

348. GNT District Finals

Playing on the editor's team in the GNT District finals against resourceful opponents, I hold:

♠ 10 6 4 2 ♡ A ◇ A Q 8 2 ♣ A K 5 4

With no one vulnerable, West, on my right, deals and opens **one heart**. I **double**, and East jumps to **three hearts**, preemptive. Partner **doubles**, which we play as responsive showing upwards to 10 points with an emphasis on the minors. With this hand I am going to game and the question is whether I have better chances in three notrump or five of a minor. If partner has the right seven points, I have nine top tricks, so I try **three notrump**. Everyone passes. The full auction:

West	North	East	South
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3♥	Dbl	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

West leads the ♡10 and I am happy that I didn't go adventuring into a minor at the five level:

♠ K 7 4
♡ J 5 4
◇ K 6 3
♣ Q J 6 3

♡10 led

♠ 10 6 4 2
♡ A
◇ A Q 8 2
♣ A K 5 4

I play low from dummy and win my ♡A. If diamonds break, I have nine tricks. East will have the top hearts and the ace of spades for his opening bid. I check their convention card and note they are playing Flannery; therefore, he has three spades at most. My plan is to check on the minors by playing clubs. I play four rounds ending in dummy. West follows all four times and East throws the eight and jack of spades and a heart, the last card with some reluctance.

The count is almost an open book. East began with 3=5=4=1 and remains with three winning hearts, a diamond guard, and the ace of spades. I lead a spade to East's bare ace, and I have nine tricks.

The full deal:

	♠ K 7 4		
	♡ J 5 4		
	◇ K 6 3		
	♣ Q J 6 3		
♠ Q 9 3		♠ A J 8	
♡ 10 9 6 3		♡ K Q 8 7 2	
◇ 7 4		◇ J 10 9 5	
♣ 10 9 8 7		♣ 2	
	♠ 10 6 4 2		
	♡ A		
	◇ A Q 8 2		
	♣ A K 5 4		

On the run of the clubs, East was bound to come under pressure. He was marked with the key values in the three side suits. So although he had five winners after the opening lead, his hand was flawed by his need to keep all his diamonds. An alternative strategy for him would have been to throw two hearts and a spade. Now declarer simply continues with his plan to develop the king of spades by leading low spades.

Considerably later in the match, I am the dealer and pick up this hand with both sides vulnerable:

♠ A J 8 5 4 2 ♡ 10 9 ◇ 8 6 4 ♣ A 3

I am not fond of opening weak two bids with two aces, but this hand otherwise has the classical qualifications, so I open **two spades**. Everyone passes so I have bought the bid after this auction:

South	West	North	East
2♠	All Pass		

West leads the king of hearts and partner's dummy is about what I expected:

♠ K
 ♥ J 6 3 2
 ♦ A J 5
 ♣ 9 8 5 4 2

♥K lead

♠ A J 8 5 4 2
 ♥ 10 9
 ♦ 8 6 4
 ♣ A 3

East signals with the ♥8 and West continues with the ace and another heart, and I ruff. I will need some extraordinary luck on this deal. It appears that my winners include the two aces and whatever I can generate in the trump suit. Prospects offered by the ♦J are diminished by West's top hearts—he can hardly hold everything.

In addition to the ♦J, the only real chance is to maneuver six trumps. This will require a four-two break and some precise handling of trumps. I start with a spade to the king, and West's ten gets my full attention. I return to hand with the ace of clubs and cash the ace of spades. West drops the queen. This keeps me in the ballgame!

West appears to have the ♠97 remaining. I exit with a club, win the diamond shift in dummy, and ruff a club. I am down to ♠J8 in my hand, and I simply wait around for my last two spades. Two spades made for a crucial five IMPs.

The full deal:

♠ K
 ♥ J 6 3 2
 ♦ A J 5
 ♣ 9 8 5 4 2

♠ Q 10
 ♥ A K 4
 ♦ K 10 3 2
 ♣ Q J 10 6

♠ 9 7 6 3
 ♥ Q 8 7 5
 ♦ Q 9 7
 ♣ K 7

♠ A J 8 5 4 2
 ♥ 10 9
 ♦ 8 6 4
 ♣ A 3

Declarer needed ♠Q10 or ♠Q9 doubleton in the West hand, but he also needed to generate two ruffs. The defenders facilitated the first one and declarer had only to exercise elementary caution to preserve his dummy entry until he could take the second ruff.

This was also a defense problem. To beat the contract West needed to attack the dummy entry early. The best card for this purpose is the ♦10, but both the recognition and the risk make this play extremely difficult.

These two deals, of course, were alternative history. Both actually ended differently. Neither was in the match against the Ames team, the winner, but combined they would have changed the quotient that determined the winner.