

Summary of NT Defence and Third Seat Play

Honour Sequences

A **perfect honour sequence** is made up of three or more consecutive cards of which the highest one is an honour. Examples: AKQ, KQJ, QJT, JT9.

A **near perfect honour sequence** is made up of three or more cards, the highest one being an honour. The top two cards are adjacent and there is a gap of one to the third card. Examples: AKJ, KQT, QJ9, JT8.

An **internal honour sequence** is made up of three or more cards. There is a gap of one, two or three between the highest two cards. The second and third cards are adjacent. The highest card after the gap is an honour. Examples: AQJ, AJT, AT9, KJT, KT9, QT9.

Lead Directing Doubles

Suppose your left hand opponent opened 1NT, your partner passed and your right hand opponent bid 2♦. This was alerted and explained as a transfer to hearts.

This is your hand.

♠ 8 5 2
♥ 7 5
♦ K Q J 9
♣ J 7 3 2

It is not a great hand although your diamonds are good. When it comes to the play you would really like partner to lead a diamond. How do you tell your partner that? You double the 2♦ bid.

A double of an **artificial bid** is known as a **lead directing double**

A lead directing double shows strength in the suit **bid** (rather than **shown**) by the opponents. In the example above, your opponent has bid diamonds but has shown hearts. The player on your left will most likely end up playing the contract either in no trumps or hearts. Either way, a diamond lead will get your side off to a good start.

Which Suit do you Lead against a No Trump Contract?

- If partner has overcalled a suit, lead that suit unless you have a compelling reason to lead something else.
- If your partner made a lead directing double, you will also need a very good reason not to lead the indicated suit.
- It is usually best not to lead a suit that the opponents have bid.
 - If the opponents have bid three suits, lead the fourth suit.
 - If the opponents have shown interest in the majors, prefer a minor suit lead.
 - If the opponents have shown no interest in the major, prefer a major suit lead.
- A suit headed by an honour sequence is usually a good choice for an opening lead.
- Prefer a strong four card suit such as KQJ9 to a wishy-washy five card suit like T8642.
- Against a speculative 3NT based on a long suit, make an attacking lead. That may be an ace or from KQx, the king.
- With a really bad hand, lead from a short suit to try and find partner's strength.
- If none of the above applies, lead from the longest and strongest suit

Which Card do you Lead?

With a Short Suit (Two or Three Cards)

With a **two card suit** it is easy. Lead the higher card.

With a **three card suit**, it is not so easy.

- With **three worthless cards** such as 9 4 3, lead the highest card.
- With **one honour and two low cards** such as Q 4 3, lead the lowest card.
- With **two adjacent honours** such as Q J 3, lead the higher honour.
- With two **non-adjacent honours** such as K J 3, usually lead the lower honour.

With a Long Suit (Four or more Cards)

- If the suit is headed by a **perfect honour sequence** such as K Q J or Q J T, lead the highest card.
- If the suit is headed by a **near perfect honour sequence** such as K Q T or Q J 9, lead the highest card.
- If the suit has an **internal honour sequence** such as A Q J or A J T or K T 9, lead the second highest honour.
- If you have one or more honours but don't have one of the honour sequences, lead your **fourth highest** card in the suit.
- With **four worthless cards**, usually lead the highest card. If the highest card is a nine, lead the second highest instead; the nine is too valuable to waste.

What can we Learn from Partner's Lead?

If partner leads...

A low card

We know that...

Partner has at least one honour in the suit. If partner has more than one honour, the honours will not be adjacent. Partner may have as few as three cards in the suit but usually has four or more.

An honour

If you can see a lot of cards in the suit (in dummy and your own hand), it may well be a doubleton; it may also be the middle card of a suit headed by non-adjacent honours.

Usually, partner has led from an honour sequence and will have the next lower card in the suit. If the lead was from an internal honour sequence, partner has a higher non-adjacent honour.

A high card - not an honour

Partner does not have an honour in the suit.

If it is a suit you have bid

It may well be a short suit.

The Rule of Eleven

If your partner leads a card that you think is the fourth highest, subtract the number on the card from eleven. The answer is the number of cards that can beat the card led - not counting the cards held by partner. If partner leads a four, subtract that from eleven to get seven. Subtract from that the number of cards in your hand and in dummy that can beat the four. The result is the number of cards in declarer's hand that can beat the four.

Third Hand Actions

Third Hand Plays High

This is the default play; third hand plays the highest available card in the suit. There are a great many exceptions to this rule but in the following situations, the rule applies.

- Partner leads a small card and dummy has only small cards.
- Partner leads a small card. Dummy has an honour that you cannot beat and small cards. If a low card is played from dummy, play your highest card. If the honour is played from dummy, play a low card.

Play Low from Equals

Equals are adjacent cards like KQ or JT or 987. When third hand has a choice of playing one of the equal cards, the choice should **always** be the lowest. In these three examples, that would be Q, T and 7.

When Dummy's Honour is Surrounded

If: (1) Dummy has an honour and
(2) Third hand has both a higher honour and a lower honour (or a nine)...

... dummy's honour is **surrounded**. If a low card is played from dummy, third hand should play the lower honour (or nine). The one exception is when the surrounding cards are ace and nine. Then play the ace.

Unblocking and Overtaking

Let's say we are in third seat and partner leads from a long suit. We have a doubleton honour, something like Q5. Irrespective of what card is played from dummy, it is nearly always right to play the honour.

Now suppose partner leads an honour and again, have a doubleton honour. No matter what card is played from dummy and no matter whether our card is higher or lower than partner's, it is still right to play the honour.

Attitude Signals

In third seat, if you are not playing your highest card or making a surround play or unblocking, you should tell partner how much you like the lead by means of an **attitude signal**. A low card means you have no help in the suit led. "No help" usually means no card jack or higher. Play a highish non-honour card if you like the lead and want to continue with that suit.

Competitive Auctions

Let's say partner opens the bidding with one of a suit and the next player overcalls in a suit. What are your options?

1. If you have support for partner's suit

- With 6-9 total points, raise to the two level.
- With 10 or more points, cue bid the opponent's suit.
- With weak hands and four card support, raise to the three level
- With weak hands and five card support, raise to the four level

2. If you have a suit of your own

If possible, make the bid you would have made if there had been no interference. Remember that a two level bid requires a five card suit and at least 10 HCP.

3. If you have a stopper in the opponent's suit

If possible, make a no trump bid.

- With 6-9 HCP, bid 1NT
- With 10-12 HCP, bid 2NT
- With 13 or more HCP, bid 3NT

4. With length in the unbid suits – especially unbid majors

Make a negative double. The suits shown are...

Suits bid so far	Suits shown by the double
Both minors	At least 4-3 in the majors. (Some people prefer 4-4.)
Both majors	At least four cards in each minor
A major and a minor	At least four cards in the other major. The double says nothing about the holding in the other minor.

The points needed for a negative double are:

	Points Needed
After an overcall of 1♦ or 1♥	6 or more HCP
After an overcall of 1♠, 2♣, 2♦ or 2♥	8 or more HCP
After an overcall of 2♠, 3♣, 3♦ or 3♥	10 or more HCP

Special Case

There is one special situation. Suppose partner opens 1♣ or 1♦ and next player overcalls 1♥. Now, double shows **exactly** four spades. Bidding 1♠, shows five or more spades.

Responding to a Negative Double

If the opponent on your right passed (or redoubled):

Combined Points	Action
Minimum	Make a minimum bid.
Invitational	Make a jump bid.
Game values	If there is a clear-cut game, bid it. If not, bid the opponent's suit.

If the opponent on your right bid something (maybe raised the overcall):

Combined Points	Action
Minimum	Make a minimum bid at the one or two level. If that is not possible, pass.
Invitational	Jump or bid at the three level.
Game values	If there is a clear-cut game, bid it. If not, bid the opponent's suit.

5. If None of the Above Apply

With these hands, it is best to pass. Your partner still has a bid and may be able to help.

Reopening Doubles

Let's say you opened the bidding with one of a suit and next player made a suit overcall. Partner passed and so did your right-hand opponent. Why did your partner pass?

There are several reasons for your partner to pass.

- Partner was too weak to bid.
- Partner had no stopper for a no trump bid.
- Partner had the wrong shape for a negative double.
- Partner had length and strength in the opponent's suit.

Despite the pass partner may still have some decent values. What can you do to help?

Firstly, evaluate your hand to include length points. With a five card suit, count one length point; with a six card suit, count two length points and so on. Then total points equals high card points plus length points.

If you have...

18 or 19 HCP and a stopper in their suit

17 or more total points and a six card suit

17 or more total points and a two suited hand (at least 5-4)

None of the above, at least 13 HCP and two or less cards in their suit

None of the above

you should...

Bid no trumps

Rebid your suit

Bid the second suit

Double. This is called a **reopening double**.

Pass

Rule of Nine

The rule of nine applies when your side has roughly half of the high card points and the opponents have reached a suit contract.

- Count the number of trumps in your hand.
- Add the number of trump honours (A, K, Q, J and ten)
- Add the level of the opponent's contract

If the total of this is nine or more, the opponent's contract is likely to fail.

If your partner makes a reopening double and you see from the rule of nine that the opponent's contract will go down, pass. Otherwise, make a natural bid.