

TIPS FOR TOPS

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All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on February 1st, (Game #42988). Full results and game schedule at

- Defence
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This issue is dedicated to Defence. It's harder to find examples from the game that everyone will have encountered, but it's too important a subject to ignore.

Whole books are written on opening leads; I will say little about those other than to remind you of the basics. The suit you choose should be one that has potential to help your side; your partner's bid suit is usually best, or a suit where you have some values. Failing those, a suit which is unlikely to help declarer - a suit nobody has bid rather than one where their side has shown length or strength. And, once you've chosen the suit, choose the card that stands the best chance of establishing more tricks for your side, and also tells your partner about your holding.

Bd: 18	♠ 53	Optimum EW 4S: -420
Vul: N/S	♥ KT4	
Dir: East	♦ A65	
	♣ 98762	
♠ AKQ72	N	♠ 864
♥ J5	W 18 E	♥ AQ972
♦ J8732	S	♦ Q9
♣ 4		♣ KJ5
7	♠ JT9	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
11 HCP 12	♥ 863	N 1 - - -
10	♦ KT4	S - - -
	♣ AQT3	E - 3 3 4 3
		W - 3 2 4 -

Once the play is underway, there are best practices to follow on subsequent leads, and also on

tricks where declarer is leading. Let's look at second hand play.

Usually, when you are the second player to the trick, there is no point in playing a high card. After all, your partner will still have a chance to take the trick if declarer doesn't play high enough. So, hang onto your high cards and play "second hand low." But there are exceptions to the rule, and one is demonstrated on Board 18. This board was played either in Spades or in NT, so the defence was not identical, but, at some point in the play the HJ was led from the West hand. Here, the rule is "cover an honour with an honour"; play the K on the J, and you stand a good chance of later scoring your 10. If you play low, the J will be allowed to win, and then a low card to the Q will set up the whole suit for declarer.

Careful card readers will observe that, after capturing the HK with the A, declarer can now finesse against the 10 and pick up the suit - but will they? Can they? Only if they have kept an entry to the West hand, and only if they are very daring, because if they duck the second Heart and it loses, they might never get their HQ. So, the general rule is "cover an honour with an honour" - unless you have a good reason not to.

Let's continue with this rule and look at Board 5. If East is playing the hand and leads the CQ from dummy, should North cover it? Here, the extension of the rule is: if the lead is from two or more

Bd: 5	♠ 984	Optimum
Vul: N/S	♥ JT76	EW 4H: -420
Dlr: North	♦ T2	
	♣ K763	
♠ AQ	N	♠ K532
♥ 82	W 5 E	♥ AKQ53
♦ 7653	S	♦ Q4
♣ QJ842		♣ A9
4	♠ JT76	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
9 HCP 18	♥ 94	N - - - -
9	♦ AKJ98	S - - - -
	♣ T5	E 4 1 4 2 2
		W 4 1 4 2 2

equal honours, cover when the last of the equals is led. In this case, don't cover the Q, but think about covering the J. But, you know better than to rely on simple bromides, don't you? As always, look at the big picture. Before the suit is played, you can see nine clubs; after one trick has been played, there are only two missing - the A and the 10. If partner has the 10, declarer will be playing the A whether or not you cover. And, if declarer has both, covering will do you no good - it will simply establish the rest of the suit for declarer. So, the situation here is Don't cover if you KNOW there is no chance that you will promote anything for your side.

If this hand was being played from the West, as it was half the time, North can see that there are only two Clubs in the East hand. Here, again, you can determine that they can't keep finessing against your K; hold onto it and you know they can't ever run the suit.

Let's look at the full defence on Board 13. East will have opened the bidding with 1C, and South will overcall 1S (Sure, you might have opened 1NT with the South hand, but you can't overcall NT without a stopper in the opponent's suit, and you have a very nice 5-card suit for a Spade overcall.) West isn't strong enough to bid Hearts at the 2-level, but can make a negative double. If North raises the Spades there is no reason for either side to bid any more. West leads the CQ; hi-lo from a doubleton in partner's bid suit. This is important; if you lead your lower Club, how will E know there are 2 Clubs she can cash?

Declarer may take the first club, or duck it and take the second - which West will lead if East has played an encouraging 9. When declarer now

leads trump from the dummy, East must play second hand low. It doesn't make a difference here, but you never know; partner might have a singleton K, or declarer might be missing the A and Q and have a guess. And what does East do when she takes the SA on the second round? She cashes her club(s), but after three rounds of Clubs, she needs to switch suits or she gives declarer a costly ruff/sluff (Ruff in one hand while pitching a loser from the other.) And how does East know which suit to switch to? On the 3rd Club trick West plays her H9, indicating that she has help in that suit. After a Heart switch, South needs to play her Diamonds carefully to make her contract, leading from the dummy towards her KQx - and East must play second hand low again. South can always make 2S if she has retained spades in dummy for transportation, but if she has to lead diamonds from her hand, she will go down. And any NS pairs who ventured (or were pushed) to 3S should be set.

Bd: 13	♠ J753	Optimum
Vul: All	♥ T87	EW 3H: -140
Dlr: North	♦ 942	
	♣ A75	
♠ T8	N	♠ A9
♥ K9653	W 13 E	♥ Q42
♦ JT63	S	♦ A85
♣ Q8		♣ KJ963
5	♠ KQ642	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
6 HCP 14	♥ AJ	N - - - 2 -
15	♦ KQ7	S - - - 2 -
	♣ T42	E 1 2 3 - -
		W 1 2 3 - -

Successful defence can be very satisfying; it takes a bit of planning, and a bit of thought. What is my partner trying to do, and what does she need to know? ♠