



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(272) Threat Cards

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Level: 2

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General

When declaring a hand, especially in a Notrump contract, honor cards are a simple way to produce winners. With experience, we come to recognize that a long suit, particularly a long, strong one, can be another valuable source of tricks. But other cards can become winners as well. These other cards can grow up into winners in a variety of ways. They may not become tricks immediately, but as the play progresses, these cards become more relevant and pose a greater danger to the defense. We refer to these cards as *threat cards*, because they are threatening to turn into winners! The opponents must hold on to their cards in these suits (guard these suits) in order to prevent our threat cards from becoming winners. Let's see how threat cards work and how we can make use of them to make us a more dangerous Declarer.

Threat Cards - Spot Cards

One type of threat card is a high spot card (a 10, 9, or even 8) that has a chance of becoming a winner. There are several ways these spot cards can become winners.

Example 1 - Promotion

T987 KQ

We play the King to knock out the Ace, cash the Queen, and then play the Ten to push out the Jack. Now the 9 is a winner.

Example 2 - Finesse

KTx Qxx

We use the Queen to push out the Ace. Then we finesse against the Jack and try to win a trick with the Ten.

Example 3 - Drop

KQ9x Ax

If the Jack and Ten fall in the first three rounds (JT_x), then the 9 can be promoted into a winner.

Note: This 9 can also be promoted into a winner if an opponent discards from a holding like Txxx, Jxxx, or JTxx.

Example 4 – Threat or Guard

Jxx AK

Here the Jack is not likely to become a winner by simple promotion or the Queen falling, but this holding threatens to become a winner and requires the opponent with the Queen to retain Qxx. The opponent may be forced to choose between guarding this suit or keeping another potential winner.

Threat Cards – Length

It is possible for even smaller cards to develop into winners if the opponents do not properly guard a suit.

Example 5

A432 KQ5

If this suit splits 3-3, we have four tricks in this suit. But even if the suit splits 4-2, we may produce a 4th trick in this suit if an opponent discards from their 4-card holding. If the layout of the suit is such that the player with 4 cards does not have an honor, they may make the mistake of discarding from a holding like 9xxx. This is particularly true if the threat 4-card suit is in the Declarer's hand and is hidden from the defenders.

Conclusion

Recognizing and making use of our threat cards is an important part of generating extra tricks when we are declaring. There are a variety of types of these threat cards, each presenting a potential problem for the opponents. If we learn to keep as many threat cards around as long as possible, we increase the complexity the opponents face when trying to guard these suits. If we practice maintaining as many threat cards as possible, we will see what appear to be “extra” tricks materialize out of nowhere. Focus on this when you are discarding and see if you can apply more pressure to your opponents, causing them to gift you even more tricks than you expected.