

The First Trick



By Mick Riccio

dynamick747@gmail.com

As I have said many times, many contracts fail due to careless play at the first trick. Often, this follows the failure to make a plan. Apparently, there is a tension to play quickly for fear of looking stupid when you pause to think about it, or thinking that you are irritating your opponents by taking a moment to ponder.

Most experts take from one to two minutes to analyze and plan before playing to the first card. Even when the play to the first trick is obvious to everyone, you should still wait to play it until you have performed the necessary analysis. If you play immediately there is a subconscious impetus to continue playing without the proper analysis.

Following this guideline, you will almost always avoid the following pitfalls:

Winning the trick in the wrong hand.

Ducking the first trick instead of winning it.

Winning the first trick instead of ducking it.

Failing to unblock from one hand or the other.

NOT winning the trick with a higher card than necessary in order to preserve a later entry to one hand or the other.

Taking an unnecessary finesse.

Not taking a necessary finesse.

Failing to count winners at No Trump and losers at suit contracts.

Failure to analyze the lead and playing too quickly.

Further considerations:

Gleaning information from the auction:

Who bid?

What did they bid.

What cards are likely to be in the hand that bid.

How does this help you decide which way to finesse.

What could be left in the remaining hand.

Adverse bidding helps you more often than not.

Did the overcaller's partner raise the suit?

Inferences from the opening lead:

You are playing 3NT as the auction went 1NT – 3NT, your Left Hand Opponent has led the ♦2, you played small from the dummy and your Right Hand Opponent plays the ♦Q, your diamonds look like this:

North (Dummy)

♦854

South (Declarer, you)

♦AK10

What do you infer?

LHO has led from Jxxx, RHO played the Queen and has therefore denied having the Jack.

LHO has no 5 card suit

LHO has no decent 4 card Major. ♣