

§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:

Hand 1

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.

Hand 2

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.

Many No-trump contracts are races between the defenders and declarer – each side trying to set up a suit. The one advantage the defenders have is that they get to go first in the race.

If you hold a sequence you may argue that you can lead any of the cards within it as they are all equals. True – but you have a partner in this game and it is usually a good idea to try to tell him what is going on. By leading a “high” card (and here we usually mean a Ten or higher) you are telling partner that you have a sequence headed by that card. So you are expressly denying that you hold the card immediately above the one you lead. (So, for example, if you lead the ♠J you are saying that you do not hold the ♠Q).

The table below shows some examples of the correct card to lead **when defending against a No-trump contract** from some miscellaneous card combinations:

Ex 1. <u>K</u> Q J 10	Ex 2. K Q 8 <u>3</u>	Ex 3. Q 10 8 <u>6</u>	Ex 4. A Q 7 <u>5</u>
Ex 5. <u>K</u> Q J 6 3	Ex 6. Q J 7 <u>5</u> 2	Ex 7. K 9 8 <u>6</u> 4	Ex 8. <u>10</u> 9 8 7 4
Ex 9. <u>Q</u> J 10 6 4 3	Ex 10. A J 8 <u>5</u> 3 2	Ex 11. A K 8 <u>6</u> 3 2	Ex 12. <u>J</u> 10 9 7 3 2
Ex 13. A Q 9 <u>8</u> 7	Ex 14. J 5 4 <u>3</u> 2	Ex 15. <u>A</u> K Q 7 5	Ex 16. J 10 7 <u>5</u> 4

Rather than try and commit these somewhat arbitrary examples to memory just note the basic rules:

- **With a broken suit, lead the fourth card down from the top.**
(Often known as: “**The-fourth-highest-of-your-longest-and-strongest.**”)
- **With a suit headed by a run (a three-card or longer sequence) lead the top card.**

Exceptions. With *near sequences*, such as K Q 10 (two consecutive honours, miss an honour then the next card) we still lead the top card, treating the holding as a three-card sequence. Hence:

Ex 19. <u>A</u> K J 9	Ex 20. <u>K</u> Q 10 6 4	Ex 21. <u>Q</u> J 9 6 3	Ex 22. <u>J</u> 10 8 4
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In the final deal of this chapter the defenders must co-operate to defeat 3NT.

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

Against the contract of 3NT West leads the *fourth-highest-of-his-longest-and-strongest* (in this case that's the ♦5) on which East must play his ♦Q (*third player plays high*). South is forced to win the first trick with his ♦K and should take stock with a **Count** and **Plan**.

Declarer can see six *top tricks* (four Clubs and two Hearts) to go with the Diamond trick already in the bank. That means South has seven easily available winners but needs two extras. The **Plan** must be to set up (at least) two more in Spades – once the ♠A is out of the way there would be three Spade tricks for the taking. Thus, South must play the ♠10 at trick two in an attempt to drive out the ♠A, setting up the three Spade honours on the table.

Now, East's duty is clear; defenders should make a **Plan** too. He wins his ♠A and *returns his partner's suit* to West's Diamond masters. It would be poor defence to switch suits by leading a Heart (although, admittedly, that is East's best suit). When your partner leads a suit against 3NT it is generally wise to lead it back when you get the chance. Here, all of West's four remaining Diamonds are winners (even the lowly ♦2!) and 3NT is defeated. Partners must co-operate at this game.

Bridge is a partnership game!

§5. Quiz on Defence Against No-trump Contracts.

In each case you are **South**

This is a Quiz with a slight difference as it's all about the opening lead.
East-West bid to 3NT and you are on lead. What is your choice?

1.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 10 8 2
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7
♣ K 10 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

2.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 8 4 2
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7
♣ K 10 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

3.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 10 8
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7 3
♣ A K 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

4.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 9 6
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7 3
♣ K 10 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

5.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9 7
♥ J 9 7 5 2
♦ Q 9 6
♣ 10

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

6.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ 9
♥ Q 8 4
♦ J 8 6 3
♣ K Q 10 9 5

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

7.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ K 8
♥ J 10 9 8
♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ 10 4 2

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

8.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 10 5 2
♥ 7 5 2
♦ 6 3
♣ A 4 3 2

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

9.

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ J 7 5
♥ Q 10 9 8 3
♦ K 4 2
♣ 7 3

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

10.*

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ K 10 7 6 4
♥ 5 3
♦ 2
♣ K 10 7 6 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

§5. Quiz on Defence Against No-trump Contracts. Answers

1.



♠ Q J 10 8 2
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7
♣ K 10 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠Q. You should generally lead your longest suit against No-trumps, and here that's Spades. As your suit is headed by a three-card sequence you start off with the top card. Partner can now deduce that you have the ♠J (and probably the ♠10), but not the ♠K.

2.



♠ Q 10 8 4 2
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7
♣ K 10 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠4. Again (cf Q1) you should be leading your long suit (Spades), but here your suit is *broken* rather than sequential. In these cases you lead the fourth-highest card, hoping that partner can fill in the gaps by contributing a useful card (such as the ♠K or the ♠J).

3.



♠ Q J 10 8
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7 3
♣ A K 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠Q. This isn't too difficult a problem – the catch is to avoid grabbing the low-hanging fruit in the guise of the ♣A K. These high cards must be retained and are means of regaining the lead during the hand in order to establish and cash a couple of Spade winners.

4.



♠ Q J 9 6
♥ 7 6 4
♦ 9 7 3
♣ K 10 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠Q. Yes, we realise you don't exactly have a sequence in Spades, but we tend to count "near-sequences" as though they were full sequences. Thus, for the purposes of the opening lead, ♠Q J 9 x counts as ♠Q J 10 x, ♠K Q 10 x counts as ♠K Q J x and so on.

5.



♠ K J 9 7
♥ J 9 7 5 2
♦ Q 9 6
♣ 10

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♥5. When in doubt, lead the fourth-highest-of-your-longest-and-strongest-suit. The key is *length before strength*, an adage that appears elsewhere in the game (in the context of bidding). Hearts is your longest suit, so that is where you look for the opening lead.

6.



♠ 9
♥ Q 8 4
♦ J 8 6 3
♣ K Q 10 9 5

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠K. Clubs are your longest suit, so you should lead them. However, *which card*? Following the logic of Q4 you should treat ♠K Q 10 as if it were ♠K Q J and lead the top-of-a-sequence. Had your Clubs been, say, ♠K Q 9 x x you'd have led the fourth-highest.

7.



♠ K 8
♥ J 10 9 8
♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ 10 4 2

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♥J. Consolation marks if you opted for the ♦3 as Diamonds are stronger than Hearts. However, it is generally better to lead from a sequence when you are lucky enough to have one. Such leads give nothing away; a Diamond might kick over a hornet's nest.

8.



♠ Q 10 5 2
♥ 7 5 2
♦ 6 3
♣ A 4 3 2

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠2. What's wrong with the ♠2? Not much, in truth. However, there are two points here. **1.** It is generally best to lead a major instead of a minor. Players happily bid No-trumps when holding long minor suits. **2.** It's better to retain Aces as a means of regaining the lead.

9.



♠ J 7 5
♥ Q 10 9 8 3
♦ K 4 2
♣ 7 3

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♥10. Leading Hearts is clear enough, the question is *which card*? With this type of holding the Ten is best. As there is a higher honour than the Ten we call this an *interior sequence*. Similar considerations apply to, say, ♥A J 10 9 x where you would lead the Jack.

10.



♠ K 10 7 6 4
♥ 5 3
♦ 2
♣ K 10 7 6 4

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

The ♠6. Why lead a Spade and not a Club? Well, picking up on point 1 in Q8 it is better to lead majors than minors. It would not be surprising to see five Clubs in either declarer's hand or dummy's, but it would be remarkable if either opponent held long Spades.

§5. Example hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1 Dealer North

♠ K 5 2		
♥ J 9 8		
♦ K Q 4		
♣ A 8 5 2		
♠ J 9 8 7 4	N	♠ Q 10
♥ K 10 5	W	♥ A Q 7 3 2
♦ 8	E	♦ 6 5 3 2
♣ Q 10 9 4	S	♣ 7 6
♠ A 6 3		
♥ 6 4		
♦ A J 10 9 7		
♣ 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		
♥ J 9 4 2		
♦ Q J 10 9 6		
♣ 8 7		
♠ 9 6 3	N	♠ Q 10 8
♥ K 6	W	♥ A 10 5
♦ K 5 2	E	♦ A 7 4 3
♣ A K 10 6 4	S	♣ Q J 3
♠ K J 7 5 2		
♥ Q 8 7 3		
♦ 8		
♣ 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		
♥ J 10 4		
♦ K Q J 8		
♣ A Q J		
♠ A 10 8 5 3	N	♠ K J 6
♥ K 6	W	♥ Q 8 5 3 2
♦ 4	E	♦ 9 6 3 2
♣ 10 9 7 5 4	S	♣ 8
♠ Q 9		
♥ A 9 7		
♦ A 10 7 5		
♣ 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		
♥ 10 8 5 2		
♦ A 6 4 3 2		
♣ 9		
♠ K 5 3	N	♠ A 6 4
♥ A 6 3	W	♥ K Q 4
♦ J 10 8	E	♦ 9 7
♣ A J 5 2	S	♣ K Q 10 7 3
♠ J 10 9 8		
♥ J 9 7		
♦ K Q 5		
♣ 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			
♥ Q 10 7 4			
♦ 7 4 3			
♣ 9 7 6			
♠ Q 5	N	♠ A 6 3	
♥ K 3 2	W	♥ A 9 5	
♦ K Q 10 9 6	E	♦ J 8 5 2	
♣ K J 2	S	♣ A 10 5	
♠ J 10 9 8 7			
♥ J 8 6			
♦ A			
♣ Q 8 4 3			

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			
♥ 9 7			
♦ Q J 10 6 4 2			
♣ A Q 9			
♠ 7 5 3	N	♠ Q J 10 9	
♥ Q J 10 8 6 5	W	♥ 4 3 2	
♦ 8 7	E	♦ A K	
♣ 6 3	S	♣ J 10 7 4	
♠ K 8 4 2			
♥ A K			
♦ 9 5 3			
♣ K 8 5 2			

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			
♥ 7 5			
♦ 8 6 5 2			
♣ K Q 10 8 3			
♠ A 10 6 3	N	♠ J 7 4	
♥ J 9 4 2	W	♥ K Q 10	
♦ K J 3	E	♦ A Q 9 7 4	
♣ A 7	S	♣ J 9	
♠ Q 8 5 2			
♥ A 8 6 3			
♦ 10			
♣ 6 5 4 2			

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			
♥ A K 2			
♦ 9 5 3			
♣ K 8 5 2			
♠ Q J 10 9 4	N	♠ 7 5 3	
♥ 4 3	W	♥ Q J 9 7 6 5	
♦ 8 7	E	♦ A K	
♣ J 10 7 4	S	♣ 6 3	
♠ A 6			
♥ 10 8			
♦ Q J 10 6 4 2			
♣ A Q 9			

West	North	East	South
Pass	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.