

§3. The Play of the Cards in No-trumps.

By the end of this chapter you should understand the following terms:

Winners: The highest cards in a suit that can be turned into tricks immediately.

To Cash: To take a trick immediately by leading a winner.

Top tricks: Those tricks that could be cashed at once (usually at the beginning of a hand).

To Knock out: To force out the opponents' high card(s) by leading the suit, often by leading or playing a high card.

To Set up: To develop low cards into winners by knocking out the opponents' high cards.

Stopper: A high card in a suit which prevents the opponents from running off their long suit.

Equals: Cards from the same suit that are neighbours in rank.

General Approach: Almost all deals played at Bridge contain *top tricks* and suits that must be developed into tricks. Tricks that need to be developed are called *slow tricks* as they are not immediately available.

Whenever dummy hoves into view you should pause to consider the hand as a whole and *count your tricks*. Only if the contract is available in top tricks should you cash all your winners immediately. Usually, you have to set up some extra tricks by establishing a suit, often by *knocking out* an Ace.

Remember:

Count – Plan – Execute.

Here is an example deal; how might you play 3NT from the South hand?:

Hand 1 South plays in 3NT. West leads the ♥2.	♠ K 4 2						
	♥ 9 7 5						
	♦ K J 8 3						
	♣ 9 6 4						
	<table border="1"> <tr><td colspan="2">Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="2">Declarer</td></tr> </table>	Dummy		W	E	Declarer	
Dummy							
W	E						
Declarer							
	♠ A 9 3						
	♥ A K Q						
	♦ Q 10 9 2						
	♣ A 10 3						

Count: You have six *top tricks* (which are: the ♠A and ♠K, the ♥A, ♥K, and ♥Q and the ♣A). You 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! Anyway, you need three *slow tricks* from somewhere to make the total up to nine.

Plan: You must arrange to *set up* three tricks in Diamonds by *knocking out* the Ace of Diamonds. In order to regain the lead immediately after the opponents win the ♦A, your aim must be to keep *stoppers* in all suits so that you 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: You should win the opening Heart lead (you have little choice there but might select any of the Ace, King or Queen of Hearts, 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*. You can win whatever the next lead is and be in a position to *cash* three diamond tricks when it suits you. You can lead any of the ♦Q, ♦10 or ♦9 from hand and play anything you like 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 call for 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.

Note the importance of holding back your high cards in order to regain the lead. Note also that the defender with the ♦A might refuse to play it early. That would make no difference – you could continue to play "high" Diamonds, which would force out the Ace eventually. You are assured of three tricks in Diamonds in one way or another.

Sometimes you have to knock out more than one high card. A small adjustment to Hand 1 gives the deal below. How might you play 3NT here?

Hand 2 South plays in 3NT. West leads the ♥2.	♠ K 4 2						
	♥ 9 7 5						
	♦ J 8 6 3						
	♣ K 6 4						
	<table border="1"> <tr><td colspan="2">Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="2">Declarer</td></tr> </table>	Dummy		W	E	Declarer	
Dummy							
W	E						
Declarer							
	♠ A 9 3						
	♥ A K Q						
	♦ Q 10 9 2						
	♣ A 10 3						

The principle of developing tricks remains the same. You win the Heart lead with whichever of the ♥A, ♥K or ♥Q gives you the greatest pleasure and should play a Diamond immediately. One of West or East is likely to win that and lead something back (a Heart, probably). Now you can regain the lead and patiently plough on with Diamonds to set up two tricks in the suit.

Note again the idea of *equals*. It matters not whether you win the first Heart lead with the ♥A, ♥K or ♥Q as they are all equals. When leading Diamonds you can lead the ♦2 to dummy's ♦8 (or ♦J) or you could lead the ♦9, ♦10 or ♦Q and play dummy's ♦3. This is because the ♦Q, ♦J, ♦10, ♦9, ♦8 are equals.

In the following deal you have to get your Spades going to make your game. This time you can see all four hands.

Hand 3 South plays in 3NT. West leads the ♣5.	♠ Q J 10 7							
	♥ K 5							
	♦ A 9 8 2							
	♣ 7 6 4							
	<table border="1"> <tr><td colspan="2">Dummy</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="2">Declarer</td></tr> </table>	Dummy		W	E	Declarer		
Dummy								
W	E							
Declarer								
♠ K 6 3		♠ 9 8 5 2						
♥ Q 10 6 3		♥ J 8 2						
♦ 6		♦ K Q J 4						
♣ J 9 8 5 3		♣ 10 2						
	♠ A 4							
	♥ A 9 7 4							
	♦ 10 7 5 3							
	♣ A K Q							

Against your 3NT West leads the ♣5 (you will see why in a later chapter) and you must stop to **Count** your top tricks. Here, there are three Clubs, two Hearts, one Diamond and one 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 ♠K (and are welcome to it) but once that is out of the way the other Spades will all be winners. So there will, in fact, be three Clubs, two Hearts, one Diamond and three Spades to take. You should realise that you can win the Club lead with whichever card you please (the ♣A K Q are equals, of course); after that the focus must be on Spades. At trick two you should lead off the ♠A and play another Spade, forcing the ♠K. Then, with the Spades on table set up, there are sufficient tricks for game.

Execute... You take the opening Club lead with the ♣Q (say), play off the ♠A (once in every blue moon the ♠K will appear on that. Not today, however) and concede a Spade trick to the King. Whatever the defenders do next you are in control – you have stoppers in all the other suits so are able to regain the lead and cash your nine winners (to wit: three Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and three Clubs).

By leading Spades early on this deal and retaining as many of your high cards as possible you are keeping control of as much of the hand as you 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!**

§3. Quiz on the Play of the Cards in No-trumps.

Here are three full deals for you to try.

In each case you are South, declarer. Obviously, your first act is to **Count** and **Plan**.

The Preliminary Analysis talks you through the first trick or two. What is your best subsequent play?

The answers are overleaf.

Q1.
How should you play in 3NT?
West leads the $\heartsuit K$.

Preliminary Analysis.
After the $\heartsuit K$ lead how many *top tricks* can you see?
What suit should you play on for your extra winners?
How should you play the hand?

\spadesuit K 6 2
 \heartsuit A Q 4
 \diamondsuit 8 4 2
 \clubsuit K J 10 3

Dummy	
W	E
Declarer	

\spadesuit A 9 7 4
 \heartsuit K 10 3
 \diamondsuit A 9 7 3
 \clubsuit Q 5

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	Pass	1NT
Pass			Pass
3NT by South		Opening lead: $\heartsuit K$	

Q2.
How should you play in 3NT?
West leads the $\spadesuit 3$.

Preliminary Analysis.
After the $\spadesuit 3$ lead how many *top tricks* can you see?
What suit should you play on for your extra winners?
How should you play the hand?

\spadesuit 8 7 4
 \heartsuit A Q 3
 \diamondsuit Q 4
 \clubsuit A 9 6 4 2

Dummy	
W	E
Declarer	

\spadesuit A Q 2
 \heartsuit K 9 7
 \diamondsuit J 10 9 8 3
 \clubsuit Q 8

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	Pass	1NT
Pass			Pass
3NT by South		Opening lead: $\spadesuit 3$	

Q3.
How should you play in 3NT?
West leads the $\spadesuit 6$.

Preliminary Analysis.
After the $\spadesuit 6$ lead how many *top tricks* can you see?
What suit should you play on for your extra winners?
How should you play the hand?

\spadesuit K 7 4
 \heartsuit Q 10 5 2
 \diamondsuit A 9 5
 \clubsuit A 7 5

Dummy	
W	E
Declarer	

\spadesuit A J 3
 \heartsuit J 9 4
 \diamondsuit K Q 3
 \clubsuit Q 6 4 2

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	Pass	1NT
Pass			Pass
3NT by South		Opening lead: $\spadesuit 6$	

Answers.

A1.

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

Your **Count** and **Plan** shows you six *top tricks*, which are: two Spades, three Hearts and one Diamond. That leaves you three “extras” to find.

They are easily available in Clubs, where three tricks are certain once the ♠A has been knocked out.

You should take the ♦A and immediately attack Clubs, resisting the temptation to grab the low-hanging fruit in the guise of the top Hearts and Spades.

Best play in Clubs is to lead the Queen first. Why? Because it conforms to the rule of *play the honours from the short side first*. West takes his ♣A (if he doesn't, then you just carry on playing Clubs until he does) and cashes his long Diamonds.

This is a fraught moment for you – had West started with five Diamonds, he'd have been able to take enough tricks to defeat you. As it is, you just have to wait patiently until West has taken four tricks (the ♣A and three Diamonds) and has run out of steam. At this point he has to hand the lead back to you whereupon you have the rest of the tricks.

A2.

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

Your **Count** and **Plan** shows you six *top tricks*, which are: two Spades, three Hearts and one Club. That leaves you three “extras” to find.

[**Note:** You can count two tricks in Spades after the opening Spade lead, which runs round into your ♠A Q. Regardless of who has the King you are sure to make both honours].

The location of your slow tricks is in Diamonds, where you have some work to do – you have to knock out the ♦A and ♦K. There's no time like the present... So, you take the ♠Q at trick one over East's ♠J and immediately lead a low Diamond to the ♦Q (*play the honours from the short side first*) and East's King. (A well-trained West will not play his Ace “on air”; he leaves the trick to his partner). East leads another Spade (*returning your partner's suit is good defence*) and you take the ♠A.

Next, you lead the ♦J, driving out the ♦A. West takes that and cashes two Spade winners. Luckily, he has no more to take, so has to lead some other suit at trick seven. You take that and have the rest of the tricks

A3.

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

Your **Count** and **Plan** shows you seven *top tricks*, which are: three Spades, three Diamonds and one Club. That leaves you two “extras” to find.

[**Note:** You can count three tricks in Spades after the opening lead, which runs round into your ♠A J. Regardless of who has the Queen you are sure to make both honours plus the King].

West's Spade lead (the *fourth-highest-of-his-longest-and-strongest*) is unfortunate for his side. You win trick one cheaply with the ♠J and play on Hearts, by leading the ♥J (*play the honours from the short side first*). This is the suit where you are guaranteed two (slow) winners. East takes the ♥A and return a Spade, but you are ahead in this race.

You take that and play the ♥9 to knock out the ♥K. Now the ♥Q 10 are winners and you have sufficient tricks to bring home the bacon.

§3. Example hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1 Dealer North

♠ A J 4 ♥ K 8 4 ♦ J 10 8 ♣ A J 8 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 8 6 ♥ J 10 9 7 3 ♦ 7 3 2 ♣ Q 5	♠ 10 3 2 ♥ A Q 2 ♦ K Q 9 6 5 ♣ 10 7
	N											
W		E										
	S											

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
3NT by North		Opening lead: ♥J	

North has an easy opening bid of 1NT with 14 points and a 4-3-3-3 shape. South, with 11 points, gives an *invitational raise* to 2NT, asking partner to advance to game with a maximum. North, having 14 points rather than 12, is happy to accept the invitation. East leads the ♥J and North must **Count** and **Plan**. With five *top tricks* declarer needs four extras – and they can all be found from the long Diamonds. So North wins the Heart lead (it doesn't matter where) and plays on Diamonds to knock out the Ace. West may not take it on the first round but has to do so on the second. Now North has nine winners (one Spade, three Hearts, four Diamonds and a Club), which he may as well cash as soon as he regains the lead.

Hand 2 Dealer East

♠ A K 5 ♥ K 5 2 ♦ Q 2 ♣ J 10 9 5 4	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 9 7 6 2 ♥ J 9 7 ♦ A 7 6 ♣ 8 3	♠ J 4 ♥ Q 10 8 6 4 ♦ K 10 5 ♣ A 7 2
	N											
W		E										
	S											

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
3NT by South		Opening lead: ♥6	

South does best to open 1NT rather than 1♦ with a 5-3-3-2 pattern. Holding 13 points and another balanced hand, North has a simple raise to 3NT. West leads fourth-highest from his longest suit – the ♥6 – and South must **Count** and **Plan**. There are just five *top tricks* (three Spades and two Hearts), so there is a shortfall of four tricks. The extra tricks can come from Clubs, where four tricks are available once the Ace has been knocked out. So declarer takes the Heart lead (with either the ♥K or the ♥A) and immediately plays the ♣K (*play the high cards from the short suit first*). If West holds on to the ♣A South persists by leading the Queen. This sets up four Clubs on the table and nine winners in all.

Hand 3 Dealer South

♠ Q J 10 9 7 ♥ 3 ♦ J 9 2 ♣ Q 9 6 3	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ K 5 4 3 ♥ Q J 9 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ K 8 4	♠ 8 ♥ A 8 6 5 2 ♦ Q 10 7 4 ♣ J 10 2
	N											
W		E										
	S											

West	North	East	South
1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
1NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass
3NT by West		Opening lead: ♠Q	

South Passes and West opens 1NT in second seat (14 points and a 4-3-3-3 shape). East has enough to raise to 3NT with a balanced 13 points. North leads the ♠Q (top-of-a-sequence) and West must **Count** and **Plan**. There are six "on top" (two Spades, two Diamonds and two Clubs) with Hearts able to provide the necessary three extras. Declarer should win the opening Spade lead (he can suit himself whether he takes the ♠K or the ♠A) and then should switch his attention to Hearts. South may take the Ace early or he may keep it back for a while. Whichever path South chooses, West can always score three Heart tricks to go with six "toppers". Two Spades, three Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs make nine.

Hand 4 Dealer West

♠ Q 6 5 2 ♥ 3 ♦ A 8 6 4 ♣ Q 10 8 7	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 9 8 7 ♥ K J 4 ♦ K 2 ♣ A K 5 2	♠ J 3 ♥ A Q 6 ♦ Q J 10 9 7 ♣ J 9 4
	N											
W		E										
	S											

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass
3NT by East		Opening lead: ♥10	

West Passes as dealer (with only 11 points he doesn't have enough to open the bidding) and it's left to East to open 1NT with 14 points and a 4-4-3-2 pattern. West raises *invitationally* to 2NT and East has enough to accept the offer. South leads the ♥10 (top-of-a-sequence) and it's East's turn to **Count** and **Plan**. There are five top tricks (three Hearts and two Clubs), so four more are needed. No sweat; declarer takes the Heart lead (somewhere) and plays the ♦K to knock out the Ace (*play the high cards from the short suit first*). When North takes his ♦A he can't return a Heart. His side may lead Spades and take three tricks there. However, that is the end of the party as East can wrap up the remainder.

§3. Example hands 5 to 8.

Hand 5 Dealer North

♠ Q J 10 9 7 2
♥ 10 6
♦ A 6
♣ 8 6 2

♠ K 5
♥ K J 4
♦ Q 9 2
♣ K Q 9 7 5

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ A 4
♥ Q 7 2
♦ 10 8 5 3
♣ A J 10 3

♠ 8 6 3
♥ A 9 8 5 3
♦ K J 7 4
♣ 4

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	Pass
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
3NT by West	Opening lead: ♠Q		

There are three Passes to West who opens 1NT, much better than 1♣. East, with 11 points, raises to 2NT and West is happy to advance to game. North leads the ♠Q (top-of-a-sequence) and a **Count** and **Plan** shows seven *top tricks* (two Spades and five Clubs). Two extra tricks are easily available in Hearts by knocking out the ♥A. After winning the opening lead declarer should immediately play a Heart to the ♥Q. South has the ♥A – and he takes it to return a Spade. Although East-West are now wide open in Spades West can see the finishing line so should sprint for home. Thus, he should cash the remaining two Hearts followed by all five Clubs for nine in all.

Hand 6 Dealer East

♠ J 9 3
♥ A 8 6 4 3
♦ J 9 5
♣ 9 8

♠ A 8 4
♥ K Q 10 2
♦ 7 4 3
♣ A 6 4

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 5
♥ J 9 7
♦ A Q
♣ J 7 5 3 2

♠ 10 7 6 2
♥ 5
♦ K 10 8 6 2
♣ K Q 10

West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
3NT by East	Opening lead: ♦6		

East should open 1NT (5-3-3-2 hands count as being balanced) and West, with 13 points, has ample to raise to game. South leads the ♦6 (his fourth-highest Diamond) and declarer can count three Spades, a Club and **two** Diamonds “on top”; note that a lead around into the ♦A Q *tenace* guarantees two tricks in the suit. To make three extras is easy – East simply has to knock out the ♥A, setting up the ♥K Q 10 on table. So, declarer takes the ♦Q at trick one and immediately leads the ♥J. North can suit himself whether he takes his Ace on this trick or a later one; declarer is destined to make three Heart tricks at some convenient time. East takes the Diamond return and has enough winners for his contract.

Hand 7 Dealer South

♠ A 7 3
♥ A 5 3
♦ A 8
♣ J 10 9 8 2

♠ 10 8 6 5 2
♥ Q 7
♦ 7 4 2
♣ A 5 3

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 9
♥ J 10 9 6
♦ K 10 5 3
♣ K 7 4

♠ K J 4
♥ K 8 4 2
♦ Q J 9 6
♣ Q 6

West	North	East	South
			1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	
3NT by South	Opening lead: ♠5		

South has a minimum but respectable 1NT opening bid (12 points and a 4-4-3-2 pattern). North, holding 13 points and an essentially balanced hand, has a routine raise to 3NT. West leads his fourth-highest Spade (the ♠5) and declarer's **Count** and **Plan** shows there to be six *top tricks* (**three** Spades after the lead into the ♠K J *tenace*, two Hearts and a Diamond). To make the necessary extras, South should play on Clubs, driving out the Ace and the King. So... he takes the ♠K at trick one over East's Queen and immediately play the ♣Q at trick two. He regains the lead (another Spade, probably) and goes back to Clubs. This way, three Club winners become established in dummy for nine winners in all.

Hand 8 Dealer West

♠ K 7 5
♥ A Q 4
♦ A 8 5
♣ 7 5 3 2

♠ Q 10 9 6
♥ K 10 2
♦ Q 10 6 2
♣ Q 6

N		
W		E
	S	

♠ J 8 3
♥ J 9 7 6
♦ J 9 4
♣ A K 4

♠ A 4 2
♥ 8 5 3
♦ K 7 3
♣ J 10 9 8

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			
1NT by North	Opening lead: ♥6		

After West Passes as dealer North opens 1NT (13 points with a 4-3-3-3 pattern). South has nothing to say, so 1NT it is. East's low Heart lead, into the Heart *tenace* in declarer's hand, allows North to **Count** six *top tricks* (two Spades, **two** Hearts and two Diamonds). What's the **Plan**? Where's the extra? In Clubs, surprisingly. Yes, setting up a Club trick is a long-term project, but there's nothing better. North just has to lead Clubs whenever it's his lead and eventually, after the ♠A K Q have been bagged by East-West, there will be a Club winner on table. *Patience is a virtue* they say, and hands like this take a lot of patience in setting up a slow Club trick. No other suit offers any chance of making an “extra”.