

THE STRATEGY OF DEFENSE I:

An analytical Bridge player/author by the name of Marshall Miles said in one of his books:

“More important than any other quality of a defender, is the ability to tell which tricks will vanish unless defenders make vigorous effort to claim them and which tricks declarer is bound to lose eventually. A good defender must know when to be aggressive attempting to establish tricks or cash tricks, or when to be passive waiting for tricks to fall in your lap while the declarer does all the guess work that has to be done.”

I also think Mr. Miles was right on the point. Knowing which tricks you have to go after actively and which tricks you must wait for patiently to come to you is extremely difficult. When you decide that you have to go after tricks, you will lead out unsupported honors, you will under lead your aces, you will take drastic measures. When you decide that the tricks will come to you eventually you try to play as passively as you can. When you are playing safe, you decide which tricks belong to the declarer and you lead that suit and lose the tricks that you have to eventually lose. Here I have divided the defense that you can adopt into four different strategies. We will cover the first two strategies today and the next two in the next class.

a. **The Programs of Defense:**

- i. *The Active Strategy of Defense:* The strong sign that you must adopt this program of defense is an abundance of tricks for the declarer, either from a long suit other than the trump suit or having established enough tricks in the side suits. It is often easy to judge that this should be the program you must adopt when there is a long suit in the dummy or if declarer has opened one suit and then they find a fit in a different suit. (A sign that declarer has five cards in his first suit and will be able to discard dummy’s losers on his long suit.) The best defense in these situations is to get active (aggressive) and go after your tricks, or remove entries from the hand that has the long suit that is not the trump suit. You usually adopt an active program when you still have control either of the trump suit or of the long suit that the declarer will run. You have to adopt the active defense before your control is gone. When you adopt this program, sometimes you even have to take drastic measures such as giving declarer a ruff and discard; at other times you might lead out a King even though you do not have the Ace and/or the Queen. Be very careful when you decide to adopt this strategy of play. If you are wrong, you will look very silly and the declarer will invite you to a money game of Bridge.

Take a look at the next two examples. In the first example, declarer had opened the bidding 1♠ and then freely bid and raised ♥. So declarer is a two suited hand with 9/10 cards in the majors. The first two tricks tell you that declarer has only one ♣. So you have to attack ♦.

North

♠ AK
♥ 10964
♦ 943
♣ Q754

West

♠ 83
♥ KQ5
♦ K1062
♣ J1083

Vul EW ; Dir N.				
W	N	E	S	
--	--	--	1S	
--	1N	--	2H	
--	3H	--	4H	
--	--	--		

East

♠ 10542
♥ J
♦ Q875
♣ AK92

South

♠ QJ976
♥ A8732
♦ AJ
♣ 6

Figure 1 Declarer ruffs the second ♣ and plays the Ace and a small ♥. What are your thoughts?

continue with the 10 of Clubs which declarer ruffs. Declarer next leads the Ace of ♥Hearts and a small ♥Heart which you win with the King of ♥Hearts and partner plays the 8 of ♦Diamonds. What do you lead next? This is a time for active defense. Declarer had first bid ♠Spades so he has at least 5 ♠Spades and it seems that he has 5 ♥Hearts also (You have 3, dummy has 4 and partner had only 1). Since the dummy has the Ace and the King of ♠Spades declarer's ♠Spades are ready to run as soon as the trumps are gone. When declarer is running the ♠Spades he will pitch ♦Diamonds from the dummy and then ruff his losing ♦Diamond in the dummy. If he has one (Which you have counted and determined that he does have a losing ♦ if partner has the Queen.). This is the time to become active and lead out a ♦Diamond. Partner helped you in this when he played the eight of ♦ indicating that he

had a useful card in the ♦ suit. If you do not lead a ♦Diamond when you win the King of ♥Hearts it will be too late.

2. See if you can select the correct play in the diagram in Figure 2. West leads the Queen of Diamonds indicating that he does not have the King. East wins this with the Ace and sees that there is no hope in the Diamond suit as South has the King and the dummy has only two diamonds. So if South has more Diamonds he can ruff them in the dummy. Next East also sees that dummy has a long Club suit that declarer can use to discard his losers. Declarer is most likely to have losers in the Heart suit. East has to decide how he will get 4 tricks (Three more after the ♦ is win.). East is guaranteed two tricks one in each of the two major suit with the Kings. The third trick will only come if partner can be persuaded to lead a ♥ or if partner has only two ♥ and three trumps. How will East cater to both these

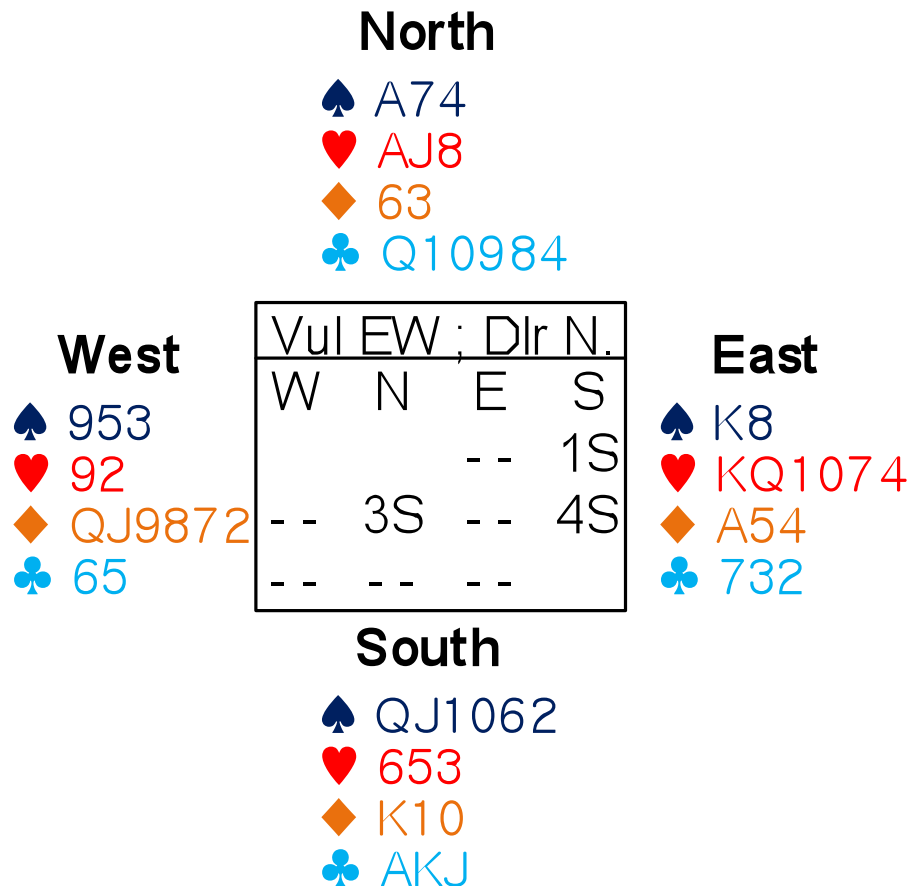


Figure 2 Partner leads the Queen of Diamonds which East wins with the Ace. East has to decide which Program he should adopt for defense this time Which program do you adopt for defense?

possibilities? The only answer is by an aggressive strategy. He has to lead out his King of Hearts with the hope that (1) West has an entry in the Club suit; this is rather an unlikely event or (2) West has only a 2-card Heart suit and has three trumps. This is more apt. With this hope, East plays the King of Hearts. South wins this in the dummy and plays the Ace of Spades and a small Spade. This East will win, now East will cash the Queen of Hearts and play a third heart and wait to see if his deduction is rewarded. When his partner ruffs the third Heart which sets the contract, East is pleased with his thinking.

- ii. *The Safety First or Passive Strategy of Defense:* This strategy is identified by the dummy being flat and weak. The dummy does not have many entries, it has no shortages and it is devoid of many high cards or if it has high cards then they are in front of partner who is known to have high cards in the suit that the dummy is strong in. In the Passive strategy of defense you do not take chances, you play safe. If you know that the declarer has the AKQ of a side suit you return the lead to the declarer by leading that suit. "To Caesar what is Caesar's". You just give declarer his tricks early. Once the declarer has won his tricks he will eventually have to give you your tricks. In this program you wait for your tricks to eventually come to you.

We often also employ this program in absence of other knowledge. This is because it is not a good idea to lead out new suits. Any side that breaks a new suit in a bridge hand usually gives up a half trick in that suit. Only a half trick because sometimes it does not matter and at other times either you or the declarer will guess correctly. Take a look at the next two deals.

- On this deal West led the King of Diamonds, promising the Queen. The King wins and East plays an encouraging 9. So West continues with the Queen of Diamonds. Declarer ruffs this Diamond and plays the Ace and the King of Hearts. Next he ruffs the third Diamond in his

North																											
♠ K1092																											
♥ K32																											
♦ J65																											
♣ K93																											
	West	East																									
	♠ A863	♠ QJ7																									
	♥ 64	♥ 107																									
	♦ KQ42	♦ A9873																									
	♣ Q42	♣ 1085																									
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South																											
♠ 54																											
♥ AQJ985																											
♦ 10																											
♣ AJ76																											

Figure 3 Declarer ruffs the second♦ lead. After the trumps are gone in two rounds and the declarer ruffs the third♦ Diamond and leads the 5 of ♠ Spades, West plays low and the King wins East is in with the second ♠ Spade lead. What should East return?

hand and plays the 5 of Spades. West plays small and the dummy wins the King of Spades. Declarer continues with a second Spade that East wins with the Queen of Spades. What should East play next? It is now time for East to take stock of the situation and decide which program he will adopt.

The dummy has already spent its Kings of the major suits and all the trumps. It only has the King of Clubs left. So what will you return when you win the second Spade trick?

From the play so far East knows that South has 6 Hearts, 1 Diamond and 2 Spades. Earlier from the bidding East knows that South has a minimum hand (South opened but passed on the second round.) North hand is now depleted of its high cards save the King of Clubs. Both North and South have no Diamonds. This is not the time to get active and break a new suit. East should find a safe lead because the program for defense in this case is “Passive”. The safest lead is the third Spade. South can ruff but will have to break the Club Suit himself and that will give East –West one Club trick. If East leads a Club then South gets three Club tricks. This time the passive defense prevented the declarer from making an over trick. A Diamond lead will give declarer a ruff and discard but it will not help. North can throw a ♣ while South ruffs the ♦. Then One of South’s ♣ can be ruffed in the North hand but South still has to lose one ♣ as the dummy has no trumps left.

North																						
♠ J3																						
♥ 9754																						
♦ A94																						
♣ Q654																						
West	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">Vul EW ; Dir N.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">--</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1D</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">--</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1H</td> <td style="text-align: center;">--</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2H</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">--</td> <td style="text-align: center;">--</td> <td style="text-align: center;">--</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Vul EW ; Dir N.				W	N	E	S			--	1D	--	1H	--	2H	--	--	--		East
Vul EW ; Dir N.																						
W	N	E	S																			
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♠ 7642			♠ AQ8																			
♥ A103			♥ K6																			
♦ Q762			♦ 1083																			
♣ A7			♣ J10932																			
South																						
♠ K1095																						
♥ QJ82																						
♦ KJ5																						
♣ K8																						

Figure 4 East leads the J of Clubs, the Queen wins. Declarer next loses a Heart to East's King. The 2 of Clubs is led and you win the Ace. What do you return? This time your program should be the Passive program plays safe. Both the dummy and declarer have shown a minimum hand. – Cash the Ace of trumps and return your third trump.

2. On this deal East leads the Jack of Clubs. South play small and the Queen wins. North next leads a small Heart. East your partner wins the King and plays another Club which you win. What do you return? What is your program? This time the program is not easy to spot as the dummy has a few high cards, but think back to the bidding and what has North bid? North has shown a weak hand. Your program should be the Passive program. When you win the Ace of Clubs, Play the Ace of Hearts and then the 10 of Hearts. With this play the declarer will struggle and you will get at least one more trick in Spades, Diamonds and Clubs for a set of 1 trick.

THE STRATEGY OF DEFENSE II:

The active and the passive strategies of defense are relatively easy to spot especially when either the dummy has an abundant source of tricks (you adopt the active strategy) or when the dummy is barren and flat (you adopt the passive strategy). The next two strategies are a little more subtle and are sometimes intertwined with the active or the passive strategy.

- iii. *The Forcing Strategy of Defense:* This strategy is characterized by two specific conditions. The first condition for this program is that one of the defenders has more than his share of trumps and the second condition is that the declarer is short in some suit in the “long trump” hand. (The ‘long trump’ hand means the hand which has more cards in the trump suit than the other hand.) Having more trumps than your share usually requires one of the defenders to have 4 cards in the trump suit, more is better. The third condition is the defender with the long trumps has a stopper in the trump suit. This means that the declarer cannot draw all the trumps from the defenders. When these conditions exist a forcing strategy is most helpful. In this case you will lead the suit that declarer is short in. You make the declarer ruff in the ‘long trump’ hand. This reduces the number of trumps in the declarer’s hand. By leading the suit that declarer is void in you hope that declarer will have to ruff many times in the “long trump” hand and eventually the number of trumps in the defender’s hand will become winners as the declarer is out of trumps. In a forcing defense sometimes you may also give the declarer a ruff and a sluff.

North

♠ J1096

♥ KQ9

♦ A963

♣ 76

West

♠ A543

♥ 105

♦ J5

♣ KQ1085

Vul EW ; Dir N.				
W	N	E	S	
--	--	--	1N	
2C	3S	4C	4S	
--	--	--		

East

♠ 2

♥ 8762

♦ 10872

♣ A942

South

♠ KQ87

♥ AJ43

♦ KQ4

♣ J3

Figure 5 West leads the King of Clubs which East encourages with the nine. West now has cashes the Queen of Clubs and has to decide which program to adopt for defense? What do you chose?

1. On this deal, West led the King of Clubs, East showed encouragement by playing the 9 of

Clubs and West continued with the Queen of Clubs, every one followed with little Clubs. At this time, West knows that Partner has the Ace of Clubs and by looking at what the dummy has and what he has in his own hand in terms of HCP he knows that East has nothing more than the Ace of Clubs. His next thought is that he has 4 Spades to the Ace and both the dummy and the declarer have 4 spades each. How will West use his assets in the Spade suit? If West plays another Club declarer will have to ruff. Declarer can ruff in either the dummy or his own hand. Let us say he ruffs in the dummy. Now the dummy will

have only three trumps. Next, when declarer tries to draw trumps West must duck two rounds of trumps and win the third round of trumps. This will exhaust the trumps in the dummy and both the declarer and West have one trump left. Declarer's trump is a bigger trump than West's trump so West cannot win the trump by playing trumps. If West instead plays another Club. Declarer will have to ruff and now West is the only one with the trump. Finally, when West is able to win the trump he will also be able to cash his well-preserved Club to set the contract by 1 trick. The key to this hand was that the defenders had a long

suit, they also had long trumps in one hand and the long trump hand had trump control so that they could win the trump whenever they wanted to. These are the general characteristics required of a forcing defense.

2. This time partner leads the 9 of Diamonds (How do partners know what to lead?) You win this with the Ace. You see an imposing suit in the dummy but you know that you have the suit blocked. Further to kill the suit you have to take away entries from the dummy. Where are the entries in the dummy? The only entries in the dummy are in the trump suit. So you

North

♠ AQ76
♥ AK10932
♦ 3
♣ 93

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	1H	--	1S															
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--	6S	--	--															

West

♠ 32
♥ 76
♦ 97642
♣ J765

South

♠ KJ84
♥ 8
♦ QJ5
♣ AK1084

East

♠ 1095
♥ QJ54
♦ AK108
♣ Q2

Figure 6 Partner leads the nine of Diamonds which East wins with the Ace. East now has to decide which program to adopt for defense? What is your thought?

should force declarer to use one of his entries before he is ready to use the entry. Play the King of Diamond this knowing fully well that you are setting up the Queen of Diamond in declarer's hand. (He does not need the trick from the queen of Diamonds he has enough tricks from the Heart suit.) Having deprived the dummy of the late entry by ruffing the Diamond you now wait for the declarer to try and score 12 tricks. You have done your part. In this deal you had to decide between two different programs, the Active and the Forcing program on defense. Fortunately, you came up with a solution that served both the programs. You forced the declarer to ruff a trick before he was ready to ruff a trick and you deprived the declarer of an entry to the long suit when he needed the entry. This time you did not have trump control but you had control of the suit that declarer was going to use to score most of his tricks. So in a way this suit is a surrogate trump suit.

- iv. *The Inference Strategy of Defense:* Sometimes none of the three above strategy are obvious. To choose the program for defense you have to deduce what has happened and what you need to

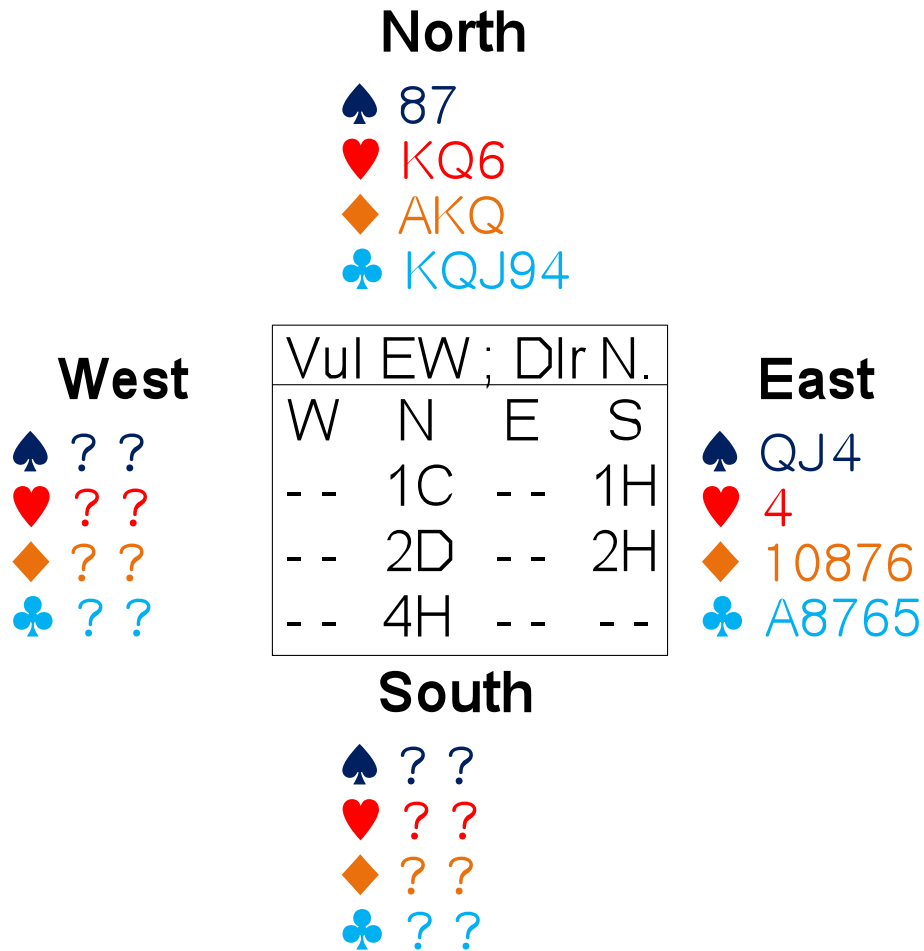


Figure 7 West leads the two of Clubs on which declarer plays the king and East wins with the Ace East now has to decide which program to adopt for defense? How will East arrive at his decision?

have happen. To arrive at the conclusion you need to ask yourself a series of questions. Asking these questions will point to the assumptions that you need to make. Often you will have a choice of different assumptions that you can make. Each of the assumptions will require partner to have some specific card or cards. From the various different options you have to chose one specific option. Then if you are right then you will succeed if not you will fail. To get to an 'Educated Guess' you ask questions and give answers.

1. This time to get to the correct play we have to ask ourselves some questions and from the answer of these questions we will judge which play will be the correct play. Here is the string of Questions you should be asking yourself:
 - a. How many tricks do you need to set the contract? (Four tricks)
 - b. Can you give partner a Club ruff? (Yes almost certainly)
 - c. Should you do it right now? (No because then that will be the last time you will be on lead)
 - d. What are the missing critical Honors? (AK of Spades and the Ace of Hearts)
 - e. If partner has any two of them do you set the contract? (yes give partner his ruff.)
 - f. If partner has only one of the three do you set the contract? (Not without help)
 - g. If partner has the Ace of Hearts what action do you need to take? (Give partner his ruff right now else declarer will make an over trick.)
 - h. If partner has the Spade King what action do you need to take? (Give partner his ruff right now else declarer will make an over trick.)
 - i. If Partner has the Spade Ace what action do you need to take? (Now you are able to set the contract by leading the Spade Queen. If declarer covers partner will win the Ace and put you in with the Spade Jack when you will give partner his ruff and set the contract. If declarer does not play the King you will win the Spade Queen and then give partner his Club ruff. When partner cashes his Spade Ace the contract will be set.)

Note that if you are wrong and partner has the Ace of Hearts or the King of Spades declarer will make his contract but your goal has always been to try and set the contract.

2. Here is another one where you have to ask yourself a string of questions to come up with the play that will set the contract. This time you West lead the 3 of Hearts. The King in the dummy wins the trick. On trick 2 declarer leads the nine of Diamonds, both East and South playing small cards as you win the Queen of Diamonds. Now ask yourselves some questions:

- a. How many tricks do you need to set the contract? (6 tricks. This is your goal. Always remember as defender you want to set the contract.)
- b. How many tricks are you likely to get in Hearts? (Zero)
- c. How many tricks are you likely to get in Diamonds? (Two)
- d. To get 4 tricks in the Club suit what do you need partner to have? (5 card Club suit with the Queen)
- e. To get 4 tricks in the Spade suit what do you need partner to have (Three Spades with the Ace.)

North

♠ 964
♥ KQJ5
♦ 9852
♣ A10

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West		East																				
♠ KJ82 ♥ 10873 ♦ AQ ♣ KJ5		♠ ? ? ♥ ? ? ♦ ? ? ♣ ? ?																				

South

♠ ? ?
♥ ? ?
♦ ? ?
♣ ? ?

Figure 8 West leads the three of Hearts, the king in the dummy wins. Declarer next plays the nine of Diamonds and you win the Queen? How will West decide how to continue?

- f. Which is more likely 3 Spades with the Ace or 5 Clubs with the Queen? (5 Clubs with the Queen. Remember South opened 1 Diamond so he has more Diamonds than he has Clubs)
- g. Do you get a second chance if you are wrong on your first decision? Say you play the King of Clubs will the declarer be able to run off 9 tricks? (No since it seems that he needs some Diamond tricks and you have the Ace you will get a second chance to set the contract.)

- h. On the King of Clubs partner will give you the attitude signal that you need and then when you win the Ace of Diamonds you will have no doubt, which suit to attack. Remember defense is a partnership game.