

NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

Chapter 16: A Continuing Theme

Based on what you have learnt so far about what to do when defending No Trump contracts, take a look at this hand and decide what you would lead if right hand opponent opens 1NT and everyone passes.

BOARD 21 DEALER North N-S VUL

South

♠ K J 9 8 4

♥ A K 3

♦ 8 7 4

♣ 9 6

You are South and North is dealer. When East opens 1NT, you are tempted to try 2S, but you are playing TEAMS. Partner has passed as dealer, so it is unlikely that you are being talked out of 4S. To come in at this vulnerability is a risky venture at teams, so you pass, albeit reluctantly. You are now on lead against 1NT.

What do you expect dummy to turn up with? What could partner have that could be useful? Just those two questions would give you the answer that you HOPE partner has something in spades. There is much merit in the old teaching that you should lead 'fourth highest of longest and strongest' when trying to either take, or establish, tricks for your partnership. Clearly, finding the queen in partner's hand will immediately set up four spade tricks, in all probability. Finding the ace may even give you the first five tricks. And to just make sure partner is not confused by your lead, and perhaps to lead declarer astray, you may choose the FOUR rather than the eight. Should you consider a 'safe' lead like the diamond eight or club nine? The answer is that it will probably NOT be safe, it will pick up any honour cards in partner's hand and unless they are entries for partner to lead spades through declarer, you will only achieve for DECLARER what declarer will be hoping to achieve himself. Remember: against ONE No Trump, try and imagine you are DECLARER, but also have the opening lead. What could be in 'dummy' for you to want to lead a diamond or club? Too much to ask from a passed partner, in all probability. So, is there a BETTER lead than a low spade? If you think about it, yes, there is. Because you have both top hearts, you can probably have your cake and eat it too. When you lead the ace, you will not only see dummy, you will also receive a SIGNAL from partner, and having kept the lead, you will be in a good position to make the correct switch, or continue hearts if that is what partner wants. You will also be in a good position to defend correctly later, as will partner, who will have the knowledge that you have the heart king.

♠ 10 2

♥ Q J 10 9 8

♦ 6 5

♣ K 8 3 2

♠ Q 5

♠ A 7 6 3

♥ 7 6

♥ 5 4 2

♦ K J 9 2

♦ A Q 10 3

♣ Q J 10 7 5

♣ A 4

♠ K J 9 8 4

♥ A K 3

♦ 8 7 4

♣ 9 6

If you start with the low spade, declarer will no doubt rise with the queen, take a club finesse, and when the king of clubs does not fall, cash up and make eight tricks. No big deal at teams. If you start with the ace of hearts, partner will be able to give you the hugest possible signal, the queen (note that 'reverse attitude' may not be so helpful with this hand!), and you will be delighted to take the first two trick and let partner take the next three. You will probably signal for partner to switch to spades and that will result in declarer making the 1NT contract. Also, no big deal at teams, but that's not the point, is it? Whether you are playing teams or match points, it is important to get off to the best defence. Switch North's hearts and East's diamonds, and yes, the diamond lead would have been a killer, but you can still do that, and partner would have needed to have all those diamonds, whereas five hearts to the queen NOTHING would have been good enough. The other consideration is that it is always easier to defend a hand when you are taking the tricks and putting declarer under pressure in terms of discards. While it may not seem difficult for declarer to find discards, try taking the first five hearts and seeing what declarer and dummy might discard. Declarer may go wrong even here. It's the same old story: If you were declarer as SOUTH, which card would you be most likely to lead from hand towards dummy? Here, with a blind guess, the most likely is a spade, but... you can find out whether there may be a better one still, by cashing a top heart, seeing dummy, and seeing what partner has to say in following to trick one