

§24. Ducking (to Establish Long Suits).

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

Duck / Ducking: Allowing the opponents to win an early trick when you were able to win it.

This section is about how to establish suits, usually played in No-trumps, by *ducking* or giving up early tricks in a suit. The reason for ducking is usually because there is a *lack of entries*.

Hand 1, below, is played in 3NT by South against a Spade lead from West. How would you fare?

Hand 1			
South plays in 3NT.			
West leads the ♠J.			
		♠ 5 3	
		♥ 9 8 7 4	
		♦ A K 8 6 5	
		♣ 7 4	
♠ J 10 9 8	Dummy	♠ 7 6 4 2	
♥ K J 6	W	♥ Q 5 2	
♦ Q 9	E	♦ J 10 7	
♣ J 9 6 5	Declarer	♣ K Q 8	
		♠ A K Q	
		♥ A 10 3	
		♦ 4 3 2	
		♣ A 10 3 2	

The first thing to do as declarer (after thanking partner!) is to **Count** and **Plan**. Here there are seven tricks “on top”, so you need to find two *extras*. We have seen on many occasions that the rapid cashing of top tricks is poor play, all that does is to set up winners for the opponents. You need to make further tricks from somewhere; in No-trumps most often that comes from *establishing long suits*.

Here, the long suit is Diamonds; you can make four tricks in that suit, assuming that they break 3-2. How might you tackle the key suit, and the hand in general, if Diamonds do behave in friendly fashion?

After winning the opening lead you *could* play off the ♦A, the ♦K and lead another Diamond. If Diamonds were 3-2 that would set up the ♦8 and ♦6, but *dummy has no entry*. Hence, the two winning Diamonds would languish on the table and would never make tricks. So, you need a better plan.

The winning line is to lead a Diamond at trick two and *duck*; that is play a low card from the dummy allowing the opponents to win cheaply. Winning the next trick, you can play off the ♦A and ♦K and now, with the 3-2 split, not only are the Diamonds all winners but the lead is crucially where you want it to be – on the table. Your nine winners are: three Spades, one Heart, four Diamonds and one Club.

The important point about this type of hand is the *timing* of the play in Diamonds. Playing the suit from the top would establish them, but it would leave the winning small cards stranded on the table, an oft-encountered fate for the inexperienced player. Since you have to lose a trick in the suit no matter how the cards are distributed, it is usually best to lose the lead early in the hand *to keep control*.

*True, you could cash a top Diamond first and duck the **second** round of Diamonds, but that doesn't really alter the lesson of the hand.*

Hmm. “Lose your losers early.” “Keep control.” These seem to be common themes in this game...

If we alter Hand 1 around, just a little, we get:

Hand 2			
South plays in 3NT.			
West leads the ♠J.			
		♠ 5 3	
		♥ 9 8 7 4	
		♦ A 8 6 5 4	
		♣ 7 4	
♠ J 10 9 8	Dummy	♠ 7 6 4 2	
♥ K J 6	W	♥ Q 5 2	
♦ Q 9	E	♦ J 10 7	
♣ J 9 6 5	Declarer	♣ K Q 8	
		♠ A K Q	
		♥ A 10 3	
		♦ K 3 2	
		♣ A 10 3 2	

Hand 2, in essence, is the same layout as Hand 1 but with the Diamond honours split between declarer and dummy instead of both being in the same hand. Is the play exactly the same as before?

Well, yes – nearly. In order for 3NT to make the Diamonds simply must break 3-2 and you have to lose a trick in the suit. Again, you have much the same choice of plays as you did in Hand 1 – success comes from either ducking the *first* Diamond, and subsequently playing off the ♦K, ♦A and running the Diamonds, or by playing off the ♦K and then ducking the *second* Diamond.

Note that it is fatal to cash the ♦A first before ducking a Diamond. If you can't see *why*, play the hand through and see. You must keep the ♦A back as an entry to be able to cash the long suit.

Try the next hand, also played in 3NT by South. West leads the ♥Q and you are again at the wheel.

Hand 3			
South plays in 3NT.			
West leads the ♥Q.			
		♠ 5	
		♥ 8 5 2	
		♦ 7 5 4 2	
		♣ A K 6 5 4	
♠ Q J 6 2	Dummy	♠ K 10 3	
♥ Q J 10 9	W	♥ 7 6 4	
♦ J 9	E	♦ Q 10 8 3	
♣ J 9 7	Declarer	♣ Q 10 8	
		♠ A 9 8 7 4	
		♥ A K 3	
		♦ A K 6	
		♣ 3 2	

Your initial **Count and Plan** produces the usual questions. How many top tricks do you have? How many more do you need? Where are the extra tricks going to come from? What distribution of the East-West cards is necessary for 3NT to make? So, precisely, what is your **Plan**?

There are seven *top tricks* (a Spade, two Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs), so two *extras* need to be developed from somewhere. The best prospect is in Clubs. To turn that suit into four tricks you need them to break 3-3. Also, you have to *duck* the first round of Clubs – there is no other play.

Your only winning line after taking trick one is to lead a low Club and play a small card from the dummy, ducking the trick to the opponents. Whatever the enemy choose to lead back (in practice that's almost certain to be a Heart), you can win that and test your fate in Clubs by cashing the ♣A and ♣K. When everybody follows suit it is clear that your luck is in as the ♣6 and ♣5 are now winners.

A 3-3 Club break is against the odds, but there is simply nothing else to play for – note that a 3-3 Diamond break would not help you make nine tricks, even if the cards obliged.

Finally there are deals where you have to duck twice in the same suit. Try making 3NT here:

Hand 4			
South plays in 3NT.			
West leads the ♠10.			
		♠ J 5	
		♥ 8 7 2	
		♦ A 8 7 5 3	
		♣ 10 4 3	
♠ 10 9 8 7 3	Dummy	♠ 6 4 2	
♥ K 6	W	♥ Q 10 5 4 3	
♦ J 4	E	♦ K Q 6	
♣ Q 9 7 2	Declarer	♣ J 5	
		♠ A K Q	
		♥ A J 9	
		♦ 10 9 2	
		♣ A K 8 6	

Your **Count and Plan** shows three Spade tricks, one Heart, one Diamond and two Clubs. That makes seven *on top*, so where might the other two tricks come from? What is your **Plan**?

The answer is that you have to develop your long suit and establish two little Diamonds. To do this, you must lead any Diamond from the closed hand at trick two and duck it on table. The opponents will win and lead another Spade (probably), so you win that and duck another Diamond. Now you can win the next lead and cash the remainder of your top tricks, which include three Diamond winners.

§24. Quiz on Ducking (to Establish Long Suits).

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 ♠2.

Preliminary Analysis.

West leads the ♠2 to the ♠A and East returns a Spade, the ♠J being allowed to hold the trick.

Your **Count** and **Plan** reveals seven top tricks (one Spade, one Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs).

Where are the extra tricks coming from?

♠ 10 9 4
♥ 10 3
♦ J 10 9
♣ A 7 6 4 2

Dummy	
W	E
Declarer	

♠ Q J 5
♥ A J 6 5
♦ A K Q
♣ K 8 3

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

Q2.

How should you play in 3NT?

West leads the ♣J.

Preliminary Analysis.

Your **Count** and **Plan** reveals eight top tricks (one Spade, two Hearts, two Diamonds and three Clubs).

Where should you look for your ninth trick?

What about entries?

♠ 9 5 2
♥ A K 8 7 3
♦ 6 3
♣ A 7 5

Dummy	
W	E
Declarer	

♠ A 10 8 3
♥ 9 2
♦ A K 8 4
♣ K Q 4

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

Q3.

How should you play in 3NT?

West leads the ♥J.

Preliminary Analysis.

West leads the ♥J, guaranteeing you two Heart tricks, even before East decides to play the ♥K. Your **Count** and **Plan** reveals seven top tricks (one Spade, two Hearts, one Diamond and three Clubs).

If Clubs split 3-2, you could make ten tricks – but what if they break 4-1?

♠ J 9
♥ 5 2
♦ J 10 3
♣ A K Q 8 5 3

Dummy	
W	E
Declarer	

♠ A 8 6 3
♥ A Q 4 3
♦ A 8 5
♣ 9 6

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

Answers.

A1.

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

Dummy	W	E
Declarer		

Count and Plan. You have one Spade, one Heart, three Diamonds and two Clubs, so that makes seven *top tricks*. To generate two extras you need to hope Clubs are splitting 3-2 – well within the odds (68% for those of a statistical bent). Because dummy is bereft of outside entries you have to duck a Club early – you can do this either by leading a Club and ducking the first one or by cashing the ♠K first and ducking the second round.

With the friendly split you have four Club tricks and nine winners in all. Note that the enemy can only take three Spades and a Club; you should know this as the ♠2 lead proclaims a four-card suit. East-West have defended well by ducking the ♠J and setting up three Spade tricks.

A2.

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

Dummy	W	E
Declarer		

Count and Plan. In terms of *top tricks* you can see eight (one Spade, two Hearts, two Diamonds and three Clubs). You need to set up a long Heart or two for your extra(s).

To do that you need to keep the ♣A on table as possible access to the long Hearts, so need to take trick one in the closed hand. At trick two you should duck a Heart, attempting to set the long suit up. East wins and returns, say, a Club, won again in the South hand.

You win and cash the ♥A K. Do they split 3-3? No, so you concede a second Heart trick to East. Now the thirteenth Heart is on the table and the ♣A is there as a means of access to it. You win the next lead, cross to the ♣A, cash the last Heart and claim your contract.

A3.

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

Dummy	W	E
Declarer		

Count and Plan. In terms of winners you can see seven *on top* after this lead – one Spade, two Hearts, one Diamond and three Clubs. A friendly 3-2 Club split would allow you to make six Club tricks and ten in all.

However, what if Clubs were to break 4-1? Now you could set up a couple of long Clubs but would have no way of accessing them as dummy has no outside entries.

As you don't need ten tricks (overtricks are just froth on the cappuccino) you should take extra precautions. Take the ♥A at trick one and *duck a Club*. For sure, should Clubs prove to be 3-2 you'd have just given up an overtrick. Big deal! When Clubs are 4-1, though, you all but guarantee nine tricks and rack up your all-important contract.

§24. Example hands 1 to 4.

Hand 1 Dealer North

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

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

North-South reach the No-trump game after South makes an uneasy 1NT response to North's 1♠ opening bid. West makes an unfortunate Heart lead, which guarantees declarer two Heart tricks once he plays low from table. South's **Count** and **Plan** shows two Spade winners, two Heart winners, one Diamond winner and two Club winners. To swell that total up to nine winners, declarer needs to develop Clubs, and needs a 3-2 split for success. Winning trick one in hand with the ♥Q, South has two possible lines of play – he could either duck a Club at trick two or he could play off the ♣K and duck a Club at trick three. Whatever he does, he must preserve the ♣A for the third round as an entry to the long suit. 3NT made.

Hand 2 Dealer East

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

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

East opens 1♣ (1♦ is just as good) and, holding 19 points, rebids 3NT over West's 1♠ response. South leads the top-of-a-sequence ♥J and declarer performs his compulsory **Count** and **Plan**. On top he can see seven winners: two Spades, three Hearts, one Diamond and one Club. The Club finesse may be working, but that would only produce an eighth winner, even if North held the ♠K. The best chance for **two** extras is in Spades, and the best (in fact, *only*) way of doing that is to duck the first Spade. One of the enemy wins the Spade and may play another Heart – winning that, East cashes the ♠A K and learns that it's his lucky day as the suit splits 3-3. Four Spade winners are sufficient for the contract.

Hand 3 Dealer South

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

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

South opens 1♠ and North has little option but to respond 1NT. South raises to 2NT and, with 8 points, North has enough to advance to game. Despite South having bid the suit, East has no better choice than to lead the ♠J. This lead removes a vital entry to the North hand, making the hand more awkward. Declarer's **Count** and **Plan** shows him three Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and a Club. To generate **two** extra tricks North needs to set up the long Clubs, and to do that he needs to duck two rounds of the suit. So, win the ♠Q and *duck a Club*. Win the return, *duck a Club* (noting the 3-2 break). Win the return and cash out the Club suit. Contract made.

Hand 4 Dealer West

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

West	North	East	South
1♦	Pass	2♣	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		
3NT by West		Opening lead: ♥6	

A deal in similar vein to Hand 3. West plays in 3NT having shown a balanced 15-16 points. North leads his trusty fourth-highest Heart and West must Count and Plan to see where his tricks are coming from. He can see seven *top tricks* (to wit: two Spades, three Hearts, one Diamond and one Club) and the best chance of two extras lies in Clubs, where a 3-2 split will be necessary and sufficient. So, declarer wins the Heart lead and ducks a Club. Another Heart lead knocks out the ♥A, so West ducks a second round of Clubs. The required 3-2 break is evident now, so West can see the harbour lights. Winning the return, he cashes three Clubs and claims his contract.

§24. Example hands 5 to 8.

Hand 5 Dealer North

♠ A K Q
♥ K Q 3 2
♦ 8 5 3
♣ A K 2

♠ 8 5 4 2
♥ A 8
♦ K J 2
♣ J 7 5 4

N	
W	E
	S

♠ 10 9 6
♥ J 10 7 6
♦ Q 10 4
♣ Q 9 3

♠ J 7 3
♥ 9 5 4
♦ A 9 7 6
♣ 10 8 6

West	North	East	South
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	
3NT by North		Opening lead: ♥6	

North opens 2NT (showing 20-22, balanced) and South scrapes up a raise to game. East's ♥6 lead is unfortunate for the defence as it sets up two Heart tricks for North when West plays the ♥A. North's **Count** and **Plan** shows him three Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and two Clubs. Winning the Heart return, declarer can see that just about his only chance of an extra is in Diamonds – and he needs a 3-3 break. So, he wins the Heart and ducks a Diamond. Winning the return, he ducks another Diamond. Now, with Diamonds breaking evenly, he has three Spades, two Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs for nine tricks. Lucky? For sure, but you must make the most of your occasional good fortune.

Hand 6 Dealer East

♠ A K 6 4 2
♥ J 7 3
♦ K Q
♣ 8 6 2

♠ Q 10 7
♥ 10 5
♦ J 10 9 7
♣ Q J 7 4

N	
W	E
	S

♠ J 5 3
♥ K 9 8 4 2
♦ A 5 2
♣ 10 5

♠ 9 8
♥ A Q 6
♦ 8 6 4 3
♣ A K 9 3

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

South plays in 3NT after North jumps to 3♠ over the 1NT opening bid. South's **Count** and **Plan** shows him just six sure tricks – two Spades, one Heart, one Diamond (set up after this lead) and two Clubs. Sure, another Heart can be set up (maybe the finesse works?) but that still doesn't total nine. How about establishing Spades? That might work if the suit splits 3-3, assuming East-West couldn't cash too many Diamond winners. The Heart finesse would still be needed as well. Anyway, at trick three South ducks a Spade and West cashes his Diamonds. After a Club lead, South cashes the Spades (yes, they are 3-3) and then, with the ♥A Q in hand, takes the Heart finesse. The gods of bridge are smiling today.

Hand 7 Dealer South

♠ 8 6 5
♥ J 8 7 6 2
♦ 5 2
♣ A K 10

♠ A K Q
♥ Q 10 3
♦ 8 6
♣ Q 8 6 4 3

N	
W	E
	S

♠ 9 4 2
♥ A 5
♦ A K Q 7 4
♣ J 5 2

♠ J 10 7 3
♥ K 9 4
♦ J 10 9 3
♣ 9 7

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

This is a subtle deal. The bidding is rapid, and North leads his fourth-highest Heart. West's **Count** and **Plan** shows him three Spades, two sure Hearts (after the lead) and three Diamonds. That's eight top tricks; were Diamonds 3-3 West would make an overtrick. Declarer plays low from dummy at trick one and is disconcerted to see South produce the ♥K and return a Heart, removing dummy's entry to the Diamonds. Now, playing the Diamonds from the top would produce ten tricks or eight, depending on the split. As the target is **nine**, it is best to play for exactly that. How? *By ducking a Diamond!* Sure, if the suit were 3-3 West would give up on an overtrick. Big deal. Here, he secures his contract. That **is** a big deal!

Hand 8 Dealer West

♠ 7 5 2
♥ K 9 2
♦ Q J 10 8
♣ Q 9 8

♠ 6 4
♥ 8 7 4 3
♦ A K 7 5 3
♣ 7 2

N	
W	E
	S

♠ A K Q
♥ A Q 6
♦ 6 4 2
♣ A 10 6 4

♠ J 10 9 8 3
♥ J 10 5
♦ 9
♣ K J 5 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♣	Pass
1♦	Pass	3NT	All Pass
3NT by East		Opening lead: ♠J	

Another tricky deal. East plays in 3NT and South leads the top-of-a-sequence ♠J. East's **Count** and **Plan** shows three Spades, one Heart, two Diamonds and one Club *on top*. By now, it should be clear to set up Diamonds – and that by ducking the first round of the suit, playing for a 3-2 break. So, take the opening lead and duck a Diamond. Take the Spade return and lead a Diamond, hoping and expecting to take the ♦K, ♦A and two little Diamonds. However, as he leads a Diamond, South shows out – so the suit is known to be 4-1. East needs a Plan B. What is it? *Duck a second round of Diamonds!* Win the return, cash **three** Diamond winners and take the Heart finesse. That works, so the contract limps home.