



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(247) Recognizing Danger on Defense

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Level: 2, 4

Robert S. Todd

robert@advinbridge.com

General

As declarer, one of our jobs is to determine where our tricks will come from or how we are going to get rid of our losers. As a defender, we must attempt to make a similar determination. For example, when defending a notrump contract, we may ask ourselves, “Where are our tricks coming from?” and “Where are declarer’s tricks coming from?” When defending a suit contract, we must consider, “Where are declarer’s losers located?” and “What is declarer’s plan for getting rid of these losers?”

In both cases it is important for us to have the skill of being able to predict the future. We need to be able to determine if the plan that declarer is likely to attempt will succeed or fail. Recognizing if something good is happening for declarer is often referred to as *Recognizing Danger!* As a defender we must develop the skill of recognizing danger. This is important because the existence of danger helps us determine if we should get active on defense or attempt to stay more passive. If danger exists, we need to get active and if no danger exists, we can afford to stay more passive. Here we look at how, as a defender, we can recognize that we are in a dangerous situation.

Some Danger Situations

Level 2

Here we look at a variety of situations that we may encounter at the bridge table and develop the skill of recognizing when danger exists, and when it does not. Generally speaking, danger can come from either length or strength. When a long suit is going to easily set up for tricks for declarer, then there is danger from length. When spot cards are likely to set up as tricks for declarer, then there is danger from strength.

Example 1

A classic danger situation is when you see a 4-card suit in the dummy and you hold 3-cards. When you see this situation, it should immediately set off an alarm that danger may exist on this hand. If the suit is divided 4-3-3-3 around the table, then the declarer may be able to use the last card in the suit for an extra trick. When you see a 4-card suit in the dummy and hold 3-cards in that suit, it is important to try to determine whether the suit is diving 4-3-3-3 or not. If it is, then there may be a race on this hand for our side to get our tricks established before declarer can set up and make use of the 4th card in this suit.



Here is an example layout:

```
      Axxx
Qxx      Jxx
      Kxx
```

When a suit is distributed like this, declarer can give up a trick and then produce 3 winners – the King, the Ace, and the 4th card in the suit. In a suit contract, declarer may be able to use this long card in the dummy to discard a loser from their hand.

Example 2

Another example of where a long suit may be dangerous is when dummy has a 5-card suit and you hold 3-cards in that suit. If the suit is divided evenly around the hand, either 5-3-2-3 or 5-2-3-3, then declarer can establish this suit for several extra tricks and/or pitches.

For example,

```
      Axxxx
QJx      T98
      Kx
```

In a suit contract, declarer can play the King, then the Ace, and ruff one of these tricks. Now declarer can use the two winners in the dummy (if they have an outside entry) to discard their losers. When we see a situation like this at the table we know that declarer has many tricks coming to them and we must get active.

Example 3

There are other cases where danger exists from a suit establishing not by our side running out of cards in the suit, but from dummy's spot cards becoming winners.

Here is an example of when this establishment of winners through strength may happen:

```
      KQTx
xxxx      Jxx
      Ax
```

Here our Jxx will fall on the third round of the suit and thus declarer will get a discard on the Queen (third round) and on the Ten (the 4th round). This is another dangerous situation.

Example 4

Yet another example of danger is when a long suit can be established by finessing our honor.

```
      AKJ98
Qxxx      xx
      Tx
```

In this dangerous situation declarer can produce 3 discards or additional winners by simply taking a finesse against our Queen. When faced with this situation we must get our tricks in the other suits because they are all likely going away!



Other Dangerous Situations

Level 4

Other danger situations for our tricks going away come from more complex situations, like being ruffed away. For example, in a suit contract when dummy has shortness in a side suit, there is a danger that the declarer can ruff away their losers in that suit. The traditional way of counteracting this danger is to lead trump. There are a large variety of these situations where we may face danger from the declarer. Combinations of these are sometimes even more complex – combining two potential winners to create a danger situation is a classic example of a squeeze.

Conclusion

There are many potentially dangerous situations that we may face at the table. Learning to recognize them is a key part of planning our defense. If you can learn to recognize potentially dangerous situations early in the play, then you will have time to determine if danger actually exists and to hopefully do something about it, like collecting your tricks before they disappear. Keep an eye out for these danger situations and let them help guide you about when to get aggressive or stay passive as a defender!