

Risk and Reward

In a team game or a money game, making the contract is all-important, and overtricks are merely a secondary consideration. But, in duplicate bridge, the method of scoring rewards overtricks and, as we'll see, that can influence the play of the hand.

First, try this 3NT in a team game, and focus entirely on making the contract. West leads ♠J, won in dummy. Declarer sees that four diamond tricks will suffice to make the contract and, as a safety play against East having the singleton king, he might cash the ♦A first. That doesn't produce the king so declarer next leads the ♦Q from dummy, and when the dust clears, declarer has nine tricks. Routine stuff.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 10 9 8 2 ♥ K 9 8 ♦ 5 4 ♣ Q 10 4	♠ A ♥ Q 6 3 ♦ A Q J 9 6 ♣ K 8 6 3	♠ Q 7 3 ♥ J 10 7 ♦ K 10 7 ♣ J 9 7 2	
	♠ K 6 5 4 ♥ A 5 4 2 ♦ 8 3 2 ♣ A 5		
West Pass Pass	North 1 ♦ 2 ♣ 3 NT	East Pass Pass All pass	South 1 ♥ 2 NT
3 NT by South Lead: ♠ J			

However, playing the same contract in a duplicate game, declarer is more likely to try for an overtrick or two and, under the right circumstances, might even risk his contract in the process. As before, West leads the ♠J, won in dummy. This time, declarer says "Phooey!" to that safety play, and will try for five diamond tricks. So, he crosses to the ♣A and finesses the ♦Q. But East is a devious fellow and fiendishly drops his ten under dummy's queen. Now, declarer can see ten easy tricks in his future. He crosses to the ♥A, cashes the ♠K (otherwise it will be stranded), and runs the ♦8. But this loses to East's king, the defense runs the spades, and it's down one in a cold contract!

Declarer's play was disastrous but, at duplicate scoring, not unreasonable. If he'd have made his overtrick he would have been rewarded with a good score. Too bad for him that the ♦K was offside, *and* East was tricky enough to duck the first diamond, *and* spades broke 5-3. It took three pieces of bad luck to bring about declarer's downfall.