

Defending against No Trump Contracts Master-class

Material for this class is based on Chapter 8 of Card Play Technique (revised version) by Victor Mollo and Nico Gardner and Chapter 2 of Defensive Bridge Play by Edwin Kantar as well as Ron's own twisted preferences.

Introduction

Bridge Technique is split naturally into the three Categories: Bidding, Play and Defence.

After you have learned the basics over a 2 or 3 year period, I believe the quickest way for you to get better results in competitions such as league matches, is to concentrate on improving your defence.

This second lesson is going to help you understand the how and why of selecting the best lead against declarer's No Trump contract. Having decided which suit to start off with, it is also important to play the best card from the suit chosen. The main idea is to select a card which clearly tells partner what your initial holding is in the suit led. If possible, the lead card should be clear and unambiguous (see Appendix A for the EBU Standard English Leads as well as a more modern style used by many of our County level players).

Summary

Summary of C.P.T., Chapter 8, page 109, which guides you as to what you should be thinking about before you make an opening lead against a No Trump contract:-

1. The best attack against NT contracts lies in developing the trick-taking capacity of the small cards. Therefore it is usual to lead from length.
2. With a sequence or near sequence of three or more cards, the correct leads is the top (\spadesuit QJ109 or \heartsuit QJ96 or \diamondsuit 987 with Standard English lead-style).
3. From an interior sequence lead the second honour (\spadesuit AJ1074 or \heartsuit KJ1063 or \diamondsuit A10985).
4. Unless the high-card combination calls for the lead of an honour, open the 4th highest.
5. The lead of the 4th highest by West allows East to apply the Rule of Eleven. By subtracting the number of pips from eleven, he can tell how many higher cards than the one led by partner are in the other three hands. And since he can see his own hand and dummy, he knows how many higher cards there are with declarer.
6. If you want partner to continue a suit, play a higher spot card than you need do (a six or five when you have the three or two. Play your lowest if you want a switch).
7. When West leads a small card and dummy has no feature in that suit, East usually plays his highest card.
8. But when dummy has one or more honours, East is correct in finessing against dummy.
9. In returning partner's suit, lead the top, unless you hold four or more. If you do, play the fourth highest.
10. But make an exception to the above, when there is a danger that you may block the suit. Leave yourself a small enough card for partner to overtake after the suit has been cleared.
11. Exercises:

1.

Bidding:	North	South
		1 NT
	3NT	all pass

What card do you lead from:

- (a) \spadesuit KJ1095 \heartsuit Q74 \diamondsuit J863 \clubsuit 5
- (b) \spadesuit KJ104 \heartsuit Q63 \diamondsuit QJ105 \clubsuit 74
- (c) \spadesuit A7642 \heartsuit Q85 \diamondsuit QJ96 \clubsuit 4
- (d) \spadesuit AJ1096 \heartsuit KJ1093 \diamondsuit 5 \clubsuit 63
- (e) \spadesuit AQ104 \heartsuit 94 \diamondsuit QJ106 \clubsuit 863
- (f) \spadesuit AKJ52 \heartsuit 874 \diamondsuit Q93 \clubsuit 84

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2.

♠	K 6 3
♥	7 5 4
♦	Q 8 7 5 3
♣	A 5

		N		♠	J 8 2
	W		E	♥	A 6
		S		♦	9 6 2
				♣	Q J 8 6 4
South	West	North	East		
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass		

West leads ♥Q and dummy plays low.
What card should East play?

3.

♠	K 7 4
♥	9 8
♦	Q 9 6 5 2
♣	A 4 3

		N		♠	J 9 5
	W		E	♥	A 7 2
		S		♦	8 4
				♣	Q J 8 6 2
South	West	North	East		
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass		

West leads ♥J and dummy plays low.
What card should East play to the first trick?
What do you suppose West's holding is in Hearts?

4.

♠	9 2
♥	A Q 4
♦	K Q 10 7
♣	Q J 6 3

		N		♠	A 10 8 7 3
	W		E	♥	J 10 7 3 2
		S		♦	5
				♣	A 7
South	West	North	East		
-	-	1 ♦	1 ♠		
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All pass		

West leads ♠K What card should East play to the first trick?
If West continues with the ♠Q, what card should East play to the second trick?

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5.

♠	A 6
♥	10 8 4 2
♦	A J 7 3
♣	J 6 4

		N		♠	Q 9 5
	W		E	♥	Q 7 5
		S		♦	Q 10 4
				♣	K 9 5 3
South	West	North	East		
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass		

West leads a small spade and dummy's Ace wins.
What card should East play?

6.

♠	A K 4
♥	Q 5
♦	A 9 7 4 2
♣	8 5 3

		N		♠	Q 10 2
	W		E	♥	AJ 10 9
		S		♦	K 6 3
				♣	7 6 4
South	West	North	East		
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦	Pass		
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass		

West leads 9 ♠ and declarer plays dummy's Ace.
What card should East play to the first trick?

7.

♠	J 6 4
♥	A J 5
♦	Q J 5
♣	K 8 7 2

		N		♠	K 10 3
	W		E	♥	Q 10 4
		S		♦	K 8 7
				♣	J 9 5 3
South	West	North	East		
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦	Pass		
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass		

West leads ♦4 and declarer plays the 5 from dummy. What card should East play ?
Assuming that West led a true card, what is declarer's likely honour holding in Diamonds?

Answers

1. (a) The ♠J. There is a danger of playing into declarer's ♠AQ, but this lead from an interior sequence still offers the best chance to set up enough tricks to break the contract.
(b) The ♦Q. This is safe while the spades are too short to justify the risk worth taking in (a).
(c) The ♠4. It is the natural opening, and with reasonable luck may lead to three tricks in defence. I the spade suit contained four cards only, the diamond lead would be preferable.
(d) The ♠J. It offers the same prospects as the ♥J, but is less risky. Even if declarer has ♠KQ5 the lead will not cost a trick. The same is true if there is a doubleton spade honour in dummy. But in hearts, unless partner has an honour, the lead is more likely to present declarer with a trick.
(e) The ♦Q. This is safe, and the suit may develop two tricks. Let declarer play the spades himself. Alternatively, wait for partner to play them.
(f) The ♠K, the orthodox opening from this combination. Partner may have an opportunity later to play through declarer into West's tenace.
2. The ♥A. The six would block the suit.
3. The Ace. West has ♥KJ1063. He is missing the nine and eight and he would not lead the jack from ♥J1063. The fourth highest would be the right lead from such a holding, not the top. By going up with the ace, East can play through declarer's queen.
4. The eight. The Ace. The bidding marks South with ♠J654. East must therefore overtake the queen and clear the suit. If he does not, he will have only one trick (the ♠A) to cash when he comes in with his ♣A. The point to bear in mind is that West cannot have a third spade.
5. The nine, encouraging West. You like spades and don't want a switch.
6. The two. East wants a switch to hearts, and hopes that West will gain the lead, before the probable diamond entry is driven out.
7. The seven. Declarer probably has the ten. By applying the Rule of Eleven, East can tell that declarer has only one card higher than the four. With the ace, declarer would have probably played an honour from dummy. It is safer, however, for East not to play the King, in case South has the Ace after all. Playing the king cannot gain, but can lose a trick.

Appendix A

Opening Leads Against Suit Contracts:

Standard English	More Advanced
<u>AK</u>	<u>AK</u>
<u>AKx</u>	<u>AKx</u>
<u>KQ10</u>	<u>KQ10</u>
<u>KQx</u>	<u>KQx</u>
<u>KJ10</u>	<u>KJ10</u>
<u>K109</u>	<u>K109</u>
<u>QJ10</u>	<u>QJ10</u>
<u>QJx</u>	<u>QJx</u>
<u>J10x</u>	<u>J10x</u>
<u>10xx</u>	<u>10xx</u>
<u>109x</u>	<u>109x</u>
<u>987x</u>	<u>987x</u>
<u>10xx</u>	<u>10xx</u>
<u>Hxx</u>	<u>Hxx</u>
<u>Hxxx</u>	<u>Hxxx</u>
<u>Hxxx</u>	<u>Hxxx</u>
<u>xx</u>	<u>xx, Hx</u>
<u>xxx</u>	<u>xxx</u>
<u>xxxx</u>	<u>xxxx</u>

The More Advanced leads can be summarised as 'Reverse Attitude' with 'Strong 10s' and 'Weak Jacks'. You should note that there is less confusion about possible holdings.

Personally, I have doubts about the Ace for Attitude, King for Kount guidance from Standard English. I prefer a King lead to deny the Ace unless it is AK doubleton and normally should show the Queen. I believe that it is clearer to play a low card from a small doubleton.

Signals and Discards

Reverse Attitude / Reverse Count is much clearer and unambiguous than the Standard English HELD or other obscure Odd/Even, McKenny, etc.