



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(449) Assumptions on Defense

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Level: 6 of 10 (2 of 6)

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General

Defense is the most difficult part of the game for most players. It is often hard to figure out “what the hell is going on?” (as Bob Hamman says), but one small thing we can do as a defender that can make a big difference in the quality of our defense is to assume that declarer is logical and playing the hand reasonably well. That means that we should try to think like declarer and ask ourselves questions like:

- “Why is declarer playing on suit X?”
- “Why isn’t declarer playing on suit Y, when this seems like the ‘normal’ thing to do?”

The general concept is to mentally get up out of our chair and sit down in declarer’s chair and play the hand based on what we know. We think about what holdings, card combinations, and distributions are logically consistent with what declarer is doing and from what we assume from the auction, and we base our defense on these conclusions.

Strange Occurrences

We should keep our mind open for what we expect to happen and what we expect declarer to play. If declarer does not do what seems like the ‘normal’ thing, then this should cause us to stop and reconsider our assumptions and conclusions about the hand. For example, in a notrump contract, when the dummy has a long strong suit like

- AQJxx,
- KQJxx, or
- AKxxx,

and declarer does not play on this suit as soon as they gain the lead, then that should be a surprise. This is likely because declarer either has the missing honor and the suit is already set up, or because they need to play this suit from the other hand by leading up to their honors.



Inferences – Declarer is Not Crazy

Let's look at a defensive problem where assuming that declarer is not crazy helps us find a good defense. We are defending this hand, playing standard carding.

	♠ A5	
	♥ Q653	
	♦ QJT32	
	♣ 53	
♠ J73		♠ Q98642
♥ AJ7		♥ KT92
♦ K7		♦ 8
♣ T9876		♣ J2
	♠ KT	
	♥ 84	
	♦ A9654	
	♣ AKQ4	

Auction

W	N	E	S
			1NT
P	2♣	P	2♦
P	3NT		

We (West) lead the ♣T and declarer wins that lead in hand, partner discouraging the suit. Next, declarer plays a ♠ to the Ace, partner playing the ♠9, and then takes the ♦ finesse by leading the ♦Q and loses to our ♦K.

Now it is time to apply logic. Partner showed an even number of ♠, which must be 6 since declarer does not have a 4-card Major. That means that declarer started with 2-card ♠ in each hand. It looks like declarer has the ♣AKQ and the ♦A (for 13 points). That leaves room for declarer to hold only one other King. It must be the ♠K! If declarer did not have the ♠K, they would not have played the ♠A so early, opening the suit. If declarer had the ♥K, they may have played a ♥ at trick 2 instead of a ♠ (certainly would not have played a ♠). Thus, we should place partner with the ♥K and hope they have good spots and 4 cards in the suit. We lead the ♥A, then the ♥J (even if partner discourages), and continue the suit – taking 4 ♥ tricks, for down 1.

By simply assuming that with only a 2-2 ♠ fit declarer would not play the ♠ suit without a double stopper, we are able to place cards and find the winning defense.



Conclusion

The simple act of attempting to empathize with declarer (to put yourself in their position and try to understand what they hold based on what they have played) can greatly improve your defense. You should assume the declarer is not crazy and draw inferences and make educated guesses about declarer's holdings based on hands that are "logically consistent" with the actions declarer takes at the table. Give this method a try and see if it can help you figure out what declarer holds and how to best defend the hand.