

# Play Slowly to the First Trick

By Howard Schenken

*Howard Schenken, who died in 1979 aged 74, was some people's candidate for the title of 'Best Player of All Time'. He was a bidding theorist, many of whose ideas are now widely played in North America and the rest of the world – the weak two bid and forcing two-over-one response are but two examples. He founded the Four Aces bridge team in the mid-1930s and contributed towards their success, in particular the victory over the French European Champions in 1935 for the first World Championship. He was a member of the team that won the first Bermuda Bowl in 1950 and successfully defended his world title in 1951 and 1953. He took over the Four Aces bridge column in 1943 and in 1957 merged it with Richard Frey's and in so doing created the longest continuously running, nationally syndicated bridge column*

Much has been written about the careful thought required of declarer before he plays to the first trick. But little has been said about the player on the declarer's right, East in the normal diagram.

When you are in this position you often have a difficult but vital role to play. Unlike declarer you cannot see your partner's hand, but by reviewing the bidding and observing the lead you may be able to visualize it.

While South is thinking over his plan of attack, you may have a chance to plan your defense. Even if South plays quickly to the first trick, you should not allow yourself go to be hurried.

Even when you have an automatic play to the first trick, you can still pause and say, 'Sorry, I'm not thinking about this trick.' This may help you prepare for a vital decision at the next trick, as in this example:

South Deals Both Vul	♠ A 9 6 2 ♥ A 3 2 ♦ Q 5 ♣ Q 10 8 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W    E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W    E	S	♠ K J 5 ♥ K 8 7 6 4 ♦ K 10 8 3 ♣ 9
N						
W    E						
S						
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>			
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	1 ♣			
Pass	3 NT	All pass	1 NT <sup>1</sup>			
	1. 12-14					

West leads the two of diamonds and declarer plays dummy's five.

From the bidding and lead you deduce that partner's distribution is probably 4-1-4-4. If his lead is from the jack your ten will force the ace. But if partner had the jack, declarer would have played dummy's queen, hoping to hold the trick!

So you conclude that your king will win and that you can establish three diamond tricks. You can certainly expect to make the king of hearts, but you will still need at least one trick in spades. With this in mind, you win the king of diamonds and return the eight, thereby deceiving partner into thinking that South started with J-10-7-4!

This produces the desired result as partner wins the ace of diamonds and switches to a spade. Declarer perforce plays low from dummy and you win with the king. Now you shift back to diamonds and are ready to take the setting trick when you get in with the king of hearts. You apologise to partner for your deceit, but he forgives you readily since no other defense would have set this contract.

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The full deal:

South Deals Both Vul	♠ A 9 6 2 ♥ A 3 2 ♦ Q 5 ♣ Q 10 8 6		♠ K J 5 ♥ K 8 7 6 4 ♦ K 10 8 3 ♣ 9									
♠ 10 8 7 3 ♥ 5 ♦ A 9 6 2 ♣ 7 5 4 2	<table><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S			♠ Q 4 ♥ Q J 10 9 ♦ J 7 4 ♣ A K J 3
	N											
W		E										
	S											

**TIP:** *When on defense in third position, cultivate the habit of playing slowly to the first trick. Careful thought will help you defeat many more contracts.*