

DELAY THAT BIG DECISION AS LONG AS YOU CAN--*USUALLY* **by Maritha Pottenger**

On many hands, it pays to invest some time in detective work. You may wish to count high card points in the defenders' hands before trying to guess whether to play the King or Jack from KJ opposite xx. Perhaps you have a two-way guess for a queen in one suit. Perhaps you have to decide whether to play for a 3-3 break in one suit—or finesse for the Jack with AK10x opposite Qxx. These sorts of bridge challenges are best addressed by collecting as much information as you can before making the “big decision.” That is why “Discovery Plays” are used. Sometimes when you “discover” who has the Ace in another suit, you can determine or at least better guess who has the Ace in the suit of that crucial KJ guess.

Delaying a decision is generally correct. You know it is essential when you can improve your “guessing” by collecting more information about high card distribution and suit distributions between the two opponents. Of course, in the hands where you have crucial guesses, the opponents will attempt to play a key suit early before you have a chance to gather your clues. An opponent to the right of a KJ combination will often put you to the test by leading low early in the hand—whether that opponent has the Queen or the Ace—because the defenders want you to guess before you have all the data available.

Not all hands benefit from delaying the big decision, however. Particularly at higher level contracts (such as a small slam), it may be to your benefit to play the key suit early. If you play low toward a King in dummy early in the hand, it can put tremendous pressure on the opponents. Especially if you do it unexpectedly, the opponent who plays next will often have to stop and figure something out—which tells you something. If you had delayed forcing the decision, the defender would have a count on your hand and KNOW when you have two cards in the suit to **duck smoothly** when holding their Ace. When you play a key suit early, the opponent must guess whether you have a singleton (and their Ace might go away if they don't take it).

In summary, defenders want to force Declarer to guess before s/he has all the information that can be collected. Declarers want to put defenders to the guess before they can collect all the information they need for a fully informed decision.

All of this reinforces **the importance of defenders (as well as Declarer) making their plans as soon as they see Dummy**. Do not turn over your card to the first trick until you have made your plans—including whether you are going to duck or not with an Ace when Declarer leads toward a KJ in dummy!