

**Odds and IMPs
By Roger Lord**

Dealer: South

Vul: None

	North		
	♠ Q5		
	♥ 75		
	♦ AKJ7643		
	♣ 43		
West		East	
♠ J83		♠ K1092	
♥ Q962		♥ A83	
♦ Q1098		♦ ---	
♣ Q7		♣ K98652	
	South		
	♠ A764		
	♥ KJ104		
	♦ 52		
	♣ AJ10		

South	West	North	East
1 Club	Pass	1 Diamond	Pass
1 Notrump	Pass	3 Notrump	All Pass

Contract: Three Notrump

Opening Lead: Heart Deuce

Look only at the North-South hands. After South opens one club and North responds one diamond, South faces a recurring rebid decision. Should he bid one notrump, describing his hand as balanced and limiting it to a minimum range of 12-14 HCP, while skipping four-card majors (horrors!)? Alternatively, should he rebid one heart, which would be ambiguous as to shape (balanced, semi-balanced or unbalanced) with high cards from a minimum through just under jump shift strength (12-18 HCP)?

We favor one notrump. One additional factor is that, after one club – pass – one diamond, when you rebid one of a major, your partner knows that you have at least four clubs. Whether or not you approve, let's say South does rebid one notrump. Counting on the diamond suit for plenty of tricks, North leaps directly to three notrump.

West leads the heart deuce, East wins the ace and returns the heart eight. The match being played is scored in IMPs, as in a Swiss team or knockout. (As you probably are aware, the odds favor the usual strategy with IMP scoring -- to ensure your contract if that could be accomplished, after which any overtricks would be a secondary bonus.) What is your line of play?

If you can take at least six diamond tricks, you can add the king of hearts and two aces for the needed nine. First, take care not to play low on the heart at trick two, to prevent LHO from winning the queen and switching menacingly to a spade before diamonds are set up. You win the heart king and lead a diamond toward dummy. When LHO follows with the queen, how do you continue? Instead, if LHO follows to the first diamond with the ten, what do you play from dummy?

If you cover the queen, or if you cover the ten with the jack for a finesse, you will establish the diamond suit with the needed entry-- unless the suit splits 4-0, in which case, once you take the third diamond, the curtain will be drawn across dummy's remaining four diamonds. Once West does not show out on the first diamond, the prudent declarer should make a safety play – he should duck the first diamond totally, whether the queen or any other diamond appears.

In that way, you may lose an overtrick, but you will be able to handle any combination for six tricks in the suit. When RHO shows out, you can next take a proven finesse, whereas if both hands have followed, you can simply continue the ace and king. By the way, West's play of the queen from Q1098 would be a memorable falsecard, whether it works or whether declarer counteracts it with the safety play.

In a pairs game scored in matchpoints, it is not clear whether to make the safety play or an alternative play of a first-round finesse or a first-round play of the ace followed by a second-round guess. The choice depends on frequency of occurrence and the likely matchpoint result for various outcomes. "Feel of the table" also can matter. Nonetheless, it may be worthwhile to go against the odds, since playing for a 4-0 split would provide satisfaction beyond the measly top score if it succeeds and would be worth the try despite the near-bottom score if it does not.