

Declarer Play

Planning the Play in No-Trump

1. General Concepts:

- a. No-Trump contracts are inherently more difficult than suit contracts because you are incapable of using one of the basic ways of winning tricks; namely, trumping. Declarer cannot trump when he/she is void nor can he/she stop an Opponent from running a long suit.
- b. In lieu of this capability, Declarer must exercise control, if possible, in all four suits, primarily through high cards called “*stoppers*.”
- c. The number and quality of Declarer’s stoppers has a direct effect on the timing of Declarer’s play, and his/her overall success.

2. Stoppers When in a No-Trump Contract:

Definition: A stopper is any card or group of cards that will eventually win a trick when your Opponents attack what is likely to be their longest and strongest suit. The function of the stopper is to prevent the Opponents from cashing long-suit winners, at least temporarily.

Types of Stoppers:

A Guaranteed Stopper: A collection of cards destined to produce a winning trick either,

- (a) On the merits of its own strength
A, KQ, QJT, JT98, etc., in one hand
Kx opposite Qx or JTx
Qxx opposite JT or T98x
- (b) Due to the lead of the suit by an Opponent
Kx, QJx, JT9x; etc., in the 4th hand
Kx opposite Jxx or T9xx
Qxx opposite Jx or T9xx

A Double Stopper: A collection of cards that offers protection against the run of the Opponent’s suit on two separate leads.

- (a) On the merits of its own strength
AK, KQJ, QJT9, etc. in one hand
Ax opposite Kx or QJx
Kx opposite QJx or JT9x
- (b) Due to the lead of the suit by an Opponent
AQ, AJT, AT98, KQT; etc. in the 4th hand
Ax opposite Qxx (in the 4th hand)
Kx opposite QTx in the 4th hand

A Possible Stopper: A card that will develop into a trick only if the Opponents first cash all of their higher honors, or if those honors are favorably placed.

(Example:) Qxx is a possible stopper, if the Ace and King are led, or if the Opponent(s) who hold(s) both the Ace and the King play(s) them first.

3. Analyzing the Opening Lead:

- A. Your Opponent's Intent: To develop their long suit(s). 4th Best
(The "*Rule of 11*" applies here if it is 4th best.)
- B. The Lead From a Long Suit:
- (1) The Lead of an Honor: Part of a **3-card** sequence or a broken sequence such as:
 - (a) *The A* – from AKQ, or AKJT
 - (b) *The K* – from AKJ, or KQJ
 - (c) *The Q* – from AQJ, or QJT, or QJ9, (or from KQT = special circumstance)
 - (d) *The J* – from AJT, or KJT, or JT9
 - (e) *The T* – from AT9(8), or KT9(8), QT9, or T98
 - (f) *Any honor* – If from RHO's bid suit, it is either as above, or more commonly, top of a doubleton, or a singleton.
 - (2) The Lead of any Spot Card: Usually 4th best ("*Rule of 11*" applies)
- C. The Lead from a Short Suit: Reasons are as follows:
- (1) The Partner of the opening leader has bid the suit.
 - (2) The opening leader's suits have been bid by the declaring side.
 - (3) The opening leader's hand is very weak and he/she is trying to find Partner's long suit.
 - (4) The opening leader holds all, or most, of the remaining high cards, and is leading passively. (A passive lead is often best against any strong opening of "2C," 2-NT, or a *jump to 2-NT* by the Leader's RHO, the Declarer.)
 - (5) The top card from any doubleton.
- D. The Impact of the Opening Lead:
- (1) When the Lead is in a Suit in Which You Have Either Multiple Stoppers, or Long Cards.
 - a) You will normally have ample time to develop your tricks.
 - b) The main problem, if you lose the lead, will be to convince the Opponents not to switch their defense to a suit in which you are more vulnerable to attack.
 - (2) When the Lead is in Your Weakest Suit.
 - a) Under these conditions, time is on the side of the defenders.
 - b) The Opponent with the potential long-suit winners is ultimately the "*dangerous Opponent.*" Your main problem will be to keep him/her from regaining the lead, once his/her suit is established.
 - c) As soon as the Partner of the dangerous Opponent is devoid of cards in the suit that has been led, (Use the "*Rule of 7*"), he/she now becomes the "*safe Opponent,*" and if the Declarer must lose the lead later, he/she must be sure to try to lose it to him/her.