

Defending No Trump Contracts – What Does Third Seat Know

Third seat (or third hand) is the partner of the opening leader.

Review of Leads

Good leads are:

- A suit bid by partner, especially if it was an overcall
- A suit not shown by the opponents
- A suit headed by an honour sequence (perfect, near perfect or internal)
- Fourth highest of a suit headed by an honour

What can Third Seat 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 form an honour sequence. Partner may have as few as three cards in the suit but usually has four or more.

If partner has four or more cards in the suit, the card played will be the fourth highest.

An honour

Partner will not have the next higher honour.

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

More likely, 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 highish card - not an honour

Partner does not have an honour in the suit.

If it is a suit you have bid

Very likely, partner has three or less cards in your suit.

Interpreting Partner's Lead (1)

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------|
| | Declarer | |
| | ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ | |
| Third Seat | | Leader |
| ♠ K J 8 7 3 ♥ A 8 ♦ Q 5 4 ♣ 8 4 3 | | ♠ Q ♥ ♦ ♣ |
| | Dummy | |
| | ♠ T 9 2 ♥ K J 5 2 ♦ K 8 ♣ A 7 6 2 | |

West North East South

1♦ Pass 1♥
1♠ 1NT Pass 2NT
3NT Pass Pass Pass

♠Q was led and dummy went down. What does third seat know?

1. Partner has led from a short suit, respecting your overcall.
2. The queen is not part of a sequence and must be either a singleton or a doubleton.
3. North has the ace of spades (partner didn't lead it) and at least two more spades.

4. North-South should have 25 hcp to bid 3NT and third seat has ten hcp. So partner started with no more than five including the queen of spades. Partner cannot have the ace of diamonds and declarer must have it.
5. North has at least four diamonds (opened 1♦)
6. North likely has at one to three hearts (bid 1NT and did not support partner).
7. Partner has at least four hearts.

This is what we know:

| | | |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| | North | |
| | ♠ A x x ... ♥ x ... ♦ A x x x ... ♣ ? | |
| West | | East |
| ♠ K J 8 7 3 ♥ A 8 ♦ Q 5 4 ♣ 8 4 3 | | ♠ Q (x) ♥ x x x x ... ♦ ♣ |
| | South | |
| | ♠ T 9 2 ♥ K J 5 2 ♦ K 8 ♣ A 7 6 2 | |

We expect to beat the contract even if declarer has four spades. We will eventually get the lead with the ace of hearts and continue with spades. After three rounds of spades, dummy's nine and ten will be gone leaving our seven and eight as winners.

Most likely, declarer will duck the first spade and hopefully, partner will continue the suit. Declarer will win and run the diamonds. We hang on to all our spades and the ace of hearts.

Eventually, West will win the ace of hearts and cash the winning spades.

Interpreting Partner's Lead (2)

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------|
| | Declarer | |
| | ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ | |
| Third Seat | | Leader |
| ♠ T 6 4 ♥ A 7 5 3 ♦ 9 7 6 ♣ 7 6 2 | | ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ J |
| | Dummy | |
| | ♠ A 2 ♥ K Q 6 4 ♦ A T 8 5 3 ♣ 8 4 | |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|--------|
| | 1♠ | 2♣ | Double |
| Pass | 2NT | Pass | 3NT |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

♣J was led and dummy went down. What does third seat know?

1. Partner has led from a long suit.
2. Partner has the ten of clubs but not the queen.
3. Partner must have ace or king of clubs for the two level overcall. The lead was from an internal sequence.

4. Partner does not have both ace and king of clubs (did not lead the ace)
5. Declarer has at most three hearts (did not support partner)

This is what we know after declarer wins the first trick with the king of clubs.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | North | |
| | ♠ x x x x x ♥ x ... ♦ ? ♣ K Q x | |
| West | | East |
| ♠ T 6 4 ♥ A 7 5 3 ♦ 9 7 6 ♣ 7 6 2 | | ♠ ? ♥ x x ... ♦ ? ♣ A J T x x |
| | South | |
| | ♠ A 2 ♥ K Q 6 4 ♦ A T 8 5 3 ♣ 8 4 | |

We hope to get the lead with the ace of hearts. Then we can finesse declarer's remaining club honour. That allows partner to make four tricks.

Declarer will probably start off by running the spade suit. We should take the opportunity to make an encouraging heart signal for partner.

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. This is the number of cards higher than the lead card not counting the cards held by partner.

Here's how it works:

| | | |
|------------|---------|---------|
| | Dummy | |
| West | ♠ J 9 6 | East |
| ♠ <u>5</u> | South | ♠ Q T 8 |
| | ♠ ? | |

The ♠5 is led. Dummy goes down. Eleven minus five equals six. There are six cards not in partner's hand that can beat the ♠5.

You can see all six of them! Three are in dummy and three are in your own hand. Hence, declarer does not have a card to beat the five. If the six is played from dummy, play the eight. If the nine is played, play the ten. If the jack is played, play the queen. In every case, you will win the trick.

Interpreting Partner's Lead (3)

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------|
| | Declarer | |
| | ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣ | |
| Third Seat | | Leader |
| ♠ 7 5 3 2 ♥ 9 8 6 ♦ Q 7 ♣ K 9 6 3 | Dummy | ♠ ♥ ♦ 6 ♣ |
| | ♠ A 8 4 ♥ J 3 ♦ 9 2 ♣ A Q J T 4 2 | |

West North East South

1♥ 2♦ 3♣

Pass 3NT All Pass

♦6 was led and dummy went down. What does third seat know?

1. Partner has led from a long suit headed by an honour.
2. For the overcall, partner should have a five card suit with three honours or a six card suit with two honours
3. By the rule of eleven, there are five cards higher than the six not in partner's hand.

4. Since partner has at least two honours, declarer cannot have more than two.
5. Partner has at least nine high card points for the overcall.
6. By bidding no trumps instead of repeating hearts, it looks like declarer has no more than five hearts.
7. Declarer will not have five spades (opened 1♥) so partner has at least two spades.

This is what we know after third seat plays the queen and declarer the ace to the first trick.

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | North | |
| | ♠ x ... ♥ x x x x x ♦ A J x ♣ x ... | |
| West | | East |
| ♠ 7 5 3 2 ♥ 9 8 6 ♦ Q 7 ♣ K 9 6 3 | South | ♠ x x ... ♥ x x x ♦ K T x 6 x x ♣ ? |
| | ♠ A 8 4 ♥ J 3 ♦ 9 2 ♣ A Q J T 4 2 | |

Since declarer did not hold up the ace at trick one, declarer is likely to have the jack as a second honour . So, partner started with six diamonds and declarer three.

The next diamond lead for the defence needs to be by west. Most likely that opportunity will arise when declarer takes the losing club finesse.

If East gets the lead before declarer tackles clubs, East should resist the temptation to continue diamonds. Another diamond lead by East will give declarer an undeserved trick. Instead, East should try and get partner on lead.