

Planning the Defence Against Suit Contracts

Masterclass, December 2023

- Planning the Lead
- Planning after the Lead

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It could be right to:

- Try to get ruffs
- Try to give ruffs
- Establish quick tricks
- Force Declarer
- Draw trumps
- Avoid giving away tricks

Planning the Lead - considerations

- The bidding - The biggest clue you have!

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Auction: 1♥ - 1♠ - ; 2♣ - 2♦* - ; 2NT - 3♥ - ; 4♥ AP

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Do you already know a lot about Declarer's shape?

Auction: 1♥ - 1♠ - ; 2♣ - 2♦* - ; 2NT - 3♥ - ; 4♥ AP

Declarer has shown 5 ♥ and 4 ♣ and has denied 3 ♠ or 6 ♥.

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Do you already know where the opponents' weaknesses are?

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Dummy has shown 3-5-4-1, so Declarer is likely to want to ruff ♣ in the short hand.

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Consider a trump lead.

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Auction: (1NT) P (2♦)* 2♠ ; (P) P (3NT) P ; (4♥) AP

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Has your partner made a bid to tell you what to lead?

Auction: (1NT) P (2♦)* 2♠ ; (P) P (3NT) P ; (4♥) AP

Your hand: ♠ 75 ♥ 962 ♦ QJT7 ♣ Q532

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Your hand: ♠ 75 ♥ 962 ♦ QJT7 ♣ Q532

You have 5 HCP, the opponents have bid game and your partner has made a 2-level overcall, which usually shows an opening hand.

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Your hand: ♠ 75 ♥ 962 ♦ QJT7 ♣ Q532

You have 5 HCP, the opponents have bid game and your partner has made a 2-level overcall, which usually shows an opening hand.

There are too many points in the pack! P must be bidding based on suit quality. Lead a ♠ despite your attractive ♦ holding.

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Are you already entitled to a trump trick or do you need to try to take ruffs?

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Compare the following hands against a 4♠ contract:

(1) ♠ 875 ♥ QJT5 ♦ 2 ♣ K7432

(2) ♠ KJT ♥ QJT5 ♦ 2 ♣ 87432

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Compare the following hands against a 4♠ contract:

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Your trumps are never going to amount to anything unless you take a ♦ ruff. Lead your singleton.

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(2) ♠ KJT ♥ QJT5 ♦ 2 ♣ 87432

You have trump tricks regardless, so no need to lead your singleton.

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Your hand: ♠ KJ42 ♥ 74 ♦ AQJT ♣ 843

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Lead the ♦A and follow up with the ♦Q.

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Declarer has shown 5-4-1-3 and you have enough entries to force him twice in ♦ (or three times if Dummy does not have the ♦K).

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Lead the ♦A and follow up with the ♦Q.

Declarer has shown 5-4-1-3 and you have enough entries to force him twice in ♦ (or three times if Dummy does not have the ♦K).

This would leave him with one fewer trump than you, so you would take four tricks: ♦A, ♠KJ and a ♠ from length.

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Planning the Lead - considerations

- Passive vs. active defence

Is the auction telling you to defend actively or passively?

Compare the following auctions:

(1) 1♠ - 2♠ - ; 3♠ - 4♠ AP

This unconfident bidding indicates a passive lead so that you do not give Declarer his tenth trick.

(2) 1♠ - 3♠ - ; 4♣* - 4♠ AP

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The opponents will have more than bare-minimum game values here. An active lead might be the only way to beat the contract.

Planning the Lead - considerations

- Passive vs. active defence

How many tricks do you have?

Auction: 1♥ (P) P (1♠) ; P (4♠) AP

Compare the following hands:

(1) ♠ 542 ♥ A7643 ♦ A3 ♣ K84

You have 2.5 tricks. P didn't respond to 1♥ but ♥ Kx or ♦ Kxx(xx) would work... so try the ♦A and see which ruff to go for.

(2) ♠ 542 ♥ AQ643 ♦ Q3 ♣ A84

You have 2 tricks and there are many ways of scoring two more. Lead a trump and wait for your tricks to come to you.

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- Planning after the Lead

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- If not, what should you be doing instead?

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- If Partner led, work out what Partner's plan on lead was; if you led, consider your plan in light of the dummy.
- Decide whether that was the best plan.
 - If not, what should you be doing instead?
 - And how can you communicate the alternative plan to your partner?

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Lead: ♦2 (3rd/5th, Declarer is balanced)

Dummy: ♦ KQT6

Your hand: ♦ AJ943

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P is showing 1 or 3 ♦ by leading a clearly low card.

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However, he obviously doesn't have 3 because that would give Decl 1!

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However, he obviously doesn't have 3 because that would give Decl 1!

Therefore, it must be a singleton.

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Your hand: (1) ♠ 75 ♥ A753 ♦ AJ943 ♣ JT9

(2) ♠ 752 ♥ 75 ♦ AJ943 ♣ QJT

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Your hand: (1) ♠ 75 ♥ A753 ♦ AJ943 ♣ JT9

Yes – you give away a ♦ trick but can give a 2nd ruff, so get it back!

(2) ♠ 752 ♥ 75 ♦ AJ943 ♣ QJT

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Yes – you give away a ♦ trick but can give a 2nd ruff, so get it back!

(2) ♠ 752 ♥ 75 ♦ AJ943 ♣ QJT

No – you give away a ♦ trick but have no entry back to hand; better to try ♣, hoping that P has the ♣A (or ♣K with Decl holding 3+)

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Dummy:  AQ63  KQ  KQT6  853

Your hand:  752  75  AJ943  QJT

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- Your partner's lead

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Lead: ♦2 (known singleton)

Dummy: ♠ AQ63 ♥ KQ ♦ KQT6 ♣ 853

Your hand: ♠ 752 ♥ 75 ♦ AJ943 ♣ QJT

Rejecting giving P his ruff will be a surprise – surprises make your partner pay attention!

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Remember to switch to the Q to make your holding clear to him.

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Lead: ♥2

Dummy: ♠ KJT8 ♥ KQJT9 ♦ 87 ♣ Q62

Your hand: ♠ 94 ♥ A643 ♦ QJT ♣ KJ75

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Since 2♦ denied 3♥, Partner's lead must be from 3, not 1; so, a switch is required.

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A♦ looks appealing but that is Declarer's long suit (5+)!

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Since 2♦ denied 3♥, Partner's lead must be from 3, not 1; so, a switch is required.

A♦ looks appealing but that is Declarer's long suit (5+)!

The only way to take the contract down is by switching to a ♣ and hoping that P has the ♣A.

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Your hand: ♠ 94 ♥ AK83 ♦ QJT ♣ KJ75

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You have 14 HCP and the opponents have ~25. This leaves Partner with at most 1 (or possibly 2).

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You have 14 HCP and the opponents have ~25. This leaves Partner with at most 1 (or possibly 2).

You have 3 tricks: the ♥AK and a ♣. The fourth cannot come from ♦ as P cannot have the ♦A.

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You have 14 HCP and the opponents have ~25. This leaves Partner with at most 1 (or possibly 2).

You have 3 tricks: the ♥AK and a ♣. The fourth cannot come from ♦ as P cannot have the ♦A.

Therefore, you will only defeat the contract by giving P a ♥ ruff.

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Your hand: ♠ 642 ♥ J3 ♦ QJT3 ♣ AQT4

Dummy: ♠ AJT ♥ 7542 ♦ K875 ♣ 62

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Declarer plays a ♣ to the J in hand and you win your ♣Q.

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You know that Declarer has four ♣ to deal with and that drawing trumps would result in you scoring two more ♣ tricks.

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You know that Declarer has four ♣ to deal with and that drawing trumps would result in you scoring two more ♣ tricks.

This means that Declarer will try ruffing ♣ in the dummy; so start drawing his trumps for him!

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Auction: 1♠ - 2♦ - ; 2NT - 4♠ AP

Lead: ♥T

Dummy: ♠ K32 ♥ K2 ♦ KQJT5 ♣ 8762

Your hand: ♠ T98 ♥ AQJ3 ♦ A632 ♣ T4

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The ♦ in Dummy look very scary! You need to deny Declarer his entries.

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Force Dummy to ruff in the short hand – this looks strange but those ruffs are not necessary to him when he has a source of tricks there.

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If that holds, your plan is to take 2 ♥, the ♦A and a trump trick (if P has ♠Q).

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If that holds, your plan is to take 2 ♥, the ♦A and a trump trick (if P has ♠Q).

Cash ♦A (in case Decl. has a singleton) before playing a third (low) ♥.

Now, head to the
Planning the Defence Against Suits
tournament and try the
practice hands!