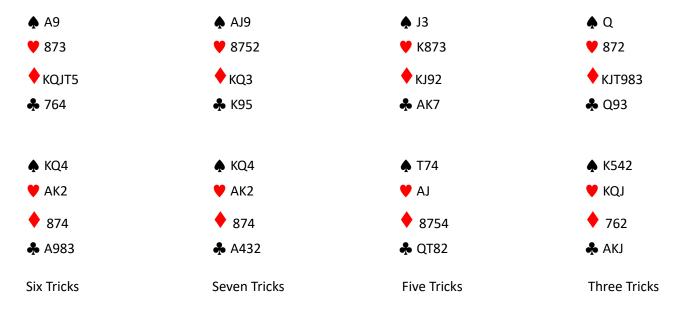# Counting Tricks In No Trumps

Playing in No Trumps is often one of the most intimidating experiences for a new player. As you have no doubt seen, when No Trumps goes wrong, it can go *horribly* wrong. We sit there helpless as the defenders rattle off a seemingly endless string of little cards while we start throwing away honours.

No Trumps contracts are generally a race – we are trying to take as many tricks as we need before the defenders take so many that our goal is out of reach. (If we are in three no trumps, we are trying to make nine tricks before the defenders score five).

Counting Tricks

Before we can make a plan in any No Trump contract, we should begin by counting how many tricks we are beginning with. At trick one, when Dummy is tabled but before you play any cards, you should get into the habit of *counting your tricks*. Once you know how many you have you can compare with how many you need. It is impossible to know how play the hand until you know how many extra tricks you will need to find, on top of those you are destined to take by virtue of holding most of the high cards.

Consider the following hands (Dummy is at the top, your hand is underneath). How many tricks do you have "off the top"? How many winners can you see if you just took everything you are *sure* of making?

♠ A9	♠ AJ9	♠ J3	♠ Q
♥ 873	♥ 8752	♥ K873	♥ 872
♦ KQJT5	♦ KQ3	♦ KJ92	♦ KJT983
♣ 764	♣ K95	♣ AK7	♣ Q93
♠ KQ4	♠ KQ4	♠ T74	♠ K542
♥ AK2	♥ AK2	♥ AJ	♥ KQJ
♦ 874	♦ 874	♦ 8754	♦ 762
♣ A983	♣ A432	♣ QT82	♣ AKJ
Six Tricks	Seven Tricks	Five Tricks	Three Tricks

Developing Tricks

It is rare that you will have enough winners to just take your required number of tricks off the top. An essential concept for No Trump play is that of developing tricks – turning cards which aren't tricks initially into surefire winners.

In a no trump contract, there are essentially two ways of developing extra tricks – we can develop extra tricks by length (playing a suit until the defenders have run out, at which point our remaining small cards are all as good as aces) or we can take advantage of the position of the defender's high cards (generally by leading towards our honours and forcing the defenders to commit one of their cards before we decide which of our cards to play).

Consider the hands shown above and pay particular attention to the Diamond suit. Imagine we are playing in No Trumps. How might we develop extra tricks in Diamonds?

Which hands contain Diamond suits we can develop through length? Which require us to play the suit in a particular way, hoping for a particular distribution of the missing high cards? Which hands feature *both* methods?