

BRIDGE – INTERMEDIATE LESSONS II – 03

Defending Against Suit Contracts

Unlike defensive strategy against No-Trump contracts, establishing length tricks when in a suit contract is *not* important for the Defense as the Declarer can trump the 4th-round of any outside suit other than the trump suit itself. The important tricks when defending against suit contracts are, however, specifically, *high-card tricks* in each suit, and *tricks from the Trump suit itself*.

High-Card Tricks: There are a limited number of high-card tricks available to the Defense in each suit (other than the Trump suit) before the Declarer or the Dummy can usually trump the suit, the most common number of which is two. Occasionally, the Defense can make three tricks, sometimes only one trick, and rarely none which occurs when the Declarer or the Dummy is void in the suit. In addition, high-card tricks in the Trump suit are, on occasion, also available to the Defense when the Trumps are being drawn by the Declarer. If Defenders hold the Ace, King or Queen in the Trump suit, they usually wait for their trick to come to them during the play.

Trump Tricks: The other source of tricks when defending against a suit contract is the Defender's Trumps. High-Card Trump tricks are occasionally available to the Defense, but the Defenders only occasionally take tricks with their small trumps as, in order to do so, they have to rid themselves of the few pieces in the short suit, before their Trumps are drawn by the Declarer.

If the Defenders wish to make their lower Trumps they need to work together in order to make this strategy succeed.

1. LEADS AND SIGNALS TO CREATE TRUMP TRICKS: One of the ways for the Defense to create low trump tricks is to make a *short-suit opening lead*. Obviously, this will only work if the defending Partners can return the suit led while low Trumps are still available. The lead of a singleton, and worse, the lead of a worthless doubleton, is usually a very optimistic play in that in order for it to work, the combination of the lead of the suit and its return by Partner has to be completed *before* the outstanding Trumps are drawn by the Declarer. There are, therefore, only two common situations where a Defender should make a lead of a singleton or a doubleton, with hopes of achieving a low Trump trick.

a. **The first condition necessary for the greatest likelihood of success is when Partner, during the bidding, has shown presumed strength in his/her hand to hopefully, sooner or later, capture a trick, then leading a second or third round of the original suit for you to Trump.**

Example: North opens "1D", East overcalls "1H" and you are South holding 9632 873 84 KQ94. After you "Pass", West bids "4H" which becomes the final contract. You should lead D8 of Partner's Diamond suit. When you lead the top card in Partner's suit, and then, on the second trick played of that suit you drop a card of lower rank, you show a doubleton with this "High-Low" Signal.

b. **A second scenario when the lead of a singleton or a doubleton is also reasonably attractive occurs when a Defender holds the Ace or the King in the Trump suit (a Trump entry control) along with one or more lower Trump cards.** Holding the Ace or the King in the Trump suit allows the Defender with shortness to regain the lead before all the Trumps are drawn in order to hopefully enter Partner's hand with a presumed high-card entry, enabling Partner to then lead the original suit back to you for you to Trump with one of your smaller Trump cards.

Example: Your Opponents have bid to "4S" and you hold: **A64 98643 9872 3**. Lead the **C3**. When you regain the lead with the **SA**, you will try to reach Partner in the Heart or Diamond suit for him/her to return a club for you to ruff.

<u>North</u>		<u>Dealer: North</u>			
	T92				
	Q86	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
	QJT6	P	P	1S	2H
	A84	2S	P	P	P
<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>				
J64	75	West leads the Ace of Hearts, followed by			
AKT53	J2	the King, with East giving a "high-low"			
84	A9532	signal playing first the HJ and then the H2.			
KJ9	7653	West then plays the H3 for East to trump.			
	<u>South</u>	West's low card, the 3 of Hearts, asks for a Club			
	AKQ83	return. North will win the CA but later East			
	974	can regain the lead with the DA and then play			
	K7	a second Club for West to win. West will then take			
	QT2	an additional Club trick to defeat the contract!			

In order for the above-listed plays to have a higher probability of working, the lead should (1) ***not*** be in a suit with an honor, unless Partner has bid the suit, for your honor may make a trick in the play of the hand at a later time; and (2) the suit in which the Defender is short is ***not*** a suit that has been bid by the Opponents. Leads in a suit bid by the Opponents may have the disadvantage of often helping the Declarer establish his/her side suit. When you lead a short suit you risk giving an extra trick to the Declarer, a trick that he/she may, otherwise, not be entitled to win.

2. The Doubleton Signal: Assuming Partnership understanding and acceptance of "Standard" signaling, one of the most important defensive signals is the doubleton "***High-Low***" signal. With this signal; i.e., by playing one's higher card on the first lead of the suit, and then, subsequently, one's lower card on the second lead of the suit, a Defender shows a holding of only two cards in the suit led, and the desire and capability to Trump that suit if afforded the opportunity to do so.

(Note: Some Partnerships play "Reverse Signals," where one plays a low card first when holding a doubleton. This is called an "Upside-Down" Signal.)

A doubleton signal is used when leading a suit or when following to a suit led by your Partner. When you play your higher card first and your lower card second, using "Standard" signaling, your Partner can assess the number of cards the Declarer holds in the suit. In a suit contract your Partner can then judge to lead a third round of the suit for you to Trump, assuming that Declarer still holds one or more pieces of the suit in question, thereby, lacking the inability to over-ruff you. When your Partner leads to the trick the highest card you should play to show a doubleton is the Jack. If Partner leads an Ace and you have a doubleton with the King or Queen you should ***not*** play your honor on the first round as this honor may win a trick later in the play.

3. Suit Preference Leads When Leading A Suit For Your Partner To

Trump: When leading a suit for your Partner to Trump you should always indicate which suit you desire Partner to lead back (return) to you after Partner has completed taking the trumped trick. Always assume that Partner knows, that you know, that your Partner is short in the suit, and is going to Trump. The level of the spot card (high or low) that you lead for Partner to Trump tells your Partner which of the two suits other than Trumps Partner should play back after Partner has trumped. You are showing an entry (honor) card in one of two possible suits for your Partner to lead back to you. Often you can thus regain the lead with that honor and play another card in the suit for Partner to Trump, yet again. (1) When you lead back a *high card* for Partner to Trump you are telling Partner to play the *higher-ranking* non-trump suit if Partner wants to give you the lead again. (2) If you lead back a *low card* for Partner to Trump you are telling Partner to lead back the *lower-ranking* non-trump suit after Partner has trumped.

Example: You are West. North is the Declarer in "4S." Your Partner leads the H2. Partner's lead is obviously a singleton. With a doubleton Partner would have led a high card first. You should win HA and lead back the H9. By doing this, you show an entry card in Diamonds, the higher-ranking of the two other non-trump suits.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
52		
A97632		H2
A4		
842		

4. Trump Promotion: Trump promotion is a strategy that occurs after you reach a position where you can over-trump the Declarer or the Dummy. Your Trump is then promoted to a winning trick when your Partner leads a suit that you can Trump with a card that would normally be lost if the Trumps were drawn. The main requirement for a Trump promotion is that you will be able to trump *after* an Opponent and the other Opponent will not be able to over-trump you. Trump promotions occur when you have the Queen, Jack, Ten or Nine in the trump suit and your card will be promoted into a trick by forcing the Declarer or the Dummy to use a higher trump when trumping.

Example: If your trumps are Q7, and the Declarer's trumps are AKT865, your Queen will fall under the Ace and King when the trumps are drawn. However if your Partner can lead a suit where you will trump *after* the Declarer has played you will always make a trick with your Queen. If the Declarer trumps with the Ten, you can over-trump. If the Declarer trumps with the King, you discard from another suit. Later when the Declarer plays the Ace, you follow with the 7 and your Queen is promoted to win a trick.

Note: It is usually poor Defense to lead a suit that the Declarer and the Dummy can both Trump. This gives the Declarer the opportunity for a "*Ruff and a Sluff*" i.e., the Declarer can discard a losing card from one hand and win the trick by trumping with the other hand. In defenses where you try for a Trump promotion you should first win any high-card tricks the Defense can take, or be sure that the Declarer cannot discard a loser, when you lead a suit that the Declarer and the Dummy can both Trump.

5. Uppercut: Another Trump promotion strategy is the *uppercut*. You look to promote a trump honor in your own hand by leading a suit you know Partner can trump, even though an Opponent can over-trump him/her. You hope Partner has a sufficiently high Trump card to force your Opponent to over-trump him/her with a high honor thereby promoting one of your high Trumps to win a trick later. To try for an uppercut you need to hold a card in Trumps which can be promoted such as a Queen, Jack, Ten, or (rarely) a Nine. You hope that Partner also has an effective Trump to force an honor from an Opponent thereby promoting a lesser Trump of yours, enabling it to take a trick later.

With the **J10** in Trumps you would not normally make a trick. However, if you can lead a suit that Partner can trump with the Queen or King, you will find your Jack will later take a trick. If the Declarer over-Trumps Partner's Queen or King with the Ace, the Declarer will then only have one higher trump than yours and will not be able to capture your Jack.

For an uppercut to succeed you need your Partner to Trump with a sufficiently high Trump to force an Opponent's honor. Usually your Partner must be aware that an Opponent is likely to over-trump. Partner can then cooperate by trumping with a high Trump, sacrificing it so as to force an Opponent's honor, thereby promoting yours.

6. THE FORCING DEFENSE: Oft times, when playing in a suit contract, Declarer fails to make his/her stated contract because he/she runs out of Trump. If the Defenders can force this to occur, the Declarer may lose control of the play of the hand. Defenders can attempt to possibly create this result by the following forcing, defensive strategy.

When one of the Defenders has four or more Trumps, including an honor, he/she can choose to try a forcing, defense strategy right from the opening lead by leading another long and strong outside suit of four or more cards. If he/she has sufficient length and strength in that other suit, making the Declarer Trump before the Declarer has drawn the Trumps, he/she may be able to reduce the Declarer's Trump holding to a fewer number than held by the Defender, thereby causing the Declarer to lose control in the later play of the hand.

A forcing defense, as described above, is most commonly effective only when the Defense can force the member of the declaring team with the longer holding in the trump suit, not the member with the shorter trump holding. This is usually, although not always, the Declarer. Note that forcing the shorter Trump holding member of the declaring team to Trump (usually the Dummy) does not usually stop the Declarer from still drawing Trumps, and, thus, control of the hand is **not** affected deleteriously.