

Extract from book "How Experts Win At Bridge" by Burt Hall and Lynn Rose-Hall

*"The chapter on defence is worth price of the book alone. I have never seen defence laid out so simply and elegantly"* **Larry Cohen**

## **5 Lines of Defence**

There are 5 primary lines of defence that keep recurring. As the hands unfold and using tools such as inferences from bidding or play, counting points, counting distribution, counting tricks or defensive signals; you need to choose which line of defence to employ.

### **1- Force Declarer to lose control**

Force is the most powerful line of defence. Here declarer will lose control of the trump suit and have to abandon side-suit winners. It is used in situations where:

- Declarer has a two suiters
- Anytime you have 4 trumps or believe your partner does
- 4-3 trump contracts
- Anytime long trump hand can be forced to ruff early

The purpose of the forcing game is to make it impossible for declarer to draw trumps and safely cash winners in long or other suits.

In above conditions best is to lead our most powerful suit even taking the risk and leading from tenances such as AQ10, KJ10 or AJ10. To illustrate:

Contract 4H, lead Ace of D

Auction:

WEST	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1H
2D	3D	Pass	4H
All pass			

North  
S KQ84  
H Q1072  
D 83  
C K95

West  
S 92  
H A653  
D AKQ109  
C 64

This is a relatively easy hand because you have 4 trumps and a strong suit to force declarer with. Declarer ruffs your third diamond in the dummy (with both partner and declarer following suit). Declarer attempts to take out trumps and partner follows to the first round. As long as you postpone taking your trump ace until the 3<sup>rd</sup> round, the declarer is at your mercy. If he plays the third round, you take the ace and immediately force out the last trump in his hand. At this point you have control of the hand. If declarer does not lead the third round, he must concede a ruffing trick to you later on. Either way you have an excellent board.

Note that the very same kind of forcing defence can be accomplished when the opening leader is short in trump and his partner is long in trumps. The opening leader forces declarer which promotes a trick in partner's hand. This is a true partnership defence.

## 2- Go active when tricks can disappear

To do well in match-points, you must take all the tricks that belong to you irrespective of whether the contract can be defeated. On many times if declarer is given enough time he will set up winners to pitch his losers on. You should become very active whenever you think declarer is going to dispose of losers. Conditions that you need to go active are typically:

- Any time tricks can go away
- Declarer's side suit is breaking
- Vigorous bidding (slam interest)
- Long running suits (e.g. Gambling 3NT)

The important thing to remember about **active** defence is that you have everything to gain and nothing to lose. In other words, you can take high or even absurd risks because any tricks you might have is going to go away anyway. Here is an example:

Auction:

WEST	North	East	South
			1H
Pass	2C	Pass	2H
Pass	3H	Pass	4H

(All pass)

West

S A742

H 94

D KJ42

C 1065

On this hand sitting West, you need to attack with your best suit (diamonds) because the bidding shows a good suit in dummy, against which you have no defence.

Anytime you can tell from your own hand that dummy's suit is going to break favourably, you know that a ready source of tricks is available to declarer. As soon as declarer gets into the lead, he will draw trumps and throw losers off on the side suit. In this case if declarer had Ace of D and Queen of D, nothing would have been lost – your King of D never would have taken a trick anyway. The full hand:

	North	
	S Q103	
	H K8	
	D1083	
West	C AKJ83	East
S A742		S J965
H 94		H 1065
D KJ42		D A97
C 1065		C 942
	South	
	S K8	
	H AQJ742	
	D Q65	
	C Q7	

### 3- Remain passive when your tricks are safe

There are a number of other conditions (see below) which dictates just the opposite approach, that is, remaining passive. When such conditions exist, the main idea is to relax and not to snatch winners, break suits for declarer or otherwise take him off the guess. The defender instead just sits back and waits for his tricks. When defenders are on lead (and they would rather not be), they must choose worthless suits, or top from sequences, or some other suit that will not give declarer anything. If you initially are unsure about what to do, resist the temptation to go active. You would rather not risk doing the declarer's work for him. Conditions for Remaining Passive:

- No evidence of strong side suit for declarer
- Declarer very strong, dummy weak
- A misfit or bad split in key suits
- No real suit to lead against notrump
- Defending 6NT and grand slams

The basic situation for electing to go passive is absence of any outside source of tricks on which declarer can throw off his losers. Usually, the defender can tell from the bidding and a view of his cards and the dummy that (1) no side suit exists, or (2) if one exist it is braking badly or (3) there is no entry to use the side suit. You should also be passive when dummy is flat and weak with little help for declarer. You should simply return declarer's lead or otherwise endplay him at every opportunity.

*“Against notrump contracts, be very reluctant to lead from a 4-card suit with one honour. Even with two honors 4-card suits present significant risks without great counterbalancing gain. **Ron Klinger**”*

Possible exception to above is an unbid major.

Auction:

WEST	North	East	South
Pass	pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT

(All pass)  
Lead ?

	North	
	S QJ4	
	H 875	
	DK543	
West	C K103	East
S A6		S K873
H Q943		H 1062
D J876		D 92
C 854	South	C AJ97
	S 10952	
	H AKJ	
	D AQ10	
	C Q62	

On this hand, you have no suit of your own, and so take a passive approach by leading 8 of C. Attacking from any other 3 suits gives declarer a gift and the contract. Once in a while these safe leads luckily hit partner, as in this case. Now, the declarer is limited to 8 tricks and you've got your partner thinking you are a genius!

#### 4- Cutting Down Declarer's Ruffing Power

This is the case that you should be leading a trump. There are specific conditions that indicate leading trump:

- Partial/Total Misfit
  - Mere suit preference taken
  - Your side has trump stack (control)
  - Misfit in general
- Bidding Suggests Dummy Shortness
  - Dummy denied notrump due to flaw
  - Dummy bid two suits and raised a third
- You are Strong In Other Suits
  - You control opponents side suit
  - You control all other suits
  - Opponents are sacrificing

Notice that missing from above is the old adage "when in doubt lead trumps". This theory was disproved many years ago. To the contrary there should be a specific reason for leading trumps and there should be no doubt about it.

In the auction below partner has left declarer in his second suit – a minor – and neither defender was able to balance (clearly a misfit situation). It is certain that dummy's spades, declarer's first bid suit, will be extremely short and dummy's diamonds may not be much longer. Declarer will be anxious to ruff out his spades losers. He will not be happy to see a trump lead on the table.

Auction:

WEST	North	East	South
			1S
Pass	1NT	Pass	2D
(All pass)			

Lead 3 of D

	North	
	S 6	
	H Q9743	
	D Q76	
West	C K1064	East
S K32		S Q1095
H A10823		H J6
D A93		D 852
C 875	South	C AQ93
	S AJ874	
	H K5	
	D KJ104	
	C J2	

Other than a spade, heart and 3 diamonds, the declarer is struggling for tricks. Ruffing out losers is best chance of getting tricks. The only way to prevent this is to lead a small trump at trick 1. Later when taking the lead playing the ace of D follow by a little trump. The very best declarer can do is to ruff one spade loser. Declarer is in a helpless situation, with nothing but losers in dummy and in his hand – two down.



North  
S AQJ  
H 6  
D KQJ107  
C A753

East  
S 10974  
H A92  
D 42  
C J1082

The declarer is in 6S contract and partner leads King of Heart. Here you should overtake the king with your ace and lead a heart back. This guarantees (promotes) a trump trick in your hand and contract is defeated.

Another popular way among the experts is to create a trump trick by the way of uppercut. Here a defender ruffs in with his highest trump to weaken declarer's holding, in the hope that it will create a trump trick for partner.

Auction:

WEST	North	East	South
			1S
Pass	2C	3D	3H
Pass	3S	Pass	4S

(All pass)

Lead Ace of D

	North	
	S AQ7	
	H Q9	
	D Q5	
West	C KJ5432	East
S J108		S 95
H 103		H 7642
D A86		D KJ10974
C AQ876	South	C 10
	S K6432	
	H AKJ85	
	D 32	
	C 9	

West leads the ace of D – the suit his partner bid during the auction and another D. East after taking the king lays down his 10 of C. His partner takes the ace and leads a low one back, aware that both partner and declarer can ruff. Partner cooperates by ruffing with his highest spade (i.e. 9) and a trump trick is created for partner out of thin air – like magic.

When you have exhausted all means of collecting defensive tricks, be careful not to overlook a trump promotion or uppercut. They are wonderful ways to create an extra trick for you and great results.