

Bridge: Defense at Trick One

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Deal One

E-W vulnerable
Matchpoints

NORTH
♠ Q 6 4
♥ 9 8 5 2
♦ J 5
♣ A K J 7

EAST
♠ 7 5
♥ A J
♦ A K Q 10 9 4
♣ 9 6 2

<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>
1D	1H	1S	2D*
Dbl	2H	3D	3H
Pass	Pass	Pass	

*Sound raise, up to 11 HCP

West leads the diamond three. What do you play? After you win the first trick, how do you continue?

Deal One

	NORTH	
	♠ Q 6 4	
	♥ 9 8 5 2	
	♦ J 5	
	♣ A K J 7	
WEST		EAST
♠ A 10 9 3 2		♠ 7 5
♥ 7 3		♥ A J
♦ 8 6 3		♦ A K Q 10 9 4
♣ Q 10 3		♣ 9 6 2
	SOUTH	
	♠ K J 8	
	♥ K Q 10 6 4	
	♦ 7 2	
	♣ 8 5 4	

Opening lead: Diamond three

Solution. To achieve one down, you should win with the nine of diamonds, cash the king, and switch to the spade seven. The goal is to make West aware that your spade holding is a doubleton, which he must duck, rather than a singleton. If you wanted spades returned immediately, you would win the ace and king of diamonds (in that order) and then lead the spade.

The lead agreement tells you that two diamond tricks are available, whether South plays the seven or the two. If on a different hand you knew that only one diamond was cashing, you would win it cheaply if your intended switch was to a doubleton. You would win it expensively (i.e. the ace) with a side suit singleton. This is not a convention; rather it invokes the logic that by winning an ace, you deny the king and so do not want that suit returned.

The logic of the proposed solution does not depend on whether there is a second diamond trick. However, it could be crucial to know. If South had a singleton diamond, the trumps might be drawn too early if you mistakenly tried to cash two rounds. On the other hand, if you switched immediately and

South's pattern were 3-6-2-2, your second diamond trick might go away on one of dummy's clubs. The recommended parity leads yield certain knowledge in this case. I cannot resist mentioning that even with partner's raise, this comfort would not be available if you were playing either third and fifth best leads, which are popular on the Continent and in the USA (South plays the seven), or fourth-best leads (South plays the two). An attitude-orientated lead, in which partner would lead high to deny an honour, would be equally useless.

The theme of using the suit led to convey information about the suit to which a switch is made has wide applicability. For example, suppose that on a deal similar to the above, dummy had ♠xxx and East had either ♠Qx or ♠QJ. East would have to lead the queen to cater for his partner's holding ♠AJxxx or ♠A10xxx. But if West held the ace without the jack, how would he know whether to duck when declarer covered the queen? The answer is that East would win expensively with the queen-jack (or a singleton) to force his partner to return a spade as soon as possible, and would win cheaply if ducking might be correct from his perspective.

This logic can sometimes be used even when East does not have a plethora of honours from which to choose. For example, declarer might duck dummy's ace in a suit led, and East can convey information by winning with either the king or the queen.

Deal Two

N-S vulnerable
IMPs

NORTH

♠ J 7 4
♥ A 10 5
♦ A J 6 3
♣ Q 6 2

EAST

♠ A 9 2
♥ K J 9
♦ 9 5 4
♣ J 7 5 3

<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>	<i>W</i>
1D	Pass	1H	Pass
2H	Pass	4H	Pass
Pass	Pass		

West leads the club ace, which gives cause for optimism. You encourage with the seven; but instead of cashing the king, partner continues with the club four. What do you play? Plan your play to the next few tricks.

Deal Two

NORTH

♠ J 7 4
♥ A 10 5
♦ A J 6 3
♣ Q 6 2

WEST

♠ 10 8 6 5 3
♥ 4 2
♦ K 8 7 2
♣ A 4

EAST

♠ A 9 2
♥ K J 9
♦ 9 5 4
♣ J 7 5 3

SOUTH

♠ K Q
♥ Q 8 7 6 3
♦ Q 10
♣ K 10 9 8

Opening lead: Club ace

Solution. If partner had continued with the club king as you hoped, you were ready to signal (suit-preference) for a spade switch by following with the jack. You might as well play the jack at this point, but you know you won't win this trick. Your key play is coming in a moment, but you've got to plan it now. Everyone at the table realizes the opening lead was from a doubleton.

Declarer's top priority is to draw the trumps. It is easy to foresee the contract rolling home if South has ♥Qxxxx. You know how he plans to play the suit; he will lead to the ace, and then continue with a low one toward hand. It is up to you to induce a change in declarer's plan. When South places the three of hearts on the table and partner produces the two, you must be ready to drop the king under dummy's ace.

This should be a standard falsecard. The goal is to make declarer think that your partner has ♥J9xx, in which case he must return to hand in order to lead toward dummy's ten. Notice that the play of the king cannot lose a trick in the trump suit. If partner has the queen, you make two tricks; if he does

not, you make one.

Obviously a falsecard in the trump suit must be produced in tempo. Even if you are aware of the standard (or should-be standard) situations, it is difficult not to give away the show unless you plan in advance. The best time to do that planning is during the normal pause before you play to the first trick.

If declarer falls for your smooth deception, he will try to return to hand with a spade, hoping that you duck or that your partner has the ace. Phase two of your diabolical plan, then, is to grab the first spade and give partner a ruff.

What if partner has three trumps, and you could have beaten the hand simply by playing routinely? There are three counter-indications. First, since North's style apparently calls for a raise with only three trumps, his partner is likely to have five for the direct raise to game. Second, partner might have echoed with three trumps, and his two rules out that possibility. Third, and most compelling, even if declarer has jumped to game with ♡Qxxx, he would still try to come to hand and lead toward the ten, in order to minimize the undertricks.

