



Quick or Slow Defence?

BROADLY SPEAKING, defences fall into two categories: quick and slow. If there is a long, strong suit in dummy that will provide declarer with discards for his losers, the defence must take their tricks quickly. If there is no such suit, the defenders are generally well advised to sit back and wait for tricks to come to them: for each time a defender breaks open a new suit, it costs about half a trick (in other words it costs a trick about half the time).

When I am considering my opening lead I think primarily: 'Will dummy have a trick source?' If the answer is probably 'Yes', I attack, leading aggressively from suits such as K-J-x-x. If the answer is probably 'No', I lead passively from suits such as J-10-x (the jack) or 9-8-x-x (the eight). I might well lead trumps if I think that dummy might have a ruffing value (the secondary threat to a source of discards).

In truth, much of this thinking is common to both teams/rubber and pairs, although I err more on the side of passivity at pairs (I hate to give a trick on the lead and let them make an extra overtrick, crucial at pairs).

Here is your hand as West.

♠ 6 4 2
♥ 10 9 4
♦ J 6 2
♣ K J 8 2

Not particularly inspiring, but you have a crucial role to play – it's your opening lead versus 4♠. What would be your choice?

I hope you didn't take that question seriously. Before you can answer, you need to know how the opponents got there! Here are three possible auctions:

Auction A		Auction B	
North	South	North	South
	1♠		1♠
2♦	3♠	2♣	2♣
4♠	Pass	4♠	Pass

Auction C	
North	South
	1♠
2♣	3♣
4♠	Pass

In Auction (A) there is a grave danger that dummy will table a trick source in diamonds – your holding of ♦J-x-x makes it likely the suit is splitting well for declarer. You need to attack – yes, even at pairs – leading the two of clubs. The opponents have bid strongly – note South's jump to 3♠ - and I would not be surprised if declarer held six spade tricks, five diamond tricks and perhaps the ace-king of hearts (but be missing the ace-king of clubs which is why they didn't go slamming). Your club trick(s) will very likely run away if you don't take them *now*.

In Auction (B) I am not overly concerned about dummy having a trick source – because you largely have the clubs covered. I would opt for the ten of hearts, top of a (yes, somewhat uninspiring) sequence. My main aim is passivity but, who knows, it may result in setting up some defensive heart tricks.

In Auction (C) South is, perhaps unwisely, advertising a club worry, perhaps four weakish cards. North's jump to 4♠ implies he can do something with those club losers which, given your strength, rates to be ruffing them. So lead the two of

spades in an effort to cut down those ruffs (the trump lead is likely also passive).

Love All. Dealer South.

♠ A 3
♥ K Q 9 6 3 2
♦ Q 7 3
♣ Q 9

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

♠ K Q 9 8 7 6
♥ A 5
♦ 10 9 6 4
♣ A

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

As West you hear the opponents reach 4♠ confidently, with dummy having shown at least five hearts. Your ♥J-x-x holding looks pretty lousy, so you should worry that if you don't take your tricks quickly, they may disappear.

On the ♣J lead, a slow, passive lead, declarer will make all thirteen tricks, winning the ace, drawing trumps then running hearts. Six trumps, six hearts and the ♣A get the job done. West should lead the ♦A. If East discourages, West should switch to the ♣J, taking whatever comes his way before packing up and moving on to the next deal. In fact, though, trick one goes ♦A, ♦3, ♦8, ♦4. With East encouraging, West continues with the ♦5. East wins with the ♦J, then cashes the ♦K felling the ♦Q, West discarding a discouraging ♣2. Now comes the *Coup de Grâce*. Seeing no tricks outside trumps, East tries for an Uppercut, leading his fourth diamond. West trumps in with his lowly ♠4 and this forces out the ♠A. Now ♠J-10-x has to score a trick. Down one. □

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