

Declarer Play in Notrumps

Declarer Play in Notrump Contracts

Once dummy goes down, **count your certain winners** and **make a plan**

Work out which suit or suits may provide your extra winners.

Don't cash all your aces and kings until you have set up your extra tricks

Counting Winners

Check each suit for immediate winners in this example.

Contract: 3NT by West **Lead:** ♥5

Declarer	Dummy	Winners
♠ QJ54	♠ AK6	4 winners
♥ Q4	♥ A76	1 winner (2 winners when N leads a heart)
♦ AK82	♦ Q53	3 winners (maybe 4 if the suit splits 3-3)
♣ QJ2	♣ 6543	0 winners

What is your Plan on this hand?

With eight certain winners you need to find one more winner.

When North leads a heart, play low in dummy and this will allow the ♥Q to make the 9th trick. If the diamonds split 3-3 that will give you an additional trick.

Establishing Winners

1. Establish a suit

Often in a NT contract you do not have a long suit. So choose a suit that offers the greatest chance of tricks to establish. Generally this will be the longest and/or strongest **combined suit**. If there is a choice between two suits, then look for the suit with good intermediate cards. Intermediate cards are 10s, 9s and sometimes 8s.

2. Review the Play Techniques in Beginner Lesson 3

You can develop extra tricks by using the following

- Promote honours
- Develop a long suit
- Play towards honours
- Take a finesse

Check each suit for immediate winners in this example.

Contract: 3NT by West **Lead :** ♠2

Declarer	Dummy	Winners
♠ K74	♠ 85	1 winner (because of the lead)
♥ K84	♥ AQ7	3 winners
♦ Q65	♦ AJ1092	1 winner
♣ A754	♣ Q82	1 winner

What is your Plan on this hand?

There are six certain winners and you need three more. The diamond suit offers the best chance of extra winners. It's important that you start from the correct hand, so play the ♦Q from the West hand first.

3. Don't keep changing suits

When you win the opening lead, play the suit(s) that may provide you with extra tricks but don't keep changing suits. Let your opponents open up new suits for you.

For example, look at the following combination:

A983	Q65	K104	Don't play a suit with a weak combination. If the opponents start playing this suit, you will win a trick (the addition of the 10 in the NS hands would guarantee you a trick)
	J72		

4. Hold-up play

As part of your plan, you must decide whether you should win the first trick.

Check each suit for immediate winners in this example.

Contract: 3NT by West **Lead :** ♠4

Declarer	Dummy	Winners
♠ A83	♠ 65	1 winner
♥ K84	♥ AQJ	3 winners
♦ Q65	♦ KJ1092	0 winners (4 potential tricks)
♣ A754	♣ Q82	1 winner

You must develop the diamond suit to make your contract. There is only one winner in the spade suit, so you should hold up your ♠A until the 3rd round. You are hoping that South has the ♦A and no more spades.

5. Choosing the correct suit to develop

Don't be afraid to lose the lead early.

Check each suit for immediate winners in this example.

Contract: 1NT by West **Lead :** ♦4

Declarer	Dummy	Winners
♠ J942	♠ Q103	0 winners
♥ A82	♥ Q976	1 winner
♦ AQ72	♦ 65	2 winners (because of the lead)
♣ K5	♣ A863	2 winners

Plan: You have five sure tricks. You need 2 more. You have two 7-card suits to choose from. Select the spade suit because it has important intermediate cards (♠9 and ♠10). After the opponents take their tricks (♠A, ♠K), you have 2 certain spade winners remaining.

Opening Leads

Look at the auction before you make the opening lead

The following are the most commonly used guidelines for the defence

1. Leads versus a Notrump Contract

The defenders aim to establish their longest or strongest combined suit

Which suit?

1. Lead partner's bid suit (if they have bid one)
2. Lead your longest or strongest suit (the suit that gives the best opportunity to win tricks)
3. Lead an unbid suit (a major before a minor)

Which card?

The lead is underlined

1. Lead top of a sequence of 3 honours or broken sequence

KQJ3 KQ109 QJ97

2. Lead a low card - **a low card promises an honour(s)**

AJ875 K93 2 Q64

3. Lead top from small cards - **a high card denies an honour** 974 8742 83
4. Lead top of an interior sequence of 2 or more honours KJ103 Q1094 AJ104