

At CHAT, I still see us taking our winners too early. Are you really in danger of losing those winners? If so, take them now. If not, focus on setting up tricks and getting rid of your losers early.

Giving up control to the opponents at the right time is a powerful skill that can improve your game. Practically every hand you play has tricks that you must lose. You have some discretion as to when you give the trick(s) up. It is a decision you make either wittingly or not. Wittingly is better.

You are playing in a 3NT contract. You have a 7-card heart suit (♥Qxxx in your hand and ♥AKx on the board). You are praying for a 3:3 split (about a 36% possibility). So, about 2 out of 3 times your prayer will go unanswered. God created this 36% chance, so prayers might not help anyway. You might try hoping for the 3-3 split. Better yet, just take what you get and shut-up.

If the suit breaks 3:3, you can be happy with your “average” score. Everybody is having “good luck” today. How nice. Quite dull, but nice. It is very likely (better than 98% of the time) that the suit is going to break the same way for the other pairs in the room. (Trust me. I have this percentage thing figured out.)

I told you last month to look forward to these unfavorable splits. This is what you want. Smile when this happens. Smiling after a bad break is unnerving to some opponents (that’s a good thing). It gives you an edge over the pairs at other tables that are grumbling (not smiling) about their “bad luck”.

When the hearts break 4:2 (about ½ the time), the opponent gets a mixed bag. The ♥J has been established, but declarer gets to decide when to “throw you in” and let you have it. “Let you have it” is exactly what declarer has in mind.

Clearing out another suit before the throw-in is common technique. This leaves the opponent with only two suits to return. You know which opponent has the J♥. Set it up to make it difficult for that opponent to find a safe lead to return. Sometimes it is a “lock”. You are pulling off a true endplay. The opponent has no good lead and must give you a trick (or more).

Sometimes the throw-in is not a guarantee. But, even in those cases you are giving the opponent a chance to make a mistake. Make them find the right card to return. The defender might give you a free finesse, or a ruff and a sluff or they might break a suit that helps you. Have you ever been put in a situation and had difficulty coming up with the right card to return? Yes. You have.

I drew up an example of the timing of a “throw in”.

	South	West	North	East
Bidding:	1♣	1♦	DBL	P
	1NT	P	3NT	passed out

	Dummy	
	♠9843	
	♥AK3	
	♦A52	
	♣Q92	
♠AQ		♠JT762
♥J976		♥T4
♦QJ974		♦86
♣86		♣K754
	Declarer (you)	
	♠K5	
	♥Q852	
	♦KT3	
	♣AJT3	

You are declarer. The opening lead is the ♦Q. Pause for a moment. What do you see? Looks like 8 tricks ought to be easy (3 hearts, 2 diamonds, 3 clubs). You have 26 points; the 1♦ overcall makes LHO a favorite to hold the ♠A (not good). Better keep East out of the lead.

Take the ♦Q with the Ace. Lead the clubs. You pick up all 4 club tricks. RHO had the ♣K. This makes it a near certainty that LHO has the ♠A.

Nine Tricks are in the bag now (4 clubs, two diamonds and 3 hearts). If hearts divide 3-3 you get 10 tricks.

So, you lead the Ace, King and Queen of hearts hoping (not praying) for a 3-3 split. Do you see why the hearts cannot split 3-3? Think about it.

It has nothing to do with percentages. The hearts cannot be 3-3 because that would screw up my example! Duh!

	Dummy	
	♠9843	
	♥	
	♦5	
	♣	
♠AQ		♠JT7
♥J		♥
♦J9		♦86
♣		♣
	Declarer (you)	
	♠K5	
	♥5	
	♦KT	
	♣	

East shows out on the 3rd heart. The Jack doesn't fall. (nonchalant smile now)

◀ Here is what we have with 5 cards yet to play:

Now is the time to give LHO his precious ♥J. When LHO gets in, all the hearts and clubs have been played. LHO must return a spade or a diamond. Either return gives you a trick. You make 4NT. It would have been easy to just lead towards the ♠K which is doomed to fail.

On a good day this will give you an “Above” score. If it doesn't, then stop all this bothersome and irritating smiling. JUST BE YOURSELF. Join in with your friends and do some serious grumbling and whining.

Arne Fockler