

## §10. Making use of favourable breaks.

The art of making tricks in No-trumps is not only by weight of high cards but also by setting up low cards in a suit. We have already seen hands where the opponents' high cards have been knocked out to establish a suit. Sometimes we can make tricks by taking advantage of the way a suit *breaks*.

In the example below, the Club suit will always provide five tricks, no matter how the remaining Clubs are distributed between East and West (using the jargon: no matter how the suit *breaks*):

♣ 4 3 2	
Dummy	E
W	Declarer
♣ A K Q J 10	

If we weaken this *combination* (by replacing the ♣10 with the ♣5) North-South are still likely to make five tricks:

♣ 4 3 2	
Dummy	E
W	Declarer
♣ A K Q J 5	

By playing off the top cards we hope that East and West run out of Clubs, setting up the ♣5 as a trick. However, if one opponent were to have all five missing Clubs (in other words: if the Clubs were to *break* 5–0) then there would be only four tricks available. It is worth noting that the chances of a 5–0 break are very low.

If we weaken the *suit combination* further (replacing the ♣J with the ♣6) we have the following layout:

♣ 4 3 2	
Dummy	E
W	Declarer
♣ A K Q 6 5	

Here, in order to make five tricks, North-South need the unseen five cards in Clubs to break 3–2 (for the actuaries that will happen roughly two thirds of the time). When South cashes the ♣A K Q he hopes to exhaust East and West of Clubs. If either West or East were to hold four cards in Clubs (or even all five Clubs) North-South cannot make five tricks. (If the suit splits 4–1 they might still make four tricks in the suit but would have to lose a trick in the process).

Let us put these ideas into a simple deal. South has nominated **Game in No-trumps** and West has led the ♠K.

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♠	A	K	6	4	2
♥	6	5	2		
♦	6	3			
♣	J	8	5		
				Dummy	
♦K				W	E
					Declarer
♠	5	3			
♥	A	K	Q	4	3
♦	A	7			
♣	A	6	3	2	

What do you make of South's chances in his attempt to make nine tricks in No-trumps? How should he go about the play?

West's lead of the ♦K succeeds in removing South's stopper in the suit by knocking out the ♦A. There are seven top tricks on this hand but declarer cannot afford to lose the lead – if he does, East-West will hit him with an avalanche of Diamonds.

The only hope (actually, a decent chance) is to trust that the Heart suit can provide five tricks. Accordingly, declarer must play off two top Hearts. If both opponents follow suit to two rounds the contract is secure – the suit must be breaking 3–2. In that case the third top Heart is cashed and the ♥4 and ♥3 are both winners. And if one opponent *shows out* on the first or second Heart? Then the suit is breaking badly (Hearts are splitting 5–0 or 4–1) and, put simply, South is doomed to failure on the hand. C'est la vie. In point of fact, South may well fail by two tricks and concede a penalty of 100 points.

There are other combinations that are worthy of study. For example, in the example below there are five tricks available provided the four missing Clubs do not break 4–0:

♣	5	4	3	2	
				Dummy	
				W	E
					Declarer
♣	A	K	Q	7	6

In the next example North-South will make five tricks if the Club suit breaks 3–3. If the six missing Clubs are 4–2 then East-West will be entitled to a trick.

♣	5	4			
				Dummy	
				W	E
					Declarer
♣	A	K	Q	3	2

In the final example North-South might make five tricks if the four missing Clubs obligingly split 2–2. If they were to break 3–1 then a trick would have to be lost and if Clubs were 4–0 (actually quite unlikely) North-South would have to lose two tricks.

♣	5	4	3	2	
				Dummy	
				W	E
					Declarer
♣	A	K	8	7	6

**Short quiz.** In these combinations how many tricks are *certain* and how many tricks are *possible*?

<p>1. ♣ 3 2</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr><td>Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W E</td></tr> <tr><td>Declarer</td></tr> </table> <p>♣ A K Q 6 5 4</p>	Dummy	W E	Declarer	<p>2. ♣ 6 5 4 3</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr><td>Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W E</td></tr> <tr><td>Declarer</td></tr> </table> <p>♣ A K Q 2</p>	Dummy	W E	Declarer	<p>3. ♣ 6 5</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr><td>Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W E</td></tr> <tr><td>Declarer</td></tr> </table> <p>♣ A K Q J 2</p>	Dummy	W E	Declarer	<p>4. ♣ 4</p> <table border="1" style="margin-left: auto; margin-right: auto;"> <tr><td>Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W E</td></tr> <tr><td>Declarer</td></tr> </table> <p>♣ A K Q 5 3 2</p>	Dummy	W E	Declarer
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### Answers

1. 3 certain, 6 possible.	The ♣ A K Q are <i>certain</i> tricks. If Clubs break 3–2 there will be six tricks in all. If the suit breaks 4–1 you may (given time) make five tricks and if the suit breaks 5–0 you may eventually make four tricks.
2. 3 certain, 4 possible.	The ♣ A K Q are <i>certain</i> tricks. If Clubs break 3–2 the ♣ 6 will become a winner. If the suit breaks 4–1 or 5–0 you will only ever make the three top tricks you had to start with.
3. 4 certain, 5 possible.	The ♣ A K Q J are certain tricks. If Clubs break 3–3 or 4–2 the ♣ 2 will be left as the last, winning, card in the suit. If the suit breaks 5–1 or 6–0 you will only ever make the four top tricks you had at the start.
4. 3 certain, 6 possible.	The ♣ A K Q are <i>certain</i> tricks. If Clubs break 3–3 there will be six tricks. If the suit breaks 4–2 you may eventually make five tricks. If the suit breaks 5–1 you may make four tricks. If there is a 6–0 break you can only make the ♣ A K Q.