



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(220) Offensively- vs. Defensively-Oriented Hands**

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Level: 2

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#### **General**

Competitive bidding is a difficult part of bridge. Evaluating whether our hand is better suited for offense (and we should keep bidding) or defense (we should choose to defend) is one of the most important parts of good competitive bidding judgement. But this skill of judging whether our hand is more offensively- or defensively-oriented is important to good bidding judgement in a variety of different situations. Let's look at what factors make a hand better for offense or defense and apply these criteria to some common situations.

#### **Distribution**

Generally, the more balanced our hand, the more defensively-oriented it is and the shapelier (distributional) our hand, the more offensively-oriented it is. The same exact high cards can be useful in drastically different ways based on the shape of the hand. Let's look at some examples.

#### **Examples**

	♠ AQ	♠ AQ875	♠ AQ8753
	♥ KQJ	♥ KQJ86	♥ KQJ864
	♦ 8743	♦ 83	♦ --
	♣ 6542	♣ 5	♣ 5
<b>#Defensive Tricks</b>	3-4	2-3	1-2
<b>#Offensive Tricks</b>	3-4	7-8	9-10

#### **Location of Honors**

As the previous examples illustrate, one of the major factors in determining whether a hand is more offensively- or defensively-oriented is the location of our honors. To summarize:

- Honors in our long suits make the hand more offensively-oriented. Honors in our short suits make our hand more defensively-oriented.

- Honors in partner's suit make our hand more offensively-oriented. Honors in the opponent's suit (especially Queens and Jacks) are more defensively-oriented.

Of course, there are many more than just these simple rules about location of honors to good hand evaluation, but these two general rules are very good starting points for evaluating whether our hand is better for offense or defense.

### Fits and Double Fits

When we have a fit with partner, at least one of the opponents will be relatively short in our suit. Thus, fewer rounds of the suit can be "cashed" before one of the opponents ruffs our winner. The larger our fit, the sooner the opponents are likely to ruff.

Size of Fit	# of Winners We Can Cash
<b>8</b>	At most 2 tricks (3-2 split)
<b>9</b>	At most 2 tricks, often only 1 (2-2, 3-1 split)
<b>10</b>	At most 1 trick (2-1 split)
<b>11</b>	At most 1 trick, often 0 tricks (1-1, 2-0 split)

Thus, when we have a large fit, we will not take many tricks with the honors in that suit and our hand is more offensively-oriented, less defensively-oriented. The corollary to this is that misfit hands are better for defense - fewer of our high cards are likely to get ruffed. *The Law of Total Tricks is founded on this concept.*

When we have fits in two suits, called a *Double Fit*, our honors in both suits are less useful on defense. These types of hands are better for offense as well.

### Types of Hands

When evaluating the offensive vs. defensive value of a hand, the type of honors we have are also an important part of hand evaluation. For example, 12 HCP with 3 Aces is very likely to have 3 defensive tricks. When the 12 HCP is all in Queens and Jacks, the hand may have only 1-2 defensive tricks. Most Aces and Kings in short suits are what we call *Convertible Values* - cards likely to take tricks on either offense or defense. On the other hand, Queens and Jacks are much more likely to only be useful in one of these situations. Queens and Jacks in the opponent's suit make our hand better for defense (as do most honors in the opponent's suit) and Queens and Jacks in our long suit (or partner's long suit) make our hand better for offense.

## **Conclusion**

You cannot always know if it is better to bid on and try to win the contract or pass (or double) and defend a hand, but having some good guidelines for helping you judge these situations is important. Understanding whether your hand is generally offensively- or defensively-oriented is a useful starting point for judging whether to bid more or not. Start to practice thinking about your hand in this way and continue to re-evaluate the nature of your hand as offensively- or defensively-oriented as you get more information in the auction. Doing this will help you make better competitive bidding decisions as well as improve your judgement in a variety of different bidding areas.