JULIAN POTTAGE on DEFENCE

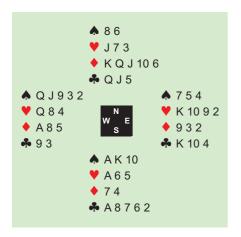
The Story So Far



uring the series so far we have covered quite a bit of ground – playing to suits partner has led, playing to suits led by declarer and switches. So this time I am going to concentrate on some examples that should mainly serve as a reminder of these types of play rather than introducing many new concepts.

On each of the examples both defenders have an active part to play in defeating the contract, so I invite you to study all four hands and predict how the play might go.

Example No. 1



West	North	East	South
			1NT ¹
Pass	3NT	End	

¹ 15-17 points

East has not bid and neither opponent has bid spades, so West naturally chooses to start with a spade, a lead from length being normal against a no-trump contract. With the almost sequential Q-J-9 at the top of the suit, the correct card is the queen.

East has no strength in spades, so follows with the four (low to discourage

you may recall). Declarer wins with the ace and leads a diamond.

In a no-trump contract an ace does not normally run away, so West has no particular reason to take the first round of the suit. Indeed, a look at dummy suggests a positive reason to duck. Dummy is short of entries and holding up the ace until South runs out of diamonds will make life difficult for declarer.

Dummy's king goes up and now it is East's turn to play. In this situation – a long suit but few entries in dummy – it is often vital to signal your length. By showing how many diamonds you have, partner will be able to work out how many declarer has. You may recall that the standard system is to play low from an odd number of cards in the suit, and East follows with the two.

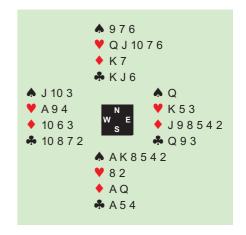
Dummy's queen of diamonds comes next and West must decide whether to duck again or to win this time. This is not too hard. East's odd number of diamonds must be three, so declarer has a doubleton. Therefore, holding up again serves little purpose and carries the risk that declarer will abandon diamonds and switch to clubs, setting up four tricks in the suit.

Having taken the second diamond, West remembers East's discouraging four of spades at trick one and switches to the three of hearts. Dummy plays low and East finesses the nine, saving the king to beat the jack. The defenders have done all the hard work now and, if the nine wins the first heart, it does not matter whether East reverts to spades, leading the seven, or continues with the two of hearts (his original fourth highest).

Example No. 2

On our next example, once again South reaches game; this time, however, it is

in a suit contract:



West	North	East	South
			1 🖍
Pass	2♥	Pass	3♠
Pass	4 🖍	End	

The bidding suggests that declarer might seek to discard losers in the minor suits on dummy's heart suit, so West seeks an attacking lead. Holding slightly stronger clubs than diamonds, West decides to lead the two of clubs (fourth highest).

Some would play dummy's jack, but let us suppose declarer makes the stronger play of letting the lead come round to hand. This makes East's first play important. If West has the ace of clubs (and South the ten), winning with the queen is almost certainly best. As the cards lie, however, East does better to finesse the nine. Since underleading an ace is generally considered a poor lead, East places South with the ace and tries the nine.

Declarer wins with the ace and cashes the ace-king of spades. East follows once with the queen and should then discard the two of diamonds. Just as you play a low card to discourage partner from leading a suit again (the four of spades on the previous deal), you discard a low card from a suit if you do not want partner to switch to it.

Leaving the master trump out, declarer leads a heart and West has the chance to shine. If East has nothing useful in diamonds, the only way the defenders can come to four tricks is with one spade, two hearts and a club. Moreover, the tenace position in clubs means that East cannot profitably lead the suit. Accordingly, West goes in with the ace of hearts and, probably after cashing the jack of spades to draw two

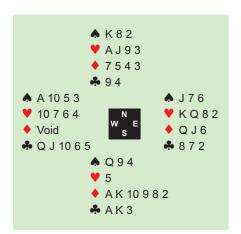
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trumps for one, continues the club suit. Whether or not the jack is played, East wins a heart and a club, and the contract goes down.

Example No. 3

Contracts in the majors are more common than those in the minors, in part because you need eleven tricks for game in a minor. Nevertheless, that is what declarer seeks to do in the next deal and, naturally, the defenders will want to prevent it:



West	North	East	South
			1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	3♦
Pass	4 🔷	Pass	5♦
End			

We have already touched on the unattractiveness of a lead from an unsupported ace and the attraction of a lead from an honour sequence, so West's choice of the club queen is easy. East plays the two, discouraging as before. Declarer wins in hand and, rather than laying down a top trump, craftily leads the four of spades.

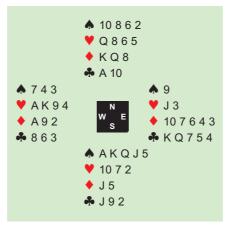
This is the third time in a row that West has had one ace and been forced to decide whether or not to play it in second seat. However, this is the first time when, depending upon the layout of the unseen cards, one cannot be sure what will work best. If East has a five-card spade suit, making the four a singleton, West wants to take the ace at once. Conversely, if South has Q-x or Q-x-x of spades then going up with the ace could cost a trick, allowing declarer to score two spade tricks instead of one (in the former case allowing declarer to discard a heart).

Two chances seem better than one and there is a slight inference that South's short suit is hearts rather than spades (or South might have tried 4♥ over 4♠ to offer a choice of contracts), so West follows the 'second hand low' rule and ducks.

Dummy's king wins and a trump is led. Now it is vital that East also plays low. Playing the queen or jack, 'splitting honours' as it is known, would give the game away when West shows out – something East can predict as South's jump rebid promises a six-card (or longer) suit. With no reason to assume a 3-0 break, declarer will surely put up the ace after East plays the six. The contract now fails, with the defenders scoring two spades and a diamond.

Example No. 4

On our fourth and final example, the opponents stop short of game, but do not take this as a cue to relax . . .



West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass	3♠	End	

Against a suit contract, you usually need look no further when you hold an ace-king combination in a suit not bid by the opponents and West leads the ace of hearts.

Holding a doubleton heart, East envisages scoring a ruff on the third round, so starts a high-low 'come-on' signal playing the jack. Getting the message, West continues with the king of hearts and a third round.

Having scored a trick with the singleton nine of spades, East contemplates the best continuation. If West has the ace of diamonds, it will be possible to win the next trick with it, but how does this help the defensive cause? When West leads a fourth round of hearts, East, who has no more trumps left, will be unable to ruff and the initiative will be lost.

As you can see looking at the four hands, the result is that declarer will be able to discard one club on the fourth heart and a second on the third round of diamonds, thereby avoiding a loser in the suit. Instead, East needs to switch to the king of clubs, knocking out dummy's ace. With any luck, South will hold at least three clubs, in which case a single discard on the fourth round of hearts will be of no value. Sooner or later West will come in with the ace of diamonds and play a club to East's queen.

This will give the defenders five tricks: two hearts, a ruff, a diamond and

It is just too bad if partner does not have the ace of diamonds, since in that case declarer can probably get rid of any club losers without touching trumps.

Watch This Space!

Next time we will pick up where we left off in BRIDGE 63, following to declarer's leads, and we will examine when to cover or not to cover honour leads.

