

Planning Declarer Play in No-Trump Contracts

Whatever the final contract, be it a Trump contract or No-Trump contract, Declarer makes the same preliminary plans for the play.

- a) Review the bidding for clues about the Opponents' hands.
- b) Analyze the lead for clues about that particular suit.
- c) Count the sure and possible tricks. In a suit contract count your losers and see if you can reduce their numbers; in a No-Trump contract, however, count your winners and see if their numbers can be increased.
- d) Develop a plan for each separate suit.
- e) Develop a plan for the whole hand, giving careful consideration to the entries and the timing of the play to come.

In a No-Trump contract count the sure winners first to determine how many additional ones you will need to develop. Sure winners are those tricks that are cashable at any time during the play.

Possible winners are potential tricks that may or may not be realized, since they depend on removing the Opponents' higher cards, taking finesses, and how the missing cards in a suit might divide.

The normal strategy for playing a No-Trump contract is to work on the possible winners early in the hand, while your stoppers are still intact. Plan to cash your winners later in the hand, when your stoppers have been removed or you can see enough tricks to succeed.

Many factors influence which possible winners and what suits you might try to develop. Among these, you will need to consider the number of possible winners in each suit, the probability of success of each play, safety, timing, and entries.

All the while you are building up tricks your Opponents are looking for ways to beat the contract. There are two common threats:

- 1) They might establish their own long-suit winners.
- 2) The "wrong" ("**Dangerous**") Opponent might gain the lead and make a damaging switch through a vulnerable suit.

To fend off the Opponents, you have two basic strategies:

- 1) Execute a holdup play and not release your stoppers until it is safe to do so.
- 2) Recognize which Opponent might be dangerous to have on lead and arrange the play so that, if possible, that does not happen.

"The Rule of Seven": In No Trump Contracts, when intending to hold-up with only one stopper in the enemy's led suit, add the number of cards held by both you and the Dummy hand in that suit, and then deduct that number from 7. The answer is the number of times you must duck, or hold-up, before taking the trick in order to sever the communication between the Opponents so as to lessen their chances of running the suit at a later time.