



Eric Kokish
kokish-kraft@rogers.com

Dear Eric,
Playing in the Silver Ribbon Pairs at the NABC, I was dealt:

♠A J 9 5 4 ♥J 6 3 2 ♦Q 8 ♣7 2.

At favorable vulnerability, I opened 2♠ in third seat, and my left-hand opponent bid 3NT to end the auction.

Partner led the ♥K and dummy appeared:

♠8 3 2 ♥7 4 ♦J 6 3 ♣Q J 9 4 3.

Which heart is correct for me to play? Assuming you play the ♥6 and declarer plays the ♥8, what is partner's correct play at trick two from ♥A K 10 9 5?

Jay Levy

That's a loaded question because your honor lead agreements and signals versus notrump are crucial here. The first order of business is to identify the holdings partner might have for ace/king/queen leads, and which signal third hand is "expected" to give in each case.

For example, the most popular expert agreements these days are: (1) ace from "weaker" ace-king holdings (or ace without the king), looking for an attitude signal; (2) king from strong holdings, asking for count or unblock; (3) queen from weaker king-queen holdings such as K-Q-x or perhaps K-Q-9-x (K-Q-10-x is marginal), again looking for attitude.

Our Readers Ask

Third hand encourages when holding the jack or ace.

Whether partner should lead the ace or king from A-K-10-9-x is a judgment call. Although he doesn't mind the unblock of the jack, and doesn't particularly want to see an unblock of the queen, a count signal would help him on many occasions, so leading the "strong" king will have appeal. On the other hand, he'd like to know whether third hand holds Q-x-x, so there is a case for leading the ace instead, to ask for attitude because third hand would encourage with that holding. Thus, there is no certain solution.

It's interesting to note that players who give only count information might get this one right.

In your partnership, I suspect the ace asked for count/unblock and the king for attitude, so the best you could do was what you did. The rest was a guess for partner, who had to play you for either J-x-x-x or Q-x-x, your weak-two style in third seat playing some role, perhaps.

Dear Eric,
Please help with a small difference of opinion. Is there a consensus approach on how to advance after a balancing 1NT? Should you play "system on"? I am from the "no system" side of things, but some seem to think there is merit to playing transfers and such. I also play that a cuebid is Stayman if looking for a major fit.

Len Doerksen, Winnipeg MB

The way I prefer to play follows, but I'm sure there is no consensus on this complex subject:

Our re-opening 1NT covers a wide variety of hands. Nominal range is about 11-16 HCP, but 17 might be acceptable over one of a major and

an awful 18 would not be outrageous over 1♠. It's the nature of the hand that is most important, and a stopper in opener's suit is *not* a requirement. If a shape-suitable takeout double or a normal-looking overcall is possible, prefer that to 1NT, but especially when the hand contains only a five-card suit in a balanced hand and the overcall would be at the two-level, prefer 1NT by a wide margin.

Advancer bids as follows (x = any suit, M = major):

West	North	East	South
1x	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	?		

- 2♣: the *only* force; asks for range and four-card major(s).
- other 2x (including a cuebid): intended as signoffs
- 2NT: minors, even if opener's suit is a minor; weak, or 5-5 or longer and game forcing.
- 3x (including jump cuebid): invitational, inappropriate for a direct overcall

West	North	East	South
1x	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♣ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	?

(1) See above.

- 2♦: no major, minimum.
- 2M: four-card or longer major, minimum.
- 2NT: maximum (continuations below).
- 3M: five-card major, maximum.

West	North	East	South
1x	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT ⁽¹⁾
Pass	?		

(1) Maximum.

- 3♣: Stayman.
- 3♦: transfer.
- 3♥: transfer.
- 3♠: asks for stopper in suit opened.