




This series of six deals is all about suit breaks (3-2, 3-3 and the like). Part 1 of 2. SA version. Updated spring 2015.

VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks 1. SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ 84		
	♥ A532		
	♦ AK62		
	♣ 652		
West		East	
♠ KJ9752		♠ QT3	
♥ KQ9		♥ T84	
♦ T7		♦ Q983	
♣ 97		♣ JT8	
	South		
	♠ A6		
	♥ J76		
	♦ J54		
	♣ AKQ43		

This set of six deals (and another series elsewhere in this edition of VBlue) is all about *suit breaks*.

We are concerned here about how suits split between the opponents and whether we can make use of this in making tricks with our small cards (our "long cards").

In earlier series we have seen deals where the opponents' high cards were knocked out to establish a suit. Sometimes, though, we can make tricks by taking advantage of the way a suit *breaks* (or *splits*) between the opponents.

In these two series we are mostly concerned about playing in No-trumps although the principle of looking at how suits break as the play progresses applies to suit contracts as well.

The essential skill here for declarer is *counting the cards* as they are played.

Hand 1 sets the scene.

Where are your extra tricks coming from?

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

Lead: ♠ 7

Bidding.

After two Passes we open 1NT with a 5-3-3-2 hand and 15 points. Partner, with 11 points and a 4-4-3-2 hand, raises to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the *fourth-highest of his longest and strongest*, the ♠7 in this case. This is an irritating lead for us as we are wide open in Spades once the ♠A has been knocked out. Holding mutual shortage in a suit in 3NT is usually bad news; here both the closed hand and dummy have a doubleton Spade.

Still, whatever the weather we know the routine – **Count** and **Plan**. There are seven *top tricks* on view (one Spade, one Heart, two Diamonds and three Clubs) but we cannot afford to lose the lead; if we do, East-West would bury us under an avalanche of Spades. So it is necessary to take nine tricks in swift order.

The only chance is to hope that the Club suit can provide five tricks. This is possible if the missing five Clubs split 3-2 between East and West. With that in mind we play off two top Clubs and see how our luck is today.

If both opponents follow suit to both rounds of Clubs the contract is secure – the suit must be breaking 3-2. When the cards (and the opponents) oblige we cash the ♣Q and the ♣4 and ♣3 (the "long" Clubs) are both winners.

What if one opponent were to *show out* on the first or second Club? Then the suit is breaking badly (Clubs would be splitting 5-0 or 4-1) and, put simply, we'd be doomed to failure on the hand. *That's the way the cookie crumbles* sometimes. When bad breaks occur simply shrug and get on with the next deal.


In point of fact, we'd probably be heading for two down in 3NT if Clubs were to break badly.

[Note. *The chances of a 3-2 break are 68% (give or take the odd decimal point). So this contract was destined to make roughly two-thirds of the time].*



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Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 853	
	♥ J6	
	♦ AK72	
	♣ A853	
West		East
♠ A94		♠ JT7
♥ K9852		♥ QT43
♦ T63		♦ J94
♣ J9		♣ T64
	South	
	♠ KQ62	
	♥ A7	
	♦ Q85	
	♣ KQ72	

On this deal you reach a poor contract. It happens...

You have plenty of points between you but the fatal flaw in many No-trump contracts comes if you and partner have a mutual shortage.

In short, can you make this contract, despite it being well against the odds?

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

Lead: ♥ 5

Bidding.

After East Passes as dealer we open 1NT with a 4-4-3-2 hand and 16 points. North confidently raises that to game holding a balanced 12-count.

Play.

West leads the ♥5 against 3NT and we must pause to assess our prospects once dummy appears.

The basic, time-honored, strategy is **Count – Plan – Execute**.

We should start by counting our *top tricks*; here we can see seven (one Heart, three Diamonds and three Clubs). That leaves us with two more tricks to find.

The problem on this deal is the mutual Heart shortage (as in Hand 1, that is bad news) and that the opening lead is about to remove our one and only *stopper* (the ♥A).

This leaves us wide open in the suit, meaning that we cannot afford to give up the lead; should we do so we'd be swamped by a deluge of tricks in Hearts (not to mention the ♠A) by the opponents.

Our only chance for nine tricks (once we have failed in the attempt to score a trick with dummy's ♥J) is if we can make four Diamond tricks and four Club tricks to go with the ♥A. This means that the five missing Clubs have to break 3-2 and the six missing Diamonds have to break 3-3. Either the suits break well (and 3NT makes) or they don't (in which case 3NT fails). **Que sera sera**.

The important thing to do is to watch the cards and *count*. We start with the three top Clubs and, when they behave nicely by breaking 3-2, we know we can cash the fourth round of the suit.

After finishing with the Clubs we can turn our attention to Diamonds, playing off the ♦A K Q. **Watchpoint!** We must play off the ♦Q early – preferably on the first round of the suit – or we

run the risk of **blocking** them. At the risk of appearing to be an endlessly repeating recording: *Play the high cards from the short suit first.*

On the third round of Diamonds, West shows out! So... is the lowly $\spadesuit 7$ the thirteenth Diamond? Yes! And it provides the vital ninth trick.

In case you missed it, the "extra" Diamond was thrown away by an opponent on the fourth round of Clubs – the suit was 3-3 originally. Of course, we expect that you knew that as you were watching like a hawk.

Was this a lucky contract to make with Clubs 3-2 and Diamonds 3-3? Yes, very!

[Note. *The chances of a 3-2 break are 68% but the chances of a 3-3 break are a mere 36%. It is a curiosity that an even number of cards (here, six missing Diamonds) are unlikely to split evenly. If you want to know why, we suggest you contact an actuary].*



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks 1. SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North

♠ A5
♥ J92
♦ AK642
♣ 873

West
♠ KQJ96
♥ 5
♦ JT75
♣ T64



East
♠ 832
♥ KQT64
♦ 98
♣ J95

South

♠ T74
♥ A873
♦ Q3
♣ AKQ2

When you are looking for suits to break in your favour it helps if you have two squares where you can place your bets.

If one suit doesn't behave nicely maybe the other one will?

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

Lead: ♠ K

Bidding.

As dealer we open 1NT with a 4-4-3-2 hand and 15 points. Holding 12 points with a five-card Diamond suit North raises that immediately to game. Routine stuff.

Play.

West leads the ♠K against 3NT, indicating that his Spades are headed by the ♠K Q J. This lead has the effect of knocking out the ♠A from the table and leaving us wide open in Spades.

[We might think of delaying matters by refusing to play the Ace at trick one – should we do that West would lead another Spade and we'd be forced to take it at trick two. It would make no difference...]

Having taken dummy's ♠A we should see that there are seven further *top tricks* (one Heart, three Diamonds and three Clubs) so we have a total of eight top tricks and require one more from somewhere. This extra trick has to come from a favorable break in either Diamonds or Clubs.

We may as well test Diamonds first and see if they break 3-3. We cash the Diamonds by playing the ♦Q first (*play the honors from the short side first*) and then the ♦A K.

On the third round of Diamonds West playfully (and with an innocent air) drops the ♦J, trying to persuade us that Diamonds are splitting nicely. However, we should not be fooled by this hoary swindle. There is a winning Diamond somewhere out there (it happens to be the ♦10) and we must abandon that suit and shift our attention elsewhere.

The second string to our bow is Clubs so we should test that suit to see if it breaks 3-3. This time it does behave so the lowly ♣2 turns out to be a boss and our ninth trick.

Could anything go wrong? Well, apart from the possibility of being fooled by West's shenanigans (trust your arithmetic, not your sneaky opponents!) there are two other possible stumbling blocks. Firstly it is possible


to miscount Clubs if you didn't notice whether a Club had been discarded on the third round of Diamonds. (It didn't happen on this deal but it did on the previous one – Hand 2).

Secondly, we have to make a discard from the closed hand on the third round of Diamonds. We can chuck a low Heart, we can chuck either of our lousy Spades but we mustn't throw away that baby Club – it may (and does) prove to be a winner!



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks 1. SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ 952		
	♥ 753		
	♦ AK752		
	♣ A6		
West		East	
♠ J		♠ QT843	
♥ T986		♥ KQ	
♦ J94		♦ T86	
♣ KT843		♣ Q95	
	South		
	♠ AK76		
	♥ AJ42		
	♦ Q3		
	♣ J72		

Some hands offer you Hobson's choice in the play. There is only one way that nine tricks will emerge so you are forced along that road.

Here you must be careful how you play your key suit and you have to count it carefully as well.

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

Lead: ♣ 4

Bidding.

After three Passes we open 1NT with 15 points and a 4·4·3·2 shape. North has an easy raise to game with 11 points and a five-card minor.

Play.

West places the ♣4 on the table as his opening lead and we contemplate a useful looking dummy.

An initial **count of tricks** shows there to be seven *on top* (two Spades, one Heart, three Diamonds and one Club).

The first (minor) point to make is that we may as well play low from the dummy on the opening lead, there being no rush to grab the ♣A. (You never know, West might have led a Club from a holding such as ♣K Q 8 4 3 allowing us to score a cheap trick with the ♣J). However, today is not Christmas day and there are no gifts on offer. East takes the ♣Q and returns the ♣9, making sure that the defenders knock out dummy's ♣A.

Now, wide open in Clubs, the only prospect for nine tricks comes from Diamonds; for success in 3NT the suit simply has to break 3-3. If it does we have five Diamond tricks (and nine in all). If the suit breaks 4-2 (or 5-1) then we can take no more than the ♦A K Q and we are heading for two down. That's the way the cookie crumbles.

So, to see our fate, we must play off the ♦Q first (*play the high cards from the short suit first*) and follow with a Diamond to the ♦A K, taking note of the defenders' cards. When all follow to three rounds the "long" Diamonds (the ♦7 and ♦5) are winners and are duly cashed.

Having taken the Diamonds we rapidly cash the rest of our top tricks, to swell the total to nine. The full tally is two Spades, one Heart, five Diamonds and one Club.

Note that East tries to deflect us from our true course by dropping the ♠Q on the second top Spade (he has seen the ♠J fall from his partner). If we were blinded by greed and


attempt to “cash” the ♠9 before taking the ♥A
we would fail. Don't be lured onto the rocks by
the sirens' call!



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks 1. SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ 762		
	♥ T84		
	♦ K9		
	♣ AK842		
West		East	
♠ KJ954		♠ QT	
♥ A93		♥ K752	
♦ 843		♦ JT6	
♣ T7		♣ J953	
	South		
	♠ A83		
	♥ QJ6		
	♦ AQ752		
	♣ Q6		

This deal is a case of making sure that you take all the chances that you have.

Suit-handling is important here, too.

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

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

After two Passes we open 1NT (15 points and a five-card minor) and partner once again has enough to raise to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♠5 (the *fourth-highest of his longest and strongest*) against 3NT and we must pause awhile to take stock.

A **count of tricks** shows there to be seven *on top* (one Spade, three Diamonds and three Clubs) meaning that two more have to be found from somewhere. Here, we have two chances: a friendly break in either Diamonds or Clubs would provide the two extra tricks we need.

After taking the ♠A we could play on either Diamonds or Clubs – on a whim we decide to play on Clubs (no reason). We play off the ♣Q (*play the high cards from the short suit first*) and follow with a Club to the ♣A K on table. If they were to break 3-3 we'd have five Club tricks and our problems would be over. If Clubs split 4-2 (or worse) then Diamonds would have to behave in a friendly fashion.

As the cards lie, West shows out on the third Club. East false-cards with the ♣J in a pathetic attempt to make us doubt our arithmetic skills but we aren't fooled; we know that East still has the master Club (actually the ♣9). As we cannot afford to lose the lead we must turn our attention to Diamonds.

To play on Diamonds it is essential that we play the ♦K first (*play the high cards ... yeah, you've got it*) and then lead a low card to the ♦A Q. When this suit behaves (by breaking 3-3) there are five tricks here and nine in all.


Watchpoint! On the third round of Clubs we have to discard something from the closed hand – that card must **not** be a low Diamond. (Can you see why not?) There is plenty of other trash to chuck in the can.



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks 1. SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ 974		
	♥ AJ		
	♦ AQT62		
	♣ 864		
West		East	
♠ A8		♠ QT652	
♥ Q9853		♥ K64	
♦ J5		♦ 9743	
♣ T952		♣ J	
	South		
	♠ KJ3		
	♥ T72		
	♦ K8		
	♣ AKQ73		

When one of your chances fails it helps to have another string to your bow.

How can you take advantage of two possibilities on this deal?

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

Lead: ♥ 5

Bidding.

After East Passes as dealer we open 1NT with a 5·3·3·2 hand and 16 points. North, holding 11 points and a likely *source of tricks* in the guise of a five-card Diamond suit, has an effortless raise to 3NT

Play.

West, naturally enough, leads a low Heart (the ♥5) against the final contract of 3NT.

We must **Count** and **Plan** and here we count seven *top tricks* (one Heart, three Diamonds and three Clubs). This Heart lead may leave us wide open in the suit so we may need nine tricks fast, if we can take them.

Firstly we must try the effect of the ♥J from table, just on the off-chance that West has led from the ♥K Q. Nope – East takes the ♥K and plays another Heart to knock out the ♥A. West's carding (the ♥5 lead, followed by the ♥3) suggests that Hearts are splitting 5-3 and that it would be fatal to lose the lead.

So, is it possible to take the next eight tricks? Well, we do have chances of making five tricks in Clubs if they were to break 3-2. On this deal, however, we have an extra chance – the Diamonds may also provide five tricks. They would do so if the suit breaks 3-3 and also if one of the defenders holds precisely the doubleton ♦J.

Having taken the ♥A at trick two we should immediately play off two top Clubs (all right, we could have played Diamonds before Clubs – it's a whimsical choice). If both opponents follow suit to two Clubs then then the suit must be breaking 3-2 and we could cash five tricks in it.

Nope, East shows out on the second Club having dropped the ♣J on the first. So Clubs are 4-1. Rats. We may as well take the last top Club and, strangely, West plays the ♣10. Does this mean we have miscounted and the two Clubs are winners? **No!** It means that West is up to his old tricks, trying to swindle us out of our due. The ♣10 (from the remaining ♣10 9) is

a baby *false-card*, hoping that we will be fooled into playing another Club.

Giving West a look of derision we turn to Diamonds, cashing the ♦K and playing another. We hope that the suit breaks 3-3 as that would give us five tricks in it. Well, it doesn't but the next best thing does. West turns up with ♦J ×, which is just as good. This promotes the ♦10 into winning rank and it means that East's ♦9 × × × is no barrier to our progress. We cash all five Diamonds and that is enough for the contract.

In total we take one Heart, three Clubs and five Diamonds for the contract.

[Note. *On this layout it would have been best to play on Diamonds first. That suit plays for five tricks and West would have to make three discards. If he were to part with a Club (even a teeny-weeny one) we'd make five Club tricks. Well, we didn't know the layout and went for our best chance first].*