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This Week in Bridge

(478) Defensive Carding - Dummy Has Qxx+

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Level: 5 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

Knowing when our partner is giving attitude, when they are giving count, and when they are giving suit preference is extremely important. Having a mixup about which partner is giving is one of the most common defensive communication errors. Sometimes we can survive it and not have it cost us.

When partner leads an Ace (from AK) and the Qxx or longer hits in the dummy, we need to know what to do and we need to have good agreements about what partner's signals mean as 3rd hand. If we have a mixup about attitude, count, or suit preference here it is likely to be very expensive. Let's make sure that we get this situation right.

Note: This may seem like a very specific situation to focus on, but it is one that comes up commonly and it is important to get this situation right.

Suit Contracts

Note: We will assume standard carding for this discussion.

When partner leads the Ace and Qxx+ hits in dummy, we generally signal attitude as the 3rd hand. That attitude is not for an honor (as we assume partner can see the A, K, and Q), so in this situation we give attitude about whether we can ruff the third round of the suit. We play high (encouraging) for a doubleton (we want the defense to continue Ace, King, and a ruff) and we play low (discouraging) from three or more cards (we cannot get a ruff). It is important to know that this is an attitude position and not a count position – we would only play high from a doubleton, not from 4 cards. Many partnerships have a mixup by playing high from 4 cards, thinking it is a count situation. Partner may then continue the suit, thinking we have a doubleton, and their King might get ruffed away – and the Queen then will be set up for a discard.



Notrump Contracts – Several Holdings

QJxx+ in Dummy

Against a notrump contract, if partner leads the Ace or King from AK (usually in a 4+card suit, which one they lead will be based on our “power lead” agreements) and dummy hits with QJxx, we need to have a different approach to our carding. In this situation our attitude is known (we have no honors or future in this suit), and count is irrelevant, so in this situation we switch to suit preference signals.

In this case we as 3rd hand will not have a lot of cards to choose from - often only two. Since there are three other suits to choose from, the question is: how do we make a suit preference signal? We (both partners) need to eliminate one of the suits (using information from both the auction and examining the dummy). Then there are only two suits left to possibly shift to and we play low to signal for the lower reasonable suit and high for the higher reasonable suit.

Qxxx in Dummy

If dummy hits with Qxxx (no Jack this time) then we expect that partner either has AKJx or AKTx and we should give attitude for the Jack / Ten – encouraging if we have it. Usually, if we have the Jack or Ten it is easiest just to play it, letting partner know what is going on.

QJx in Dummy

When partner leads the Ace or King and QJx hits in dummy, all of the honors are known and partner is likely to want to give up a trick and “set their suit up”. Here, it is best to give count and let partner know the layout of the suit around the table. If we have xxx, partner can give up the 2nd round of the suit and keep communication open. If we have a doubleton, then partner can take their winner and clear the suit – knowing that we can only run the suit if they have an entry.

Conclusion

Since Ace from AK is a common opening lead (one of our favorites) then knowing what to do when dummy hits with such an unfortunate holding as Qxx or longer is very important. Using this set of agreements, we can make good decisions and help partner make good decisions about what to do (continue or shift suits) at trick 2. Make sure that you discuss these situations with all your regular partners – they come up more often than you would think!