

Strategy and Tactics – The End Game

Tactics – The means employed to carry out a strategy that was formulated to achieve an end result.

There is no substitute for counting when defending a hand. No matter how many tactics you know, choosing the right strategy, i.e., solving the problem, requires an accurate picture of declarer's and partner's hands, knowledge only gained by counting. Counting, though, is hard work, and it takes practice to make it second nature. Ultimately, you want to reach the point that you count every hand, but until you reach that point, it may be helpful to recognize the signs that say, "Wake up! Count this hand – or else!"

A side suit that's a great source of tricks is a red flag hand. It tells the defenders that this might be a good hand to defend actively, to grab their tricks and run. Most of the time, though, declarers need to develop tricks to make their contract. When that's the case, passive defense is the best strategy. The defenders' goal when defending passively is simply stated, "Don't let declarer have any tricks to which he or she is not entitled." This is sometimes easier said than done. When you hold most of the defensive side's high card points (HCPs), you're holding a red flag hand. Take the time to count carefully, because the pressure is on you. It will be very easy for you to mistime your tricks or panic and give declarer the trick(s) he or she needs.

Aces Are Meant to Take – Tricks at the Opportune Moment

HAND 1.

	♠854	
	♥KT83	
	♦J2	
	♣AK74	
♠AK762		♠JT3
♥A5		♥
♦K763		♦
♣52		♣
	♠Q9	
	♥J9???(?)	
	♦	
	♣	

Auction (South dealer):

1H – 1S – 2S – Pass

4H – Pass //

You lead the ♠A and dummy comes down.

While declarer is planning his play, you should be thinking, too. The rest of this trick is ♠4, ♠J, ♠9. *Don't turn that Ace over until you have a plan.*

What do you know about this hand?

1. You and dummy hold 25 HCPs and partner's ♠J makes 26. Only 14 HCPs are missing.
2. When dealer opens the bidding one of a major suit, he usually holds at least 11 HCPs. This declarer went straight to game after partner's limit-raise-plus cue bid. This suggests extra length or extra HCPs. Partner probably began holding no more than 4 HCPs.
3. Declarer opened the bidding 1H, so declarer holds at least five hearts. Partner has no more than two hearts. If declarer holds *only* five hearts, it's also likely that declarer has 13-14 HCPs, i.e. the ♦A and all the missing queens.

- Partner's play of the ♠J at trick one promises a singleton or the ♠T. It denies the ♠Q, so you know that declarer holds that card. Declarer holds at least five hearts and two spades and no more than six minor suit cards. You now know that your side will take at least two spades and one heart.
- If partner holds the ♦A, then declarer opened the bidding with only 10 HCPs. Don't play your partner for the ♦A. The setting trick will probably be your ♦K. Don't lead away from that king!

You continue with the ♠K; partner plays the ♠3 and declarer follows with the ♠Q. You now know that it's safe to play one more spade. What card(s) are safe to play after you win the ♥A?

You play a third spade; dummy and partner follow suit and declarer ruffs with the ♥9. Declarer now plays the ♥J towards dummy. What do you do? **Declarer tip:** If you want the opponents to take an Ace immediately, play your King. If you want them to hold up their Ace, play a lower honor card. This is especially effective if you make it appear that you are planning to finesse.

HAND 2:

	♠852	
	♥AQ85	
	♦J3	
	♣QJ83	
♠AK976		♠JT3
♥74		♥J3
♦K972		♦
♣A2		♣
	♠Q4	
	♥KT962	
	♦	
	♣T	

Auction (South dealer):

1H – 1S – 2S – Pass

4H – Pass //

You lead the ♠A and dummy comes down.

While declarer is planning his play, you should be thinking, too. The rest of this trick is ♠2, ♠J, ♠4. *Don't turn that Ace over until you have a plan.*

What do you know about this hand?

- You and dummy hold 24 HCPs and partner's ♠J makes 25. Only 15 HCPs are missing.
- When dealer opens the bidding one of a major suit, he usually holds at least 11 HCPs. This declarer went straight to game after partner's limit-raise-plus cue bid. This suggests extra length or extra HCPs. Partner probably began holding no more than 4 HCPs.
- If partner holds the ♦A, then declarer opened the bidding with only 10 HCPs. Don't count on it! Leading away from the ♦K may cost your side a trick.
- Declarer opened the bidding 1H, so declarer holds at least five hearts. Partner has no more than two hearts. If declarer holds *only* five hearts, it's also likely that declarer has 13-14 HCPs, i.e. the ♦A and possibly the ♦Q, as well.
- Remember that partner's play of the ♠J at trick one promises a singleton or the ♠T. It denies the ♠Q, so you know that declarer holds that card. Declarer started with at least five hearts and two spades and no more than six minor suit cards. You now know that your side will take at least two spades and one club. Get ready to count the tricks.

You continue with the ♠K; partner plays the ♠3 and declarer follows with the ♠Q. You now know that it's safe to play one more spade. You play a third spade; dummy and partner follow suit and declarer ruffs with the ♥9. Declarer plays two rounds of trumps, ending in hand, and partner follows

suit with the ♥3 and ♥J. Declarer now leads the ♣T.

You now know that declarer started with only five hearts, so you're pretty sure that declarer began with more than 11 HCPs. Partner does not hold the ♦A. What do you play on this club trick?

Win the Battle – Lose the War

HAND 3:

	♠862	
	♥AQ53	
	♦T72	
	♣AQ3	
♠AK954		♠JT3
♥74		♥J
♦K83		♦4
♣K72		♣
	♠Q7	
	♥KT9862	
	♦	
	♣4	

Auction (South dealer):

1H – 1S – 2S – Pass

4H – Pass //

You lead the ♠A and dummy comes down. While declarer is planning his play, you should be thinking, too. The rest of this trick is ♠2, ♠J, ♠7.

What do you know about this hand?

1. You and dummy hold 25 HCPs and partner's ♠J makes 26. Only 14 HCPs are missing.
2. When dealer opens the bidding one of a major suit, he usually holds at least 11 HCPs. This declarer went straight to game after partner's limit-raise-plus cue bid. This suggests extra length or extra HCPs. Partner probably began holding no more than 4 HCPs.
3. If partner holds the ♦A, then declarer opened the bidding with only 10 HCPs, so it's very unlikely that partner holds that ace. Unless partner holds the ♦Q, leading away from the ♦K will cost your side a trick.
4. Your ♣K is badly positioned. Unless partner can help you out, declarer is likely to make this contract.
5. Declarer started with at least two spades, the ♠Q and the ♠7. You can safely play three spades, but after that, any lead from your hand is dangerous.

You continue with the ♠K; partner plays the ♠3 and declarer follows with the ♠Q. You play a third spade; dummy and partner follow suit and declarer ruffs with the ♥9. Declarer plays two rounds of trumps, ending in hand. Partner follows with the ♥J to the first round, but discards the ♦4 on the second heart lead. *Don't turn over that second heart until you paint your picture of declarer's hand.* At trick six, declarer leads the ♣4 towards dummy.

Answers:

HAND 1.

	♠854	
	♥KT83	
	♦J2	
	♣AK74	
♠AK762		♠JT3
♥A5		♥74
♦K763		♦9854
♣52		♣T986
	♠Q9	
	♥QJ962	
	♦AQT	
	♣QJ3	

Auction (South dealer):

1H – 1S – 2S – Pass

4H – Pass //

When declarer plays the ♥J towards dummy at trick four, it looks like partner holds the ♥Q! However, you know that your only really safe *out card* is a heart, so you win the ace and exit with the ♥5. Partner follows suit to both tricks. You now know that declarer started with two spades, five hearts, and six minor suit cards. Unless five of those six minor suit cards are clubs, you can smugly sit back and wait to collect the setting trick with your ♦K.

Look at the full deal. On this hand, clubs are also a safe out for you, if declarer lets you lead them. If you duck the first heart trick, it's possible that declarer will play two clubs before forcing you to win that ace of trumps. Now, look what happens. If you lead a diamond, declarer will win four hearts, four clubs, the ♦A – and a diamond trick to which declarer is not entitled. If you lead a fourth spade, declarer will win four hearts, four clubs, the ♦A – and a spade ruff in dummy to which declarer is not entitled. Move the cards around. Can you come up with a holding in which it's wrong for you to win the first heart?

HAND 2:

	♠852	
	♥AQ85	
	♦J3	
	♣QJ83	
♠AK976		♠JT3
♥74		♥J3
♦K972		♦T854
♣A2		♣9654
	♠Q4	
	♥KT962	
	♦AQ6	
	♣KT7	

Auction (South dealer):

1H – 1S – 2S – Pass

4H – Pass //

You know declarer must hold the ♦A. Otherwise, he would not hold enough points to open the bidding. Despite declarer's play of the ♣T at trick six, you know he probably holds the ♣K, as well. If he doesn't, his jump to game over partner's possible limit raise was very aggressive. Therefore, declarer has five heart tricks, three club tricks, and the ♦A. You don't want to give him an extra diamond trick or a sluff and ruff, tricks to which he is not entitled. Of course, you identified the ♣2 as your only safe *get out* card at trick one. You won the ♣A and

led the ♣2, didn't you? Declarer is always entitled to those club tricks, so it won't hurt your side to give them to him. Move the cards around. Can you come up with a holding in which it's wrong to win the first club?

HAND 3:

Auction (South dealer):

1H – 1S – 2S – Pass

4H – Pass //

You know that declarer will be able to take six heart tricks and two club tricks. If he does not have the ♦A, he would have been more likely to open the bidding with a 2H bid, not a 1H bid, so he also

has one diamond trick. He needs one more trick to make his contract. If you win the third round of clubs with your ♣K, you will be forced to lead a spade or a diamond. A spade lead will give declarer his tenth trick with a ruff in dummy. If declarer holds the ♦Q, a diamond lead will give declarer his tenth trick with that queen. *If you win the third round of clubs, it's likely that you will be forced to give declarer the contract.*

	♠862	
	♥AQ53	
	♦T72	
	♣AQ3	
♠AK954		♠JT3
♥74		♥J
♦K83		♦J9654
♣K72		♣JT95
	♠Q7	
	♥KT9862	
	♦AQ	
	♣864	

When winning a trick forces you to concede the contract to declarer, try not to win the trick. On this hand, you don't have to make your decision the first time clubs are led, but you must be prepared to get the ♣K out of your hand the second time the suit is played. You play a low club at trick six, and declarer calls for the ♣Q. Your partner follows with the ♣J! Did your partner really start with only one club? Of course not. That would give declarer six clubs, i.e., fourteen cards. Partner is trying to say that he holds the ♣JT and probably at least one more club card.

If one member of the defense has most of the defensive HCPs, the corollary is that the other defender has almost nothing of value. That defender must pay close attention and take every opportunity to let partner know just where those meager values might be. If partner can win the third club trick, your problem is solved. When declarer plays the ♣A from dummy, get rid of your ♣K. Now, declarer must rely on the diamond finesse to make the contract. Down one. Move the cards around. Can you construct a hand in which it's right for you to win the third club trick?

Summary

Statistically, you and your partner are likely to defend about 50% of the hands you play. Counting may be hard work, but it's necessary work if you want to defend those hands accurately. If you find it tiring to count every hand, then focus on these hand types.

- ♠ No trump auctions are very descriptive, so count all those hands.
- ♠ A trick-taking long suit in dummy is a red flag hand. Count carefully to determine whether or not an active strategy is needed. If you need to grab your side's tricks and run, make sure you choose the appropriate tactics.
- ♠ If you hold most of your side's defensive strength, you're holding a red flag hand. Count carefully to determine problems in advance. You don't want to be caught in a position in which you are forced to give declarer the contract.
- ♠ When defending passively, avoid giving declarer any tricks to which he or she is not entitled. Breaking new suits for declarer is usually the wrong tactic. Giving declarer a sluff and ruff is only right when all other tactics are known to be wrong. In other words, plan your *out cards* in advance. Entitled tricks are those winning tricks to which no transportation problems exist, so leading those suits costs the defense nothing.
- ♠ Most hands should be defended passively, so if in doubt, defend passively.
- ♠ If you hold few defensive points, *don't fall asleep*. Jacks and tens and four-card suits may be very important. Be prepared to step up and get partner off the hook.

Strategy and Tactics – The End Game

BONUS HAND:

	♠J8	
	♥K65	
	♦AT72	
	♣K982	
♠AK762		♠QT943
♥QJT		♥9842
♦63		♦95
♣J74		♣??
	♠5	
	♥A73	
	♦KQJ84	
	♣????	

Auction (South dealer):

1D – 1S – 2S – 4S

5C – Pass – 5D – Pass

Pass – Pass //

Sometimes, you don't have the ability to control your own fate. Declarer and the cards dictate when you must win a trick.

You lead the ♠A and dummy is tabled. If you can take two spade tricks, you see a chance to set this contract; but the auction doesn't give you much hope. Partner signals for a spade continuation, but declarer ruffs that trick. Declarer pulls two rounds of trumps and

partner follows suit to both rounds. Declarer now plays the ♥A and the ♥K. You see it coming, but there's nothing you can do. You must win the third heart trick – and you have no choice. You must lead a spade, giving declarer a ruff and sluff; or you must break the club suit for declarer. What are you going to do?

BONUS HAND – YOU'RE ON LEAD:

	♠--	
	♥---	
	♦A--2	
	♣K982	
♠--762		♠QT4--
♥---		♥9---
♦--		♦--
♣J74		♣Q?
	♠-	
	♥---	
	♦-Q--4	
	♣A???	

You should have a very good idea of declarer's and partner's hands by now. Declarer started with one spade and five diamonds. He played three hearts, and since he jumped to 5C, he must hold four clubs. If he doesn't hold the ♣A, his bidding was foolhardy and the contract is already set, so give him that card. That gives him five diamond tricks, two heart tricks, and two club tricks. If declarer also holds the ♣Q, that's his eleventh trick, so give partner that card. Partner's original distribution must have been 5-4-2-2. Declarer needs two more tricks, so giving him one with a sluff and ruff doesn't give him the contract. On the other hand, if you break the club suit

for him, what does that do?

BONUS HAND – FULL DEAL:

	♠J8	
	♥K65	
	♦AT72	
	♣K982	
♠AK762		♠QT943
♥QJT		♥9842
♦63		♦95
♣J74		♣Q6
	♠5	
	♥A73	
	♦KQJ84	
	♣AT53	

Here's the complete deal. If you give declarer a sluff and ruff, he'll still have to lose a club trick. If you break the club suit, declarer will need to finesse for your ♣J and he might guess wrong, but your play gives him a chance. This hand is also an example of the normally superior 4-4 trump fit. 5C cannot be set.

1

♠ Q92
♥
♦ 5
♣ AK10976532

♠ 85 ♠ AJ1076
♥ 10986 ♥ A3
♦ AK863 ♦ QJ109
♣ 84 ♣ QJ

♠ K43
♥ KQJ7542
♦ 742
♣

Dealer: North
Neither Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	5 ♣	Dbf	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: Q ♦

This may not be your choice for the opening bid, but this is a class on defense, so liberties may be taken. Your DQ wins trick one and you continue a diamond, which declarer ruffs. Declarer pulls two rounds of trumps and leads a spade towards dummy. What do you do? Why?

2

♠ 9832
♥ 83
♦ J1094
♣ 1032

♠ A64 ♠ KJ7
♥ KQ75 ♥ AJ1062
♦ K72 ♦ A85
♣ J85 ♣ 96

♠ Q105
♥ 94
♦ Q63
♣ AKQ74

Dealer: East
N-S Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1 ♥	2 ♣
3 ♣	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: A ♣

You lead the CA and partner follows with the C2. You continue clubs and declarer ruffs the third round. Do you see the problem?

3

♠ AK103
♥ Q76
♦ 53
♣ AKQJ

♠ 84 ♠ A1032
♥ KJ4 ♥ A76
♦ QJ1098 ♦ 10653
♣ 987 ♣ QJ975

♥ 985
♦ K42
♣ 42

Dealer: South
E-W Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
			Pass
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Opening Lead: Q ♦

Unlike bridge classes, hands in bridge games don't follow a lesson plan. Partner led the DQ and you have a decision to make. Do you play passively and let declarer win the trick? If you answered, "No," and played your DA, what did you lead at trick two? Why?

4

♠ 92
♥ KJ6
♦ J1093
♣ K1085

♠ AK1083 ♠ QJ75
♥ 742 ♥ AQ3
♦ K85 ♦ AQ6
♣ AQ ♣ 742

♠ 64
♥ 10985
♦ 742
♣ J963

Dealer: West
Both Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 NT	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♦	Pass	5 NT	Pass
6 ♦	Pass	6 ♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Opening Lead: J ♦

2NT was alerted and explained as Jacoby; 3NT was alerted as showing a maximum, probably some 5-3-3-2 distribution with at least two side suits stopped. 4NT was 1430 RKC; 5D showed 0 or 3; 5NT asks specific kings; 6D showed the DK. Declarer wins this trick and pulls two rounds of trumps ending in hand. He now leads the H2 towards dummy. It's your play. Do you see the problem coming?