

Coaching NT #4 – Bidding 2 NT – Difficult Hand

Note: The complete layout of the four hands for this game is shown at the end of this lesson so the cards can be set up for practice with 4 players. Beginners may find the analysis and strategies to be helpful in learning how to bid and play.

Bidding:

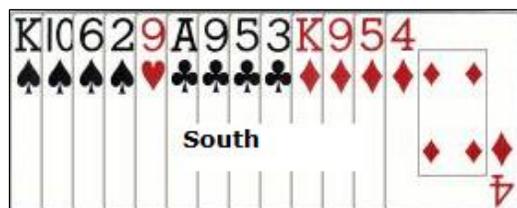
North is the Dealer. This is North's hand:



North has 14 HCPs, plus 1 for length.
With a 5-card major, North bids 1♥.

East passes.

This is South's hand:



South has 10 points. South does not have support for hearts, but will now show his partner that he has a 4-card major.

South bids 1♠.

West passes.

North cannot support the spades, so it looks like a contract in a major is not possible. The next best thing is a contract in No Trump. With just 14 HCPs and no other 4+ card suit, North bids **1 NT**. This is a cut-off bid and South can pass.

South has 10 points and knows that North probably has somewhere between 12-15 points. South bids **2 NT** inviting North to game. If North had 15+ points, he would bid 3 NT but he does not. Also, North has most of his points in Aces and Kings and they are scattered between 3 suits. This is not a very good hand for pushing higher. North passes.

The final contract is **2 NT by North**.

Playing the Hand:

Please be aware that the strategy of E/W could be different and the cards could be played in a different order. This is just one scenario, trying to predict what the most likely scenario could be.

East is on lead. His strongest suit is spades, but South bid it. His second strongest suit is clubs, so he will lead the 7♣, not the Q♣, which is the top of touching honours. In a NT contract, it is recommended to have 3 touching honours (Ace and face cards) to lead with the top card of touching honours. (If it were a suit contract, starting with the Q♣ is recommended — the top of 2 or more touching honours.)

North can now see the Dummy hand and will take a moment to plot his strategy. He can see 6 immediate winners (the Ace-King combinations together), but needs 2 more to make the contract of 2 NT. Which is his longest suit? Clubs and diamonds both have 7 cards. But looking at the hearts, even though he has just 6 of them, he is missing only the Q♥ and J♥. The 8♥, 9♥, and 10♥ are all touching, so if he can force out the Q♥ and J♥, that will make an extra winner in hearts. North can see that this game will be challenging. He has to lose several tricks before he can promote extra winners and he will have to keep close track of each card played in each suit. Also, he must be careful not to lead a spade. He has to protect his K♠. He has to hope the opponents will lead spades, allowing him to eventually take a trick with the K♠. The danger is that the A♠ is in West's hand and possibly the Q♠, also.

So the 7♣ is led by East. The 3♣ is played from South's hand (the Dummy). West plays high, the 10♣, and North will "duck" the K♣ and play the 4♣. (Trick #1X — The ✓ notation after a trick indicates a winner for N/S and the X indicates a lost trick. E/W takes this trick; therefore, the X.) Often, it is a good idea to let the opponents take the first trick, and sometimes the first two tricks in a suit led in NT. Sometimes it is impossible for the partner to lead back the suit after two rounds. This is a strategy to consider.

West will likely lead back the suit, so will lead the top card of his doubleton now, the 6♣. North will play the 8♣, East will play the J♣. This time, the trick will be taken by South's A♣ in Dummy. (Trick #2✓) The K♣ is a stopper and North is going to keep it for now.

So now it's time to lead towards the high hearts. The 9♥ is led from Dummy. West may decide to cover the 9♥ and play the Q♥. In that case, North will take the trick with the K♥. (Trick #3✓) Now the 8♥ will either take a trick or force out the J♥. North plays the 8♥. East plays the 3♥, the 4♦ is discarded from Dummy, and West takes the trick with the J♥. (Trick #4X) North knows that his A♥ and 10♥ are now good and, with any luck, the 5♥ also. North is constantly counting and re-counting his winning tricks. As soon as he knows he can run them all and make the contract without losing control, he will take them. Another option would be to let West take the trick with the Q♥. Then all the hearts are good after that. But that only works because the Q♥ and J♥ are both in West's hand and that would be impossible to predict.

North has 2 tricks and needs 6 more. He can see 5 more sure tricks — the A♦ and K♦, A♥ and 10♥ (maybe the 5♥) and the K♣. If he pulls one more heart, he will

know if the 5♥ will win a trick. But it is West's lead. West does not want to lead from his spades. He wants the lead to come around towards him so he can capture the K♠ (which is clearly visible in Dummy) with his A♠. So he has to lead something else. He decides to lead a small diamond, the 3♦. North plays low (the 2♦) as he knows that East will likely play high. East plays the 10♦ and North "ducks" the K♦. (Trick #5X) East now leads the 7♦, the 9♦ is played from Dummy, West plays the J♦ or Q♦ and North takes it with the A♦. (Trick #6✓)

Now North plays the A♥ and sees that the two outstanding hearts fall. (This illustrates why it is so important to keep track of all the cards in each suit.) The 2♠ is discarded from Dummy. (Trick #7✓) Now North knows that both his 10♥ and 5♥ are winners. He plays both of them. (Tricks #8✓ and #9✓) If North is watching carefully, he can see that he might not have to play a spade at all. So he will slough them off from Dummy. Meanwhile, West will eventually slough off the J♠ as he might as well take the one spade trick when/if he can, and not lead back a spade. Besides, it is getting unlikely that he will get more than one trick in spades.

North will now take the K♣ trick. East has to play his Q♣. (Trick #10✓)

Then he will play the 8♦ to the K♦. (Trick #11✓)

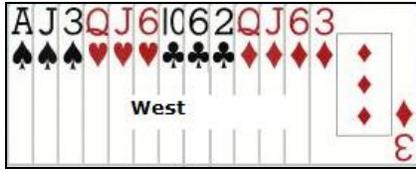
North knows the A♠ is out there, so won't play the K♠ first. Even if he is not sure that the 9♣ is good, he will try it anyway, as his K♠ is a sure loser. (Trick #12✓)

Then he will finally lose the K♠ to West's A♠. (Trick #13X)

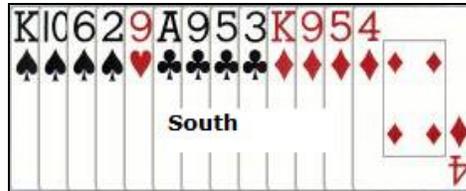
North takes 9 tricks, one above his contract. What a master player! Now would it actually work out this way? Possibly not. The opponents may have gotten in with the spades, but then they should take only 2 tricks in spades.

So what can a beginner learn from this? First of all, playing a NT hand takes a lot of concentration. Second, it is very important to give up your losers first in some suits while trying to promote your lower cards in other suits. Many beginners feel very uncomfortable doing that. It takes experience and confidence to get to that level. With practice, you will get there.

Complete layout of hands:
North is the Dealer.



Declarer



Dummy