

Ultimate Defence 10

In our search for the ultimate defence, let's have a look at some fairly normal situations that you will encounter as a defender.

Dealer South EW Vul

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

The bidding has been:

South	North
1H	1S
1NT	3NT

This one is not a difficult one, yet many even good players go wrong on the opening lead. Against a No Trump contract, unless it is a slam, the important thing for the defence is to develop tricks and not to take them too early. Because there are no trumps to stop you taking your long tricks when they are established, you must ensure that you don't take the top tricks too early. You expect to lose a trick or two defending a No Trump contract, so set about establishing your club suit by leading your "fourth highest of longest and strongest". Lead the seven of clubs.

There is another reason why you should not lead the ace. What if partner has the doubleton queen? Or dummy has Q10x and partner Jx and declarer guesses wrong which card to play from dummy (in fact it is less than a guess, inserting the ten wins every time West has the jack, going up with the queen only wins when West has both the ace and king). West has no entry outside the clubs, so sets out to lose the first trick and hopefully to win the next four if partner can gain the lead and has a second club to lead back. East does, on both counts. East hangs on to their king of spades and the second club and the moment declarer finesses the spades (declarer's best option for the ninth trick), you have the next four tricks. See what happens if you cash just one of your top clubs at trick one!

Dealer West All Vul

♠ 10 9 8
♥ Q 7 5 2
♦ A Q
♣ K J 7 3

♠ K 2
♥ J 10 9
♦ K 9 8 4
♣ A Q 9 6

♠ A J 6 4
♥ A K 8 6
♦ J 6
♣ 10 8 5

♠ Q 7 5 3
♥ 4 3
♦ 10 7 5 3 2
♣ 4 2

The bidding has been:

West	East
1NT	2C
2D	3NT

After West opens 1NT, North is cut out of the bidding. East uses Stayman to look for a major suit fit, but West denies having 4H or 4S so East bids 3NT.

North should do some counting: West has a minimum of 12 HCP and East 13+. That leaves partner with three at most. It is not a time to look for help from partner in any of your suits, so play it safe by leading your ten of spades. That might find the only points in partner's hand but it is safer than any other lead. The spades are also good middle cards, therefore less likely to damage partner's holding if partner has e.g Kxxx, Qxxx, or Jxxx. After that, North intends to continue spades and not lead away from the other suits.

Let's repeat the hands here, for convenience.

Dealer West All Vul

♠ 10 9 8

♥ Q 7 5 2

♦ A Q

♣ K J 7 3

♠ K 2

♥ J 10 9

♦ K 9 8 4

♣ A Q 9 6

♠ A J 6 4

♥ A K 8 6

♦ J 6

♣ 10 8 5

♠ Q 7 5 3

♥ 4 3

♦ 10 7 5 3 2

♣ 4 2

As it happens, the spade lead might immediately tell North that partner has nothing other than the queen of spades. If declarer plays low from dummy, South should signal with the seven, and declarer will win the king. Or, if declarer covers with the jack from dummy, South can safely cover with the queen, expecting North to have the nine at least, and hopefully the eight also. Declarer's best play is not to put in the jack from dummy but play low and win the king of spades and immediately run the jack of hearts. This works and four heart tricks are taken. Now declarer might run the eight of clubs, losing to North's jack. North persists with the nine of spades and this puts declarer under pressure. If declarer finesses and loses, declarer may never make the ace! So, the best play is to win the ace and repeat the club finesse. This loses again and North now leads their third spade. Declarer does best not to cover this, limiting the defence to just one spade trick, but North can exit with a club and wait for the AQ of diamonds to take two tricks and defeat the contract.

Declarer might take a different line and scramble nine tricks somehow, but at least North has tried their best. The heart lead, as it happens, does no harm as declarer can always finesse that suit for four tricks. A club lead helps declarer considerably, and a diamond lead should never be considered from that holding. Leading from your apparently weakest suit in this instance though, is definitely the best move!