

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENDING A BRIDGE HAND

by Maritha Pottenger

There are **five** major lines of attack for the defenders:

- 1) **Forcing the Declarer** (to Lose Control of the Hand)
- 2) **Being Active**
- 3) **Being Passive**
- 4) **Cutting Down on Ruffing Tricks** by Declarer or Dummy or Both
- 5) **Creating Trump Tricks** (for Self or Partner)

A **Forcing Game** is usually best when Declarer has a two-suited hand. A forcing game is generally advisable when Declarer is playing a 4-3 trump fit or a 4-4 trump fit with a 4-1 break. To create a Forcing Defense, lead from the most powerful suit held by your partnership (trying to force ruffs in the long hand). If you have the Ace of trumps, you generally put off taking it until dummy has no more trumps (generally the 3rd round—sometimes 2nd round). Often declarer would like to draw exactly two rounds of trump to prevent a ruff from the defender short in trump while preserving the ability to ruff twice in dummy. When the defender with the ace of trump holds up once, declarer must settle for drawing only one round of trump or allow three rounds to be drawn.

Active Defense is vital when Declarer or Dummy has a long suit, or any time when it looks as though your tricks can go away. When Declarer's side suit is breaking well, you probably need to be aggressive in your leads and defensive play. If there is vigorous bidding (slam interest shown), you probably need to be active. Against a Gambling 3NT, lead an Ace (aggressive lead) and try to figure out how to get 5 tricks for your side right away.

Passive Defense is essential when you want Declarer to break new suits. Attacking suits may give Declarer the game-going trick s/he needs. Passive defense is usually best when Dummy has a balanced hand. Go passive when Declarer does not have a strong side suit (in own hand or in Dummy). Be passive when Declarer is very strong and Dummy is very weak (don't help Declarer take finesses!). If you know the hand is a misfit or that Declarer is getting a bad split in an important suit, passive defense is advisable. Passive leads are crucial against 6NT and grand slams. If you have no real suit to lead against NT contracts, passive is often best. Ron Klinger recommends against leading from a 4-card suit with only one honor. Even with two honors, you may lose more than you gain by leading it. Leading from five card suits headed by an honor is worth the risk!! See *Winning Notrump Leads* (Anthias and Bird) for more.

Cutting Down on Ruffing is a good idea in several circumstances. Consider leading a trump when: (a) your side has a trump stack so wants to control the trump suit; (b) misfits in general; (c) dummy took a mere preference between suits and doesn't seem to like either one—particularly if you have a good holding in Declarer's other suit; (d) Bidding suggests Dummy will be ruffing—either Dummy avoided no trump or Dummy bid two suits and raised a third suit; (e) You control all other suits but the trump suit (usually because the opponents are sacrificing); (f) You control the opponents' side suit. Strongly consider trump leads against any two-suited hands (e.g., Michaels Cue Bid, Unusual Two No Trump, Flannery, Mini-Roman, etc.) unless you know the opponents have a really good fit (in which case getting your side suit winners right away may be crucial). For (e), if choosing to double and defend a three level contract is correct, it is almost always correct to lead a trump and often crucial.

Creating Trump Tricks for Your Side is possible when you are short in any unbid suit (singleton or doubleton); when you are long in opponents' side suit that was bid and raised (thus partner rates to be short); when you have a weak hand and nothing better to hope for; when you can promote a trump trick for yourself or partner by forcing Declarer or Dummy to ruff high in front of one of you or through a trump uppercut (e.g., one partner ruffs with Jack and Declarer overruffs with King, setting up the doubleton Queen in other Defender's hand for a trick. It is not advisable to go for trump trick from ruffing when you have natural trump tricks anyway (e.g., QJ10). It is helpful to have an entry—preferably a high honor in the trump suit—when trying to get a ruff from a singleton or doubleton.