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This series is about elementary defense against No-trump contracts, focusing on opening leads and play by the partner of the leader

VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 2	Contract: 3N
SA	By: East
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

North  
 ♠ A5  
 ♥ K97  
 ♦ J943  
 ♣ T642

West  
 ♠ KQ643  
 ♥ 3  
 ♦ A8652  
 ♣ A8



East  
 ♠ 72  
 ♥ QT64  
 ♦ KQ  
 ♣ KQJ97

South  
 ♠ JT98  
 ♥ AJ852  
 ♦ T7  
 ♣ 53

**This is the second set of six deals concerned with defensive co-operation against 3NT. There is another, previous, set in this edition of V-Blue with a similar theme. Much of this defensive play is concerned with counting. You must be able to count your own suit if you are the opening leader and partner should be there in third seat, ready and willing to help. There are clear conventions in leading back partner's suit when you are the third player.**

***With two cards remaining lead the higher; with three cards remaining lead the lowest.***

**This allows (an intelligent) partner to know how his suit is lying and what declarer has left. This may be very important on some deals – we'll see how this works as we go along.**

Hand 1: We'll start with a straightforward deal, just to get you in the mood...

What is going on in Hearts?

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

Lead: ♥ 5

Here you are on lead against 3NT and it is obvious enough to attack with the ♥5. A little surprisingly, a 5-5-2-1 hand goes down as dummy. Anyway, the accuracy or otherwise of the opponents' bidding is very much **not** your concern – taking five defensive tricks is your focus.

Partner wins the ♥K (it's good to have partners like that!) and he returns the ♥9. Declarer plays the ♥10, you with the ♥J and...? Now it may be tempting to take the ♥A but it's a temptation that should be resisted. The carding so far indicates that partner started with only three Hearts (the ♥9 return cannot be from an original holding of ♥K 9 × ×) so declarer has four cards in Hearts.

Thus, cashing the ♥A will only set up the ♥Q and will also disrupt the North-South communications. What is needed is a switch to another suit and for North to get in and lead yet another Heart through the closed hand.

It may look to be a guess what suit to lead but you should actually try the ♠J (if East has the ♠A you'll just have to be patient and hope North can gain the lead with a minor suit King). Here, the ♠J is covered by the ♠Q and ♠A. North fires another Heart through declarer and that's *Goodnight, Vienna*. The defense duly takes five Hearts and the ♠A. Two down.


The hand "works" because you can read the Heart position. You do that because of your partner's clear carding in the suit.



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N By: East
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

	North		
	♠ 72		
	♥ K964		
	♦ 943		
	♣ KQ64		
West		East	
♠ KQ643		♠ A5	
♥ 3		♥ QT7	
♦ A8652		♦ KQJ	
♣ A8		♣ JT972	
	South		
	♠ JT98		
	♥ AJ852		
	♦ T7		
	♣ 53		

You may think that you've seen this deal before. It's *déjà vu* all over again...

Well, maybe you have seen this deal and, then again, maybe you haven't.

Can you defend it accurately?

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

Lead: ♥ 5

You (South) are on lead to 3NT and it is obvious enough to attack with the ♥5. A 5-5-2-1 hand goes down as dummy and suddenly you have a strong feeling of *déjà vu*. Anyway, your focus should be on the present, not on the past.

Partner wins the ♥K (he's still producing the goods, this partner) and he returns the ♥4. Declarer plays the ♥10, you with the ♥J and...? Now, it is essential to **count** the Heart suit. Partner's carding shows a four-card suit as the ♥4 must be his lowest Heart. Note that you can see the other two Hearts lower than the ♥4 – the ♥3 is in dummy and the ♥2 is in your hand.

[North can't have only two Hearts (to wit: ♥K 4) because that would leave East with five of them and the bidding would have been different. Very different.]

So, partner has four Hearts and that leaves declarer with exactly three Hearts – and they must be precisely the ♥Q 10 7. When you can see through the backs of the cards this game is remarkably easy. Here, you can just cash the ♥A (knowing that the ♥Q will fall) and then cash out the rest of the suit. Declarer is one off before he gets started.

Note that your partner has been clever on this deal as well. On your ♥A he had to **unblock** his ♥9 in order that your ♥8 became the master Heart. Had he failed to do this then he would have won the fourth round of Hearts and the suit would have been tangled up.

This hand is relatively easy to defend from your perspective because you can read the Heart position accurately. This is only possible because of North's clear carding in the suit. Had he returned the ♥9 instead of the ♥4 at trick two you would have miscounted the Hearts and defended the hand differently (make that "unsuccessfully").





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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 2	Contract: 3N
SA	By: West
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

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

Lead: ♥ 4

East-west reach 3NT by West after a short, sharp and very common auction. Partner places the ♥4 on the table and you have to defend clearly and accurately with the South cards.

Having won the Heart lead with the ♥K it's – initially – a case of returning the right Heart, and that's the ♥2. Partner can read that as from a four-card suit – with fewer Hearts you would have returned your highest one.

Declarer's ♥J and ♥Q fall on the same trick and, without bothering to think (partner has been really good these last few hands – now he's stepped down from his pedestal), North plonks the ♥10 on the table. If you make the reflex play of the ♥5 you will allow the suit to become **blocked**.

To avoid this you need to ditch the ♥7 and let North cash the ♥6 and the ♥3. On reflection this isn't that difficult, but then it wasn't difficult for North to play a low Heart rather than the ♥10 either...

Anyway, you manage to cash out five Heart tricks and, yet again, 3NT fails. Next case.

North  
 ♠ J95  
 ♥ AT643  
 ♦ 863  
 ♣ J8

West  
 ♠ AQ6  
 ♥ J9  
 ♦ AQ75  
 ♣ KT63



East  
 ♠ KT3  
 ♥ Q8  
 ♦ KT942  
 ♣ A42

South  
 ♠ 8742  
 ♥ K752  
 ♦ J  
 ♣ Q975

Some hands are easy, routine almost. Turn your brain off and switch to autopilot.

Some hands are trickier and require thought. Turn the autopilot off and your brain back on.

Some deals require you to stop partner from making a mess of them. Like here...



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 29/10/2014	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

North  
 ♠ KT86  
 ♥ JT8  
 ♦ 942  
 ♣ KJ8

West  
 ♠ 97  
 ♥ Q43  
 ♦ AT875  
 ♣ A63



East  
 ♠ Q4  
 ♥ AK97  
 ♦ KQ63  
 ♣ Q92

South  
 ♠ AJ532  
 ♥ 652  
 ♦ J  
 ♣ T754

You are on lead in this hand.

Is this hand just too easy for words or do you need to think carefully?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

You are on lead to the perennial contract of 3NT and select the obvious ♠3. North obligingly produces the ♠K and returns the ♠6 at trick two. East follows with the ♠3 at trick one and the ♠Q at trick two. What next...?

Well, many players would snatch the ♠J without much thought (if any). Then they would look bewildered as declarer would soon claim the contract. Why? Because the Spades are **blocked**. You could cash four Spade tricks but not five. Could you have worked this out? Certainly!

The fact that East played the ♠Q is not a reliable indicator of him starting with a doubleton – it may be a desperation play from ♠Q × ×. What you must do is analyze the spot-cards for clues. You started with ♠A J 5 3 2, dummy with ♠9 7 and declarer has played the ♠Q 3. What holding must partner have to return the ♠6 at trick two?

Well, you can see now, after the event, that partner simply must have four Spades. The ♠6 is the lowest visible Spade and hence can only be from an original holding of four cards in the North hand.

*[Quibblers beware! If North started with ♠K 6 alone then East had ♠Q 10 8 3 originally. Firstly, he probably wouldn't play the ♠Q on the second round, and secondly, the Spades are disconnected and 3NT is probably cold].*

Knowing that North has four Spades is half-way towards solving the problem. To overcome the blockage you must underlead the ♠J to partner's ♠10 and then overtake the ♠8 with your Jack on the next round. Only this way can you cash the first five tricks.

Note, in passing, that North played his part too. Many defenders, seeing the ♠9 on table and holding the ♠10 8 would lead the ♠10 at trick two. What difference would that make? Well, now you would be almost certain to try the ♠J at trick three (thinking the Spades would be yours to run). Not so – they would be blocked...



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N By: East
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	


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

Lead: ♠ 4

East-west reach 3NT by East after taking the usual 1NT – 3NT route and, as South, you lead your trusty fourth-highest Spade.

North, partner, delights you by producing the ♠K and returning the ♠7, drawing the ♠Q from East. You might take that quickly with the ♠A but really should pause for thought. It is possible that East is up to his old tricks again and has the ♠Q 10 3, false-carding with the ♠Q in an attempt to make you take your ♠A prematurely. It is equally possible that East started with ♠Q 3 alone and you must take your ♠A. **How can you tell?**

Well, North's Spade return at trick two (the ♠7) is the lowest visible Spade (the ♠5 was in dummy, declarer played the ♠3 and you started with the ♠6 4 2) so it is clear that North started with four Spades and that East-West have only two Spades each.

North		East
♠ KT87		♠ Q3
♥ K53		♥ A72
♦ JT873		♦ KQ5
♣ T		♣ AQ832
West		South
♠ J5		♠ A9642
♥ Q98		♥ JT64
♦ A962		♦ 4
♣ KJ74		♣ 965

On this deal you have a routine lead against 3NT. That, though, is not the problem.

Once more you have to accurately read the layout of your suit and to know what to do about it.

Can you meet the challenge?

Accordingly, it is quite safe to take the ♠A and to play another. North takes the ♠10, plays the ♠8 to your ♠9 and you are in the right place at the right time to cash the last Spade.

This way you manage to cash the first five Spade tricks to defeat 3NT.



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VB#24 Year 1 Third hand defense in NT (giving count) Part 2	Contract: 3N
SA	By: East
Date: 29/10/2014	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	

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

Lead: ♠ 4

East-west reach 3NT by East after taking the usual 1NT – 3NT route and, as South, you lead your trusty fourth-highest Spade.

Your hand is familiar, as is dummy. Is this Groundhog day?

North, partner, delights you by producing the ♠K and returning the ♠8, drawing the ♠Q from East. You might take that quickly with the ♠A but really should pause for thought. It is possible that East is up to his old tricks again and has the ♠Q 10 3, false-carding with the ♠Q in an attempt to make you take your ♠A prematurely. It is equally possible that East started with ♠Q 3 alone and you must take your ♠A. **How can you tell?**

This time the tell-tale clue is the ♠8 return, which cannot be North's lowest Spade. The key question is **Where is the ♠7?** If North has it he cannot have started with four – if East has it then something seriously weird is going on. East would not have played the ♠Q from ♠Q 10 7 3

The only plausible explanation is that North started with ♠K 8 7 and East with ♠Q 10 3. In this case you simply have to **duck** the ♠Q and hope that North has an entry. If he doesn't – well, how were you ever going to beat 3NT?

Here, East wins trick two and has no choice but to play on Clubs. North wins his ♠A and, with defensive lines of communication still open, leads another Spade, allowing you to cash three more tricks to defeat the game.

One down again and a string of six successive failures for East-West. Tough luck, guys...

North  
 ♠ K87  
 ♥ 753  
 ♦ JT8753  
 ♣ A

West  
 ♠ J5  
 ♥ Q98  
 ♦ A962  
 ♣ KJ74



East  
 ♠ QT3  
 ♥ AK2  
 ♦ KQ  
 ♣ QT832

South  
 ♠ A9642  
 ♥ JT64  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ 965

You may think that you've seen this deal before. It's *déjà vu* for a second time...

Well, maybe you have played this deal before and, then again, maybe you haven't.

Can you defend it with accuracy and precision?