

Falsecards

First consider the questions on the quiz sheet at the end of these notes.

Here are a few examples of how you might be able to steal good results with the use of judicious false cards. Each paragraph refers to the equivalent hand on the quiz sheet.

1. Pretending to take a finesse.

Let's suppose you are playing in notrumps and the diamond suit is like this:

North ♦AQ98

South ♦KJ107

Obviously the suit is completely solid so you can play the cards in any order you like. Suppose you don't want to cash four rounds immediately – maybe you will need entries later in the hand. You could try leading the ten and then on the next round the seven to the queen. That could leave East in some doubt as to what is going on. If he makes an incorrect assumption that West has the king, perhaps he will come up with the wrong answer when he tries to work out who has the high cards in the other suits.

By the way, if you make a play like this you should not pause before playing from dummy as if you were considering going up with the ace. That would be unethical as you have nothing to think about and you should play in tempo.

I would also not support plays like this on a completely straightforward hand where the only motivation is to destabilise the opponents, as that would also be borderline unethical.

2. Playing the card you are known to hold

These plays come up frequently and are really easy once you have got the general idea. Here is a hand that came up last month in the Northern Pairs final.

♠ KQ65	
♥ 872	
♦ T5	
♣ AK32	
♠ J8	♠ T72
♥ AK	♥ J96
♦ Q876	♦ KJ32
♣ 98654	♣ QJT
♠ A943	
♥ QT543	
♦ A94	
♣ 7	

I have changed it very slightly to take away a separate problem concerning the spade suit. I was playing the hand as South in 3♥ after I had made a try for game which my partner had turned down. First of all, look at it from declarer's viewpoint and cover up the West and East hands. Because it's a

pairs even the level we were playing at doesn't greatly matter because this hand is all about the trump suit. They led a diamond and you can see that you have a diamond to lose and at least two trumps. So how are you going to play the trump suit to give yourself the best chance of losing only to the ace and the king? The best chance is going to be lead twice up to your Q10642 holding. You hope that the top honours will be split and that your right hand opponent has the jack. Then on the first round you will put in the ten drawing the ace or king from West. On the second round either the other top honour will appear from East or your queen will hold the trick. So following this plan let's say you duck the opening lead, they continue diamonds and you take the second trick with the ace. You cross to dummy with a spade, and you play the three of hearts, five from East, ten from you and the king from West. So far, so good. Now West plays a club which you take in the dummy with the ace. Following the original plan you now play the eight of hearts and East follows with the nine. Now it is time to reconsider What has East got and what might he have? There are only two missing hearts, the ace and the jack. However, you know that East has the jack! You know this because, if West had the jack, surely he would have won the first round of hearts with the jack and not with the king. So East has the jack and either opponent might have the ace. The key point to realise is that it can never gain to play the queen. If it holds the trick with West showing out then East has two winners. If you play the queen losing to West's ace then East will take another trick with the jack. So it must be right to play low and, as it happens, West has to play the ace because he began with ace king doubleton. You might have got this right just by table presence, without analysing it card by card, but what has this got to do with false cards?

Put yourself in the East seat after one round of trumps has been played. You are now left with jack and nine of hearts and the ten and king have gone. The remaining high cards are the ace and queen and you can deduce from the way the play has gone so far that declarer and partner each have one of these high cards. However, once you get familiar with this kind of situation you don't have to work out who has the ace and who has the queen. The key point is that once the ten has drawn the king, first of all the jack and nine are equals against the queen and, secondly, declarer knows you have the jack. He knows and you know that he knows. So you have the jack ready to play on the second round of hearts. This is "the card that you are known to hold" and it gives declarer a losing option. After it goes eight, jack declarer doesn't know who has the ace and who has the nine. He might stay with his original plan A and play the queen losing to the ace. Of course declarer might still get it right, but the point is that you have given him the chance to go wrong, and some of the time he will go wrong. That has to be better than a play that can never gain.

The next one is on similar lines but this time it is a spade contract you are West and lead the king of clubs. In the diagram I have only shown the club suit.

North ♣A7654

West ♣KQ98 East ♣J103

South ♣2

Declarer takes the ace and immediately plays another club, ruffing low in his own hand. You should follow with the queen, the card you are known to hold after leading the king. We don't know what declarer's plan is, but as long as you retain the queen he is comfortably placed, knowing he can ruff small the next time a club is led without being overruffed. Once the queen is gone, he has to

think about ruffing high. If he does that and the trumps are divided unfavourably for declarer, then maybe that will promote a trump trick for one of the defenders.

3. Playing an unnecessary high card from the closed hand

This time you're the declarer playing in a heart contract and West has made a weak jump overcall in spades. You can place West with the ace-king of spades and East with a singleton. West duly leads the ace of spades and partner puts down J73 of that suit. You hold Q94. This looks terrible, because if you play low from both hands West will surely cash the king of spades next, East will show out and then ruff the third round. It can't cost anything to try playing the queen of spades at trick 1, to create the illusion that East began with three small cards and the king of spades will get ruffed on the next round at the same time setting up the jack. Some of the time West will switch to another suit and when you get in you can then draw trumps and lead up to the jack of spades, still losing to the king but avoiding the ruff.

Of course, false carding the queen on this layout only works because dummy has the jack. If North had 1073, for example, the false card would be ineffective because West can see that it will never cost a trick to continue spades.

4. Inducing the Bath Coup.

I found this definition of Bath Coup in Wikipedia.

"Bath Coup is a coup in the game of contract bridge, where the declarer, holding AJx in a suit ducks the left-hand opponent's lead of a king (or a queen). The coup is presumed to be named after the city of Bath in England and dates from the game of whist, the predecessor of bridge."

The purpose of the Bath Coup is to either gain a trick by means of a free finesse if the suit is continued, or to gain a tempo, because the suit may not be continued by opponents without the loss of a trick.

This is a possible layout where you can make life difficult for the defenders by falsecarding

	North A43	
West KQ109		East 875.
	South J62	

Against a no-trump contract, West leads the king and it goes three, five, two. The five is intended by East as a discouraging signal (they play low to discourage). West has no difficulty in reading this so he switches and waits for East to get in later in the play to lead a heart through South's remaining cards. In the fullness of time the defence get the three tricks in hearts they are entitled to.

South can cause a problem for the defence by false carding with the six. From West's viewpoint, the two is missing and East might have begun with (say) J52. If West continues you have stolen a trick. Maybe the defenders ought to have got this right, but opponents don't always play perfectly and at least you have given them an opportunity to go wrong.

For an effective false card in positions like this one, you use the same signalling method as the defence. So if the opponents are playing reverse attitude where a low card is encouraging, as declarer you would also play your lowest card in the hope of inducing an error.

5. Scrambling the defenders' count signals

North ♥965

West ♥???

East ♥AJ4

South ♥???

This came up in a recent weekend event and it seemed quite innocuous. Declarer (South) was playing in 4♠ and partner led the three of hearts. Dummy went down with three small cards, let's say they were 965. My holding was AJ4. Naturally enough I played the ace (third hand high) and declarer followed with the eight. After carefully studying the cards on view I realised that the two was missing. So what had partner led from? If he had queen to three he would have led his third highest but from three small it would be the middle card as we play MUD (middle, up, down). So did he begin with 732 or Q73? It isn't my partner's style to lead away from unsupported honour cards and furthermore if he did begin with Q73 that meant declarer had falsecarded the eight retaining the two. So I backed my judgement by switching to another suit, which turned out to be completely ineffective, and if I had continued hearts we would have got another trick. Fortunately it was only an overtrick in a teams event, so it didn't matter much. But it shows that against an opponent who is paying attention to the spot cards, even an innocuous false card like playing an eight instead of a two can be surprisingly effective. And, by the way, my partner hadn't made a random decision to make an uncharacteristic risky opening lead. It just happened that on the particular hand he had similar holdings in all the unbid suits and in trumps so he had no alternative but to lead away from an honour card

Put yourself in the position of West defending a suit contract, say it's 4♠, and after he leads the ace of hearts from an original holding of ♥AKJ3. Dummy goes down with ♥Q1064, East plays the five (high-low to show an even number) and South the seven. The missing spot cards are the nine, eight and two so did East begin with four of the suit (9853), three of them (985) or just two (52)? West might be tempted to play his partner for a doubleton hoping to cash the king and then give a ruff. If the declarer began with 72 doubleton false carding with the seven induces a defensive error. After the king of hearts is cashed at trick 2 dummy's queen is established and can be used to discard a loser in another suit. If declarer had played the 2 West would see that his partner's five was the lowest remaining card so it could not be top of a doubleton.

For an effective false card in positions like this one, you use the same signalling method as the defence. So if the opponents are playing reverse attitude where a low card is encouraging, as declarer you would also play your lowest card in the hope of inducing an error. That means you should find out what signalling method the opponents are using and you have to do that at the start of the round. OK, that isn't really practicable in a club pairs event but if you are playing a match, even something like the Yorkshire League, it's a reminder to study the opponents convention card before the start of the set.

6. Defensive false cards

As declarer you have licence to false card as much as you like because partner is out of the game for the time being and the only people you can confuse are the opponents. You have to be more cautious about false carding as a defender because if partner treats your card as honest he might take the wrong view of the hand with disastrous consequences. Nevertheless there are some situations where defensive false cards work well; some of these have been put into categories known as obligatory false cards. They are obligatory because they give declarer a losing option,

which he might or might not take. If you as a defender had played an honest card declarer could not get it wrong. Here is an example.

The opponents bid very accurately to a grand slam in hearts and the bidding suggests they have a four-four fit and their responses to Roman Key Card Blackwood confirm that they have the ace, king and queen of hearts as well as the other aces. You are defending as West and hold ♥J954. Of course you won't lead a trump from this combination, so you lead something else and dummy's hearts turn out to be K1076. This is a disappointment because if declarer had had the ten you would have been sure to defeat the contract. As it is, the natural line of play is for declarer to cash the ace and queen of hearts from her own hand – partner will show out on the second round and your jack can then be picked up by the marked finesse of the ten. Is there anything you can do about this? Yes, the answer is that when the six of hearts is led from dummy, partner follows with the three, the ace from declarer and you drop the nine. This changes things from declarer's viewpoint because if the nine is a singleton, the winning line is to play the king from dummy with the idea of picking up East's hypothetical J543 by a marked third round finesse of the eight. This plan is scuppered when partner shows out on the second round. Of course by leading low to the king declarer discovers that the nine is not a singleton, but won't risk finessing the ten on the second round as the suit might still be breaking 3-2.

Plays like this are not intrinsically difficult, you just have to recognise the situation when the opportunity arises.

7. A tricky suit combination

The last example was relatively easy because it was clear from your own hand and the sight of dummy what was going to happen.

Hand 5 is not so easy because the evidence on view doesn't tell you that declarer has a problem with the spade suit and, even if he has, what can you do about it with a balanced Yarborough and trumps of ten, nine and three? The key to making the right play is to recognise holdings that are suitable for a false card. In this case you should play either the ten or the nine, it doesn't really matter which, on the first round of trumps. To be effective, false cards have to be played in tempo, so if you want to analyse, you should do it before turning over your card at trick 1. In fact you don't have to visualise exactly what the layout is, or might be, or what the effect of a false card might be. Your thought process might go something like this. First of all, is my holding in spades one that is suitable for a false card? What is a suitable holding? Most of them consist of three or four cards, they have two intermediate cards such as the jack, ten, nine (sometimes the eight qualifies) sometimes they include one of the top three honours, and they always have an insignificant smaller card. Here, your holding qualifies, because you have two intermediate cards (ten and nine) and a small card (the three). Secondly, dummy has pretty good spades – ace, queen and eight – but could partner have anything in spades that might give us the chance of a trick? Answer: declarer has opened 1♠, so he is likely to have the king and, if he has the king, we have no chance of a trick. If declarer's spades are five small, partner will have king jack doubleton and we are certain to win a trick. If declarer's spades are slightly better, jack to five, then partner holds king small, and he will cover the jack when it is played, so my ten of spades might turn out to be an important card. Thirdly, can it do any harm to our side to false card? Answer: no, we have no chance of more than one trick in spades and it will be OK to false card the ten or nine on the first round provided I keep back the other intermediate card as a potential winner on the third round of the suit. Finally, which card do I false card with? Answer, the lower ranking of the two intermediate cards though if they are equals you can choose either, so here it is the ten or nine, whichever you prefer. So, if you wish, you can go through all this analysis at trick 1 when dummy is displayed and you won't be criticised

and you won't give anything away. Then at trick 2 when declarer plays a small spade to the queen, you will be ready to play the nine or ten in tempo. But once you recognise a situation like this that comes up surprising often, you don't have to bother with the analysis and just get ready to play the nine or ten.

How might the play might go after you have made this false card and why and how might it cause a problem for declarer. First of all put yourself in declarer's seat and decide what the optimum way of tackling the suit combination is. This is what declarer can see:

North ♠AQ8

South ♠J7654

Let's say that in the context of the hand South's target is to pick up this suit without loss or at least would like to give himself the best chance of making five tricks. Of the five missing cards three of them are significant ones – the king, ten and nine. It would be a serious error to begin by leading the jack from South. Whenever West has the king he will cover the jack. After that, however the other cards are divided between East and West, in nearly every case one of them will take a trick eventually with either the ten or the nine. There is only one layout where leading the jack can gain – East having ten-nine doubleton - more on that shortly.

A better chance from declarer's viewpoint is to play West for an original holding of king doubleton. Start with a low card from the South hand and finesse the queen. The ace is played next and the king falls under it. South's jack wins the third round of the suit. Note that West's small x alongside the king can be any of the four remaining cards – ten, nine, three or two, so that is a much better chance (four times as good) than playing for East to have ten –nine doubleton.

So South starts out on this line and leads the four of spades, West follows with the two, try the queen from North, which holds the trick – but something rather unexpected happens when East plays the nine. Now, from South's viewpoint, the miracle layout that I mentioned earlier of ten-nine doubleton will seem quite plausible. If the nine is an honest card, the winning line is cross back to hand in another suit and lead the jack. If West covers it, the ten falls under the ace and dummy's eight wins the third round of the suit. That is what declarer thought would happen but as the cards lie, of course, East contributes a disappointing three under the ace. The false card has worked and the defence win a trick they are not entitled to.

Quiz on false cards

Hand 1

You are South, playing a no-trump contract and it turns out that you have impressively solid diamonds between you.

North ♦AQ98

South ♦KJ107

The rest of the hand is not so robust, and it appears that you will have to lose the lead two or three times and may eventually need a defensive error to succeed in your contract. Is there any way you might play diamonds that could cause at least one of the defenders to misread your hand?

Hand 2(a)

North

♠ KQ65

♥ 872

♦ T5

♣ AK32

West

♠ J8

♥ AK

♦ Q876

♣ 98654

East

♠ T72

♥ J96

♦ KJ32

♣ QJT

South

♠ A943

♥ QT543

♦ A94

♣ 7

This question is in two parts. (i) Cover up the West and East hands and find a line of play for ten tricks in a heart contract (they lead diamonds). (ii) Next cover up West and South and imagine yourself defending as East. The two of hearts is led from North and it goes six, ten, king. Declarer regains the lead and now leads the eight of hearts from dummy. Which card should you play on this trick – and why?

Hand 2(b)

North ♣A7654

West ♣KQ98 East ♣???

South ♣???

You are West and lead the king of clubs against a suit contract, let's say it's 4♣. Declarer takes the ace and immediately plays another club, ruffing in his own hand. Which card should you play on this trick – and what might it achieve?

Hand 3

North ♠J73, ♥AJ73, ♦KJ532, ♣86

South ♠Q94, ♥KQ10832, ♦6, ♣AKQ

Again you are South, the contract is 4♥ and West has made a weak jump overcall in spades. West leads the ace of spades. You can see the risk that West will cash the ace and king of spades and East will discard on the second round and ruff the third round, and the ace of diamonds will be a fourth loser, but what can you do about it?

Hand 4

Against your 4♠ contract West leads the ace of hearts and dummy puts down in that suit ♥Q1064. You have ♥72. You follow with the four from dummy, and East plays the five (they are playing standard length signals, high-low to show an even number). Which card would you play from your own hand, and why?

Hand 5

You are East and the opponents are playing in 4♠. Partner leads the three of hearts, a suit in which you hold ♥AJ4. Dummy puts down ♥965, you play the ace and declarer follows with the eight. What is your next move? Do you like your chances of taking more tricks in this suit, or should you switch?

Hand 6

You (West) hold ♠1097, ♥J954, ♦8762, ♣J8

Dummy is ♠A32, ♥K1076, ♦AQ4, ♣Q765. South opened 2NT (20-21).

The opponents have a convincing bidding sequence to 7♥ having found a 4-4 fit and used Roman Key Card Blackwood to check that they have all the aces and the top three honours in hearts. However, you have a promising looking holding in hearts, ♥J954, and are hopeful this might be good enough to defeat the contract. You decide to lead a spade. Dummy puts down ♥K1076 plus a lot of high cards. Of course this is really disappointing, because you hoped South would have the ten of hearts in which case the contract could not be made. As it is, it seems that your holding will be

picked up (partner will show out on the second round and there will be a marked third round finesse against your jack). Is there any chance of deflecting declarer from this winning line?

Hand 7.

This question is also in two parts.

North ♠AQ8, ♥K2, ♦943, ♣KQ843

East (you) ♠1093, ♥8753, ♦10762, ♣92

You pick this balanced Yarborough and have to listen as the opponents bid up to 4♠ (South opened 1♠ playing five card majors) Partner leads the queen of diamonds. Declarer wins the lead in his own hand with the ace and plays a low spade, two from partner and dummy's queen takes the trick. It looks as though you can relax on this hand because you will have nothing to do except follow suit, or might you have a role to play after all?

Now change seats to South, cover up the East hand above and consider the best line of play with the following suit combination:

♠AQ8

♠J7654

Say you begin with the four, West follows with the two, you try the queen from dummy and East plays the nine. Do you stay with your original plan or change to an alternative line?

