

ACTIVE VS PASSIVE DEFENSE

May 16, 2017
Brian Samuels

1

Credits

- The majority of this material I learned from Debbie Rosenberg
- Current slides have a few differences from the handouts, so if you want these latest, please print them from our website
 - paloaltobridge.com – wait a day or 2 for them to be posted

2

Active vs Passive Defense

- Defense is the most challenging part of bridge
- Key question: Should you “attack” or play “safe”
 - i.e. use Active or Passive Defense?
- Good defenders make a conscious decision
- Easy to lose focus during defense
- On defense be ready for some serious thinking
- What should you and your partner be thinking about?
- Its not black & white, a lot of judgment and learning

3

Passive Defense

- When it comes to defense, PASSIVE is NOT weakness, but rather an intentional strategy
- Passive Defense is the art of sitting back and waiting for declarer to lose what she must
- Make safe leads so declarer only wins a trick that she would win anyways
- Don't play a new suit for declarer that she will have to play herself
 - This is an extremely common mistake!

4

Active Defense

- Also called Aggressive Defense
- We can't always sit back and wait, in Passive Defense, because declarer may be able to discard losers or ruff them in the dummy
- In those cases we need to be proactive – i.e. Active Defense
- Types of Active Defense
 - Attempting to establish or cash tricks before declarer discards losers
 - i.e. leading low from an honor, from an A, or even leading an honor
 - Attempting to get a ruff (or trump promotion), or give partner one
 - Leading trump to prevent declarer from ruffing losers

5

What's The Declarer Thinking?

Developing a plan to make the contract

- Count the losers in each suit in the Master Hand
- Develop options to reduce the number of losers
 - Trump in the short hand (usually dummy - but not always e.g. transfer)
 - Discard on a winner from another suit
 - Finesse
- Decide to draw trump now or not
- Prioritize options to reduce losers
- Execute – it's often a race with the Defenders

6

What Do Expert Defenders Think About When Dummy Comes Down?

- Applies to BOTH defenders – Defense is a team game!
- Review the bidding and determine what is known about declarer's hand
- Look at partner's lead and the first trick to determine what is known about the suit led
- Study the dummy and ask yourself - What will declarer do with his losers?
- The dummy is the key to Active vs Passive Defense!
 - Eddie Kantar – LSD (Long, Short, Dead)
 - Jerry Helms – BOP (Bid, Opening lead, Points)
 - Marty Bergen – “I never met a 5 card suit I didn't like”
 - Debbie Rosenberg...

7

Debbie's Advice When Analyzing The Dummy

- Ask yourself - What will declarer do with his losers?
- A few possible answers and actions to take
 - Declarer has winners in the dummy and will be able to discard on them
 - ACTIVE defense – get your tricks before they go away, may need to cash out
 - NOTE when there is an abundance of trump in dummy, need to consider dummy's losers going away on winners from declarer's hand
 - It appears declarer will be able to trump losers in dummy
 - Dummy must have a short suit, usually 2 or fewer
 - Especially look for hands where dummy is worthless for any other purpose except ruffing
 - ACTIVE defense – lead trump to (try) to stop ruffs
 - Nothing
 - If dummy has no source of tricks & declarer has tricks to lose in his hand, “let him” lose them
 - A flat dummy looks like PASSIVE Defense may be right

8

Passive Defense

- You may encounter the following

J32

AT94

K76

Q85

- If defenders start this suit, from either side, they ONLY GET 2 TRICKS
- If declarer starts this suit, defenders should (!!) get ALL 3 TRICKS
 - Second hand low, cover an honor with an honor
- REPEAT: Don't start a new suit for declarer that he will have to start himself

9

Passive Defense

- When you've decide the best approach is Passive, now what?
 - Give declarer only what she is entitled to, but how?
- Passive Defense examples
 - Lead a suit in which dummy has AK doubleton or equivalent
 - Lead trump if you are not worried about finessing partner out of a trump trick
 - Lead, or continue a suit you know declarer will ruff in her hand, as long as you aren't setting up anything in the dummy
 - Often, playing back the suit the declarer just led will be Passive

10

Good Defender Thought Process

S AT3
H K73
D T986
C A85

S	W	N	E
1H	P	2NT!	P
4H	P	P	P

S Q85
H QJT8
D KQ5
C K72

S K6 – Declarer 4H
H A9542
D A43
C Q64

S J9742
H 6
D J72
C JT93

11

Good Defender Thought Process

You
S T7
H K3
D KT74
C QJT74

S	W	N	E
1H	P	1S	P
3H	P	4H	P

S KQJ98
H T95
D 862
C K8

S A2 – Declarer 4H
H AQJ874
D Q93
C A3

S 6543
H 62
D AJ5
C 9652

12

Let's Try Some Active vs Passive Defense

A few guidelines please

- 4 hands to play
- Be sure boards are placed with N in the correct direction
- Please ignore who the board says is dealer
- Dealer and bidding will be prescribed
- Please follow the bidding using your bidding boxes
- Pick your opening lead but put it face down
- Then the opening lead will be prescribed. Please make that lead
- We will discuss after each hand, so please do not start the next one

13

First Hand

				S QJ32	
				H Q43	
				D KQJ	
				C K98	
S 854					S 9
H A96					H JT875
D A98					D T742
C A763					C JT4
				S AKT76	Declarer 4S
				H K2	
				D 653	
				C Q52	
S	W	N	E		
1S	P	2NT!	P		
4S	P	P	P		

14

Second Hand

S Q97 Declarer 4H
 H KJT73
 D A42
 C A2

S	W	N	E
P	1H	P	1NT!
P	2D	P	3H
P	4H	P	P

S K432
 H A62
 D J3
 C QJT8

S AJT
 H 84
 D 865
 C 97654

S 865
 H Q95
 D KQT97
 C K3

Third Hand

S A83
 H 876
 D A63
 C K952

S	W	N	E
1H	P	1NT!	P
2C	P	2D	P

S 942 Declarer 2D
 H Q
 D KJ8542
 C T43

S Q76
 H A5432
 D Q7
 C AQ6

S KJT5
 H KJT9
 D T9
 C J87

Fourth Hand

S KQ4
H AJ96
D 75
C KQJT

S	W	N	E
			2S
P	4S	P	P

S 63
H KT2
D A832
C 9632

S 87
H Q84
D QJT94
C A75

Declarer 4S
S AJT952
H 753
D K6
C 84

17

Go Forth and Practice Active vs Passive Defense!

- Have fun defending and keep working on your focus and commitment
- Put yourself in the declarer's shoes
- Remember to use good defender thought processes and think like an expert defender
- Evaluate and make conscious, reasoned decisions to defend Actively or Passively
- Thank you for coming

18