

# Defense

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## The Opening Lead

The single most important card played in the game of bridge is the opening lead. More contracts are either fulfilled or defeated as a direct result of the opening lead than by any other play.

There are two separate and distinct aspects to the opening lead: choosing which suit to lead and, once having decided on the suit, which card to lead from your particular holding in that suit.

Picking the best suit to lead is one of the most difficult and, unfortunately, most important decisions you have to make at the bridge table. It is an area where even the experts often go wrong. The opening lead is made “blind”; it is the only play you ever have to make without the benefit of seeing the dummy.

Luckily, once you decide which suit to lead your choice of cards in that suit is almost automatic. Ever since the days of whist, leads have been standardized. I assume you are familiar with most standard leads, but will present some here which you may not know as well as some that are so important they should be reiterated.

- Against notrump, the normal lead is your fourth best card from your longest and strongest suit. Exceptions may be made if you hold a strong honor combination.
- When leading from length against a suit contract, the proper card to lead is your fourth best (the same as against notrump).
- Lead the top card from touching honors except, in the United States, it is customary to lead the king from either ace-king or king-queen. It is becoming more popular to lead the ace from ace-king even in the U.S.
- The lead of an honor against notrump promises not only the next lower honor but also a third honor, either touching or the next lower card. For example, the lead of a king not only promises the queen, but either the jack or 10 as well.
- Lead the top card from any doubleton.
- From three small cards, there is no general agreement. Some prefer the highest card (“top of nothing”). This has the advantage of warning partner you have no desire to have the suit returned. Others (myself included), feeling that count in the suit is more important, prefer the smallest card. A third school of thought insists the proper card to lead is the middle card MUD leads). This is an area you must discuss with partner.
- There is an old wives’ tale that you should lead the highest card in a suit your partner bid. This is wrong. The proper card is your normal lead from your particular holding in the suit.
- The old “rule” that you should never underlead a king is also wrong
- Do not underlead aces against suit contracts. It is far too dangerous. You may never take your ace or, worse yet, partner will misdefend the hand because he “knows” you don’t have the ace in the suit led. This does not apply versus notrump, where aces are frequently underled.

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- The lead of an ace (if obviously from length) versus notrump requests partner to play his highest card in the suit on the first trick.

Against notrump, the lead of a queen requests partner to play the jack if he has it. The queen might be led from some holding as: A-K-Q-10-x or K-Q-10-9-x.

## Leading the Right Suit

Choosing the best suit to lead at trick one is an area where you must be alert to many factors and use your judgment. To this end, we will look at some general guidelines to help your decision. If you are more interested in this subject (and, if you seriously intend to improve your game, you should be), Robert B. Ewen's book *Opening Leads* is highly recommended.

Lead the suit partner bid. Not only may this be the beginning of the best defense, but also partners have a tendency to get very angry when their suit is not led. Even if you fail to defeat the contract, you will maintain partnership harmony.

- Lead an unbid suit. If you have a choice of unbid suits, prefer the one you have some strength in. That way, you don't have to rely so much on partner's holding in the suit.
- Lead your longest suit vs. notrump. Sometimes, when you have no outside entries, it can be better to lead a short suit, hoping to "hit" partner's length, but it must be recognized that this strategy is a desperate one. In general, be safe – lead your long suit.
- Against suit contracts lead a strong honor combination. Lead the king from A-K or K-Q, the queen from Q-J, etc.
- With a good hand, where you suspect you hold almost all of the defensive strength, consider a passive lead. Try not to give anything away on the opening lead.
- With some length in trumps (usually four cards or more) or the suspicion that partner may have some length, try the effect of leading a long side suit to "force" declarer.
- When you are well heeled in declarer's second suit, a trump lead is often right.
- If your side seems marked with the preponderance of the high cards, consider leading a trump to cut down on dummy's ruffing power. If dummy's bidding indicates a short suit might be in dummy, a trump lead is also indicated.
- When one of the opponents leaves a notrump contract in favor of a suit contract a trump lead is often right.
- Lead aggressively against small slams. The opening lead may be your last chance to establish the setting trick for the defense. Declarer will be reluctant to stake his contract on finesse at trick one.
- Make a passive lead against grand slams. You need only one trick to defeat the contract; let declarer do all the work.
- Singleton and doubleton leads are usually poor ones. Short-suit leads give away far more

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tricks than they gain; they should be considered desperation leads. Short suit honor leads are the worst. *Exception:* lead singletons against slams and strongly bid game contracts.

- Keep an ear open during the auction for the opponents' weaknesses. While the opening lead must be made "blind," it should never be made "deaf."

## The Art of Signaling

It is one of the fascinations of the game of bridge that a player with few or no high cards can take an active and important role in defending a contract.

When defending, the average beginner either follows suit with a high card in an attempt to win the trick or plays his lowest card in order to preserve his higher ones. This certainly seems logical enough. After all, why waste a 9 when you can follow with a 2?

What the beginner doesn't realize is that not only by the card he plays, but also by the *order* in which he plays it, he can convey information to his partner. There are three different messages he can send across the table. He does this with the come-on signal, the count signal, and the suit preference signal. Each has its place and is important in its own right.

Before we examine each of these signals we should answer a question that bothers many players. Won't our defensive signaling help declarer play the hand? The answer is yes, sometimes it will. But defense is so much more difficult than dummy play that the information conveyed by signaling will generally be much more helpful to the defenders.

## The Come-On Signal

When your partner leads a suit you want continued, you must let him know. Conversely, when you want him to switch to another suit, you have to tell him that too. Unfortunately, it is against both the law and spirit of the game to make any remark or change your expression to show either delight or disgust with his lead. You may however, let your spot cards do the talking for you. All good players do just that.

For example, suppose you hold the ♥Q-9-2 and partner leads the ♥K. You want the suit continued so you play an *unnecessarily high* spot card on the king, in this case the ♥9. Partner will notice that the ♥2 was not played on the first trick and should deduce your high spot card is a come-on signal. The come-on simply says to him, "I liked your lead, partner. Please continue the suit if and when you get the chance." If your holding had been ♥9-6-2, you would have played the ♥2 to the first trick, indicating no interest in the suit.

There are other ways to convey interest in a particular suit to partner. You can show interest by discarding a high card in the suit when you can't follow suit to some other lead. In this situation, sometimes you cannot afford a high card in the suit you want led. In that case, show your interest by discarding low cards in the other suits. By negative inference partner will know what suit you are really interested in.

For example, suppose declarer runs several spade tricks and you can't follow suit. You discard the ♥2 and then the ♣2. Your partner, watching your discards, will think, "My partner, has no spades, he played the two of both hearts and clubs, showing no interest in either of those suits, therefore he must want me to lead diamonds when I get in."

As a matter of good practice, when signaling high you should play the *highest* card you can afford; when

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signaling, low you should play your lowest card. In addition, you should know that a signal with an honor absolutely guarantees the next lower touching honor (or, obviously, an original singleton –in which case you had no choice) and denies the next higher touching honor. Thus if you lead the king from A-K-x and partner plays the queen you know it is safe to underlead the ace at the next trick. Therefore you must realize that when you hold the Q-x in a suit and partner leads the king you must play the small card even though you may want the suit continued.

### The Echo

Sometimes you want a suit continued but you don't have a high card to play. How can you let partner know to lead the suit again? The solution again is to follow with the *highest* card in the suit that you can afford. With Q-3-2, if partner leads the king, play the 3 and hope that partner will notice the 2 was missing on the first trick. A good partner *will* notice. The next time the suit is played, you will follow with the 2 and your message will become clear. This play, where you play a high card followed by a low card is known as an "echo" (or, in Europe, a "peter").

Sometimes you will want to discourage but have nothing but high cards, 10-9-8; play the lowest and hope partner won't be misled.

If your signals are to work, it is important to notice and make a mental note of every small card played. While this may seem to be a formidable task at first, with practice it is relatively easy. If you can't remember that partner played the four on the first round of a suit, how can you ever know if his play of the three on the second round is the completion of an echo or not?

Of all the signals we can send across the table to partner, the come-on is far and away the most common as well as the most useful. If there is ever a doubt as to exactly what partner's echo (or high card) means, assume it is a come-on signal.

### The Count Signal

The second most common message sent to partner is done with the count signal. Although some authorities recommend "giving count" only in those situations where it is obvious that one is needed, in practice you will find it advantageous to give count on almost every hand. Most hands are much easier to defend when you can deduce declarer's distribution. Even if you are not an expert at counting a bridge hand, perhaps partner is and you can make his task much simpler by providing a count for him. There are some hands in which signaling your length in a particular suit is absolutely vital to the defense.

To give count, when declarer leads a suit you follow "up the line" or low-to-high with an odd number of cards in the suit. With an even number, you echo. An exception to this rule occurs in the trump suit: in trumps, you echo with odd and play up the line with even.

Note that it is impossible to make a come-on signal in a suit led by declarer. Many people are under the mistaken impression that an echo in this situation shows "stuff" in the suit.

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Let's see some examples of just how important the count signal can be for the defense.

♠ K Q J 10 8	
♥ A 7	
♦ 8 5 2	
♣ 7 6 2	
<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 5px;">             N W     E S           </div>	♠ A 7 4
	♥ K 3
	♦ J 10 9 7
	♣ Q J 10 4

Against three notrump, partner leads the ♥10. You win the first trick with the ♥K and return the ♥3 in order to knock out what may be a very important entry to dummy. Declarer plays the ♠K, you (properly) duck, declarer follows with the ♠5 and partner, the ♠2. The ♠Q is led from dummy. What do you do?

If you ducked again, declarer just made his contract. But of course, you played the ace and led a minor suit, holding declarer to eight tricks. How did you know when to take the ace? Because of partner's play of the ♠2 on the first round.

With an even number of spades, partner would have started an echo. Therefore, since the ♠2 is the smallest spade in the deck, partner is marked with an odd number (either 1 or 3) of spades. If he had only a singleton, declarer started with four and would have no problem returning to dummy even if you held up your ace another round. But if partner had three spades, declarer started with only two and it was safe for you to take your ace on the second round since you know declarer can never get back to dummy to enjoy all those good spades.

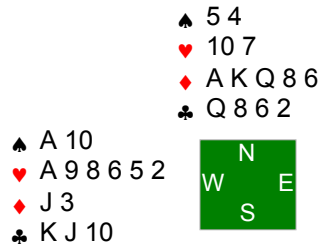
The entire hand was:

	♠ K Q J 10 8	
	♥ A 7	
	♦ 8 5 2	
	♣ 7 6 2	
♠ 6 3 2	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 5px;">             N W     E S           </div>	♠ A 7 4
♥ 10 9 8 6 2		♥ K 3
♦ Q 6		♦ J 10 9 7
♣ 9 8 5		♣ Q J 10 4
	♠ 9 5	
	♥ Q J 5 4	
	♦ A K 4 3	
	♣ A K 3	

If you had ducked the second spade lead, declarer would have had nine tricks. Your partner's count signal saved the day.

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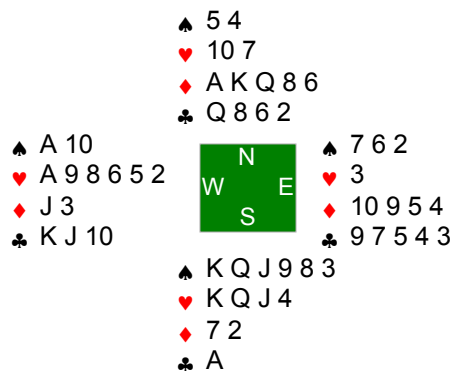
Most examples of count signals to be found in textbooks occur against notrump contracts. But count signals are equally important against suit contracts. By providing count, the defenders can learn what suit(s) to hold at the end of a hand. Providing count in the trump suit itself can sometimes lead to an extra ruffing trick for the defense. How often have you been in the situation that you knew partner was void in some side suit but, because a couple of rounds of trump have already been played, you didn't know if he could still ruff or not? The count signal can help here too.



Defending against four spades, you lead the ♥A and another heart. Partner ruffs the second trick with the ♠6 and returns the ♣4 to declarer's ace. Declarer leads the ♠K, which you win with the ace, as partner follows with the ♠2. You have taken three tricks so far and only need one more to set the contract. What do you lead? (Be careful now.)

Basically, you have a choice of two plays: You can attempt to cash the ♣K or you can attempt to give partner another heart ruff. Maybe you can do both. Which is safer? Can you cash the king? Probably, but declarer might have started with a singleton ace, in which case a club return would enable him to make his contract. Can you give your partner a heart ruff, or is partner out of trumps? Yes, you can give your partner another ruff – he has another trump. How do you know? Were you watching the cards? He trumped the heart with the ♠6 and followed to the spade lead with the ♠2. He echoed to show he started with an odd number of trumps. Therefore he must have another one and a heart return is completely safe.

The entire hand was:



If you had tried to cash the ♣K, declarer would have ruffed, drawn your partner's trump, and claimed the remainder of the tricks. Once again, the count signal enabled you to make a play that was guaranteed to beat the contract. If partner had not echoed in trumps, you would have had to assume that he didn't have any more and you would have tried to cash the club.

Remember, an echo in a plain suit shows an even number of cards in the suit; an echo in the *trump suit* shows an odd number.

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## The Suit Preference Signal

The third type of signal commonly used by the defense is the suit preference signal (sometimes called the Lavinthal, after its originator). This is, without a doubt, the most misused of all the signals. For some reason many players attempt to use it in situations where it cannot possibly apply. *The suit preference signal applies only when a come-on signal cannot apply.*


Employed properly, the suit preference is a very useful tool. It works like this: When there is *no question* about the necessity to shift to another suit, the play of an unnecessarily high card requests a shift to the higher-ranking suit, a low card asks for a shift to the lower-ranking suit.

You will notice that this signal can differentiate between only two suits. But there are four suits in the deck, what about the other two suits? First of all, the suit led is not counted, since the suit preference signal is used only when there is an obvious need to *shift*. Secondly, the trump suit is also ignored.

The suit preference is most commonly used when you are leading to a trick you know (or suspect) partner will ruff. After he ruffs the trick, he will obviously have to shift to another suit. The card you lead to the ruffing trick can tell him which suit to return.

Here's an example:

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



You are defending four spades. For lack of a better opening lead, you lead the ♥A and partner drops the ♥K on the first trick. How do you continue?

Partner's heart must have been singleton and it looks like you can beat this contract if you can manage two heart ruffs to go along with your two red aces. So at trick two you lead another heart for partner to ruff. Which heart do you lead?

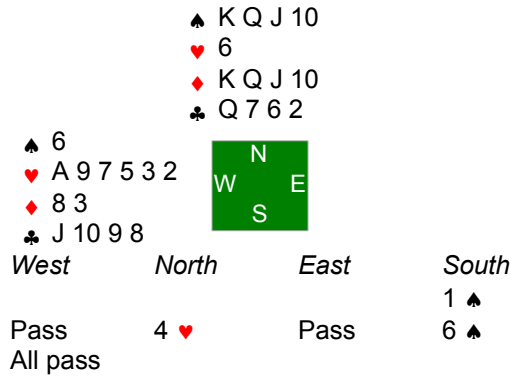
You must lead the ♥9. That will be an obvious high card to partner and he will return a diamond, the higher-ranking side suit, to your ace. Then you can give him another ruff to beat the contract, If your entry had been in clubs, you would have led the ♥4 to the second trick.

If you didn't play suit preference signals, you probably would not have beaten this hand. Partner most likely would have returned a club up to dummy's weakness rather than a diamond up to the ♦K-J-6.

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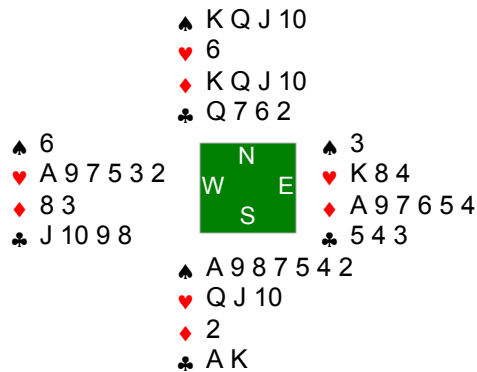
Another example:



After a strong auction, 1♠ – 4♥ (Splinter) – 6♠, you decide to lead the ♥A against the opponents' spade slam. Partner plays the ♥K on the first trick: What should you lead at the next trick?

Can the ♥K be a come-on? No, there can be no reason partner can have for wanting the heart suit continued. The need to shift is obvious. Partner's king must have been a violent suit preference signal imploring you to lead a diamond.

The entire hand:



If you lead a diamond, the defense will take the first two tricks and beat the slam. If you lead anything else, declarer will win, pull trump and discard his diamond loser on the club queen.



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You must be careful not to misapply the suit preference signal. Suppose you hold the same West hand. Against a different auction, you lead the ♥A and dummy comes down with:

	♠ 5 4					
	♥ 6					
	♦ K Q J 10 4					
	♣ A Q 6 3 2					
♠ 6	♥ A 9 7 5 3 2	♦ 8 3	♣ J 10 9 8			
West	North	East	South			
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N						
W   E						
S						
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	1 ♠			
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	2 ♠			
Pass	4 NT	Pass	3 ♠			
Pass	6 ♠	All pass	5 ♥			

Once again, partner plays the king on your ace. What do you lead to trick two?

*Another heart:* The entire hand was:

	♠ 5 4					
	♥ 6					
	♦ K Q J 10 4					
	♣ A Q 6 3 2					
♠ 6	♥ A 9 7 5 3 2	♦ 8 3	♣ J 10 9 8			
West	North	East	South			
	<table border="1" style="width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto; background-color: #008000; color: white;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W   E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W   E	S		
N						
W   E						
S						
		♠ K 7 3				
		♥ K Q J 4				
		♦ 9 7 6 5				
		♣ 7 4				
	♠ A Q J 10 9 8 2					
	♥ 10 8					
	♦ A 2					
	♣ K 5					

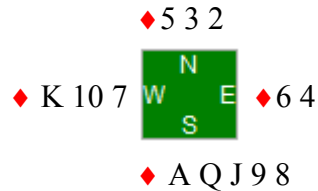
Partner's high heart is simply a strong come-on signal. It is by no means obvious that a shift is called for. Partner wants hearts continued to force dummy to ruff. If declarer can be forced to ruff a heart in dummy, he cannot take two spade finesses through your partner's king third of trumps and East will eventually win a trump trick. Any other defense would allow declarer to make the hand.

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## Tricks with Trumps – The Case for the Defense

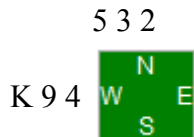
### Trump Tricks from “Nowhere”

You should be aware that it is sometimes possible to promote a trump trick for the defense by refusing to overruff. Look at the following example:

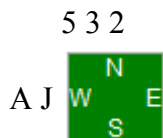


Diamonds are trumps. If East leads a suit that both declarer and West can trump, and South splits his honors by trumping with ♦J, West must *refuse* to overruff with ♦K. Why?

If West overruffs, that will be his last trump trick. When declarer gets back in, he will simply lead out the ♦A and ♦Q, picking up West's ♦10-7. If West refuses the overruff, he will be in a situation where he has the ♦K-10-7 over declarer's ♦A-Q-9-8, and no matter how declarer plays, West will come to two trump tricks (work it out). Some other holdings you should consider not overruffing are:



If declarer ruffs with the queen or jack, consider pitching on the trick. This will promote a trick at once if partner holds the trump 10 or eventually if partner can uppercut declarer again (pitch again).



If declarer ruffs with the king or queen, you should refuse to overruff to assure your side of two trump tricks. Even if you didn't hold the jack it would generally be right to pitch on this trick. Partner might hold the Jack and your refusal to overruff might lead declarer to take the wrong view in the suit.

These are some of the more obvious examples of holdings where you can profit by not overruffing. There are many more, somewhat less obvious situations where it can be right – keep on the lookout for them.

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## The Uppercut

Terence Reese defines the uppercut as “a familiar kind of trump promotion. A defender ruffs as high as he can, though he expects to be overruffed, in the hope of promoting his partner’s trumps.”<sup>1</sup>

Opportunities to make this play occur fairly often and are often overlooked by the defense. A defender with a completely useless trump holding should usually ruff with his highest trump if he gets the opportunity. A ruff with a card as low as the six can possibly effect an undercut, and promote a trump trick for the defense.

Although declarer has the advantage of designating which suit shall be trumps, he doesn’t have a monopoly on the tactical plays involving that suit. Sometimes the defenders too can take advantage of the fact that the hand is being played in a certain suit.

The advantage with which you are probably most familiar is the defensive ruff. One defender, early in the play before trumps are drawn, may lead a singleton or doubleton and be lucky enough to find his partner with a quick entry so he can return the suit for a ruff.

But there are many other situations where the defenders can put their trumps to work for them. The average player will not recognize many situations where the defense has the opportunity to “manufacture” extra trump tricks – which sometimes seem to materialize out of thin air. Let’s examine how this can be possible.

It is an old bridge joke that the poor player is prone to trumping his partner’s aces. In real life, the expert trumps his partner’s aces far more often than the dub. Here is a deal where trumping partner’s ace provided an extra trick for the defense. The deal provides a wonderful example of how the defenders can manufacture trump tricks that, at first glance, don’t seem to be there:

	♠ —		
	♥ K 8		
	♦ J 8 6 5 4 3		
	♣ J 7 4 3 2		
♠ A 10 8		♠ 9 2	
♥ A Q 10 6 4	W N E	♥ 9 7 5 3 2	
♦ A K 2	S	♦ Q 9	
♣ 10 8		♣ A K 9 5	
	♠ K Q J 7 6 5 4 3		
	♥ J		
	♦ 10 7		
	♣ Q 6		

Against a doubled contract of four spades, West led the ♦K. East played the ♦9 and declarer dropped the ♦7. West then shifted to the ♣10. East won that trick with the ♣K, cashed the ♣A and led back the ♣5 (a suit preference for diamonds). South ruffed this trick with the ♠J and West made a good play: he discarded the ♥10. By refusing to overruff, he set up a situation where he held ♠A-10-x over declarer’s ♠K-Q-x and assured himself two trump tricks.

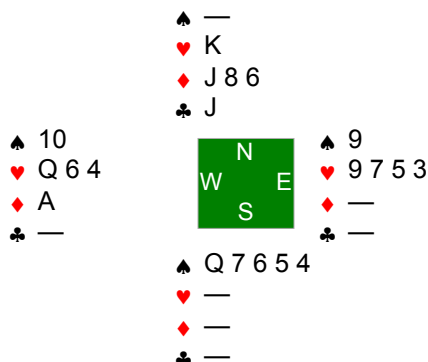
Declarer started to pull our trumps by leading the ♠K. West won this trick with the ♠A and made his second good play of the hand. He led a small(!) diamond to the ♦Q. East returned his last club.

<sup>1</sup> Reese: *Bridge Conventions, Finesses and Coups*, p. 188.

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South ruffed with the ♠3 and West overruffed with the ♠8. He cashed the ♥A and followed by playing the ♦A with the cards in this position:



Since East knew South was out of diamonds too, and the ♠9 was a dead duck anyway, he ruffed partner's ♦A. Notice the effect this had on declarer. He had to lose another trick to the ♠10. The play East made by trumping has a name. It is called an uppercut. How did he know the uppercut would work? He didn't. All he knew was that declarer was going to trump the trick anyway and the ♠9 would fall on the next round of spades, so why not trump with the ♠9, forcing a high card to overruff and just maybe promoting a trump trick for partner.

Declarer made just five trump tricks from an original holding of ♠K-Q-J-7-6-5-4-3, despite the fact the suit split 3-2. Careful defense had set him 1,100 points.

This was a very instructive deal. It serves as an excellent example of how, by careful play, West was able to promote two seemingly nonexistent trump tricks. He actually made all three of his trumps from an original holding of A-10-8 in spite of declarer holding eight trumps to the K-Q-J. This was only possible because he refused to overruff at the first opportunity. It was also necessary for East to uppercut declarer by trumping West's ♦A.

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## The Forcing Game

As alluded to earlier, the best defense often consists of forcing declarer to ruff a certain suit in his hand. This strategy is sometimes called “pumping” declarer. The two main reasons for this type of defense are:

- 1) To cause declarer to lose control of the hand by forcing him to use up all his trumps early.
- 2) To promote a trump trick for one of the defenders.

Let’s see how this works:

♠ A 4 3 2			
♥ 5			
♦ 9 8 7 6 4 3			
♣ J 4			
West	North	East	South
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	1 ♠
All pass			6 ♠

After this strong (but uninformative) auction to six spades, what do you lead?

If you led your singleton heart, declarer just made his slam. In fact, if you led anything other than a diamond, declarer had no trouble taking twelve tricks.

The entire hand was:

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

Notice the devastating effect a diamond lead has on declarer. He is forced to ruff the first trick in his hand, Whenever he gets around to leading trumps, you will win the first trick with the Ace and lead another diamond, forcing declarer again. If declarer ruffs this trick, he will be down to two trumps left in each hand. You still have three trumps left and must make one of them sooner or later. You have managed to *promote* a trump trick for yourself by “pumping” declarer’s trumps.

Be sure to notice that diamonds must be led *twice*, forcing declarer to ruff. Therefore a diamond lead at trick one is necessary if you are to beat this contract. If you lead anything else, declarer will have the time to draw trumps and cash his winners in hearts and clubs, taking, in all, twelve tricks.

This was a very unlucky hand for declarer. He bid the best slam. Slams in hearts and clubs will go down, losing the Ace of spades and a spade ruff. And it took *perfect* defense by you to beat his spade slam.

# Defense

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## Two Common Coups by the Defense

A coup can be defined as any strategic or tactical play by any player, declarer or defender. There are some well-known coups of which you should be aware.

Two coups employed by the defense are the Deschappelles Coup and its closely related cousin, the Merrimac Coup. Both plays revolve around entries, either in declarer's or one of the defenders' hands.

## The Deschapeiles Coup

The Deschappelles Coup is a defensive play in which one player intentionally sacrifices a high card in order to establish an entry to partner's hand.

Here is an example:

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

		N		
W			E	
		S		

Against three notrump, West leads the ♠J. You win the first two tricks with the ♠A and ♠Q. What do you lead to trick three?

It looks certain that partner has some number of spade tricks to run as soon as he regains the lead. If he holds the ♣A, it won't make any difference what you return; it is hard to see how declarer can come to nine tricks without playing on clubs. But if declarer has the ♣A, the situation looks ominous for the defense – he will take four tricks in each minor plus the ♥A.

Recognizing this, your only chance seems to be to play partner for the ♥Q. If he doesn't have it, nothing is lost, for declarer will make his contract anyway. If partner does hold the ♥Q, however, you might be able to establish it as an entry to his good spades.

The proper play at trick three is to lead the *king* of hearts (Deschappelles Coup) from your hand. It will do declarer no good to duck this lead, for you can then simply lead another heart, forcing the ace to be played.

Now, when you come in with the ♦K, you can lead a heart to partner's established ♥Q so he can cash his good spades.

Be sure to notice that a shift to a small heart at trick three would not have worked unless partner held *both* the queen and jack, which is asking a little too much (check it).

# Defense

## The Merrimac Coup

As you might have guessed from the name, the Merrimac Coup is another play which deliberately sacrifices a high card from a defender's hand. It was named for the Merrimac, an American ship deliberately scuttled in 1898 in Santiago Harbor in an attempt to bottle up the Spanish fleet.

The Merrimac Coup may, and often does, give up one or more tricks in the suit led, but hopes to make up more in return by forcing declarer to use an entry prematurely.

The difference between the Deschappelles Coup and the Merrimac Coup is that the former is an attempt to establish an entry while the later is an attempt to destroy an entry. Both coups involve the deliberate sacrifice of a high card.

Here's the Merrimac Coup in action:

	♠ K Q J 10 5 3 2		
	♥ A 4		
	♦ 7 5 3		
	♣ 8		
♠ 4	♠ A 9 6		
♥ J 10 9	♥ K 8 7 3	N	
♦ 6 4 2	♦ J 10 9 8	W	E
♣ J 10 9 6 5 2	♣ A 4	S	
	♠ 8 7		
	♥ Q 6 5 2		
	♦ A K Q		
	♣ K Q 7 3		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	3 ♠	Pass	3 NT
All pass			:

West leads the ♣J against three notrump and you (East) win the first trick with the ♣A. What do you lead to trick two?

The only card you can lead to the second trick to defeat this hand is the ♥K, deliberately sacrificing a heart trick. Looking at all those solid spades in dummy, which will run as soon as your ♠A is knocked out, you should see the paramount importance of forcing dummy's heart ace before it can serve as an entry to the established spade suit. In effect, you are willing to trade one heart trick for five spade tricks, a good deal by any standards.

A shift to a small heart at the second trick would not have the desired effect. Declarer would simply win with his queen and preserve the ace for when the spade suit has already been established.

Again, it would do declarer no good to duck the king; you would simply lead another heart, forcing the ace on the second round of the suit. Incidentally, did you notice South's real mistake in this hand? He should have raised three spades to four spades instead of bidding three notrump. Four spades is unbeatable.

# Defense

## Appendix

STANDARD OPENING LEADS		
<i>Against Notrump</i>		<i>Against Suit Contracts</i>
<b><i>Partner having passed throughout</i></b>		
A 7 6 <u>5</u> 4	Fourth highest of the longest suit, allowing partner to apply the Rule of Eleven. If the 2 is the fourth highest, it must be a four-card suit	A
A Q 6 <u>5</u> 2		A
A K 8 <u>4</u> 3 Q106 <u>2</u>		K 2
A K Q <u>4</u> 2 K Q 7 <u>6</u> 4	With no side entry; otherwise K	K K
<u>K</u> Q 10 8 3 <u>K</u> Q J 7 5 <u>Q</u> J 9 8 4	Top of a sequence or near sequence	K K Q
<u>J</u> 10 2	Top of touching cards	J
K <u>J</u> 10 9 5 A <u>J</u> 10 8 6	Top of the interior sequence. (Try to avoid leading from such holdings.)	J A
<u>A</u> K J10 7 6	Asks partner to throw his highest, unblocking	K
<b><i>Leading a suit bid by partner</i></b>		
A <u>K</u> 6 Q 3 <u>2</u> K 7 <u>4</u>	The lead of the lowest card indicates one of the top honors and at least three cards	K 2 4
<u>4</u> 2 <u>A</u> 2 <u>Q</u> 3	From a doubleton, always the top	2 A Q



# Defense

**FROM THE OFFICIAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BRIDGE**

<b>LONG-SUIT (4 or more cards) LEADS AGAINST NOTRUMP</b>					<b>SHORT SUIT LEADS AGAINST NOTRUMP</b>		
Suit Headed by	<i>With sure side entry</i>		<i>Without sure side entry</i>		Holding in suit	First Lead	Second Lead
	First Lead	Second Lead	First Lead	Second Lead			
AKQJ	A	J	A	J	AKx	K	A
AKQx	K	Q	K	Q	AQx	Q	A
AKJx	K		K		AJx	small	A
AK10x	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		A10x or Axx	small	
AQJx	A		Q		KQx	K	Q
AQ10x	A		4 <sup>th</sup> best		KJx	small	
AQ109	A		10		K10x	small	
AJ10x	J		J		Kxx	small	
A109x	10		4 <sup>th</sup> best		QJx	Q	
KQJx	K	J	K	J	Q10x	small	
KQ10x	K		K		Qxx	small	
KQxx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		J10x	J	
KJ10x	J		J		Jxx	small	
K109x	10		10		109x	10	
K98x	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		10xx	small	
QJ10x	Q		Q		9xx or xxx	top card	
QJ9x	Q		Q		Any doubleton	top card	
QJxx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		<b>LEADS AGAINST SUIT CONTRACTS</b>		
Q109x	10		10		AK	A	
Q98x	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		All other doubletons	top card	
J109x	J		J		All longer suits headed by AK	K	
J108x	J		J		All holdings headed by KQ	K	
J10xx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		All holdings headed by QJ	Q	
Jxxx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		J10x	J	
1098x	10		10		J10xx or more	4 <sup>th</sup> best	
1097x	10		10		Axx or more	A	
109xx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		Kxx, Qxx, Jxx, 10xx or more	3 <sup>rd</sup> or 4 <sup>th</sup> best	
10xxx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		109x	10	
98xx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		109xx or more	4 <sup>th</sup> best	
9xxx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		xxxx or more	4 <sup>th</sup> best	
xxxx	4 <sup>th</sup> best		4 <sup>th</sup> best		xxx	top card	
					xx	top card	