

Cardiff Bridge Tutors

How to improve Declarer play

Part 2 – Strategies in No Trump Contracts

Becoming a SWOT.

In Part 1 of this series we looked at planning using the SWOT technique.

The remaining booklets in the How to improve Declarer play assume that you have mastered this technique.

Remember to plan:-

S trengths	Your top winners
W eaknesses	The number of tricks you are short; weak suits
O pportunities	Long suits, establishing winners, discarding losers
T hreats	What might go wrong (bad splits, "danger" hands, blocking)

Plan in this way for both Trump and No Trump contracts.

Strategies.

We will look at a series of strategies that you can use in making your plan for No Trump contracts.

The list is in an order of priority i.e. use probability before using a finesse.

- 1. Cashing top winners**
- 2. Setting up extra winners**
- 3. Turning small card into winners**
- 4. Probable distribution of cards**
- 5. Keeping entries and preventing blocks**
- 6. When to give up the lead**
- 7. Using finesses**
- 8. Understanding the opening lead**
- 9. Using the Rule of Eleven**
- 10. Looking for signs**
- 11. Holding up**
- 12. Danger hands**

Cashing top winners

In a perfect world the number of top winners is at least equal to the number of tricks you need for your contract. However, if this is the case then everyone in the room should make the contract and to steal a top you still need to look for ways to make more tricks.

However, this is an unlikely event and you will probably have to work out how to make the tricks that you are short.

Remember: Plan before you play, make sure that you take your winners in the correct sequence and have entries.



Setting up extra winners

First look to see if you can establish extra winners.

These will be cards that don't start life as winners but become winners after other cards fall e.g.

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	K 7 6	♠	Q J 3 2
♥	A K 8 6	♥	10 3 2
♦	6 4 2	♦	A K 3
♣	A 6 4	♣	7 5 3

The bidding went:

West	North	East	South
1NT	All Pass		

North has led the Q♦

Strengths 5 top winners

Weaknesses 2 needed

Opportunities Establish the ♠s by driving out the A♠

Threats **Must establish extra winners before cashing top winners**

Plan

Take the Q♦ with the K♦.

Lead the 2♠ towards your K♠.

If the A♠ is played, then when you win the lead (the very next card!) then take your winning ♠s and afterwards your other top winners.



Turning small card into winners

When you have more cards in a suit than the opposition, then even your small cards become winners.

e.g.

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	A K 8 6 2	♠	Q J 5 3

East and West have 9 cards in ♠s.

North/South have the other 4.

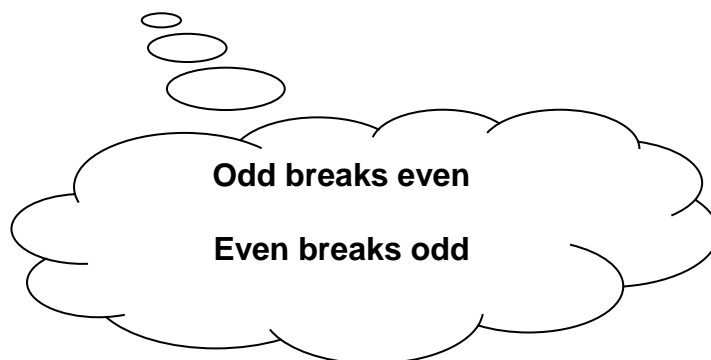
Even with the worst possible distribution if the 4 top honours are played **ending in West's hand** then the 2♠ becomes a winner!

This is an extreme example and life isn't that simple but if we start to consider the probable distribution of cards in the opponent's hands then we can still turn small card into winners.

Probable distribution of cards

There are tables of the probability of the distribution of cards, but we can adopt a very simple rule that works most of the time.

- If your opponents hold an even number of cards they will break unevenly
- If they hold an odd number of cards they will break as evenly as possible



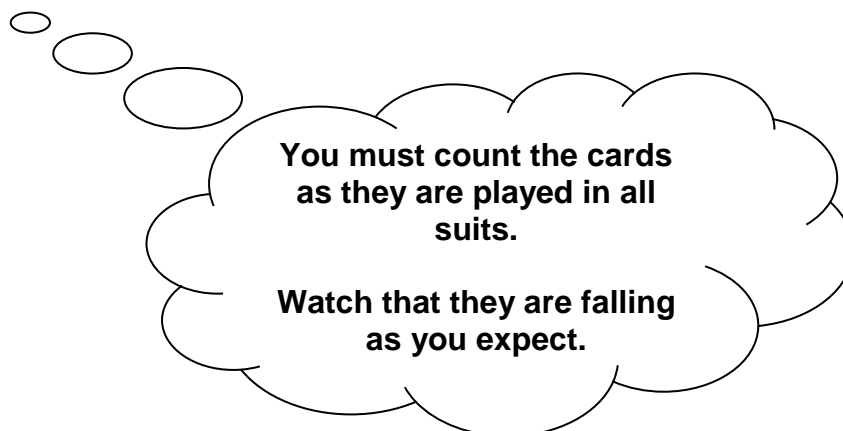
Let's look at some examples.

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	A K 8 6 2	♠	Q J 5 3

Here the opposition hold an even number of cards (4) and so the most probable distribution is Odd. So, 4-0 or 3-1 is more likely than 2-2.

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	A K 8 6	♠	Q J 5 3

Here the opposition hold an odd number of cards (5) and so the most probable distribution is even. So, 3-2 is more likely than 5-0 or 4-1.



More examples in using Probability.

West	East	Possible Extra tricks?	How to play
♠ A K 5 3	♠ 6 4	No - The Ace and King are your only winners	Hold on to your top winners, try to establish another suit
♠ A K Q 3	♠ 6 4 2	Unlikely – opponents hold 6 cards and will split 4-2. Only if they split 3-3 can you make an extra trick	Don't cash this suit too early. Watch to see if an opponent discards ♠s changing the odds in your favour.
♥ A K 10 9	♥ J 8 6 4 2	Possibly – opponent's hold 4 cards and the distribution is likely to be 3-1	Play for the drop! If the Q♥ is the singleton you win handsomely. If they split 2-2 you win. Even if it takes three rounds to draw the Q♥ you still have winners provided that you have an entry to the long hand!

Keeping entries and preventing blocks

We check this when we calculate our top winners but sometimes we must take a chance.

Look at these hands.

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	A Q	♠	K J 10 4 2
♥	A K 8 6 4	♥	9 7
♦	6 4 2	♦	A 3
♣	A 6 4	♣	9 7 5 3

The bidding went:

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

North has led the Q♦

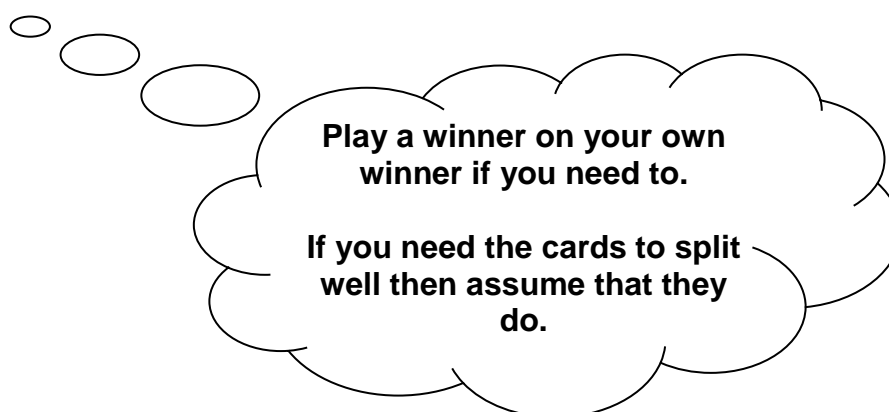
Any other lead and it would be all over but there is still a chance.

The opponents have 6 ♠s and they are likely to split 4-2 (5-1 or 6-0) so unless the worst happens you can still establish your ♠s

Take with the A♦ and play 2♠ to take with the A♠.

Return the Q♠ and overtake with the K♠

Watch that both opponents follow and if so you will make your ♠ tricks



When to give up the lead.

The short answer to this question is **give up the lead early, providing that you can win it back and in the right hand.**

It is a scary thing to have to do but we will look at how we might spot a **Danger Hand** and reduce the risk where these exist.

Firstly, let's look at how we can protect ourselves against the opponents' leads after we have given up the lead.

Keep a high card as protection.

This works well if you have this type of holding: -

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	Q 4	♠	J 5 3

Or

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	K 2	♠	5 3

Or

West's hand		East's hand	
♠	K 8 2	♠	5 3

In each case the opponents will be reluctant to lead this suit as they will give you a winner in it.

Using finesses.

A finesse is when you can “sandwich” a high card held by the opposition between one held in Declarer’s hand and one in Dummy.

e.g.

West’s hand		East’s hand	
♠	A 8 6	♠	Q J 5 3

If the K♠ is held by South, then we have sandwiched it between East’s Q♠ and West’s A♠.

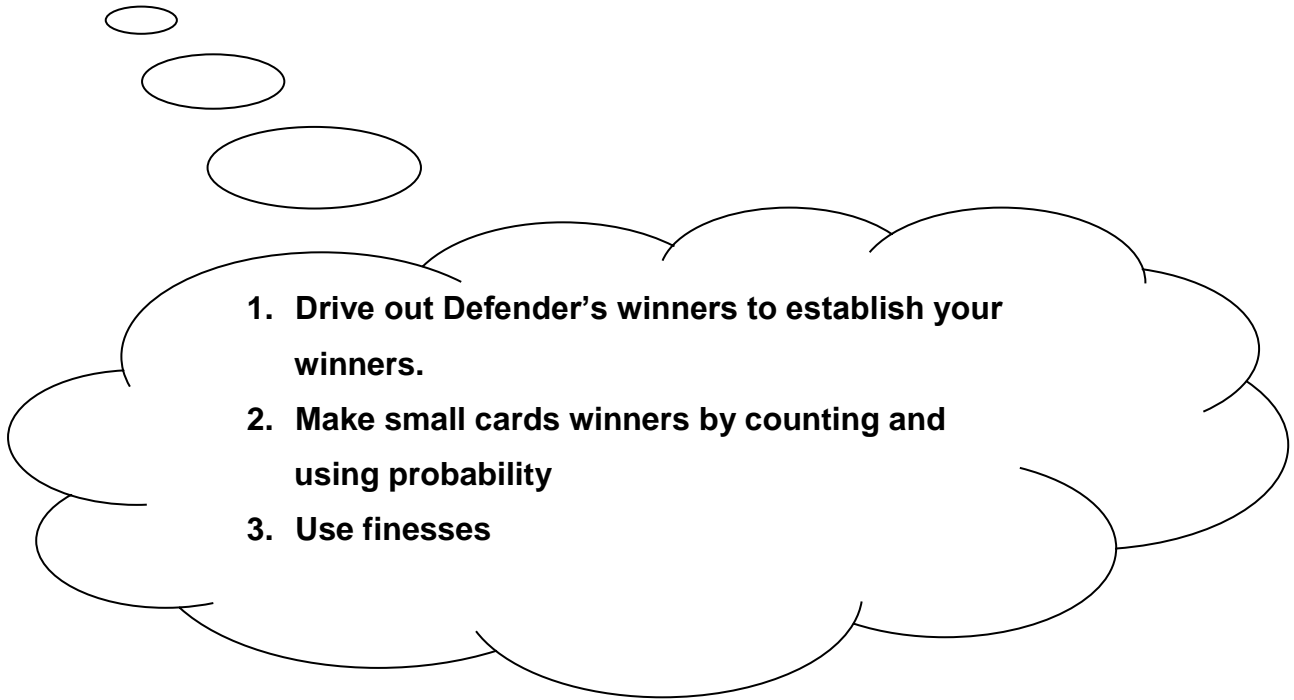
If we lead the Q♠ from East, then South may be reluctant to play it and you may win the trick with the Q♠.

If it wins then play the J♠ and do it again!

“Very good” you say, “but what if North has the K♠?”

And this is the fact - **finesses are a 50-50 chance.**

What have I learnt to make extra tricks?



Understanding the opening lead.

You will need to read the How to make Opening Leads booklet but the most likely leads against a No Trump contract will be:

- Top from a sequence of Honours
- Fourth from an Honour

If the card is high – it is likely to be top from a sequence

If the card is low – it is likely to be fourth from an honour

When we believe that the lead is fourth from an honour we can use the Rule of Eleven.

Using the Rule of Eleven

This is valuable for the partner of the Defender who makes the opening lead.

When we believe that the lead is fourth from an honour we deduct the value of that card from eleven. Let's work an example

- Card led is 7♥
- $11 - 7 = 4$
- There are four cards higher than the 7 in the other three hands (Dummy, you, Declarer)
- Once Dummy is shown we can see two of three hands
- Therefore, we know how many are held in the third hand

Lead	Dummy	You	Declarer
♥ 7	♥ Q 6 5	♥ A J 8	♥ ?

After the lead is made we know that there are four cards higher than the 7 in the other three hands.

Dummy has one the ♥ Q
 You have the ♥ A J
 Declarer must have the ♥ 10 as Partner has lead from an honour and the only one is the K♥!

Another example

Lead	Dummy	You	Declarer
♥ 8	♥ 10 9 2	♥ Q J 3	♥ ?

After the lead is made we know that there are three cards higher than the 3 in the other three hands.

Dummy has two the ♥ 10 9
 You have the ♥ Q J
 Declarer must have the ♥ A or K

Looking for signs

It is unusual for an auction to be uncontested and so we can try to gather information from the bidding.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♥	1♠	Pass
1NT	All Pass		

What can we deduce from the bidding?

- West has 15-16 points.
- East has 6-8 points (with 9 points they would have offered 2NT)
- North has 8-10 points, 5 ♥s with two honours in ♥s (with 11 they would have bid 2♥)
- South has 6-10 points.

If we are going to finesse in ♥s we should try to do it via North.

Holding up.

The most likely suit that the opposition lead will be your weakest (shortest) suit.

Often it is as well to not play your stopper in this suit too early other wise if they win the lead back they will run this suit at you sometimes with expensive results!

There is a rule which you may use to help you with knowing how many times you should delay using your stopper in the opponents" strong suit

- The Rule of Seven

Deduct the number of cards that you and Dummy have from seven. That is how many times you should delay playing your stopper.

Although the adage "**If it is worth ducking once, it is worth ducking twice**" might help too.

Danger hands

This will take a little more thought!

Danger hands are those that you do not want to gain the lead

- Where the hand has winning tricks and its partner is void
- Where the lead would be through a vulnerable holding

<p> ♠ K Q J 4 2 ♥ 7 4 3 ♦ 4 2 ♣ K 7 6 ♠ A 10 9 ♠ 8 7 ♥ A K Q ♥ J 6 2 ♦ Q 9 8 5 ♦ A J 10 7 3 ♣ A Q 2 ♣ 5 4 3 ♠ 6 5 3 ♥ 10 9 8 5 ♦ K 6 ♣ J 10 8 </p>	<p> West(21) North(9) East(6) South(4) 1♦ 1♠ 1NT Pass 3NT All Pass Lead K♠ Here is an example of holding up. Let North make the ♠K and Q. You are reducing the risk of North running that ♠ suit at you by reducing N/S's ability to communicate via that strong suit. If you didn't do this and South won, the lead with the K♦ then the contract would fail. </p>
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As Declarer you can use the Rule of Eleven to help spot Danger hands.