

NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

Chapter 08

Now let's look at some deals and see how the defence, based on the opening lead, might go.

Firstly, we'll have a look at a trump contract, because it will not only be of interest from a 'technical' point of view, but because it will illustrate, quite clearly I hope, the difference in defence that is required when defending against No Trumps and Trump contracts.

Board 1 DLR N NIL VUL

♠ 8 4
♥ A Q J 6 5
♦ A J 7
♣ 10 6 2

♠ J 6 5 3

♥ 4 3

♦ K Q 4 3 2

♣ 9 4

♠ 9 2

♥ 8 7 2

♦ 10 9 8

♣ A K 8 7 3

♠ A K Q 10 7

♥ K 10 9

♦ 6 5

♣ Q J 5

The Bidding:

W	N	E	S
	1H	NB	1S
NB	2H	NB	4H
NB	NB	NB	

East is on lead against 4H by North. The CLEAR CUT lead is the ace of clubs. Neither of the opponents has bid the suit, so East hopes for at least two club tricks. Not only does the person with the opening lead have to work out a strategy, their PARTNER has to cooperate by telling THEM how to proceed. That is where it is VITAL to employ SIGNALS.

We'll talk about signals later, but the BASIC signals need to be addressed immediately. WEST, by following with the NINE, can tell East that East has struck gold on the opening lead.

The very basic, and most common, signalling system is: play the HIGHER of two cards to tell your partner that you have TWO cards, and play the LOWEST from THREE. If West follows with the NINE, East KNOWS that West has two only (or maybe even a singleton, though the bidding might have been different then!).

The basic concept is : HIGH, ENCOURAGE; LOW, DISCOURAGE, but more of that later. Here, when West plays the nine, East should KNOW to lead two more rounds of the suit. Even if declarer drops the TEN at trick one. This might, without any signalling system from EW, deter East from continuing with the ace, expecting it to be ruffed by declarer if declarer had a singleton ten.

With a signalling system, East knows what to do BEFORE declarer has a chance to try and lead them astray! So, after three rounds of clubs, West ruffing the third, the defence have taken the first three tricks and need just one more.

West then plays the king of diamonds and waits for the queen to make the setting trick. This, indeed, is what happened at the tables where East started with three rounds of clubs. But could declarer have made the contract despite the good defence?

Since bidding, declarer play, and defence are all intricately linked, and it is seldom possible, or even sensible, to talk about just the declarer play or defence in isolation, let's look at how declarer MIGHT play the last nine cards of the hand. And how they SHOULD play them.

The natural inclination for declarer is to win the ace of diamonds, draw trumps, and then hope that there will be two diamond discards on the spades. Alas, this does not eventuate. Only one diamond discard is possible when West has the protected jack of spades. Unlucky? Or is better play possible?

Let's have another look at all the hands.

Board 1 DLR N NIL VUL

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

The Bidding:

W	N	E	S
	1H	NB	1S
NB	2H	NB	4H
NB	NB	NB	

Declarer should be able to see that if the jack of spades falls, the contract will make. But if the jack of spades doesn't fall, the contract is doomed, unless...

The answer is that only FOUR spade tricks are required and not five. Even if the jack of spades does not fall, it might be possible to SET UP the fourth spade by ruffing out the jack. But that can only happen if declarer has an ENTRY left to enjoy the fourth spade. That means KEEPING the king of hearts as an entry and starting on spades while there is still one trump out. The moment the jack drops, declarer can, of course, cash the king of trumps and thereby draw that last trump.

But, after two rounds the jack has not dropped. If declarer cashes the queen NOW, East will ruff with the outstanding trump. But declarer CAN do better. Instead of CASHING the queen of spades, declarer can now make 100% certain of the contract by RUFFING THE SEVEN, while keeping the queen and ten in dummy. Declarer's trumps are too big to be over ruffed (they should be AQJ!). If the jack of spades drops, no harm done, but if it does NOT, this play pays HUGE dividends. Dummy is reentered with the king of trumps, drawing East's final trump in the process, and the queen of spades is cashed. THIS time the jack does fall, and the TEN provides the extra discard to dispose of the losing diamond.

There are many such hands, where both good declarer play and good defence can neutralise each other. Generally, though, if YOU learn to play the hand better and defend better, you will be the victor in any such confrontation.

Board 3 DLR S EW VUL

The Bidding:

♠ A Q J 8		W	N	E	S
♥ J 7					1H
♦ K J 9 8		NB	1S	NB	1NT
♣ J 8 4		NB	3NT	NB	NB
♠ 10 9 2	♠ K 6 5 4	NB			
♥ 8 4	♥ Q 10 9 2				
♦ 4 3 2	♦ 7 6 5				
♣ A K 9 7 3	♣ 10 5				
♠ 7 3					
♥ A K 6 5 3					
♦ A Q 10					
♣ Q 6 2					

This one is not a difficult one, yet many even reasonable players go wrong on the opening lead. Against a NO TRUMP contract, unless it is a slam, the important thing for the defence is to DEVELOP tricks and not to take them too early. Because there are NO trumps to stop you taking your long suit tricks when they are established, you must ensure that you don't take the TOP tricks too early. You EXPECT to lose a trick or two defending a No Trump contract, so set about establishing your club suit by leading your "fourth highest of longest and strongest" THIS time. Lead the seven of clubs.

There is another reason why you should NOT lead the ace. What if partner has the doubleton QUEEN? Or dummy has Q10x and partner Jx and declarer guesses wrong which card to play from dummy (in fact it is LESS than a guess, inserting the ten wins every time West has the jack, going up with the queen ONLY wins when West has both the ace and king). West has NO entry outside the clubs, so sets out to lose the first trick and hope to win the next four if PARTNER can gain the lead AND has a second club to lead BACK. East DOES, on both counts. East hangs on to their king of spades and the second club and the moment declarer finesses the spades (declarer's BEST option for the ninth trick), you have the next four tricks. See what happens if you cash just ONE of your top clubs at trick one!

Board 4 Dlr W ALL VUL

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

The Bidding:

W	N	E	S
1NT	NB	2C	NB
2D	NB	3NT	NB
NB	NB		

After West opens 1NT, North is cut out of the bidding. East MUST use Stayman to look for a major suit fit, but West denies having 4H or 4S so East bids 3NT.

North should do some counting: West has a minimum of 12 HCP and East 13. That leaves partner with THREE at most. It is not a time to look for help from partner in any of YOUR suits, so play it safe by leading your TEN OF SPADES. That MIGHT find the only points in partner's hand but it is safer than any other lead. The spades are also good middle cards, therefore less likely to damage partner's holding if partner has e.g Kxxx, Qxxx, or Jxxx. After that, North intends to continue spades and not lead away from the other suits. Let's repeat the hands here, for convenience.

Board 4 Dlr W ALL VUL

The Bidding:

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

W	N	E	S
1NT	NB	2C	NB
2D	NB	3NT	NB
NB	NB		

As it happens, the spade lead might immediately tell North that partner has nothing other than the queen of spades. If declarer plays low from dummy, South should SIGNAL with the SEVEN, and declarer will win the king. Or, if declarer covers with the jack from dummy, South can safely cover with the queen, expecting North to have the nine at least, and hopefully the eight also. Declarer's best play is to NOT put in the jack from dummy but play low and win the king of spades and immediately run the jack of hearts. This works and four heart tricks are taken. Now declarer might run the eight of clubs, losing to North's jack. North persists with the nine of spades and this puts declarer under pressure. If declarer finesses and loses, declarer may never make the ace! So, the best play is to win the ace and repeat the club finesse. This loses again and North now leads their third spade. Declarer does best NOT to cover this, limiting the defence to just one spade trick, but North can exit with a club and wait for the AQ of diamonds to take two tricks and defeat the contract.

Declarer might take a different line and scramble nine tricks somehow, but at least North has tried their best. The heart lead, as it happens, does no harm as declarer can always finesse that suit for four tricks. A club lead helps declarer considerably, and a diamond lead should NEVER be considered from that holding. Leading from your apparently weakest suit in this instance though, is definitely the best move!

Board 6 DLR E EW VUL

The Bidding:

<p>♠ J 10</p> <p>♥ Q 10 7 5</p> <p>♦ J 9 8</p> <p>♣ A 9 5 3</p>		W	N	E	S
				1H	NB
		1NT	NB	3NT	NB
		NB	NB		
♠ Q 9 7	♠ 6 5 2				
♥ 4 2	♥ A K J 8				
♦ Q 10 7 5	♦ A K 4				
♣ Q 8 4 2	♣ K J 6				
♠ A K 8 4 3					
♥ 9 6 3					
♦ 6 3 2					
♣ 10 7					

Put yourself in the North chair this time. The bidding hasn't told you much, but try and picture the hands as best you can. East should have a fairly balanced 19 count to raise West's weak response to game, maybe 18. West has 6-9 HCP but in which suits? Or, more to the point, which suit(s) does West NOT have? West does NOT have four or more spades if their bidding is to be believed because West MUST bid 1S if they have 4 or more. West does not have heart support, therefore West has one or both of the MINOR suits. EAST just might have four spades, but even in that case, PARTNER has four also, and if East has fewer than four, partner has FIVE.

Opening ANY of your suits could be dangerous. A heart might run round to declarer's Jx, a club may just be enough to prevent your nine making later, and leading a diamond from Jxx in a suit that declarer probably has is VERY foolish as it will ruin any combined holding you and partner may have in the suit.

So, the only answer is to lead PARTNER'S suit, and that is SPADES. Lead the jack, as it will tell partner that is your highest. Once you do, here is where signalling is once more important. Partner has NO entry but sees the need to take as many spade tricks as possible. South also KNOWS that West probably has Qxx because the jack has DENIED any higher card. South therefore SIGNALS by playing the EIGHT and allows West to score the queen. But after careful discarding, North gets the lead after declarer has taken EIGHT tricks, and leads the ten of spades which South overtakes and then takes the last three tricks as well.

This hand is no different in principle to an earlier one. Had SOUTH been on lead, South would have led the FOUR of spades and NORTH played the ten. No real difference between North leading the jack and South following with the eight. The COMMUNICATION has been preserved and as long as South doesn't throw any spade tricks away, the tricks are assured.

SOME Souths might overcall 1S on this hand, especially at the vulnerability. That is a good move and will ENSURE that partner leads a spade. As long as the proper system of leads and play is followed, North will lead the jack, South encourage with the eight, and the result will be down one. But it is much more satisfactory when you, as North, have NO such help from partner yet still produce such a great lead. People of course may question how you came to find the lead when PARTNER had five to the AK, but you will have great delight in explaining to them WHY it is the only sensible lead on the bidding.