

IMPROVE YOUR CARDPLAY

STEP BY STEP

PLAYING
NOTRUMP
CONTRACTS



ROBERT BERTHE
NORBERT LÉBELY

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ROBERT BERTHE & NORBERT LÉBELY

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FOREWORD

I first met Robert Berthe in 1975. He was a cheerful man, very passionate about education, especially in regard to the game of bridge. One not insignificant detail: everything he explained was always very clear and he impressed everyone he spoke to with his intelligence. As I was at the time a professor of modern literature and we were friends, he suggested that we put our skills together in order to write a first book (and maybe others if it were successful...).

We have worked together many times since then. Robert got better at writing, I improved my bridge pedagogy and Robert liked to say that we had achieved a 'win-win' trade-off. The *Step by Step* series was born. This collection corresponded to a need as bridge grew more popular — we were fortunate that our books became bestsellers in France and they have remained so for forty years. As time passed, bidding evolved, bridge teaching made progress, and so it seemed like a good idea for us to bring the books up to date in this second edition.

Norbert Lébely, April 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Our intention in writing this series was to implement an original approach to teaching bridge. We therefore cannot overemphasize enough that you should read this Introduction carefully.

First, the book is divided into three parts:

Part 1 consists of forty-nine example deals, which will help you discover the fundamentals of cardplay at notrump. We believe strongly in the idea of ‘discovery’, and so we have made use of two complementary techniques:

- a) We have not grouped the examples together by type, since you must become accustomed to determining for yourself what technique to apply on a particular deal. Likewise, we have not placed a prominent label on every example. What is left to discover when the authors have already told you, ‘Dear reader, you are going to be applying a hold-up’? Rather, the problems are presented as you might encounter them at the table. Of course, we did have to organize them to a certain extent, and we decided to present them in increasing order of difficulty.
- b) There are a number of questions that declarer must always ask in order to come up with a coherent game plan. Based on this fundamental idea, we decided to use a step-by-step technique, which gets you used to reasoning by the question/answer process. Then you will be able to pull together everything you know or have deduced.


Each example ends with a summary of the principle(s) that we want you to remember.

Part 2 constitutes the *crossroads* of this book. There you will find a list of the key concepts relating to notrump play, with the corresponding examples or problems identified.

In Part 3, we subject you to a sort of examination in the form of twenty-six problems arranged in order of difficulty. You will be able to test the extent of your understanding and, we hope, progress.

Now, a few words on planning the play in notrump. You will notice that every example we present starts with a version of the same question: ‘How many sure tricks do I have?’ Therein lies the initial phase of the game plan. We

would especially draw your attention to the fact that at this point you do not count *potential* tricks. If this is your hand and dummy in 3NT, for example:

♠ 4 3 2
♥ 9 8
♦ 10 6 3 2
♣ 7 6 5 4

♠ K Q
♥ K Q J 10
♦ K Q J
♣ K Q J 10

you have no *sure* tricks, as you have all four aces to dislodge!

In planning to obtain the tricks required to make your contract, you must take many things into account, including:

- the number of times you will need to give up the lead
- the existence of a dangerous opponent
- the number of entries you have
- suit blockage, etc.

One last point: we are not asking you to try to make the maximum number of tricks, as you would playing matchpoints, but rather to do your best to ensure making your contract, as you would in a team game or a social game.

Our objective is that you learn something while at the same time having fun, and we hope you will not be disappointed.

PART 1: THE EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE 1

Both vul.

♠ 8 7 4 3
♥ 4 3
♦ A Q 5
♣ K 10 8 7

♠ A K 6
♥ A 10 8
♦ K 9 3
♣ Q J 9 6

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

Opening lead: ♥5

How many sure tricks can you count?

2 in spades

1 in hearts

3 in diamonds

Total: 6 tricks

Where can you set up the missing tricks?

In clubs, by knocking out the ace.

In almost every notrump contract, you face the same decision at Trick 1. What is it?

You have to ask yourself whether you should win the opening lead or hold up your stopper some number of times.

Why is this technique important?

It will make the difference between success and failure in many contracts, as a hold-up play will often allow you to cut the communications between the defenders.

Think about the possible layouts of the suit led

You are missing eight cards in hearts. Remember that you must constantly be aware of the number of cards the opponents hold, and it is best always to think in terms of how they are distributed:

PART 3: THE EXERCISES

In working through these exercises, we suggest you follow a method appropriate to your level as a player.

- Newcomers will want to go step by step — that is, they should not move on to the next question in an exercise until they have made sure that they have the right answer to the previous one.
- Intermediate players will be able to read through all the questions and look at the problem as a whole.
- Advanced players should be able to ask themselves the right questions without looking at the ones we have posed.

EXERCISE A

East-West vul.

♠	A K 5
♥	4 3 2
♦	Q 9 6 5 4
♣	Q 7
	<input type="text"/>
♠	Q 6 4
♥	Q J 8
♦	A J 10 2
♣	A K 3

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

Opening lead: ♥6. East wins the ♥K and returns the ♥10 to West's ace. West plays a third heart, East discarding the ♣2, and you are in your hand with the ♥Q.

QUESTIONS

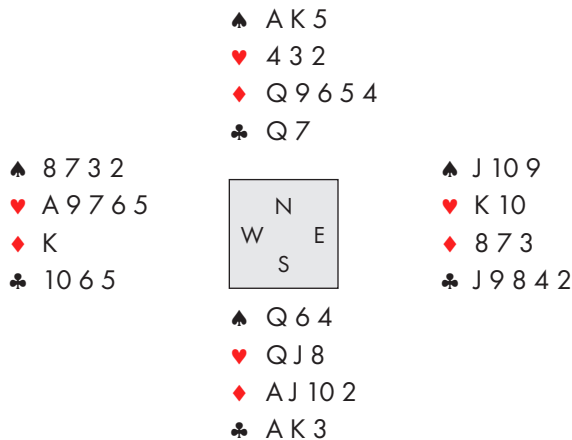
1. How many sure tricks do you have?
2. How will you give yourself the best chance to make your contract? What are you hoping for?

ANSWERS

1. You have:
 - 3 in spades
 - 1 in hearts (after the lead and continuation)
 - 1 in diamonds
 - 3 in clubs
 - Total: 8

2. You seem to be well on the way to making the contract.

Everything depends on not letting West gain the lead, since he has two heart tricks to cash. If East has the $\heartsuit K$, you are in no danger. However, if West has that card, the situation is hopeless, unless... it is singleton! So cross to dummy with a spade, and lead the $\heartsuit Q$ (who knows, maybe East will cover). In any case, this play costs nothing. No, East plays the $\heartsuit 3$. So go up with the ace... and drop West's singleton king. What if East has the king after all? Yes, you will have given up a trick you didn't have to lose, but your contract is not in jeopardy — East is not the danger hand.



COMING SOON



IMPROVE YOUR CARDPLAY STEP BY STEP: PLAYING SUIT CONTRACTS

Robert Berthe & Norbert Lébely

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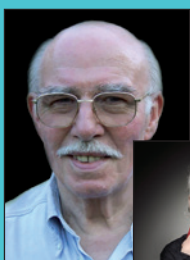
Particular care has been taken with this revision of the second volume, which is devoted to play in suit contracts. Indeed, in the years since the original publication, the authors changed their minds on how best to teach declarer play when a trump suit is involved. They abandoned the traditional method of counting losers, which is difficult and not very intuitive, to focus on counting winners, much like the technique used at notrump. This innovative approach has resulted in a book which is a much-improved learning tool.

The first part of the book teaches the techniques by leading the reader step by step through a series of examples. The second part consists of problem deals where what has been learned is applied and reinforced.

Forty years ago, in 1980, Robert Berthe and Norbert Lébely put the finishing touches on two books that would revolutionize the teaching of bridge cardplay: the first two books in the Step by Step series (*Pas à Pas* in the original French).

Based on an innovative yet clear and easily-understandable pedagogical approach involving the reader in a series of questions and answers, the series has allowed hundreds of thousands of readers over the years to absorb techniques known to be arduous and complex. Now available in English for the first time, this edition reflects the updates made by Lébely in 2020. He did the revision alone, as Robert Berthe passed away in 2016.

The first part of the book teaches the techniques by the leading the reader step by step through a series of examples. The second part consists of problem deals where what has been learned can be applied and reinforced.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

After their first meeting, at the Sarcelles Bridge Club, it became inevitable that the bridge writer,

Robert Berthe, and the professional teacher, Norbert Lébely, would collaborate on books for teaching bridge. The result was *Pas à Pas*, a series which in its original form has sold more than 300,000 copies in France.

