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F O C U S O N

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# Defence



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D A N N Y R O T H

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# Foreword

In a companion book, *Focus on Declarer Play*, we looked at errors to avoid if you want to improve your dummy play. This book is, of course, twice as important! Unless your style of bidding is very self-ish and/or competitive, you will, over a long period, defend twice as many hands as you declare and therefore proficiency in this area is twice as essential to your success in tournaments.

Common defensive mistakes can be divided into a number of categories of which the most important are probably the following:

## **1) *Undue haste***

The issue here is rushing to take, or to try to take, your tricks too quickly. To be fair, at matchpoints, it is often important to cash top tricks early for fear of conceding unnecessary overtricks but, even here, defenders must choose their moment; holding back is often a winning policy, at least in the long term.

## **2) *Communications issues***

Too many defences founder owing to failure to secure the defenders' lines of communication or to disrupt declarer's.

## **3) *Ignoring available information***

Defenders often fail to note and use information from the bidding and early play to place outstanding high cards and end up following lines of defence inconsistent with the picture on view.

## **4) *Trouble with trumps***

Trumps are a fascinating aspect of bridge, and it is vital to know how to make the most of the defenders' trump holdings.

## **5) *Careless discarding***

This is often the result of defenders, with very poor hands, losing interest in the proceedings. If your standard of card-holding is comparable to mine this could be a very expensive habit. A whole book could be written on this subject alone.

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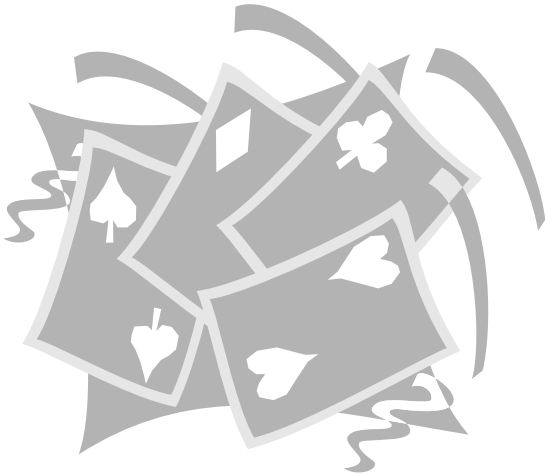


C H A P T E R

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# 1

# Undue Haste





P A R T

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# 1

## The Bronze Position

Followers of the Olympic Games and similar events will immediately connect the word 'bronze' with the competitor in third place. At bridge, once the opening lead has been faced and dummy tabled, it will be the duty of the 'third-place' defender in the East position (following the usual custom of calling declarer South) to plan the defence. Countless contracts are handed to declarer by thoughtless play at this point.

## *Third hand think!*

If you are going to be a successful bridge player, your first priority is to remove beginners' parrot rules completely from your mind. The 'third-hand-high' rule, for example, should be regarded with the height of suspicion and this particularly applies when the card you are going to play is not all that high anyway.

Mistakes in this area can often be avoided if you consider the basic reason for playing third-hand-high. Usually, you will be hoping to win the trick outright or to knock out a high card from declarer in order to promote a trick for the defenders. If it is clear that neither applies, then it may well be wrong to dive in head first.

Strangely, while I was in the process writing this chapter, I watched two hands come up, within a quarter-of-an-hour of each other, where West had to sit helplessly as his partner cruelly swung the axe.

**Dealer East**

*Both vulnerable*

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>
		pass	2NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	4NT	pass	6NT

<sup>1</sup> 20-22 points

**North**

♠ Q 10 8 4

♥ K 9 7

♦ A 10 2

♣ K 7 4

**East**

♠ K 7 5 3

♥ 6 5 3 2

♦ 7 5 4

♣ 6 3

Partner leads the ♠6 and dummy plays low. Which card do you play, and would it make any difference if declarer had called for the ♠Q?

This is the kind of situation where parrot rules lay out the surest route to disaster. What is the spade situation? Clearly, South has the ♠A — who is underleading an ace against a slam when sitting over a 2NT opener? Once you have established this, you are well on the way to finding the correct defence. If South has four spades, your king is dead, regardless of your defence. If he has fewer, the ace will drop in three rounds while your king remains intact so that declarer will make three rather than four spade tricks — all the difference in the world.

	<b>North</b>	
	♠ Q 10 8 4	
	♥ K 9 7	
	♦ A 10 2	
	♣ K 7 4	
<b>West</b>		<b>East</b>
♠ 6 2		♠ K 7 5 3
♥ 10 8 4		♥ 6 5 3 2
♦ J 8 6 3		♦ 7 5 4
♣ Q 10 9 5		♣ 6 3
	<b>South</b>	
	♠ A J 9	
	♥ A Q J	
	♦ K Q 9	
	♣ A J 8 2	

South is left with eleven tricks and no realistic play for the twelfth; third-hand-high gives him the slam. This applies irrespective of which card is played from dummy at trick one. But suppose dummy plays the queen and partner has the jack; should you not cover then? The answer is that this is simply not on. Firstly, jack to three is a bad lead in this kind of situation — likely, as here, to pick up anything in your hand. Secondly, put yourself in declarer's position. With ace doubleton or trebleton opposite that dummy, would you rise with queen? Who is leading away from a king against a slam when sitting well-placed over a 2NT opener?

### ***Points to remember***

1. Before playing third-hand high, consider why you are doing so.
2. Make an effort to place the remaining cards in the suit so that they are consistent with the bidding and play so far and only then decide whether 'third-hand-high' makes any sense.

## The king can wait!

The unhappy West player in the first example was still nursing his wounds when, just a couple of rounds later, a new pair arrived.

**Dealer South**

*E-W vulnerable*

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>
			1♥
pass	2♥	pass	3♦ <sup>1</sup>
pass	4♥		

<sup>1</sup> help-suit game try

**North**

♠ 10 9 4 3

♥ Q 9 8 4

♦ A 10 9

♣ J 7

**East**

♠ K 8 7 6

♥ 7 6

♦ Q 7 5

♣ A 9 6 3

West leads the ♠5 and dummy plays low. Which card do you play and would it make any difference if declarer had called for the ♠10?