



Ducking (to Establish Long Suits)

THIS ARTICLE is about how to establish suits, playing in no-trumps, by ducking. The reason for ducking is usually because there is a lack of entries.

This time we will look at some simple examples, just to establish the basic principles. Consider Deal 1, below, played in 3NT by South against a spade lead from West:

Deal 1
 South plays in 3NT.
 West leads the ♠J.

♠ 5 3
 ♥ 9 8 7 6
 ♦ A K 7 6 5
 ♣ 7 6

♠ A K Q
 ♥ A 10 3
 ♦ 4 3 2
 ♣ A 10 3 2

The first thing to do as declarer (after you have thanked partner graciously for his impeccable bidding and for displaying the dummy) is to count your tricks. Here there are seven top tricks (three spades, one heart, two diamonds and one club), so declarer needs to find two more.

It remains a truism that the rapid cashing of top tricks is poor play: all that does is to set up winners for the opponents. We need a plan to make extra tricks from somewhere; in no-trumps most often that comes from establishing long suits. In the case above the long suit is diamonds: North-South can make four diamond tricks assuming that the suit breaks 3-2. All right, then – let's assume that the diamonds do indeed break favourably. How should South tackle the hand?

South must win the opening lead and

now could play off the ace of diamonds, the king of diamonds and lead another diamond. If diamonds were 3-2 that would set up the seven and six of diamonds but dummy has no entry – hence, the two winning diamonds would languish on the table and would never make tricks. So we need a better plan.

The winning play is to lead a diamond at trick two and *duck* – that is play a low card from the dummy and allow the opponents to win the trick. Winning the next trick (declarer has kept stoppers in all suits, you may note), South can play off the ace and king of diamonds and now not only are the diamonds all winners but the lead is where you want it to be: in the dummy. Declarer's nine tricks consist of three spades, one heart, four diamonds and one club. The full deal is revealed below:

♠ 5 3
 ♥ 9 8 7 6
 ♦ A K 7 6 5
 ♣ 7 6

♠ J 10 9 8
 ♥ K J 4
 ♦ Q 9
 ♣ J 9 5 4

♠ 7 6 4 2
 ♥ Q 5 2
 ♦ J 10 8
 ♣ K Q 8

♠ A K Q
 ♥ A 10 3
 ♦ 4 3 2
 ♣ A 10 3 2

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

Incidentally, an alternative line of play

(ducking the second round of diamonds) also works here. Declarer could play off the ace of diamonds at trick two and then lead a low diamond from the dummy. That works just as well. As long as at least one top diamond remains in the dummy as an entry on the third round of diamonds, 3NT will make the requisite nine tricks.



Hmmmm. 'Lose your losers early.' 'Keep control.' These seem to be common themes in this game . . .

If we alter Deal 1 around a little we get:

Deal 2
 South plays in 3NT.
 West leads the ♠J.

♠ 5 3
 ♥ 9 8 7 6
 ♦ A 7 6 5 4
 ♣ 7 6

♠ A K Q
 ♥ A 10 3
 ♦ K 3 2
 ♣ A 10 3 2

This, in essence, is the same layout as Deal 1 but with the diamond honours split instead of both being in the same hand (dummy). Is the play exactly the same as in Deal 1?

The answer is yes, the play is fundamentally the same. In order for 3NT to make, the diamonds must break 3-2 and we must lose a trick in the suit. Again, we have much the same choice of plays as we did above: success comes from either ducking the first diamond, and subsequently playing off the king and ace of diamonds and running the diamonds, or by playing off

the king of diamonds and then ducking a diamond.

Note that it is fatal to cash the ace of diamonds first before ducking a diamond. If you can't see why, play the hand through. You must keep the ace of diamonds back as an entry to be able to cash the long suit.

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Try the next deal, also played in the inevitable 3NT.

This is a deal where you have to duck twice in the same suit to make your contract. This can be illustrated by showing the full layout at the outset:

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

The opening spade lead removes South's entry to his hand. How annoying . . . Anyway, let's count the top tricks. There are three spade tricks, two hearts, a diamond and a club. That makes seven on top, so where might the other two tricks come from? What is declarer's plan?

Nine tricks will certainly not emerge if all declarer does is cash his top tricks! The answer is that South has to develop his long suit and establish two little clubs. To do this, South must lead a low club from his hand at trick two. The opponents will win and lead something (another spade, probably) but declarer can win that and immediately lead and duck another club. Now South is in a position to cash the remainder of his top tricks, cross to his hand with the ace of clubs (which drops the opponents' last club) and cash the two long clubs.


Deal 3 is an important type of deal. Too many players, especially early on while learning the game, simply lead out high cards in the vague hope that extra tricks will materialise from somewhere. □

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