

§8: The play of the cards in No-trumps.

General Approach: Almost all deals played at Bridge contain *top tricks* and suits that must be developed into tricks. Whenever dummy comes into view declarer should pause to consider the hand as a whole and *count his tricks*. Only if the contract is available in *top tricks* should declarer *cash* all his winners immediately. Usually declarer has to *set up* his tricks by developing a suit.

Remember:

Count – Plan – Execute.

Here is an example deal, with South the declarer having nominated **Game in No-trumps**. West leads the ♥2:

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

Count:

Declarer can see six *top tricks* (which are: the ♠A and ♠K, the ♥A, ♥K, and ♥Q and the ♣A). Declarer could *cash* these immediately but to do so would be poor play. In fact, little could be more wrong-headed since that would set up *winners* in the opponents hands. Top cards, in general, should be kept in order to regain the lead. It is the object of the defenders to dislodge your high cards – don't help them along! Declarer needs, therefore, three tricks from somewhere else to make the total up to nine.

Plan:

Declarer aims to *set up* three tricks in Diamonds by *knocking out* the ♦A. In order to regain the lead immediately after the opponents win the ♦A declarer must aim to keep *stoppers* in all suits so that he can keep control of the hand. Little is worse in No-trumps than allowing the opponents to have the lead when you have a wide open suit.

Execute:

Declarer should win the opening Heart lead (he has little choice there but might select any of the ♥A, ♥K or ♥Q, which are all *equals*) and should immediately lead a Diamond. This will drive out the opponents' ♦A and make the remaining three Diamonds all *winners*. He will win whatever the next lead is and be in a position to *cash* three diamond tricks when it suits him. Declarer can lead any of the ♦Q, ♦10 or ♦9 from hand and play anything he likes from the dummy since (apart from the ♦2 and the ♦3) they are all *equals*. The only losing line is to lead the ♦2 and play dummy's ♦3, inviting the opponents to win the trick with a low Diamond. You have to play a "big" Diamond to force out the ♦A.

Notice the importance of keeping high cards in order to regain the lead. Note also that the defender with the $\diamond A$ might refuse to play it early. That makes no difference – declarer can continue to play “high” Diamonds, which will force out the $\diamond A$ eventually. Declarer is assured of three tricks in Diamonds in one way or another.

Sometimes declarer has to knock out more than one high card. A small adjustment to the hand above gives the deal overleaf:

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

The principle of developing tricks remains the same. This time South can **count** seven top tricks. The **plan** is to win the Heart lead with the $\heartsuit Q$ (or the $\heartsuit K$ or the $\heartsuit A$, it makes no difference) and play a Diamond immediately, with the aim of setting up two *slow tricks* there. Either West or East might win the Diamond lead with the $\diamond A$ or $\diamond K$ and lead anything back – declarer can win that trick and can patiently continue with Diamonds to set up two tricks in the suit.

Note again the idea of *equals*. It matters not whether South wins the first Heart lead with the $\heartsuit A$, $\heartsuit K$ or $\heartsuit Q$ as they are all equals. When leading Diamonds South can lead the $\diamond 2$ to dummy’s $\diamond 8$ (or $\diamond J$) or he can lead the $\diamond 9$, $\diamond 10$ or $\diamond Q$ and play dummy’s $\diamond 3$. This is because the $\diamond Q$, $\diamond J$, $\diamond 10$, $\diamond 9$, $\diamond 8$ are all *equals*.

In the following deal South (declarer) has to get his Spades going to make **Game in No-trumps**. This time you are allowed to see all four hands.

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

West leads the $\clubsuit 5$ (you will see why in the next chapter) and declarer stops to **Count** his tricks. There are three Clubs, two Hearts one Diamond and a Spade. That makes seven top tricks in all, so two more are needed.

The **Plan** is to make two extra tricks in Spades. The opponents have the $\spadesuit K$ (and are welcome to it) but once that is out of the way the other Spades will be winners. So there will, in fact, be three Clubs, two Hearts, one Diamond and three Spades to take. Declarer knows he can win the Club lead with whichever card he pleases, after that the focus must be on Spades. South

can lead off the ♠A and play another Spade, forcing the ♠K. Then, with the Spades set up, there are sufficient tricks for Game.

Execute... Declarer wins the opening lead with the ♣Q, plays off the ♠A (every blue moon the ♠K will appear on that. Not today, however) and concedes a Spade trick to the King. Whatever the defenders do next South is in control – he has stoppers in all the other suits so can regain the lead and cash his nine winners.

By leading Spades early on this deal and retaining as many of his high cards as possible declarer is keeping control of as much of the hand as he can.

This last point is important and needs reinforcement: **High cards are there to regain the lead after setting up a suit. Cashing winners early is a real no-no at this game!**