

LESSON 1

Opening Leads Against Notrump Contracts



General Concepts

General Introduction

Group Activities

Sample Deals



GENERAL CONCEPTS

Defense

The opening lead against notrump contracts

- Choosing the suit
 - Partner's suit
 - Your suit
 - The unbid suit
 - Considering the contract
- Choosing the card
 - Partner's suit
 - Top of the doubleton, top of a two-card or longer sequence
 - Otherwise low
 - Your long suit or the unbid suit
 - Top of a three-card or longer sequence, an interior sequence or a broken sequence
 - Low or fourth best

Bidding

Review of opening the bidding at the one, two and three levels

Play of the Hand

Review of declarer's PLAN

1. *Pause to consider your objectives*
2. *Look at your winners and losers*
3. *Analyze your alternatives*
4. *Now put it all together*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This is the first lesson of the third series. Although there may be some students who have taken the *Bidding in the 21st Century* or the *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century* courses, for others this will be the first class. Take a few minutes to have the students give their names, tell about their bridge experience and perhaps tell something else about themselves. This will give you an idea of the experience levels of the students and what they are likely to expect from the class. Although each course is designed to stand on its own, the bidding and the declarer play covered in the *Bidding in the 21st Century* and *Play of the Hand in the 21st Century* courses are reviewed throughout the lessons.

After the introductions, give an overview of the course. You could say something like:

“The spotlight in this course is on defense, an area of the game that most players say is the most challenging. It might seem as if you and your partner have to be clairvoyant. After all, you are trying to work together as a team to defeat declarer’s contract, and you can’t even see the cards in each other’s hands.

“When you are declarer, you can make a plan and put it into practice to try to make your contract. The plan is not as clear for the defenders, and when the play is over, you may find yourself asking: ‘Could we have defeated that contract?’ In this course, we will be looking at ways you and your partner can work together more effectively to defeat declarer’s contract. This all begins with the opening lead.

“The experts say opening leads can make the difference between winning and losing a world championship. What a responsibility, especially when the lead has to be made before the dummy comes down and you can see only the 13 cards in your hand! Fortunately, there are some standard guidelines for opening leads. In this lesson, we will consider leads against notrump contracts.”

GROUP ACTIVITIES

EXERCISE ONE: Choosing the Suit

Introduction

The lesson is developed in two stages. First, the focus is on choosing the suit to lead and, second, the specific card to lead from the suit selected. In this first exercise, students are guided to see that the choice of suits depends on a combination of the cards in the opening leader's hand, the bidding and a consideration of the final contract.

“One of the most popular maxims for leading against a notrump contract is to lead the fourth highest from your longest and strongest suit. This is good advice, but like most good advice, it works best if used at the right time and place.

“When defending against a notrump contract, it is often a good idea to try to develop the longest suit in the defenders' combined hands. The longer the suit, the more winners that can be developed, and since there is no trump suit, declarer can't stop you from taking your winners once you get the opportunity to play them.

“You are looking at only your 13 cards when you make the opening lead, so it may be difficult to determine which is the longest suit in the combined hands. The bidding, however, may give you some information. If your partner has bid, your first choice is to lead partner's suit. After all, if a suit is good enough to bid, it is likely good enough to lead — to say nothing of what it does for your partner's appreciation of your thoughtfulness in leading the suit. Partner will open (unless partner has to open a three-card minor) or overcall the longest suit in the hand first, so that may well be the longest combined suit. In addition, if partner has bid, partner is likely to have the entries needed to establish the suit and then to regain the lead to take the winners.

“You don't want to give the opponents the same pleasure. If they have bid a suit, it is best to stay away from it unless your cards are very strong. With nothing else to guide you, choose an unbid suit, one the opponents have not bid.

“If you find you are on opening lead against a notrump contract and your partner has not bid, you normally choose your longest suit, hoping it is the partnership's longest combined suit. With a choice of long suits, you normally choose the stronger, since it probably will require less help from partner to establish. This is where the 'longest and strongest suit' part of the guideline comes from. We'll look at the 'fourth highest' part a little later.

“Finally, it is important to consider the level of the contract which the opponents have reached. If the opponents have arrived at a contract of 6NT and you have two aces, take a leaf from declarer's book and take your tricks and run.”

Instructions

“You are on lead against a notrump contract with the hand shown in Exercise One.

♠ 10 9 7 6 2
♥ 8 6
♦ A 9 4 3
♣ K Q

“Work as a group with the others at your table and decide which suit you would lead under each of these conditions:

- 1) The contract is 3NT and your partner overcalled in hearts during the auction.
- 2) The contract is 1NT with no bidding from your side.
- 3) The contract is 3NT after one of the opponents opened the bidding 1♠.
- 4) The contract is 6NT.”

1) Heart 2) Spade 3) Diamond 4) Club

Follow-up

Have a student from one of the groups report on the suit which was chosen by the group in each situation.

Conclusion

“The opening lead is your chance to get a head start in the race to establish enough winners to defeat the contract. You want to start with the suit that offers the most potential for your side. Usually that is the suit your partner bid or your longest suit. With a choice of long suits, choose the stronger. Avoid leading a suit bid by an opponent since you will probably have difficulty developing tricks in it. Of course, if you can see enough tricks in your hand to defeat the contract, take them.”

EXERCISE TWO: Choosing the Card in Partner's Suit**Introduction**

There are tables of opening leads which outline the specific card to lead against notrump contracts. Most students can't effectively memorize them and, even if they could, would not necessarily know how to use the information. It is important for students to understand why one card is preferable to another. This can best be understood by considering how the suit would be played by a declarer.

"Once you have decided on the suit to lead, you have to choose the specific card to lead from the suit. The specific card you select is important for two reasons. First the defenders can't see each other's hands. This is a disadvantage they want to overcome as quickly as possible, so they send messages about their hands through the cards they choose to play, starting with the opening lead. The second reason the card is important is that you want to make it easy to take the tricks that belong to your side. Let's look at a familiar combination of cards by laying out the heart suit."

Make sure the students know what direction they are sitting (North, East, South and West) and call out the cards for each direction. For example:

"North has the 6, 4 and 2 of hearts, East has the ace, queen, 9, 7 and 3, South has the jack, 10 and 5 and West has the king and 8."

	♥ 6 4 2	
♥ K 8	■	♥ A Q 9 7 3
	♥ J 10 5	

"If you were the declarer, how would you take the tricks that belong to you if East were the dummy and you had no other entries in the East hand?"

Develop with the students the familiar idea of taking the first trick with the high card from the short side, the ♥K in the actual layout.

"A defender can't see what partner has so the defender has to use imagination. If you have decided to lead partner's suit, you imagine that partner has some length and strength in the suit. So you want to play the high card from the short side when you have a doubleton, the ♥K. When that wins the trick, you can lead your remaining low card to partner's hand and your side takes all five tricks.

"If you were to lead a low heart to partner's hand and partner were to lead a low card to your ♥K, you would take only two tricks in the suit if partner had no other entries. Partner's winners would be stranded.

"When you lead partner's suit, the first suggestion is that you lead the top of a doubleton, which is effectively playing the high card from the short side."

“Now let’s change the layout slightly to give West the jack, 10 and 5 in partner’s suit:

	♥ K 4 2	
♥ J 10 5	■	♥ A Q 9 7 3
	♥ 8 6	

“If you were the declarer, how would you play the heart suit held by East and West?”

Have the students talk about leading the ♥J (or ♥10) to trap North’s ♥K.

“When you are defending, each card sends a message. Declarer could play either the ♥J or ♥10, since they are equal cards. However, when you are a defender, you lead the top of touching high cards in partner’s suit, the ♥J. This tells partner that you do not have the next higher card, the ♥Q in this example. If you were to lead the ♥10, partner would think declarer held the ♥J, rather than you, and would probably play the ♥Q on the first trick, costing your side a trick.

“So the second guideline when leading partner’s suit is to lead the top of touching honors. If you don’t have a doubleton or touching honors (that is, if you have three or more cards in the suit with no touching honors), then you lead low. Let’s change the layout again to see why that works out best:

	♥ 5 3	
♥ K 9 4	■	♥ A J 10 7 2
	♥ Q 8 6	

“What would happen if you were to lead the ♥K on this layout?”

Discuss the idea that the defenders would take the king and the ace but declarer would get a trick with the queen.

“Now let’s try playing a low card. Partner can win the first trick with the ♥A and play back the ♥J, which traps declarer’s ♥Q. Partner will need another entry to enjoy the rest of the winners if declarer doesn’t cover the ♥J with the ♥Q, because the third round of the suit would then be won by your ♥K. Nevertheless, by leading low from the honor, the defenders manage to trap declarer’s queen. So, from three or more cards in partner’s suit, when defending against a notrump contract, lead a low card if you do not have touching honors. Let’s look at some more examples to put all this together.”

Instructions

“In each of the examples in Exercise Two, you lead partner’s suit. Which is the best card to lead? Why?”

1)

	DUMMY	
	9 6 2	
YOU	■	PARTNER
J 3		K Q 8 7 5
	DECLARER	
	A 10 4	

2)

	DUMMY	
	K 8 5	
YOU	■	PARTNER
Q J 3		A 10 9 6 2
	DECLARER	
	7 4	

3)

	DUMMY	
	9 6	
YOU	■	PARTNER
Q 7 5		A 10 8 4 2
	DECLARER	
	K J 3	

- 1) Jack the top of a doubleton
- 2) Queen top of touching high cards
- 3) 5 low from three cards not leaded by touching high cards

Follow-up

Have one member of the group tell which card in partner's suit the group decided to lead. Then you can ask what guidelines this lead falls under. If the student does not know it, give a brief recap of the reason the lead works out for the best. You might say something like this:

“On the first example, you lead the jack, the top of a doubleton. Essentially, you are starting the suit by playing the high card from the short side.

“On the second example, lead the queen, the top of touching high cards in partner's suit. This tells partner that you do not have the next higher card but do have the next lower card (unless you are leading from a doubleton, Q-2, for example). The lead of the queen traps dummy's king. If you lead the 3, partner can win the first trick with the 10, but then partner would have to try to get into your hand again to lead through dummy's king, and this may not be possible.

“On the last example, lead the 5, low from three cards not headed by touching high cards. Partner can win the ace and lead one back through declarer's king and jack. Declarer can take only one trick, the king. If you were to lead the queen, declarer would get two tricks, one with the king and one with the jack.”

Conclusion

“When you lead partner's suit, choose the top of a doubleton or the top of touching honors. Otherwise lead low from three or more cards.”

There is no need to discuss leading fourth highest in partner's suit at this point. That will confuse the students since they are more likely to have three cards in partner's suit rather than four or five. The guideline of leading a low card is sufficient when they have either three or four cards. The idea of fourth highest will come when we look at a player leading a suit bid by that player.

EXERCISE THREE: Leading the Top of a Sequence

Introduction

“If your partner hasn’t bid and you have no information about the opponents’ suits, you choose your longest suit. If this suit has a three-card or longer sequence, lead the top card. A sequence has wonderful potential to promote winners. Let’s see why by laying out the following cards in the spade suit:

	♠ 8 6 2	
♠ K Q J 9 7	■	♠ 4 3
	♠ A 10 5	

“You can see that if West leads a low card, declarer would win a trick with the ♠10 since partner has no high cards in the suit. If you lead one of your high spades, you can drive out declarer’s ♠A and establish four tricks. With three or more touching high cards, lead one of them. You do not necessarily need partner to hold any high cards in the suit to help promote tricks, and you do not want to let declarer win a trick too cheaply.

“As we have seen earlier, you should lead the top card of the sequence, the ♠K, rather than the ♠Q or ♠J. While it does not make any difference to you, remember you are trying to give partner some information through the specific cards that you play. By leading the top of touching honors, you tell partner that you do not have the next higher-ranking card but you do have the next lower-ranking card.

“Now exchange West’s ♠K with South’s ♠5.

	♠ 8 6 2	
♠ Q J 9 7 5	■	♠ 4 3
	♠ A K 10	

“West now holds a broken sequence, two touching high cards with a break before the next lower-ranking card. You can see that if you lead a low card, declarer can win the first trick with the ♠10. So, the general guideline is to treat a broken sequence like a three-card sequence and lead the top card.

“When you lead from a broken sequence, your partnership may have to be careful how to continue leading the suit if declarer has all of the other high cards. In the example, suppose you lead the ♠Q and declarer wins the first trick with the ♠K, while North and East contribute low spades to the trick. Take these cards away so we can see what is left:

	♠ 8 6	
♠ J 9 7 5	■	♠ 4
	♠ A 10	

“Declarer has not yet won a trick with the ♠10. If West regains the lead and leads the suit, declarer’s ♠10 will win the trick. If West leads the ♠J, declarer’s ♠A takes the trick and the ♠10 is good on the next round. If West leads a low spade, declarer’s ♠10 wins the trick and declarer still has the ♠A left. Which defender must lead the suit next to prevent declarer from winning a trick with the ♠10? (East.)”

If the students ask how West can tell whether East or South holds the ♠10, you can tell them that it is an excellent question and the answer will be forthcoming in a later lesson when we discuss defensive signals.

“Let’s look at one more type of sequence West might have to lead from. Lay out the following cards in the spade suit:

	♠ 8 6	
♠ K J 10 7 5	■	♠ A 4 3
	♠ Q 9 2	

“This time West holds what is called an interior sequence, a sequence of two or more cards with a higher-ranking card in the suit. What would happen if West leads the highest card, the ♠K?”

Let the students see that declarer would eventually take a trick with the ♠Q.

“West does not want to lead a low card when holding three high cards for the reasons we have seen earlier — West does not want declarer to win a trick too cheaply. Leading the ♠K, however, does not seem to be the answer. Instead, declarer leads the top of touching cards (sequence), the ♠J. How can East help partner take all of the tricks in the suit once the ♠J is led? (East can win the trick with the ♠A and lead the suit back, trapping declarer’s ♠Q.) How does East know declarer has the ♠Q? (West has led the top of touching high cards.) East wins the first trick to prevent declarer from winning a trick with the queen.”

There is no need to go into all of the variations from this position at this time (*e.g.*, giving North the ♠Q or giving South both the ♠A and ♠Q). The position will be reexamined in Lesson Three with a look at third-hand play. The text has some further discussion on the subject if any student has a lot of questions. Otherwise, the point is to show them what an interior sequence looks like and to tell them to lead the top of the touching high cards.

“Let’s review all these guidelines about leading from sequences by doing the next exercise.”

Follow-up

If the students are having trouble with any of the examples, have them lay the actual cards out on the table and experiment with them. Afterwards, have the students report the card they would lead and the number of tricks they think they can get from each suit. Since we have not yet discussed the play by third hand, you may need to say something like this:

“In the first example, lead the jack, top of a three-card sequence. If declarer plays dummy’s king, partner can win the ace and lead the suit back, driving out declarer’s queen. You get three tricks in the suit. If declarer plays a low card from dummy, partner can save the ace to capture dummy’s king and let declarer win the first trick with the queen. When the defenders next gain the lead, they again can take three tricks in the suit.

“In the second example, lead the queen, top of a broken sequence. If declarer wins the first trick with the king, either defender can lead the suit next time to drive out dummy’s ace and set up three tricks for the defense. If declarer wins the first trick with dummy’s ace, partner will have to lead the suit next in order to trap declarer’s 10.

“In the third example, lead the jack, top of an interior sequence. If declarer wins the first trick with dummy’s king, you will have to be careful to have partner lead the suit next so you can trap declarer’s queen and take the four tricks to which you are entitled.

“On the last example, lead the king, top of a three-card sequence. The defenders can take the first five tricks, but partner must be careful to win the first or second trick with the ace so that partner has a low card left to lead back to you. Otherwise, the lead will be stuck in partner’s hand after the first three tricks and your remaining winners will be stranded if you do not have an entry in another suit.”

Conclusion

“When you lead your own suit or an unbid suit, your first preference is to lead the top of a three-card or longer sequence or the top of a broken or interior sequence. Your side now has an excellent chance of promoting winners and your partner knows something about your suit. As you saw in the examples, the partnership still may need to be careful in order to get all of the available tricks. We will discuss more on that topic in later lessons. For now, we are more concerned with choosing the best opening lead.”

EXERCISE FOUR: Leading a Low Card

Introduction

“When you look at your longest suit, there may not be a sequence although the suit may contain one or two honors. You likely will need some help from partner to establish winners in the suit, so lead a low card over to partner’s hoped-for high card(s). Let’s see how this works by laying out some cards in the diamond suit:

	♦ 10 8 4	
♦ K J 7 5 2	■	♦ A 6
	♦ Q 9 3	

“What happens when West leads a low diamond? (East wins the first trick with the ♦ A and leads a diamond back, trapping declarer’s ♦ Q). What would happen if you started by leading the ♦ K instead? (Declarer would get a trick with the ♦ Q).

“Now let’s exchange East’s ♦ A for South’s ♦ 3:

	♦ 10 8 4	
♦ K J 7 5 2	■	♦ 6 3
	♦ A Q 9	

“Leading a low diamond does not look like such a good idea since declarer can win the first trick with the ♦ 9. If partner can get the lead, however, partner can lead a diamond through declarer’s ♦ A and ♦ Q. How many tricks do the defenders take in the diamond suit? (Three.) Even though West ‘sacrifices’ a trick by leading the suit initially, the defenders are still rewarded by establishing winners in their long suit.

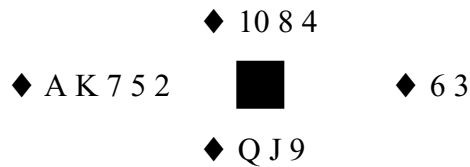
“Let’s see why you want to lead a low card when holding both the ace and the king – but only a two-card sequence. Lay out the following diamonds.

	♦ 10 8 4	
♦ A K 7 5 2	■	♦ Q 3
	♦ J 9 6	

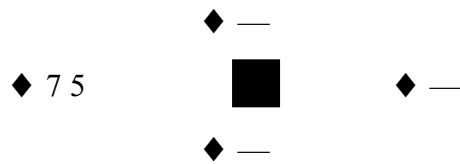
“What happens if West leads a high diamond first?”

Show the students how the suit would become blocked, even if West continues with a low diamond. You also can point out what happens if West continues with another high diamond. The students should be able to see how the defenders take the first five tricks if West leads a low diamond.

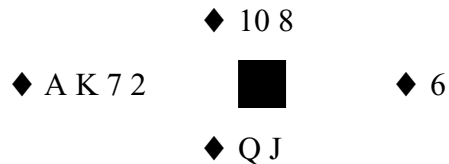
“Of course, you were lucky to find partner with the ♦ Q, but let’s exchange partner’s ♦ Q for declarer’s ♦ 6.



“Let’s see what happens if West starts off by playing the ♦ A, the ♦ K and another diamond:

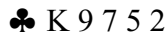


“West’s remaining diamonds are established as winners, but what if East, rather than West, next gains the lead for the defense? (West’s winners are stranded.) Let’s put the cards back and see what the suit looks like if West starts off by leading a low diamond:



“Declarer wins the first trick, but what happens now if either defender wins the next trick for the defense? (The defenders take four tricks.) By giving up a trick early, the defenders retain communication between the two hands.

“When leading a low card from a long suit, the defenders traditionally lead the fourth highest card. Let’s see what is meant by fourth highest (best). Put the following cards from the club suit on the table.



“Leading fourth highest means that you start at the top with the ♣K and count down four cards to the ♣5. The ♣5 is the fourth highest club. If you take away the ♣2, the ♣5 is still the fourth highest. It is not necessary at this point to go into why players lead the fourth highest. If you are interested you can read about it in ‘The Finer Points’ in the textbook. For now, it’s enough to know what the fourth highest card is. If you forget, leading any low card is likely to be equally effective. From this suit, playing with the most partners, you could lead the ♣2.

“Let’s see the effect of leading low and how partner cooperates.”

Instructions

“In Exercise Four, you again lead your suit against a notrump contract. Which is the best card to lead? How many tricks can your side develop from the suit? What must the defenders do to ensure that they take all of the tricks they have coming?”

1)

	DUMMY	
	6 5	
YOU	■	PARTNER
K 9 8 7 2		J 4 3
	DECLARER	
	A Q 10	

2)

	DUMMY	
	A 2	
YOU	■	PARTNER
Q 7 6 3		K 8 5 4
	DECLARER	
	J 10 9	

3)

	DUMMY	
	8 7 5	
YOU	■	PARTNER
A Q 4 3 2		K J
	DECLARER	
	10 9 6	

1) Low (7); 3 2) Low (3); 3 3) Low (3); 5

Follow-up

Ask a member of the group to report the card they thought should be led and how many tricks the declarer could take. The answers should be something like this:

“In the first example, if you lead low, East plays the jack and declarer wins the trick with the queen. Declarer has a second trick with the ace, but if partner later leads the suit, declarer’s 10 is trapped. Declarer takes two tricks and the defenders take three. If you led the king originally, declarer would get three tricks.

“In the next example, if you lead low, partner can win the first trick with the king if declarer plays low from the dummy. Declarer takes a trick with the ace, but your queen takes a third trick and you end up with three tricks in the suit. If you were to lead the queen, declarer would take two tricks in the suit.

“In the last example, partner wins the first trick with the king and leads the jack. You will have to be careful to overtake the jack with your queen to avoid stranding your winners. By overtaking partner’s jack, you take with the first five tricks.”

Conclusion

“When leading your long suit against a notrump contract, lead a low card (fourth highest) if you do not have a three-card sequence or a broken or interior sequence.”

EXERCISE FIVE: Leading against a Notrump Contract

Introduction

“Now that you know how to pick both the suit and the card, let’s put it all together and select the opening lead against a notrump contract.”

Instructions

“The opening bid is 1NT by the opponent on your right and everybody passes. Which card do you lead from each of the hands in Exercise Five?”

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| 1) ♠ A K | 2) ♠ J 9 6 3 | 3) ♠ A J 8 6 5 2 |
| ♥ Q 10 8 4 3 | ♥ Q 4 | ♥ K 8 3 |
| ♦ J 9 5 | ♦ Q J 10 5 | ♦ 8 4 |
| ♠ 7 4 2 | ♠ K 8 3 | ♠ 9 2 |
| 1) <u>♥ 4</u> | 2) <u>♦ Q</u> | 3) <u>♠ 6</u> |

Follow-up

Discuss the answers with the group as a whole. This exercise summarizes the guidelines and the discussion should not take up too much time. For example, you might say something like this:

“In the first hand, you would pick your longest suit, hearts. With no sequence, lead low, the ♥4, fourth highest.

“In the second hand, you have a choice of long suits. Pick the stronger, diamonds. With a three-card sequence, lead the top card, the ♦Q.

“In the third hand, your long suit is spades. Again you would lead a low card, the ♠6, fourth highest.”

Conclusion

“Against a notrump contract, lead your longest suit with no help from the bidding. With a choice of suits, pick the stronger. If you do not have a sequence, lead a low card, fourth highest. Now you know the origin of the guideline: *fourth highest from your longest and strongest.*”

EXERCISE SIX: Listening to the Bidding

Introduction

“The bidding can often guide you when deciding which suit to lead. The opponents have to describe their hands to each other in order to reach the best contract. As they are talking back and forth, there is nothing to stop you from listening. Their auction will often tell you which suits to avoid and point you in the right direction for selecting the best opening lead.”

Instructions

“You are on lead against a contract of 3NT after the auction has progressed as follows:

NORTH (DUMMY)	EAST (PARTNER)	SOUTH (DECLARER)	WEST (YOU)
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
3♠	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

“Which card do you lead from each of the hands in Exercise Six?”

1) ♠ 7 4	2) ♠ Q 6 5 2	3) ♠ 6 3
♥ K Q 8 3	♥ Q 8 4	♥ J 9 4 2
♦ K J 6 2	♦ J 10 9	♦ Q 8 3
♣ 9 8 5	♣ J 8 3	♣ K Q J 10

1) <u>♦ 2</u>	2) <u>♦ J</u>	3) <u>♣ K</u>
---------------	---------------	---------------

Follow-up

Discussing the exercise should not take very long. It might go like this:

“The opponents have bid spades, hearts and clubs. The only unbid suit is diamonds, so your thoughts should turn to that suit even before you look at the cards in your hand. On the first hand, your heart suit is stronger than your diamond suit, but partner is less likely to have help for you in hearts since declarer bid that suit. Lead a diamond. With no sequence, lead the ♦2, fourth highest.

“In the second example, your only long suit is spades, but the opponent on your left has bid that suit twice. It is time to ignore the general guideline about leading your longest and pick the unbid suit, diamonds. Partner is likely to have some length and strength in that suit. Lead the ♦J, top of a sequence.

“Even though the opponents have bid a suit, that should not deter you from leading it when it obviously presents the best chance to defeat the contract. With the third hand, you would lead a club, even though declarer bid the suit. Lead the ♣K, top of a sequence, establishing three tricks for the defense even if declarer has the ♣A.”

Conclusion

“If the opponents have bid a suit, it is a good idea to avoid leading it if you have a suitable alternative. Paying close attention to the bids made by the opponents often can guide you to the best opening lead.”

EXERCISE SEVEN: Review of Opening the Bidding

Introduction

“Let’s quickly review opening the bidding. The dealer has the first opportunity to open the bidding and may pass or open the bidding at any level. If the dealer passes, each player in turn gets the opportunity to open the bidding. With 13 to 21 points, you open the bidding at the one level. With a balanced hand of 15 to 17 HCP, open 1NT. Otherwise, bid your longest suit if it is at least five cards in length (playing five-card majors). If you don’t have a five-card suit, open your longer minor suit. With two four-card minor suits, open 1♦. With two three-card minor suits, open 1♣.

“With a balanced hand of 20 or 21 HCP, open 2NT. Open 3NT with 25 to 27 points. With an unbalanced hand of more than 21 points, open 2♣. This is a strong bid, almost always forcing to game. You will name your real suit with your rebid.

“Sometimes you have a hand too weak to open the bidding at the one level, but the hand contains a good six-card or longer suit. Such hands can be opened with a preemptive bid, a suit bid at the two level or higher. Naturally 2♣ is reserved for a strong bid.”

Instructions

“As a review, what would you open with each of the hands in Exercise Seven?”

1) ♠ Q 10 8 5 2
♥ 9 4
♦ A K 8 3
♣ A 4

2) ♠ K 7 3
♥ A J
♦ K 10 9 6 4
♣ A J 10

3) ♠ 7 4
♥ A J 9 2
♦ K 10 4 3
♣ A J 8

1) 1♠

2) 1NT

3) 1♦

4) ♠ Q J 9
♥ A K 7
♦ K Q 8 4
♣ A J 9

5) ♠ K Q J 10 8 3
♥ A K J
♦ K Q
♣ K 4

6) ♠ 8 6
♥ 10
♦ A Q 10 9 6 4 3
♣ J 4 2

4) 2NT

5) 2♣

6) 3♦

Follow-up

Discuss the answers with the group as a whole since this is a course on defense and the bidding is just a review. You can lead the students to the right bid by prefacing the question with a statement such as this for the first hand:

“You have 13 points in high cards plus one point for the five-card spade suit, a total of 14 points. The hand is unbalanced because it has two doubletons. What would you open?”

Now the students are led into bidding 1 ♠. This may seem like too much direction but there isn't time to teach a bidding lesson, as well as a lesson on defense and a review of declarer play. This exercise should take about six or seven minutes. It is most useful if you have new students in the class who have not taken the earlier lesson series. If all of the students have taken the *Bidding* course, you could leave this exercise for self study if you are running short on time.

Conclusion

“Open the bidding at the one level with 13 to 21 points and with 2 ♣, holding an unbalanced hand of more than 21 points. You will name your real suit with your rebid. With fewer than 13 points, pass unless you have a good six-card or longer suit, in which case, you may open with a preempt at the two level or higher.”

EXERCISE EIGHT: Review of Declarer's Plan

Introduction

“Before declarer starts to play, declarer always should take the time to review the PLAN. The four steps are:

1. *Pause to consider your objectives*
2. *Look at your winners and losers*
3. *Analyze your alternatives*
4. *Now put it all together*

“In a notrump contract, the emphasis is on winners. In a suit contract, you look at the PLAN from the point of view of losers.”

Instructions

“Go through the four steps of declarer's PLAN to decide how to play the deal in Exercise Eight in a contract of 3NT after the opening lead of the ♣Q.”

LEAD	DUMMY
♣ Q	♠ J 9 2
	♥ 10 6 4
	♦ Q J 10 7 3
	♣ A 8
	■
	DECLARER
	♠ A 8 4 3
	♥ A K 9
	♦ K 8
	♣ K 7 3 2

Follow-up

Discuss the deal with the entire class.

“The first step is to consider your objective. In a notrump contract, you look at your objective in terms of winners. How many winners do you need to make 3NT? (Nine.) The second step is to count the number of winners you have (sure tricks). How many sure tricks do you have? (Five: one spade, two hearts and two clubs.) This tells you that you need four more tricks. The next step is to analyze your alternatives. Where can the extra tricks come from? (The four extra tricks can come from promoting the diamonds into winners by driving out the opponents' ♦ A.) Finally, put it all together. What do you have to watch out for? (Once the diamonds are promoted, declarer needs an entry to the dummy. So the first trick must be won with the ♣K, keeping the ♣A in dummy. When playing the diamonds, declarer must start with the ♦K, high card from the short side.)”

Conclusion

“Always stop to make a plan before starting to play. It takes only a moment and sets you off in the right direction. For example, if you didn’t stop to make a plan on this deal, you might win the first trick with the ♣A and throw away your chance to make the contract.”

SAMPLE DEALS

EXERCISE NINE: Leading Partner's Suit

Introduction

“We know that leading partner's suit makes partner happy. In the first practice deal, we'll see that it also can be effective in setting the contract.”

Instructions

If your students have attended an earlier series of lessons, you probably will be familiar with the amount of help they need prior to playing the pre-dealt deals. With some, you can have them play the deal and discuss it afterwards. With those students who need more confidence, you still should go through the deal before playing, covering the major points. They still will have enough challenge putting it into practice.

“Turn up the cards on the first pre-dealt deal. Put each deal dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player.”

(E-Z Deal Cards #1, Deal 1)

Dealer: North	♠ Q J 8 4 ♥ 5 2 ♦ Q J 10 8 2 ♣ A K				
♠ K 9 3 ♥ K 6 ♦ 5 4 3 ♣ Q J 10 9 5	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ A 10 7 ♥ A J 9 ♦ A K 6 ♣ 8 6 4 2
N					
W E					
S					
	♠ 6 5 2 ♥ Q 10 8 7 4 3 ♦ 9 7 ♣ 7 3				

The Bidding

“What would North open the bidding? (1♦.) How can East describe the hand? (Overcall 1NT.) South passes. How many points does West have? (10, 9 HCPs plus 1 for the five-card suit). At what level does the partnership belong? (Game.) Is there a Golden Fit? (No.) What does West respond? (3NT.) How does the auction proceed from there? (Pass, pass, pass.) What is the contract? (3NT.) Who is the declarer? (East.)”

The Defense

“Which player makes the opening lead? (South.) What would the opening lead be? (♦9.) Why? (Partner’s suit.) How does North plan to defeat the contract? (Drive out declarer’s ♦A and ♦K to take three diamond tricks and two club tricks.)”

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer needs nine winners. There are six sure tricks: two in spades, two in hearts and two in diamonds. Declarer plans to promote the club suit into three winners by driving out the ♣A and the ♣K.)”

Conclusion

“The diamonds offer the best chance of defeating the contract, but the defenders have to be persistent. The first step is for South to lead diamonds, the suit South's partner bid. Then, North has to keep leading diamonds at every opportunity in order to defeat declarer’s contract. Notrump contracts are often a race to see which side can develop its winners first.”

EXERCISE TEN: Leading from a Sequence

Introduction

“We’ll see that leading the top of a sequence promotes winners for the defenders. There’s more to it, though. The lead from an interior sequence can trap the opponents’ high cards — but the defenders have to work together. Let’s see how this works.”

Instructions

“Turn up the cards on the second pre-dealt deal. Put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player.”

(E-Z Deal Cards #1, Deal 2)

Dealer: East	♠ K Q J 4 ♥ 8 5 ♦ A J 8 ♣ K 10 5 2					
♠ 9 6 2 ♥ K J 10 9 ♦ 10 4 3 ♣ A 9 4	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ 8 7 5 3 ♥ A 7 6 2 ♦ 7 2 ♣ 7 6 3	
N						
W E						
S						
	♠ A 10 ♥ Q 4 3 ♦ K Q 9 6 5 ♣ Q J 8					

The Bidding

“East and West pass throughout the auction. What does South open with? (1♦.) What does North respond? (1♠.) How does South finish describing this balanced hand? (1NT.) At what level does the partnership belong? (Game.) Is there a Golden Fit? (No.) What does North rebid? (3NT.) How does the auction proceed from there? (Pass, pass, pass.) What is the contract? (3NT.) Who is the declarer? (South.)”

The Defense

“Which player makes the opening lead? (West.) What would the opening lead be? (♥J.) Why? (Top of touching honors from an interior sequence.) From the opening lead, which card does East know that declarer has? (♥Q.) How do the defenders plan to defeat the contract? (Trap declarer’s ♥Q to take four heart tricks and the ♣A.)”

It will probably be difficult for East to play the ♥A on partner’s ♥J and then lead a heart back. Also, this lesson series has not yet addressed which heart East should return after winning the ♥A. In the beginning of this lesson, however, returning partner’s suit was mentioned (Exercise Three). Also mentioned was the fact that you would lead back the same card that you would normally lead from your remaining holding in the suit (*e.g.*, low from three low cards). If necessary, you can remind the students of this. If declarer plays a low heart, rather than the queen, on East’s heart return, West might not be sure whether to play the king next or not. Most students will. For those who do not, point out that it is likely to be their only opportunity to defeat the contract (*e.g.*, hoping that declarer’s ♥Q will fall under the ♥K). Note that declarer also makes the contract if West fails to take the ♣A after taking four heart tricks. You can point out that this is similar to declarer’s guideline of “take your tricks and run” — when you see enough tricks to defeat the contract, take them! The defenders’ main objective is to defeat the contract.

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer needs nine tricks and has four spade tricks and five diamond tricks — as soon as declarer gets the lead.)”

Conclusion

“Leading the top card from a strong sequence often provides the defenders with a good chance to defeat the contract. If partner leads a high card, you have to use your imagination to visualize partner’s holding in the suit. In this deal, East knew from West’s opening lead that declarer held the ♥Q. If partner had the ♥K, then declarer’s ♥Q could be trapped — if East won the first trick with the ♥A.”

Despite the earlier exercises, North may be reluctant to lead a low heart. If that is the case, let North defend by leading a high heart and take a look at the end result to see the difference it makes. While declarer will probably lead a club before taking all of the other winners, it still is useful to point out to North and South which cards they have to hold on to. There will be more discussion of this in later lessons.

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer needs nine tricks and has three spade tricks and four diamond tricks. After the heart lead, declarer has eight tricks. The extra trick will have to come from promotion in the club suit, by driving out the ♣A.)”

Conclusion

“The only way for the defenders to defeat the contract is for North to lead a low heart. Declarer takes the first trick, but when South gets the lead with the ♣A, South leads a heart. North has enough winners to defeat the contract. Notice that South should return partner’s suit even when declarer’s ♥J wins the first trick. Also notice that South must rise with the ♣A at the first opportunity — otherwise, declarer can cash nine winners (four diamonds, three spades, one heart and one club) for game.”

EXERCISE TWELVE: Listening to the Opponents

Introduction

“Sometimes the opponents give you information about their hands through the bidding. It is worth listening to what they have to say. When you are not sure what to lead, choose a suit the opponents haven’t mentioned, an unbid suit. The next deal illustrates why this can work well.”

Instructions

“Turn up the cards on the fourth pre-dealt deal. Put each hand dummy style at the edge of the table in front of each player.”

(E-Z Deal Cards #1, Deal 4)

Dealer: West	♠ K Q J										
	♥ 9 6										
	♦ K J 9 4 3										
	♣ A 7 6										
♠ 9 8 7 6 5	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 7 4 2		♥ A 8 5 3									
♦ 6		♦ A 8 7 5									
♣ K 9 4 3		♣ Q 10 8 2									
	♠ A 10 3 2										
	♥ K Q J 10										
	♦ Q 10 2										
	♣ J 5										

The Bidding

“West passes. What is North’s opening bid? (1♦.) Why can East not overcall or make a takeout double? (East has no five-card suit to overcall and does not have support for all of the unbid suits.) What does East do? (Pass.) Which suit does South bid at the one level? (1♥, bidding ‘up the line.’) West passes. How does North describe this balanced hand? (1NT.) East passes. At what level does the contract belong? (Game.) What does South bid? (3NT.) How does the auction proceed from there? (Pass, pass, pass.) What is the contract? (3NT.) Who is the declarer? (North.)”

The Defense

“Who makes the opening lead? (East.) After listening to the auction, which suit should East choose? (Clubs, an unbid suit.)? Which card? (♣2, fourth highest.) What would happen if East chose a different suit? (Declarer would win the trick and have time to drive out the ♦A and make the contract.)”

The Play

“Review the steps in declarer’s PLAN. How does declarer plan to make the contract? (Declarer needs nine winners. There are four sure tricks in spades and one sure trick in clubs. The diamond suit will provide four winners through promotion and the heart suit only three. Therefore declarer would plan to drive out the ♦ A to make the contract.”

Conclusion

“East has a choice of three suits that would be reasonable to lead. After eavesdropping on the opponents’ bidding, however, the unbid suit becomes the logical choice, even though it is the weakest of the three. If East leads another suit, declarer will have no trouble making the contract.”