

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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19. Defense and bidding are joined at the hip

In my last column on defense (as you would notice I am writing on defense, bidding, and card play in a repeat sequence) I pointed out that an opening lead problem is more like a bidding problem as it involves drawing intelligent inferences from the whole auction.

I ended that column (#16) with a Quiz for opening leads when the auction goes 1N – 3N. Those are taken from “*Winning Notrump Leads*” by David Bird and Taf Anthias. Here are the answers to that quiz from computer simulations:

Quiz 1.	♠ A 7	♥ J 8 7 6 3	♦ Q J 5 4	♣ 9 3
		Chance of beating the contract (IMP)		Creates number of Tricks for the Defense (MP)
	♠ A	21.4% of the time		3.24
	♥ 6	17.2% of the time		3.21
Quiz 2.	♠ J 6 4	♥ Q J	♦ A T 8 2	♣ K 9 7 3
	♥ Q	16.8% of the time		3.32
	♠ 4	15.0% of the time		3.25
Quiz 3.	♠ T 7	♥ Q T 9	♦ J 9 6 4	♣ Q J T 4
	♠ T	23.9% of the time		3.46
	♥ T	22.2% of the time		3.36
Quiz 4.	♠ Q 8 6 5	♥ Q J 3	♦ K T 8 5 2	♣ 9
	♥ Q	25.0% of the time		3.43
	♦ 5	20.5% of the time		3.16

All other leads produce worse performance. Particularly noteworthy is Quiz #4 where a 4th best spade (traditional defense) is not as effective as the two leads mentioned above.

There are several other situations where defense and bidding work together. Some of the most common situations are:

- Agreements for minimum holding to open a hand on 1st and 2nd chair. Opening solid hands allows us to double opponents' low-level contracts. Minimum hands to open bidding with will be my topic for the next column. Then low level doubles will be discussed in the next cycle of defense related column.
- Agreements on lead directing doubles. This is what I will discuss in this column.

Agreements on Lead Directing Doubles:

A. We did not participate in the bidding

1. If partner doubles the final contract, then a great agreement is to lead dummy's first bid suit whether that first bid suit is natural or conventional. Some examples:

1N 2C
2H 4H

If partner doubles this final contract he is asking you to lead C.

1C 1H
1S 3S
4S P

If partner doubles this final contract he is asking you to lead H.

2. What happens if partner did not ask for a lead directing double earlier but doubles the final contract?

1N 2H=transfer

2S ---- lots more bidding, and then they land on 6N and partner doubles. The question is if she is asking for a H lead why didn't she double 2H for lead directing? Partner realizes that the opponents have very strong hands and if she doubles 2H, a blue card (redouble) would come on the table and the result will not be pretty. In real life situation with this hand, partner had A and K of H and 6N gest set with a H lead but makes with any other lead. And, yes, 2HXX does make with uptricks!

3. What happens if partner DID ask for a lead directing double earlier AND doubles the final contract?

In example 2 if partner has doubled 2H and then again doubles the final contract, you should STILL lead H. Original lead directing double is NOT negated by final penalty double. There was lot of confusion among top notch players on this in a Spingold final a few years ago.

4. Special NT auctions doubled at the end

1N – 3N	doubled	Lead your SHORTEST major
2N – 3N	doubled	Lead your SHORTEST major

1N - 6N	doubled	I like Granovetter's idea of asking for a Spade lead.
2N - 6N	doubled	I like Granovetter's idea of asking for a Spade lead.

B. We have bid something and the final contract is doubled

1. If the original bidder doubles the final contract, then he is asking not to lead the suit we bid. In that case, leading dummy's first bid suit is again a good agreement.

Consider this auction

1C	1S (us)	2H	P
4H	X		

In this case partner is asking for a C lead as without a X you will of course lead S.

2. If we bid and raised something and then the "raiser" doubles the final contract, she is asking TO LEAD our suit.

Consider this auction

1C	1S (us)	X	2S
2N	P	3N	X

In this case partner is CONFIRMING a good holding of S (they have one stopper only) and asking for a S lead.

3. We bid something which the opponents cue bid and partner doubles that cue bid

1C	1S (us)	X	P
2S	X	2N	P
3N			

Partner is asking NOT to lead S by doubling opponents' cue bid.

C. We double their Splinter Bid

1S	P	4C (splinter)	X
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Leading C cannot be productive as defense can get at most one C trick. The agreement I like when a splinter bid is doubled has two parts:

1. If we are white (NV) and they are red (V) --- only in this situation a double of splinter asks to take a sac in the splinter suit (Cs in this specific auction). This is NOT lead directing!
2. In all other situations my preferred agreements is to lead the lowest unbid suit if a splinter bid is doubled (which will be D in this specific auction).