

Ultimate Defence 23

Let us now continue with our quest for ultimate defence by looking at some examples of thinking ahead, a vital part of any defence. Once the opening lead is made, it is up to the defence to continue with the good work that the lead has started, or to try and change the attack if the lead looks like being unsuccessful.

Generally, it is not a good idea to change the original defence plan set by the opening lead unless there is good evidence to try "Plan B". Therefore it is best to decide on the opening lead and then for both partners to cooperate with the plan. In effect, the partner must try and read the opening leader's mind, otherwise how can he cooperate in the defence? And cooperating is not such a simple matter as "returning partner's lead", as the simplistic teaching goes. Yes, this rule is based on good sense, but a far better way to defend is for the partner of the opening leader to infer the plan that partner has started on, and then follow through with it. Few partnerships do this, yet for a good partnership, this is vital.

You should always ask yourself "What is partner's plan" when you see the opening lead. It will become apparent when you see the lead, dummy, and in combination with your own holding, just what partner's basic plan is. For instance, has partner led from his long, strong, suit? Has he tried to find YOUR suit? Is he trying to stop declarer ruffing in dummy? Has he led from his short suit, looking for a ruff? Has he tried to make a safe lead in order to give nothing away? These are all thoughts that should be going through your own head if you are on lead, so try and read partner's mind when he makes the opening lead.

This is all theory based on the assumption that you can rely on partner to have thought about is as well, but bridge IS a game requiring a lot of thinking, despite what some would prefer. Just try it and see the vast improvement that just a bit of cooperative thinking between you and your partner will achieve.

Now let's have a look at some deals in practice.

Dealer East All Vul

♠ 6 5 4
♥ 9 7 5 2
♦ K 5 3 2
♣ K 3

♠ K 8 2
♥ Q J 10
♦ Q J 9
♣ A 8 7 5

♠ A Q 3
♥ A 8 6 4
♦ 10 6 4
♣ Q J 10

♠ J 10 9 7
♥ K 3
♦ A 8 7
♣ 9 6 4 2

The possible bidding:

W	N	E	S
		1NT	NB
3NT	NB	NB	NB

The bidding has been short and sweet. About all that South knows is that East has a balanced 12-14 HCP and West has enough values for game and no interest in the majors. The opening lead should therefore be obvious. South should start with their 'longest and strongest', the JACK of spades (not 'fourth highest' because of the solid sequence at the top). Here is where the importance of signalling comes in. Whether declarer plays the king from dummy, or a low card, North must signal by playing the four, which, being the lowest card, should send a message to South. He has not struck the right spot, and declarer clearly has the ace and queen. After that, declarer will finesse in either clubs or hearts by leading the queen and letting it run. Both finesses are losing finesses, but whichever of the defence partnership wins the king, they must now find the best continuation.

If it is North who wins the king of clubs, the continuation of a spade is more likely than if South wins his king, therefore a good declarer will take the heart finesse first. But when South wins the king, the simple play of the lowest spade on the opening lead by North should have told South that a) there is no future in spades and b) South should look for an alternative source of tricks. South switches to the ace of diamonds and North signals as encouragingly as he can, following with the five. It is vital to look at all the cards as they are played, and an observant South will note that the three and two are still out after declarer follows with the four. South will therefore continue with another diamond and whether North ducks this to preserve the communication, or wins the king and clears the diamonds, North will gain the lead with the king of clubs to take the setting diamond tricks. Should declarer play on CLUBS first, when North wins the king, he must bite the bullet and switch to a diamond, but this time when South wins the ace and returns another, North must DUCK to ensure that South still has another to lead should South win a heart if the finesse loses, which it does. Isn't defence FUN when both partners cooperate? Try defending without signalling. You may as well drive your car blindfolded.