

Notes from *Card Play Technique* by Victor Mollo & Nico Gardener (Notes by Maritha Pottenger)

Declarer Play

1. Wherever possible lead towards honors and honor sequences, or better still with broken honour sequences wait until opponents lead the suit.
2. A suit shortage opposite a finessing position often allows a choice between a natural and ruffing finesse.
3. Draw opponents' losing trumps at once if you fear opponents will ruff your winners in side-suits, but don't draw trumps prematurely if you need them to ruff a loser or losers in the short-trump hand. There is often no need to draw their winning trumps if these are the only ones left.
4. Before undertaking a cross-ruff, cash your winners in the side-suits - otherwise opponents might short themselves in these suits and ruff your winners.
5. Refuse to be forced to trump opponents' winners when you may lose control of the trump suit and you can play loser on loser (eg discard a loser from another suit) or you can afford to lose the trick.
6. With weak trump holdings, develop side-suits or ruffing positions before drawing trumps to avoid losing control on a bad trump break. Even if holding AKxx it is sometimes best to give up the first round (low trump from both hand) to ensure trump control when trumps break badly.
7. Take care ruffing if the trumps provide the only entries to a long side-suit - a single ruffing trick is generally less valuable than several tricks in an established side-suit.
8. When opponents threaten to take too many tricks in a NT contract, hold up to try to sever their communications. With 8 cards against you hold up till the third round, with 7 hold up to second round, with 6 there is no need to hold up - assuming you are fearing a five card suit. After holding up, play to avoid the lead reaching the danger hand - this can include unnatural finesses or playing for the drop instead of finessing.
9. With double stoppers declarer should still hold up if the lead might be lost twice. If this is the case declarer should try to lose to the dangerous hand first.
10. Do not hold up at all if the danger of a switch to another suit is greater.
11. When playing a suit keep your options open for as long as possible. For instance play a higher honour from the hand with two if this keeps open the possibility of a finesse in either direction. Keep track of entries without wasting them, and ensure you do not block a suit accidentally.
12. Throwing the lead back to defenders after eliminating safe suits can force them to lead into your tenaces.
13. Build up an image of the defender's likely card holding by making inferences from their bidding, leads and play. This includes their lack of bidding or leads. For instance a low card lead against NT indicates a long suit without an honour sequence - with Ax in dummy and 109xx in hand, declarer might usefully go up with the A, and then capture the other defender with a blocking singleton honour. Similarly if defenders do not lead a suit in which they hold the A and K then it is likely that the honours are split or at least that the hand that has had leading opportunities does not have both.
14. When a defender shows greater length in a suit then, other things being equal, the odds of a particular card in that suit will be proportional to the length held. The odds of a particular card in another suit will be proportional to the number of cards held in other than that suit. [See Vacant Spaces handout.]
15. When there are no other indications missing honor cards are more likely to be spread between the two defending hands. However establishing the location of a missing honour card

does not change the likelihood of the location of another missing honor card unless the bidding, leads or play allows inferences to be made.

16. Safety plays are particularly important in team (rather than pairs) events where an apparently easy contract can be assured at the expense of a possible overtrick. Two common safety plays are to deep finesse or duck on the first lead to a long suit (eg AKQ10x opposite xx) when there is no outside entry, or not finessing to guard against singleton/doubleton honours with bad breaks.

17. Use end-plays to ensure that the defenders lead into your tenace or ruff/discard or otherwise to your assistance - with this achieved by stripping or eliminating the safe suits (including ruffing to eliminate defenders' safe exit cards), and then throwing in the lead to the defense (sometimes a particular defensive player), and sometimes with a loser on loser play.

18. Provide defenders with the least information or with deceiving information by false carding when appropriate (but not automatically). For example playing K from AKJ may encourage this suit to be led again. Against NT playing K from AK suggests weaker holding than playing A immediately.

19. On opening leads declarer should normally play lowest if not wanting suit continued and play high if wanting it continued (unless defenders play upside down signals).

20. Use a squeeze to gain a single extra trick when a single defender is the sole guard for two suits. A squeeze involves two or more menaces with one being a two card menace headed by a winner which is the link between the two hands. A positional squeeze can have both menaces in the hand over the defender, otherwise the menaces need to be divided. In both cases declarer needs to lose inevitable losers, and then remove all the defender's non-critical cards (while setting up the menaces) and then play a card that forces the defender to discard a guarding card.[See Squeezes handout.]

Defensive Play

1. Cover an honor with an honour when there is a chance you will promote a card in your or your partner's hand and when your honor is not safe from capture. [See Covering Honors handout.]

2. When declarer leads from touching honours, cover the last - unless you have a doubleton honour yourself in which case you should normally cover the first honour (especially if you have the K10 over QJx).

3. Do not split your honours if you think declarer might attempt a deep finesse (eg with KQx under AJ9).

4. Minimise the danger of leading into a tenace by, where possible, avoiding leading from unsupported honours (eg Kxx) or from your own tenace (eg AQx or KJx).

5. If the bidding indicates that declarer might find ruffing value in dummy (eg 1D - 1H - 1S - 2S) then a trump opening lead would probably be appropriate. From Axx or Kxx it is generally appropriate to lead a small one to leave partner with a small trump to return should he or she win the first trick for the defence (unless the point count suggests that partner is unlikely to win a trick).

6. Leading a trump from a singleton is generally poor as it can destroy a trump trick in partner's hand. Leading a trump from 4 is also generally poor, with a forcing strategy (continuing to force declarer to trump side-suits) frequently superior.

7. Don't over-ruff automatically - rather work out the way to increase the chance of developing another trump trick. With a natural trump trick (ie one that will win anyway) don't over-ruff unless you want the lead or hope to get a second ruff.

8. Singleton leads are more likely to be effective from poor hands rather than good ones - as this suggests your partner is more likely to have entries. Similarly if your partner is likely to have a short suit, leading that suit is most effective when you have a good hand with several entries (especially with an early trump entry).

9. When you suspect that partner is leading from a doubleton to your ace and has outside entries, keep it for partner's second lead so that you can give partner an immediate ruff.

10. When declarer will be forced to over-ruff (as opposed to throwing a loser), ruffing high may promote partner's trumps.

11. Ruff winners, where possible, rather than losers - particularly when second player to the trick.

12. When dummy has a long suit that can be established, generally defenders' first goal is to knock out dummy's entries.

13. When only a miracle can break the contract, play for the miracle - particularly in teams (less so in pairs).

14. Attack NT contracts by developing small cards, which generally means leading from length or to length if partner's bid indicates a long suit.

15. Generally lead the top of sequences of three or more involving an honour, or the top of an interior sequence (eg QJ109, KQ10x, QJ9x, KJ10x, A1098x), otherwise lead fourth highest to allow partner to place missing cards - obviously this can vary according to partnership agreement. With fourth highest the rule of eleven allows partner to place how many higher cards are with declarer (ie 11 less the card led equals the number of higher cards outside partner's hand).

16. When leading partner's suit, lead high from a doubleton, middle-up-down or MUD from three or more without an honor [Maritha prefers "top of nothing" from three small], and low from three or more with an honor (except against a suit contract lead the A from Axx(x) to avoid the risk of declarer/dummy having a singleton and K).

17. When the opening lead is low, partner normally plays his or her highest card (though the lowest of equivalent touching cards), but generally keeps covering honours when dummy holds one or more honours.

18. Playing an unnecessarily high card on partner's lead is generally an encouraging signal - conversely a low card is discouraging signal suggesting a switch [unless playing upside down]. Sometimes in NT a count signal is more useful with a high card indicating an even number of cards in the suit and a low card an odd number - some partnerships play that the lead of a K against NT asks for a count signal even if they normally play attitude.

19. When partner leads your suit against NT and you do not have enough entries to establish it yourself, duck the first lead to allow partner to lead it again.

20. When returning partner's suit generally lead the highest from one or two cards, and low from three or more (though taking care not to block the suit if partner is likely to have the longer holding).

21. When dummy has a long suit but is short of entries, defenders should hold up a controlling card until declarer's cards in the suit are exhausted. The defender's other partner can give count (high for even number, low for odd number) to allow timing to be calculated.

22. Build up an image of declarer's hand with inferences from the bidding and from the way declarer and partner play - including the apparent strategy declarer (and partner) adopts. Knowing declarer's strategy is often instrumental to defeating it. Remember if the contract or the number of tricks was without risk, declarer would have already claimed.

23. A McKenny or suit-preference signal utilises an unnecessarily high or suspiciously low discard to indicate a preference for a switch to the higher or lower ranking side-suit. In trump

contracts the trump suit is ignored. In NT the signal occurs in a discard of another suit and the suit of the discard is ignored.

24. Don't signal unnecessarily - for instance if it is impossible that partner will gain the lead. Don't throw away winners as signals, rather show what you do not want led.

25. When being squeezed in NT, generally hold enough winners even if this means unguarding a suit and relying on partner for a guard - otherwise the contract would probably be unbeatable.

26. If declarer appears to be pursuing an elimination and throw-in end play strategy, defenders should try to avoid the throw-in by discarding winners in the throw-in suit or by the partner playing high in second place to prevent the throw-in.

27. The defense can sometimes achieve a throw-in end play against dummy or declarer by eliminating their safe exits/links and then forcing them to play from their high card holdings.

28. False carding by a defender is useful against good declarers in removing declarer certainty provided that it cannot lure partner into a wrong course of action.

29. Leading against slams should normally be passive when opponents' bidding indicates balanced hands but aggressive when their bidding indicates long suits with a surplus of tricks when they are in control.

30. Defenders can sometimes avoid being squeezed by refusing to win a trick prematurely or by attacking the link between declarer and dummy.