

Defending No Trump Contracts – Overtaking and Unblocking

We have already seen situations where Third Seat does best by not playing high. By playing the lower of equals and the use of surround plays, Third Seat could help partner plan the defence.

Now, we consider more techniques that help in establishing and running a suit.

Unblocking

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.

Example 1

After partner's 3♠ bid, your left hand opponent bid 3NT. Partner leads ♠J and dummy has a singleton ace.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has	
♠ J	♠ A	♠ Q 6	What card does Third Seat play?

From the auction, we know that partner has a long spade suit. Your left hand opponent must surely have ♠K to bid 3NT. From the opening lead, partner's suit must be JT9xxxx (top of a perfect sequence) or JT8xxxx (top of a near perfect sequence).

It is essential to play the queen to **unblock** the suit. Here is the full deal.

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

West	North	East	South
3♠	Pass	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♠J and the ace is played from dummy. Suppose East were to play the six.

Declarer has eight tricks and needs a ninth trick from the heart suit. When declarer tackles hearts, West will win and play another spade. East has to play the queen and an astute declarer will allow it to win.

East has no more spades so what is East to do? East may play a heart to partner's ace. If East plays anything else, declarer will win and return another heart. Either way, West wins and can play a spade but it is too late. Declarer has set up hearts and will make the contract.

How different it would have been had West played the queen at trick one. Again, declarer tackles hearts and West wins. West plays the ten of spades. If declarer ducks, West plays another spade. Declarer will win and lead another heart. West wins that and runs off the rest of the spades, beating the contract.

By dumping an honour at trick one, East has **unblocked** the suit.

Example 2

Defending 3NT, partner leads a small heart.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has	
♥ 5	♥ Q 6	♥ J 3	What card does Third Seat play?

With only four hearts between dummy and third seat, it looks like the lead is from a long suit; possibly five or six cards. If dummy plays low, naturally Third Seat plays the Jack. If dummy plays the Queen, it is still right to play the Jack.

The full deal.

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

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

If declarer plays a low heart from dummy and allows East to win the trick, the contract will be safe. East may continue hearts but then East will have no hearts left when winning the ♠A.

Fortunately for the defence, declarers sometimes make mistakes. Then, the defence needs to take advantage of them.

Assume the ♥Q is played from dummy at trick one. If east plays low, declarer will start on the spades. East will win the ace and play the ♥J - but now declarer can duck. East has no more hearts to lead and the contract is safe. If West overtakes East's jack with the ace, then declarer still has the king as a stopper.

East should **unblock** at trick one by playing the Jack. Now, declarer is doomed. On winning the ♠A, east plays the ♥3. West's AT is sitting over declarer's K9. No matter what declarer does, West will take five heart tricks.

Overtaking

Example 1

Partner opened 2♠, North doubled and South bid 3NT. Partner leads the queen of spades. The lead of the queen indicates that partner has AQJxxx or QJTxxx or QJ9xxx.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has
♠ Q	♠ 7 3	♠ K 2

Overtake by playing the King.

This may be the full spade lay out.

The full deal.

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

West	North	East	South
2♠	Dble	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Declarer has eight top tricks. Hearts may provide the ninth.

If you play low at trick one, declarer will duck. Partner will lead another spade and you have to play the king. Declarer will duck again. Now, you can't continue the suit and declarer still has ♠A.

If you **overtake** the Queen with the King, it doesn't help declarer to duck. You will play your other spade to West's Jack. West continues spades to force out the Ace. West still has the ace of hearts as an entry.

So, declarer is forced to win the first trick. But that doesn't help either. As soon as West gets the lead with the ace of hearts, West can run the spade suit.

Example 2

After you opened 1♠, the opponents ended up in 3NT. Partner leads the jack of spades. This is surely a singleton or a doubleton. Partner would lead low with three to an honour.

The Lead is	Dummy has	Third Seat has
♠ J	♠ 8 6 3	♠ K Q T 5 4 2

	Dummy	
	♠ 8 6 3	
West		East
♠ J		♠ K Q T 5 4 2
	South	
	♠ A 9 7	

If partner has a singleton as here and you play a low card, partner will not be able to continue the suit.

The full deal.

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

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

Declarer has eight top tricks. Again, hearts may provide the ninth.

If you play low at trick one, declarer will duck. Partner has a singleton and cannot continue the suit.

Later, you will win the ace of hearts and continue spades to force out declarer's ace. The only problem is that you have no more entries and your spade winners go to waste.

At trick one, you **overtake** by playing the Queen (lower of equals). You can now continue spades to force out the ace. When you get in with the ace of hearts, you can cash all of your spade winners.