

# Planning the play as declarer

As declarer you need a certain number of tricks to make your contract. When dummy goes down, stop for a moment and make a plan of how you are going to make those tricks. This plan will only come about by careful, logical thought on your part.

One way is to become a SWOT, which stands for:

**Strengths** Count the tricks that you can make without losing the lead. In no trumps this is just high cards and long suit tricks. In a suit contract, add the extra tricks that can be made straight away by ruffing.

**Weaknesses** Work out how many tricks you are short of your target. If the number of top winners equals the number of tricks needed for your contract, you can just take them. But as overtricks improve your score, you should consider if any are available without endangering your contract.

**Opportunities** Look at each suit in turn to find the opportunities to make extra tricks.

**Threats** Think what might go wrong when you play your contract and how you can counter the threats.

**Plan** When you have gathered the evidence, make your plan for the contract.

Here is an example of how SWOT might work. Say you are in 3NT and the defence lead a suit where your only stopper is the ace and two little cards in one hand, facing two small cards in the other.

- The Strength might be that you can cash eight tricks off the top.
- The Weakness is that you need nine tricks for 3NT.
- The opportunity might be in a suit where you have KQJ, where if you drive out the ace you will set up your ninth trick.
- The Threat is that the defence can win their ace and cash too many winners in the suit led.
- The Plan might be to hold up your ace in their suit until the third round. When you play your suit, you hope that if the suit led breaks 5-3, the hand with the winners does not hold the ace of your suit.