

Defensive Play of the Hand

Plays Which Maximize Tricks for the Defense

Defenders have many methods of maximizing their defensive result by minimizing the number of tricks that Declarer can muster. Signaling attitude and count and the use of “*deductive*” reasoning are among the most important. In addition, applying the following playing mechanisms will, most certainly, lead to maximizing the results for the defense, under most circumstances.

- A. The Hold-Up:** In the following layout of the cards, Declarer, South, leads the King in the suit shown, while playing a No-Trump contract. Your Partner, West, plays the “9”. What reasoning can be applied by you using this information to best defend under these circumstances, and where are the “865”?

	<u>DUMMY</u>	
	QJT73	
<u>PARTNER</u>		<u>YOU</u>
9		(?)A42
	<u>DECLARER</u>	
	K	

1. What is Declarer likely attempting to do? Declarer is attempting to set up winners through promotion of his **QJT** by playing from the short side first in order to eliminate the Ace.
2. What effect would the presence or absence of Dummy’s available outside entries have on the outcome of this situation? If Dummy holds entries outside the suit being played, it is, most likely, immaterial when the Ace is played. If there are no outside entries, however, holding up or not will have a **major impact!**
3. How can Partner, playing in the West, best assist under these circumstances?

When an Opponent breaks a new suit, Partner’s obligation is to give “**count.**”

(“WHEN DECLARER LEADS A NEW SUIT, DEFENDERS MUST GIVE COUNT.”)

4. What is the significance of Partner’s having played the “9”? Partner’s “9” is either a singleton or the start of a “**high-low**” signal showing an even number of cards in the suit; i.e., two or four. If Partner holds just a singleton in the suit, then Declarer’s holds 4-pieces and you can never hold up long enough to thwart Declarer’s attempt to set up and run the suit. If Partner holds a doubleton, however, Declarer holds three pieces and you must hold up twice in order to block Declarer’s entry into the Dummy.

Declarer often needs to establish tricks in his/her long suit. Once he/she has established winners in a suit, he/she requires an entry in order to get to them. Defenders cannot alter the cards Declarer has been dealt; but they can try to prevent Declarer from using the cards to best advantage. In each of the following examples, Declarer has no other entries to Dummy other than the cards in the suit shown. To limit Declarer to the minimum number of tricks, which cards would you and your Partner play on the first trick assuming Declarer were to lead the 10, and then again on the second trick if Declarer were to lead a small card to the Dummy’s Queen?

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Conclusion: The defensive holdup play is one method the Defenders can use in order to prevent Declarer from getting any undeserved tricks. Success of operation of this method depends upon cooperation between the Defenders; i.e., one of them giving count while the other rejects his/her winner until Declarer is playing his last card in the suit he/she is attempting to establish. If no other outside entries are available to Declarer, his/her established additional winners are, thus, stranded.

B. Missing Honor: In the following layout, Declarer, South, plays the Queen towards the Dummy in the suit shown. What factors dictate your second-hand play to the current trick?

	<u>DUMMY</u>	
	J73	
<u>YOU</u>		<u>PARTNER</u>
(?)A86		????
	<u>DECLARER</u>	
	Q	

1. Under normal circumstances, what card should you, in the second seat, play? If Declarer holds the King the only effect as to when you play the Ace is whether or not you allow the Jack to become a possible entry into the Dummy. Partner, however, could hold the King, and it might be a singleton. You should, therefore, under most circumstances, play low. **“SECOND-HAND USUALLY PLAYS LOW!”**

2. What mitigating circumstances, if any, might preclude your playing low, and cause you to consider winning the trick immediately with the Ace? You might, however, desire to take the trick immediately if:

A: you desire to give Partner a quick ruff, especially if the suit shown is the trump suit.

B: you desire to draw trumps, or to run outside pre-established winners.

C: you might wish to lead through Dummy’s existing *“tenace”* in a side suit, especially if Partner has signaled a suit preference for that particular suit.

C. Un-Entitled Tricks: Declarer leads the “3” from the Dummy as shown.

	<u>DUMMY</u>	
	Q73	
<u>YOU</u>		<u>PARTNER</u>
???		AJ2
	<u>DECLARER</u>	
	????	

1. What card, with these holdings, should you, in the second seat play, and why? If Declarer holds the King, playing your Ace on the first trick will promote one additional trick for the Opponents, a trick to which they otherwise would not be entitled. The King is missing! Play small! If Partner holds it, your side will take the trick anyway. If Declarer holds the King, he/she is always entitled to one trick in the suit anyhow. Even, under the most obscure circumstances, if Declarer were to hold a singleton King, Declarer would subsequently secure a sluff on the promoted Queen even if you, **“Double Dummy,”** were to capture the singleton King. Playing small on trick one will result in your side securing two tricks and Declarer only one, whereas the opposite will occur if you play the Ace immediately!

D. Telegraphing Information: Declarer leads towards the **KJ73** in the Dummy as shown.

	<u>DUMMY</u> KJ73	
<u>YOU</u> A52		<u>PARTNER</u> ????
	<u>DECLARER</u> 6	

1. What card should you, in the second seat play, and why? Play the “2” *without hesitation*. Partner may, although it is remote, the singleton Queen, but by playing without hesitation, Declarer, absent the Queen may finesse the Jack and lose two tricks in the suit, instead of one. If Declarer holds the Queen your Ace will take one trick later, in most instances, anyhow. “**Second Hand usually plays low.**” Whenever the Dummy is first tabled, try to think, before the fact, what you would do under any imaginable circumstance throughout the eventual play of the cards so that all of your plays are made with equal tempo, and without hesitation. As an aside, seeing a Dummy as shown above, and with cards as held by West, under-leading the Ace, if you had been on lead, would have been an excellent play if you had suspected that Partner may have held the Queen.

E. Covering an Honor with an Honor: Declarer leads the Queen from Dummy as shown.

	<u>DUMMY</u> QJ73	
<u>PARTNER</u> ???		<u>YOU</u> K864
	<u>DECLARER</u> ????	

1. Should you in second seat, cover the Queen, or not; and if yes, why, and if not, why not? Play small! Do not cover the first honor in this instance! Normally, second hand plays low, but the exception to this is that “**covering an honor with an honor**” supersedes this principal. If, however, there be two honors in sequence, one should cover the second one, *not the first*, in case Partner holds a missing singleton Honor, the Ace in this instance.

F. Attacking Entries: If Declarer holds multiple outside entries which will eventually serve as transportation to winners that are being developed in the Dummy, attacking the Dummy’s entries is of little significance. If, however, Dummy has few outside entries, Defenders must work together so as to eliminate whatever outside entry that exists before Declarer is ready to use it, and before Declarer has the opportunity of setting up his/her long running suit. In each of the following, you are on lead. Which card would Partner lead to prevent Declarer from later using the suit shown as an entry to the Dummy?

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Conclusion: When you can see that Declarer is planning to develop a long suit and may have some entry problems, it is often a good idea to drive out any entries in the hand with the long suit *before* Declarer has established his/her winners.

G. Watching Your Discards: Small cards in any suit are usually assumed to be of no value. The unwary Defender, thus, unthinkingly may tend to throw them away, preferring to hold on to higher cards in other suits instead. Sometimes, however, these, seemingly inconsequential small cards, make the difference between success and failure for the Defenders. How do the Defenders know which suits to guard? Often it is obvious when you see the cards held in Dummy. In each of the following layouts, how many tricks does Declarer get if Partner unwittingly discards a small card in the suit shown, and how many does Declarer get if Partner does not?

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Conclusion: A card as low as a 2 can have as much power as an Ace. When discarding, try and keep the same length in a suit as you can see in the Dummy or as you imagine might be held by Declarer. The defending Partners must share the responsibility for guarding all of the suits. You never want, as a Defender, to be left with high cards in one suit while Declarer is taking tricks with small cards in another suit in which you have made discards.

H. Defending Against Finesses: One of the methods by which Declarer gets the extra tricks he/she needs is by finessing. Many times the Defenders can do something about this. In each of the following layouts, you are defending against a No-Trump contract. Declarer leads a small card toward Dummy's Jack. Which card should Partner play and which card should you play in order to give Declarer the most difficulty?

1)	<u>DUMMY</u>	
	AQJ2	
<u>PARTNER</u>		<u>YOU</u>
T87		K63
	<u>DECLARER</u>	
	954	
	8; 3	

Conclusion: Keep Declarer guessing as to how to play a suit. Do not reveal any information that will assist Declarer in deciding how to play the cards in a particular suit unless you have to. The more guesses you give Declarer, the more opportunities Declarer has to go wrong.

SUMMATION: Defenders have available multiple methods of minimizing the number of tricks that can be achieved by a Declarer under specific circumstances. Knowing and then applying these methods will often lead to maximizing the results for the defense.