Defend Better, Win More

This presentation will introduce you to some important defensive techniques.   While you may not think of defense as "exciting", you defend *half* the time in bridge -- and only declare about a quarter of the hands.   Learning to defend better will help your score no matter who you're playing with, and whether you are playing IMPs, Matchpoints, or a family rubber game. Once you start to master defense, you'll get a satisfaction that's hard to beat -- imagine *knowing* what to pitch and being the only pair to set a 6♥ contract, or even endplaying declarer into giving you the setting trick!

#1: __ __ __ __ __   __ __ __   __ __ __ __!

You hold ♠ 752   ♥ —   ♦ K10954   ♣ QJ653

The auction is:

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
P	P	2H	X
2S	P	4S	All Pass

Dummy (North here) is revealed when partner leads the club 8:


```
E Deals       ♠ AQJ
N-S Vul       ♥ AKQ6      15
              ♦ Q
              ♣ A10972

                    ♠ 752
                    ♥ —
                    ♦ K10954
                    ♣ QJ653
```

The first trick goes ♣8, A, 3, 4.

(example will be worked in the presentation)

#2: Signal!

You have ♠ A65   ♥ A1052   ♦ 6   ♣ KQ653

The auction is:

| You	LHO	Partner	RHO	
		P	1D	
X	1S	P	1N	All Pass

You lead the ♣ K and the first trick is ♣ K, 4, J, 2

Q1: What does partner's ♣ J mean?

You lead a low club at trick 2, and partner's 10 is taken by declarer's ace.

Declarer now leads the ♠Q.

```
N Deals
E-W Vul
                              25

♠ KJ107
♥ J84
♦ 1083
♣ 984
              ♠ A65
              ♥ A1052
              ♦ 6
              ♣ KQ653
```

Q2: What do you do? Does it matter?

1. We take some inference from the auction: how many spades does declarer have? Why?

2. You see seven spades, leaving six out.   Partner has four and declarer two, or each has three.
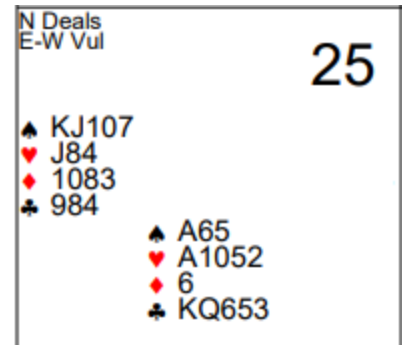
If you duck, what do you do when declarer next leads the ♠ 4? This is important, because there seem to be no entries to dummy -- if you duck too long, you give declarer an undeserved spade trick. If you take your ace too soon, you give declarer one or two undeserved spade tricks!

So what do you do on the second lead of spades? Answer: You'll be in the dark **unless partner has *given you the count* in the spade suit.**

In standard methods, this means he follows suit on the first spade with his lowest spade if he has an odd number of spades, and plays the highest spade spot he can afford if he has an even number of spades.

Q: When partner plays the spade 9 on the first lead of spades, does partner have an odd or even number of spades?

Q: Specifically, how many spades does he have?

The complete hand:

Declarer has one club trick, four diamonds, and …
one, two, or three spade tricks.

Your partner's signalling and your correct hold-up
for _____ round(s) of spades will hold declarer to
six tricks and set the contract.   Setting 1NT even
one trick will get you quite a few matchpoints.
Letting 1NT make 2 or 3 gets you close to a zero.

```
N Deals          ♠ 9832
E-W Vul          ♥ Q9
                 ♦ A852          25
                 ♣ J107
     ♠ KJ107              ♠ Q4
     ♥ J84               ♥ K763
     ♦ 1073              ♦ KQJ94
     ♣ 984               ♣ A2
        7        ♠ A65
     5     15    ♥ A1052
        13       ♦ 6
                 ♣ KQ653

NS 3♣; NS 1N; EW 2♦;
NS 1♠; NS 1♥; Par +110
```

The basic rules for signalling are:
Count: We give count when *following suit* either
when declarer leads a suit, or if we've already
given attitude to partner's lead. This does not apply to when we lead a suit -- use the
convention card to guide you when *leading a suit for the first time*.
Attitude: We give attitude when partner first leads a suit and we're not trying to win the
trick, or with our first discard.

"**Standard Count**" is to play high, then low with an even number, and to play your
lowest and then a higher one with an odd number.

"**Standard Attitude**" is to play a high card if you want the suit continued, or a low card if
you don't want it continued.

Note: *Upside-down count and attitude signals* (low then high from even, high-low from
odd, plus low to encourage, high to discourage) are technically superior: you can give
accurate count with holdings like Qx or Tx without having to throw the honor. I
recommend you and your regular partners practice using upside-down signals because
of that -- but most important is that you get in the habit of accurate signalling.

Note: We signal UNLESS giving the 'correct' signal will cost a trick.   With standard
signals, for instance, we do not throw the Q from Q4 to show a doubleton! We play the
4 and hope partner can work it out (and see recent Mike Lawrence *Bulletin* article).

Note: We give attitude signals when partner leads the suit. The 99% correct
assumption is that when declarer leads a suit, he controls it, and we won't want partner
to lead the suit. We give count signals when we've already given attitude, or when
declarer leads a suit.

#3: Stop the aggression!

If you pay attention to the robots on BBO, you'll find that if they don't have a solid sequence QJT, KQJ), they avoid leading from honors, they make *passive leads*. John Mohan gave a whole presentation on this in Phoenix earlier this year; among his claims were that extensive computer simulations proved the case (and BBO's robots do a simulation before every play).

Let me suggest that you consider making more passive leads (i.e., from three small or four small cards, in preference to leading from KTxx or Qxxx). This is particularly true at matchpoints, where you can get a bad board from giving up an overtrick, and less true at IMPs where you are trying to set the contract (and are willing to give up an overtrick eight times if it lets you set an otherwise making game contract once).

One somewhat contradictory point Mohan made is that against a NT contract, consider leading from a 3-card major before leading from a 4-card major. His point was "nobody ever set 3NT with a 4-card suit", and the chances of hitting partner with five are slim. On the other hand, when you lead a 3-card major, I believe he quoted over 60% chance of hitting partner with five.
NOTE: this clearly doesn't apply if your 3-card major has been bid by one of the opponents!

The exception to being passive is that when declarer has a soon-to-be-established suit, it's time to take your tricks before they get pitched away. Since we won't get our tricks if we don't take them now, the heightened risk of being aggressive is worth taking -- try to find partner's honors!.

Summary: Count. Signal. Be a bit more passive on defense.

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Appendix

The final two pages are some information I've given before on how to make counting easier -- and probably much easier than how you have been counting until now. It supplements the first example given in this presentation.

What makes counting hard?

It has a lot to do with simultaneously trying to keep track of 13 cards in four suits, counting up to 13 or from 13 down to 0, and then trying to add and subtract the cards in each person's hand to get what the rest of their hand must be -- gosh, that feels like a lot of work!
It is!

So, big guy, what's this super-secret simple shortcut?

Instead of counting each suit and then fitting it into a player's hands, count ***patterns***. Counting *patterns* is easy -- much easier than counting "four hearts on trick one, then West pitched one, three more on trick seven is eight …. "

Cards in a suit are distributed in the same patterns as cards in your hand (see the chart of the most common patterns on the next page). Get in the habit of counting *your* hand as 5431 or 4432 or 6421 (etc.) when you first pick it up -- you'll start to learn the possible distributions of suits around the table (And if you ever count 5331 ...!)
Then look at each suit in your hand and dummy. Suppose you hold three spades and dummy has four -- you start thinking of the suit patterns with 43: 4333, 4432, 5431, 6430 -- some of those you can eliminate based on the auction. It's a major suit and the opps opened 1S, then you know the suit must be 5431 or 6430 around the table, since 1) there are only six cards you don't see, and, 2) Declarer bid spades and has to have at least five, and 3) the only ways left for spades to split are 5-1 or 6-0.
Second-level inference, if partner was on lead in a suit contract (other than spades) and did not lead a spade, he may well be void.
Even if nobody bid spades, there are only a few ways those six outstanding spades can be split: 33, 42, 51, 60. Pay attention as the hand unfolds and you will be able to figure out which pattern it is on this hand.

The key is not to count "four spades on the first lead, declarer pitched a spade on trick three so that's five spades, three of us followed to spades on the next round so that's eight …" What a lot of work!

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Instead, make use of patterns -- those relatively few ways 13 cards can split -- and use them to suss out suit distributions around the table, and then the distributions of each of the two unseen hands.

The most common hand/suit distributions and their frequency:

Distribution	Expected Frequency		Distribution	Expected Frequency
4432	21.6%		6331	3.5
5332	15.5		5521	3.2
5431	12.9		4441	3.0
5422	10.6		7321	1.9
4333	10.5		6430	1.3
6322	5.6		5440	1.2
6421	4.7		5530	.9

The five most common shapes are 71% of all hands.   The total occurence of the hand patterns shown above account for 96.4% of all the hands you'll see.

For example, when you see ten cards of a suit in your hand and dummy, you should automatically think, "This suit is 5 5 3 0 or 5 5 2 1" (or "6 4 3 0 or 6 4 2 1") and know that the cards you can't see are even 3-0 or 2-1 in the closed hands.   Practice until this is automatic when dummy hits the table (and whether you are declarer or defender!).

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