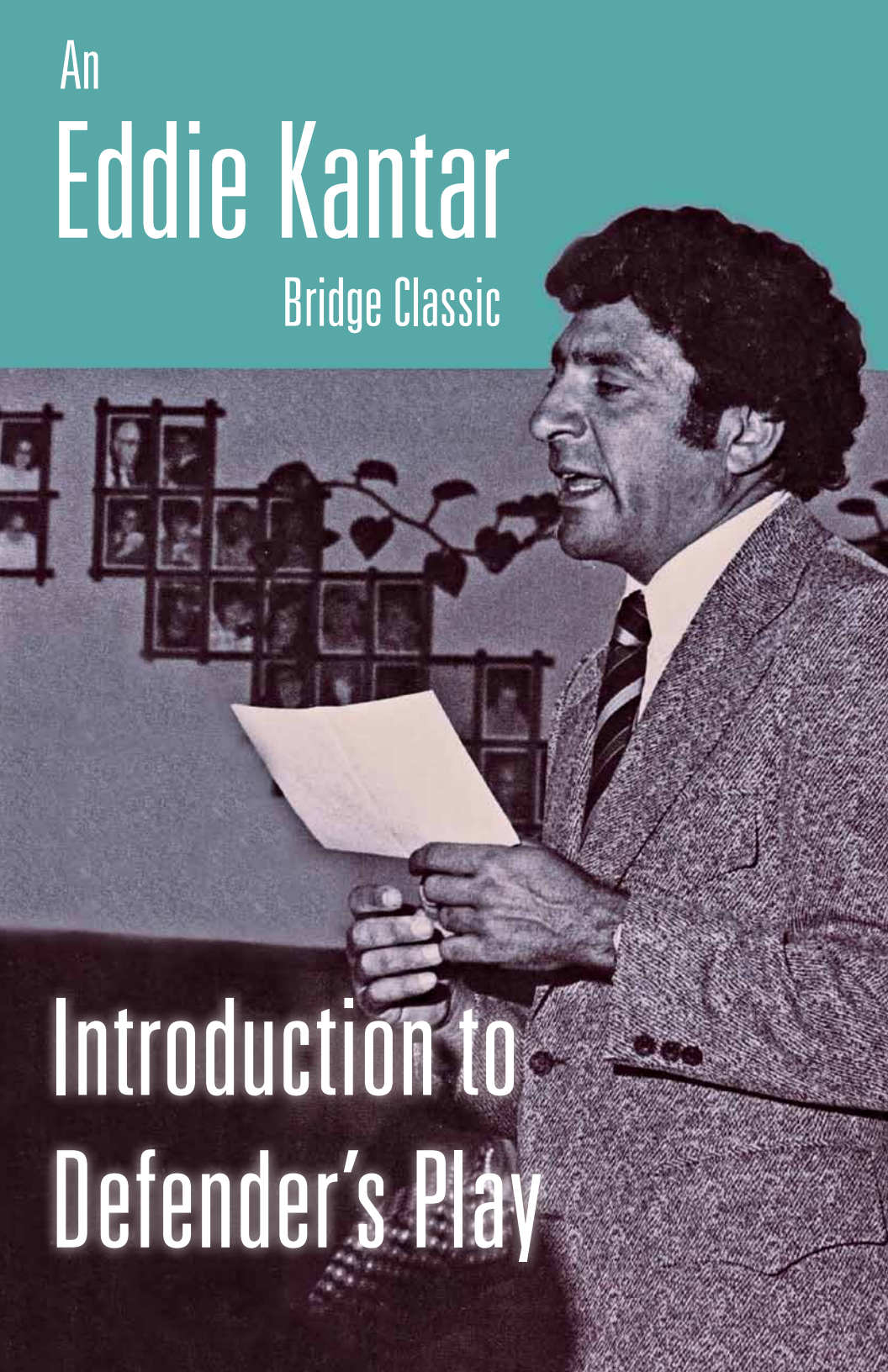


An

Eddie Kantar

Bridge Classic

A black and white photograph of Eddie Kantar, a man with dark, curly hair, wearing a suit jacket, white shirt, and striped tie. He is shown in profile, looking to the left, and holding a piece of paper in his hands. The background features a wall with several framed photographs and a plant with heart-shaped leaves.

Introduction to
Defender's Play

An

Eddie Kantar

Bridge Classic

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Part I

DEFENSE VS. NOTRUMP





There is no question that defense is the most difficult aspect of playing bridge. Many players become adequate bidders by simply memorizing the point count for various bids; others find that playing a dummy becomes easy with practice. But, defense is a matter of *logic* and thus separates the men from the boys.

If you are a good defender it is almost impossible to be a losing player. At least half of your opponents' contracts can be defeated with a good defense, but the sad truth is that about eighty percent of them are fulfilled. Why?

Because most players have not been well-drilled in the fundamentals of defensive play: know the suit and the card in that suit to lead that will give partner the maximum amount of information; know when to signal; know when to play an attacking defense (taking your tricks as quickly as possible) as opposed to a passive defense (sitting back and waiting for your tricks); decide what the declarer is trying to do based on his manner of play. This is the blocking and tackling of bridge. You cannot be a good bridge player unless you can do these things with reasonable skill.

Because there is a considerable difference between defense against *notrump* contracts and defense against *suit* contracts, this book is divided into two parts. *Notrump* will be discussed first.



1

The Opening Lead



In order to be a good defender you must have some objectives in mind. What are they?

Go back and ask yourself how you play a hand as declarer. You try to establish your tricks before the defense can establish theirs. You are fortunate in that you can see the dummy and can usually tell which suit to establish. But even so you are almost always involved in a race.

The defenders, on the other hand, cannot see each other's cards and often will waste time trying to establish the wrong suit. However, the defenders have one great advantage that overshadows all else—they have the opening lead!

In other words, in the great “establishing” race the defenders always get off to a head start; and if you consistently make the proper opening lead, you will go down in history as one of the world's greatest players, even though your bidding and defense may be just average!

Why is it so hard to make the proper opening lead? Opening leads are based on the bidding and your hand. Sometimes the bidding makes it clear which suit to lead, other times you will have a clear-cut lead in your own hand, but much of the time you will be forced to make an intelligent guess because the bidding will not have given much away. Consider these two bidding sequences by your opponents:

SOUTH	WEST (you)	NORTH	EAST
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

as opposed to:

SOUTH	WEST (you)	NORTH	EAST
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

In both cases as West you have to make the opening lead. In the first case your partner hasn't bid and the opponents have given away very little information. They may have a weakness somewhere but you cannot be sure where.

Now take the second case. South has excellent clubs and North good diamonds. As West, you can eliminate a club or a diamond as a possible opening lead because you don't want to waste your lead establishing the opponents' suits. You would select either a heart or a spade lead depending upon your hand.

The important point is: listen to the bidding. *You must listen to the bidding; you can't even begin to defend unless you do.*

As a general rule, the declarer will establish his longest suit first, and the defense tries to do the same—the most logical way being to lead it. *That is why, with nothing else to go by, the opening leader leads from length.* Notice the key words, “with nothing else to go by.” However, many times you are provided with plenty of information: your partner may have bid, or the opponents may have bid your longest suit. In such cases you would probably select another lead.

Assume, for the sake of argument, that after listening to the bidding you have decided to lead your longest suit, as this is by far the most common lead against notrump. Which card do you lead? Now look at a hand.

Sitting West, you hold:

♠ A 8 6 5 3 ♥ J 7 4 2 ♦ Q 3 ♣ 8 2

The bidding has proceeded: 1 NT on your right and 3 NT on your left. It is your lead. Now, if you could peek into your partner's hand and see that he had only one spade and five hearts

you would lead a heart because that is your *combined* longest suit. Unfortunately, the rules do not permit this, so you must assume, because you have more spades, that spades is the longest combined suit. So you are going to lead a spade, but which spade?

Normally, when leading a suit that has four or more cards you lead your *fourth highest card*. Fourth highest means starting at the top and counting down four places. In this case your fourth highest spade would be the five. Don't make the mistake of starting at the bottom and counting up. *Start at the top and count down.*

That's simple enough, isn't it? What's the catch. The first catch is that your suit may have a three-card sequence, which simply means three equal cards at the head of the suit. For example, Q J 10 4 2 would be an example of a three-card sequence.

Whenever you hold a three-card sequence or longer at the head of your suit you always lead the *top of the sequence*. The sequence rule takes precedence over the fourth highest rule.

If the third card (the lowest card) in the three-card sequence is missing by one spot (Q J 9 2), it is still considered a sequence and the queen is led. However, if the third card drops off by more than one spot (Q J 8 2), you revert to the fourth best rule and lead the deuce.

Simply, the rule for leading from a suit of four or more cards is this: lead fourth highest unless the suit contains a sequence; if it does, lead the top of the sequence instead.

Which card would you lead from each of these combinations?

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| (a) K J 7 6 5 | (d) K Q J 10 2 | (g) J 10 7 6 4 |
| (b) A 8 7 2 | (e) K Q 10 8 5 | (h) Q J 8 7 3 2 |
| (c) K Q J 2 | (f) K Q 8 4 3 2 | (i) J 10 8 5 3 |

Solutions

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------|
| (a) The six | Fourth highest |
| (b) The deuce | Fourth highest |
| (c) The king | Top of a sequence |

- | | | |
|-----|-----------|---|
| (d) | The king | Top of a sequence |
| (e) | The king | Top of a sequence (Third card in sequence missing by only one spot.) |
| (f) | The four | Fourth highest (You must have a three-card sequence before you can lead an honor card.) |
| (g) | The six | Fourth highest |
| (h) | The seven | Fourth highest |
| (i) | The jack | Top of a sequence |

Sometimes you will have a choice of suits to lead. For example, sitting West you hold:

♠ Q 7 6 3 ♥ J 10 9 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ 5 4 2

Once again the bidding goes 1 NT on your right, 2 NT on your left, and everyone passes. It's your lead and you have two four-card suits. Which one should you lead? You should lead a heart—the jack, to be more specific. When holding two long suits, one of which contains a sequence, *you should lead the suit with the sequence.*

As a matter of fact, sequences are such fine leads that if you had the two of spades rather than the two of clubs you would still lead the jack of hearts, even though you had five spades and only four hearts.

Another possibility on opening lead is that your opponents may have bid your longest suit. Let's say you hold this hand:

♠ K 7 6 4 2 ♥ Q 10 4 2 ♦ J 10 7 ♣ 2

Again, you are West and your right-hand opponent bids 1 ♠, your left-hand opponent 2 ♣, 2 NT on your right, and 3 NT on your left. Your partner has been as silent as a mouse and it's your lead.

Had the opponents simply bid notrump without mentioning any suits, you would lead the four of spades. But spades have been bid, and it is usually a bad idea to lead suits the opponents

have been bidding unless you have a sequence. So, we rule out a spade lead and lead our next-longest suit, hearts. The proper lead *on the bidding* would be the deuce of hearts.

Now let's keep the same hand but assume that our left-hand opponent bids 2 ♡ instead of 2 ♣. Once again, you are leading against notrump, only this time your opponents have bid both of your long suits! When you do not have a sequence in either of the bid suits, you normally select a lead from a three-card suit. In this case you would lead the jack of diamonds. But why the jack when you don't have a sequence?

When leading from a *three*-card suit, you must keep a few important points in mind. The most important is that the ten, jack, queen, king, and ace are considered honor cards. If you hold two touching honors and exactly three cards in the suit you must lead the higher honor. (The one exception to this is that from A K x you lead the king.)

Let's take a look at all the holdings that have *three* cards with two touching honors: A K x, K Q x, Q J x, J 10 x, 10 9 x. (Even though the nine is not considered an honor it is included in the list.) Remember that these are three-card holdings. If you have four or more cards in the suit you should lead fourth highest or top of a sequence, depending upon the size of the third card under the touching honors.

If you have three cards in the suit to be led headed by either one honor or by two non-touching honors, you must lead your *lowest* card. For example, if you were to lead from Q 10 4, you would lead the four. You have two *non-touching* honors, and from this type of holding you lead low.

Also, if you had A x x, K x x, Q x x, J x x, or 10 x x, you would lead your smallest card.

Finally, if you have three spot-cards, such as 8 4 2 or 9 7 5 or 6 5 3, lead the top card. This is called "top of nothing." Leads may be easier to remember if you repeat "top of nothing," "low from an honor," "top of a sequence," and "fourth highest" a few times.

The easiest of all rules to remember when making an initial lead covers which card to lead with a doubleton. With a doubleton, *always* lead the higher card first. Very often partner will

have thrown in a bid and you will be leading his suit. When you have precisely two cards in that suit, lead the higher card.

The time has come to do a little reviewing. Which card would you lead from each of the following holdings?

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| (a) J 9 7 5 3 | (g) K Q 3 2 | (m) K J 8 6 4 3 |
| (b) J 7 5 | (h) K 10 4 | (n) Q 3 |
| (c) 5 3 | (i) A K 3 | (o) 9 6 2 |
| (d) Q J 9 7 3 | (j) A K 7 5 2 | (p) Q 7 4 2 |
| (e) A 2 | (k) 10 9 3 2 | (q) 10 6 3 |
| (f) K Q 3 | (l) 10 9 4 | (r) 4 3 2 |
| | | (s) K J 9 3 2 |

Solutions

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| (a) The five | Fourth best |
| (b) The five | Low from an honor |
| (c) The five | Top of a doubleton |
| (d) The queen | Top of a sequence |
| (e) The ace | Top of a doubleton |
| (f) The king | Top of two touching honors, when holding exactly three cards. |
| * (g) The two | Fourth best, when holding two touching honors and more than three cards. |
| (h) The four | Low from two honors when they are not touching in a three-card suit. |
| (i) The king | This is the exception. When you hold exactly three cards, the king rather than the ace is led. (The lead of the ace <i>in an unbid suit</i> has a special meaning at no-trump, which we will come to shortly.) |
| * (j) The five | Fourth best |
| (k) The two | Fourth best |
| (l) The ten | 10 9 x is considered the same as two touching honors even though the nine is not an honor. |

* But against a suit contract lead the king.

(m)	The six	Fourth best
(n)	The queen	Top of a doubleton
(o)	The nine	Top of nothing
(p)	The two	Fourth best
(q)	The three	Low from an honor (Remember that the ten is considered an honor.)
(r)	The four	Top of nothing
(s)	The three	Fourth best

These rules apply to the opening lead only! Common sense dictates your play *after* you see the dummy. For example, if dummy contains a singleton ace and you have K Q 10 6 in that suit, you should lead the six and not the king.

The reasons behind these opening leads are quite logical. Keep in mind that when you lead against notrump you will usually be leading a suit that has four or more cards. Your partner is aware of this and knows that you are leading from your long suit. Therefore, when you lead a low card from a holding such as K J 9 4 3, your partner will protect your holding by playing his highest card:

DUMMY	
♠ 7 6	
WEST (you)	EAST (partner)
♠ K J 9 4 3	♠ Q 8 5
SOUTH	
♠ A 10 2	

Assume that you are defending a notrump contract and you lead the four of spades. Dummy plays low and your partner must play his queen. This protects your holding. If your partner refuses to play his queen and plays the eight instead, declarer makes two tricks rather than the one to which he is entitled.

You may wonder why you as West are leading fourth best from such a holding as:

DUMMY	
♠ 9 8 6	
WEST	EAST
♠ A K 7 5 3	♠ 4 2
SOUTH	
♠ Q J 10	

If you were to lead the king, the ace, and then a third spade, South would win the trick. You would be left with two good spades, but your partner would not have a spade; if he then gained the lead he would not be able to return your suit.

If you first lead the five of spades, the declarer wins the trick; however, if your partner regains the lead he can return your suit and you can take your ace, your king, and your two little ones.

You must remember that at notrump you cannot lose an ace—since they cannot be trumped, you don't have to take all of your aces and kings immediately. You will recall that when you are playing a hand at notrump you seldom have enough sure tricks to make your contract; generally, you must establish and make good your lower honors as well as your lower cards. *The same applies to the defense.* They, too, must establish their lower cards if they wish to defeat most contracts, and the best way to do that is to lead fourth best from their longest suit.

We now have a few more combinations that we have not discussed and which simply must be memorized. These holdings include sequences in the middle of the suit, called "interior sequences"—holdings such as K J 10 9 3, A J 10 8 3, or simply K J 10 5 4 or A J 10 6. With any K J 10 or A J 10 holding the jack is led.

This naturally results in a little confusion, because the jack is also led from J 10 9 or J 10 8 combinations. The only thing that can be said is that when partner leads the jack you must be aware that he can conceivably have A J 10 or K J 10.

Similar holdings are A 10 9, K 10 9, and Q 10 9 with or without extended length. From these three holdings the ten is led. In other words, if you were to lead from K 10 9 6 3 you

would lead the ten in preference to the six. Incidentally, these do not always work. Sometimes it turns out better to lead fourth highest from these holdings, especially if one of the opponents has bid the suit and you decide to lead it anyway. Nevertheless, most of the time a ten lead works out best.

If you have an inside sequence (interior sequence) beginning with a nine or less, *you still lead fourth best*. (From A 9 8 7 2, K 9 8 7 3, Q 9 8 7, or J 9 8 7 lead the seven.) In order to lead from the top of an interior sequence there must be at least one honor card in the sequence.

Finally, we come to the lead of the ace in an unbid suit. The lead of the ace against notrump asks partner to drop any high honor he may have in the suit!

Therefore the lead of the ace shows one of these holdings (with, perhaps, additional length):

A K J x x x A K J 10 A K Q 10 A Q J 10

In other words, when you have all the honors but one in your suit and you want your partner to unblock and throw his honor, you lead the ace—obviously an unusual lead against notrump.

DUMMY		
♠ 7 5 3		
WEST		EAST
♠ A K J 10		♠ Q 4
SOUTH		
♠ 9 8 6 2		

West leads the ace against notrump and East throws the queen as requested. If East does not throw the queen, West must assume that South has it, and he may make a mistake in the subsequent play.

Now that you know which card to lead from a good many

holdings and you realize how important it is to listen to the bidding, you are going to have a chance to test your new-found ability.

In each of the following problems you are to decide which card you would lead. You will always be West.

(a) You hold:

♠ K J 7 5 ♥ Q J 9 6 ♦ 7 6 ♣ J 10 4

The bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

(b) You hold the same hand but this time the bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

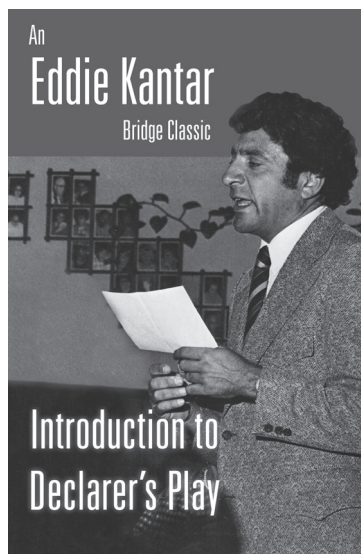
(c) With the same hand again, the bidding has proceeded:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	2 ♦
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

For each of the following five different hands to lead from, assume that in each case the bidding has gone:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

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