

TEST YOUR
BRIDGE TECHNIQUE

DEFENDING NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

David Bird • Tim Bourke

♠ J 5
♥ 7 2
♦ A K Q 10 6 4
♣ A Q 5

♠ 9 led



♠ A Q 10 8 3 2
♥ A Q 4
♦ 8 5
♣ 8 3

HOW TO PLAN THE DEFENSE AGAINST NOTRUMP CONTRACTS

Were you hoping to buy a book that would show you how easy defense against notrump contracts can be? If you read our earlier book on defending suit contracts, probably not. If you're new to this, we're sorry but you're in for a challenge.

There are some reasonable general guidelines, taught to beginners, but even these have many exceptions. When you are past the novice stage you have to do two things when on defense: you must count and you must think. You count, to gather evidence, and must then tax the grey matter to determine the best chance of defeating the contract.

Let's look at counting first. What do you count? This is the list:

High-card points. If declarer has indicated his point-count range during the auction (by bidding or passing), you keep a count on the points he shows and deduce what remaining cards he may hold. You must also calculate how many points your partner has. There is no future in a defense that requires partner to have the ♦A if he cannot hold more than 2 points!

Shape. As soon as possible, you must try to gain a 'count of the hand'. In other words, you must discover how many cards each player holds in each suit. The more you play bridge, the more you will appreciate how important this is.

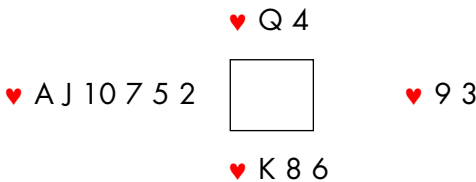
Tricks. You count how many certain tricks declarer has, and also how many the defenders have. For example, if you can count three certain tricks for the defenders, you will need to find two more to beat 3NT.

Before we look at any sample deals, we must consider the matter of how you and your partner should signal to each other in defense. It is widely agreed that when declarer is playing a suit, the defenders do best to signal their ‘count’ in the suit. This is done by following with a high spot card when you hold an even number of cards in a suit, or with a low spot card when you hold an odd number of cards.

How should you signal if your partner leads a suit and you do not have to play your highest card in an attempt to win the trick? This is more contentious. Attitude signals (high to encourage, low to discourage) are useful in some situations. Count signals work better in others. As the years go by, more and more players prefer to use count signals, even when partner has led to the trick. Many US experts use this method; in Europe it has become almost universal. In the 2004 Generali World Individual Championship, an event in which everyone had to play the same methods, all the players used count signals instead of attitude.

Even if you are a committed disciple of attitude signals, it makes good sense to show count when your negative attitude to the lead is obvious. It is a waste of your resources to tell partner the same message twice over, with a discouraging signal. Give him a count on the suit instead!

This is a typical situation:



You lead the ♥J and dummy’s ♥Q wins. Your partner signals count with the ♥9. Knowing that declarer’s king is not yet bare there will be no temptation for you to lay down the ace when you gain the lead. Instead you will seek an entry to partner’s hand. In contrast, if partner

contributes the ♥3, you will know that declarer started with either a doubleton king or Kxxx; with luck, the bidding will have given you some help in deciding which.

Even when a count signal makes little difference to the subsequent play in that particular suit, it can still perform a valuable role. It can assist the defenders in building a complete ‘count of the hand’.

When are attitude signals most useful? One situation is when you lead a queen from Q-J-10 and declarer wins with the ace in one hand or the other. You would like partner to play a high card to show you that he holds the king.

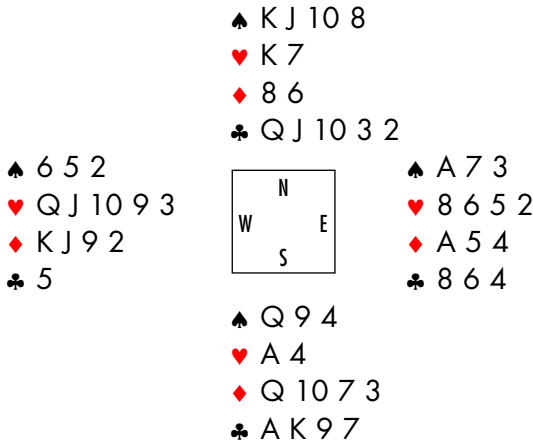
There is a scheme of opening leads popular in Europe that attempts to combine the best of both count and attitude signals when the defenders lead to a trick. It is known as ‘ace (and queen) for attitude, king for count’. What does this mean? When you lead an ace or a queen, partner will give you an attitude signal. When instead you lead a king, partner will give you a count signal. Against a notrump contract, the lead of a king has a further meaning. It asks partner to unblock any honor he may hold; otherwise, to give a count signal¹.

Since we need to establish some signaling system as standard throughout the book, we will assume that the defenders play ‘ace (and queen) for attitude, king for count’.

When a low card is led and the card in dummy wins, the defender in third seat will again give a count signal. If you prefer to use other signaling methods in real life, that’s fine by us. Look back at each problem and decide if you could have defended the hand as well, using the methods that you prefer.

So much for signals that help in counting shape. Let’s see a full deal where your defense should be guided by counting points and tricks.

1. In North America, it is standard to assign a similar meaning to the lead of an ace against notrump. It is also standard in N. America that the lead of a queen against notrump asks partner to drop the jack or otherwise to give count. This is useful when you are leading from KQ109x, for example, and need to know whether declarer has the jack.



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2♣	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	2♦

You are sitting East and your partner leads the ♥Q against 3NT. Declarer wins with the ♥A and leads a spade to the jack. How will you defend?

Many defenders would give the matter little thought. They would win with the ♠A and clear partner's heart suit. Declarer would then score three spades, two hearts and five clubs for an overtrick.

It should come as no surprise to East that the clubs are ready to run. If declarer had been missing a big club he might well have played on that suit first. Whether or not declarer is missing the ♠Q, he will have his game with five clubs, two hearts and at least two spade tricks. So, the only chance for the defense is to switch to diamonds. In case two diamond leads have to be made through the South hand, East should switch to a low diamond. West will cover South's card and return to East's ♦A for a lead through South's last two cards in the suit. Four diamond tricks will put the contract down one. All that is needed to beat the contract is a willingness to count declarer's tricks.

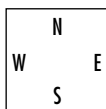
Could West hold the necessary four diamonds headed by the king-jack (and one other middle card)? Yes, if South holds a minimum 15 points for his 15-17 point 1NT, there is room for West to hold the ♦K-J in addition to the ♥Q-J that he has already indicated.

Well, we have reached the end of our brief introductory section on how you should defend against notrump contracts. Count, think and stay awake! What could be easier than defending perfectly? Almost everything...

Problem 1 [To Solution](#)

♠ J 5
 ♥ 7 2
 ♦ A K Q 10 6 4
 ♣ A Q 5

Lead: ♠ 9



♠ A Q 10 8 3 2
 ♥ A Q 4
 ♦ 8 5
 ♣ 8 3

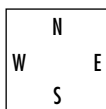
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	1♦ 3NT	1♠ all pass	1NT

You are sitting East and West leads the ♠ 9 against South's 3NT. Declarer plays the ♠ 5 from dummy. What is your plan for the defense?

Problem 2 [To Solution](#)

♠ A 9
 ♥ K 10 3
 ♦ J 6 4
 ♣ A 10 9 6 4

Lead: ♦ 8



♠ K 10 8 4 2
 ♥ 8 5 2
 ♦ A 10 3
 ♣ K 2

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♦ 8 (he would lead second-best from 9-8-2 or 9-8-7-2) and declarer plays low from the dummy. How will you defend in the East seat?

Problem 3

[To Solution](#)



Lead: \heartsuit 5

\spadesuit Q 8 7 3

\heartsuit J 10 5

\diamondsuit Q J 4

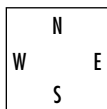
\clubsuit A 8 4

\spadesuit 10 5

\heartsuit A Q 6

\diamondsuit K 10 7 5 3

\clubsuit 10 9 5



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You lead the \heartsuit 5. Dummy's queen wins and your partner follows with the \heartsuit 2. Now the \heartsuit J is led from dummy, partner playing the \heartsuit 3 and declarer the \heartsuit 2. How will you defend?

Problem 4

[To Solution](#)



Lead: \heartsuit 7

\spadesuit 10 6 2

\heartsuit 9 5

\diamondsuit 9 8 4 2

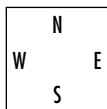
\clubsuit J 10 9 5

\spadesuit J 9 5

\heartsuit A 10 8 7 3 2

\diamondsuit Q 10 7

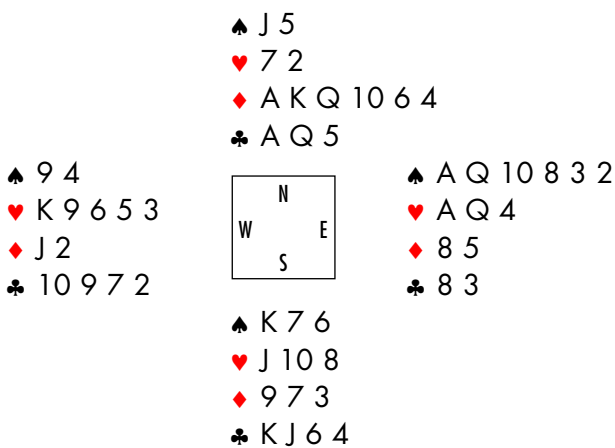
\clubsuit 3



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	2 \heartsuit	pass	2 \clubsuit
all pass			3NT

You lead the \heartsuit 7 to East's \heartsuit J and South's \heartsuit K. Declarer plays the \diamondsuit A, to which your partner follows with the \diamondsuit 3. Declarer then cashes the \diamondsuit K. What is your plan for the defense?

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 1



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

You are sitting East and partner leads the ♠9 against 3NT, declarer playing the ♠5 from dummy. How will you defend?

Even if partner's opening lead is a singleton, you can be sure of setting up your spade suit by overtaking with the ♠10 and driving out South's ♠K. Will this be enough to defeat the contract, though? Declarer will score one trick with the ♠K and is virtually certain to add at least eight more tricks in the minors. If South does not hold the ♣K he will be able to take a club finesse when he gains the lead in spades.

So, your magnificent spade suit does not seem up to the job when it comes to defeating the contract. A better idea is to win with the ♠A and switch to the ace and queen of hearts, hoping that partner's hearts are good enough to produce at least four tricks in the suit. When the cards lie as in the diagram, partner will signal encouragement on your ♥A switch. You will continue with queen and another heart, putting the contract down two.

SOLUTION TO PROBLEM 2

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

West leads the ♦8 (second-best card from a poor suit) and declarer plays low from the dummy. How will you defend as East?

There is no problem reading the opening lead. Looking at the diamond suit in isolation, the ♦8 might be a fourth-best card from ♦K-Q-9-8-2. If West held as many as 5 points, though, South would be left with only 13, not enough for his 15-17 point 1NT. So, you can tell that the ♦8 is a second-best card from a weak suit and that declarer holds a double stopper in diamonds. How should you take advantage of this knowledge?

Suppose you duck the opening lead or win with the ♦A and continue the suit. Declarer will take a losing club finesse and score at least ten tricks. Instead you must win the first trick and attempt to set up some spade tricks.

Switching to a low spade may not be good enough. If South plays low, your partner will have to play the ♠Q and declarer's ♠J will become a second stopper in the suit. Since your ♠10-8 'surround' the ♠9 in dummy, the correct card to return is the ♠10. Declarer has no counter to this. With only eight top tricks at his disposal he will have to take the club finesse. When you win with the ♣K, you can score the remainder of the spade suit to beat the game.

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TEST YOUR DEFENSIVE PLAY!

This book is designed to accompany *Planning in Defense*, Book 11 in the *Bridge Technique* series.

Why should you want to polish your defensive technique? There are two very good reasons. The first is that it is the hardest aspect of the game. Even expert defenders have to work on every deal. The more practice you have, the better you will get. The second reason is that in every bridge session you play, you will be a defender roughly twice as often as you will be declarer. So the rewards to be gained are considerable.

The basic principles of defensive 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.



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