

Notrump Play

Notrump is a “race against time.” While in a suit contract you count your losers, in notrump you should count your winners. There are fast tricks (can be taken at any time) and slow tricks (which can be developed by knocking out the opponent’s cards). In addition, you have to know how many winners the opponents have. If there is no threat of the opponents taking too many tricks, you can leisurely work on your best suit.

Dlr	South	NORTH	A
Vul	E-W	♠ 876	
		♥ A102	
		♦ A8432	
		♣ A3	
	WEST		EAST
	♠ Q1054		♠ 92
	♥ 765		♥ Q9843
	♦ KJ9		♦ 105
	♣ KJ6		♣ 10752
		SOUTH	
		♠ AKJ3	
		♥ KJ	
		♦ Q76	
		♣ Q984	

Against 3NT, West leads a spade and declarer wins the jack. Declarer counts 7 top tricks. If desperate, he could take a heart finesse/guess and hope the ♣K is with East. But, the best trick source is diamonds. There is plenty of time to work on that suit because the defenders are not threatening to run any tricks. The ♦ A followed by more diamonds eventually sets up 9 tricks.

If it is safe to give up the lead, establish your slow tricks. If it is not safe to give up the lead, then you have to find a way to take enough tricks immediately. Often the decision will come down to knocking out an ace or taking a finesse.

NORTH	B
♠ AJ10	
♥ 864	
♦ QJ10	
♣ KQ85	
SOUTH	
♠ Q65	
♥ A2	
♦ K65	
♣ AJ764	

Against 3NT, West leads the ♥3. That implies 4-4 hearts. Accordingly, the opponents have only 3 winners when they get in. Knocking out the diamond ace is the way to go. What if the lead was a higher heart?

Against 1NT, West leads the ♥4. The lead implies a 4-4 split. That gives the opponents 3 heart tricks and 3 more in aces and kings. If you play on clubs and lose a club trick, you give them 7 tricks—down one. Better is to play on diamonds first.

NORTH	C
♠ J84	
♥ 63	
♦ J103	
♣ KJ976	
SOUTH	
♠ KQ6	
♥ A72	
♦ Q976	
♣ A103	

Notrump Play (continued)

At Notrump, there is a “Rule of 7,” but I prefer the rule of thinking.

Rule of 7: Subtract the number of cards you have in the suit led from seven and hold up that number of times. For example, with Axx opposite xx, hold up twice (7-5). With Axx opposite xxx, hold up only one time (7-6). The idea is to exhaust one opponent of the suit led, so that if he gets in, he won’t be able to play the dangerous suit. Some logic is required:

♠ 753
♥ 64
♦ QJ1098
♣ AK7

♠ AK4
♥ A98
♦ K542
♣ 652

D

In 3NT, on the opponent’s heart lead, you can see 5 sure tricks, but need the diamonds. Winning the first (or second) heart will lead to sure defeat if the suit is divided 5-3. Hold up twice.

In 3NT, the ♥4 is led. There are 6 top tricks. Should declarer work on diamonds or spades? If clubs are 3-3, only 2 spade tricks are needed. If clubs aren’t 3-3, declarer has to work on diamonds.

♠ KQ2
♥ A3
♦ 97632
♣ Q42

♠ J43
♥ K7
♦ A1084
♣ AK53

E

♠ 753
♥ K6
♦ J4
♣ KQJ1087

F

♠ KQ109
♥ J1043
♦ 10976
♣ 3



♠ 862
♥ Q7
♦ KQ853
♣ A94

♠ AJ4
♥ A9852
♦ A2
♣ 652

♠ 984
♥ 764
♦ AQ1098
♣ A4

G

♠ K1032
♥ 985
♦ 54
♣ 9765



♠ QJ5
♥ KQJ10
♦ K32
♣ 1083

♠ A76
♥ A32
♦ J76
♣ KQJ2

West leads the ♠K against 3NT.

There is more danger from a diamond shift, so do NOT hold up.

West leads the ♠2 to East’s Jack (3NT).

There is more danger from a heart shift, so do NOT hold up.