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This series is about setting up suits by ducking an early round of the suit

VB#21 Year 1. Ducking to set up a suit. Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/09/2014	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ 64		
	♥ 8743		
	♦ AK753		
	♣ 72		
West		East	
♠ JT98		♠ 7532	
♥ KT9		♥ Q52	
♦ Q9		♦ JT8	
♣ J953		♣ KQ8	
	South		
	♠ AKQ		
	♥ AJ6		
	♦ 642		
	♣ AT64		

This set of six deals (and its counterpart elsewhere in this edition of V-Blue) covers the theme of *ducking* to establish a long suit. This play is usually made in No-trumps and is a way of retaining communication between the closed hand and dummy.

It is often the right play at this game to allow the opposition to take their tricks(s) early in the piece rather than later in the hand. This way you keep control of matters.

Hand 1 sets the tone – it isn't that difficult a hand but it establishes general principles.

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

Lead: ♠ J

You reach 3NT as South after opening 1♣ and rebidding 2NT to show a balanced 18-19 points. Partner has an easy raise to game, expecting that his decent five-card suit will provide a useful source of tricks.

West leads the ♠J, which does you no harm with your ♠A K Q. Thanking partner for his contribution to proceedings you count the *top tricks* that you can see. These total seven (three Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and the ♠A), which means you are fishing for two more.

The usual source of extras is a long suit and this deal proves to be no exception – Diamonds will produce four tricks if the suit breaks 3-2. However, a trick has to be lost to East-West in the process no matter how the cards lie. In these cases it is usually best to concede the losing trick(s) as early as possible rather than later.

So... best play is to win the Spade lead (you can hardly do otherwise!) and lead a low Diamond at trick two. Regardless of West's card you call for a low card from dummy. You don't care which of East or West wins this trick – let's say that East decides to take his partner's ♦9 with the ♦10 and leads a Spade back (it isn't clear to East exactly what the Spade position is – he may be hoping for a more favorable Spade holding with West than just ♠J 10 9 8).

You win East's Spade return and revert to Diamonds. The ♦A K clear all the opponents' Diamonds making the ♦7 and ♦5 into winners as they are the only Diamonds in town. Having cashed out the suit you are in a position to take the rest of your top tricks as that gives you the required nine.

Now, what happens if you were to play Diamonds in a different way? Well, you might think of cashing one top Diamond and then ducking the second round. That works well enough and 3NT would make that way.

The *losing* line is to cash the ♦A K early in the piece. Can you see *why*?

Well, play the hand through mentally and see. You cash the ♦A K and concede a Diamond. True, the ♦7 5 are winners *but how do you ever reach them?* Dummy has no entry and you are destined to watch helplessly as the two Diamond winners wither and die on the table.


The point of this hand (and others in these series), therefore, is to keep control, **by losing your certain losers early**. It's an important learning point.



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VB#21 Year 1. Ducking to set up a suit. Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/09/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ AK974		
	♥ A74		
	♦ AJ		
	♣ K42		
West		East	
♠ J6		♠ QT852	
♥ KT863		♥ J9	
♦ Q32		♦ KT85	
♣ QJ5		♣ T8	
	South		
	♠ 3		
	♥ Q52		
	♦ 9764		
	♣ A9763		

In Hand 2 we maintain the theme.

How can you set up and reach your main source of tricks on this deal?

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

Lead: ♥ 6

Here, you reach 3NT as South having responded with an uneasy 1NT to your partner's 1♠ opening bid. Partner's raise to 3NT gives you no further choice in the matter, so game it is.

West starts off with his fourth highest Heart. As it happens that costs his side a trick but he can hardly be blamed for his choice of lead. You must start by running the Heart lead to the ♥Q. That gives you two Heart tricks (note that you are assured of two Heart tricks in any case – even if East turned up with the ♥K you'd have the ♥A and ♥Q left in the bank).

Now, a necessary **count of tricks** shows there to be two Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and two Clubs. That makes seven *top tricks*, meaning that two more have to be found from somewhere. That "somewhere" is usually from a long suit that can be set up and here that long suit is Clubs.

[Dummy's Spade suit is not a good choice – even if Spades split 4-3 there would only be one extra trick available there, and that after two tricks had been conceded].

Clubs will provide four tricks in all with any 3-2 break. The "trick" (forgive the pun) is not to use the ♣A too early. We have to duck a round of Clubs, either at the first available opportunity or immediately after cashing the ♣K. Following the principle of losing losers early we choose to duck the first Club.

A surprised East wins the ♣8 and plays back a Heart to set up his partner's suit. Good defense but not good enough (there is nothing East-West can do, though. Still, they are following sound principles just as we are).

We can take the ♥A, carefully cash the ♣K next (*play the high cards from the short hand first*) and then cross to the carefully preserved ♣A. This pulls out all the opponents' Clubs and the last two Clubs – actually the ♣9 7 – are winners. Having cashed them it's an easy matter to take the remainder of the top tricks before conceding the last three tricks to the opponents.


3NT bid and made. And on to the next deal.



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VB#21 Year 1. Ducking to set up a suit. Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/09/2014	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ AK753		
	♥ 652		
	♦ 432		
	♣ 75		
West		East	
♠ QJ8		♠ T62	
♥ JT984		♥ 73	
♦ JT		♦ KQ85	
♣ K96		♣ JT82	
	South		
	♠ 94		
	♥ AKQ		
	♦ A976		
	♣ AQ43		

Here you reach a game contract although it turns out to have poor chances. That's often the case with a strong hand facing a weak one, by the way.

Anyway, your task is to find the best chance of making the contract.

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

Lead: ♥ J

We reach 3NT as South and, immediately after thanking partner, embark on **Counting tricks**.

Here we can see seven *on top* (two Spades, three Hearts, one Diamond and one Club). We need, therefore, two more. We might take the Club finesse but that would only yield one extra trick – always assuming that East holds the ♠K. What we need is two extra tricks.

What other choices are there? Well, long suits shouldn't be ignored – they are usually the first port of call when it comes to looking for extra tricks.

Here, Spades are a possible source of extras; if the suit were to break 3-3 there would be four tricks there. It *might* be possible to set up Diamonds with a 3-3 break – but here there would only be one extra trick available (having lost two tricks *en route*).

So, in fact, there are two possible lines of play – try to set up the long Diamond (hoping for a 3-3 break) and take the Club finesse as well. That line requires two pieces of favorable luck: a 3-3 break **and** a finesse. The other line of play is simply to hope that the Spades break 3-3. To play for just one favorable break is better than playing for two, so the correct line is to hope Spades break nicely.

That's the **Plan**, how do we **Execute** it? The answer is to *duck the first round of Spades*. We can't do this any other way. If we take a top Spade first we cannot recover – there is no way that we can set up the long Spades and get to them.

Anyway, back to the plot... We win the Heart lead (any card will do) and immediately attack Spades by leading one and ducking it. We don't care who wins this – in the event it's East who takes the trick with the ♠10 and dutifully, if woodenly, returns his partner's Heart lead.

We take that and now try our luck in Spades by cashing the ♠A K. Yippee-ki-yay! They break 3-3, as we'd hoped, and now the two baby Spades are winners (and need cashing immediately). It is now completely safe to try the Club finesse for an overtrick. As it happens,

West has the ♣K so that shot proves unsuccessful.

No matter, we have nine tricks and the contract – and that's all that really matters.



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VB#21 Year 1. Ducking to set up a suit. Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/09/2014	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

<p>West</p> <p>♠ JT987</p> <p>♥ K65</p> <p>♦ Q86</p> <p>♣ KT</p>		<p>East</p> <p>♠ 53</p> <p>♥ JT42</p> <p>♦ JT73</p> <p>♣ QJ4</p>
<p>North</p> <p>♠ AK642</p> <p>♥ A83</p> <p>♦ AK</p> <p>♣ 952</p>		<p>South</p> <p>♠ Q</p> <p>♥ Q97</p> <p>♦ 9542</p> <p>♣ A8763</p>

Here, in a predictable contract, you have to make sure that you can set up your suit and get to it before the opponents can do you any damage.

West	North	East	South
P	1♠	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ J

North (partner) opens 1♠ and we have little option but to respond 1NT with just 8 points. Partner raises to 2NT and we have to decide whether to advance to game or not. Well, within the 6-9 point range of 1NT we are near the maximum and have a five-card suit as well. So that argues for bidding on.

What about that singleton ♠Q? Well, crucially, it is in partner's suit where it may well provide a useful "filler" so it is well worth its 2 points (imagine if partner's spade suit were ♠A K J × × – now you could reasonably hope for five Spade tricks). All this argues for bidding game rather than Passing.

When dummy goes down we can see that the ♠Q is valuable as it backs up the ♠A K. Now, an essential **count of tricks** reveals just seven *on top* (three Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and a Club) so we need to generate two more. What suit might we develop?

This Spade lead, by the way, is a little odd after North has bid them. It suggests that West has long Spades (so we will not be able to set up that suit). It is also irritating in that it removes an entry to our hand, leaving the ♣A as the only card that allows us to place the lead in the closed hand.

Right... where are these extra two tricks coming from? The answer – as usual – is from the long suit: Clubs in this case. To make three Club tricks (the best we can hope for) we need a 3-2 break and we will have to lose two tricks in the process. That means ducking *two* rounds of Clubs, and – in keeping with our theme – it has to be done early in the hand.

Let's do it. Win the ♠Q at trick one and duck a Club. East wins and, realizing the futility of continuing with Spades, switches to a Diamond. We win and duck another Club. A second round of Diamonds comes too late (for East-West at any rate). We take the ♦A and come to hand with the ♣A, simultaneously extracting the last Club from the opponents. That leaves the two remaining Clubs in hand as winners, which we must cash at once (or will lose them forever).

Since we have enough tricks for the contract we can cash the remaining top tricks on the table (the ♥A and the ♠A K) and that's enough for the contract. The opponents are welcome to the rest, whoever wants them.



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VB#21 Year 1. Ducking to set up a suit. Part 1 SA

Date: 21/09/2014

Dealer: East


[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N

By: South

Board #: 5

Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ AK642	
	♥ J73	
	♦ KQ	
	♣ 862	
West		East
♠ QT7		♠ J53
♥ T5		♥ K9842
♦ JT97		♦ A52
♣ QJ74		♣ T5
	South	
	♠ 98	
	♥ AQ6	
	♦ 8643	
	♣ AK93	

On this deal both you and your partner have about the same strength. Nonetheless, the contract that you reach is not a good one as the hands do not fit well. *C'est la vie*, as the French say.

The important task is to take your best shot at making the hand.

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

Lead: ♦ J

We, sitting South, reach 3NT after opening 1♣ and rebidding 1NT. Partner (reasonably enough) raises to 3NT and West leads the ♦J from what you can now see is a fairly solid sequence.

We have little choice but to cover the ♦J with the ♦Q so East takes his ♦A and returns his partner's suit by leading back a Diamond. This sets up West's Diamonds and, irritatingly, removes the *entry* to dummy's long Spades.

So we now must **Count our tricks** and we can see that there are just two Clubs, one Diamond, one Heart and two Spades on top. That's a miserable total of six, so three more tricks have to come from somewhere.

To make 3NT we need some luck - we need to bring in the long Spades (assuming it works, it will provide us with only *two* additional tricks) and also have to hope that the Heart finesse is working.

If Spades do indeed break 3-3 then the trick count goes up to eight (four Spades, one Heart, one Diamond and two Clubs) and the Heart finesse (should it succeed) makes nine. Not a great chance, to be sure, but it's the only one that's going...

So, here we go. Win the second Diamond and play a Heart to the ♥Q at trick three. This wins so it's now time to switch to Spades. Lead a Spade and **duck** it, whether West plays a higher one than the ♠8 or a lower one. As it is, West covers with the ♠10 and is allowed to hold the trick.

On lead West cashes his two Diamonds (no need to worry, you have some trash to put in the can as this is going on) before getting off play with a Heart. Now the moment of truth. If Spades are 3-3 the rest are yours – if not, you will be two down.

Lady Luck is smiling on you today and you land your contract.



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VB#21 Year 1. Ducking to set up a suit. Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 21/09/2014	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

North
 ♠ T74
 ♥ A5
 ♦ QT4
 ♣ A9652

West
 ♠ Q53
 ♥ J9764
 ♦ 96
 ♣ KJT



East
 ♠ J986
 ♥ 832
 ♦ KJ85
 ♣ Q8

South
 ♠ AK2
 ♥ KQT
 ♦ A732
 ♣ 743

There seems to be no reason here to follow the theme on this deal – surely you don't have to duck the first round or two of your suit...?

Or do you?

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

Lead: H

You reach 3NT as South and West leads the ♥6 from his five-card suit. That appears to do you no harm at all with your strong holding in Hearts but you need to be careful; the ♥A on the table can be knocked out easily by the opponents and that is your only entry to dummy and its source of tricks.

A brief **Count of tricks** shows that there are only seven *top tricks* so you need to set up two more – the most appropriate suit to play on being Clubs. (What else? Diamonds, maybe? Well, how do you intend playing that moth-eaten suit? No, it is usually best to look to *length* in these No-trump deals).

The best play is to win the Heart in hand and duck a Club, hoping for a 3-2 break. This is us beating the drum on this important theme – ***when you have to lose tricks in a suit to set it up it is best to lose those tricks early.***

Having won a cheap Club trick the opponents are going to make a nuisance of themselves by returning a Heart to remove dummy's entry (the ♥A). No matter, you can win the the ♥A and calmly duck a second round of Clubs – all the time hoping that the suit breaks favorably.

The defense can lead what they like now; you can win whatever they play, cash the ♣A to extract the defenders' last Club and the two baby Clubs are masters (which you have to take at once). You now have two Spades, three Hearts, one Diamond and **three** Clubs. That totals nine tricks.