

The Notrump Contract (February 15, 2021)

In today's lesson, I want to look at several situations which you might encounter when making the opening lead against a notrump contract.

When your strongest suit is AQxx as opposed to AQxxx

Whenever you lead from an AQ combination there is a good chance the king is to your right. You are basically conceding a cheap trick to the declarer. If you don't lead the suit, declarer cannot take a trick with the king. If you are going to give up a trick, you want to get something back.

When you lead from AQxx, the most you can get back is three tricks. However, when you lead from AQxxx, you stand an excellent chance of establishing four tricks (if partner has the jack or can get in and return the suit).

Leading against 6NT

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
P	4N	P	1N
P	P	P	6N

You are West and hold the following hand:

Q104
K10432
1098
108

Against 3NT you would lead the three of hearts; but, against 6NT your strategy is different. You do not want to give declarer a possible twelfth trick by leading away from an honor. Against 6NT you play the waiting game if the bidding indicates that neither opponent has a long suit. Your goal is to take TWO tricks. You want the declarer to take major suit finesses into your hand. Make the PASSIVE lead of the 10 of diamonds.

When your partner has doubled

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
1D	1H	1N	P
3N	DBL	P	P
P			

You are West and hold the following hand: QJ1092
7
10642
987

Which card do you lead? Why?

The seven of hearts. Partner's double is conventional and calls for the lead of the suit s/he bid. Although the spade lead looks very attractive and safe, you **MUST NOT** ignore partner's demand that you lead a heart. Note that a spade lead might present the declarer with the timing needed to make the contract.

Recall from last week's lesson the following advice:

When the responder has used the Stayman Convention when his/her partner has opened one or two notrump, s/he is assumed to hold at least one four card major. For example, if your RHO opens one notrump and LHO bids two clubs (Stayman), s/he is asking his/her partner to show a four-card major. If the opener bids two hearts (indicating four hearts) and the responder then bids three notrump, you can assume that the responder held four spades. You should avoid leading spades in this auction unless you hold a strong sequence in the suit. Let's look at the example below:

The bidding has proceeded as follows:

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
1NT	P	2C	P
2H	P	3N	All Pass

You are West and hold the following hand:

KJ432
76
KJ532
2

What is your lead and why?

The three (3) of diamonds. West knows from the bidding that LHO (North's hand) has four spades to justify his/her Stayman bid (2C). The diamond lead proves to be the toughest and will likely cause most declarers to go down. Let's look at the complete hand below:

	North	
	Q1085	
	J32	
	85	
	AKJ	
West		East
KJ432		96
76		Q1098
KJ532		Q76
2		9874
	South	
	A7	
	AK54	
	A109	
	Q1053	

Note: If you had led the three of spades, you give declarer the ninth trick. You take away all the guess.

Let's switch chairs and you are now the declarer. With the diamond lead, how would you plan to play the hand? Can you make the contract? Yes. The declarer should take the second diamond lead (Why the second lead and not the first or third?), cash the AKQJ of clubs and the AK of hearts. Then he should exit with a diamond. West can cash his remaining diamond tricks; but, he is endplayed. Eventually, he will have to lead away from his king of spades. Thus, South makes the contract. We will be looking at “play of the hand,” including endplays in future lessons.

ASSIGNMENT: Refer to last week's lesson (February 1, 2021). Look at the hand in which East doubles the artificial bid of 5H, asking his partner to lead a heart. Is there a way for the declarer to make this hand? HINT: See if you can spot an endplay.

UNBLOCKING

When your partner leads a suit, you have to be very careful NOT to block the suit should you hold big cards in the suit. Let's look at the following example:

	North	
	AK5	
West		East
???6(?)		QJ5
	South	
	?	

Your partner leads the six. Declarer plays the king. East's proper play is the jack at trick one. If he plays low, he will be certain to win one trick and may “block” out partner from being able to cash out the suit. When the ace is played, East must play his queen in order to get out of partner's way. Using the Rule of Eleven, East knows partner has five cards to the ten spot.

The same principle applies when you hold an honor and one other card of partner's suit.

	North	
	432	
West		East
J???		Q5
	South	
	?	

When partner leads the jack, you should play your queen in order to get out of the way. If East holds the K5 doubleton of the suit, he should play the king when partner leads the jack.

However, if you can see that by unblocking you will lose a trick because of dummy's holding, you should not unblock.

	North	
	9743	
West		East
Q		K5
	South	
	?	

If you incorrectly play the king when partner leads the queen, the nine will subsequently become a winner.

Let's look at the following hand which will clearly illustrate how important it is to unblock.

North

975
K932
K862
KQ

West

K62
J10
1053
A9643

East

843
Q654
J74
J107

South

AQJ10
A78
AQ9
852

South is playing 3NT. When West leads the four of clubs, declarer plays the king. What card should East play at trick one?

When West leads the four of clubs, East should recognize the lead as fourth best. Using the Rule of Eleven, East determines that among the remaining hands, there are seven cards larger than the four. He can see five of them, leaving two for the declarer.

When South plays the king of clubs at trick one, East must set about to unblock his high cards, i.e., the jack and ten of clubs. He should play the ten of clubs on the first trick. Declarer finesses the queen of spades at trick two. West wins with the king of spades. When West plays the ace of clubs, East must ditch the jack of clubs. Now West can cash the nine, six and three of clubs and set the contract.

The key play is that East must NOT retain his two high clubs. If he does so, he will win the third club trick. Unfortunately, West does not have another entry in order to cash out the now established club suit.

Next week, I plan to talk about defensive signals: Attitude
Count
Suit Preference

But, I will continue to point out bidding of the hand and open lead for each example I use.