

Ultimate Defence 31

I am now going to embark on a short series on how to tell partner what partner wants to know, and of course getting partner to tell you what you want to know. That is what partnership play is about. Declarer is usually happy to play opposite a dummy, but as a defender the last thing you want is to have a dummy opposite, rather than to either side!

This brief series will be entitled “Counsel For The Defence” and is based on my experiences many years ago.

Counsel for The Defence 01

So little seems to have been written about defence as compared to declarer play that I was beginning to wonder whether there really is very much to that part of the game. You learn the basic concepts and that's all you really need. Lead through strength, up to weakness, encourage or discourage partner when they lead a card, return the lead, give him count and sometimes even a suit preference signal.

Of course you can't do all these things at once, or can you.....?

I believe you can indeed do all these things at once if you develop a proper partnership understanding. I don't mean all at the same time in the literal sense but one can in most cases tell partner what it is that he really wants to know at the time that he wants to know it, or which it is that he wants, or needs to, know the most. If he wants a count, give him a count, if he wants encouragement or discouragement, give him that. Or if he wants suit preference, then give him that. All fine in theory you might say, but how can you do all that in practice without getting your messages garbled?

I was fortunate enough to have my eyes opened many many years ago when I played a tournament with a prominent lawyer who shall remain nameless but let's just call him a Counsel for the Defence, first name Bob. I had met Bob many times at the bridge table but never directly opposite. Hence we agreed to play very simple Precision and to use 'standard' signalling methods, you know the sort of thing that I have been talking about: encourage, discourage, suit preference, the usual sort of nonsense.

Bob and I seemed to develop an instant rapport on defence until this little number came up:

Dealer South EW Vul

Dummy (East)

♠ Q 6 4

♥ J 6 3

♦ A Q 9 7 5

♣ 8 2

Me (South)

♠ 7 5 3

♥ 8 4

♦ K 6 4

♣ A K Q 10 9

At favourable vulnerability, as dealer I opted for a 1NT opening (12-15). In fact I really had no choice considering the system we were playing. Left hand opponent doubled and Bob bid 2H, not what I wanted to hear but hey, we weren't vulnerable after all. But right hand opponent bid 3H which was converted very smartly to 3NT. I considered doubling for an unusual lead but couldn't be sure that that would be a club, or that it wouldn't suggest that partner could lead his suit, so I passed and simply hoped that I could get to make my clubs before declarer made nine tricks. When Bob, as expected, led a heart and dummy appeared I was quite hopeful. The heart ran to declarer's nine and dummy was entered with the queen of spades, and a heart was led, to declarer's queen and Bob's king. Surely you can now place me with the top clubs, pard, I thought to myself, but no such luck Bob continued with a third heart, the two. I was annoyed that he would try and set up his hearts instead of doing the obvious, so I signalled strongly with the ten of clubs, knowing full well that it was too late. I just had to hope that declarer, who was quite a fresh faced youth, would fail to read the situation and take the diamond finesse.

What happened next will be revealed in chapter 2.