

Notrump Contracts—Part II
(July 19, 2021)

When the contract is 3NT (or, any notrump denomination), the opening lead is usually from length and strength (refer to February 1, 2021 lesson). Also, refer to February 8th lesson on leads to make when your partner has bid.

Last week, we looked at the **Holdup Play**, which is a strategy frequently used by a declarer in an attempt to break the line of communication between the two opponents. The following example was taken from **Three Notrump in Depth** by Augie Boehm.

Example 1.

| | | | |
|--------|--------|-------|---------------------------|
| | KQ | | |
| | 854 | | |
| | 109842 | | Contract: 3NT |
| | AQ6 | | |
| | | | Opening Lead: J of hearts |
| 1052 | | 98763 | |
| J10973 | | K2 | |
| A7 | | KQ | |
| 1043 | | J972 | |
| | AJ4 | | |
| | AQ6 | | |
| | J653 | | |
| | K85 | | |

After the lead of the jack of hearts, East correctly unblocks the king. You have eight immediate winners—3 in spades, 2 in hearts, and 3 in clubs. You need a diamond trick,

which means you must lose the lead at least twice developing the suit. If you win trick one, East is able to win the first diamond and return his remaining heart. Thanks to East's earlier unblock, West can clear hearts, eventually regaining the lead with the ace of diamonds to cash the setting trick.

Instead of taking the first heart trick, South should holdup at trick one and win the heart return. As before you attack diamonds, but now the defenders are helpless. West can grab his ace to establish hearts, but he now has no entry to cash his remaining good hearts. If East wins the first diamond, he has no hearts to lead to his partner.

Your first round holdup has gained the tempo in the play of this hand. You are one step ahead in the race—you run your diamonds before the defense can run hearts.

Another frequently used strategy by a declarer who is playing in a 3NT contract is that of the **Duck (aka Safety Play)**.

Example 2. AK763 (Spades)

54

Assume that you are playing in a NT contract and that the North hand has no outside entries. How can you give yourself the best chance to make four tricks in this suit? You have to hope that the opponents spades split 3-3. If you play the A/K and another spade, the two remaining spades will be good; but, you have no means of getting over to the dummy in order to cash them.

The proper way to play this suit is to give the opponents their trick **early**. Play a small spade from your hand and “duck” in the dummy. You now hope that each opponent will have two cards left in the suit. When you cash the A/K, hopefully your two small spades will now be good.

Example 3. A9763 (Spades)

542

Sometimes it may be necessary to “duck” twice in order to establish a suit. Such is the case in the above example. No matter how the cards are distributed, the opponents must win at least two tricks in the suit.

Assuming that the North hand has no outside entry, it would be futile to play the ace of spades first. The only way to play this combo is to duck twice—give the opponents their two tricks **early**. When you play the third round, your ace takes the trick and you can cash the remaining two small spades.

The following example shows how to play a suit combo when you hold seven (7) cards between the two hands.

Example 4. AK64 (Spades)

983

QJ10

752

You hold seven cards between the two hands with AK in the dummy—a perfect setup for ducking a trick. You can only hope that your opponents' six cards are divided 3-3. To find out, you have to play the suit three times.

You know that you have to lose at least one spade trick because your opponents hold the QJ10 between them. Because you have to lose at least one spade trick, it's better to lose the trick **early**.

After you concede the trick with the two of spades from your hand and the four of spades from the dummy, you can next try cashing the A/K of spades. When the suit breaks 3-3, the six of spades takes a third trick in the suit!

The following example shows how to play combination where you hold eight cards between the two hands.

Example 5. AK643 (Spades)

Q109

J8

752

The opponents have five spades between the two hands, including the QJ10. You have to lose a spade trick no matter what. So, lose it **early by ducking** the first trick in both hands. Lead the two of spades. When West plays the nine, play the three of spades from the dummy. Not to worry. The next time either you or the dummy regains the lead, play the A/K. Your two remaining small spades will take the last two tricks in the suit.

Let's look at one last example of the “duck”. This hand was taken from one of Bob Schulman's lessons. (See Lessons Tab on swvabridgeclubs.org website.)

Example 6. 652 Contract: 3NT
 753
 AK864 Opening Lead: 4 of clubs
 J2

 AK9
 AK42
 532
 A105

Number of Top Tricks: 7 (2S, 2H, 2D and 1C)

Additional Tricks: Try to get 2 extra tricks from dummy's diamonds.

Entries: RED FLAG: Dummy has no entries outside of the diamond suit. If South cashes the A/K of diamonds, and then loses the third diamond trick there will be no entry to the two good diamonds on the board.

Opening Lead: The opening lead gives the declarer two stoppers. Play low from dummy. If East plays low, win with the ten. If East plays an honor, win the ace and your combined 10 and jack guarantees a second stopper.

Is there a danger hand? Not relevant in this hand.

Do you need to hold up on the opening lead? Not relevant in this hand. Note: By not holding up at trick one, you guarantee yourself a second trick in the club suit.

If you need to lose tricks in a suit, do it **early** while you still have controls in the other suits. The RED FLAG about lack of entries to the dummy's hand is an indicator that you need to “duck” a diamond in both hands. As long as the diamonds split 3-2, this play will ensure the contract. With the extra club trick, you will make a total of 10 tricks on this hand.

Example 7. AQ7542

 63

The contract is 3NT. Above is your holding in spades. The North hand has no outside entries other than in spades. Your objective is to win five tricks in the suit. No matter how the adverse cards are distributed, one trick must be lost in any event.

Concede a trick to the opponents at once. You have to hope for West to hold the king. You finesse the king by playing your queen the second time you lead the suit. Should West hold the king your spades are now good to run.

It is true that if the finesse loses, you will succeed in taking no spade tricks instead of one. But, it is your only hope to make the contract. **Remember to give yourself every opportunity to make a hand, if possible.**

Good Resource:

Reese, Terence; Trezel, Roger (1978). When to Duck when to Win in Bridge. Master Bridge Series. New York: Frederick Fell Publishers, Inc. ISBN 0-88391-078-0. LCCN 77-23677 (<https://lcn.loc.gov/77-23677>).

Let's finish by looking at the following suit from the defender's aspect.

K1082

A53

J6

Q974

A defender can deceive the declarer by ducking a trick he could win, inducing the declarer to place the defenders' cards wrongly; and, adopt a losing line of play. In the position shown, declarer leads a small card from dummy to the queen . If West takes the ace, the declarer could easily play the king in the second round, dropping East's jack. However, if West ducks, the declarer will place the ace with East, and finesse the dummy's ten the second round, losing to East's now singleton jack.

This kind of duck by a defender requires perfect reading of cards and nerve. West must duck smoothly, without hesitation; otherwise, the declarer could infer the layout of the cards.

Next Week: Notrump Contracts—Part III

Kurt and Lew were North/South in the following hand:

| | | |
|---------|-------|----------------------------|
| 109754 | | Contract: 3N by East |
| QJ3 | | |
| J7 | | Opening Lead: 10 of hearts |
| A102 | | |
| K62 | AQ | Bidding: 1N P 2N P |
| K | 764 | 3N All Pass |
| 9864 | AK532 | |
| Q8764 | KJ3 | |
| J83 | | |
| A109852 | | |
| Q10 | | |
| 95 | | |

South led the 10 of hearts covered by the king of hearts from the dummy. North needs to start unblocking his honors by playing the jack of hearts.

East totally blew the play of the hand. Instead of cashing his 5 diamonds and 3 spades to make 3NT, he decided to knock out the club ace. When North takes the Ace, he correctly plays his queen of hearts to complete the unblock of the heart suit.

Recall the hand at the end of last week's lesson where the declarer could not allow the opponents back into the lead. East made the critical mistake of playing on clubs rather than cashing out his diamonds and three spades.

South now knows he can safely overtake the queen with his ace of hearts and cash his remaining hearts. All of his SPOT cards are now good.

The power of all those little cards in the heart suit is GOLDEN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Necia provided the following hand which appeared in the July 11, 2021 **Roanoke Times**.

Goren Bridge Hand

Neither side is vulnerable. South deals.

| | | | |
|---------|--------|--------|--------------------------------|
| | AKQ832 | | Contract is 1NT X XX in South! |
| | 10654 | | |
| | 8 | | |
| | 62 | | Opening Lead: Jack of diamonds |
| J9 | | 74 | |
| 7 | | Q832 | |
| AKQJ974 | | 2 | Bidding: 1N* X XX P |
| J107 | | AK9543 | All Pass |
| | 1065 | | *1N = 10-12 HCP |
| | AKJ9 | | |
| | 10653 | | |
| | Q8 | | |

South opened with a 10-12 point weak notrump. West doubled, dreaming that this would be the final contract. North redoubled to show a good hand, begging the question of what is a good hand after your partner has opened a weak NT type hand?

The bidding ended. When the dust settles. E/W had taken 7 diamonds and shifted to a club. One notrump, down seven, doubled and redoubled, for a score of 1760. No consolation--but had N/S been vulnerable, the score would have been 3160. .

Recall "Hello" after an opponent has opened with a weak NT. Double is for penalty and 2C forces partner to bid 2 diamonds. If there are no intervening bids, then West will pass and play the hand in 2D.

North should bid two spades whether West doubles or bids 2C.

MORAL of this Hand: We are not the only people who end up in such disasters!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Hopefully, no one will know who we are. LOL