balanced and too strong for 1NT. Not true either.

After 1S, Ss hand is starting to not look as good, but a rebid is in order - 2H. This doesn't promise any extra points, but it does promise 6 Hs. You might think it's a bit conservative with 10HCP, but when the hands don't

seem to mesh well, it's good to dial back a little. In this case, N has extra and should now try 2NT and S will happily raise to 3NT.

East is on lead; the CJ stands out. This is NOT the time for 4th best 7; top of a sequence of honours is much stronger. It tells your partner you have the 10 and 9 as well - and doesn't risk giving declarer a cheap trick with the 8.

Declarer, of course, makes a plan. In NT you should consider your target, and how many tricks you have. Off the top, you have 3Ss and 2Cs. You can establish 1H, and Ds look good for 3 or 4. You should feel reasonably confident about making your contract, but you have work to do. And you will have to lose the lead twice in the process of setting up your tricks.

At this point, both declarer and defender have a chance to shine - or to go wrong. Declarer first: where should she win the first trick? That's a trick question - she shouldn't win it. She should duck once. You don't know how the Cs are divided - the lead hasn't told you that; and if they are split 4-4, it doesn't matter what you do. But if they are split unevenly (5-3 is more likely), ducking will help to break up the opponents' communication. What you are hoping is that one of the defenders will run out of Cs, so that when she later takes a trick and is on lead, she has to help you by leading something else. So declarer ducks once and takes the second C trick

with the K. And now? It's time to work on Ds.

It seems simplest to start with the J in dummy - high card from the short side first to avoid blocking the suit. W should not take the A - you can't tell whether declarer is about to try a losing finesse. When the J holds and another D is led, W needs to duck again. Aces are most effective when they capture an opponent's honour; if you pop up with it now, you are capturing "air". But if you wait, declarer is now stuck leading Ds from her hand, and both your A and your 10 will take tricks.

When W takes her first D trick, what should she lead? If declarer didn't duck the first C, of course W should lead back her partner's suit. But what if W has no more Cs? Is anybody counting? You now know that N started with 5Ds (because E showed out on the 3rd round); 4Ss (she bid them) 3Cs (they've been played twice and she still has the A). So there is only room in her hand for 1H, and that's the suit you want to lead. There is no danger in this; she doesn't have any chance of setting up that suit in dummy and getting back to cash them.

In fact, you find your partner with the A, and what should she lead next? Strangely enough - another H is best, but not just any H. If E woodenly leads another C, she will set up her long suit, but will never have a chance to use them. But if both defenders know

that N has no more Hs, then you can let declarer have her Q, and you have now set up another trick for the defenders while W still has a good D in hand. And that's why I said "not just any H". E has to lead the J, so that if declarer tries to set up the suit, W takes the 2nd defensive H trick and has the good D as the setting trick.

All this is quite complicated to follow, and there are many places to go wrong. The principle that I would like you to take on board is the idea of ducking - both on offense and on defence. If there is no need to take a trick immediately, ducking can often reap rewards by complicating the opponents' communication.

And why do I tell you you can defeat the contract when the analysis says it makes 4? Declarer can always make the contract if, when she plays Ds to hand, she inserts the 9, finessing against the 10. Should she? I can't see any good reason.

Bd: 10 Vul: All Dir: East	<p>♠ K73 ♥ KQT2 ♦ A732 ♣ Q3</p>	Optimum EW 2S+1: -140
<p>♠ QT8642 ♥ 754 ♦ Q65 ♣ K</p>	<p>N W 10 E S</p>	<p>♠ AJ5 ♥ AJ8 ♦ KT ♣ 98765</p>
<p>14 7 HCP 13 6</p>	<p>♠ 9 ♥ 963 ♦ J984 ♣ AJT42</p>	<p>♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 2 2 1 - 1 S 2 2 1 - 1 E - - - 3 - W - - - 3 -</p>

Board 10 is interesting mostly for the play. Most E/Ws got into Ss; a few got overboard. But in matchpoints the difference between making 2 and making 3 is the difference between a bad board and a good board.

E, of course, opened the bidding 1C, S passed and W responded 1S. Half of the Ns passed, so let's follow that route first. E rebid 1NT, showing a balanced hand with a minimum opening strength - about 12-14. Ws hand is minimum for a responder, with only 7 HCP, but she does have a 6-card suit. E has shown a balanced hand, which should include a couple of Ss, so W must now bid 2S - a better contract

than 1N if there is an 8-card "golden" fit. The key here is to recognize that the 2S bid does not promise any extra points; it is only trying for a safer part-score. E still has the same minimum that she already indicated, and has no reason to do anything but pass. 2S is a fine final contract.

Let's go back to Ns first call. N had opening strength, but both opponents had bid by the time she had a chance to get into the auction. What should she do? She can't bid a suit - that requires at least 5 - but what she can do is make a take-out double. After (1C) p (1S), double shows a hand with opening points and support for the unbid suits. It asks partner to bid one of the other suits. In this case, Cs and Ss have been bid; N has 4 Hs and 4 Ds, which is good support for whichever of those suits partner chooses. In this case, if E passes, S is forced to bid, and would choose Ds - her 4-card suit.

What should E do if N doubles? There's no reason not to go ahead and bid the 1NT you were planning. You would have to avoid this if you didn't have both H and D stopped, but you may as well tell partner that you do. S is now "off the hook"; some might still try a 2D bid, but it's not recommended. It's not a good thing that your points are in the opponent's suit, and you don't particularly want a D lead if you end up defending. W should still rebid her Ss, as previously indicated.

How should the play go in Ss? The outstanding lead is the HK - the top of a (broken) sequence. Anything else risks giving W a cheap trick. In this case, you are sorry to see the AJ in dummy, but you haven't given declarer anything she couldn't have done herself.

Look at the hand from declarer's perspective and make a plan. With this lead, you can make 2 H tricks, scoring the A and the J - as long as you can lead toward the J. So that leaves 1 H loser. You may have to lose the SK, but you can pick it up if it's in the N hand - and if you can lead towards dummy. You have to lose at least 1 D

trick, and you may lose 2 unless you can ruff your 3rd D. And your C is a loser. That's 4 or 5 tricks to lose. The catch is: how to get to your hand? Leading either a H or a S will cost you, so it's a C or a D.

What do you know about the missing high cards? If N doubled at your table, you know they have a stronger hand than S. You can assume that more of the high cards are there. But the opponents have 20 points between them, and if they were all in the N hand, she would have bid more, so S rates to have a good card or 2. You hope it's not the SK, but it could be either A.

What I would suggest for trick 2 is a little petty thievery. Lead a C from the board. If S has the A, will she know she has to take it right now? It's usually a better defensive play for the second hand to play a low card, but this time, that backfires. There is no guarantee with this play, but it's worth a shot, and it doesn't cost anything to try. But there is a reason to do this now: good defenders learn about the hand as more cards are played. Your best chance of sneaking one by is to do it early on, before they have figured out the shape of your hand.

What comes next will depend on what S does. The best defence, assuming she has taken her A, is to return partner's lead - a H to the Q that partner promised. After that, W can get to her hand by ruffing a C, and then will be in a position to lead trumps and pick up Ns K. Be careful; lead a high trump, so you are still in your hand to lead again if N doesn't cover. It turns out you need all 3 Ss in dummy to pick up Ns 3, so you end up losing 2Ds, along with 1H and the AC - making 3, as planned, for a better-than-average board.

I will look for more takeout doubles next week. They are the sort-of flip side of overcalls; both allow you to get involved in the bidding when the opponents get there first. But, in both cases, it's important for partner to know how to advance the auction to convey the strength of your hand.