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This deal is about taking five tricks quickly against 3NT. It involves the idea of "third player plays high", playing the lower (est) of equal cards and "returning partner's suit". SA version.
Part 1 of 2. Updated spring 2015.

VB#4 Y1 Defense v No-trumps 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

<p>West</p> <p>♠ A52</p> <p>♥ J98</p> <p>♦ AK4</p> <p>♣ A852</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ K63</p> <p>♥ 64</p> <p>♦ QJT97</p> <p>♣ KJ3</p>
<p>North</p> <p>♠ QT</p> <p>♥ AQ732</p> <p>♦ 6532</p> <p>♣ 76</p>		
<p>South</p> <p>♠ J9874</p> <p>♥ KT5</p> <p>♦ 8</p> <p>♣ QT94</p>		

This set of deals (and another series of six deals elsewhere in this edition of VBlue) is all about defense against 3NT contracts.

The principles involved form the bedrock of defensive play. Let's list some of these ideas, which we hope to crystallize with these deals.

Leading from long suits (top of sequences – if you are lucky enough to own one; fourth-highest from broken suits);

Third hand playing high to help establish partner's suit;

Returning your partner's suit.

On these six deals you will be sitting as the *third player*, working out what to do when partner leads against West's 3NT. In the second series of six deals you will be switched to being the opening leader.

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

Lead: ♥ 3

Bidding.

West opens 1NT in fourth seat (16 points and a 4-3-3-3 pattern). East, holding 10 points and a decent suit, raises that to 3NT without stopping to admire the view.

Play.

Our partner leads a low Heart against 3NT, which we must assume to be from his longest suit. Holding a **broken suit** he leads the fourth-highest card; had he held a sequence (such as ♥J 10 9 and others) he would have led the top card.

Declarer calls for dummy's ♥4 and we must not forget to play the ♥K. If we were too mean to play our highest card (by playing the ♥10 instead, say) West would have an easy ride as he'd win a cheap trick with the ♥J and then would have tricks to burn (a Heart, two Spades, five Diamonds and two Clubs *on top*).

The usual rule to guide us here is:

Third hand high

meaning that we should respond to the opening lead by playing our highest card to help develop partner's suit. (We will expand on this important theme as we proceed).

After correctly playing our ♥K (which wins the trick) we must lose no time in playing back another Heart (**return your partner's suit**).

The correct card to lead back is the ♥10. When we hold two cards remaining we should always lead the higher, although on this layout of the cards, on this deal, it doesn't actually matter.

North has to keep track of all the Hearts (by counting them). As he does so he realizes that all of them are winners (yes, even the lowly ♥2) and the defense have the first five tricks before a bemused declarer gets a look in.

One down in 3NT. If we were that way inclined we could always sympathize with West. "Tough luck, pal"



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VB#4 Y1 Defense v No-trumps 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North	
♠ KJ752	
♥ Q873	
♦ 8	
♣ T52	
West	East
♠ QT8	♠ 963
♥ AT5	♥ K6
♦ A743	♦ K52
♣ AQ3	♣ KJ964
South	
♠ A4	
♥ J942	
♦ QJT96	
♣ 87	

Defensive co-operation is crucial in this game.

Can you co-operate with your partner effectively on this deal?

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

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

After two Passes West opens 1NT (16 points and a 4-3-3-3 pattern). East, holding 10 points and a five-card Club suit, raises that to 3NT without stopping to pick the daisies.

Play.

Partner leads a low Spade (the ♠5 this time) against 3NT. As it's a low card we may assume that it's the fourth-highest card from a long suit.

So, after studying the dummy, how should we plan the defense? Should we take the ♠A or not? If we do so, what should we do at trick two? After all, we do have an attractive sequence in Diamonds...

Firstly, by leading a low card partner is saying "Let's try and take some tricks in this suit". So, failure to take the ♠A would be a dereliction of duty. Secondly, having taken the ♠A it would be poor play to shift suits. The right thing to do is to lead another Spade. (Again – as in Hand 1 – **Return your partner's suit**).

It may look tempting to shift to a Diamond (after all, we would have led the ♦Q at trick one if East had been declarer) but is generally wise for the defenders to stick to the same suit. Here a Spade return is fatal – to declarer.

Whatever West plays at trick two (the ♠Q or the ♠10) North, sitting over him, has a counterplay. He can win with either the ♠J or ♠K as necessary. Now all North's Spades are winners and can be cashed immediately for one off. Sitting South we are just a spectator while this is going on, albeit a contented one.

After losing the first five tricks West easily has the rest of but it's too late – he is one down.

Shake your head sympathetically but don't forget to record the score.


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VB#4 Y1 Defense v No-trumps 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

West ♠ Q9 ♥ A97 ♦ AKJ8 ♣ K632		East ♠ 742 ♥ JT4 ♦ QT75 ♣ AQJ
North ♠ AT853 ♥ K6 ♦ 4 ♣ T9754		
South ♠ KJ6 ♥ Q8532 ♦ 9632 ♣ 8		

On this deal partner leads his suit against 3NT and you have two decisions to make as *third player*.

What card do you play to trick one and what card do you play to trick two?

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

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

West opens 1NT (17 points and a 4-4-3-2 pattern). East, holding 10 points, raises that to 3NT immediately.

1NT – 3NT is one of the commonest bidding sequences in the game.

Play.

North leads the ♠5 against West's 3NT. From our perspective that has to be the fourth-highest from a long suit, giving North four or five Spades.

Now, this deal is just a little more subtle than the previous two. Firstly we have to play our ♠K (it is quite wrong to play the ♠J, keeping back the ♠K for later) and secondly, we must return a Spade at trick two. Failure to lead partner's suit at trick two might just result in us searching the "Partners wanted" column of tomorrow's newspaper...

Anyway, we duly lead back a Spade at trick two (this hand being little different than the previous two deals) – but *which Spade*? We only have two Spades left, the ♠J and the ♠6. Can you see what would happen if we led the ♠6 at trick two? West would have to play the ♠Q, North would take his ♠A and trick three would be won by our ♠J...

There might then follow a few moments of nothing very much broken by an icy remark from North along the lines of, "*It's your lead, partner*". Oops! We'd be on lead with no Spade left and North's two master Spades would wither on the vine.

In order to prevent this tangling up of a suit (the technical term is a **blockage**) it is important for us to return the ♠J at trick two. We made this point in Hand 1 where we said that, "*When you hold two cards remaining you should always lead the higher*". In Hand 1 it made little difference – here it is crucial.

By returning the ♠J we allow partner to take trick two with the ♠A and three with the ♠10. That clears the path for tricks four and five to be

taken with North's last two Spades (the ♠8 and ♠3). Essentially we are getting out of partner's way.


This way (and only this way) we take the first five tricks against 3NT and declarer is one down.

It's a tough old game, West.



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VB#4 Y1 Defense v No-trumps 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

		North			
		♠ Q72			
		♥ T852			
		♦ A6432			
		♣ 9			
West		East			
♠ K53		♠ A64			
♥ AK3		♥ Q64			
♦ JT8		♦ 97			
♣ AJ52		♣ KQT73			
		South			
		♠ JT98			
		♥ J97			
		♦ KQ5			
		♣ 864			

Your partner again leads against 3NT and you have a choice of plays.

Which is the correct card to play initially and what is your follow-up?

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

Lead: ♦ 3

Bidding.

West opens 1NT (16 points and a 4-3-3-3 pattern). East, holding 11 points and a decent Club suit, raises that to 3NT without wasting time.

Play.

Once more we are defending against 3NT and North (our loyal partner) kicks off with a low Diamond lead – the ♦3 to be precise.

As declarer is contemplating the dummy we might do some card-reading ourselves. Since our methods are to lead the fourth-highest card from a long suit we should realize that North might have five Diamonds but cannot have six. How might we deduce this?

Much depends on where the ♦2 lies. If declarer has it North has led his lowest Diamond and therefore can only have four of them. If North has it then he has a five-card suit. To have six cards in Diamonds and to have led the fourth-highest North would have to have been dealt two cards lower than the ♦3. Not too likely, that, we think... QED. (That's Latin for *Quite Easily Done*, by the way).

Anyway, when dummy plays the ♦7 we are called into action and have to play a card from ♦K Q 5. Playing the ♦5 would be idiotic, of course (dummy's ♦7 would most likely win the trick) but playing the ♦K would be a subtle error. True, we have been saying **Third hand high** but when we hold equal cards (effectively a sequence) we should play "high enough" – meaning that we play the lowest card from our sequence.

[Note how this reverses what we do as a leader. With the ♦Q J 10, as an example, we would lead the ♦Q if we were on lead. As third player, though, we would follow suit to a low card with the ♦10. It is an important point of technique].

Back to the plot... Our ♦Q wins trick one, leaving us on play with ♦K 5. Naturally, we play another Diamond at trick two (**return your partner's suit**). This Diamond, though, must be

the ♦K. Why? *Play the higher card from a doubleton* (as in Hands 1 and 3).

If we didn't do this the suit would become tangled up (or **blocked**) and North would be unable to run off his suit. (Play it through in your head and see what happens if we were to lead back the ♦5 at trick two – it's an instructive deal).

Essentially we are following the rule that we use as a declarer. We are ***playing the high cards from the short suit first***. True, we can't actually see partner's hand and his actual Diamond holding but we are following general principles.

Having cashed the ♦K we continue with the ♦5 and North is able to take the remainder of his suit as West is exhausted of Diamonds. One off before West can gain a foothold.

Note that declarer would have ten easy tricks (two Spades, three Hearts and five Clubs) were he able to gain the lead.


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VB#4 Y1 Defense v No-trumps 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North	
♠ JT987	
♥ J86	
♦ A	
♣ Q843	
West	East
♠ A63	♠ Q5
♥ A95	♥ K32
♦ KJ82	♦ QT965
♣ AJT	♣ K52
South	
♠ K42	
♥ QT74	
♦ 743	
♣ 976	

On this deal partner leads an honor card against 3NT.

How does that help you plan the defense?

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

Lead: ♠ J

Bidding.

West opens 1NT (17 points and a 4-3-3-3 pattern). East, holding 10 points and a five-card Diamond suit, takes the fast track by bidding 3NT at once.

Play.

West plays in 3NT again (he gets dealt some good hands, that guy!) and partner (as usual) leads his longest suit.

Since North has a sequence it would be quite wrong to lead the fourth-highest card (the ♠8 in this case). When the long suit is headed by a three-card or longer run it is customary to lead the top of the sequence so here North leads the ♠J.

As South we know instantly that North has the ♠J 10 9 (and at least one other Spade – why lead from a three-card suit?) When we see the dummy we should also realize that the ♠Q on table is caught in a vise.

If declarer calls for dummy's ♠Q we'd cover that with the ♠K, forcing the ♠A and all of North's Spades would be winners. If, on the other hand, West calls for dummy's ♠5 then we'd have no need to play the ♠K as the ♠J would be doing the work of forcing out the ♠A. Heads West loses, tails we win.

Faced with a two-way losing option West decides to call for the ♠5. We follow with a low card and sit back to watch the show, which progresses well for our side as West declines to part with his ♠A.

Charmed by the fact that the opening lead has won the trick North plays another Spade. Now we put the ♠K on the ♠Q to force the ♠A. When West stubbornly refuses to play his ♠A we continue to play Spades to drive it out.

West's extra tricks can only come from Diamonds so declarer leads the suit early in the piece to knock out the ♦A. North happily takes his Ace and cashes out his Spade suit. We make four Spades and a Diamond for one off.


Hard luck, West. However, note that declarer could do nothing after the ♠J lead makes puppy-chow of dummy's ♠Q.

We defenders have the **tempo** to make five tricks no matter what declarer tries.


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Part 1 of 2. Updated spring 2015.

VB#4 Y1 Defense v No-trumps 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: West
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

		North		
		♠ 753		
		♥ QJT865		
		♦ 87		
		♣ 63		
West			East	
♠ K842			♠ A6	
♥ AK			♥ 97	
♦ 953			♦ QJT642	
♣ AQ52			♣ K98	
		South		
		♠ QJT9		
		♥ 432		
		♦ AK		
		♣ JT74		

The opponents have yet another stab at 3NT and dummy displays a long suit.

Does partner's lead help you plan an effective defense?

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

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

In third seat, after two Passes, West opens 1NT (16 points and a 4-4-3-2 pattern). East, holding 10 points and a six-card minor suit, raises that directly to 3NT.

He takes the reasonable view that nine tricks in No-trumps are likely to be much easier than eleven in Diamonds.

Play.

We are defending against 3NT and a slightly surprising dummy appears. That's not our concern, though – taking five tricks is our focus.

Partner leads the ♥Q and we must **Read the Lead**. Partner has the ♥Q J 10 (and others) and declarer has the ♥A K. As an aside, it's surprising what information we can dig up when we think about it.

Anyway, declarer wins the first trick with the ♥A (fooling precisely nobody as we know he has the ♥K) and sets about his Diamonds. We win that (not that we have much choice) and have to decide what to do.

Well, we must leave the Spades alone – tempting as the Spade sequence might be this is not a time to switch suits. We have to set North's Hearts up by **returning partner's suit**.

West wins his ♥K and realizes he is in a deep hole. Still, there's little he can do. He plays another Diamond, hoping that we will do something stupid. Nope – no such luck. We take the ♦A and continue with the – ahem – Heart-attack.

Partner brightens up on the lead of the ♥3 and cashes out his long suit. Two down.

Notice how 3NT would have made had East been declarer. With no reason to lead a Heart (we don't have x-ray vision) we'd have led a Spade. Now East-West could get the Diamonds going for enough tricks to make 3NT. True, we could have set up a couple of Spade tricks but

that wouldn't have been enough to beat the contract.

Luckily for our side, the declaration placed North on lead.