

# TIPS FOR TOPS

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*All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, (Game #58569). Full results and game schedule at [www.bridgecentreofniagara.com](http://www.bridgecentreofniagara.com).*

## • Interference over Opening NoTrump

Bd: 16 Vul: E/W Dlr: West	♠ A9 ♥ AQ63 ♦ 865 ♣ AJT9	Optimum NS 4H+1: +450
♠ KJ73 ♥ 52 ♦ 9732 ♣ Q64	N W 16 E S	♠ QT6542 ♥ K84 ♦ K4 ♣ K5
15 6 HCP 11 8	♠ 8 ♥ JT97 ♦ AQJT ♣ 8732	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 5 4 5 - 1 S 4 4 5 - 1 E - - - 2 - W - - - 2 -

I'm going to concentrate on Board 16 this week - from all angles. North has a perfect 1NT opening bid, and many Easts made a 2S overcall. Overcalling a NT bid is never without risk; being vulnerable increases that risk, and the Spade suit is not gorgeous. But you do have six of them and, with the strong hand on your right, your Kings look well placed. In any case, interfering with a NT auction has a lot going for it; most pairs know how to use Stayman and Jacoby to get to their best contract when there is no interference, but many don't know how to cope with interference. This brings me to a suggestion, which doesn't apply on this hand but comes up often. You will find more opportunities to get involved in your opponents' NT auctions if you adapt one of the many conventions that allow you to show a two-suited hand as well as a single suit. It's safer, with a better chance of finding support from

partner, when you can offer two potential suits. These conventions are quite easy to learn and use; two which are popular are DONT ("Disturb Opponents NT"), and Meckwell. Google is your friend.

Of course, today we have only one suit, but, looking from South's perspective, you see how effective an overcall can be. South would have liked to use Stayman to check for a Heart fit; if one was found, they can count their dummy points for the Spade singleton, and raise to game. If no fit was found, they would have wanted to make an invitation in NT. Some of those options are gone now, but they have a good enough hand that they don't want to be shut out of the auction. What can South do?

For those who are ready to take their game to the next level, there is a convention that's useful here. Lebensohl has more than one purpose; when used in a NT auction, it allows responder to indicate whether or not they have a stopper in the opponent's suit, and also allows them to compete and reach a contract at a level below game. As always, I don't recommend players take on a lot of new conventions; they add a level of complication that sometimes outweighs their potential benefits. But I know there are players who are always looking for new gadgets. If that's you, Lebensohl is worth a look.

But let's see how to handle this situation without that help. What are the options available after an overcall, and what do they mean? Stayman and Jacoby Transfers have been taken away; if you have a 6-card major and you were going to transfer to it and raise it to game, you can bid the game yourself - or use a Texas Transfer, if that's in your arsenal. If you

have a 5-card suit, you bid it at the 3 level - forcing - which offers opener the choice of games. And there is a new bid that the opponents have made available - a cue bid. By ACBL definition, a cue bid is "A bid of a suit that an opponent has bid naturally or quasi-naturally or a suit in which an opponent has shown 4 or more cards." In this situation, a cue bid (3S) takes the place of Stayman. And today it works well; North has hearts, and you play in 4H. But it's risky; what if N doesn't have Hearts? Then, in normal circumstances, they choose between rebidding NT, if they have enough strength in the opponent's suit, or they bid 4 of a minor, and hope to land in a makeable contract.

So is this a good hand for cue-Stayman? You're forcing the auction to the game level with only invitational strength, but it has good things going for it. The fact that East has spades increases the chance that North has hearts, although there's never a guarantee. But you also have good support in both minors, if North has to run there. The effect of interference is often like this: it forces you to choose between an overbid and an underbid. Today the slight overbid has a lot going for it.

Assuming the contract is 4H in the North, how should the play and defence go? A Spade lead is really the only possible choice; anything else risks losing one of your Kings. North will win with the Ace and make a plan. The key to this hand is all in the transportation, and knowing which suits to play in which direction. The Diamond suit needs to be played towards the AQJ, hoping the K is in the East. The Heart suit needs to be played from the South towards the North, hoping the K is in the West. It isn't, but there's nothing East can do to hurt you when they take that trick. The Clubs should be led from the South to the North; if either the K or the Q is in the West hand, you will lose only one trick there. But all finesses will have to be repeated if they work, so plan your timing. Diamond to Q first (wins), then Heart (loses.) Win the return - probably another Spade which you ruff in dummy. Pull two more rounds of trump, ending in hand, then repeat the Diamond finesse and play a Club to hand. That loses, but the next time you are in dummy with a Diamond, you repeat the Club finesse and make eleven tricks.

There's nothing to discuss about the defence; Even on trick 3, East isn't tempted to lead a minor suit, and nothing else matters.

At half of our tables, the hand was played by East in Spades. South knows that her side has the majority of the high cards - 23-25 HCP between them, so there's no need to do anything risky. Leading a singleton trump is risky - you often help your opponent to pick up your partner's honours. Leading a Diamond is out of the question. Sure, the K might be in your partner's hand, but the bidder on your right must have SOME values to make a risky bid when vulnerable, and if East has the K, you give him a trick if you lead the suit. The safe lead - as it often is - is the HJ - the top of a sequence of honours. North should take the A and lead back a Diamond-dummy's weak suit - which puts South back on lead. She should still not lead another Diamond (unless East played the K), but when North gets in again with the SA, she will lead another Diamond, and NS should take five tricks - four Aces and a second Diamond.

If the defenders play like this there is little declarer can do. Her plan will always have been, with the majority of the HCP on her right, to lead from the West hand toward all her Kings, and the only way to get to West is in the trump suit.

This hand is perfectly set up for me to make one more point about defence. The suit I'm looking at is the Clubs. IF South had chosen a Club on opening lead, how should North play? Normally, you play 3rd hand high, but holding AJ109 over dummy's Q, North should not play the A until the Q is played. It's called "only as high as necessary." If South had the K, the 9 from North is high enough to take the trick. If, as here, East has the K, they will take that trick, but, with K and Q, they were always entitled to one Club trick, so it hasn't cost you. But if North takes the A on the first round, East now makes both K AND Q. The tip here: when you have honours which surround dummy's honour(s), play yours to keep dummy's trapped. And note, from AJ109 you play the 9 - not the 10 or J, the LOWEST of touching equals. If you play the J, partner has no idea where the 10 and 9 are, but if declarer uses the K to beat you 9, partner can "see" the actual situation. ♠