

Planning the Defence Against NT

Masterclass, November 2023

- Planning the Lead
- Planning after the Lead

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But watch out: this is a simplification.

You should lead **your side's longest suit**. This does not necessarily correspond to your own long suit.

Remember that the aim is to produce length tricks once the opponents run out of cards in the suit. Unless you and your partner have at least 7, ideally 8, cards in the suit between you, this is unlikely to happen.

Planning the Lead - considerations

- Suit quality

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♠: You have to **lose 2** rounds of the suit before your fourth ♠ becomes a winner.

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You are choosing between ♠ 7654 and ♥ KJ54. Which is more likely to be established more quickly?

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♠: You have to **lose 2** rounds of the suit before your fourth ♠ becomes a winner.

♥: You might **lose 1** round if the Q is on your left but will **lose 0** rounds if it is on your right!

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(b) ♠ K2 ♥ 973 ♦ 53 ♣ JT8642

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In (a), you expect to gain the lead during the hand, which might give you time to establish your ♣ and then cash them.

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(a) ♠ K2 ♥ AQ3 ♦ 53 ♣ JT8642

(b) ♠ K2 ♥ 973 ♦ 53 ♣ JT8642

In (a), you expect to gain the lead during the hand, which might give you time to establish your ♣ and then cash them.

In (b), you may or may not get in once more, at which point your ♣ are unlikely to be winners.

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♠ 852 ♥ 97 ♦ Q642 ♣ T743

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The opponents have not looked for a major fit and you don't have ♥ length... It looks very likely that your partner has ♥ here!

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1NT – 3NT AP

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The opponents have not looked for a major fit and you don't have ♥ length... It looks very likely that your partner has ♥ here!

Lead a ♥ to establish your partner's suit.

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♥ AQ63 ♦ 9852

If the ♥K is on your right, you would like P to play a ♥ through the ♥K.
A passive ♦ might be better instead.

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(b) 1NT – 2NT – ; 3NT AP

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In (a), leading a ♥ and finding P with a key honour might be the only way of taking 3NT down when they often have a surplus of HCP.

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In (a), leading a ♥ and finding P with a key honour might be the only way of taking 3NT down when they often have a surplus of HCP.

In (b), they have shakily bid to 3NT: if you make them work for it, they might end up going down; you don't want to give them their ninth trick!

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and if not,

- what you should switch to.

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Lead: ♠6

Dummy: ♠ J87

You: ♠ QT5

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Declarer wins with the ♠K.

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Lead: ♠6

Dummy: ♠ J87

You: ♠ QT5

Declarer wins with the ♠K.

Cards missing above the ♠6: A, 9. Therefore, the ♠6 cannot be fourth-highest and must be second-highest: ♠ 96xx.

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Lead: ♥4

Dummy: ♥ A73

You: ♥ K96

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Declarer plays the ♥2.

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Can Partner's suit be strong or long enough to take the contract down?

Lead: ♥4

Dummy: ♥ A73

You: ♥ K96

Declarer plays the ♥2.

The ♥4 is the lowest possible spot: as fourth-highest, it must be from precisely 4 cards without a strong sequence: ♥ QJ54 at best.

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Lead: ♥4

Dummy: ♥ A73 ♦ 642

You: (a) ♥ KQ2 ♦ QJT9

(b) ♥ K92 ♦ QJT9

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With P's ♥J, a ♥ seems to be right.

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Playing a ♦ is more appealing when P might hold ♥ J854.

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Dummy: ♣ 753

You: ♣ K4

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If you play the ♣4 on the first round, Declarer can block the suit by winning with the ♣A straightaway!

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- Your holdings

Do you need to unblock in the suit P led?

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Dummy: ♣ 753

You: ♣ K4

If you play the ♣4 on the first round, Declarer can block the suit by winning with the ♣A straightaway!

Unblock the ♣K instead.

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Auction: 1♦ - 1NT AP

Lead: ♥8

Dummy: ♠ 875 ♥ KQJ

You: ♠ Q64 ♥ A743

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Declarer has denied four ♠, so P must have four!

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Declarer has denied four ♠, so P must have four!

Switch to a ♠: maybe P didn't want to lead one from ♠ AJTx.

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Declarer is the one with the ♠ stop: lead a ♠ through him!

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Lead: ♠J

Auction: (a) 1NT – 3NT AP

Dummy: ♠ Q73 ♥ 743 ♦ KQT8 ♣ K72

(b) 1NT AP

Dummy: ♠ Q73 ♥ 743 ♦ QT82 ♣ K72

You: ♠ K65 ♥ KQ852 ♦ AJ4 ♣ J3

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You: ♠ K65 ♥ KQ852 ♦ AJ4 ♣ J3

In (a), P cannot have any more HCP. Hoping for the ♥J is futile and playing ♥ will help Decl. Play a passive ♠.

Planning after the Lead - considerations

- Passive vs. Active Defence

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Auction: (a) 1NT – 3NT AP Dummy: ♠ Q73 ♥ 743 ♦ KQT8 ♣ K72

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You: ♠ K65 ♥ KQ852 ♦ AJ4 ♣ J3

In (a), P cannot have any more HCP. Hoping for the ♥J is futile and playing ♥ will help Decl. Play a passive ♠.

In (b), P could easily have the ♥A or ♥J. Switch to a ♥!

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- Passive vs. Active Defence





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Auction: 1NT – 4NT AP

Lead: 7

(a) Dummy:  Q4  96  AT9  AKQ974

(b) Dummy:  Q4  96  AQJ  AQT874

You:  876  Q74  K532  863

You:  876  Q74  K532  KJ3

Planning after the Lead - considerations





- Passive vs. Active Defence

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Auction: 1NT – 4NT AP





Lead: 

(a) Dummy:    

You:    

(b) Dummy:    

You:    

In (a), the  are running, so Declarer will make the contract easily unless P has a good  holding such as . Switch to the !

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You:  876  Q74  K532  863

(b) Dummy:  Q4  96  AQJ  AQT874

You:  876  Q74  K532  KJ3

In (a), the  are running, so Declarer will make the contract easily unless P has a good  holding such as  AJTx. Switch to the Q!

In (b), the contract might be going down as long as you don't give anything away. Return a passive .

Now, head to the
Planning the Defence Against NT
tournament and try the
practice hands!