

Declarer Play

Planning the Play of the Hand – Timing When Playing in NoTrump

Timing in a No-Trump Contract: Remember, when playing in a No-Trump contract, Declarer must count his/her winners and determine ways to increase their number, if it is at all possible to do so.

Sure Winners

Sure winners are cards which require no further development in order to be cashable. They are, therefore, by definition, immediately and unquestionably winnable.

1. **When to Take Sure Winners:** Sure winners should be released, only when they have no further duties to perform. Their two principal functions are:

a) **Sure winners are controls for the suits that they head.** They prevent the Opponents from winning tricks with cards that are below them in rank. The sooner Declarer cashes sure winners, the sooner he/she sets up tricks for the defense.

With **AKx** opposite **xxx**, unless you abandon control prematurely by cashing the **Ace** and **King**, the Opponents can not earn a trick in this suit without gaining the lead three times (once to drive out the **Ace**, once to drive out the **King**, and once to score their trick.

b) **Sure winners provide entry into the hand in which they reside.** They are the principal means of getting back and forth, from one hand to the other. The sooner Declarer cashes them, the lesser his/her ability to place the lead precisely in the hand from which Declarer wishes the lead to originate.

2. **Which winners should be developed, and in what order?:** The specific winners that the Declarer attempts to develop and the order of their selection can substantially affect the outcome of the hand. Which ones are chosen for development, and the specific order of their selection, are both dependent upon the following factors:

a) **Quantity:** In general, prefer to work on those suits that have the greatest number of possible winners to offer.

b) **Probability:** Likewise, prefer to work on those suits which hold the highest probability for the development of additional tricks.

With **KQJ** opposite **xxx**, you can produce two tricks 100% of the time, just by driving out the **Ace**. With **Kxxx** opposite **xxx**, the chances for two tricks (one with the **King** and one as a long-suit winner) are very poor.

c) **Safety:** Work on those possible winners, where, if your efforts should fail to materialize, would least jeopardize the contract. The fewer the possible losers with which you flirt initially, the better your combined chances over the whole hand. Be aware as to whether either of the two Opponents presents a danger, and attempt, if possible, to not to allow that Player entry.

d) **Flexibility:** Avoid plans that are basically do-or-die. If several options which are capable of developing additional winners exist, choose, initially, to work on those such that, if your efforts were to fail, would allow you to safely try others at a later time.

Summary: Even though Declarer, when playing in a No-Trump contract, is concentrating on winners and how to, if possible, increase their numbers, he/she must also consider the losers from a preventative point of view. The Opponents will be attacking with their long suits, attempting to drive out your stoppers in order to set up long-card tricks for themselves. Declarer must take whatever steps are necessary to thwart their plans, such as holding up your stoppers, eliminating their entries before their suit is established, and keeping the more dangerous Opponent from getting the lead.

Suppose you are playing 3-NT with the following cards, and the opening lead is the Jack of Spades:

	<u>Winners</u>	
	<u>Sure</u>	<u>Possible</u>
Kx	S = 2	0
AKQx	H = 3	1
AKJx	D = 2	2
xxx	C = 0	3

AQ		
xxx	Total = 7	6
xxx		
QJT98		

Screening of the “sure” **winners** in this hand shows that Declarer would fall two tricks short of the specified contract, and that he/she must attempt to convert at least two of the “possible” winners in order to avoid being set. Declarer’s attention must quickly fall on the most likely, fruitful suit or suits to accomplish this goal; i.e., those suits which hold the greatest chances of success while, at the same time, take the least effort.

a) After you win the first trick, you will have but one Spade stopper remaining and can only afford to lose the lead once more, before their suit is established.

b) Quite readily, the three possible winners in Clubs could be converted to sure winners, but to do so you would have to lose the lead twice. With two Club losers and at least three Spade losers Declarer would be set as time would be on the Opponents’ side. If either hand had initially held a third Spade, Declarer would have had two stoppers left and time to develop the Clubs, but the actual holding in Spades will not permit this.

c) To make the contract Declarer must work on Diamonds and, if necessary, on Hearts, as well, with no certainty of success. Win the first trick with the Ace or Queen of Spades and immediately “Finesse” in Diamonds. If it works, then Declarer still needs **either** the missing Diamonds **or** the missing Hearts to be divided 3-3; if it fails, Declarer will need **both** suits to divide 3-3. Overall, his/her chances are not very good, but these are the only plays Declarer will have time to try.

“If there is only one way to make a contract, mentally place the missing card or cards in your Opponent’s hand of choice, and play the cards as if the missing card or cards are where you want them to be!”



3. Methods For the Development of Additional Tricks Other than Sure Winners:

a) **The Promotion of High-Cards:** The forfeiture of some of one's high card(s), especially when a sequence of them is present, is one of the most certain methods of developing additional tricks when planning Declarer play in many No-Trump contracts. In order to accomplish this, one must consider losing at least one promotional trick to the Opponents as early as possible in the play of the cards, **before** controls are expended in any other of the outside suits.

DUMMY: KQJ10 Here, the Declarer must give up one trick to the
DECLARER: XXXX Ace in this suit in order to promote three
additional tricks which then become developed.

b) **The Development of Tricks Through Length:** One can statistically conclude (in all but the most unusual of circumstances) that the division of missing cards within any suit is distributed amongst the Opponents as follows:

(1) If there is an **even number of cards outstanding** in a suit (2, 4, 6) - then the cards tend to be **unevenly divided**. For example, if there are 6 cards held by the opposition, they would probably be divided 4-2 rather than 3-3.

(2) If there is an **odd number of cards outstanding** in a suit (3, 5, 7) - then the cards tend to be **evenly divided**. For example, if there are 5 cards held by the opposition, they would likely be divided 3-2 rather than 4-1.

DUMMY: AXXXX Here, the Declarer must assume a 3-2 split for the
DECLARER: KXX five outstanding trump cards held by the Opponents, and
must give up one trick in order to develop two additional tricks.

c) **The Development of Tricks By Ducking:** Additional tricks, oft times, become available by simply giving up at least one trick to the Opponents. The ducking of tricks can be very useful when trying to establish a long suit. When you have a limited number of winners in the Dummy, it is often necessary to take your losses early in the suit so that you have enough cards left in Declarer's hand to enable you to get to the winners you worked so hard to establish.

DUMMY: AXXXX Holding three cards in one hand and five in the
DECLARER: KXX other, and assuming a 3-2 split in the Opponent's
holdings, Declarer can establish two additional tricks by simply "**ducking**"
once early in the play of that suit.

d) **The Establishment of Additional Tricks by Finessing:** Power can, oft times, be gained for lower-ranking cards by taking advantage of a presumed favorable position of higher-ranking cards held by the Opponents. The process is based upon the idea of leading toward the card, or cards, you hope will take a trick, and that the higher-ranking card(s) missing lie(s) in front of, not behind, the card with which you desire to win the trick. Finessing will, therefore, be successful 50% of the time.

DUMMY: AQJX Declarer can win **three tricks** simply by leading the Ace
DECLARER: XXX and then the Queen in order to promote the Jack and the
Ten, but alternatively, Declarer might make **four tricks** by finessing
successfully against the King, three times.