



## Introduction to Defensive Strategies

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Approximately 50% of our time at bridge is spent on defense with the advantage declarer has of seeing all 26 of her side's cards and in control - most of the time - of directing the line of play. Partnerships often devote much energy discussing their system and bidding sequences only to be left at the declarer's mercy when defending. Now is the time to take charge as a defender! In this article, we focus on five "lines of defense" and five "supporting tools of information", as outlined in "How The Experts Win At Bridge," by Burt Hall and Lynn-Rose Hall.

### A. INTRODUCTION

The five lines of defense are:

- \* Forcing Declarer
- \* Being Active on Defense
- \* Passive Defense
- \* Cutting Down Declarer's Ruffing Power
- \* Creating Trump Tricks

The five major "supporting tools" of information will guide your decision as to which line of defense play. These tools are:

- \* Inferences from bidding or play by the opponents
- \* Counting Points
- \* Counting Distribution
- \* Counting Tricks
- \* Using Defensive Signals

All this may look daunting right now as you ask yourself, "How do I count points, distribution, and tricks?" Over the next number of weeks, you will be given the tools to do so. Practicing these tools is key! In this lesson note, we will take a broad sweep, looking in general terms at what we mean by these five lines of defense and then the five KEY supporting tools.

### B. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO LINES OF DEFENCE

### 1. Force Declarer to Lose Control

Here the goal is to get control of declarer's own trump suit. We shall return to the condition and examples of the force in future articles!

### 2. Active Defense

Active defense means going after our side's actual and potential winners as quickly as possible. It includes somewhat (or very) risky leads. When a long side suit is breaking favorably for declarer, when the opponents have bid vigorously showing slam interest or there is a known long running suit (such as a preemptive bid by one opponent followed by a bid of 3NT by the other), we need to get active before our tricks are discarded on declarer's winners.

### 3. Passive Defense

The opposite approach to the above, passive defense, typically occurs when your tricks are safe. How do we know this? Here are some indicators:

- a. There is no evidence from the opponents' bidding that there is a strong side suit for discarding losers.
- b. Declarer appears to be strong while dummy is weak.
- c. The bidding forewarns us of a misfit.
- d. By looking at your hand, you see a bad split in key suits bid by your opponents.
- e. The contract is 6NT or 7 of any strain.
- f. One or more suits are "frozen". That is, whichever side leads the suit will lose an unnecessary trick by doing so.

### 4. Cut Down Declarer's Ruffing Power

Usually this strategy involves leading trumps to reduce the number of times that a side suit can be ruffed in the hand that is short in trumps. Here are some indicators:

- a. Dummy has shown preference for opener's second suit. This is most obvious when dummy has passed opener's minor suit rather than prefer back to opener's original major suit. Example: 1H-1S-2C-all pass.
- b. You or your partner are known to have considerable length and worthwhile honors in one or more of the opponents' long suits.
- c. One of the opponents has shown a 3-suited hand (4441, 5431, or 5440 distribution).

d. You have good secondary holdings in most or all side suits.

e. The opponents are sacrificing without much values or a long side suit. In that case, almost all of their tricks will come from trumps, including ruffs in one or both hands.

f. The opponents are doubled in a part score where you or your partner

clearly has a trump stack. In this case, trump leads not only have the

potential to cut down dummy's ruffing power, but may also keep declarer from making her small trumps.

## 5. Creating Trump Tricks

The most obvious way for the defense to create trump tricks is to ruff

declarer's side suit winners. Leading singletons, or leading doubletons in partner's known good suit, can produce ruffing tricks. Sometimes the bidding will suggest leading a long suit in which the opponents also have shown some length, in hopes of hitting partner's shortness (see the example below).

Trump promotions are a more subtle way to create trump tricks. These can be an immensely satisfying exercise in partnership. For example, you hold Q3 of trumps behind a long strong trump suit on your right. If declarer holds AKJ9876 and leads trumps at every chance, your Q will fall under the AK and you will get no trump tricks. Suppose, however, that you make an opening lead of a singleton in a suit in which declarer also has just one. Your partner wins and returns the suit. No matter what trump declarer plays, your Q will now end up winning a trick.

Here's a different twist. You hold KT2 in trumps and declarer has AQJ9876 on your right. Again you lead your singleton and partner comes back in the same suit. Declarer ruffs with the J. If you overruff, all you get is your one trump trick. However, if you discard, your KT2 is now worth 2 tricks sitting behind the remaining AJ9876. Your side has earned (or stolen) an extra trump trick.

One more variation. You hold JT of trumps and your partner has Q3 of trumps. If declarer pulls trumps right away, you get no winners. If you lead a suit in which both partner and declarer have no more cards, then partner can ruff with the Q. If declarer overruffs, your JT is now worth a trick. Another way to create trump tricks is to use high trumps on separate tricks. For instance, if you have exactly the AJ of trumps and your partner has exactly KQ of trumps, then you have 2 trump tricks. But if one of you can ruff a side suit, then you gain another trump trick.

## C. SUPPORTING TOOLS

### 1. INFERENCES FROM BIDDING

As North you hear the following auction:

West North East South

1S pass 2C pass

3C pass 4S all pass

You hold S: A7 H: 98 D: A853 C: T732

You infer from the bidding that East does NOT have four trump or she would have bid Jacoby 2NT (showing 13 HCP+ and four-card trump support for partner's major suit opening). It seems likely that East has three spades and four or five clubs. In order for West to raise clubs, she has four. Thus partner has either a void or singleton in clubs. You duly lead your C2 and declarer wins it with the CA. Now as soon as declarer leads trumps, you pop up with your SA and return the D3, asking partner when she ruffs the club, to return the LOWER RANKING of diamonds and hearts, here diamonds. Indeed partner ruffs your C3, returns a low diamond, you win the DA and return yet another club for partner to ruff.

The contract is defeated because you have taken listened closely to the

bidding and taken inference from what you have heard. You have correctly

deduced that South has 5 spades and 4 clubs. You have also deduced that

North has 3 spades and 4 or 5 clubs (in this case 4). Holding that gem of the SA, you hope that partner will get a club ruff. She actually she gets two ruffs, plus your SA and DA. Well done!

## 2. COUNTING POINTS

Now as North you partake in the following bidding:

West North East South

1S Dbl 2NT\* pass

4S all pass

(Note that 2NT\* over the double by East is conventional, showing a limit

raise or better with at least 3 card trump support for opener's major suit. It would be 4+ support, or even better, 5+, if the suit were a minor).

You hold:

S: xx H: KJT9 D: AQ65 C:K76

You look at your own hand and see your 13 HCP and assume around 26 HCP for E-W to bid their game. What does that tell you about partner's HCPs? Maybe she has a Jack? Maybe two Jacks or one Queen? And indeed declarer has the same information as you. You will NOT make an aggressive lead. Instead, you will let declarer play to you. Thus you may even choose a trump lead, attempting to give nothing away. You have made the first step in logically deducing how many HCPs partner can have. Thus you choose your passive lead and set the tone for the defense.

## 3. COUNTING DISTRIBUTION

As West you hear the following auction:

North East South West

1S 2NT 3H\* pass

4S all pass

(Note that the 2NT bid in this example is very unusual, and shows hearts and an unknown minor and that 3H\* is conventional, a cue bid of the KNOWN suit held by West, showing a limit raise or better with 3 or more card trump support for opener's major. This convention, called "Unusual over Unusual", is one way of dealing with the UNUSUAL NOTRUMP overcall.)

Ten of partner's cards are known, 5 hearts and 5 of a minor. You hold:

S: K9543 H: 74 D: T9875 C: 9

Even before seeing dummy, you start to count distribution. You know that

partner cannot have any spades as East-West have a 5-3 fit and you have the rest. So what can be left in partner's hand? It would seem that partner has 5 hearts, 5 clubs and 3 diamonds. That means the opponents have four diamonds between them. Partner's opening lead is the CA. You see three diamonds in dummy. Now you know that declarer has two diamonds and can account for 7 of declarer's 13 cards. Seeing 3 hearts in dummy, you know now declarer must have 3, for you have 2 and partner has 5. Your count now grows to knowing declarer has 5 spades, 3 hearts, 2 diamonds and therefore 3 clubs. From this you have a full count on all hands at the table. This allows you to know how many club ruffs you can hope for after partner's lead of the CA. Partner continues with the CK. You now play the H7, starting a high-low to show an even number in the suit. Partner persists in clubs with the T, which you ruff. Partner's card suggests the higher of the two side suits (hearts or diamonds), so you play your H4, completing the echo.

Partner wins the HA and continues with hearts, giving you a ruff in that

suit. You will still score the spade K for a total of 6 tricks (2 clubs, a club ruff, a heart, a heart ruff, and a trump). Thus with your 3 HCPs, and partner's 11 versus the opponents with their 26 HCPs, you have set them by three tricks. Curious about all the hands, let's take a peek:

VUL: N-S

NORTH

S: QJT86

H: KJ9

D: AK

C: J83

WEST EAST

S: K9543 S: void

H: 74 H: A6532

D: T9875 D: 643

C: 9 C: AKT32

SOUTH

S: AT7

H: QT8

D: QJ2

C: Q765

#### 4. COUNTING TRICKS

The bidding goes quickly:

East South West North

1H 1S pass 4S

all pass

NORTH

S: AJ943

H: 97

D: AT6

C: A52

WEST EAST

S: 75 S: 6

H: T4 H: AKJ852

D: Q983 D: K74

C: Q8642 C: JT9

SOUTH

S: KQT82

H: Q63

D: J52

C: K7

The opening lead is the HT. East wins the HA and the HK and must now ask

herself, "Where do we find two other tricks to defeat this contract?" It

looks tempting to lead the CJ, does it not? However, an astute East sees the danger of South's heart Q. By leading a third heart which partner ruffs and is overruffed in dummy, declarer's QH is no longer available to be used to for discarding a diamond in dummy. Without this key play, declarer loses only one diamond and ruffs her third diamond in dummy. As it is, declarer cannot avoid two diamond losers against alert defense. This example is from William Root, author of numerous books, including possibly the best introduction to defense, "How To Defend A Bridge Hand". Root offers this hand as an example of KILLING DECLARER'S DISCARDS. It also vividly highlights the vital question that one must ask: "Where and how do we find those extra tricks to defeat this contract?"

## 5. DEFENSIVE SIGNALS

Defensive signals are the way we communicate effectively with partner while defending. These signals constitute a large part of the vocabulary of bridge.

The bidding proceeds:

South West North East

1D 1H 3D pass

3NT all pass

Your partner leads the HK and you see dummy and of course, your own hand, East.

NORTH

S: AQJ

H: 32

D: KQJ84

C: 632

EAST

S: T7642

H: 984

D: 5

C: AT95

The lead of a K against NT asks for attitude. If you had three or more

hearts headed by the Ace, Queen or Jack, you would give an encouraging

signal. However, here you want to discourage. Your attitude signal, the H4 is terrific as it clearly says NO! In standard methods, the 4 does not tell partner which suit to switch to, but it clearly asks for something besides more hearts. Declarer ducks the heart K. Your very clever partner decides that declarer would not bid 3NT without a spade stopper (the K), and leads the club 8 (attitude). You grab your A and switch back to hearts, playing the 9, highest of your remaining 2 cards in the suit. Declarer plays the J, losing to partner's Q. Back comes another heart, losing to declarer's A.

Declarer plays on diamonds, losing to partner's A. Two more hearts from partner result in down 2 (4 hearts, DA, CA).

The complete hand:

NORTH

S: AQJ

H: 32

D: KQJ84

C: 632

WEST EAST

S: 953 S: T7642

H: KQT65 H: 984

D: A6 D: 5

C: 874 C: AT95

SOUTH

S: K8

H: AJ4

D: T9732

C: KQJ

Had it not been for the ATTITUDE SIGNAL, West might have continued hearts into declarer's AJ. Declarer would knock out the DA and score 3 spades, 2 hearts, and 4 diamonds to make 3NT. Recall that attitude is one of three major signals we use on defense, along with count and suit preference.

SUMMARY



1. In keeping with the work done by Burt Hall and Lynn-Rose Hall in "How The Experts Win At Bridge", we see five lines of defense which we will further explore with more summary notes over the weeks to come. They include the following:

\*Forcing Declarer

\*Being Active

\*Being Passive

\*Cutting Down Ruffing Power

\*Creating Trump Tricks

2. Each of these lines of defense depends on "supporting tools of information":

\*Inferences from Bidding or Play

\*Counting Points

\*Counting Distribution

\*Counting Tricks

\*Defensive Signals