

**TEST YOUR
BRIDGE TECHNIQUE**

PLANNING NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

David Bird • Tim Bourke

♠ 8 5
♥ 8 5 3
♦ J 10 8 3
♣ A Q 10 4

♠ 4 led

♠ K J 3
♥ A K Q
♦ A Q 9 2
♣ J 9 6

HOW TO PLAN A NOTRUMP CONTRACT

A notrump contract often develops into a race between the two sides. In 3NT, for example, declarer must attempt to score nine tricks before the defenders can score five. To give yourself the best chance of winning the race, as declarer, you should always make a plan before embarking on the play. The general idea, in a notrump contract, is to count your top tricks and then determine the safest way to create the extra tricks that you need.

Usually your plan will be to develop the longest suit between your hand and the dummy. Not always, though. Look at this deal:

	♠ 7 4										
	♥ 10 2										
	♦ A K 8 3										
	♣ Q 9 7 6 3										
♠ Q 10 8 5 2	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 9 6 3
	N										
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♥ 8 7 4 3		♥ K J 6 5									
♦ 6 2		♦ 9 7 5									
♣ K 5		♣ A 2									
	♠ A K										
	♥ A Q 9										
	♦ Q J 10 4										
	♣ J 10 8 4										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♠5 against 3NT and you win East's ♠J with the ♠K. What is your plan?

You have seven tricks on top and can establish three extra tricks in clubs by knocking out the ace and king. It's a possible plan but your next duty is to visualize how the play will develop. What will happen

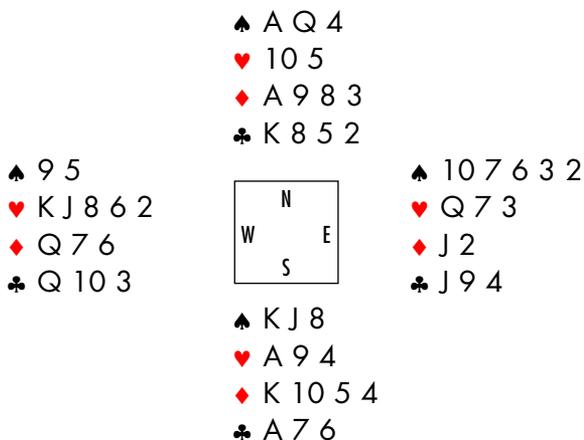
when you play a round of clubs? One of the defenders will win and clear the spades. When you play a second round of clubs, the defenders will take their second stopper in the suit and cash at least three spades to beat the contract. You will lose the race. The defenders will score five tricks before you have your nine.

Instead you should take a double finesse in hearts. After winning the spade lead, you cross to the $\heartsuit A$ and play a heart to the nine. Since East has both the missing honors, your $\heartsuit 9$ will win. You then return to dummy with the $\heartsuit K$ and play a heart to the queen. The two extra heart tricks have bumped your total to nine and the game is made.

Of course it was lucky to find East with both the $\heartsuit K$ and the $\heartsuit J$. But it was better to have a one-in-four chance of making the contract than no chance at all!

That's one part of making a plan, then. You have to choose which suit is most likely to yield, in good time, the extra tricks that you need. Another decision you frequently have to make is whether to hold up in the suit that has been led. When you hold A-x-x in the suit that has been led, it will often be right to hold up your ace until the third round. Since one of the defenders is then likely to be void in the suit, you can afford to let him gain the lead.

Here is a straightforward example of holding up an ace:



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

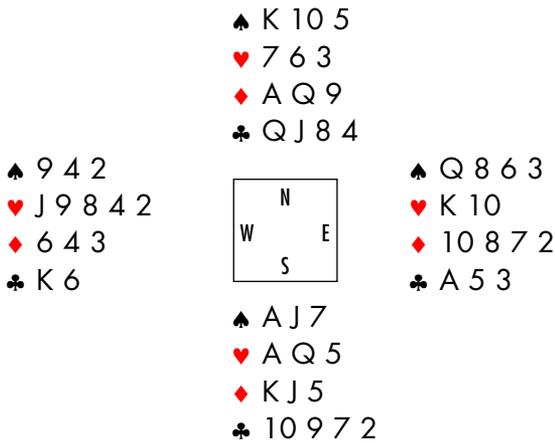
West leads the ♥6 and East produces the ♥Q. What is your plan?

You have eight top tricks and will need one more to give you the game. Suppose you win the first or second round of hearts with your ace. You can set up a ninth trick in diamonds (or even in clubs) but it will do you no good. The defenders will score one trick in the minor that you establish and another four tricks in hearts. They will win the race.

Anyone beyond the beginner stage would realize that it is right to hold up the ♥A for two rounds. By doing this you remove East's cards in the suit. He then becomes the 'safe hand' because he will have no heart left to play (unless hearts were 4-4 and pose no problem anyway). That is not the end of the matter, however. You must now develop an extra trick in one of the minors without allowing West, who is the 'danger hand', to gain the lead. Here you should lead a low diamond from the South hand, covering West's card. East wins with the ♦J but has no heart to play, so you make the contract. (By leading low on the first round, instead of playing king and another diamond, you will succeed even when East started with ♦Q-J-x-x).

Note that you would go down if, after ducking the ♥A for two rounds, you played ace, king and another diamond. West (the danger hand) would win the third round of diamonds and cash two heart winners. The correct technique was to 'duck into the safe hand'.

Sometimes you have to hold up even when you have a double stopper in the suit that has been led. This may happen when you have two enemy stoppers to knock out. Look at this deal:



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♥4 and East plays the ♥K. What is your plan? You have seven top tricks, counting two in hearts. A successful finesse in spades, one way or the other, will not help much because it will raise your total only to eight tricks. To make nine tricks you will have to develop the clubs, which involves knocking out both the defenders' high cards in the suit.

Suppose you win East's ♥K with the ♥A on the first round and play a club. Whether you lead clubs from your own hand or the dummy, East will win the first round with the ace and clear the heart suit. A hold-up on the second round will be ineffective. When West subsequently gains the lead in clubs, he will have two hearts to cash and you will go down one.

On this type of deal you must hold up on the first round, allowing East's ♥K to win. You win the second round of hearts, exhausting East of his cards in the suit, and can now safely play clubs. When East takes his club honor he will have no heart to play. The contract is yours.

Sometimes your decision on whether to hold up depends on how secure your protection is in other suits. You may also have to judge whether the suit that has been led is breaking 4-4 (when a hold-up is unnecessary) or 5-3 (when you may have to hold up and hope that the defenders do not switch to another weakly protected suit).

This deal illustrates the situation:

	♠ J 6										
	♥ A 6 3										
	♦ Q 10 9 2										
	♣ Q J 8 4										
♠ K 10 7 2	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 9 5 4
	N										
W		E									
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♦ 7 6 4		♦ A 8 3									
♣ 9 6 3		♣ 10 5									
	♠ A 8 3										
	♥ 10 7 2										
	♦ K J 5										
	♣ A K 7 2										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♠2 and you try your luck with dummy's ♠J. 'No dice, son,' and East covers with the ♠Q. How would you play the contract?

With only six tricks on top, you will have to knock out the ♦A to bring your total to nine. When you concede a trick in diamonds, the defenders would beat the contract if they could score four spade tricks. It may therefore seem, at first glance, that you should hold up the ♠A for two rounds, to break the link between the defenders.

There is a big snag with taking this precaution. Suppose for a moment that the spades are divided 5-3. To break the defenders' communications you would have to hold up the ♠A for two rounds. This would do you no good anyway! If the ♦A lay in the same hand as the short spade holding, it would be clear to the defenders that they must switch to hearts at Trick 3. You would then lose two spades, at least two hearts and the ♦A.

We have not yet mentioned the most important piece of evidence before you. West led the *two* of spades! If this is a true fourth-best card, he must hold four spades. (Since the two is his fourth-best spade, he cannot have a fifth-best spade.) So, you know that the spade suit is

breaking 4-4. There is no need whatsoever to risk a heart switch by holding up the ♠A for a round or two. Win immediately and knock out the ♦A.

We have looked briefly at some of the main factors in planning a notrump contract. The subject is covered in much greater detail in Book 7 of the *Bridge Technique* series: *Planning the Play in Notrump*. You can now test your own skill in this area on thirty-six problems. These will include examples of the techniques we have just seen: choosing which suit to play, deciding whether to hold up and establishing your extra tricks without allowing the ‘danger hand’ on lead. Many other important techniques will be involved. Don’t worry if you fail to spot the solution first time round. The winning line of play will be clearly explained in the solution.

The time has come for you to step onto the stage and test your ability. Good luck! (No one is watching.)

PLANNING IN NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Problem 1

[To Solution](#)

♠ 8 5
 ♥ 8 5 3
 ♦ J 10 8 3
 ♣ A Q 10 4

♠ 4 led

♠ K J 3
 ♥ A K Q
 ♦ A Q 9 2
 ♣ J 9 6

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

West leads the ♠4 against 3NT and East plays the ♠Q. What is your plan?

Problem 2

[To Solution](#)

♠ A K 3
 ♥ K 10 6 4
 ♦ A J 5 2
 ♣ K 7

♥ 3 led

♠ 8 5 4
 ♥ A 7
 ♦ 9 6 3
 ♣ A 8 6 5 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♦	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

West leads the ♥3 against 3NT. What is your plan?

Problem 3

[To Solution](#)

♠ 5 led

♠ A
 ♥ A J 5 2
 ♦ J 5 4 2
 ♣ Q 10 6 2

♠ K 4 3
 ♥ K 10
 ♦ K Q 10 8
 ♣ J 9 5 3

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♠	pass
pass	dbl	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

How would you play 3NT when West leads the ♠5?

Problem 4

[To Solution](#)

♠ 9 led

♠ 7 2
 ♥ 5 4
 ♦ K 9 7 5
 ♣ A K J 10 2

♠ A Q 3
 ♥ A Q 6
 ♦ A Q 6
 ♣ Q 7 6 5

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		2♠*	3NT
pass	6NT	all pass	

West leads the ♠9, East overtaking with the ♠10 as you win with the ♠Q. If you play all the clubs, West will throw one spade and two hearts; East will throw three spades. When you play the ace and queen of diamonds, the ♦4 and ♦10 will appear from East. What now?

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 1

♠ A 10 7 4 2 ♥ 10 4 2 ♦ 7 5 ♣ 8 7 2	♠ 8 5 ♥ 8 5 3 ♦ J 10 8 3 ♣ A Q 10 4	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ Q 9 6 ♥ J 9 7 6 ♦ K 6 4 ♣ K 5 3
N						
W E						
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♠ K J 3 ♥ A K Q ♦ A Q 9 2 ♣ J 9 6						

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	2NT

How will you plan 3NT when West leads the ♠4 to his partner's queen?

If spades were 6-2 it would sometimes be right to hold up the spade king, breaking the communication between the defenders. However, it is clear from West's fourth-best lead of the ♠4 that he can hold no more than five spades. (The ♠4 is his fourth-best card in the suit and only one lower spot card is out.) The best idea is to win the first spade with the king. Your remaining ♠J-3 will then act as a stopper in the suit provided East does not gain the lead. What next?

Suppose you take an immediate club finesse. This will be 'into the danger hand'. If the finesse loses, East will return a spade and you will go down. A better idea is to cross to the ♣A and to run the ♦J. A diamond finesse will be 'into the safe hand'. You will go down only if two cards are both badly placed — the ♦K and the ♣K. Here the diamond finesse will win and you will have nine tricks. If instead the diamond finesse had lost, you would still succeed when West also held the ♣K. If he played a second round of spades when he was in with the ♦K, the ♠J would be your ninth trick. If, instead, he exited passively in one of the red suits, you would be able to take the club finesse.

<p>♠ J 10 ♥ J 8 5 3 2 ♦ 8 7 4 ♣ Q 10 3</p>	<p>♠ A K 3 ♥ K 10 6 4 ♦ A J 5 2 ♣ K 7</p>	<p>♠ Q 9 7 6 2 ♥ Q 9 ♦ K Q 10 ♣ J 9 4</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> <p>♠ 8 5 4 ♥ A 7 ♦ 9 6 3 ♣ A 8 6 5 2</p>		N		W		E		S	
	N											
W		E										
	S											

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♦	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

West leads the ♥3 against 3NT. You have 26 points between the two hands and every suit under good control. Even so, the contract is not an especially good one. What is your best plan?

You have seven tricks on top and must develop two more. You have some chance of creating one extra trick in the heart suit. If West has led from ♥Q-J-x-x-x, for example, you could score an extra trick by inserting dummy's ♥10 at Trick 1. If instead West has led from ♥Q-9-8-x-x or ♥J-9-8-x-x, you could generate an extra trick by playing low from dummy. East would have to play the jack or queen, to prevent your ♥7 from winning, and you could then win with the ace and finesse dummy's ♥10. Still, one extra trick is not much good. You need two extra tricks.

The best chance of making the contract is to play for a 3-3 club break. Since you will need an entry to your hand to enjoy the long clubs, you should win the first trick with dummy's ♥K. You then play

king, ace and another club, pleased to see the suit breaking 3-3. You win the return and cross to the ♥A to score the two established clubs.

Many a contract is lost by playing incorrectly to the first trick. That's why it is important to make a plan the moment that dummy goes down (whether you're a novice or a know-it-all expert!)

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TEST YOUR NOTRUMP PLAY!

This book is designed to accompany *Planning the Play in Notrump*, Book 7 in the *Bridge Technique* series.

This is a book of problems that will test your knowledge of the basic principles of playing notrump contracts, and the tactics available for developing extra tricks. The topics covered include hold-up plays, deciding which suit to attack, reading the opening lead, keeping the danger hand off play, combining your chances and exerting pressure on your opponents.

The basic principles of notrump play are straightforward, but applying them is not always so easy. Rest assured that some serious challenges await you in these pages!

DAVID BIRD has written more than fifty previous books,



including the award-winning *Bridge Technique* series (with Marc Smith). A regular contributor to many bridge magazines, he lives near Southampton, England.



TIM BOURKE is a world-renowned collector of interesting bridge hands, whose previous books include *Countdown to Winning Bridge* (with Marc Smith) and *Saints & Sinners* (with David Bird). He lives in Canberra, Australia.



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