

The most difficult part of the game

To master this game, you have to do well in both play and defence.

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiastic non-expert who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

By the time this column appears, it will be 2016. So in keeping with that New Year's resolution you made to improve your defence (and no, there were no prizes for working out that the title of this column refers to defence) here are a few hands to ponder over, from various congresses in November 2015.

Let's start with a couple of opening lead problems. For the first, your LHO bids 1C, partner overcalls 1H, RHO bids 1S and despite your enthusiastic raise in hearts, opponents effortlessly reach 4S. What will you lead?

♠ Q3
♥ AT963
♦ J72
♣ 982

| W | You | E | S |
|----|-----|----|----|
| | | 1C | 1H |
| 1S | 3H | 4S | |

On this next hand, RHO deals and opens 1NT (15-17 hcp) and LHO transfers to hearts, then bids 3NT. Once again, you're in the hot seat...

♠ K53
♥ JT843
♦ 954
♣ K2

| W | You | E | S |
|-----|-----|-----|---|
| 1NT | P | 2D! | P |
| 2H | P | 3NT | |

This time the opening lead is not a problem. You are West, South opens 1S and North bids 4D as a splinter. South signs off in 4S. You lead the ♠J which partner takes with the ace. She returns the ♣3 for you to ruff. What now?

♠ K73
♥ AQ5
♦ 4
♣ QT8752

♠ T982
♥ 9432
♦ AJT9
♣ J

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | |
| W | | E |
| | | S |

| You | N | E | S |
|-----|----|---|----|
| | | | 1S |
| P | 4D | P | 4S |

Splinter

And for one last problem, you are South. Partner passes as dealer, East opens 1C and rebids clubs after West's 1S response, then after West shows hearts, East continues to 3NT. You lead the ♦5 to partner's king and declarer's ace. Declarer cashes the ♠K and plays a heart to the ace, on which partner follows with the queen. Now declarer cashes the ♠A, discarding a heart, and takes the club finesse. What do you do after winning your king?

♠ A98642
♥ AT73
♦ 6
♣ 75

♠ 53
♥ K642
♦ Q8532
♣ K4

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | |
| W | | E |
| | | S |

| W | N | E | You |
|----|---|-----|-----|
| | P | 1C | P |
| 1S | P | 2C | P |
| 2H | P | 3NT | |

The first two hands illustrate the general idea that when you're trying to find an attacking lead from a rather ordinary-looking hand, it pays to ask yourself "where could a setting trick come from?" Then if you avoid the silly leads and the leads that aren't likely to help your side, have a look at what's left. It's probably best!

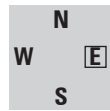
Thus on the first hand, with LHO bidding clubs, that lead probably isn't going anywhere; you won't get rich leading a heart since you and partner have at least a 10-card fit; leading a spade makes no sense; so why not a low diamond, promising an honour?

Board 14

Dealer E | Vul None

♠ Q3
♥ AT963
♦ J72
♣ 982

♠ AKT654
♥ 4
♦ 983
♣ K76



♠ 72
♥ 75
♦ KQ4
♣ AQJT43

| W | You | E | S |
|----|-----|----|----|
| | | 1C | 1H |
| 1S | 3H | 4S | |



♠ J98
♥ KQJ82
♦ AT65
♣ 5

| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| N | - | 1 | 3 | - | - |
| S | - | 1 | 3 | - | - |
| E | 4 | - | - | 3 | 1 |
| W | 4 | - | - | 3 | 1 |

As it turns out, this is a very effective lead. Partner takes the ace and returns a diamond to knock out dummy's winner. Then when the defenders come in with a spade, there's a heart and a diamond to cash. At the Parramatta Teams, 27 of 41 pairs made at least 10 tricks in spades, whereas only 3 went off. Two of these were on a low diamond lead. A heart lead and a diamond switch also works.

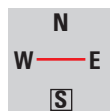
The second hand involves similar logic. There doesn't seem to be much point leading a heart when LHO clearly has five, a top-of-nothing diamond hardly looks promising for developing tricks, a club lead into the notrump opener doesn't seem rational, so it must be a low spade, mustn't it?

Board 19

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ 76
♥ A9752
♦ J82
♣ A65

♠ K53
♥ JT843
♦ 954
♣ K3



♠ QJ842
♥ 6
♦ K76
♣ QJ94

| You | N | E | S |
|-----|-----|---|-----|
| | | | 1NT |
| P | 2D! | P | 2H |
| p | 3NT | | |

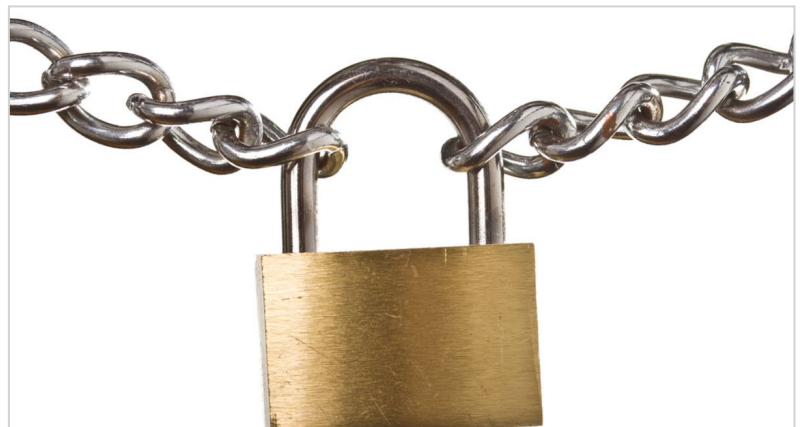


♠ AT9
♥ KQ
♦ AQT3
♣ T872

| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| N | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| S | 3 | 3 | 4 | 1 | W |
| E | - | - | - | - | - |
| W | - | - | - | - | - |

A spade lead isn't the only way South can be held to 8 tricks, but it is effective. If South ducks the first two spade tricks, East can switch to a low club. At the Manly Leagues Margaret Smith Memorial Teams, 14 of 21 NS pairs who played in notrumps made 9 or more tricks, which contributed to quite a few swings.

Defence is the most challenging part of the game.



The next hand is in fact straight out of the textbook, but it needs courage. Partner's return of the ♣3 is suit preference for diamonds, of course, so it's time to take a deep breath, underlead your diamond ace and get another ruff. Nothing else works.

Board 11

Dealer S | Vul None

♠ K73
♥ AQ5
♦ 4
♣ QT8752

♠ T982
♥ 9432
♦ AJT9
♣ J

♠ J
♥ JT87
♦ K8653
♣ A63

♠ AQ654
♥ K6
♦ Q72
♣ K94

11
6 9
14

| You | N | E | S |
|-----|----|---|----|
| | | | 1S |
| P | 4D | P | 4S |

| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| N | 4 | - | - | 3 | 1 |
| S | 4 | - | - | 3 | 1 |
| E | - | 2 | 2 | - | - |
| W | - | 2 | 2 | - | - |

At the Parramatta Teams, 25 of 41 made 4S, but 11 went off.

The final hand involves listening to the bidding. Declarer did not raise hearts and discarded a heart on the ♠A. There is just no way declarer had 4 hearts to start with, so partner's play of ♥Q must be promising the jack! Underlead your ♥K and 3NT will go down 2 tricks, because partner will be able to cash two spade tricks to go with your diamond, club and another heart.

Board 17

Dealer N | Vul None

♠ QJT7
♥ QJ
♦ KT74
♣ T87

♠ A98642
♥ AT73
♦ 6
♣ 75

♠ K
♥ 985
♦ AJ9
♣ AQJ963

♠ 53
♥ K642
♦ Q8532
♣ K4

9
8 15
8

| W | N | E | You |
|----|---|-----|-----|
| | P | 1C | P |
| 1S | P | 2C | P |
| 2H | P | 3NT | |

| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| N | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| S | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| E | 5 | - | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| W | 4 | - | 3 | 3 | 3 |

At the Trumps Spring Teams, East usually made a partscore in clubs or spades, but 3 pairs made 9 tricks in notrumps. Of course after a diamond lead, the contract is cold if declarer knows she can protect the ♦J by playing the ♣A and ♣Q at tricks 2 and 3, but in reality the finesse beckons... 🍀