

# Improve your bridge with me

By Migry Zur Campanile



Last month I broached the subject of defense and we have seen how demanding it can be to combine concentration, deduction and sound judgment in order to extract the maximum number of tricks out of each contract. To simplify the task of the defense it is best to use the very same method which I described when discussing declarer play: using the bidding to assess the opponents' strength, this time in order to get a better idea of what we can expect to find in partner's hand to help us plan an effective defense.

The principles are very intuitive: when the opponents tortuously creep and crawl their way to four of a major, they may be stretching with 23 or 24 points, perhaps even less. Assume that your side has about 16 high-card points. Count your own points and credit your partner with the difference between your count and 16. If you have very little and a doubleton in a side suit, this is the time to lead it: you will have a good chance that partner might hold the cards you need to make the lead a winning one. If instead the opponents reach game easily and confidently, they will usually have around 25-28 points and the defending side can be expected to hold around 12 to 15 points. As before, make a point of counting your own points and credit your partner with the difference between your count and 14, give or take a point or two.

Similarly, when the opponents bid a slam on sheer power, they usually have 32 points or more. Your side has seven or eight points at most. Count your own, and credit your partner with the difference between your count and seven.

You would be surprised how much that can help in planning a sensible defense, especially in those cases where you can tell that you have just about all of the points your side is entitled to.

South dealer - All vulnerable

|         |        |        |  |
|---------|--------|--------|--|
|         | ♠ KJ5  |        |  |
|         | ♥ 972  |        |  |
|         | ♦ AQJ2 |        |  |
|         | ♣ AK7  |        |  |
| ♠ Q104  |        | ♠ 9873 |  |
| ♥ A1064 |        | ♥ 53   |  |
| ♦ 1098  |        | ♦ 743  |  |
| ♣ J85   |        | ♣ 9643 |  |
|         | ♠ A62  |        |  |
|         | ♥ KQJ8 |        |  |
|         | ♦ K65  |        |  |
|         | ♣ Q102 |        |  |

| West | North | East | South    |
|------|-------|------|----------|
|      |       |      | 1NT      |
| Pass | 6NT   | Pass | All Pass |

Lead: ♦10

Sitting West we can estimate from the bidding that North-South have 32-35 high-card points. Therefore we deduce that our side has about five to eight points; and since we are looking at seven of them in our hand, we should not expect more than a Jack from partner.

The correct way to use this inference is to get off to a very safe opening lead: the ♦10. When dummy comes down, we can proceed further in our analysis of the opponents' assets: declarer's combined count is exactly 33 points since we can see 25 of them, 18 in dummy and 7 in our hand, and South opened 1NT. Therefore South must have 15 points, including the ♠A and all of the missing honors. It looks like declarer will be able to gather three club tricks, four diamonds, two hearts and two spades and unfortunately the spade finesse will also work for him.

Is there any way to stop declarer from making his contract?

Another vital fact which gets all too often forgotten by the average player is: "Declarer cannot see your cards". That

means that whenever we see that the distribution and the honors he is missing are favorably placed for him we should attempt to make him believe the opposite and hope that he gets it wrong.

Presumably South, with a sure loser in hearts, will try and look for tricks elsewhere before chancing the spade finesse. Assuming that declarer has a balanced hand without a five card suit, otherwise he would always make his contract, he may have four cards in clubs, in which case our best hope is to signal high-low when he plays the suit hoping to fool him into finessing East for the missing ♣J. However, our best chance to push declarer into the wrong line of play is if his four-card suit is hearts since then we can perhaps induce him to misguess the suit by letting him think that partner has the ♥A.

After the ♦10 lead taken by dummy's ♦J, declarer immediately leads a heart to the king and, of course, we smoothly play low as though we have never heard of such a thing as the ace.

Naturally if we have one of those partners who get easily bored whenever they hold anything less than a two club opener, we may have little chance of pulling this off. You need a partner who will sit up in his chair and pay attention as though the hand was a matter of life and death. In this case, when he cannot hope to win a trick, he should do his best to avoid betraying you by an air of gloomy despair or by shaking his head and showing his hand to the dummy in a silent appeal for sympathy.

If you have a partner who doesn't give up prematurely, when South wins the first heart with the ♥K he will not have a clue as to which of you has the ace. His next step will probably be to cash the three top diamonds to see what we discard, pitching a spade from this hand. A careful East will now throw a club since a heart discard would reveal the heart situation at the next trick, and a spade discard might indicate that the spade finesse is on.

When South leads a second heart from dummy to the ♥Q, and East follows suit, West once more plays low in perfect tempo.

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much easier to judge the auction. I can't stress enough how important it is to know the limits of your partner's fundamental actions. Getting a handle on his various minimums and maximums is vastly more important than adding a new convention to your repertoire.

Holding:

♠ x  
♥ QJ1098x  
♦ Qxxx  
♣ xx

what would your regular partner open, as dealer, neither side vulnerable? Would he call this a clear pass? Is 3♥ possible, and, if so, is it potentially weaker than 2♥? Or does it just show more shape? Could his suit be as good as AKJ10xxx for a non-vul. opening three-bid? Does he go totally crazy in third seat? Does vulnerability play a big role? (For Marty Bergen, it didn't--"Colors are for children," he used to say.)

**The bottom line is that there is often no right or wrong in these situations, but you are going to guess a lot better if you know what type of player your partner is like:**

*Mr. Sound,*

*Mr. Aggressive*

*or Mr. Medium!.*

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What should declarer do now? Should he try the spade finesse, without a single indication that it will succeed? Or should he go to dummy with a club to lead a third heart?

# Bookshelf

***Kantar on Kontract* by Eddie Kantar, published by Masterpoints Press in 2004; 192pp, 16.95\$**

**Target: Intermediate-Expert**

**Rating: 95/100**



The legendary Eddie Kantar has been one of the two most popular and prolific American bridge authors of the past quarter century (the other being Mike Lawrence), so I was really looking forward to reading his new book, *Kantar On Kontract*, a selection of his best pieces from some 40 years of writing on bridge.

The collection includes many great bridge hands, fascinating stories of life on the tournament trail, tips to help your game, including some examples of pitfalls to avoid with some of Kantar's greatest disasters at the bridge table. An example? Easy, the first catastrophe is on page one: Eddie Kantar and Paul Soloway are defending four clubs with a combined trump holding of six cards including AQJ98, and took one trick in the suit. Can you do better?

In addition we have perhaps the most famous hand ever played by the Italian great, Giorgio Belladonna, an example of how preemptive bids can provide a blueprint to declarer, why it isn't always a good idea to double a slam contract holding three aces, a trick hand that Kantar sometimes sneaks into his bridge classes, and much, much more, always magically brought to life by Kantar's breezy writing style that is both entertaining and instructive.

How does he continue to write such wonderful books, with the perfect mixture of humour and instruction? To complete the story the book comes with a great glossy front cover, excellent printing and font selection, and an optimal use of white space. A great read and thoroughly recommended.

*From page 46*

After all, the first two rounds of hearts strongly point to East holding the ♥A. Even if East does not have the ♥A but has the ♥10, it will be enough. The heart play is wrong only if (a) West started with ♥A10xx and was able to play low convincingly on the first two rounds of the suit; and (b) if East, with two low hearts, resisted the temptation to throw one of them away on the fourth round of diamonds.

Only a very talented declarer would see through our plan and find the winning line of play against such a defense.

Look instead how easy it would be for South if we had taken our ♥A early on. He would cash the ♥J, discovering that the ♥10 doesn't drop. He would then

take his clubs and the ♠A, followed by a spade toward dummy. At this stage, all hands are down to two cards. South has the ♥9 and his last spade. Dummy has the ♠KJ. West has the ♥10 and therefore only one spade. If West plays the ♠Q, the hand is over. If West doesn't have the ♠Q, the contract was unmakeable from the start since the hearts broke badly, and the spade finesse was off.

As the cards lie, of course, the ♠Q would show up and all would be well for declarer. Not at our table though: here a forlorn South would open up the score and discover a long list of 1440 to which he would have to add the first -100 thanks to the ingenuity and resourcefulness of a smart defense!

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Last month I set out to show how an accurate estimate of the points that each line holds, based on how the bidding developed, can provide valuable clues to help the defence select its most effective strategy.

Here is another hand to test the readers on the same subject: IMPs, North-South Vulnerable, South Dealer  
Sitting East and holding:

♠ A  
♥ A76  
♦ AQ86  
♣ 97543

You pass throughout as your opponents bid as follows:

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------|------|-------|
|      |       |      | 1♥    |
| Pass | 1♠    | Dbf  | 2♥    |
| Pass | 3♥    | Pass | 4♥    |
| Pass | Pass  | Pass |       |

Partner leads the ♠J and this is what you can see when dummy comes down:

|        |         |
|--------|---------|
| ♠ Q954 |         |
| ♥ J82  |         |
| ♦ K75  |         |
| ♣ KQ10 |         |
|        | ♠ A     |
|        | ♥ A76   |
|        | ♦ AQ86  |
|        | ♣ 97543 |

Declarer plays low from dummy and the ♠7 from hand while you take perforce your ♠A.

*What deductions can you make from the bidding?*

South has six hearts and 13-14 points (as otherwise he would not have rebid 2♥ and with less points he would not have accepted North's balanced game invitation), which makes the combined total on the N-S line a likely 24-25.

*How many points can you therefore expect to find with partner?*

Given our holding of 14 points, partner can at most have one or two points.

*How can you hope to beat the contract?*

There are three almost sure tricks on our line: the three aces. The setting trick could either come from a spade ruff or the ♦Q, once either partner or declarer play the suit.

*How many tricks can you place with declarer?*

Declarer is sure to hold the ♠K and the ♣A so he should easily be able to gather 10 tricks, after knocking out the ♥A, with two spades, five hearts and three clubs, without even needing to rely on the ♦A being outside.

*Can you see a way to defeat the contract, given all the considerations we just made?*

Since there is no chance to get a second diamond trick, the only possibility to beat the contract is a spade ruff. However, there is a seemingly insurmountable problem: partner has no obvious entry to gain the lead and play a second spade for us to ruff.

*Can you think of any way at all to get partner in to give us a spade ruff?*

Playing matchpoints we should not risk gifting declarer with an extra trick to which he is not entitled to. However in IMPs we can and should try any feasible way to

defeat the contract: here the only chance to develop an entry in partner's hand is to return the ♦Q at trick two, hoping that declarer has at least two diamonds and partner holds the ♦J. Now if declarer ducks, we have just made our fourth trick to go along with our aces; if he takes, we can then play another diamond, when in with the ♥A, and wait for our spade ruff (or start looking for another partner if after all that we have done he plays back anything apart from a spade!!).

The complete deal:

|           |           |         |  |
|-----------|-----------|---------|--|
|           | ♠ Q954    |         |  |
|           | ♥ J82     |         |  |
|           | ♦ K75     |         |  |
|           | ♣ KQ10    |         |  |
| ♠ J108632 |           | ♠ A     |  |
| ♥ 5       |           | ♥ A76   |  |
| ♦ J943    |           | ♦ AQ86  |  |
| ♣ 86      |           | ♣ 97543 |  |
|           |           |         |  |
|           | ♠ K7      |         |  |
|           | ♥ KQ10943 |         |  |
|           | ♦ 102     |         |  |
|           | ♣ AJ2     |         |  |

Aren't you proud of yourselves?

Simply by analyzing the hand in some detail and following the logic of our findings, we have made a play which could feature in the best bridge magazines!

For those of you who like to know a little bit more, I will explain that the technical name for this defensive stroke of genius is the Deschappelles Coup, from the name of the player who first devised it two centuries ago (as you guessed he was a Whist player as bridge was yet to be created at the time).

The idea of the Coup is exactly what we described: to play a high card which would normally be assured of taking a trick, in the hope of knocking out declarer's and thus creating an unexpected entry in partner's hand.

The classic example of the Coup is when East plays his King in this position:

Axx

Qxx

Kxxx

However, don't you go out and start playing unsupported Kings and Queens trying to make the headlines of your club newsletter! The need for such a play comes very seldom and we should only make it as a last resort when we are absolutely sure that all other possibilities will inevitably lead to declarer making his contract!