

Bridge – Beginner’s Lessons III - 21

- 1 -

Planning the Play of the Hand

Declarer’s Strategy When Playing in No-Trump Contracts

1. With All Four Suits Well Protected:

A. Work on “Possible” Winners First, *Not* “Sure” Winners:

1. Save your “*sure*” winners for entries and stoppers, as the need arises during the hand.

- a) “*Sure*” winners are entries, and they represent the vital links between your two hands, both to facilitate the development of “*possible*” winners and ultimately to enjoy them as cashable tricks.
- b) “*Sure*” winners are stoppers, and if you need to lose the lead in the process of developing “*possible*” winners, you will need these stoppers to control the run of your Opponents’ long suit(s).

2. If you cash “*sure*” winners prematurely, you promote the lesser honors in your Opponents’ hands to winning rank.

With **AQx** opposite **Kx**, if you cash three tricks early in the play, you merely establish the **Jack**, the **Ten**, and whatever long cards are outstanding as winners for your Opponents. Without your help it would take four defensive leads for them to accomplish the same thing.

3. Likewise, if you cash long-suit winners too early, you might give yourself an unnecessary discarding problem. “*Do Not Squeeze Yourself!*”

Whenever you can run six winners from one hand, you will have to make several discards from the other. If these discards are long cards in a side suit, you may be throwing away possible winners; if they are spot cards that protect honors, such as from **Kx**, **Qxx**, or **Jxxx**, you may be jeopardizing your stopper in a particular suit.

4. Unless you have enough “*sure*” winners to make the contract without further work, develop your “*possible*” winners while you still have stoppers in all four suits.

B. Drive Out the “Sure” Losers Early, While Your Stoppers are Still Intact:

1. The “*sure*” losers must be lost, regardless of how you play, whereas the “*possible*” losers might be avoided. The outstanding “*sure*” losers stop the run of your “*possible*” winners. To facilitate the flow of tricks, you must eliminate the Opponents’ Aces and Kings that block your way.

2. What are “*sure*” losers to you are entries for your Opponents. To minimize the threat to your contract, the “*sure*” losers must be forced out before your Opponents’ long suit is established.

If you hold **KQJ** opposite **xxx** in one suit and **ATx** opposite **KJx** in another, drive out the missing **Ace** first, a trick that must be lost. It is a certain entry for your Opponents, and it also prevents you from taking tricks in this suit. The missing **Queen**, however, in the other suit, is neither a certain trick nor a guaranteed entry for your Opponents. They can not score the **Queen**, unless you lead the suit yourself and the finesse fails (A 50% chance).

C. When All Your Busy Work has been Completed and You Have Established Enough Tricks to make the Contract, then Cash Your Winners.

2. With Inadequate Protection In One Suit:

A. With Only One Stopper Remaining:

1. If you might lose the lead only once more before you have enough tricks to succeed, concede the loser and claim your contract.

2. If you might lose the lead more than once, attack the likely entry of the "**Dangerous**" Opponent first, while you still have a stopper to fend him/her off.

If the Opponents hold an **Ace** and you also have a finesse which might lose to the "**Safe**" Opponent, force out the **Ace** first. Whichever Opponent wins the trick will now drive out your last stopper, but even if your later finesse should fail, it would fail into the hand of the "**Safe**" Opponent.

On the other hand, if the finesse must be taken and it might lose to the "**Dangerous**" Opponent, try the finesse first, hoping either that it will succeed or that the **Ace** is held by the "**Safe**" Opponent.

If you mistakenly attack the entry of the "**Safe**" Opponent first, he/she might win the trick and drive out your last stopper, while the "**Dangerous**" Opponent still has a potential entry to his hand.

B. With No Stoppers Remaining:

1. With enough "**sure**" winners to make the hand, take your tricks immediately.

2. If you lack the necessary "**sure**" winners to make the hand,

a) Continue to develop your "**possible**" winners, provided you can prevent the "**Dangerous**" Opponent from gaining the lead.

b) If the "**Dangerous**" Opponent has a likely entry to his/her hand, cash all of your winners in an established, long suit. Hopefully, this will put discarding pressure on him/her, and he/she might have to abandon some of his/her long-suit winners.

3. The "Holdup," "Ducking," and "Unblocking" are Effective Mechanisms Used to Maximize Declarer Play When in No-Trump Contracts