

Board 9
East Deals
N-S Vul

They Play Flannery

♠ K 7 2
♥ 7 4
♦ A K Q 10 9
♣ Q 7 4



♠ Q 8 6
♥ A 10 6 5
♦ 8 2
♣ K 10 6 5

West	North	East	South
	<i>Jim</i>		<i>Pete</i>
		Pass	Pass
2 ♦ ¹	3 ♦	Pass	3 NT

All pass

1. Flannery: 11-15 HCP, exactly 4 ♠ & 5 ♥

3 NT by South

Lead: ♥ K

Spots approximate, especially in spades; deal rotated for convenience.

We played this deal in the "8 Is Enough" Swiss team even in Watertown, August 16, 2013. Each team of four in the event must not exceed 8 player points (PP), where a player with over 2500 masterpoints has 3PP, between 300 and 2500 has 2PP, and 1PP under 300. The event is fun, but the quality of play is expectedly mixed.

Our opponents were misguided enough to play the Flannery 2 ♦ opening, which led to this thin game contract. I think it's clear to bid 3 NT in this field, at this vulnerability, and with much of the distribution known. All I had to do was make it.

After ducking the opening lead, I won the ♥ J continuation with the ace, to exactly exhaust East's hearts. A quick count (very quick) showed four top tricks. Given time, it would be easy to develop another trick in each suit except hearts. Still, that's two tricks short. How would you continue?

They Play Flannery -- SOLUTION

Board 9
East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A 10 9 5 ♥ K Q J 9 2 ♦ J 6 ♣ 8 2		♠ K 7 2 ♥ 7 4 ♦ A K Q 10 9 ♣ Q 7 4	♠ J 4 3 ♥ 8 3 ♦ 7 5 4 3 ♣ A J 9 3
♠ Q 8 6 ♥ A 10 6 5 ♦ 8 2 ♣ K 10 6 5			

3 NT by South
Lead: ♥ K

After ducking the opening lead, I won the ♥ J continuation with the ace, to exactly exhaust East's hearts. They had four top tricks ready to go (two aces and two hearts), so I could not afford to give up a diamond right away.

It looked right to attack clubs immediately. A finesse for the ♣ J appeared to be in my future, expecting East to have the length. The ♣ A could have been doubleton with West, allowing me to win the ♣ Q and then play small from both hands, for three club tricks on the marked finesse. (Would you be willing to make that play?) Anyhow, a small club went to the queen and was taken with the ace, ending such speculation.

Many times in these cases, the opponent will return the suit you just led, trying to avoid giving up a trick. This did not happen: it looked likely the club finesse would indeed win. Instead, East produced the ♠ 3. After some thought, West took the ♠ A, and after more thought, led another spade. (He would have done better to do all his thinking at once: with nothing good to return, he should have ducked, forcing dummy's king.) West's heart winner was now isolated.

With a second spade trick available, the club finesse would produce a ninth trick, even if I had to lose a diamond. I won the ♠ Q in hand, and played diamonds from the top (only East could have had four, at this point, and the ♠ K remained as an entry). When the ♦ J appeared, I refused the club finesse, making exactly nine tricks and assuring the vulnerable game. (At matchpoints, I might have finessed for the overtrick, weighing the strong likelihood of success against the value of a game that would not often be bid.) This was the second of two vulnerable game swings in our favor, allowing us to eke out a 2 IMP win in the match. (I did say the quality of play was mixed, did I not?)

My analysis shows the Flannery 2 ♦ opening bid to be an improvement over standard bidding for these hands. However, these issues offset those advantages:

- Bill Flannery wrote a whole book on the convention, and it omits some key info. Playing this well is not for the faint of heart.
- There are better and simpler methods available.
- You cannot use the 2 ♦ opening for some other purpose.
- You may map the bidding and play for the opponents, as happened here.

For more information on these issues, please see "Flannery and Major Nightmare Solutions at Bridge" under "Articles by Club Members" at web.mit.edu/mitdlbc.

- Pete Matthews