

## Defence (Advanced!)

Whether you are an expert or a relatively inexperienced player, defence is the most challenging part of the game. Bidding can be memorised. When declaring a hand, at least you can ensure that you and your partner are working in unison. When defending, you and your partner are both operating with incomplete information and can only rely on inference, memory and guesswork to deduce the correct way forward.

When defending a hand, there are a few habits we should develop. Remember, we are trying to prevent declarer from making the contract they have declared. Sometimes, we will have a few quick tricks off the top and can send them down immediately. More often though, we will need to work to develop tricks for the defence. The only true way to master defence is through imagination, paying attention to the auction and the cards as they are played and lots and lots of practise.

The following tips will prove useful as you begin to improve your defence. All of the skills outlined below are difficult at first, but will become easier over time. Don't expect to master them all immediately – it is enough to try. Just by thinking actively about defence you will become better at this notoriously difficult facet of the game.

### Lead Through Strength And Around To Weakness

If you play a suit, it often works well to make Declarer play from their stronger holding first. Then, once your side has played their cards, Declarer won't have many good options. Imagine Declarer is playing in One No Trump and you can see the Dummy below:

#### Dummy

♠ KJ9

♥ AJT

♦ 7642

♣ KQT2

#### Our Hand

♠ QT842

♥ 94

♦ J9

♣ A542

Imagine our partner leads a Club, Dummy plays low and we win the Ace. Our partner might have points in Hearts or Diamonds. It will be better for us to play a Diamond, not a Heart (playing through Declarer's presumed stronger diamond holding in their hand and around to their weak diamond holding in dummy). Your partner will then be able to respond *after* Declarer has made their choice of card. Playing a Heart means Declarer gets to play low and respond to your Partner's choice of card.

Note that what we want is for our partner to play a Spade for us (through strength and around to weakness). Either way, Clubs has turned out to be a poor opening lead, but both defenders should avoid "returning your partner's suit" and instead play cards that will be useful for their partner.

### Try Not To Give Away Tricks – Only Open New Suits With A Good Reason

Often the defence are not sure what to do and will kind of shrug and then flail about playing every suit in turn. Often, whoever plays a suit first will give away a trick. It is often right as defenders to continue to plug away at a suit you've started on, rather than to open up a new suit. Remember, you don't need to get all your tricks at the start!

Warning – don't give a ruff and sluff! This is one of the most common and costly errors! Avoiding a ruff and sluff is a good reason to open a new suit.

### Play Our Suits, Not Declarer's Suits

This is an obvious one, but one often ignored by inexperienced defenders. If the opponents have bid a suit, they likely have cards there even if they don't end up as trumps. Playing those suits is likely to promote long tricks in their hand. We would rather play our suits to develop tricks in *our* suit. Try to picture where your partner has long suits.