

DEFENDER PLAY - SPRING 2015 - WEEK 2  
DEFENSE AGAINST NO TRUMP CONTRACTS

LAST REVISED ON MARCH 13, 2015  
COPYRIGHT © 2013-2015 BY DAVID L. MARCH

A LONG SUIT IS A WEAPON AGAINST A NO TRUMP CONTRACT

INTRODUCTION

Declarer has an advantage because declarer can see all of the offensive cards while you can only see one-half of the defensive cards. Although you can also see one-half of the offensive cards, the dummy is usually the weakest part of the offense.

So, how does your partnership defend against a no trump contract? This question leads to a number of more focused questions:

- ✓ What is the best defensive strategy?
- ✓ How do you choose an appropriate opening lead?
- ✓ How can you silently tell your partner about the strength and shape of your hand?
- ✓ How can you interfere with declarer's plan to make the contract?

These questions will occupy us for the next two weeks and part of the sixth week.

DECLARER STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

After your partnership makes the opening lead and the dummy is tabled, an effective no trump declarer will pause, count the sure winners in the combined hands, and then formulate a plan to create any additional winners that are needed to make the no trump contract. Declarer will then use some combination of the following tactics to implement the plan:

- ✓ Promote cards in a solid sequence by driving out a defender's higher cards in the suit.
- ✓ Develop winners in a long suit by continuing to lead the suit until the defenders are powerless or void in the suit.
- ✓ Finesse against a defender's higher cards.

Because the declarer must lose tricks to implement the first two tactics and may lose a trick if a finesse fails, the declarer will also try to maintain a stopper in each suit to guard against the defense running a long suit of their own.

## DEFENDER STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Since it is rare for the defenders to have enough sure winners to defeat a no trump contract, the defenders must also develop a plan to create the setting tricks. The two most effective strategies that your partnership can use to defeat declarer's plan to make a no trump contract are:

- ✓ Promote lower cards in your partnerships longest suit by driving out declarer's stoppers in the suit.
- ✓ Block declarer's attempts to promote lower cards in declarer's long suit.

This means that there is often a race between the declarer and the defender to develop extra winning tricks.

## OPENING LEADS AGAINST NO TRUMP

Since the defense makes the opening lead, the defense has a head start in the race to create extra winning tricks. This means that the best opening lead is a card that will help to **develop your partnership's longest suit**. Your lead should also give your partner as much information as possible.

Your first choice for a lead suit should be your partner's suit.

If your partner opened the bidding, made an overcall, or made a lead directing double, your partner's suit is probably your partnership's longest suit.

You will usually be short in your partner's suit. With two or more cards in the suit lead:

- ✓ Top of a doubleton: **9** 6; **K** 7; **J** 2
- ✓ Top of touching honors: **Q** J 5; **T** 9 3; **J** T 7
- ✓ Top of three or four small: <sup>1</sup> **9** 6 4 3; **7** 4 2; **8** 7 3
- ✓ Low from three or four to an honor: **K** 7 **4**; **J** 9 4 **2**; **T** 4 **3**

### POSSIBLE EXCEPTIONS

If you have a long and relatively strong suit of your own consider a lead from your suit if:

- You are short in partner's suit.
- Your partner opened **1♣** and you think it might have been a three-card *better of minors* or a two-card *short club*.

But when in doubt, you should always favor leading from partner's suit.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a "top of nothing" lead. Some partnerships prefer a low or middle card lead from three or four small. But it is correct and easier to remember to lead top of partner's suit except when you have three or four with an honor.

Your second choice for a lead suit should be your longest and strongest unbid (major) suit.

If your partner did not make a bid, then you will need to pick a suit of your own.

- If opponents also did not bid a suit, lead your longest suit. With two suits of equal length, lead the strongest of the two suits. With two suits of equal strength, lead an unbid major.
- If opponents did bid a suit you want to avoid leading that suit unless you do not have a better alternative. If you must lead from an opponent's suit, lead an unsupported suit if possible.

When you are leading from your longest suit you will have four or more cards in the suit. Your lead should be:

a. **Top of connecting honors in a three card sequence or broken sequence.**

These leads promise the next lower card in the suit.

- ✓ Top of a solid sequence: **A** K Q 6; **K** Q J 4 3; **Q** J T 3; **J** T 9 6
- ✓ Top of a broken sequence: **A** K J 5 2; **K** Q T 5; **Q** J 9 4 3; **J** T 8 5
- ✓ Top of an interior sequence: A **Q** J 9; K **J** T 8 4; Q **T** 9 7;

b. **Fourth highest card when you do not have a sequence.**

This lead promises at least one honor in the suit.

- ✓ Fourth highest: Q J 8 **4**; K J 7 **5** 3; A K 9 **4**; K T 6 **5** 2

### EXCEPTION

- In a no trump contract, the dummy is often the weak hand and the declarer is often the strong hand. This means that any missing honors are most likely on your right and leading from a four card suit with honors that are not in a sequence is a doubtful choice. For example, leading fourth highest from **Axxx**, **AQxx**, **AJxx**, or **KJxx** usually gives declarer a cheap trick and your chance of developing three tricks in the suit is questionable. A better choice is a lead from another four card suit that has an honor or lead top of nothing and hope that your partner will lead your suit at the first opportunity. On the other hand, leading fourth highest from **AQxxx** or **AJxxx** has an excellent chance of taking at least three tricks.

Your last choice for an opening lead suit should be top of nothing.

If you can not find an attractive lead from a long suit with an honor, lead **top of nothing** (usually a 9, 8, or 7) to discourage your partner from continuing the suit.

### Leads Against a No Trump Slam

If you have an Ace, lead it against a grand slam but do not lead an Ace against a small slam unless you have an excellent chance of taking a second trick. Otherwise, it is usually best to lead a suit in which you have no high cards, its length being immaterial.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 1				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West
♠ 6 5 2	1♥	1NT	Pass	3NT
♥ 9 7	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♦ QT 8 7 4				
♣ 7 5 3				

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 2				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West
♠ Q J T 6 2	Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
♥ J 6 2	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♦ AK				
♣ 7 4 2				

1. Although it is tempting to lead the ♦7, fourth highest from your longest and strongest suit, your diamonds are not strong enough to justify leading your own suit. Lead the top of the doubleton in your partner's suit.
2. You have a solid sequence in an unbid major. The ♠Q is the obvious choice.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 3				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West
♠ K J T 8	Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
♥ 9 7 2	Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
♦ T 4 3	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♣ A 9 6				

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 4				
SOUTH - YOU	East	South	West	North
♠ A J T 7	1♥	Pass	2♦	Pass
♥ A Q 6 2	2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
♦ 5 2	Pass	Pass		
♣ 9 7 3				

3. Opponents did not bid spades and you have a three (actually four) card broken sequence in your longest suit. The ♠J is the top of connecting honors in the sequence.
4. There are two reasons why you should not lead a heart:
  - a. Opponents bid hearts.
  - b. Leading fourth highest from a suit headed by an AQ often gives declarer a free finesse. Here you know that declarer probably holds the ♥KJ because declarer opened 1♥.

There are two reasons why you should consider leading a spade:

- a. Spades is the unbid major.
- b. Although you do not have a three card sequence, you do have connecting honors. Leading the ♠J will either take a trick or force declarer to play the ♠K or ♠Q which improves your chances to take a trick with the ♠T.

You could also consider the ♣9, the top of nothing and hope your partner will eventually be able to lead a spade or heart to give you a free finesse. But your opponents have at least 25 high card points and you have 11 high card points which means partner's chances of gaining the lead are very small.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 5				
SOUTH - YOU	North	East	South	West
♠ K T 8 <b>5</b> 2	Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
♥ 8 4 3	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♦ Q T 9				
♣ K 5				

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 6				
SOUTH - YOU	East	South	West	North
♠ A Q 9 4	1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
♥ <b>8</b> 4 2	Pass	Pass		
♦ J 9 5				
♣ 7 4 3				

- The obvious lead is the ♠5, fourth highest in your longest suit which is also an unbid major.
- It is tempting to lead the ♠4, fourth highest in your longest and strongest suit which is also an unbid major. But this gives declarer a free finesse, especially if declarer holds the ♠KJ. A better lead is the ♥8, top of nothing and an unbid major. If your partner gains the lead, you hope your partner will lead a spade which might give you a free finesse with the ♠Q.

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 7				
SOUTH - YOU	East	South	West	North
♠ <b>Q</b> J T 9	1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
♥ J 8 6 4 3	Pass	Pass		
♦ A 8				
♣ A 5				

OPENING LEAD EXAMPLE 8				
SOUTH - YOU	West	North	East	South
♠ K Q 8 6 4	Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
♥ 7 2	2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
♦ T	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
♣ K J 6 <b>5</b> 2				

- Opponents have about 25 high card points and you have 12 high card points which means your partner will not be much help. Leading the ♠Q, the top of connecting honors in a solid sequence in an unbid major, is much better than leading the ♥4, fourth highest in a longer unbid major. Leading the ♠Q guarantees that you will take at least four tricks and with some luck, you might also get a trick in hearts to set the contract.
- You have two five card suits that are close to the same strength. But West initiated the *Stayman Convention* so you know West has a four card major. Since West did not rebid East's hearts, West's major must be spades. That makes the ♣5, fourth highest in an unbid suit, a better lead than the ♠6.

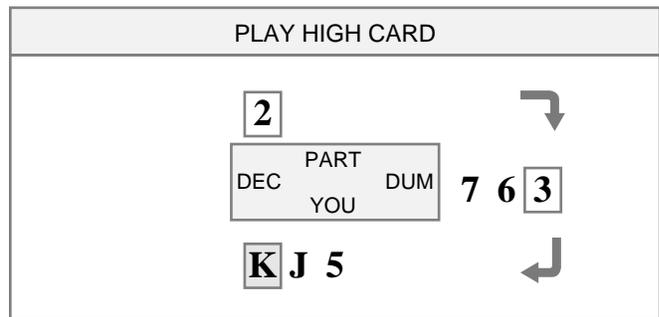
## THIRD HAND HIGH

Anytime your partner has the lead, you are in a position called the *third hand* because you will be the third person to play a card on the trick. The card that you play depends on the card that was led and the card that declarer played from the dummy.

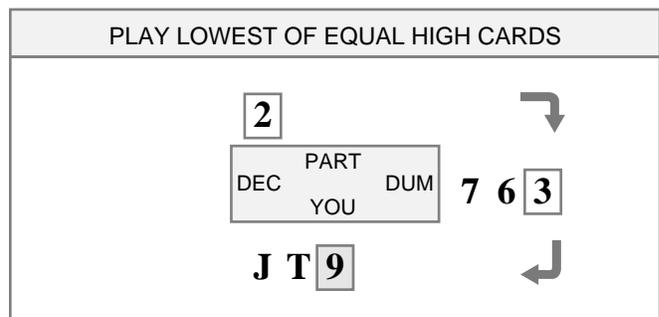
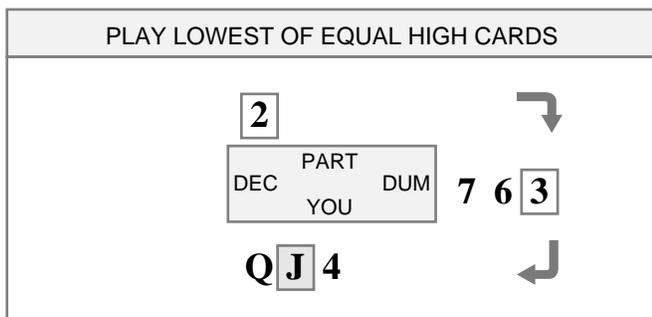
A common guideline that applies when your partner leads a low card and declarer plays a low card from the dummy is *third hand high* which is shorthand for:

When your partner leads a low card  
and declarer plays a low card from the dummy,  
play a high card **but only as high as necessary.**

When your partner leads a low card, the presumption is that partner is leading from length with an honor or two in the suit. As third hand, your job is to help your partner establish tricks in the suit. By playing a high card, you either take the trick or the declarer plays a higher card which helps to establish the remaining cards in partner's hand.



When you have equal high cards, always play the lowest of the equal cards. For example:

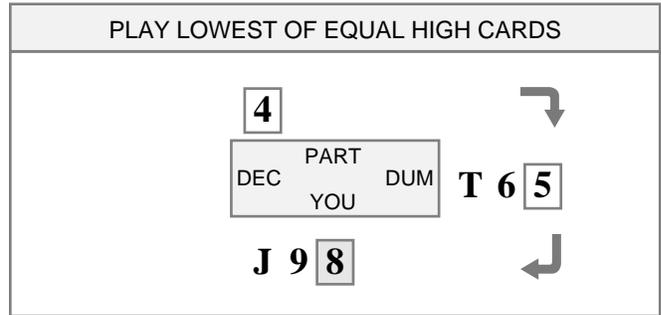
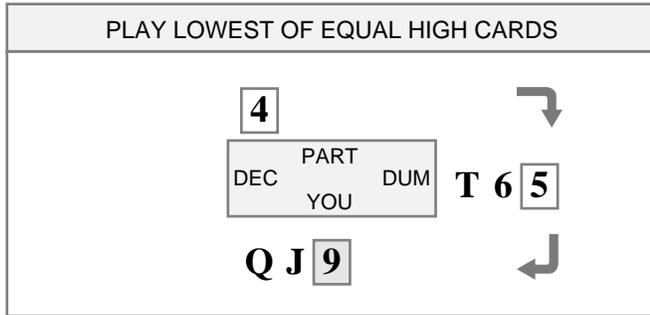


If the third hand always plays the lowest of equal high cards, then:

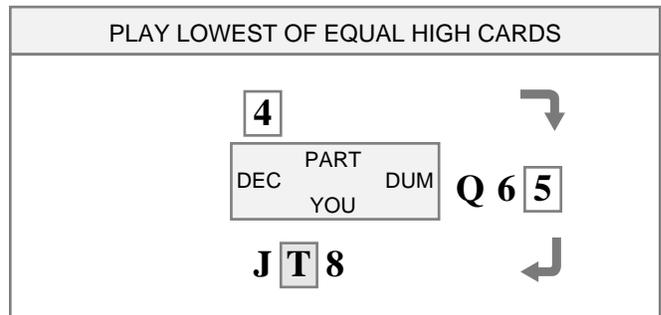
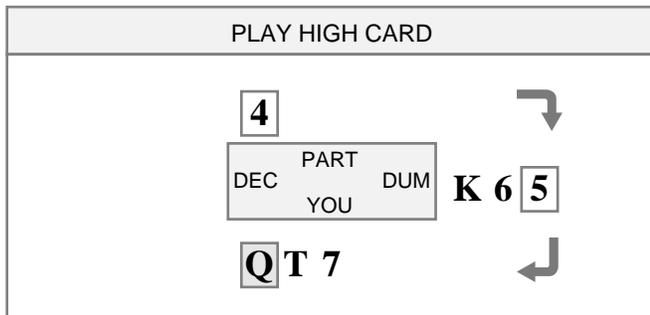
When third hand plays high, third hand can never have  
the card directly under the card played.

In the left hand example, playing the jack tells your partner that you do not have the ten. In the right hand example, playing the nine tells your partner that you do not have the eight.

Before you play third hand high, make sure you look at the dummy to see if one of your lower cards is equal to your honor cards. In both of these examples, the dummy has the ten which makes the nine and eight in the third hand the equal of the jack.

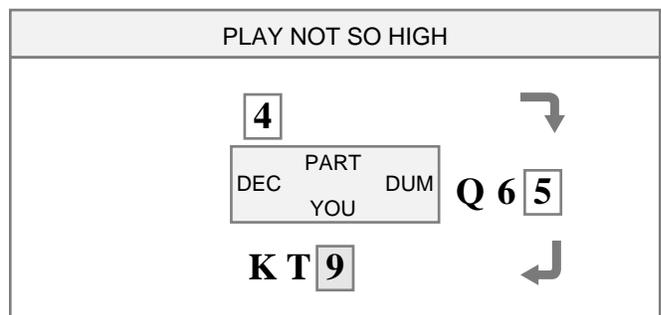
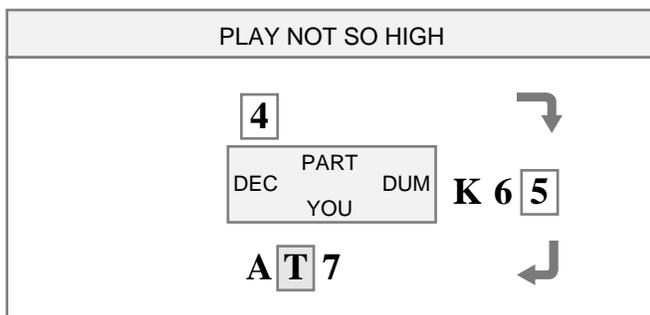


Third hand high also applies if the dummy has an honor card that is higher than your highest honor card but the dummy plays low. For example:



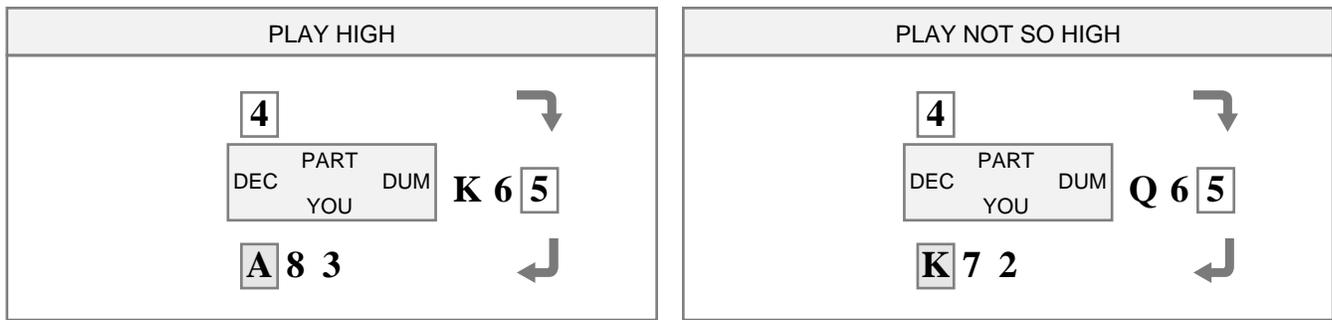
### THIRD HAND NOT SO HIGH

There is one important exception to the third hand high guideline. When your partner leads low, the dummy has an honor but plays low, and you have at least three cards with a higher honor, you should keep the higher honor if you can play a nine or higher. This traps dummy's honor for capture on a later trick. For example:



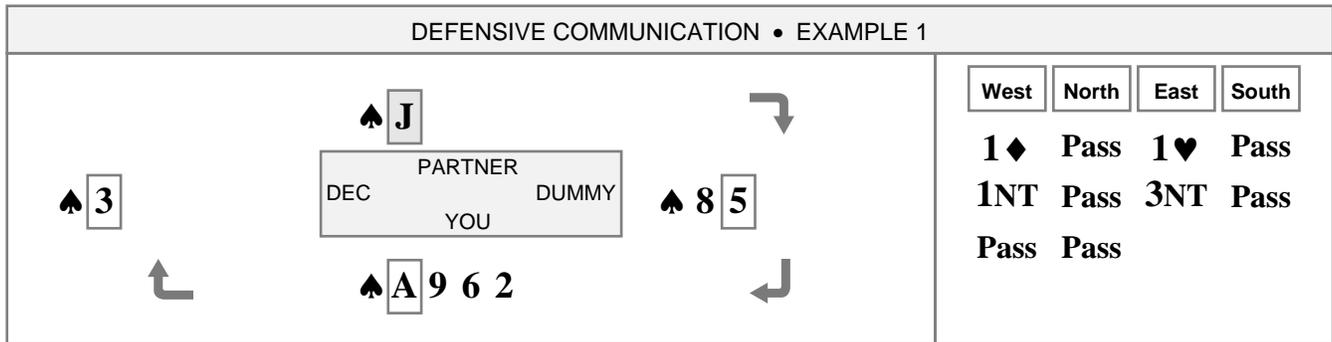
If you have a doubleton with a higher honor and think you can take a trick in another suit, you must play the honor to **unblock** your partner's suit. That will leave you a low card to lead back to your partner when you take the trick in the other suit. Unblocking will be discussed in greater detail next week.

Third hand not so high is only worthwhile if you can play a nine or higher. If not, then play the higher honor. For example:

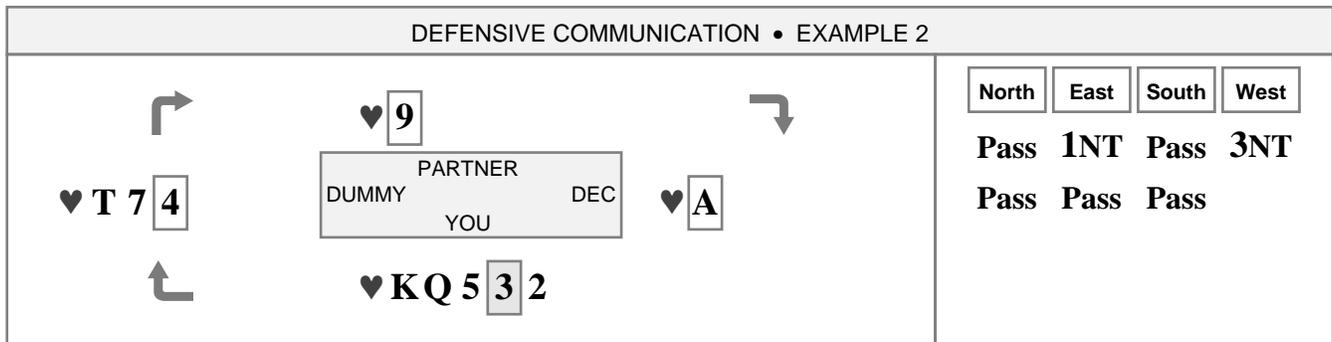


### DEFENSIVE COMMUNICATION

When your partnership follows a set of defensive guidelines each card that is played has the potential to communicate useful information. For example:



Partner's ♠J should be the top of connecting honors in a three card solid or broken sequence. This means that partner can not have the ♠Q and since you have the ♠9 and see the ♠8 in the dummy, your partner probably led from ♠KJT<sub>x</sub>. Take the first trick with the ♠A (third hand high) and return the ♠9 to trap West's ♠Q between your partner's ♠KT or your ♠9.



Lacking a three card sequence, you lead the ♥3, fourth highest in your longest and strongest suit. Dummy plays low and your partner plays the ♥9 which should be third hand high, but only as high as necessary. Since partner should not have the next lower card, East must have the ♥8. Your partner must have the ♥J because if East had the ♥J, East surely would have taken the first trick with the Jack instead of the Ace.



ATTITUDE SIGNAL • EXAMPLE 2 • DISCOURAGE

	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="padding: 2px;">East</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">South</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">West</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">North</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">1♦</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">2NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">3NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> </tr> </table>	East	South	West	North	1♦	Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
East	South	West	North										
1♦	Pass	2NT	Pass										
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass										

In the second example, your partner leads top of connecting honors and the dummy plays the Ace. You should play the ♥4 to tell your partner you have no help in hearts. Since partner sees the ♥2 in the dummy, partner can be reasonably sure you played low.

ATTITUDE SIGNAL • EXAMPLE 3 • DISCOURAGE

	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th style="padding: 2px;">West</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">North</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">East</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">South</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">1NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">3NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> </table>	West	North	East	South	1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass		
West	North	East	South										
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass										
Pass	Pass												

In the third example, partner leads the ♦6, fourth highest, in your void suit. You should discard the ♣2 to discourage a club lead. The next time diamonds are led, discard the ♥2 to discourage a heart lead. Then, if your partner gains the lead, partner, who has been paying careful attention to your signals, will surely lead a spade and you can take four spade tricks.

*You could decide to play the ♥2 and then the ♣2 with the same result.*