

Responding to 1NT, hand evaluation, card combinations, second-hand play

Dlr: East	♠ J 9	
Vul: Both	♥ A 4 2	
	♦ K 8 5 3	
	♣ A K J 2	
♠ 10 8 7 5		♠ K 6 3
♥ J 10 9		♥ 7 6 5 3
♦ Q 9 7 4 2		♦ J 10
♣ 9		♣ 8 6 4 3
	♠ A Q 4 2	
	♥ K Q 8	
	♦ A 6	
	♣ Q 10 7 5	

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1NT
Pass	4NT	Pass	6NT
All Pass			

Opening lead: ♥J

**Bidding commentary:** North's raise to 4NT shows 16-17 HCP. It is not Blackwood and can be passed. To ask for aces in response to a 1NT opening bid, leap to 4♣, Gerber. As South, accept partner's invitational bid of 4NT and bid slam with any 17-point hand or with any 16-point hand without 4-3-3-3 distribution. With 15 HCP or with 16 HCP with a 4-3-3-3 pattern, pass. Another possibility when accepting partner's invitation to slam is to show a four-card minor en route.

If partner happens to have a matching four-card minor, you probably have found a better spot than no-trump. A deal usually plays one trick better in a 4-4 t than at notrump. 6♣ is a far better contract than 6NT. If South bids 5♣ over 4NT, North raises to 6♣.

**Lead commentary:** As West, on lead against 3NT, you might opt to lead a diamond or a spade, but against 6NT, the heart sequence, even with only three cards, stands out. Against 6NT, both opponents balanced, you want to make a safe lead rather than an attacking lead.

**Play commentary:** As South, count your sure tricks outside of the suit you plan to work with (spades). You have three hearts, two diamonds and four clubs – nine in all. You need three spade tricks. The proper play is to lead low to the 9, hoping West has the 10. If the 9 loses to the 10, there is always tomorrow, though it can't hurt to run the jack in case East, with ♠K 10 x, forgets to cover. Play the same needing three tricks with A-J-x-x facing Q-9 doubleton, A-10-x-x facing K-9 doubleton, or K-10-x-x facing A-9 doubleton. In all these cases, the best play for three tricks is to lead low to the 9. Nines deserve some respect.

**Defensive commentary:** As East, if the ♠J is ever led from dummy, cover! A vulnerable slam is hanging in the balance!