

Defending Against Notrump

When playing in a notrump contract, the declarer will nearly always seek to set up her side's longest suit. Perhaps declarer needs the long tricks in this suit in order to make the contract. Or perhaps the contract is already guaranteed, but declarer will still try to set up the long suit in order to score overtricks. In either case, declarer will go to work on her long suit.

The principal defensive strategy against the declarer is very similar. The defensive side hopes to have a long suit themselves, and they will seek to set up the long cards in their suit in order to defeat the contract, or at least hold the declarer to the least number of tricks available. Trying to set up a long suit is the goal of the defenders, just as setting up a different long suit is the goal of the declarer.

Since both sides are striving to set up long suits, the resulting contest is much like a race. The side who first succeeds in setting up their long suit will be the successful side.

The defending side has at once both a disadvantage and an advantage. Their disadvantage is that they may not know which suit is their best and longest. Their advantage is that they get to make the opening lead, which is to say, they get to strike first. If they determine correctly which suit to lead, then the advantage of the lead may bring them the success they desire.

The complete art of determining how to lead and defend will have to await further lessons. But the information found in this introduction to defense will be a good foundation for future development. It focuses on making the opening lead, since that is the beginning of it all.

1. **STRONGLY** avoid leading the first suit bid by the declarer. Declarer's first bid suit is usually her best suit. If you lead it, you will probably be helping the declarer.

2. **AVOID** leading any suit bid by the declarer. Declarer may have a holding like AQ, so leading this suit will make it easy for declarer to score the top two tricks in the suit.

3. **AVOID** leading the dummy's first bid suit if it may be a 5-card suit. Again, you will be giving the declarer a time advantage in his efforts to set up the same suit you have led.

4. From a sequence, lead the TOP card in the sequence.

from KQJ84, lead the K

from QJ1084, lead the Q

from J10984, lead the J

from 10984, lead the 10

The card you lead will tell partner what's up and show her additional high cards in your hand. Don't worry that the declarer will also know about it. What's important is to communicate with your partner.

5. From a broken sequence, lead the TOP card.
from KQ1084, lead the K
from QJ984, lead the Q

6. From an interior sequence, lead a 10 or a 9.
from AJ1084, lead the 10
from KJ1084, lead the 10
from A10984, lead the 9
from K10984, lead the 9
from Q10984, lead the 9

Whenever a 10 is led, it tells partner that you have either no cards higher than the 10, or else you have 2 higher. The same is true of the lead of a 9. You are telling partner either that you have no cards higher than that 9, or else you have 2 cards higher than the 9. If you lead a 10 and have 2 higher, one of those two will be the jack. If you lead a 9 to show two higher, one of those two will be the 10. Partner can nearly always tell whether you have zero or two cards higher than your 10 or 9. Remember this corollary rule: the lead of a jack denies all higher honors.

7.. The default lead against notrump is fourth down in your longest and strongest suit.