

COUNTERING DECEPTION AT BRIDGE

DON'T
BE
FOOLED!

DANNY ROTH

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*All warfare is based upon deception.
Hence, when able to attack, we must seem unable;
When using our forces, we must seem inactive;
When we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away;
When far away, we must make him believe we are near.*

Sun Tzu

Introduction

Are you a gullible person — easily taken in? Do you find certain opponents particularly difficult to play against because they are continually making deceptive opening leads, playing falsecards and adopting strange, apparently anti-percentage, lines of play or defense? Not to mention what they are liable to do during the auction!

Well, it is time you did something about it — you need to become an equally difficult person to play against and just as difficult to fool. The considerable amount of literature on play and defense includes a number of books that have highlighted falsecards and other forms of deception; however, up until now almost nothing has been written on how to combat these practices. All too often there is little you can do but try to guess whether you have been fooled or not, but that's not always the case. Over the years a fair number of deals have been reported in which top-class players have been conned unnecessarily. With a little anticipation and deeper knowledge, they could have avoided trouble. In the last of its three main sections, this book will display a collection of such deals in quiz form; my aim is to show readers how to recognize potentially dangerous situations and, if possible, take evasive action in good time.

The number of books I have written on bridge is now running into the mid-twenties, so my readers will fall into two categories. A special welcome is extended to those who are joining me for the first time. I hope you will enjoy and benefit from my style and presentation. Those who have subjected themselves to one or more doses of me before and are obviously gluttons for punishment will know that my method of presenting bridge problems, in both declarer play and defense, differs from that of other authors in one important respect.

Everybody else will put a problem in front of you, give the method of scoring, bidding and early play and take you up to the critical point of the deal. They will then ask for your continuation. Most of the time I shall do the same but — be warned — not always! On a number of occasions, I shall stop well short of, or go well past, the vital moment. As I have explained in previous books, this is obviously far more realistic. When playing in your local club's duplicate pairs, an important team-of-four match, or in a major tournament, you will not have the benefit of some expert

sitting at your side ready to tap you on the shoulder at the critical moment and say ‘This is it!’ You have got to be on the ball the whole time without any such prompting.

Thus, when I pose a problem, you will be expected to give a full analysis, stating a logical understanding of what has happened so far and how you expect the remainder of the play to go. Readers of my previous books will be familiar with my seven “roll-calls”: count in each of the four suits, distribution of high-card points and the number of tricks immediately available to declarer and defenders — and should be able to anticipate impending trouble well before it happens. Of course, this is important at all times but particularly so when deceptive positions are involved. In the deals presented in problem form, top-class players allowed themselves to be deceived because they failed to appreciate what their opponents were up to, still less what to do about it *well in advance*. Thus, in all deals, whether they involve deceptive play or not and whether you are declarer or (unless you are an extremely selfish and/or aggressive bidder, twice as often) a defender, a priceless habit to get into is to anticipate how the play is going to proceed, what your opponents’ plans are and, when defending, how you intend to counter them and/or help your partner to do so.

It is stating the obvious that, if you are going to deceive your opponent(s), the earlier in the play you do it, the better your chance of success. Similarly, if you are likely to be the victim of deception, the earlier in the play that you spot a dubious situation ahead, the better your chance of avoiding trouble. *So this applies right from Trick 1*. Once the opening lead has been made and dummy tabled, both declarer and defenders (particularly East, third to play — we shall be adopting the usual format of making South declarer) should take their time to assess the situation and anticipate how play will proceed. As the old proverb goes, ‘A stitch in time saves nine!’ implying that, for example, a telling signal now could avoid embarrassing problems later on.

Enough of the preamble; let me explain that, as indicated earlier, the book is divided into three main parts. We shall start by summarizing common situations where deception is possible. These have been organized under various headings, but obviously there will be a certain degree of overlap. Only when I researched the subject did I realize how enormous the world of deception is: as the old saying goes, you only realize how ignorant you are when you start learning! Here, the potential victim will simply have to guess whether he is being misled or not. In the second section, we shall concentrate on situations where he has enough evidence to be suspicious, although the counter will by no means be clear-cut.

Finally, a number of real-life problems will be presented to you, in the usual quiz form, where deception was successful but, in my opinion at least, the victim could have steered well clear of trouble. Rather than putting them under the various headings from Part 1, they will appear randomly as they would at the table. I have, however, tried to present them approximately in order of increasing difficulty. By the time you start solving those, you should be familiar with potentially deceptive positions and know what to do. If you do get them wrong, then so much the better to fail now, when it costs nothing, rather than at the table.

As in my previous books, I am going to present you with a warm-up problem to illustrate the points I have made above. So here, to start with, you are East, playing teams:

E-W vul.

♠ J
♥ J 9
♦ K J 10 6 4 2
♣ Q 9 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 8 6 5 2
♥ 6 4
♦ 3
♣ 10 8 5 3

West	North	East	South
			1♥
dbl	2♦	3♠	4♥
dbl	all pass		

Partner leads the ♣A, dummy playing the ♣4. In a position like this, with the ♣Q in dummy, you are obviously expected to give count, so, in the normal manner, you correctly play the ♣8 to show an even number and South plays the ♣J. Partner switches to the ♥3, dummy's ♥9 winning as South follows with the ♥2. Declarer now calls for the ♦K from dummy, dropping the ♦Q from his hand as partner wins with the ♦A. He now cashes the ♠A and switches back to the ♦8. Dummy plays the ♦10. How do you defend?

It may well be that South is now also out of diamonds but it cannot possibly cost to ruff; so that is what you do to take the contract one down.

The full deal:

	♠ J													
	♥ J 9													
	♦ K J 10 6 4 2													
	♣ Q 9 6 4													
♠ A 10 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="text-align: center;"> </td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="width: 50%; text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> </table>		N			W		E			S			♠ K 9 8 6 5 2
	N													
W		E												
	S													
♥ 7 5 3		♥ 6 4												
♦ A 9 8		♦ 3												
♣ A K 7 2		♣ 10 8 5 3												
	♠ Q 7 3													
	♥ A K Q 10 8 2													
	♦ Q 7 5													
	♣ J													

But now let's see what happened at the table when this deal occurred in a top-class American tournament. West felt obliged to take some action over South's opening bid and it is the modern style to compete on these hands for fear of 'missing out'. This is totally wrong in my opinion in that West, with a hand much better suited to defense, lacks four cards in the other major and has the wrong shape with too many hearts. But I am not here to get into arguments about bidding style; that is for another (be warned — highly controversial!) book.

The early play proceeded as described above. Declarer had realized that, if he drew trumps before knocking out the ♦A, he would lose at least four tricks off the top; against that, if he didn't, he risked running into a diamond ruff, the bidding strongly suggesting that West held at least three diamonds. So, caught between the devil and the deep blue sea, he tried to mislead West about the diamond position. After cashing the ♠A, West took the view that, as it was 'obvious' that South's ♦Q was singleton, he surely was still holding at least one more club. Consequently, after the ♠A, he tried to cash the ♣K, presenting declarer with the contract.

Need this have happened? At the table, East gave count in the spade suit — totally irrelevant. My concern is which spade did *you* play on that ace? It should have been the king, a clear request for a switch to the higher-ranking of the two minors.

I hope that you now see my point. I have emphasized many times in previous books that failure to use suit-preference signals is the principal cause of misdefending at all levels of bridge. But now suppose that I had presented the problem like this:

Partner leads the ♣A, dummy playing the ♣4. In a position like this, with the ♣Q in dummy, you are obviously expected to give count, so you play the ♣8 and South plays the ♣J. Partner switches to the ♥3, dummy's ♥9 winning as South follows with the ♥2. Declarer now calls for the ♦K from dummy, dropping the ♦Q from his hand as partner wins with the ♦A. He now cashes the ♠A; which card do you play?

Now you would surely have realized that this was your big moment and almost certainly come up with the right answer. But did you do so the first time? I should be very surprised if you can honestly say, 'Yes'!

It is time to start the detailed work. I hope you will enjoy it.

Section 1

You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time.

Phineas T. Barnum

In which we survey some common deceptive positions...

Chapter 1

A Single Suit in Isolation

We shall work our way through positions that come up frequently and start by concentrating on layouts in a single suit. The relevant factors are obviously length, strength and lines of communication, notably where a long suit is displayed in an otherwise weak dummy and declarer may have problems in establishing and reaching his winners. The most common example of this arises when South has a big balanced hand with strength at or near 2NT-opening level and has been raised to game by his partner, who proudly tables a long minor suit but little else.

In the world of deception, the important parameters are as follows:

- 1) How many tricks does declarer need?
- 2) How much does he know about his opponents' hands? If there has been no bidding, the answer may be 'very little'. However, if your bidding has been descriptive (with varying reliability), the picture could change dramatically and you must be prepared to adjust your approach accordingly.
- 3) It is vital to give your opponents as little information as possible. This almost invariably means that, if you are known to hold a specific card or it is clear that you will soon be known to hold that card, you should play it as soon as possible unless you obviously cannot afford to do so. If you play other cards, you are simply giving declarer more information than he is entitled to — purely for *his* benefit.

Let's tabulate some everyday situations. In each case, South has shown a big hand and is in 3NT. The bulk of his tricks will come from dummy's long diamonds and we shall display various layouts like these; you are West:

	♦ J7	♦ AKQ654 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ 83	♦ 1092
or	♦ Q7	♦ AKJ654 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ 83	♦ 1092
or	♦ K7	♦ AQJ654 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ 83	♦ 1092

South plays a low card from his hand. In each case, if you play low, declarer will simply call for the lowest of dummy's three honors and wrap up six tricks. But if you play your honor on the first round, for all declarer knows, the position might look like this:

	♦ J	♦ AKQ654 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ 83	♦ 10972
or	♦ Q	♦ AKJ654 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ 83	♦ 10972
or	♦ K	♦ AQJ654 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♦ 83	♦ 10972

Declarer now has the choice of winning, in which case he will be restricted to three tricks in the suit, or ducking, to ensure five. But in that latter case, you will have won a trick to which you had no right. Note that playing your honor can never cost.

We shall look at more situations where 'second hand high' can give declarer headaches even when he has no entry problems:

♦ Q 7	♦ A K 10 9 5 4 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♦ J 6
	♦ 8 3 2	

On the ♦2, play your ♦Q. Declarer now has the option to play for:

♦ Q J 7	♦ A K 10 9 5 4 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♦ 6
	♦ 8 3 2	

Even if West plays the ♦7 on the first round, rather than the ♦Q, East can drop the ♦J under dummy's honor. Now declarer may feel obliged to use an entry to return to hand in order to take a 'restricted-choice' finesse against West on the second round. This is not to mention that, in a suit contract, a defender may be void in that entry suit and get a ruff. Declarer has no chance to go wrong if both defenders play low on the first round.

♦ K 7	♦ A Q 10 6 5 4 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♦ J 9 2
	♦ 8 3	

Here, on the first round, play your ♦K. Declarer may read this as singleton, which would give your partner ♦J9xx and a double stopper; he may decide to seek his fortune elsewhere. If you play low, declarer will play dummy's ♦10 and the suit will come in for five tricks.

Even sitting East, you can also cause problems:

♦ 9 5	♦ A K 10 6 4 2 <div style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	♦ Q J 3
	♦ 8 7	

This time, South may be the opponent with a weak hand, typically after a sequence like this:

North	South
1♦	pass
3NT	1NT
	pass

The lead is in the North hand, and declarer may start diamonds with a low card — if he does, there is little to discuss. However, with plenty of entries and other options, he may call for a diamond honor from dummy. Unless you are worried about an endplay, try dropping one of your honors. Now declarer may cross to hand to play a low diamond toward the $\heartsuit 10$ on the second round to cater for this position:

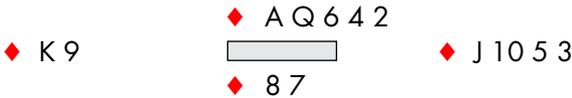


This might mean that he has had to expend a valuable entry.

It is particularly important, when you have a card that has been finessed against successfully, to play it as soon as possible, preferably on the next round:



Spades are trumps and declarer is trying to establish diamonds as his long side suit. After a diamond to the $\heartsuit Q$, he calls for the $\heartsuit A$. You must drop your $\heartsuit K$, at least making declarer worry about:



Now declarer is threatened with possible overruffs and in any case, will need a lot of entries and hard work to set up that fifth diamond. He may well abandon the suit, while, if you follow with the $\heartsuit J$ on the second round, the position will be clear and he will have no further problem.

Similarly here:



Again, drop the $\heartsuit K$ on the second round. Threatened with overruffs, declarer may well look elsewhere. We shall be looking at the ruffing threat in more detail in the next chapter.

Similar reasoning applies here:



On the first round, declarer plays low from the South hand to dummy's ♦J. When he calls for the ♦A, you must drop your ♦Q as if the position were:



Declarer now has an awkward decision on the third round, whereas if you play the ♦10 on the second round, he has no problem.

Still with the ♦Q missing, you can give declarer a losing option as West here:



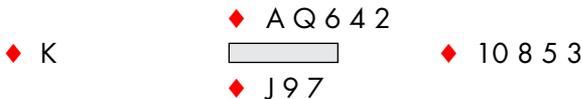
When South leads the ♦7 on the first round, play your ♦Q, giving the impression of:



Declarer has a losing option on the second round. The same applies here:



On the first round, play your ♦K, painting this picture:



Again declarer will sometimes go wrong. At worst, you will have lost nothing.

In this next example, you are East; South has shown a big hand with a diamond suit and is now on play:



If you play the ♦10 when he plays the ♦A, declarer cannot go wrong, but dropping the ♦Q makes it look as if this is the layout:



and he may well finesse against the ♦10 on the second round.

This is another position where playing an honor can hardly cost:

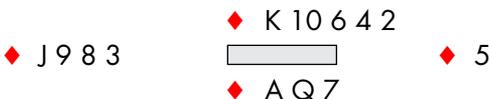


Declarer is booked for five tricks but when he plays the ♦K, try dropping the ♦Q. Now declarer may read the position as:



Now, notably if East is the danger hand (he has winners to cash or West has a tenace position over South in another suit), declarer may abandon the suit, preferring to look elsewhere. Note again that playing the ♦Q cannot cost.

With an entryless dummy, this is another position where you can play the card you will soon be known to hold with little risk:



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DON'T BE FOOLED!

Many books have been written on falsecards and other deceptive plays at the bridge table. However, there is very little help available on how to recognize when the opponents are trying something sneaky, and what can be done in terms of counter-measures. This book fills that gap — readers will learn the most common situations where deceptive play by the opposition may occur, and the most effective ways to nullify the threat.



DANNY ROTH (UK) has more than a dozen books to his credit, and is a regular contributor to bridge magazines around the world.

