

Defend a NoTrump Contract

Good Defender = Good Detective:

- **WATCH** the bidding, the opening lead, the cards played, the spot cards in important suits.
- **COUNT** dummy's points, cards in dummy's long suit.
- **DEDUCE** partner's points, cards in partner's long suit, declarer's card distribution.
- **PLAN:** Make a plan for the defence. Where will we get 5 tricks?

How Many High Card Points Does Partner Have?

- Add up your points and dummy's points. Declarer has 15-17 for 1NT opening, 20-21 for 2NT opening. Subtract from 40 to deduce partner's points.
- **Example:** You and dummy have 20. Declarer has 15-17. Partner has only 3-5.
- **Example:** You and dummy have 12 points. If declarer has 20-21, partner has 7-8.

Make a Plan for the Defense

- **Where will we get 5 tricks?** Consider your hand and what partner might have.
- **Does partner have another A or K? Will partner take another trick?** If partner has only 3-5 points and partner has already led **Q** from **QJ**, then partner has no **A** or **K**. If partner has 7-8 points, then maybe partner will get another chance to lead towards you.
- **If you see only 1 chance to beat the contract, take that 1 chance.** If you need partner to have a specific card for that 1 chance to work, assume partner has it.
- **Plan your discards. Keep parity with dummy in a suit that only you can guard.**
Example: Dummy has **AKQx**. You have **Jxxx**. You cannot afford to discard any of these.

The Best Way to Defeat 3NT is to Set up a 5+ Card Suit

- **Did partner lead an honor?** This shows an honor sequence in a long suit that partner wants to set up.
- **Did partner lead a low card?** This should be the 4th best card in partner's longest and strongest suit. Help partner set up this suit.
- **Did partner lead a high spot card?** This would be top of nothing in a short suit. Partner has no promising long suit and is looking for your long suit.

Long Suit Tactics:

- **Do not block partner's long suit:** With **Ax** or **Kx** in a suit where partner leads the **Q**, overtake partner's **Q** and lead back your small card.
- **Lead back "remaining count".** If you win the first trick in partner's suit, lead back "remaining count", low from an odd number remaining, high from an even number remaining. Example: Partner leads the 4th best 3 of hearts. You win the Ace. Lead back the 4 from 984 remaining. Lead back the 9 from 94 remaining. Lead back the Q from Q9 remaining. Once you tell partner your count, partner can determine declarer's count.
- **If the long suit is not yet set up, leave an entry in the hand with the long suit.** If you have the long suit, hold up taking a trick with a high card hoping that partner can take a trick and continue setting up your long suit before your entry is knocked out. If

partner has the long suit, jump up with your high card in 2nd seat and continue partner's suit so that partner can retain partner's entry until the long suit is set up.

- **If opponents are entitled to a trick in your long suit, give it to them early.**
Example: You have **AKxxxx**. Opponents have **QJT**. Opponents always get 1 trick. If you play **AKx**, you might never get the other three. When partner wins a trick, partner will not have another one to lead to you. If you let opponents win the first trick, partner will most often have a second card to lead to you. You then get 5 tricks.
- **Should I overtake partner's high card in my long suit?** Watch partner's "remaining count" signal, but also think. Is it possible that partner might be forced to lead back high from a doubleton? **Example:** You lead **Q** from **QJ9xx**. Partner wins **A** & leads back **T**. Since the **T** might be partner's last card and you have **J** & **9**, you should overtake.
- **Is it safe to continue my long suit?** Place the remaining cards. **Example:** I have **J9**, declarer has **T8**. If I lead them, I give away a trick. Wait for partner or declarer to lead the suit.

2nd Hand Low

- **General Rule:** First two hands play low; last two hands play high to fight for the trick.
- **Think ahead to avoid hesitation.** If you hesitate, this suggests that you have the Ace.
- **Don't play high to force out a high card.** 3rd hand will usually play high anyway.
- **Example:** You have **A**, dummy has **KJ**: Play low smoothly. Partner may have **Q**.
- **Example:** You have **A**, dummy has **KQT**: Often right to duck twice. Partner may have **J**.
- **Exception: Split Your Honors.** Play top of touching honors, the one you would have led. **Example:** Declarer plays low. You hold **KQx**. Dummy has **ATx**. You should play the **K** to prevent declarer taking a deep finesse with the **T**.
- **Exception: Cover an honor with an honor.** If 1st hand plays an honor, you should cover it with an honor to set up **9's** and **T's** for your side. **Eg:** Declarer plays **Q**. You have **Kxx**. Dummy has **AJx**. Your **K** drives out their **A** & **Q**, a good day's work for your **K**.
- **Exception: Prevent dummy entry.** Play high to prevent declarer reaching dummy.
- **Exception: Protect partner's entry.** Play high if you need to preserve entries in partner's hand.
- **Exception: Take the setting trick(s).** If 1 more trick will defeat the contract, take that trick. If partner's long suit is ready to run, win the trick & lead partner's suit.

3rd Hand High

- **General Rule:** First two hands play low; third hand plays their highest card.
- **Exception: Play lowest of equals.** This can give partner useful information. **Example:** Partner leads low from **Kxxx**. You play the **J**. Declarer wins the **A**. Partner knows you have the **Q**. If declarer had it, declarer would have played the **Q** on the **J**. If you have **QJ9** and dummy plays low from **Txx** before you, then the **9** is your lowest of equals.
- **Exception: Keep an honor card to cover dummy's honor card.** **Example:** Dummy plays low from **Qxx**. You hold **ATxx**. Play the **T**. Keep the **A** to capture dummy's **Q**. If declarer has the **K** and you play the **A** on a small card, the opponents make both **K** and **Q**. If you keep the **A** to capture the **Q**, they do not make the **Q**. They make 1 less trick.

Cover an Honor with an Honor

- **General Rule:** It is usually right to cover an honor card with an honor card. The intention is to promote **9's** and **Ten's** into winning tricks for your side.
- **Exception: Cover the last of touching honors.** Example: Dummy has **KQ**. You have **A**. Do not cover the first one. Cover the second one. This also applies if declarer leads an honor from the closed hand. If you think declarer has more touching honors, cover the last.
- **Exception: Do not cover if there is no chance to promote tricks for your side.** Example: Declarer leads **Q**. You have **Kxx**. Dummy has **AJT9x**. Do not cover. You cannot promote the **T** or **9** for your side ... dummy has them.
- **Exception: Dummy is short, you are long,** and you expect to make your honor if you hold on to it. Example: Dummy has **Qx**, you have **Kxxx**: they can finesse you only twice. You will make your **K** if you do not cover the **Q**.
- **Exception: Dummy has a threatening suit:** Example: Dummy has **AJxxx**, you have **Kxxx**: If you play the **K** early, you help declarer establish the suit.
- **Exception: J is led from dummy's Jxx & you have Axx:** Partner may have the **Q** and make it if you play low smoothly. Partner may also have the **K** over declarer's **Q**.

Cover the Last of Touching Honors

- **Exception: Dummy has doubleton.** Cover the 1st honor, to block the suit.
- **Exception: You have doubleton.** Cover the 1st honor, so you're not caught playing your honor on air on the next trick.

Watch & Think: Rules like “2nd hand low”, “3rd hand high” and “cover an honor with an honor” provide a basic foundation, but being a good detective is what takes you to the next higher level.