

NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

Chapter 13: Follow the Leader

This chapter will examine the hands we saw in Chapter 11, and show how, by careful analysis and communication with partner, you can get the greatest possible mileage from just defending a very ordinary 1NT contract. When you, and your partner, have mastered the art of 4-D defence against 1NT contracts, and also found the best way to compete in the bidding, you will be in a position to get the best of both worlds. You will be able to compete when the time is right, and defend when the time to do that is right. No more just sitting back and muddling through while one of your opponents plays in 1NT!

BOARD 1 DEALER North NIL VUL

North

♠ 7 6 5

♥ 7 4 2

♦ 7 4 3

♣ A K 10 7

West

♠ 9 8 3

♥ A Q 8 5

♦ A Q 6

♣ 8 6 4

East

♠ K J 4

♥ 10 9 3

♦ K 10 8 5 2

♣ J 2

South

♠ A Q 10 2

♥ K J 6

♦ J 9

♣ Q 9 5 3

We can now examine each of the hands from a defensive point of view, and, because of the nature of many hands where both sides hold balanced hands with about the same number of HCP, we will be able to look at each deal from more than one perspective.

After two passes South opens 1NT and all pass.

That was the original problem and West led a low heart. Leading a low heart is not that terrible a lead, and most experts would no doubt try that. The play, then, would go as suggested earlier. But, as our analysis has shown, the ACE OF DIAMONDS is a better lead against 1NT opened and passed out. And, no, LEADING the ace of HEARTS is not a good idea. With a FOUR card suit headed by AQ you should stick to the normal rule of 'fourth highest'. But with AQx specifically, that is a different matter. So, let's say that West tries the effect of the ace of diamonds. EW have added to their repertoire of leads the ACE as possibly from AQx. Not from AQ doubleton (NEVER) or AQxx (no reason not to lead the fourth highest). East sees West's lead and is rapt. East signals encouragement, and West continues with the queen.

What would YOU do next, as East? Were you going to play a low diamond, knowing that partner would then lead their third one and you could then take the first five diamond tricks? Why not think in FOUR dimensions? Because you have strict rules about leads from suits headed by AQ, you know that the ONLY possible holding partner can have is AQx! You ALSO know that declarer won't have an abundance of tricks, this being a 1NT contract. In fact, the odds are that YOUR side has the balance of power, and therefore you must make as many tricks as you can. Partner is almost certainly sitting with heart honours, and heart honours which are such as to make the diamond lead more attractive. Leading hearts through declarer would then appear to be a good idea.

Because East KNOWS that West has started with AQx in diamonds, East can OVERTAKE West's queen, KNOWING that declarer's jack will fall! Now East switches to the TEN OF HEARTS, 'seeing' declarer's hearts to be vulnerable. Declarer covers, and West wins. Now West leads the third diamond and East takes the diamond tricks before piercing poor declarer with a second heart lead. When the defence have taken the first nine tricks, they can happily concede the rest. Did you notice something interesting? Yes, if East was DECLARER, East would never be able to overtake West's queen of diamonds since East would not KNOW that the jack would fall. As a defender, with North as DUMMY, East knows precisely that. Nor would the heart switch be so automatic. So, you see, the DEFENCE know more about this hand than declarer, and they also know more about this hand than if either of them was declarer! Who said it was an advantage to be declarer?

Now let's turn the spotlight on West as DECLARER and North with the opening lead. The hands are repeated for convenience.

BOARD 1 DEALER North NIL VUL

North

♠ 7 6 5

♥ 7 4 2

♦ 7 4 3

♣ A K 10 7

West

♠ 9 8 3

♥ A Q 8 5

♦ A Q 6

♣ 8 6 4

East

♠ K J 4

♥ 10 9 3

♦ K 10 8 5 2

♣ J 2

South

♠ A Q 10 2

♥ K J 6

♦ J 9

♣ Q 9 5 3

Let's say this time WEST has opened 1NT and everyone passed. Now, North is on lead. No need for any tricky lead this time. The ace of clubs is clear cut if you play a leading system where an ace asks for encouragement or discouragement. It also promises the KING unless you have added in the specific holding of AQx against a ONE NO TRUMP contract. Some Norths may lead the seven of clubs but the ace is MUCH better because of the third honour in the suit, the TEN. Since North wants to know whether the club suit has promise, South should encourage, right?

(Hands repeated for convenience)

North

♠ 7 6 5

♥ 7 4 2

♦ 7 4 3

♣ A K 10 7

West

♠ 9 8 3

♥ A Q 8 5

♦ A Q 6

♣ 8 6 4

East

♠ K J 4

♥ 10 9 3

♦ K 10 8 5 2

♣ J 2

South

♠ A Q 10 2

♥ K J 6

♦ J 9

♣ Q 9 5 3

ABSOLUTELY, and CATEGORICALLY, WRONG! Why? Because South can 'see' all four hands, from the moment North makes the opening lead which marks North with the ace and king of clubs and nothing else, and West with the rest of the honour cards, these being the red suit AQ combinations. South must DISCOURAGE the club continuation. If South was DECLARER and could see all the hands, what would South do at trick two?

The answer is obvious. Lead a SPADE and finesse the ten! And it would work. THEN South would cross back to dummy and repeat the dose. Any sensible declarer would not take all the clubs first without leaving TWO entries to dummy, would they? Since South can 'see' all the hands, all South needs to do is to discourage clubs. North, not seeing quite as much as South, but still knowing the rule of 'lead THROUGH strength' and also knowing that leading through the long diamond suit will do no good, will find the switch to the SEVEN (top of nothing in the suit) of spades. South wins whether declarer plays the jack or king, and leads another club to North.

Another spade through, and the defence now have four spade tricks and four club tricks, North being surprised when South turns up with the queen of clubs! But, as North, YOU will know that there was a reason why partner discouraged you when s/he in fact had the queen, won't you? Isn't it fun being declarer on defence? That is why I have entitled this chapter 'Follow the Leader'. When YOU learn to become a good leader, and your partner learns to follow your lead, and vice versa, your defence will be accumulating more match points than you could ever imagine. But you STILL need to learn to THINK when necessary!

BOARD 3 DEALER South EW VUL

North

♠ K 8 7 2

♥ 9

♦ K J 8 5 4

♣ K 9 2

West

♠ J 9 3

♥ Q 5 3 2

♦ 10 7 6

♣ Q 10 5

East

♠ 6 5 4

♥ A K 10 8

♦ Q 3

♣ A J 6 3

South

♠ A Q 10

♥ J 7 6 4

♦ A 9 2

♣ 8 7 4

This is another hand where the opening led can be crucial and where the defence have a huge advantage, as you will see. Imagine South as declarer, BUT being able to 'see' all the hands. AND being able to make the first play! I have explained in the earlier chapters why there IS only one sensible lead from the South hand against 1NT by East. That is the ace of spades. Now, let's 'follow the leader'. North encourages, using whatever signalling system NS use. For future reference, we will stick with the tried and true, HIGH for encouragement, LOW for discouragement.

South continues with the queen, and then the ten, North winning the king and then cashing the last spade. South discards the four of clubs, discouraging in clubs. Now North does the only sensible thing and switches to a diamond. The FIVE of diamonds, as fourth highest, also is a low card which tells partner that North has an HONOUR in diamonds. Declarer plays low and South wins the ace. Because North has shown an interest in the diamond suit by leading a low one, South returns a diamond, the NINE because it is the HIGHER of the two that South has. It is perfectly clear to North that EAST has the queen, and North must therefore play the king, there is no choice. When the king is played and the queen falls from East, North can take the rest of the diamonds. It was easy for South, as a pseudo declarer, and for North, as a pseudo dummy, to 'see' that the diamond finesse was not working. Had South been the true declarer, South would no doubt have cashed the ace of diamonds and then finessed the jack, as that would have given him the best odds of making as many tricks as possible.

Imagine, as declarer in the South seat, leading a HEART towards dummy. Yet that is what most defenders would have done with the opening lead against East's 1NT. Now look at the WEST hand and imagine that South has opened an 11-14 1NT. West has nothing exciting to lead from, but instead of four to the jack, West has four to the QUEEN of hearts. Partner is also marked with at least 9 HCP, so the lead of a low heart seems the most attractive lead. It is now easy for EW to take four heart tricks, BUT West must make sure that, if the play goes heart ace, heart king, heart ten to South's jack and West's queen, West does NOT blindly lead the last heart, because THAT would leave the lead with EAST.

West, while they have the only opportunity, must switch to the QUEEN (or TEN) of clubs in order to drive out the king from North. Again, the club switch is obvious and can be 'seen' by a good defender in the West seat, but many Wests will switch to the five, thus not being able to force out the king. Once more, the defence can follow the leader and play the hand as declarer and dummy if they are switched on. This time, eight tricks for EW on defence!