

BASIC PLANNING IN A NO TRUMP CONTRACT

With thanks to Barbara Seagram and David Bird

"Planning the Play of a Bridge Hand"

Remember these points — Basic Planning

- When planning a notrump contract, you count your 'top tricks' (immediate winners) rather than your losers.
- You count the available top tricks in each suit, arriving at a total that will often be less than that required to make the contract.
- You must then seek a safe (or the safest available) plan to set up the extra tricks that you need.
- Your plan must give you a chance of making the contract before the defenders can score enough tricks to defeat you.

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Remember these points — When to hold up

- When you hold the ace of the suit that has been led, it is normally right to hold up the ace for two rounds. The intention is to leave the other defender with no cards in the suit.
- Think carefully about holding up an ace when this will give the defenders a chance to put the contract in danger with a switch to a different suit.
- When you need to knock out two of the opponents' winners to achieve the tricks you need, it may be right to hold up in a suit even if you have two stoppers.

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Remember these points — Establishing a Suit

- When dummy's long suit is headed by the ace, it is often right to delay playing the ace until you lead the last card in the suit from your hand. With $\diamond A 9 7 3 2$ in dummy opposite $\diamond 8 5 4$ in your hand, duck two rounds and then cross to the $\diamond A$.
- By ducking a round of a suit such as $\clubsuit A K Q 7 3$ (in a dummy with no side entry) opposite $\clubsuit 8 2$, you will be able to score four tricks when the defenders' cards break 4-2.
- You can gain an entry to dummy by overtaking an honor in your hand. For example, with $\clubsuit A 10 9 8 6$ in dummy opposite $\clubsuit K Q$ you can overtake the $\clubsuit Q$ on the second round and lead the $\clubsuit 10$ to clear the suit.

Hold up Plays

Look at

this deal:

♠ 8 3	♠ Q 7 4
♥ A 8 6 3	♥ J 10 5
♦ J 10 6	♦ A 9 7 5 2
♣ A 10 7 2	♣ 8 6
♠ K J 9 6 2	♠ A 10 5
♥ Q 9 4	♥ K 7 2
♦ 8 4	♦ K Q 3
♣ 9 5 3	♣ K Q J 4

West	North	East	South
pass	1♥	pass	1♣
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West leads the ♠6 against 3NT and (having recently bought an excellent book on the subject) you pause to make a plan. You start from this position:

Top Tricks: ♠ 1 ♥ 2 ♦ 0 ♣ 4 Total: 7

You need two extra tricks to bring the total to nine and these can easily be established in diamonds. What will happen if you win with the ♠A at Trick 1 and play a diamond? It's not difficult to see. East will win with the ♦A and return a spade. The defenders will score four spades and one diamond, putting you down one.

To make the contract, you must hold up the ♠A for two rounds; East will then have no spades left. When you seek your extra tricks by playing on diamonds, your luck is in — East (the safe hand, with no spades) holds the ♦A. Whatever suit he chooses to return, you will win and claim your nine tricks for the contract. If East did have a spade left, the suit would be breaking 4-4 and pose no threat.

PLAN: I will hold up the ♠A until the third round and then play diamonds, hoping that East holds the ♦A.

On the deal that we have just seen, you still needed a measure of luck after the hold-up play. If West had held the ♦A, along with five spades, you would have gone down. (There would have been no way to make the contract, in that case).

Holding up a king

When your right-hand opponent has won the first trick with the ace, you may have the opportunity to hold up your king on the next round. That's the case here:

♠ 10 6	♠ K 8 5 4	♠ Q J 7 3
♥ Q J 8 6 2	♥ 10 4	♥ A 7 3
♦ J 9 7 2	♦ K 8 6	♦ 10 4 3
♣ 8 6	♣ A 10 5 2	♣ K 7 4

West	North	East	South
pass	2♣	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	2♦

ESTABLISHING A SUIT IN NOTRUMP

When you have a trump suit at your disposal, establishing a suit is usually quite easy. Whether or not you have to duck a round at some stage, you can ruff a round or two until the opponents' cards are exhausted. This mechanism is not available when establishing a suit in a notrump contract, but the concept of ducking is still important. We will look at this technique first.

Ducking to preserve an entry

We will start with a fairly simple deal that illustrates the potential advantage of ducking an early round of a suit.

West	North	East	South
♠ 10 6 5 2 ♥ K J 8 2 ♦ J 5 ♣ Q 7 4	♠ J 7 4 ♥ 6 5 ♦ A K 8 7 4 2 ♣ J 6	♠ A K 8 ♥ A 9 7 4 ♦ 6 3 ♣ A 9 8 2	♠ Q 9 3 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ Q 10 9 ♣ K 10 5 3
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Top Tricks: ♠ 2 ♥ 1 ♦ 2 ♣ 1 Total: 6

Three extra tricks from the diamond suit will bring your total to nine. How can you score the five diamond tricks that you need? The defenders' diamonds will need to split 3-2 and you will have to take care with your entries to the dummy.

What will happen if you cash the ace and king on the first two rounds of diamonds and then surrender the third round? The defenders' cards do indeed split 3-2 and the suit will be established. Unfortunately, you will have no entry to the three good diamonds in the dummy. To ensure that you preserve the entry to dummy, you must duck the first round of diamonds. You will then be able to cross to dummy on the second round.

How does the play go? You win the first round of hearts, since otherwise the defenders may switch to clubs and establish too many winners (West's fourth-best lead of the ♥2 tells you that the suit is breaking 4-3). You then play a low diamond from both your own hand and the dummy, allowing the defenders to win the first round of the suit. The defenders are welcome to score three heart tricks at this stage. When you regain the lead, you will cross to the ♦A, noting that the suit breaks 3-2. Four more tricks in diamonds give you the contract.

PLAN: I will win with the ♥A and duck the first round of diamonds. Provided diamonds are 3-2, I will have nine tricks.

Sometimes you need to duck the first two rounds of the suit that you wish to establish. Look at the clubs on this deal:

West	North	East	South
♠ 10 8 6 2 ♥ Q 10 8 2 ♦ 9 5 3 ♣ Q 7	♠ 7 5 3 ♥ A K ♦ 8 7 4 ♣ A 10 8 6 3	♠ A K 4 ♥ J 6 5 3 ♦ A K 6 ♣ 9 4 2	♠ Q J 9 ♥ 9 7 4 ♦ Q J 10 2 ♣ K J 5
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Overtaking to establish a suit

When you are hoping to establish a long suit in dummy, remember that the defenders may make life awkward by holding up a stopper. Look at the heart suit on this deal:

♠ J 10 9 7	♠ Q 8 3
♥ 7 5	♥ A 8 6 3
♦ J 9 6 3	♦ Q 10
♣ K 9 7	♣ Q 8 5 3
	♠ K 6 4
	♥ Q J
	♦ A K 5 4
	♣ A 10 6 4

West	North	East	South
pass	2♦	pass	1NT
pass	2NT	pass	2♥
all pass		pass	3NT

North shows his hearts with a transfer bid and you end in 3NT. West leads the ♠J and, to the admiration of all present, you pause to make a plan. This is the winner situation:

Top Tricks: ♠ 2 ♥ 0 ♦ 2 ♣ 1 **Total: 5**

You have five top winners and four more are easily available in the heart suit, it seems. You win the spade lead with the ♠K, preserving the ♠A as a subsequent entry to dummy. You lead the ♥Q next and this card is allowed to win. What now? Suppose you continue with the ♥J, playing a low card from dummy. East will hold up the ace again and there will be no way to make the contract! Since there is only one entry left to the dummy (the ♠A) you will score only two tricks from the heart suit.

To ensure that you score the four heart tricks that you need, you must overtake the ♥J with dummy's ♥K on the second round. It will do East no good to hold up his ace now. Since the lead would be in dummy, you would then continue with the ♥10 and (if necessary) the ♥9. Overtake on the second round and nothing can stop you from scoring four heart tricks and making the contract.

PLAN: I will win with the ♠K and lead the ♥Q. If this is allowed to win, I will overtake the ♥J with the ♥K and establish four tricks in hearts.

Suppose you have a side suit of ♣K10976 in dummy opposite ♠AQ in your hand, with one entry to dummy in a different suit. When you need only four club tricks, and can afford to lose the lead, it may pay you to overtake the ♠Q on the second round of the suit. Look at this full deal:

♠ J 4	♠ 9 6
♥ Q 10 7 5	♥ J 6 3
♦ Q J 10 9 2	♦ A 7 3
♣ 5 3	♣ K 10 9 7 6
	♠ Q 10 8 5 2
	♥ K 9 2
	♦ 6
	♣ J 8 4 2
	♠ A K 7 3
	♥ A 8 4
	♦ K 8 5 4
	♣ A Q

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

How will you play 3NT when West leads the ♦Q? You start with these top tricks:

Top Tricks: ♠ 2 ♥ 1 ♦ 2 ♣ 3 **Total: 8**

You need one extra trick and it is unlikely to come from a 3-3 diamond break, after West has chosen to lead a diamond. Instead you should look for a fourth trick from the club suit.

Suppose you win the diamond lead with the king, cash the ace and queen of clubs and cross to dummy with the ♦A. All will be well if clubs break 3-3 (or if the ♣J fell on the first two rounds). When the cards lie as in the diagram, you will go down. West will show out on the ♣K and there will be no point in setting up a fourth club trick because there is no further entry to the dummy.

The best chance of scoring four club tricks is to cash the ♠A and then overtake the ♠Q with the ♣K. When both defenders follow to two rounds of clubs, the contract is secure. You lead the ♣10 from dummy, forcing out the ♣J, and dummy's ♣97 will then be good. The ♦A remains as an entry to the two established winners in clubs.