

COUNTING DECLARER'S TRICKS (AS DEFENDER)

By Maritha Pottenger

Your sources of information for counting Declarer's tricks are: the bidding, the lead (and partner's return of your lead), the cards in dummy, partner's count and attitude signals, and Declarer's line of play.

Questions to **ask yourself when counting Declarer's tricks**:

- 1) How many **trump tricks** does Declarer have in the **long trump hand**?
- 2) How many **ruffs** can Declarer do **in the short trump hand**? (Ruffing in long trump hand does not add to total number of tricks. Each ruff in the short trump hand is an extra trick. Exception: dummy reversal)
- 3) Is a **cross-ruff** possible? (If so, the answer to #2 may be higher than expected. .)
- 4) **Could Declarer have a hidden side suit** to run? (Sometimes, Declarer can discard Dummy's losers in another suit on his/her hidden side suit and eventually trump that other suit on Dummy.)
- 5) **Does Dummy have a long side suit**? If so, how many tricks are probably available in it?
- 6) Can Dummy's side suit be set up by trumping? If so, how many tricks are available? (There must be an entry to get back to the side suit after it is set up.)

When Dummy has a threatening side suit, the Defender's options are limited:

- 1) **Cash all your winners quickly** before the side suit can be run. (That is why an aggressive lead is vital when the bidding has announced a long, strong suit in Dummy.)
- 2) **Kill Dummy's entry** BEFORE the side suit can be established. (This might mean knocking out an Ace, or forcing Dummy to ruff something early, etc.) Figure out whether Declarer's entries to Dummy are in the trump suit (i.e. declarer might want to draw trump, *ending* in Dummy) or in another side suit.

Other Tips

When Declarer has enough tricks in 3 suits to make the contract, the only hope is to switch to the fourth suit.

When partner or Declarer is winning the 2nd round of a suit that you led, and you have equal cards remaining, play your HIGHEST of equals. That denies anything above it and helps partner count Declarer's tricks.

If you play "jack denies" and 9 or 10 show 0 or two higher cards (one of which must be the jack when the 10 is played), when partner leads the 10 and you have the jack, partner has zero higher. Count Declarer's tricks accordingly. If partner leads 9 and you have jack, partner probably has two higher cards. Count Declarer's tricks accordingly.

Playing an honor card from known length shows a sequence. That is, you play (or discard) the card you would have led. From J1098x, play (or discard) the jack. That gives partner lots of information.

Kantar recommends that the lead of the **QUEEN from AKQ(x)(x)** should **ask for COUNT**.

When dummy wins the trick with the Queen or a lower card, your attitude is known. Give COUNT in that suit.

Remember, if Declarer's count is known (from the bidding), you do not have to give partner count in that suit—and shouldn't. It can only help Declarer.

If Declarer does not attack a strong suit in dummy when only one top honor is missing, assume that Declarer has that top honor.

If you lead one suit and then switch to another suit, a low card in the 2nd suit asks partner to return the 2nd suit. A high card in the 2nd suit asks partner to return the 1st suit.

Remember how many tricks you need to set the contract and envision partner having the right honor cards (if possible from bidding) to do it. Then, defend accordingly!