

## §5. Defence Against No-trump Contracts.

**By the end of this chapter you should understand the following terms:**

**Fourth-highest leads:** When leading against a No-trump contract it is customary to lead the fourth-highest card from a long suit, if that suit is headed by an honour.

**Top-of-a-sequence leads:** When leading from a suit headed by a sequence (a three-card or longer run) it is customary to lead the top card.

The **defence** to a No-trump contract follows the same general principles as does declarer play – that is, the defenders lead their long suit hoping to make *winners* out of the small cards.

The defenders' top tricks are for regaining the lead so that the defenders can get on lead to cash their suit. The following deal shows a classic example of this idea:

|                     |          |              |  |
|---------------------|----------|--------------|--|
| <b>Hand 1</b>       |          |              |  |
| South plays in 3NT. |          |              |  |
| West leads the ♠5.  |          |              |  |
|                     |          | ♠ 10 9 8     |  |
|                     |          | ♥ K Q 2      |  |
|                     |          | ♦ Q J 10 9 5 |  |
|                     |          | ♣ A K        |  |
| ♠ K J 6 5 2         | Dummy    | ♠ Q 4        |  |
| ♥ 7 3               | W        | ♥ 10 9 8 6 4 |  |
| ♦ A 8 6 2           | E        | ♦ 7 4        |  |
| ♣ 6 3               | Declarer | ♣ Q J 9 4    |  |
|                     |          | ♠ A 7 3      |  |
|                     |          | ♥ A J 5      |  |
|                     |          | ♦ K 3        |  |
|                     |          | ♣ 10 8 7 5 2 |  |

Here, against 3NT by South, West leads his longest suit (Spades), hoping to *set it up*. This requires co-operation from East who must play his ♠Q on dummy's ♠8 at trick one to knock out declarer's *stopper*. We refer to this teamwork as: *Third player plays high*.

Now, South may choose not to part with his precious ♠A, so East must keep up the good work by *returning his partner's suit*. South can only see six *top tricks* (a Spade, three Hearts and two Clubs) so must try to set up the Diamonds. Winning the ♠A South should immediately play the ♦K to knock out the ♦A. When West gets on lead with that card his Spades are all *winners* so the contract is defeated.

The opening lead “rule” (against No-trump contracts, anyway) is usually:

Lead the **fourth-highest-from-your-longest-and-strongest**.

If, however, your long suit is headed by a three-card (or longer) sequence then it is normal to lead the top card. The following rearrangement of Hand 1 (swapping West's ♠6 with East's ♠Q) gives Hand 2. Here, the ♠5 lead would give dummy a cheap trick with the ♠8 and would allow declarer to make as many as *eleven* tricks.

|                     |          |              |  |
|---------------------|----------|--------------|--|
| <b>Hand 2</b>       |          |              |  |
| South plays in 3NT. |          |              |  |
| West leads the ♠5.  |          |              |  |
|                     |          | ♠ 10 9 8     |  |
|                     |          | ♥ K Q 2      |  |
|                     |          | ♦ Q J 10 9 5 |  |
|                     |          | ♣ A K        |  |
| ♠ K Q J 5 2         | Dummy    | ♠ 6 4        |  |
| ♥ 7 3               | W        | ♥ 10 9 8 6 4 |  |
| ♦ A 8 6 2           | E        | ♦ 7 4        |  |
| ♣ 6 3               | Declarer | ♣ Q J 9 4    |  |
|                     |          | ♠ A 7 3      |  |
|                     |          | ♥ A J 5      |  |
|                     |          | ♦ K 3        |  |
|                     |          | ♣ 10 8 7 5 2 |  |

West does not need East to contribute a “high” Spade, however; the correct lead being the ♠K. This knocks out the ♠A (if South refuses to part with his ♠A West persists with the ♠Q and then another Spade if necessary) and *sets up* all of West's suit. Declarer must play on Diamonds to set up enough tricks for his contract but this allows West to grab the trick with his ♦A and cash his Spades. The defence cannot be denied four Spade tricks and a Diamond for one down.







## §5. Example hands 1 to 4.

**Hand 1** Dealer North

|  |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| ♠ K 5 2<br>♥ J 9 8<br>♦ K Q 4<br>♣ A 8 5 2   | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ Q 10<br>♥ A Q 7 3 2<br>♦ 6 5 3 2<br>♣ 7 6 |
|  | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
| W  |  | E   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
|  | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
| ♠ J 9 8 7 4<br>♥ K 10 5<br>♦ 8<br>♣ Q 10 9 4 |  | ♠ A 6 3<br>♥ 6 4<br>♦ A J 10 9 7<br>♣ K J 3 |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |

|              |       |                  |       |
|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West         | North | East             | South |
| Pass         | 1NT   | Pass             | 3NT   |
| Pass         | Pass  | Pass             |       |
| 3NT by North |       | Opening lead: ♥3 |       |

North opens 1NT with his 4-3-3-3 13-count and South happily raises to 3NT, hoping his Diamonds will prove a rich *source of tricks*. East leads the ♥3 (his fourth-highest Heart) and declarer's **Count** and **Plan** indicates he has nine *top tricks* (two Spades, five Diamonds and two Clubs). Unfortunately for North-South East-West get to go first in this race, and they are able to take five Heart tricks before declarer can get his foot in the door. West must co-operate with his partner by playing his King of Hearts at trick one (failure to do so counts as a dereliction of duty) and he must return his partner's suit at trick two, actually by leading back the **Ten**. Having taken the three top Hearts the ♥7 2 are winners as well. One off.

**Hand 2** Dealer East

|   |  |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| ♠ A 4<br>♥ J 9 4 2<br>♦ Q J 10 9 6<br>♣ 8 7 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ Q 10 8<br>♥ A 10 5<br>♦ A 7 4 3<br>♣ Q J 3 |
|   | N  |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
| W   |  | E  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
|   | S  |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
| ♠ 9 6 3<br>♥ K 6<br>♦ K 5 2<br>♣ A K 10 6 4 |  | ♠ K J 7 5 2<br>♥ Q 8 7 3<br>♦ 8<br>♣ 9 5 2 |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |

|             |       |                  |       |
|-------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West        | North | East             | South |
| 3NT         | Pass  | 1NT              | Pass  |
| 3NT by East | Pass  | Pass             | Pass  |
| 3NT by East |       | Opening lead: ♠5 |       |

East has an easy 1NT bid (13 points, 4-3-3-3 pattern) and West a straightforward raise to game. East is delighted with the sight of dummy as his **Count** and **Plan** shows he has nine easy winners (two Hearts, two Diamonds and five Clubs). Not so fast. North-South are in charge of the field and they can take five Spade tricks first. South leads the ♠5 (the *fourth-highest-of-his-longest-and-strongest*) and it's up to North to show partnership co-operation. He takes the ♠A and should *return his partner's suit* (switching to Diamonds would be poor play). East has no winning option now. Whatever he plays at trick two (the Ten or the Queen) South has a counterplay (the Jack or the King). All five of South's Spades are winners.

**Hand 3** Dealer South

|  |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| ♠ 7 4 2<br>♥ J 10 4<br>♦ K Q J 8<br>♣ A Q J  | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ K J 6<br>♥ Q 8 5 3 2<br>♦ 9 6 3 2<br>♣ 8 |
|  | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
| W  |  | E   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
|  | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |
| ♠ A 10 8 5 3<br>♥ K 6<br>♦ 4<br>♣ 10 9 7 5 4 |  | ♠ Q 9<br>♥ A 9 7<br>♦ A 10 7 5<br>♣ K 6 3 2 |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |

|              |       |                  |       |
|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West         | North | East             | South |
| Pass         | 3NT   | All Pass         | 1NT   |
| 3NT by South |       | Opening lead: ♠5 |       |

The auction here should be routine to 3NT. With two five-card suits West leads the stronger (Spades) and selects the *fourth-highest* card (the ♠5). South may like the look of the 14-point dummy but Spades is a weakness and the opponents have led the suit. East must play his ♠K at trick one (*third player plays high*); playing the Jack (ugh!) would allow South a cheap and unmerited trick with the ♠Q. Next, at trick two, East must *return his partner's suit* – but it is crucial to lead back the Jack and not the ♠6. With two cards remaining it is customary to lead back the higher when returning partner's suit – this deal illustrates the importance of that principle. The ♠6 would allow 3NT home by tangling up the Spades. Try it and see.

**Hand 4** Dealer West

|   |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|
| ♠ Q 7 2<br>♥ 10 8 5 2<br>♦ A 6 4 3 2<br>♣ 9 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ A 6 4<br>♥ K Q 4<br>♦ 9 7<br>♣ K Q 10 7 3 |
|   | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
| W   |  | E   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
|   | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |
| ♠ K 5 3<br>♥ A 6 3<br>♦ J 10 8<br>♣ A J 5 2 |  | ♠ J 10 9 8<br>♥ J 9 7<br>♦ K Q 5<br>♣ 8 6 4 |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |

|             |       |                  |       |
|-------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West        | North | East             | South |
| 1NT         | Pass  | 3NT              | Pass  |
| Pass        | Pass  |                  |       |
| 3NT by West |       | Opening lead: ♦3 |       |

West has an obvious 1NT opening bid and East has no reason to do other than raise to 3NT. North has an unpromising hand but does at least have a five-card suit – so selects the ♦3, the fourth-highest card. Once again declarer's **Count** and **Plan** shows him to have plenty of tricks, *if* he could gain the lead. South plays a Diamond honour at trick one – the Queen for choice. (Although *third player plays high* you should play the *lower of equals*). Having won the trick the next play must be the ♦K. Firstly, South should *return his partner's suit*, secondly he should play the higher card from two remaining (cf Hand 3). The ♦5 would tangle Diamonds up, the ♦K followed by another Diamond allows North to cash five tricks in the suit.

## §5. Example hands 5 to 8.

**Hand 5** Dealer North

|   |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| ♠ K 4 2<br>♥ Q 10 7 4<br>♦ 7 4 3<br>♣ 9 7 6 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ A 6 3<br>♥ A 9 5<br>♦ J 8 5 2<br>♣ A 10 5 | ♠ J 10 9 8 7<br>♥ J 8 6<br>♦ A<br>♣ Q 8 4 3 |
|   | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |
| W   |  | E |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |
|   | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |

|             |       |                  |       |
|-------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West        | North | East             | South |
|             | Pass  | 1NT              | Pass  |
| 3NT         | Pass  | Pass             | Pass  |
| 3NT by East |       | Opening lead: ♠J |       |

This deal illustrates why we lead the top-of-a-sequence and not the fourth-highest card. East plays in 3NT after a time-honoured auction and South naturally leads his longest suit. Here, the ♠J neatly skewers dummy's Queen, leaving declarer with no winning option. Should East call for dummy's Queen North would (*should, must*) cover with the King, forcing the Ace and setting up all South's remaining ♠10 9 8 7 as masters. Should East call for the ♠5 at trick one then North would have no cause to play his King – the Jack is doing the work for his side. North-South make four Spades and the ♦A. Now, suppose South led the ♠8 and East played low from dummy. Should North play the King? How could he tell?

**Hand 6** Dealer East

|   |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |   |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|
| ♠ A 6<br>♥ 9 7<br>♦ Q J 10 6 4 2<br>♣ A Q 9 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ Q J 10 9<br>♥ 4 3 2<br>♦ A K<br>♣ J 10 7 4 | ♠ 7 5 3<br>♥ Q J 10 8 6 5<br>♦ 8 7<br>♣ 6 3 |
|   | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |   |
| W   |  | E |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |   |
|   | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |   |

|              |       |                  |       |
|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West         | North | East             | South |
|              |       | Pass             | 1NT   |
| Pass         | 3NT   | All Pass         |       |
| 3NT by South |       | Opening lead: ♥Q |       |

Over 1NT North may as well take a pot at 3NT. 5♦ is likely to be a step too far and Diamonds may well provide a rich *source of tricks* in No-trumps. That's the theory, anyway... West leads the ♥Q (top-of-a-sequence) and this deal is a classic *tempo hand*. South's **Count** and **Plan** tells him that he has seven "on top" so needs to knock out the ♦A K to make extras there. Meanwhile, in an odd sort of symmetry, East-West are leading Hearts to knock out the ♥A K in declarer's hand. It's a *race* and the defenders are ahead by virtue of having the opening lead. A Heart lead, a Diamond to East, a Heart back (*return your partner's suit*) and another Diamond. No good. Another Heart lead and declarer is two down.

**Hand 7** Dealer South

|   |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| ♠ K 9<br>♥ 7 5<br>♦ 8 6 5 2<br>♣ K Q 10 8 3 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ J 7 4<br>♥ K Q 10<br>♦ A Q 9 7 4<br>♣ J 9 | ♠ A 10 6 3<br>♥ J 9 4 2<br>♦ K J 3<br>♣ A 7 |
|   | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |
| W   |  | E |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |
|   | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |   |

|             |       |                  |          |
|-------------|-------|------------------|----------|
| West        | North | East             | South    |
|             |       |                  | Pass     |
| 1NT         | Pass  | 3NT              | All Pass |
| 3NT by West |       | Opening lead: ♣K |          |

This deal and the last one illustrate the value of leading the top card from "near sequences". Here, West plays in 3NT and discovers a mutual Club weakness. However, if North were to lead the ♣8 (*fourth-highest-of-his-longest-and-strongest*) then the Jack would score on table, or even the Nine if declarer opted to play that. The textbook lead from a suit headed by the K Q 10 is the King, treating it as the K Q J, catering for positions such as this one. After a **low** Club lead declarer would make three Hearts, five Diamonds and **two** Clubs. After the ♣K lead the defenders have the tempo to take four Clubs and the ♥A. It's easy for North to play the ♣Q on the second round of Clubs and crush the Jack on table.

**Hand 8** Dealer West

|  |  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |  |
|--|--|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| ♠ K 8 2<br>♥ A K 2<br>♦ 9 5 3<br>♣ K 8 5 2 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <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 |  | ♠ 7 5 3<br>♥ Q J 9 7 6 5<br>♦ A K<br>♣ 6 3 | ♠ Q J 10 9 4<br>♥ 4 3<br>♦ 8 7<br>♣ J 10 7 4 |
|  | N  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |  |
| W  |  | E |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |  |
|  | S  |   |   |  |   |  |   |  |   |  |  |  |

|              |       |                  |       |
|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West         | North | East             | South |
|              | 1NT   | Pass             | 3NT   |
| Pass         | Pass  | Pass             |       |
| 3NT by North |       | Opening lead: ♥Q |       |

North opens 1NT and, applying the same logic as in Hand 6, South tries his luck in 3NT. East to lead. Now, a low Heart lead (*fourth-highest-of-his-longest-and-strongest*) would be fatal for the defence. Dummy's Ten (even the Eight, if that were declarer's choice) would score and North would have a cheap-as-chips extra Heart trick. Now declarer could set up Diamonds with no risk to his contract, scoring two overtricks. Now, if East makes the recommended lead of the ♥Q (treating the Q J 9 as though it were the Q J 10) then 3NT should fail. As North sets up Diamonds East can crush dummy's ♥10 with the Jack (the technical term is "pin") setting up all of his Hearts as winners. As in Hand 6, 3NT is two down.