

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR HONOUR CARDS AS DECLARER

Communication between Declarer & Dummy

In the previous few weeks, we have covered suit combinations and finesses. We have also discussed ideas such as leading towards honours in preference to leading away from honour cards.

In order to maximise our new found knowledge with suit combinations, it is important to manage our entries well. Oddly enough, often our strongest suit should be delayed in order to set up other suits. We can use the honours in these strong suits as entries back and forth.

LEADING TOWARDS HONOURS

Even when some honour combinations look innocent, it's best not to be too complacent when handling them. Consider the following suit combination;

The position you see

(dummy)
♣KQJ2
W E
♣7654
(declarer)

Actual distribution

(dummy)
♣KQJ2
♣A W E ♣10983
♣7654
(declarer)

Laziness is often our downfall. With the combination above, if dummy leads on the first round, declarer will lose 2 tricks in the suit. Provided declarer carefully crosses to their hand before leading the first round of clubs, the ♣A will take thin air.

UTILISING ENTRIES TO LEAD TOWARDS HONOURS

The key is to manage your entries well. Hands of this type often arise in no-trump contracts. If you have a long solid suit with certain tricks, remember that this suit may be your source of entries to promote cards in another suit.

Example

West	East
♠ 432	♠ KQJ5
♥ 43	♥ AK2
♦ AQ1098	♦ KJ3
♣ 876	♣ A72

Playing 3NT, South leads the ♥Q. 10 tricks are easy but why not try for 11 tricks. At trick 2, declarer should lead the ♦3 to dummy's ♦8. Next declarer leads a spade towards the ♠KQJ. If North holds the ♠A they must duck.

Entering dummy twice more by overtaking the ♦J with the ♦Q and the ♦K with the ♦A to lead spades both times allows declarer to score 3 spade tricks as long as the ♠A is with North. Spades can break 3-3 or worse.

If declarer lazily leads the ♠K from hand at trick 2, they will be held to 2 spade tricks if the suit breaks 4-2 or worse.

Example

	North				
	♠ AJ2	Dir	N		
	♥ AKJ	Vul	Nil		
	♦ 982				
	♣ QJ54				
				West	North
					1NT
				No	No
					East
					No
					South
					3NT
West		East			
♠ K865		♠ Q97			
♥ Q43		♥ 10985			
♦ 7654		♦ 103			
♣ K9		♣ A1083			
	South				
	♠ 1043				
	♥ 762				
	♦ AKQJ				
	♣ 762				

East leads the ♥10 against 3NT. North wins and looks immediately for their 9th trick. If either of the ♣A or ♣K are onside, then by leading towards the ♣QJ twice, declarer will score the desperately needed 9th trick.

DUCKING TO RETAIN COMMUNICATION

With an inescapable loser in a suit, it's often best to duck a suit on the first round to retain communication between declarer and dummy.

Example

West	East
♠ J3	♠ A986
♥ 6543	♥ AK
♦ A8642	♦ K73
♣ A4	♣ J1062

West declares 3NT on the ♣5 lead from North. South covers dummy's ♣J with the ♣K. West must win the ♣A lest South continue the suit and the ♣A take thin air. Diamonds 3-2 appears to be declarer's best chance.

As the ♦A is declarer's only entry, ducking the 1st or 2nd round of the suit is required. When the suit breaks 3-2, the ♦A is the entry to 2 extra diamond tricks.

SIMULTANEOUS SUIT SET-UP

Situations arise when declarer must carefully organise 2 suits at once. Declarer may be able to take advantage of leading towards honours in both hands.

Example

West	East
♠ 1072	♠ AQJ65
♥ K53	♥ A942
♦ KQJ42	♦ 73
♣ A4	♣ J2

East declares 4♠ on the lead of the ♣K from South. Declarer's plan should be to attempt to set-up the diamonds whilst using trump finesses as entries.

After winning the ♣A, dummy leads a trump to declarer's ♠J. If this trick wins, declarer should next lead a diamond towards dummy's ♦KQJ. If South ducks the ♦A, declarer takes another spade finesse and leads again towards dummy's diamonds.

1.

	North	Dir: N
	♠ AK754	V: Nil
	♥ A9743	
	♦ J	
	♣ 52	
West		East
♠ J8		♠ Q1032
♥ KQ105		♥ 86
♦ 109854		♦ K732
♣ J6		♣ Q109
	South	
	♠ 96	
	♥ J2	
	♦ AQ6	
	♣ AK8743	

North	East	South	West
1♠	No	2♣	No
2♥	No	3NT	All Pass

Bidding: North shows the majors and South – with a double diamond stopper – chooses 3NT.

Play: Lead – ♦10. East covers dummy's ♦J with the king and declarer wins. Declarer can set up 5 club tricks if they break 3-2 by losing one trick. It's important that declarer loses the first club. Ducking the first club retains communication between declarer & dummy to enjoy the club suit.

2.

	North	Dir: E
	♠ J10764	V: NS
	♥ Q962	
	♦ AK3	
	♣ K	
West		East
♠ 98532		♠ A
♥ 107		♥ KJ54
♦ J		♦ 10875
♣ A9852		♣ J643
	South	
	♠ KQ	
	♥ A83	
	♦ Q9642	
	♣ Q107	

North	East	South	West
	No	1♦	No
1♠	No	1NT	No
2♦*	No	3♦	No
3NT	No	No	No

Bidding: North uses 2-way checkback. 2♦ is artificial with enough HCP for game. South shows 5 diamonds and North settles in the NT game.

Play: Lead – ♣5. South wins the ♣K & immediately establishes the spades. Note how declarer has left the diamonds as communication between the hands. When East returns a club, declarer plays the 10 as East may have the ♣J but not the ♣A. When the ♦J drops declarer scores 11 tricks.

3

North Dlr: N
 ♠ AKJ42 V: Nil
 ♥ J4
 ♦ AK
 ♣ AKQ2

West	East
♠ 875	♠ Q93
♥ A1098	♥ 76
♦ 1072	♦ 9865
♣ 543	♣ 10987
South	
♠ 106	
♥ KQ532	
♦ QJ43	
♣ J6	

West	North	East	South
	2♣	No	2♥
No	2♠	No	3♦
No	4NT	No	5♣
No	6NT	All Pass	

Bidding: North opens a Game Force. South shows 9+, 5 hearts, 4 diamonds. North checks on aces and settles in 6NT

Play: Lead – ♣10. With only one entry in dummy declarer is careful not to waste the ♣J at trick 1. Declarer unblocks ♦AK and plays the ♥J. When West ducks the first heart, declarer continues with another heart to the queen. Using the ♣J as an entry, declarer crosses to dummy and cashes their two diamonds and ♥K. 12 tricks (2 spades, 2 hearts, 4 diamonds, 4 clubs).

4.

North Dlr: S
 ♠ A73 V: Nil
 ♥ Q94
 ♦ 765
 ♣ KQJ2

West	East
♠ J1094	♠ 862
♥ J762	♥ A103
♦ 942	♦ K83
♣ A6	♣ 10987
South	
♠ KQ5	
♥ K85	
♦ AQJ10	
♣ 543	

North	East	South	West
		1NT	No
3NT	No	No	No

Bidding: With a 4333 shape North goes straight to 3NT.

Play: Lead – ♠J. Declarer keeps the ♠A as an entry to dummy and wins the first spade in hand. The trick is to set up both the clubs and the diamonds simultaneously. Declarer leads a club to dummy and finesses a diamond. When they lead another club, the ace pops up leaving all of dummy's clubs as winners. Declarer wins the next spade in dummy, finesses again in diamonds, crosses to the clubs and finesses for the last time in diamonds. After giving up the ♥A, declarer has 11 tricks.