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# Eddie Kantar

Bridge Classic



Introduction to  
Declarer's Play

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# Part I

## NOTRUMP PLAY





# 1

## Sure Tricks



The game of bridge revolves around the bidding for and the taking of tricks. In this book we are not worried about the bidding—just the taking.

The most important single move that you must make before playing out a hand is to count your tricks. That seems easy enough, doesn't it?

Let's take a simple example:

DUMMY

♠ A 4 3

YOU

♠ K 5 2

Whenever you play a bridge hand, you get to see all of your partner's cards before you play. Your partner's hand is called the dummy—and that term has nothing to do with the way he may have bid his hand.

So what you do after the opponent on your left makes an opening lead is to look at one suit at a time; look, for example, at your spades and at dummy's spades and count the number of sure tricks you have in that suit. Then you go through the same process in each suit and come up with a figure. That is a very important figure. It tells you how many tricks you can take at a moment's notice. Remember that term—*sure tricks*—because we are going to work with it for a while.

Now let's go back to our example. In dummy we have the A 4 3 of spades, and in our own hand we have the K 5 2.

The ace will take one trick and the king will take another, so we have the two sure spade tricks. This may seem elementary, but you will never learn to play a hand unless you do this.

Counting tricks has its hazards. Let's try this one:

DUMMY

♠ K Q

YOU

♠ A 2

Now how many sure tricks do you have in spades? This answer is two, not three. You see, when you play a card from your hand, you must also take a card from the dummy. Let's say you play the ace; then the queen must be played from dummy. That leaves you with the two in your hand and the king in dummy. In other words, you have two tricks, not three.

The important thing to see is that you can never take more tricks in a suit than there are cards in the longer of the two hands. Look:

DUMMY

♠ A K Q

YOU

♠ J 10

Between you and your dummy you have the ace, king, queen, jack, and ten. But you can only take three tricks. That is because the dummy, which is the longer hand in spades, has only three cards.

Practice counting sure tricks with these examples:

(a) DUMMY  
♠ K Q 3

YOU  
♠ A 5 2

(b) DUMMY  
♠ A Q J 8

YOU  
♠ K 7

(c) DUMMY  
 ♠ A J 3

YOU  
 ♠ K Q 5 4

(d) DUMMY  
 ♠ Q J 10 5 4

YOU  
 ♠ A K 3

### *Solutions*

- (a) Three tricks. You can take them in any order you like. You could play the king, then the queen, and then the three to your ace; or you could play the ace, and then a little one to the king, and then the queen. Or you could play the king, then the three to your ace, and then a little one back to your queen. You see, when you have an even number of cards in both hands (e.g., three cards on each side), you have quite a bit of flexibility. You would have to see all 26 cards before you knew which hand you wanted to end up in. I am merely showing you that you don't always have to play the ace first when taking tricks.
- (b) Four tricks. Now this situation and the following ones are a little different because you do not have an even number of cards on both sides. In this case the dummy has four and you only have two. As a general rule, whenever you have a bunch of good tricks in a suit that is unevenly divided, *you should play the high card(s) from the short side first*. This means playing the king, which will take the eight from dummy, and then leading your seven over to the ace, queen, and jack in dummy. When cards are high it does not matter which one you play first. In this case, when you have played the king and are about to lead the seven over to the dummy, it doesn't matter if you play the jack, queen, or ace—they are all the same. In this little game we are playing, we are always assuming that the opponents have led some other suit and we have taken the trick. Now we are about to play our suit. Sometimes the trick we have taken will

have been in dummy. Therefore, if the lead is in the dummy, we must play the eight of spades over to our king and then the seven back to the dummy. But in either case we are playing the high card from the short side first.

- (c) Four tricks. If the lead is in the dummy (from the prior play), we should first play the ace, then the jack, and then the three over to our king and queen. Notice that we played the high cards from the short side first. Things would be exactly the same if the lead were in our hand. We would play the four over to the ace (or jack), then the jack, and then the three over to our king and queen. It is conceivable that the opponents might lead this suit themselves, in which case we would still play it the same way.
- (d) Five tricks. This time we would play the king and ace (or the ace and king) from our hand and then lead the three over to the queen, jack, and ten in the dummy.

Playing the high card or high cards from the short side first allows us to end up on the long side, where we can take the maximum amount of tricks.

Now let's practice counting our sure tricks in an entire hand:

DUMMY

♠ A 4 3  
 ♥ K 4  
 ♦ 10 8 7 5  
 ♣ A K Q 3

YOU

♠ 7 5 2  
 ♥ A Q 3  
 ♦ A 4 3 2  
 ♣ J 4 2

Let's pretend the final contract was 3 NT and West, your left-hand opponent, led the king of spades. How many sure tricks do you have in the *entire* hand?

You should have come up with nine sure tricks. You have one in spades, three in hearts, one in diamonds, and four in clubs.

Sometimes counting tricks and taking them are two different things. But if you remember about the high card from the short hand, you will not have any trouble. In clubs, you would play the jack first from your own hand and then play a little one over to the ace, king, and queen in dummy. In hearts, you would play the king first and then the four over to the ace and queen in your own hand.

Here are a couple more practice hands. Count your sure tricks and see what you come up with:

<p>(a) DUMMY</p> <p>♠ K Q 3</p> <p>♥ A J</p> <p>♦ A J 7 6</p> <p>♣ K 4 3 2</p> <p>YOU</p> <p>♠ A 4</p> <p>♥ K Q</p> <p>♦ K Q 8 3 2</p> <p>♣ A 7 6 5</p>	<p>(b) DUMMY</p> <p>♠ K Q J</p> <p>♥ Q J 10 9</p> <p>♦ J 10 9</p> <p>♣ K Q J</p> <p>YOU</p> <p>♠ 10 9 8</p> <p>♥ K 8 7 6</p> <p>♦ K Q 8 7</p> <p>♣ 10 9</p>
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### *Solutions*

- (a) You should have come up with twelve tricks: three in spades, two in hearts (make sure you see why), five in diamonds (playing the ace and jack first), and two in clubs.
- (b) You have zero sure tricks! That's right, not one. In order to take tricks in any one of these suits, you must first get rid of the opponent's ace. Until you get rid of that ace, you do not have a sure trick. The definition of a sure trick is a trick which you can take *without giving up the lead*. When you must give up the lead to take a trick, you are *establishing tricks*, which leads us to the next chapter.

**KEY POINTERS**

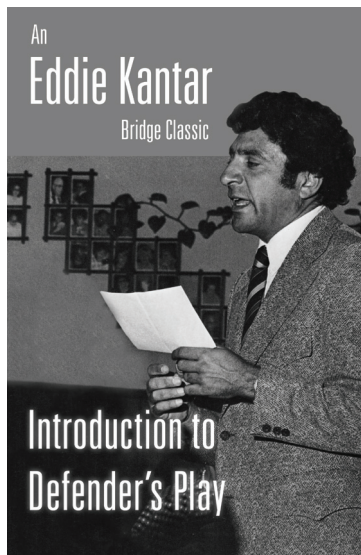
(1) The first step in playing a bridge hand is to count your *sure tricks*.

(2) A sure trick is a trick which can be taken without giving up the lead.

(3) You can never take more tricks in a suit than there are cards in the longer hand. (If both you and your dummy have two cards in one suit, the most tricks you can take in that suit is two.)

(4) When taking sure tricks, play the high cards(s) from the short side first. This will allow you to end up on the long side, where you can cash the rest of the tricks in the suit.

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If reading this book is your first exploration of the world of card play at bridge, you will find it much easier going than you had thought. You will be in the hands of a master. If you already know how to play, you may be surprised at how many gaps in your knowledge can be filled by Kantar's tips and advice.

*Introduction to Declarer's Play and Introduction to Defender's Play are the two best bridge books ever written for novices. Eddie's style is so easy for players of all levels and he makes it so much fun to learn. Eddie is a guru for so many and I personally would not be teaching without having had access to all his wonderful material over the years.*

**Barbara Seagram**  
*Author of 25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*

