

Northern Virginia Bridge Association
Intermediate/Novice Teaching
Unit Game
Thursday Sept 12 2013
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available for playing lessons

Defensive Planning: What the Contract Tells You

You've heard already about how one defends differently in a Team game (scoring by International Match Points (IMPs)) than in a Pairs game (scoring by Matchpoints). The objectives are different, so the tactics are different.

You missed last week's lecture (it was at a different site, and most of you missed the game as well) -- it was on using what the auction tells you in your defensive planning.

This week the talk is about how the level of the contract affects your defensive planning.

Remember, the basics remain the same. The opening leader has the least information, and bases the choice of lead on the auction, the contract, and the cards held. Although there is often much that can be deduced from the auction and the contract, all that's certain is the thirteen cards the leader holds.

Once the lead has been faced and the dummy hand exposed, each defender knows for a certainty, besides the thirteen cards in hand, the dummy's cards. This additional information is usually essential in further defensive planning.

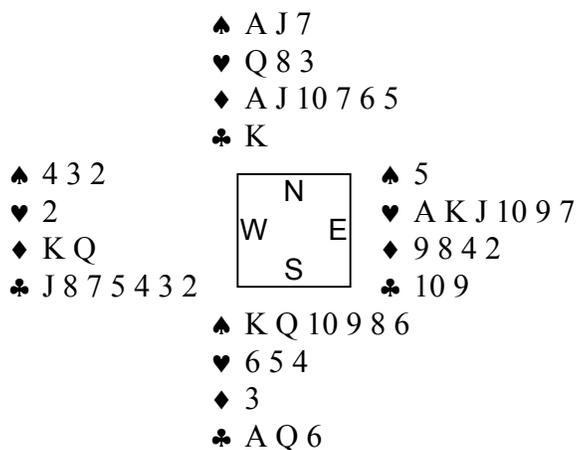
What is your objective? Sometimes it's to set the contract, sometimes to hold declarer to the contract -- prevent overtricks, often against a doubled contract reached by pre-emptive bidding by the opponents, it's to set declarer enough to offset the value of your side's presumed game or slam.

In a Notrump contract, the defenders most often gain tricks the same way the declarer does -- setting up a long suit and cashing tricks in that suit. It's often a race between declarer and defenders to see which side can get all its tricks before the other side can get theirs.

In a Suit contract, long suits can be established and cashed only when the other side has no trumps remaining with which to ruff otherwise-established winners. The play often revolves around timing -- when to attack the trump suit, when to set up a long suit.

Let's look at a hand! This one comes from Eddie Kantar, published in the March 11, 2005 Pittsburgh Spring NABC Daily Bulletin:

North Deals
Both Vul



| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| | 1 ♦ | 2 ♥ | 2 ♠ |
| Pass | 3 ♠ | Pass | 4 ♠ |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

Auction: Kantar says: "East's 2 ♥ weak jump overcall is comparable to a weak two-bid — basically a reasonable six-card suit with 6-9 HCP. It frequently serves as a good lead director. South's two level major-suit response of 2 ♠ guarantees at least five spades and 11 or more HCP."

Defensive planning: West decides to lead partner's suit. If there is a post-mortem quarrel, West will not lose. Kantar says: "Painfully obvious. Some players will lead a singleton even when they don't have one!"

East wins the first three heart tricks, counting on West's discards to provide further direction.

Kantar says: "West anticipates making two discards. Why not discard the ♦ K Q so a diamond can be ruffed at trick four? After all, declarer may have a singleton diamond and no diamond trick may be forthcoming. That is not only the best defense, it is the only defense that defeats 4 ♠.

When several discards can be envisioned, consider discarding from shortness, putting yourself in a position to ruff the suit you are discarding."

Actually, it's almost painfully obvious. Why ruff partner's winners when there's no reason for you to want to be on lead? Why discard clubs, there's nothing to be gained? True, discarding a low ♣ encourages a ♦ shift, but there is no guarantee you can set up and cash a ♦ winner. Look at the HCP -- after East wins Trick 1, you know where all the Red HCP are. For South to have as many as eleven, you know where all the Black HCP are. So the most obvious place your further tricks can come from is your Diamond ruff.

On this hand, you can do all of your defensive planning at Trick One. Not all hands are this easy -- but even on this hand, you have to count the HCP to figure the Black suits. You have to be awake to play this game well!