

Larry Teaches



Defense

by Larry Cohen
25-time National Champion

Editor: Allison Brandt
Assistant Editors: Mike Geisler, Patty Becker

Copyright 2015 by Larry Cohen

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission from the author.

Printed in U.S.A.

First Edition

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	5
Opening Leads	7
QUIZ.....	8
Leading a Suit after Trick One	10
BOTTOM OF SOMETHING TOP OF NOTHING	10
QUIZ	13
Second Hand Play.....	15
Second hand low, but cover an honor with an honor	15
QUIZ.....	20
Third Hand Play.....	21
Third hand high	21
1) You can't possibly win the trick.....	21
2) Cheaper of equals	22
3) Dummy has an honor you can beat.....	24
QUIZ.....	25
Defensive Strategy	27
When to shift to trump	33
QUIZ.....	34
Signals.....	38
Count Signal.....	38
Suit Preference.....	39
Attitude	41
QUIZ.....	46

Helpful Tips	48
Returning Partner's Suit	48
The Rule of 11	49
Keeping Parity	51
Counting the Points	52
The Difference between IMPs and Matchpoints	54
Some Dos and Don'ts.....	56
Do be willing to tap declarer	56
Don't give declarer a ruff-and-sluff	57
Don't be an ace-grabber.....	58
Do discard to promote an extra trump trick	58
Don't criticize or second-guess your partner	60
Do hold up when dummy has no entry to the long suit	60
Closing Odds and Ends	62
Falsecards	62
Big leads against notrump	62
Special defensive carding	63
Lead-directing bids	63
It's a wrap	64

Introduction

Bridge consists of Bidding, Declarer Play and Defense. By far, the most important is Defense. You are on Defense twice as often as you are declarer (well, most of you, anyway). Yet, most bridge instruction (books/lessons/articles/teaching) is not on defense. Maybe it is thought to be too difficult? Maybe players enjoy the other parts of the game more and don't wish to work on defense?

If you're reading this book, you're on the way to improving your game big time. So many tricks are lost on defense. So many contracts are allowed to make that shouldn't make. So many overtricks are handed away on a silver platter. Defenders break suits they shouldn't and fail to find killing shifts that they should.

There is a tendency to get lazy on defense. You have a flat 6-count with two queens and two jacks. You'd like the deal to just be over so maybe you can open 2♣ on the next deal and bid a game or slam, maybe be declarer. You must resist the urge to "take a deal off." On every deal you defend, you are likely to face many crucial decisions.

Can defense be taught in 64 pages? Not completely, of course. My objective in these 64-page booklets is not to cover 100% of a topic. It is to give an overview of the most important 90%. No defender is going to get every deal right anyway. My hope is that the guidelines in this book will improve your defense from maybe C+ to B+ or from B to A. If you read, reread and study over and over the principles herein, I am sure your defense will improve dramatically.

Opening Leads

This topic is covered in depth in “Larry Teaches Opening Leads.” Here is just a brief summary to get the defense started.

Most desirable is to lead the top of a sequence. Three-card sequences, such as the king from king-queen-jack or the jack from jack-ten-nine are best. Against a suit contract, a two-card sequence (king from king-queen-low, for example) is acceptable. The normal lead these days from a suit headed by ace-king is the ace. (Only with ace-king doubleton is the king led.) Leading the highest in the sequence tells your partner that you have the card(s) directly below the one led.

Leading partner’s suit is also a winning strategy (high from a doubleton; low from three to an honor). If partner opens in a major or overcalls in any suit, he has at least five cards, making that an attractive suit to lead. If he opens in a minor (especially 1♣, which could be a 3-card suit), it is okay to lead something else. However, “declarer bid notrump” is not an excuse to lead your suit instead of partner’s. If your partner has the strength, he is the one most likely to get his long suit set up with an entry to later run the suit.

Against a suit contract, a singleton (not in trumps) is an attractive choice. There is no need to lead a singleton when you have a strong trump holding. Leading a small doubleton is okay, but not honor-doubleton.

If guessing which suit to lead, prefer majors to minors. Leading away from an ace (or leading it) against a suit contract is a no-no. Leading away from any other honor is acceptable, though risky. Against notrump, generally lead 4th from your longest and strongest (unless you have a suit headed by a 3-card honor sequence or an almost 3-card sequence, such as KQJ75 or KQ1075--in which case you would lead the king). Against a suit contract, it is normal to lead the 2 from say K42 and also from K742 (4th-best). From three low cards, there is no standard lead--it is up to the partnership.

Leading trumps is okay, especially when declarer ends up in his second suit (for example: 1♠-1NT-2♥-Pass). Usually a trump lead is a “passive” lead, made to avoid leading from something dangerous in the other suits. Against a doubled partscore or a sacrifice, a trump lead is usually indicated.

With a broken sequence, such as KJ1096, the proper lead is the “top of the interior sequence,” so in this case the jack. Similarly, you would lead the 10 from Q10982.

There are some non-standard lead conventions mentioned at the end of this book, but the recommendations above are used by the majority of players worldwide.

QUIZ

What is your lead after 1NT-3NT?

- A) ♠KJ43 ♥Q6 ♦KJ43 ♣862
- B) ♠864 ♥762 ♦KQ1082 ♣54
- C) ♠52 ♥J3 ♦KJ43 ♣A10872
- D) ♠QJ764 ♥J104 ♦QJ2 ♣43

- A) ♠3. Prefer majors to minors (they didn’t use Stayman) and lead 4th-best.
- B) ♦K. From KQ543, you would lead 4th-best. But with 3 in a row (like KQJ) or almost 3 in a row (like KQ10), lead the top of the sequence.
- C) ♣7. 4th from your longest and strongest.
- D) ♠6. The queen could work, but studies show that 4th-best is better unless you have 3 in a row or almost 3 in a row. Against a suit contract, leading the ♠Q would be okay.

Partner opens 1♥ and they overcall 1NT, all passed. What is your lead?

- E) ♠J8432 ♥J6 ♦J432 ♣62
- F) ♠Q864 ♥76 ♦98762 ♣54
- G) ♠52 ♥3 ♦QJ1098 ♣K5432
- H) ♠J654 ♥Q94 ♦764 ♣432

- E) ♥J. His are likely better than yours--and he has the entries.
- F) ♥7. Same reasoning as E. If you try a diamond or spade and it is wrong, be prepared to lose the postmortem. Just because they have the suit stopped, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t lead it.
- G) ♦Q. An exception to leading partner’s suit. Your suit is very good and this lead is safer than a club.
- H) ♥4. Leading the queen is very 1950s. We lead low from three to an honor in partner’s suit. Picture declarer with AJx and partner with K10xxx.