

## §9. Defence against No-trump contracts.

The **defence** to a No-trump nomination follows the same general principles as does declarer play – that is, the defenders lead their long suit hoping to make *winners* out of the small cards.

The defenders' top tricks are for regaining the lead so that the defenders can get on lead to cash their suit. The following deal shows a classic example of this idea. South has nominated **Game in No-trumps**. West leads a low Spade, in this case the ♠5.

|             |              |             |  |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--|
|             | ♠ 10 9 8     |             |  |
|             | ♥ A J 7      |             |  |
|             | ♦ Q J 10 9 5 |             |  |
|             | ♣ A 10       |             |  |
| ♠ K J 6 5 2 | Dummy        | ♠ Q 4       |  |
| ♥ 10 8      | W            | ♥ 9 6 5 4 2 |  |
| ♦ A 8 6 2   | E            | ♦ 7 4       |  |
| ♣ 6 3       | Declarer     | ♣ Q J 9 4   |  |
|             | ♠ A 7 3      |             |  |
|             | ♥ K Q 3      |             |  |
|             | ♦ K 3        |             |  |
|             | ♣ K 8 7 5 2  |             |  |

Here, against **Game in No-trumps** by South, West leads his longest suit (Spades), hoping to *set it up*. This requires co-operation from East who must play his ♠Q on dummy's ♠8 at trick one to knock out declarer's *stopper*. South may choose not to part with his precious ♠A so East must keep up the good work by *returning his partner's suit*. South can only see six *top tricks* (a Spade, three Hearts and two Clubs) so must try to *set up* the Diamonds. Winning the ♠A South should immediately play the ♦K to force out the ♦A. However, when West gains the lead with that card his Spades are all *winners* so the contract is defeated.

The opening lead “rule” (against No-trump nominations, anyway) is usually:

**Lead the 4<sup>th</sup> highest from your longest and strongest.**

If, however, your long suit is headed by a three-card (or longer) sequence then it is normal to lead the top card. The following hand may explain why we do that.

In the deal below (a rearrangement of the above deal, swapping West's ♠6 with East's ♠Q) the ♠5 lead will give dummy a cheap trick with the ♠8 and will allow declarer to make as many as *eleven* tricks.

|             |              |             |  |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--|
|             | ♠ 10 9 8     |             |  |
|             | ♥ A J 7      |             |  |
|             | ♦ Q J 10 9 5 |             |  |
|             | ♣ A 10       |             |  |
| ♠ K Q J 5 2 | Dummy        | ♠ 6 4       |  |
| ♥ 10 8      | W            | ♥ 9 6 5 4 2 |  |
| ♦ A 8 6 2   | E            | ♦ 7 4       |  |
| ♣ 6 3       | Declarer     | ♣ Q J 9 4   |  |
|             | ♠ A 7 3      |             |  |
|             | ♥ K Q 3      |             |  |
|             | ♦ K 3        |             |  |
|             | ♣ K 8 7 5 2  |             |  |

West does not need East to contribute a “high” Spade, however; the correct lead being the ♠K. This will knock out the ♠A (if South refuses to part with his ♠A West will persist with the ♠Q

and then another Spade if necessary) and *set up* all of West's suit. Declarer must play on Diamonds to set up enough tricks for his contract but this allows West to grab the trick with his  $\diamond A$  and cash his Spades. The defence cannot be denied four Spade tricks and a Diamond for one down.

Many No-trump deals are *races* between the defenders and declarer – each side trying to set up a suit. The one advantage the defenders have is that they get to go first in the race. If you hold a sequence you may argue that you can lead any of the cards within it as they are all equals. True – but you have a partner in this game and it is usually a good idea to try to tell him what is going on. By leading a “high” card (and here we usually mean a Ten or higher) we are telling partner that we have a sequence headed by that card. So we are expressly denying that we hold the card immediately above the one we lead. (So, for instance, if we lead the  $\spadesuit J$  we cannot hold the  $\spadesuit Q$ ).

The table below shows the correct card to lead when defending against **No-trumps** from some miscellaneous card combinations:

|                               |                               |                               |                                |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. $\underline{K}$ Q J 10     | 2. K Q 8 $\underline{3}$      | 3. Q 10 8 $\underline{6}$     | 4. A Q 7 $\underline{5}$       |
| 5. $\underline{K}$ Q J 6 3    | 6. Q J 7 $\underline{5}$ 2    | 7. K 9 8 $\underline{6}$ 4    | 8. $\underline{10}$ 9 8 7 4    |
| 9. $\underline{Q}$ J 10 6 4 3 | 10. A J 8 $\underline{5}$ 3 2 | 11. A K 8 $\underline{6}$ 3 2 | 12. $\underline{J}$ 10 9 7 3 2 |
| 13. A Q 9 $\underline{8}$ 7   | 14. J 5 4 $\underline{3}$ 2   | 15. $\underline{A}$ K Q 7 5   | 16. J 10 7 $\underline{5}$ 4   |

Rather than try and commit these somewhat arbitrary examples to memory just note the basic rules:

**With a broken suit, lead the fourth card down from the top.**

(Often known as: “**The fourth highest of your longest and strongest.**”)

**With a suit headed by a run (a three-card or longer sequence) lead the top card.**

In the final deal of this section the defenders must co-operate to defeat **Game in No-trumps**.

|                       |                |                         |  |
|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------------|--|
|                       |                | $\spadesuit$ K Q J 8    |  |
|                       |                | $\heartsuit$ A K 4      |  |
|                       |                | $\diamond$ 6 4 3        |  |
|                       |                | $\clubsuit$ 10 8 5      |  |
| $\spadesuit$ 6 4      | Dummy          | $\spadesuit$ A 9 7 3 2  |  |
| $\heartsuit$ 5        | W            E | $\heartsuit$ Q J 10 9 8 |  |
| $\diamond$ A J 8 5 2  | Declarer       | $\diamond$ Q 7          |  |
| $\clubsuit$ 9 7 6 4 2 |                | $\clubsuit$ 3           |  |
|                       |                | $\spadesuit$ 10 5       |  |
|                       |                | $\heartsuit$ 7 6 3 2    |  |
|                       |                | $\diamond$ K 10 9       |  |
|                       |                | $\clubsuit$ A K Q J     |  |

Against a nomination of **Game in No-trumps** West leads the fourth highest of his longest and strongest (in this case that's the  $\diamond 5$ ) on which East must play his  $\diamond Q$ . South has to win the first trick with the  $\diamond K$  and should take stock by counting his tricks.

Declarer can **count** six top tricks (four Clubs and two Hearts) to go with the Diamond trick already in the bank. That means South has seven easily available winners but needs two more. The **plan** must be to set up (at least) two more in Spades – once the  $\spadesuit A$  is out of the way there

are three Spade tricks for the taking. So, South should play the ♠10 at trick two in an attempt to drive out the ♠A, setting up the three Spade honours on the table.

Now, East's duty is clear. He should win his ♠A and lead back a Diamond. It would be poor defence to switch suits by leading a Heart (although, admittedly, that is East's best suit). When your partner leads a suit against No-trumps it is generally wise to lead it back when you get the chance. Here, all of West's four remaining Diamonds are winners (even the lowly ♦2!) and **Game in No-trumps** is defeated. Partners must co-operate at this game.

**Bridge is a partnership game!**