




Compare and contrast deals for defensive strategy

VB#21 Year 2 Defense (Counting tricks) Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 18/09/2014	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East
♠ 65		♠ AQJ942
♥ QJ63		♥ A54
♦ KT632		♦ Q
♣ 94		♣ Q85
West		South
♠ KT73		♠ 8
♥ K72		♥ T98
♦ A84		♦ J975
♣ JT2		♣ AK763

This set of six deals (and its sibling elsewhere in this issue of V-Blue) aims to make you think as a defender. *What do you do and why?*

Many of these deals require more than reflex plays ("Third player plays high"; "Return your partner's suit"). What you need to do is to stop, think and – most importantly – count. What are you counting? Well, tricks, mainly. How can you manage to wangle sufficient tricks to beat the contract? Also, you must count declarer's tricks. Where are his tricks coming from?

[Please note that "you" in this context is plural. There is a partner over the other side of the table and the name of the game is co-operation].

There are plenty of clues available in the bidding and the early play for you to work out what to do.

Just to make things interesting we have created these deals in contrasting pairs so that similar hands will appear consecutively. You may get an itching sense of *déjà vu* on every other deal. If you do, trust us, it's a good thing and it may help you defend accurately.

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ A

Bidding

East opens 1♠ in second seat and West raises that invitationally to 3♠. With a far from minimum hand East is fully justified in taking a shot at game.

Play

"God dealt you an Ace-King combination so you wouldn't have a problem with your opening lead"

Barry Crane [1927 – 1985]

The obvious opening lead from your hand is a top Club and the first trick goes (around the table): ♣A - ♣2 - ♣9 - ♣Q. What is going on? Is the ♣Q a singleton? What is the right play at trick two?

The key card here is partner's ♣9. What is that from? It can only be an *encouraging signal* and why would partner have any reason to encourage a Club continuation with no ♣Q? If the ♣Q were a singleton then North would have played the ♣9 from ♣9 8 5 4, a play that makes no sense whatever.

The answer is that partner must have a doubleton Club and be wanting a ruff. The ♣Q is an attempt to fool you; trust your partner and not the opponents.

After you play three rounds of Clubs declarer has an inescapable Heart loser. Well, to pass the time he rattles off all of his trumps (a play known as "ordeal by discard") to see if you are going to throw away the wrong cards. There are two ways of defending correctly – either South keeps his Diamonds and North keeps his Hearts or the other way around.

Here, we throw Diamonds from the South hand and North throws Hearts.

Eventually the contract is one down.

Hand 1: You are defending 4♠. How should you aim for four defensive tricks?



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VB#21 Year 2 Defense (Counting tricks) Part 1 SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 18/09/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

North

♠ 65
♥ AJ63
♦ QT63
♣ 954

West
♠ KT73
♥ K72
♦ A84
♣ JT2



East
♠ AQJ942
♥ Q54
♦ K2
♣ Q8

South

♠ 8
♥ T98
♦ J975
♣ AK763

This deal is in similar vein to Hand 1.

You must decide on your best strategy against an opponent's game contract.

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ A

Bidding

East opens 1♠ in second seat and West raises that invitatively to 3♠. With a better than minimum hand East is fully justified in taking a shot at game.

Play

"God dealt you an Ace-King combination so you wouldn't have a problem with your opening lead"

Barry Crane [1927 – 1985]

The obvious opening lead from your hand is a top Club and the first trick goes (around the table): ♠A - ♣2 - ♣4 - ♣8. Who has what in Clubs? Should we cash the ♠K before the rats get at it?

The key card here is partner's ♣4, the lowest Club he can have. What is that from? It can only be a *discouraging signal* and that would suggest a holding of three low Clubs. With a doubleton Club (or the ♠Q) partner would surely have found a higher card to play.

True, it might just be that North started with a singleton Club (or even with ♠Q 4 alone) but you have to play the odds in these situations.

Cashing the ♠K would be wrong (it would set up the ♠J for a discard) and best play is to switch to a Heart from the sequence. That goes ♥10 - ♥2 - ♥6 - ♥Q. Perusal of the spot cards suggests that the ♥6 is an encouraging card (it's probably that highest partner can afford).

Declarer draws trumps and, with an innocent air, leads towards the ♠Q. To defeat the contract you have to take the ♠K (not difficult!) and then play another Heart. That's a stake through the heart and declarer has four losers.

Any other defense allows the game to make.



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VB#21 Year 2 Defense (Counting tricks) Part 1 SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 18/09/2014	By: West
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	P
1♥	P	2♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ J

Bidding

West opens 1♥ and East raises to 2♥. On some days we might be tempted into the auction now (a take-out Double?) but it is dangerous as West is unlimited at this point. 2♥ ends the auction.

Play

Partner leads the ♣J, showing the top of a sequence. We look at the dummy and start our defensive **Count** and **Plan**.

We look at the dummy and notice that our black cards (the ♠K J 10 and ♣A) are well placed for us and badly placed for West. The ♠Q is as dead as a doornail (although declarer is unaware of that) and West is only going to make one Club trick.

How else might West use the dummy? Well, there is a ruffing value over there in the form of the doubleton Diamond. Ah. What if **we** lead trumps, pulling dummy's teeth, before declarer gets a Diamond ruff?

At trick one, we win with our ♣A over dummy's ♣Q and lead a trump at trick two. Declarer wisely ducks this, allowing North to win the ♥K and lead another. At trick four, declarer leads a Diamond to his ♦9, hoping that the last trump is with us. This way we are off lead and declarer could ruff a Diamond on the dummy.

Curses! Foiled again! North takes the ♦K and plays his last Heart, removing the remaining trump from the dummy. Declarer's last hope is to make something from Spades but the fates are not with him today. A low Spade to the ♠Q is gobbled up by our ♠K and declarer cannot avoid the loss of two Spades, two Diamonds, a Club and a Heart. One off.

North
 ♠ 98
 ♥ K53
 ♦ K873
 ♣ JT98

West
 ♠ A54
 ♥ AJT97
 ♦ A95
 ♣ 63



East
 ♠ Q632
 ♥ Q82
 ♦ T6
 ♣ KQ52

South
 ♠ KJT7
 ♥ 64
 ♦ QJ42
 ♣ A74


It has been said many times that two-level contracts are the hardest to make and the hardest to defeat.

How might you take sufficient defensive tricks against this one?



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VB#21 Year 2 Defense (Counting tricks) Part 1 SA	Contract: 2H
Date: 18/09/2014	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ A8	
	♥ 643	
	♦ A87	
	♣ T9863	
West		East
♠ 954		♠ Q632
♥ KJT97		♥ Q82
♦ K95		♦ T6
♣ AJ		♣ KQ52
	South	
	♠ KJT7	
	♥ A5	
	♦ QJ432	
	♣ 74	

"Two-level contracts are the hardest to make and the hardest to defeat".

So how do we beat this one?

West	North	East	South
1♥	P	2♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ T

Bidding

West opens 1♥ and East raises to 2♥. On some days we might be tempted into the auction at this point (a take-out Double? 3♦?) but taking action is dangerous as West is unlimited at this point. 2♥ ends the auction.

Play

Partner leads the ♣10, showing the top of a sequence. This marks declarer with the ♣A J, although we can't tell how many Clubs declarer has.

A look at the dummy shows us that our Spade honors (the ♠K J 10) are well placed for us and badly placed for West. The ♠Q is as dead as a dodo (although declarer can't know that).

Declarer takes the ♣A at trick one and immediately leads the ♥K. His plan is to knock out the ♥A, unblock the Clubs, draw trumps ending on table and enjoy four Hearts and four Clubs. How might we thwart these plans?

Well, after taking the ♥A we need five more tricks quickly. We need North to hold two vital Aces. We can count eight tricks for declarer as well (four trumps and four Clubs).

So we hastily switch to the ♦Q, hoping to trap West's ♦K. That works well enough – West tries the King but North bashes it with the ♦A and returns a Diamond. Now we have to make the dangerous looking play of a Spade lead, away from the ♠K J 10 around to dummy's ♠Q 6 3 2. However, danger is relative. If declarer has the ♠A (in addition to the high cards he's already shown) then 2♥ is not going down.

North pleases us by producing the ♠A and returning the suit to our ♠10. Now we cash the ♠K and the contract fails.

Hard luck, West.



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VB#21 Year 2 Defense (Counting tricks) Part 1 SA

Date: 18/09/2014

Dealer: North


[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N

By: East

Board #: 5

Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ Q96	
	♥ 86543	
	♦ AQ4	
	♣ 83	
West		East
♠ 84		♠ AJ2
♥ AKT9		♥ QJ
♦ 752		♦ KJT
♣ QJT7		♣ A9652
	South	
	♠ KT753	
	♥ 72	
	♦ 9863	
	♣ K4	

It's back to defending against a game contract.

The early play is obvious but can you defend accurately thereafter?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1NT	P
2♣	P	2♦	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding

The opponents reach 3NT after East opens 1NT and denies a major in response to a Stayman enquiry.

Play

As South there's no real reason **not** to lead the fourth-highest from our longest and strongest suit; in this case that's the ♠5.

North puts the ♠Q on dummy's ♠4 and East takes the ♠A. We know immediately partner does not have the ♠J. Had North started with the ♠Q J it would have been his duty to play the ♠J, playing the lower of equal cards.

At trick two, declarer cunningly conceals the ♥Q by leading the ♥J to the ♥K. Now comes the ♣Q, as East tries the finesse, which we take with the ♣K. We need to decide if and how to get to partner's hand; after all, it might be right to exit passively with a Heart.

Let's count declarer's tricks... hmmm, this is difficult. However, partner's ♣8 suggests he is short in the suit. It is possible that declarer has four Hearts, four Clubs and a Spade. Certainly, if East has the ♦A it looks as though he is home and hosed.

Best, then, is to play partner for the critical ♦A and switch to a Diamond. However **which Diamond?** If we were to lead a low Diamond partner might think we are trying to take tricks there. After the ♦9 (or the ♦8 if you prefer) lead it should be clear to North that you have no interest in the suit.

Remember: Lead **Low** for **Like** and **High** for **Hate**.


North obliges firstly by having the ♦A and secondly by reverting to Spades. Declarer grimaces as we take the next four Spade tricks for down two.



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VB#21 Year 2 Defense (Counting tricks) Part 1 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 18/09/2014	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ K962		
	♥ 8654		
	♦ AT8		
	♣ 83		
West		East	
♠ 84		♠ AQ	
♥ AKT9		♥ QJ3	
♦ 752		♦ Q94	
♣ QJT7		♣ A9652	
	South		
	♠ JT753		
	♥ 72		
	♦ KJ63		
	♣ K4		

Again (compare this deal with Hand 5) you are defending against a game.

What should you do to defeat this one?

Can you work out who has what?

West	North	East	South
-	-	1NT	P
2♣	P	2♦	P
3NT	P	P	P

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding

The opponents reach 3NT after East opens 1NT and denies a major in response to a Stayman enquiry.

Play

As South there's no real reason **not** to lead the fourth-highest from our longest and strongest suit; in this case that's the ♠5.

North puts the ♠K on dummy's ♠4 and East takes the ♠A. We know immediately North does not have the ♠Q. Had North started with the ♠KQ it would have been his duty to play the ♠Q, playing the lower of equal cards.

At trick two, declarer cunningly conceals the ♥Q and crosses to the ♥K by leading the ♥J and overtaking it. Now comes the ♣Q, as East tries the finesse, which we take with the ♠K. We need to decide what to do next.

Let's count declarer's tricks... again, this is difficult. However, partner's ♣8 suggests he is short in the suit. It is possible that declarer has four Hearts, four Clubs and two Spades. Certainly, if East has the ♦A it looks as though he is home and dry.

Best, then, is to play partner for the critical ♦A and switch to a Diamond. However **which Diamond?** By leading a low Diamond (here that's the ♦3) we are saying that we have no further interest in Spades and want to turn our attentions to Diamonds. Remember: Lead **Low** for **Like** and **High** for **Hate**.

North obliges firstly by having the ♦A and secondly by returning the suit. This allows us to take four Diamonds and the ♠K for one down.