

DEFENSE: CLUES FROM THE AUCTION

By Maritha Pottenger

The auction offers many clues to the alert defender. One example, with ♠ xx ♥ xx ♦ KQJxx ♣ Axxx in your hand, your RHO opens 1♣ and you overcall 1♦. Your LHO makes a negative double (showing 4-4 or 4-3/3-4 in the majors). RHO bids 1♠. LHO bids 4♦. RHO bids 4♠. LHO bids 4NT. RHO bids 5♥. LHO bids 6♠. What is your lead? (Answers appears below***.)

- 1) **When the opponents bid to a minor suit and bypass 3NT, both are probably lacking a stopper in one suit.** Lead that suit (even if it means leading from an AQxx or from a KJxx). For example: 1♥ on your right; 1♠ by LHO; 2♣ by RHO; 2♦ [fourth-suit forcing—an artificial bid] by LHO; 2♠ by RHO; 4♣ by LHO; 5♣ by RHO. Lead a diamond!
- 2) **When Declarer bids two suits and dummy takes a preference, lead a trump** (to cut down on ruffs in dummy).
- 3) **When Dummy makes a point of showing a good side suit, make an aggressive lead.** Your side needs tricks quickly! (For example, 1♥ by RHO; 1♠ by LHO; 1NT by RHO; 4♥ by LHO. Attack!)
- 4) **When you have four or more trumps, or you know from the auction that partner could have four or more trumps, lead your longest suit** or the suit you and your partner have bid. You hope to force the long hand to trump a couple times so that Declarer will lose control of the hand. (You or your partner end up with more trumps than Declarer.)
- 5) **When you know things are breaking badly and/or sitting badly for Declarer, make the safest possible lead (trump or top of a sequence or top of nothing) and let Declarer find out the bad news later.** For example, you hold ♠ KJ10x ♥ xx ♦ 987 ♣ Q10xx and the auction goes: 1♠ by RHO; 2♥ by LHO; 3♣ by RHO; 3♦ by LHO; 3NT by RHO. Lead the ♦9 and expect this contract to go down. You have spades behind RHO and partner has hearts behind LHO. You have clubs behind RHO and it sounds as though their ability to stop diamonds is not all that wonderful.
- 6) **When opponents have “stretched” to get to their contract (e.g., 1♠-P-2♠-P-3♠-P-4♠) or one hand has shown all the strength (e.g., 2NT-P-P-P), make the safest possible lead and play passive defense.** Do not break new suits.
- 7) **When you can tell that things are sitting much too well for Declarer, make an attacking lead and be aggressive in your defense.** It is time for desperate measures. (For example, you hold ♠ KJ10x ♥ xx ♦ 987 ♣ Q10xx and it goes 1♥ by RHO; 1♠ by LHO; 2♦ by RHO and 3NT by LHO. Things look awful for your side, so you’ll have to take a few chances to try to get tricks.)
- 8) **When partner bids a suit, lead it (unless you are void or have a really, really good reason for a different lead).** Particularly when partner doubles an artificial bid (such as a transfer or a response to Ace-asking), that is a demand that you lead that suit.
- 9) **Listen to what was NOT bid.** After an auction of 1NT-P-3NT, you would prefer to lead a 4-card major to a 4-card minor because dummy, at least, does not have (probably) a 4-card or 5-card major. If the opponents cue-bid their way up to the 4 or 5-level, but stop short of slam, lead the suit in which they denied control! If you are choosing between two suits to lead and your partner could have overcalled one of the suits at the one level—and did not—lead the other suit.
- 10) **Visualize Declarer’s distribution based on the bidding (and then, as the hand progresses, based on how s/he plays the hand).** The more you know about Declarer’s shape, the more accurate your defense will be.

***ANSWER: Lead the Ace of clubs and another club. You know that Dummy has a singleton or void in diamonds and is 4-4 or 4-3 in the majors. Therefore, dummy has 4 or 5 clubs. Declarer opened 1♣, so has at least 3 clubs. You have 4 clubs. There is a good chance that partner has a singleton or void in clubs. (Partner can trump the second round of clubs—the only lead to set the contract.)