




This series is the first of two about elementary card-play and the knocking out of high cards to set suits up. Part 1 of 1. ACOL version. Updated spring 2015.

VB01 #2 The play of the cards in NT Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ T32	
	♥ AQ2	
	♦ KQ965	
	♣ T7	
West		East
♠ Q86		♠ K975
♥ JT973		♥ 65
♦ 732		♦ A4
♣ Q5		♣ K9642
	South	
	♠ AJ4	
	♥ K84	
	♦ JT8	
	♣ AJ83	

Almost all deals played in No-trumps contain *top tricks* and suits that must be developed into tricks. Whenever dummy comes into view declarer should pause to consider the hand as a whole and *count his tricks*.

The usual mantra that declarer needs to chant (silently, naturally) is *Count – Plan – Execute*. So... *Count* your tricks, make a *Plan* as to where the "extras" are coming from and, having determined what you are going to do, put your plan into action (*Execute*).

It is foolish for declarer to play too quickly at trick one – can you really assimilate twenty-six cards and work out a plan in the blink of an eye? Of course not! So, no matter how obvious the first card might be don't play it until you are good and ready.

Hand 1 talks you through the thought processes.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ J

Bidding.

We reach 3NT after an invitational bidding sequence. We open 1NT after two Passes with our 4-3-3-3 shape and 14 points and partner raises to 2NT.

This puts the ball back into our court – we may choose to advance to game or to let the bidding die. With a maximum hand for a 1NT opener we are quite entitled to bid on to 3NT.

Play.

West, to our left, leads the ♥J. (Against No-trumps it is customary to lead from your longest suit and, holding a sequence, West leads the top card).

Our first task as declarer is to count our *top tricks*. Here there are just five (a Spade, three Hearts and a Club) so that means a shortfall of four tricks. Our source of "extras" has to come from outside of our top tricks.

The usual source of extra tricks in No-trumps is with the long suit and here we should attack Diamonds to knock out the ♦A. Once that has gone there will be four tricks in the suit. So the count of tricks should include four "slow" Diamond tricks to go with the five top tricks for a total of nine in all.

The play in detail: we win the Heart lead in either hand (let's say with the ♥Q in dummy, just for argument's sake) and play a Diamond immediately. We could lead the King on this deal but it is better to lead towards the ♦J 10 8, following the sound principle of ***playing the high cards from the short suit first***.

The main idea behind this play (of leading Diamonds early) is to *knock out* the ♦A, setting up the long Diamonds in return.


If the defender holding the Ace stubbornly withholds that card then we simply persist in playing "high" Diamonds until the ♦A has to be played. On this deal, East may do anything he likes; once he has taken the ♦A as good a defence as anything is to lead back a Heart, to *return his partner's suit*.

At this stage there are enough top tricks for the contract, so we run off our tricks in the long Diamond suit and cash our outside winners, cheerfully conceding the remainder to the enemy.



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Y1 VBlue #2 The play of the cards in NT Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North			
♠ AK5			
♥ K52			
♦ Q2			
♣ JT954			
West		East	
♠ J4		♠ T9762	
♥ QT864		♥ J97	
♦ KT5		♦ A76	
♣ A72		♣ 83	
South			
♠ Q83			
♥ A3			
♦ J9843			
♣ KQ6			

This deal continues the theme of Hand 1.

There is a small point here, though, which will be repeated in later deals and within bridge as a whole.

Just how do you handle the critical suit here?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 6

Bidding.

We play in 3NT after the briskiest of bidding sequences.

We open the South hand 1NT with a 5-3-3-2 shape and 12 points and partner (holding 13 points) takes that straight to 3NT. Unsurprisingly, no one has anything more to say.

Play.

West, naturally enough, leads from his long suit and, holding a *broken suit*, leads the fourth-highest card, the ♥6 in this case.

When dummy goes down we must **Count** and **Plan**. This is something that is true for all bridge hands – don't fall into the all-too-common trap of playing too quickly at trick one. In No-trump contracts we must count our *top tricks* and then decide where our "extras" are coming from.

Here we should see that we have just five top tricks (three Spades and two Hearts) and so need four more from somewhere. That "somewhere" is Clubs, where four tricks can be garnered once the ♠A has been knocked out.

The small point of technique here is that Clubs should be attacked by leading the ♠K (or ♠Q) first. If that wins then we lead the other big honour and finally the ♠6 to dummy's remaining ♠J 10 9. Why do this? Well, if we were to lead the ♠6 first we would inevitably end up in the wrong hand at the wrong time – a mistake that befalls most of us at one time or another. The "rule" is:

Play the honours from the short suit first.

This applies even when you don't have the top card(s) in the suit.

Anyway... the play in detail. We win the Heart lead somewhere (it actually doesn't matter – so we'll take the ♥A for choice) and immediately lead Clubs. The ♠K wins (the opponents usually do best to refuse to take their Aces unless forced to do so. Note this defensive play!)

The ♣Q is also allowed to hold and finally West takes his ♣A on the third round. Another Heart lead is taken with dummy's ♥K and now we can run off the remaining Club winners.

Having cashed the Clubs and being wide open in Hearts all we can do is run for home by cashing three Spade tricks. After that, the rest belong to the opponents.

Good luck to them – we have our all-important nine tricks and the contract.



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VB#2 Y1 The play of the cards in NT Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North	
♠ K543	
♥ QJ9	
♦ A85	
♣ K84	
West	East
♠ QJT97	♠ 8
♥ 3	♥ A8652
♦ J92	♦ QT74
♣ Q963	♣ JT2
South	
♠ A62	
♥ KT74	
♦ K63	
♣ A75	

Continuing the theme of this set of deals you are invited to count your *top tricks* and work out where the extras are coming from.

Count – Plan – Execute.

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ Q

Bidding.

We reach 3NT after a rapid bidding sequence where we open 1NT (14 points and a 4-3-3-3 pattern) and partner raises that to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♠Q, proclaiming to the world that he holds long Spades headed by the ♠Q J 10.

Let's **Count...** There are six *top tricks* (two Spades, two Diamonds and two Clubs) so three more need setting up from somewhere. Those tricks are easily obtainable from Hearts once the ♥A has been dislodged so the **Plan** must be to win the Spade lead and to play on Hearts immediately.

It doesn't matter which hand wins the opening lead – we win it in the closed hand just on a whim. Having done so we then play a low Heart and continue to play the suit until the ♥A has gone.

When East takes the ♥A (on the third round, just to be awkward) and returns a Diamond (the poor fellow doesn't have a Spade to lead back to his partner) we win that, cash the last boss Heart and then take the rest of the top tricks.


The arithmetic consists of $2+3+2+2 = 9$ (In other words, two Spades plus three Hearts plus two Diamonds plus two Clubs makes a total of nine tricks).

We can afford to allow East-West to mop up the last three tricks.



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Y1 VBlue #2 The play of the cards in NT Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 8652	
	♥ K83	
	♦ KQJ8	
	♣ A5	
West		East
♠ QJT9		♠ 743
♥ 6542		♥ A9
♦ 3		♦ A742
♣ QJ63		♣ T982
	South	
	♠ AK	
	♥ QJT7	
	♦ T965	
	♣ K74	

In this deal you have **two** suits where you have to make extra tricks, not just one.

There is nothing to do but knuckle down and get to work...

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ Q

Bidding.

East Passes as dealer and we have another classic weak No-trump opening bid (13 points, 4-4-3-2 shape).

Partner doesn't stop to pick the daisies, he simply raises to game.

Play.

West leads the ♠ Q (the top of a sequence, we may safely assume).

We must pause and **Count** our tricks on the sight of dummy; here we can see only four *top tricks* (two Spades and two Clubs) so we need to establish five more.

That can't be done in only one suit so we have to knock out two of the opponents' high cards – the ♥ A and the ♦ A. We have to win the opening Spade lead and play on either red suit to drive out the Ace. Since there are more Diamonds in the North-South hands than Hearts we choose to start with them (although it really doesn't matter which red suit we play on first).

East takes his ♦ A (he might have held off his Ace for a round or two, but here he chooses not to) and he returns a Spade to drive out our ♠ A. This adheres to the sound defensive principle of *returning partner's suit*.

On winning the ♠ A we play off the remaining Diamond winners but then have to switch our attention to the Heart suit. By leading a Heart to the ♥ K we are aiming to knock out the ♥ A, hoping that the opponents cannot take too many tricks in Spades.

As the cards lie, East takes his ♥ A and plays his last Spade but West only has two more of those to cash. After he has finished with his Spades West has to lead a Club or a Heart and the rest are ours.


Although we may be able to count ten tricks for our side (two top Spades, three slow Hearts, three slow Diamonds and two top Clubs) in practice the opponents get four tricks first and we have to throw a Heart winner away.

No matter, we still make the all-important number of nine tricks.



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VB#2 Y1 The play of the cards in NT Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East	
♠ J3		♠ Q652	
♥ AQ6		♥ 3	
♦ QJT97		♦ A864	
♣ J94		♣ QT87	
West		East	
♠ AK4		♠ Q652	
♥ T98752		♥ 3	
♦ 53		♦ A864	
♣ 63		♣ QT87	
South			
♠ T987			
♥ KJ4			
♦ K2			
♣ AK52			

This deal is thematic with all the others in this series.

Count your tricks, **Plan** how you are going to establish your long suit and, in **Execution**, make sure that you handle that suit correctly...

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ T

Bidding.

We open 1NT with our balanced hand (4·4·3·2) and 14 points and partner raises to 2NT.

This lobs the ball back over the net onto our side – we may choose to bid game or to let the bidding die.

With a maximum hand for a 1NT opener we really have to take a pot at 3NT.

Play.

We must, as a matter of necessary technique, **Count** our *top tricks*, which are: three Hearts (careful! not four) and two Clubs. That totals five.

That means we need to set up four extra tricks to make nine overall. These tricks are easily available in Diamonds, once the ♦A has been knocked out.

It doesn't matter much where we win the opening lead or with which high card – we could take the trick in dummy or in the closed hand – but it does matter what we do next. We must immediately attack Diamonds by leading (or playing to) the ♦K. Don't make the error of leading the ♦2; follow the rule of **Play the honours from the short suit first**.

Here we have chosen to win the ♥J on the first trick before leading the ♦K. When that wins the trick (East deciding to hang on to his Ace for a while) more Diamonds are led until East finally parts with his ♦A.


At this point there are winning Diamonds in the dummy, a way of getting to the table and enough tricks to bring the overall total up to nine in all.

East switches to a Spade in an attempt to hit us in our weak spot but that only delays matters. East-West can cash the ♠A K Q before they run out of steam and we are in a position to claim the rest.



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VB01 #2 The play of the cards in NT Part 1 ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ A3	
	♥ Q64	
	♦ A42	
	♣ QJT96	
West		East
♠ Q97		♠ JT85
♥ 9		♥ KJT82
♦ QT865		♦ J7
♣ K842		♣ 73
	South	
	♠ K642	
	♥ A753	
	♦ K93	
	♣ A5	

Here, in the ubiquitous contract of 3NT, you just have to decide which suit to establish and how to go about it.

First, though, you will have to **Count** your tricks. Then you'll have to **Plan** to see which suit you must develop.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ 6

Bidding.

This is a breeze, a walk in the park. We open 1NT with our balanced hand (4-4-3-2) and 14 points and partner raises that straight to 3NT.

Play.

The opponent on our left leads a Diamond. Holding a broken suit West chooses to lead his fourth highest card, the ♦6 in this instance.

As declarer we must take stock of the hand and should note that we have six *top tricks* (two Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and a Club) so need to develop some more. The suit to establish to make up the shortfall is Clubs (it being normal to look to our long suit for "extra tricks"), so we should play on them.

The best way of playing the hand is to win the opening Diamond lead with the ♦K over East's ♦J and play off the ♣A and another Club, forcing out the ♣K.

As it happens, West has the King and takes the trick eventually as Clubs are played at him. Another Diamond knocks out dummy's ♦A but by then we have enough tricks to make the contract.

We cash the rest of the Clubs and take our ♠A K and ♥A to make nine in all. Contract made.