



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(207) Planning the Defense

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Level: 2

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

One of the most important parts of being a good bridge player is to make a plan. As declarer, we are taught to do this at trick 1 by counting either our winners or our losers and even to stop and do it again in the middle of the hand if something surprising happens or if we get more useful information. But as a defender, planning is equally as important! Here we look at how to make plan as a defender.

“Thinking” on Defense

After we make our opening lead and see the dummy, we take the time to think about how to defend the hand. We should ask ourselves some important questions:

- (Notrump Contracts) *Where are declarer’s tricks or winners coming from? How are we going to stop them from getting these tricks?*
- (Suit Contracts) *What losers does declarer have? How do we prevent declarer from getting rid of these losers?*
- *Where are our tricks coming from? What do we need to do to ensure we get these tricks?*

If we wait until we see dummy to ask ourselves these questions then we have skipped a step. We should start to guess the answer to these questions before we lead. This process can help us make good decisions about being Active vs. Passive on defense.

Example

If dummy has a 5-card suit and we hold something like Qxx in that suit, then we should recognize that this suit is likely dividing well (like 3, 5, 3, 2 around the table) and thus this is a source of tricks for declarer. In this case if we are passive, then declarer will be able to set up this suit and discard their losers. We must recognize this danger and get aggressive about going to get our winners before they disappear on this suit.

Think Like the Declarer

One of the best ways that we can try to answer the first of these questions as a defender is to get up from your seat (figuratively, not literally) and sit down in the declarer's seat. Try to visualize what holdings they might have that are consistent with what was bid.

Example

Imagine that dummy (on our left) has \spadesuit KQJT \times and only one outside potential entry in \clubsuit K \times \times . If declarer wins the opening lead and plays a \clubsuit at trick 2, then we can assume that declarer has the \spadesuit A. Assuming the declarer is logical, if they did not have the \spadesuit A then they certainly would have lead a \spadesuit at trick 2, setting up dummy's long, strong suit while keeping the outside entry. If we hold the \clubsuit A, it might be that the declarer is stealing their 9th trick at this point. We should consider taking our trick \clubsuit A and shifting to dummy's weakest Major suit -- a suit in dummy with three small cards is often where our winners, or declarer's losers, may come from.

An Unusual Event in the Play

In the middle of the play, if the declarer plays a card (or plays on a suit) that seems unusual or something that we were not expecting them to do, then we should stop and take the time to reassess the situation and the assumptions we have made about the defense. Bob Hamman says that as a defender you should repeatedly ask yourself "*What the hell is going on?*" This turns out to be surprisingly helpful advice and an effective approach to defense.

Active vs. Passive Defense

One of the big considerations on defense is when to lead away from an honor and be active vs. when to attempt to be safer and force declarer to earn all their own tricks or be more passive. The approach we take, active defense vs. passive defense, may change throughout the defense. We may start one way before opening lead (from the auction information), change once we see dummy, and then change again as we get more information about the hand from partner or from what the declarer does. We are trying to balance making sure we get the tricks that belong to us, before they go away, with not making things easier on declarer by breaking new suits or playing difficult suits for them.

Defending 1NT

One of the most difficult and interesting contracts to play and defend is 1NT. Defending 1NT is sometimes a race to set up our tricks before declarer sets up their tricks, but other times it is about not giving the declarer any tricks. Defending 1NT

often requires patience! It is important not take our tricks and winners too soon and set up tricks for the declarer. We need to make declarer work for their tricks and use our honors to capture their honors.

Conclusion

Planning on defense is more difficult than as declarer since we can see 26 cards in both cases, but on defense we cannot see all of our side's assets. It is important on defense to try to visualize where our side's tricks are coming from and where declarer's tricks are coming from before opening lead, after we see the dummy, and throughout the play. This takes work but is the best way to improve our defense.