BRIDGE TECHNIQUE SERIES

PLANNING THE PLAY IN NOTRUMP



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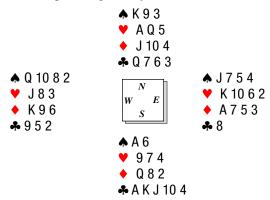
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CONTENTS

Chapter 1 How to Plan a Notrump Contract Quiz	5 7
Chapter 2 The Hold-up and Subsequent Play The hold-up with one stopper The hold-up with one and half stoppers The hold-up with two stoppers Key points Quiz	9 9 13 15 17 19
Chapter 3 Which Suit Should I Attack? Knocking out the entry to the danger hand Reading the opening lead Which is the better chance? Leading through a defender's honor Key points Quiz	21 21 24 25 27 28 29
Chapter 4 Combining Chances Combining two finesses Avoiding a premature guess Key points Quiz	31 35 36 38 39
Chapter 5 Communications Play Scoring all your winners Winning with a higher card than is necessary Winning the opening lead in the right hand Key points Quiz	41 43 45 46 49 50
Chapter 6 Running the Long Suit Exerting genuine pressure Key points Quiz	53 54 58 59

How to Plan a Notrump Contract

You reach 3NT, the opening lead is made, and with a nervous look across the table partner lays down the dummy. What next? Before playing a card from the dummy, you should make a general plan for the contract. The first step is to count how many top tricks you have. You must then determine the safest way to establish the extra tricks you need. Let's see an example straight away.



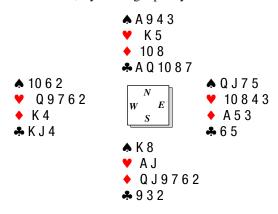
West leads a fourth-best \$\Delta 2\$ against 3NT. You can count eight top tricks: two spades, one heart, no diamonds and five clubs. A successful heart finesse would give you a ninth trick. If the finesse lost, though, the defenders would clear the spade suit and you would surely go down. How about establishing a ninth trick in diamonds? West's \$\Delta 2\$ lead indicates that the spades are 4-4. By knocking out the ace and king of dia-

monds, you will set up a ninth trick for yourself, at the same time restricting the defenders to just two spades and two top diamonds.

Is the line 100% (assuming spades are 4-4)? Not quite. Suppose West held both missing diamond honors and East held the ♥ K. West could win the first diamond and switch to hearts. You would rise with dummy's ace of hearts and play a second diamond. This is better than finessing, because if East wins the second diamond trick, he cannot hurt you in hearts. However, West could win the next diamond and lead a heart through the queen to beat you. But this would need three cards to be wrong — both diamonds and the ♥ K. If the contract went down on this line, a simple heart finesse would have failed too.

That is our plan for the contract, then — we will play on diamonds. If West wins the first round of diamonds and switches to a heart, we will rise with dummy's ace. Dummy's remaining ♥ Q5 will then act as a stopper if East holds the other diamond honor.

On the next deal, try making a plan yourself.



West leads the ♥ 6 against 3NT. Plan the play.

You have only five tricks on top. The diamond suit can provide four more, once you have knocked out the ace and king. Unfortunately, you will not have time to do that. The defenders will clear the heart suit when you knock out their first diamond stopper, then cash at least three hearts when you knock out the second stopper. The only other possibility is to play on clubs, hoping to score five tricks in the suit. You will need West to hold both the missing honors. Only a 24% chance, yes, but better than the near-zero chance of playing on diamonds.