




A set of 6 deals on simple opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ K4	
	♥ J853	
	♦ J96	
	♣ JT92	
West		East
♠ 75		♠ J986
♥ KQ2		♥ A64
♦ AQ754		♦ K83
♣ Q83		♣ AK6
	South	
	♠ AQT32	
	♥ T97	
	♦ T2	
	♣ 754	

This set of deals is all about leading against No-trump contracts. Sometimes the bidding may guide you, most often it won't.

The basic ideas of the game are generally understood by most players (to wit: *Lead the fourth-highest of your longest and strongest* except when it's headed by a sequence) but there are many exceptions.

Hand 1. Let's start with an easy one (well, we think it's straightforward...)

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

Lead: ♠ 3

East-West reach 3NT via the fastest (and most common) route and you (sitting South as ever) have to find an opening lead.

The obvious choice is a low Spade (the ♠3 in this case) and that proves devastating in this layout. North wins the ♠K (it would be a grave dereliction of duty to withhold His Majesty at trick one) and returns the suit. Again, unless it is obvious that the opening lead has turned out badly, it is usually the sensible thing to do to *return partner's suit*. Here North-South take the first five tricks while East can only sit and fume impotently.

Now, this simple hand illustrates two very important points. Firstly, the reason that you lead a long suit is that it (sometimes) enables you (as a defender) to set up and cash the "long" cards in your suit. Here you had the joy and pleasure of making a trick with the ♠2.

Secondly, the defenders *had the tempo* of taking their tricks at the start of the hand before declarer got a look in. Had East managed to gain the lead somehow he would have been able to take three Hearts, five Diamonds and three Clubs, making two overtricks. As it is, he went one down.

It is an under-appreciated fact that No-trump contracts are often races between the defense and declarer. Declarer has the benefit of having the majority of the high cards (why is he declarer otherwise?) but the defense has the crucial advantage of going first in the race. When you are ahead in the race we say you *have the tempo*. It is a recurring theme of these deals

Now, one final point... Why lead the ♠3 and not the ♠2? We hope that you can see that any other Spade lead (the ♠A, the ♠Q or the ♠10) would allow East to make his contract with ease. From a *broken* suit it is important to lead a low card, hoping partner can fill in the gaps with a high card of his own. However, the ♠2 would work as well as the ♠3.

The answer is subtle and a little beyond the scope of this set of deals. For the moment it is sufficient to say that it is (very!) wise to follow the guidance and also that if you see that partner has led the lowest visible card (he may

have led the Two or he may have led the Three
and you can see the Two in dummy or in your
hand) you know he must have a four-card suit.
That information may be crucial...



A set of 6 deals on simple opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ QJ942	
	♥ J82	
	♦ 9752	
	♣ A	
West		East
♠ A53		♠ K76
♥ 75		♥ AKT
♦ AQ84		♦ KJ
♣ Q632		♣ JT975
	South	
	♠ T8	
	♥ Q9643	
	♦ T63	
	♣ K84	

On this deal we have another unhelpful auction.

This time you have to defend with a certain amount of care and attention. You are not going to be able to cash the first five tricks as you managed in Hand 1.

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

Lead: ♥ 4

You are on lead against the rapid bidding of 1NT – 3NT.

With no reason **not** to lead the fourth highest of your longest and strongest you start off with a low Heart, the ♥4.

When partner produces the ♥J and declarer the ♥A you can deduce that declarer has both the ♥10 (partner wouldn't play the ♥J from a holding that included the ♥J 10) and the ♥K. So, with a deduction that even Dr Watson could manage, you can work out that declarer started life with the ♥A K 10 and that another Heart lead from your side of the table would be of benefit only to the opponents.

Declarer leads a Club at trick two and you have to decide whether or not to take your ♣K. There are two good reasons not to. One is that you know you have nothing good to lead at trick three if you do. Continuing the "heart-attack" is good only for East, not for your side. The second reason is that you might suffer an embarrassment in the Club suit.

You can see **now** what would happen if you fecklessly played the ♣K on this trick. Partner would put his ♣A on that with a pained look and declarer would make loud cackling noises. In these circumstances you should realize that it is usually best to leave the trick to partner if you can. The old whist adage of "*second player plays low*" should be your guide here although in general in bridge – to quote the great bard – "*'tis honored more in the breach than the observance*"...


Anyway... back to the plot. Partner takes his ♣A and (naturally) returns a Heart, *through* declarer's vulnerable holding. East optimistically tries the ♥10 but you can take the ♥Q and clear the suit with another Heart lead. Now you are in a position to grab the next Club lead and cash your Hearts to beat the contract. (Note that there is no point in ducking the second Club lead).

This is (another) *tempo* hand. By leading Hearts the defense get their long suit established before declarer gets his long suit (Clubs) set up. This does mean that the defenders have to be awake and not "crash" their Club honors, though...



A set of 6 deals on simple opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ 8763	
	♥ KQ972	
	♦ Q62	
	♣ 4	
West		East
♠ JT4		♠ Q95
♥ JT3		♥ A65
♦ T9		♦ AK4
♣ AQJ53		♣ KT86
	South	
	♠ AK2	
	♥ 84	
	♦ J8753	
	♣ 972	

This is another example deal on the theme of *tempo*.

In this type of deal the defenders have to get their suit established before declarer gets his ninth trick set up.

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

Lead: ♦ 5

Another day, another deal, another 1NT – 3NT sequence to lead against.

Well, with a five-card suit you (South, as ever) may as well try your fourth-highest Diamond.

Partner agreeably produces the ♦Q and declarer rather artlessly wins the ♦K (this marks East with the ♦A – North would have played it had he held it). So, declarer counts his tricks and sees that he has but eight (to wit: one Hearts, two Diamonds and five Clubs.) The best shot for a ninth trick is in Spades so declarer's first (sneaky) play is a low Spade towards the dummy.

Having realized how important it is to play low in similar circumstances on Hand 2 you now have to appreciate that the situation is very different here. You must play the ♠K and hammer away at Diamonds. How can you tell? Well, it's all a question of *counting*. Here, you can see that you (by which we mean the defense) can make two Spades and three Diamonds by force.

With five tricks staring you in the face you should take them. Also, there is no chance that partner may have a singleton Spade honor on this deal. If North held the ♠Q singleton East would have been dealt six low Spades and his 1NT opener would have been – what shall we say? – somewhat eccentric.


So, as South, you rise with the ♠K and play a Diamond – but which Diamond? Well, you must recognize that dummy started with the ♦10 9 and that the ♦8 7 can be set up by leading the ♦J to *pin* the ♦10.

Declarer ducks the Jack so you continue with Diamonds (any Diamond will do as it happens) to set up the suit. Declarer runs off his Clubs – merely to delay the inevitable – and then plays a Spade. This allows you to gain the lead to cash the two Diamond winners and defeat the contract.



A set of 6 deals on simple opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 1N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ AQ62	
	♥ 98763	
	♦ 63	
	♣ 73	
West		East
♠ KJ4		♠ T53
♥ A42		♥ KQT
♦ T987		♦ KJ42
♣ T98		♣ AQJ
	South	
	♠ 987	
	♥ J5	
	♦ AQ5	
	♣ K6542	

This time you are defending a part-score. That doesn't mean that you can relax - you still have to find the correct (killing) defense.

West	North	East	South
P	P	1NT	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ 4

This time East's opening 1NT is Passed out, West making a very conservative decision to leave the opening bid alone with a 4-3-3-3 hand and 8 points. As it turns out, though, such pessimism is well placed....

As South you lead your fourth highest Club, despite the suit's lack of intermediate cards, and North shows himself unable to beat dummy's ♣10 9 8. When declarer is forced to overtake the ♣8 with his own ♣Q you can work out that he has the ♣A and the ♣J as well and that the ♣Q is a feeble attempt to get you to lead another Club.

Declarer crosses to the dummy to try the Diamond finesse, running the ♦10. You take the ♦Q and take stock. Another Club lead is out of the question as it would ride into the jaws of the ♣A J and leading another Diamond would simply play into declarer's hands.

Best is a Spade shift and this hits gold when partner wins the ♠Q to play another Club *through* declarer. East tries the ♣J but you can win your ♣K and clear the Clubs. Try, turn and twist as he might declarer is unable to avoid losing three Clubs, (see – that feeble suit was worth setting up!) two Diamonds and two Spades. One off.

You congratulate West on his acumen in the bidding and move on to the next deal..



A set of 6 deals on simple opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

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

Lead: ♥ T

This South hand is identical to that of Hand 1 (as you have doubtless recognized!)

On that occasion the bidding was 1NT – 3NT and you had no reason to do anything other than lead a low Spade – something that rapidly sank 3NT. On this occasion, though, the player on your right (East) opened the bidding with 1♣ before declaring 3NT. Now the rationale for leading a Spade has evaporated.

With long Spades on your right it is impossible that you can make all the Spades and the only likely outcome of leading the suit is that you surrender a cheap trick and a *tempo*. Look at the effect of a Spade lead on this deal. Declarer would take trick one with the ♠6 and would immediately knock out the ♣A. Unable to return a Spade North would have to exit forlornly with a Club (or a Diamond) and declarer would have a cake-walk to ten tricks (one Spade, one Heart, five Diamonds and two Clubs).

So it is best in these circumstances to lead something else and keep your Spade honors as a rod in pickle, lying in wait over declarer's suit. What to lead? Well the choice is between Hearts and Clubs after the bidding and with a near-sequence in Hearts that looks the more promising suit.

As the cards lie the ♥10 lead hits pay dirt. Immediately North-South have three Heart tricks and must also come to the ♣A and two Spade tricks. Two off – tough luck, East.

North
♠ 4
♥ KJ86
♦ 9763
♣ A983

West
♠ 75
♥ Q53
♦ AQJ54
♣ KJT



East
♠ KJ986
♥ A42
♦ K8
♣ Q62

South
♠ AQT32
♥ T97
♦ T2
♣ 754

These next two deals depart a little from the rule of "*always lead the fourth highest of your longest and strongest*".

How might you know when you should depart from the iron law? Well, that's where experience, common sense and good fortune come into it.


The opponents' bidding may help too...

If this deal looks familiar it's because you have held the same thirteen cards recently. If you don't recognize your hand then we will reveal its source later.



A set of 6 deals on simple opening leads against No-trumps.

VB#19 Year 1 Opening leads against NT Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/08/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ 982	
	♥ Q42	
	♦ T8642	
	♣ A7	
West		East
♠ A63		♠ QT4
♥ K65		♥ A73
♦ K97		♦ AQJ
♣ J942		♣ QT83
	South	
	♠ KJ75	
	♥ JT98	
	♦ 53	
	♣ K65	

What's the difference between a *safe* lead and an *attacking* (or an aggressive) lead? This deal may help explain...

We're sorry, but the bidding is back to its monotonous worst. Still, can't be helped.

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

Lead: ♥ J

On this deal you (South) are on lead against a game contract with two four-card suits. The bidding is unhelpful (what can you learn from 1NT – 3NT? Very little) so you have to choose between your two long suits.

Now, it is generally best to lead a five-card suit if you have been dealt one but you should be more wary about four-card suits. That's not to say that you shouldn't lead from a four-card suit (that would be ridiculous!) On the contrary, if you have a choice of four-card suits you should – in general – select the stronger suit.

The caveat, however, is when you have a choice between a broken suit and a sequence. This deal presents a clear-cut case. The choice is between a suit headed by the ♠K J and a *solid* suit of ♥J 10 9 8. Now, either suit could be the right one to lead (it depends on partner's holding, after all) but, in the long run, it is better to lead from a sequence than from a broken suit.

Here, a Spade lead would allow declarer to run the lead around to his hand and get off to a good start by making a cheap trick with the ♠10. Eventually East would emerge with two Clubs, two Spades, two Hearts and three Diamonds for a total on nine tricks. Sure, the defense would get two Spade tricks in return but that wouldn't cause declarer sufficient pain. North-South would be restricted to two Spades and two Clubs.

Leading a Heart instead of a Spade cannot give away a trick (leading from sequences cannot give tricks to declarer that aren't his to take anyway). On this deal, the defenders actually set up two Heart tricks to go with the ♣A K.

By **not** leading Spades (and just sitting and waiting) South also cannot be prevented from making a Spade trick. Two Hearts, two Clubs and a Spade makes five tricks for the defense. One off.