

TIPS FOR DEFENDERS

Reg Busch



You are West on lead against a suit contract. You lead the $\spadesuit 9$ from 9872.

AJ1039 (dummy)

9872 (you)

The play goes 9, 10, Q 4. Who holds the $\spadesuit K$? Obviously partner does, else declarer would have taken the $\spadesuit Q$ with his $\spadesuit K$.

What if the play had gone 9,10,K,4? Who has the $\spadesuit Q$? Clearly declarer must, else East would have played the $\spadesuit Q$. Perhaps, perhaps not. Time and again in our club games, I've seen Easts who, holding both the diamond honours, win the first trick with the $\spadesuit K$. When queried about this, they will say 'The diamond honours are equals, so it doesn't matter which one I play!' But East doesn't realise that, to his partner, this is not obvious. If my partner's $\spadesuit Q$ holds the trick, I *know* that he holds the $\spadesuit K$ (unless declarer is mad). But, if partner must play his $\spadesuit K$ to win the trick, then I *know* that he does not have the $\spadesuit Q$ (why use the $\spadesuit K$ when the $\spadesuit Q$ would do?). So declarer must hold it, and I must look elsewhere (wrongly) for defensive tricks.

Such Easts are quite oblivious to the fact that bridge is a partnership game. Defence is the most difficult part of our game, and good partnership understanding is essential here. It would not be too much of an exaggeration to say that every card you play in defence carries some sort of message to partner. To me, the logical way to play cards that are 'equals' is to play the lowest of the sequence. In that way, partner can place the higher cards as probably in my hand.

If your aim is to be a competent bridge player, remember this when you sit down at the bridge table: for the next few hours the most important person in your life is your bridge partner. Make life easy for him. Don't force him to guess. Thus: against a $4\spadesuit$ contract, partner leads the $\clubsuit K$ (promising the $\clubsuit Q$), taken by dummy's Ace. You hold $\clubsuit J987$. Play the $\clubsuit 9$ (not the 8 or 7 because they look "high enough") to tell him it is safe to continue when he gets in again.

Below are a few not uncommon situations where you and partner would be co-operating in defence, but first let's introduce an old term.

The Peter

This is an old fashioned but useful term from the days of whist. To peter is to play high/low in a suit. In standard methods, to peter is to show that you like partner's lead when he leads from honours. When discarding it shows that you have values in the suit you play. In this context, a peter is an 'attitude' signal

(I like/dislike your lead). In other situations, a peter may be a count signal showing how many cards you hold in the suit.

Giving partner a ruff

In a recent article, we covered the matter of Lavinthal type signals. Thus, having bid spades during the auction, you hold ♠AK962, and, against a 4H contract, partner leads the ♠8, presumably from a doubleton. You cash the K, A and then the card you lead for him to ruff signals where your other entry may be. The 9 would show diamonds, the higher of the non-trump suits, and the 2 would show clubs, the lower suit. The 6 would be a neutral card, giving no preference. From this particular holding, partner would have little difficulty in reading your signal. But, if your holding had been say AK543, how many partners would read the 5 as suggesting diamonds? So: **when anticipating a ruff, keep track of the spot cards in partner's suit, not the honours,**

Giving count

You are West and hear South open with 1♥, North bids 4♥ and South bashes 6♥. You hold the ♠AK72, and hopefully lead the King, promising the Ace. Play goes: K,4,9,J

	Q54	
AK72		9
	J	

Declarer's ♣J may be a false card – any sensible declarer with a doubleton J x will play the Jack – he has nothing to lose. So you are in a quandary! Do you try to cash the Ace at the risk of having it ruffed and thus establishing dummy's Q to discard a loser? Your only problem is 'Will the play of my Ace hold up?' Partner can solve this if you have this agreement with partner:

When partner plays the King promising the Ace, and Qxx is in the dummy, you *always* give partner *count* in the suit. High /low for an even number, low for an odd number.

So partner's ♣9 shows an even number of clubs, either 2, 4 or 6. It can't be 6, as South would be void. Whether it is 2 or 4, then it is safe to cash your Ace and take the contract off. .

Below the slam level it may not always be right to cash your Ace at this time, but at least you will know that it *is* cashable.

Giving count #2

South opens 2NT (21-22 HCP) and North bids 3NT. West leads the ♠9, which declarer wins. Then declarer leads the ♣10 partner following with the ♣2.

Here is the club suit:

KQJ54

A97 (you)

There are no other likely entries in dummy. Do you win the Ace? If not now, then when?

This is the classical hold-up play. You aim to hold up your Ace until declarer has no more clubs. Declarer holds at least 2 clubs for his 2NT opening, so we hold up. Now declarer leads the ♣8, partner the ♣3, and dummy the ♣J. Do we take our Ace now?

Yes. Partner, by playing the ♣2, then the ♣3, has told us that he holds three clubs. So declarer has only two and we can confidently take our Ace. Had partner held an even number of clubs, he would have petered with the 3 then the 2. This is a vital understanding we must have with partner when there is a long suit in dummy. To take our Ace too soon is to allow declarer to make four club tricks. To take it too late may have presented him with his ninth trick.

So: when there is a long suit in dummy a peter will show an even number of cards.

This applies also when declarer has a presumed long suit. Remember that declarer is not always the stronger hand.

Petering to show an even number of cards is a good practice for defenders. Against a declarer who doesn't bother to watch the cards it's fairly safe to do it routinely. But against a good declarer, it is often more useful to him than to us. So give count only when you think it important for partner.

Giving Count #3

Against a NT contract, partner leads the ♣3. Here is the situation

AQ6

3

965

Declarer plays the ♣Q. What card do you play?

It is clear that you would have played the King if you had it. There is no possible reason to hold off. Here you don't give partner an attitude signal, you give him a count signal. In this case, you play the five to show three. If you had a doubleton, you would play the nine. In showing your count, you are also telling partner declarer's count, which may help partner in establishing his suit.

So: on partner's opening lead, where you can't beat dummy's card but would obviously do so if you could, you give partner count.

Petering in trumps

Another good understanding with partner. Say partner has bid spades and you

are defending 4H. You lead your singleton ♠4, taken by dummy's Ace (partner encouraging), and declarer leads trumps. You hold ♥982. You peter by playing the ♥9 then the ♥2. This says to partner 'I have three trumps and am interested in a ruff'. If partner gets the lead in time he may be able to give you a ruff. If you don't peter he knows you probably don't have three trumps. Even if your lead had been from a doubleton, you would do the same, as a ruff is still possible.

The same would apply if, for example, you had led any singleton against a suit contract. Partner may not be sure whether your lead was a singleton, but your trump peter reinforces the message.

So: To peter in trumps shows three trumps and a desire to ruff.