



IMAGINATIVE CARDPLAY

PART IV: THE ART OF DEFENSE

TERENCE REESE & ROGER TRÉZEL



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Master Point Press 331 Douglas Ave., Toronto, Ontario, Canada

M5M 1H2 (416)781-0351

Email: info@masterpointpress.com

www.masterpointpress.com, www.teachbridge.com

www.bridgeblogging.com, www.ebooksbridge.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Reese, Terence

[Works. Selections]

Imaginative cardplay part 4 / Terence Reese and Roger Trézel.

(Master bridge series)

Contents: Those extra chances in bridge -- Master the odds in bridge -- Snares and swindles in bridge -- The art of defense in bridge.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-55494-625-9 (pdf).

ISBN 978-1-55494-670-9 (epub)

ISBN 978-1-77140-860-8 (mobi)

1. Contract bridge. I. Title.

GV1282.3.R443 2014

795.41'5

C2014-906128-5

C2014-906129-3

Editor

Mark Horton

Copyeditor/Interior format

Sally Sparrow

Cover and interior design

Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

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INTRODUCTION

The play of the cards at bridge is a big subject, capable of filling many large books. In the 1970s, Roger Trézel, the great French player and writer, had the idea of breaking up the game into several small books, each dealing with one of the standard forms of technique. He judged, quite rightly as it turned out, that this scheme would appeal both to comparative beginners, who would be able to learn the game by stages, and to experienced players wishing to extend their knowledge of a particular branch of play.

The English version was prepared in collaboration with Terence Reese, and appeared in eight small volumes. This new edition, updated and revised for the modern player, presents the eight original booklets as two larger compendiums, entitled *Accurate Cardplay* and *Imaginative Cardplay*.

PART IV

THE ART OF DEFENSE

Defense is certainly the most difficult part of the game, because it calls for more imagination and experience than dummy play. It is seldom possible to form the sort of logical and comprehensive plan that is made by a declarer who can see twenty-six cards in combination. Nevertheless, defense has an extensive technique. We have aimed in this section to cover all the most important areas.

THE OPENING LEAD

The first step in the defense, obviously, is the opening lead. Most players know the general principles involved and we do not propose to spend a lot of time on this subject — only to give some broad indications. In many cases the lead is a matter of guesswork: no one can say that one lead is better than another. Of course, certain holdings are more favorable than others. When you hold a strong sequence such as AKQ, KQJ, or QJ10, or even a broken sequence such as AKJ, KQ10, or QJ9, this suit is likely to be your choice because there is the double advantage that you are giving nothing away and may be establishing tricks for your own side. (The lead of the king from KQ10, or the queen from QJ9, is sometimes disastrous, of course, but one hopes to find partner with a supporting card.)

When no lead appears to stand out, we advise you to adopt a process of elimination. Say to yourself: 'I cannot lead this suit, for such and such a reason. Another suit is equally impossible, so the choice lies between the remaining two suits.' This negative approach may well bring you to the best answer.



Depending on whether the contract is notrump or a suit, your objectives will be different. At notrump it will usually be right to lead your longest suit, in the hope of establishing low cards. It is therefore quite normal to lead from suits headed by a combination such as AQ or KJ. Against a suit contract you must have a good reason before you lead from this type of holding, because you risk giving a trick away for no good purpose. As a rule, safety is the paramount consideration. A trump lead, for example, will usually be safe, but it must be said that such a lead is apt to lose a tempo, to the extent that it permits the declarer to draw trumps and develop his own best side suit before you have attacked his weakness.

The lead of a singleton or doubleton will seldom give away a trick and may lead to a ruff. It is, however, most unwise to lead a singleton of declarer's side suit: you will too often kill a potential trick in your partner's hand.

The lead of your longest suit against a suit contract will generally be the best attack when you hold four trumps. (This applies when the declarer holds five trumps and dummy two or three; not so much when declarer holds four and the dummy four, because then declarer will play a crossruff game.) Your object is to force declarer to ruff so that eventually you will possess trump control.

It is normal to lead the higher card from a doubleton, the eight from 82. The lead from three cards, a combination such as 972, is a highly debatable problem. Some players lead the nine ('top of nothing'), some the seven (the style known as MUD, signifying middle, up, down, as they intend to follow the seven with the nine), others the two, to make it clear that they hold three or more cards, not a doubleton. The top of nothing lead has gone out of fashion, because even after two rounds it may not be clear whether the leader has two cards or three. If you play with a regular partner, the lead from three cards is one of the first points to establish. From four small cards, it is normal to lead the second highest.

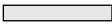


When you hold touching honors it is usual to lead the top card, the king from KQ2, the queen from QJ5, and the jack from J104. But when you hold three cards headed by a single honor or by honors not in sequence (for example, Q10x), lead the bottom card. The object is partly to distinguish the lead from a doubleton, still more to save a trick in many familiar situations, such as:

J 7 2	8 4  A Q 10	K 9 8 5 3
J 6 2	9 5  A K 10	Q 8 7 4 3

In each case the lead of the jack will present the declarer with three tricks. By leading the bottom card the defenders can hold

declarer to two tricks, so long as the second lead is made by East.

These are similar examples:

Q 7 2	6 5  K J 4	A 10 9 8 3
Q 10 2	6 5  A J 4	K 9 8 7 3
A 6 2	7 5  K Q 3	J 10 9 8 4

Defending against notrump, you must lead the bottom card in each case, whether partner has bid the suit or not. Against a trump contract it would not be wrong to lead the ace from A62, but with the other two holdings you should lead the two.

One of the problems in leading against a suit contract is that the leader has to decide whether safety or aggression is the best policy. This is a typical example:

	♠ A 7 2										
	♥ K J 6 2										
	♦ Q J 7 4 2										
	♣ 9										
♠ Q J 9 5 ♥ 8 ♦ A K 10 ♣ A J 7 4 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 6 3 ♥ 5 3 ♦ 9 6 5 ♣ Q 10 8 6 5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K 8 4										
	♥ A Q 10 9 7 4										
	♦ 8 3										
	♣ K 2										

South plays in 4♥ after West has doubled the opening bid of 1♥.

What should West lead? Most players would choose the ace of diamonds, because the lead is relatively safe, it contains

attacking possibilities, and it allows the leader to see the dummy and decide what to play next. Yet on this occasion the ace of diamonds gives away the tempo: it allows declarer to establish diamonds before the ace and king of spades have been forced out.

The winning lead is the queen of spades. Every player knows the sickening feeling of leading a queen and seeing K10x or A10x show up on the table, yet there is a sound reason for making this lead on the present occasion. West cannot hope for much in his partner's hand. East is more likely to hold the ten of spades than the queen of diamonds. And is there any hurry to lead a diamond? If declarer has three losers in the suit, how will he dispose of them when West controls both the spades and the clubs. On the other hand, if the defense is to make a spade trick, the suit must be attacked at the first opportunity

We do not say that the queen of spades will always turn out well. We say only that a good player would weigh all the chances and might settle on this card in preference to the more obvious ace of diamonds.

TO COVER OR NOT TO COVER?

As a defender, when is it right to cover an honor card that has been led by the declarer? We all know the old saying, cover an honor with an honor, but that is far from being an answer to the problem.

In most situations it is correct to cover a *single* honor that has been led from your right. These are familiar examples:

10 6 5	Q 3 2 ▬	K 7 4
	A J 9 8	

When the queen is led from dummy, East must cover with the king to promote a trick for his partner's ten.

K 9 6	10 5 4 ▬	Q 3 2
	A J 8 7	

The ten is led from dummy and East must cover to ensure two tricks for his partner's K9.

These are relatively simple plays, because the defender can see that dummy has only one honor. The best defense may not be so clear when the honor card is led from the closed hand.

Q 3 2	A J 8 7 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 2px auto;"></div> K 10 9	6 5 4
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When South leads the ten, should West cover? As the cards lie, doing so would save declarer a guess, but if partner held K9x it would be right to cover. Alas, there is no final answer to problems of this sort.

It is generally wrong to cover when there are two touching honors on your right:

10 6 4 2	Q J 9 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 2px auto;"></div> A 7 3	K 8 5
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When the queen is in dummy, East must not cover on the first round, as this would expose his partner to a finesse and allow the declarer to make three. Generally speaking, it is also wrong to cover when the queen is led from the closed hand in this type of situation:

K 8 5	A 7 3 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 2px auto;"></div> Q led
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Probably, the declarer holds QJ and he may hold QJ9. It is unlikely that the queen is unsupported, because then the normal play would be to lead towards it from the dummy.

Similarly, a defender must not cover when the jack is led from J10x:

	J 10 2	
K 8 7 5	[]	Q 9 6
	A 5 4	

The jack is led from dummy and clearly it would cost a trick for East to cover. The same principle holds when the lead is made from the closed hand:

	A 8 7	
Q 9 6	[]	
	J led	

Here, West can hardly gain by covering the jack with the queen — or with the king if he holds Kxx.

Some tricky problems may arise when a defender holds a doubleton honor. Consider East's position here, when the queen is led from dummy:

	Q J 4 2	
	[]	K 6

Covering with the king would be a mistake if South held A98, correct if he held Axxx or A9xx. You cannot be right always, but in the long run the best policy is to cover with K10 or K9 but not with Kx. The reason appears when the cards are like this:

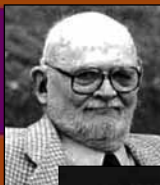
	Q J 4 2	
10 8 5	[]	K 6
	A 9 7 3	

The queen is led from dummy. Now, if you could see all the cards you would cover with the king. However, it would be wrong to cover if South held A98, and the important point is that even if you do not cover on the present occasion it is by no means certain that you will lose your defensive trick. When the queen holds the first trick, declarer may well follow with the jack from dummy, aiming to pin a doubleton ten in the West hand. Against most opponents it would be good play for West to drop the eight on the first round, to create the impression that his holding was 108 alone.

Learn from the Masters

In the 1970s, two of the best bridge writers of all time collaborated on a series of eight small books on a number of aspects of cardplay at bridge. These books have long been out of print, and are republished now in two combined volumes, edited and updated by BRIDGE magazine editor Mark Horton.

Imaginative Cardplay is the second of these two books, and comprises the following titles from the original series: *Those Extra Chances in Bridge*; *Master the Odds in Bridge*; *Snares and Swindles in Bridge*; and *The Art of Defense in Bridge*.



TERENCE REESE (1913-1996, UK) was a world champion and one of the best-ever writers on the game. His *Reese on Play* and *The Expert Game* are classics of bridge literature.



ROGER TRÉZEL (1918-1986, France) was a multiple world champion. His partnership with Pierre Jaïs is regarded as one of the greatest in the history of the game.

