



Mislaid Plans

WHEN PLAYING as declarer, one of the most important habits to develop involves effective planning. This requires a degree of counting, and a level of anticipation about the likely developments over the first couple of tricks.

Choosing the Best Suit to Develop in No-trump Contracts

First, consider some no-trump planning, as in Example A:

Example A

♠ A 5
♥ K J 5
♦ A 8 7 6 5
♣ J 6 3

♠ K 6 3
♥ Q 4
♦ 10 4 3 2
♣ A K Q 4

You are South, the declarer in a 3NT contract. West leads the two of spades. How should you plan the play?

Mistakes People Make: Taking Unnecessary Risks

It is a good habit to begin by counting your certain winners (top tricks). If you fail to count your winners, you might be tempted to choose diamonds as your best source of tricks. You start with seven top tricks – two spades, one diamond and four clubs. While playing on diamonds could allow you to make an overtrick if they split evenly, your contract will now be at risk if they split 3-1. Say you play the ace of diamonds followed by the five. The defenders

can win and continue spades. Whether you now lose a second diamond trick or turn to hearts, the defenders can potentially win two spades, one heart and two diamonds to defeat your game.

However, starting out with seven winners means that you only require two more tricks, and these can be guaranteed by forcing out the ace of hearts immediately. You will not have any chance of making an overtrick if the defenders continue spades, but your contract will be secure.

Now consider Example B:

Example B

♠ A 5
♥ K J 5
♦ A Q J 6 5
♣ 7 6 3

♠ 9 6 3
♥ Q 4
♦ 8 4 3
♣ A K Q J 10

Once again you are South, the declarer in 3NT and West leads the two of spades. How should you plan the play?

Mistakes People Make: Failing to Draw Inferences

This time you only have one stopper in spades, so it is tempting to win the ace of spades, cross to the ten of clubs and lead the three of diamond to the jack hoping to find your left-hand opponent with the king of diamonds. If the finesse succeeds, you will make at least three diamond tricks without losing the lead. However, this approach will also lead to defeat if it is your right-hand opponent who holds the

diamond king. Does this represent the best chance of success?

Assuming that your opponents are playing 'fourth highest' leads, then it is still safer to attack hearts immediately. Why is this? You begin with seven top tricks – one spade, one diamond and five clubs, so can again make two winners by force in hearts. This might seem risky once the ace of spades has been played, but will only lead to defeat if spades do not divide 4-4. West's lead of the two of spades is consistent with a four-card holding, in which case the safest approach is to force out the ace of hearts rather than finessing diamonds.

Suit-contract Planning

Counting winners is still a good habit to develop, but it is often a good idea to also count your potential losers when planning a trump contract. This is particularly important when assessing whether to draw trumps immediately or not.

Mistakes People Make: Mis-timing Trump Plays

Consider Example C:

Example C

♠ K Q 4
♥ Q 10 5 3
♦ 8 6 4 3
♣ Q 5

♠ A J
♥ K J 9 7 6 4
♦ A 2
♣ J 7 3

Once again you are South, but this time ⇒