

# “Common Mistakes in Defence”

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I play a lot of bridge in a lot of different cities and countries. Defence is always where the most mistakes get made, and some mistakes I seem to see more than others. Today we’re going to learn about two common types of mistake and try to improve our thinking in these areas.

## Common Mistake #1:

### Panicking when dummy has a shortage

Many players (of all levels) do not produce their best defence when dummy shows up with a shortage. A very common mistake is to switch to trumps in a misguided attempt to ‘cut down on ruffs’. This often makes declarer’s job very easy.

### *Problem 1 (Australian Open Playoff)*

|            |             |              |
|------------|-------------|--------------|
| West Deals | ♠ 9 7 3     | ♠ A 10       |
| Both Vul   | ♥ A         | ♥ Q 8 5 3    |
|            | ♦ A Q 9 2   | ♦ K 10 8 7 6 |
|            | ♣ A J 8 4 3 | ♣ 7 5        |

  

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| N | ♠ A 10       |
| W | ♥ Q 8 5 3    |
| S | ♦ K 10 8 7 6 |
| E | ♣ 7 5        |

| West | North             | East | South |
|------|-------------------|------|-------|
| Pass | 1 ♣ <sup>1</sup>  | 1 ♦  | 1 ♠   |
| Dbl  | Rdbl <sup>2</sup> | 2 ♥  | 2 ♠   |
| Pass | 3 ♠               | Pass | 4 ♠   |
| Pass | Pass              | Pass |       |

1. could be short
2. support redouble

4 ♠ by South

| Trick | Lead | 2nd | 3rd      | 4th |
|-------|------|-----|----------|-----|
| 1. W  | ♦ 5  | 2   | <u>K</u> | 3?  |

There are many reasons to switch to trumps when dummy has a shortage. Ruffing in the short trump hand often produces extra tricks.

### When to switch to trumps:

- When there are no obvious threats aside from ruffs in dummy;
- When a cross-ruff is very likely going to be declarer’s best chance;
- When you (or your partner) can draw multiple rounds of trumps.

But switching to trumps is not always best. Sometimes other issues take priority.

### *Problem 2 (NSWBA Congress)*

|            |             |           |
|------------|-------------|-----------|
| East Deals | ♠ K 9 5 4   | ♠ A Q 8 7 |
| None Vul   | ♥ 6         | ♥ A K 5   |
|            | ♦ A K 5     | ♦ Q 10 3  |
|            | ♣ A Q J 7 6 | ♣ 8 5 3   |

  

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| N | ♠ A Q 8 7 |
| W | ♥ A K 5   |
| S | ♦ Q 10 3  |
| E | ♣ 8 5 3   |

| West              | North | East             | South |
|-------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
|                   |       | 2 ♥              | Pass  |
| 2 NT <sup>1</sup> | Dbl   | 3 ♥ <sup>2</sup> | Pass  |
| Pass              | Dbl   | Pass             | 3 ♠   |
| Dbl               | Pass  | Pass             | Pass  |

1. inquiry
2. minimum

3 ♠x by South

| Trick | Lead       | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
|-------|------------|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. W  | <u>♥ A</u> | 6   | 3   | 9?  |

When NOT to switch to trumps:

- Declarer has plenty of other options, for example a long suit in either hand;
- Declarer's side has so many trumps that leading one round won't do much.

Common Mistake #2:

Not making the hand easy for partner

It sounds simple, but when you know how the play should go - take control of the hand! The number of times I see a player leave their partner with a guess then abuse them when they get it wrong is truly amazing.

If you can see what the defence should do, do it. If you leave it up to your partner and they get it wrong, it's your mistake – not theirs!

*Problem 3 (NSW weekend congress)*

East Deals ♠ A J 9 4 2  
 E-W Vul ♥ 8 2  
 ♦ 10 9 7 5 3  
 ♣ 10



♠ 8 5  
 ♥ A J 9  
 ♦ J 6  
 ♣ K Q J 9 6 2

|      |       |                  |       |
|------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West | North | East             | South |
|      |       | 1 ♣              | Dbl   |
| 1 ♥  | 1 ♠   | Dbl <sup>1</sup> | 2 ♦   |
| Pass | 3 ♦   | Pass             | 3 NT  |
| Pass | Pass  | Pass             |       |

1. support double

3 NT by South

|              |             |            |            |            |
|--------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <i>Trick</i> | <i>Lead</i> | <i>2nd</i> | <i>3rd</i> | <i>4th</i> |
| 1. W         | ♣ 8         | 10         | ♣          | 4          |
| 2. E         | ♣ K         | A          | 3          | ♦ 3        |
| 3. S         | ♠ K         | 3          | 2          | 8          |
| 4. S         | ♠ 10        | 6          | A          | 5          |
| 5. N         | ♦ 5         | 6          | Q          | K          |
| 6. W         | ♣ 7         | ♦ 7        | ?          |            |

The key to helping partner defend is to envision how things look from the other side of the table and to consider what might go wrong. Having **empathy** for partner's point of view goes a long way when defending the hand.

*Problem 4 (Miles – 'Defensive Signals')*

South Deals ♠ 9 7 3  
 E-W Vul ♥ J 9 6  
 ♦ A Q 10 8 5  
 ♣ 10 6



♠ Q 5  
 ♥ 7 3  
 ♦ K J 9 3  
 ♣ K J 9 7 2

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      |       |      | 1 ♥   |
| Pass | 2 ♥   | Pass | 4 ♥   |
| Pass | Pass  | Pass |       |

4 ♥ by South

|              |             |            |            |            |
|--------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|
| <i>Trick</i> | <i>Lead</i> | <i>2nd</i> | <i>3rd</i> | <i>4th</i> |
| 1. W         | ♣ Q         | 6          | ?          |            |

To sum up:

When dummy comes down with a shortage, consider whether it's one of those hands where declarer will certainly be going for ruffs in the dummy. If it is, you might switch to trumps.

If, on the other hand, declarer has some other strings to their bow (for example, sources of tricks such as long suits), think about setting up side suit tricks or even making dummy ruff.

If you see a way to take the contract down, take control of the defence. If I am your partner, I will be pleased rather than insulted. And if you don't take the opportunity to beat the hand, apologise later to your partner rather than abuse them!

# Common Mistakes in Defence - Solutions

## Problem 1 (Australian Open Playoff)

|              |             |               |  |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| West Deals   | ♠ 9 7 3     |               |  |
| Both Vul     | ♥ A         |               |  |
|              | ♦ A Q 9 2   |               |  |
|              | ♣ A J 8 4 3 |               |  |
|              |             | ♠ A 10        |  |
| ♠ Q 6        |             | ♥ Q 8 5 3     |  |
| ♥ K 10 4 2   |             | ♦ K 10 8 7 6  |  |
| ♦ 5 4        |             | ♣ 7 5         |  |
| ♣ K Q 10 6 2 |             |               |  |
|              |             |               |  |
|              |             | ♠ K J 8 5 4 2 |  |
|              |             | ♥ J 9 7 6     |  |
|              |             | ♦ J 3         |  |
|              |             | ♣ 9           |  |

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Pass | 1 ♣   | 1 ♦  | 1 ♠   |
| Dbl  | Rdbl  | 2 ♥  | 2 ♠   |
| Pass | 3 ♠   | Pass | 4 ♠   |
| Pass | Pass  | Pass |       |

4 ♠ by South

|       |      |     |          |     |
|-------|------|-----|----------|-----|
| Trick | Lead | 2nd | 3rd      | 4th |
| 1. W  | ♦ 5  | 2   | <u>K</u> | 3   |

At trick two East has an awkward problem. There is no obvious continuation.

On the bidding, it is fairly likely that declarer has good long spades and partner has a few points. Switching to trumps is misguided. Declarer will draw trumps and run diamonds or establish clubs. Dummy's minor suits are too threatening.

If East continues diamonds, they can later win the first round of trumps and play a third round for partner to ruff, but this only creates 3 tricks.

In the Open Playoff Final, Andy Hung found the crucial switch to a heart at trick two! When declarer won and played a spade around to the queen Nabil Edgton continued hearts for dummy to ruff. That was the end for declarer: all roads lead to defeat. When declarer tried a diamond to the jack followed by a heart ruff and a top diamond, West ruffed for down one.

## Problem 2 (NSWBA Congress)

|            |             |               |  |
|------------|-------------|---------------|--|
| East Deals | ♠ K 9 5 4   |               |  |
| None Vul   | ♥ 6         |               |  |
|            | ♦ A K 5     |               |  |
|            | ♣ A Q J 7 6 |               |  |
|            |             | ♠ 2           |  |
| ♠ A Q 8 7  |             | ♥ Q J 8 7 4 3 |  |
| ♥ A K 5    |             | ♦ 9 7 4 2     |  |
| ♦ Q 10 3   |             | ♣ K 9         |  |
| ♣ 8 5 3    |             |               |  |
|            |             |               |  |
|            |             | ♠ J 10 6 3    |  |
|            |             | ♥ 10 9 2      |  |
|            |             | ♦ J 8 6       |  |
|            |             | ♣ 10 4 2      |  |

|                   |       |                  |       |
|-------------------|-------|------------------|-------|
| West              | North | East             | South |
|                   |       | 2 ♥              | Pass  |
| 2 NT <sup>1</sup> | Dbl   | 3 ♥ <sup>2</sup> | Pass  |
| Pass              | Dbl   | Pass             | 3 ♠   |
| Dbl               | Pass  | Pass             | Pass  |

1. inquiry
2. minimum

3 ♠x by South

|       |            |     |     |     |
|-------|------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Trick | Lead       | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
| 1. W  | <u>♥ A</u> | 6   | 3   | 9?  |

East's ♥ 3 suggests the ♣ K, but West must consider the bigger picture.

Playing a trump is suicidal. South will establish the clubs. East can belatedly switch to hearts but declarer continues with three more clubs throwing their last heart. West ruffs but it's over.

Playing a club is ok, but generally it is not a good idea to help declarer set up their source of tricks.

The best defence is to continue hearts to weaken the strong dummy. If declarer tries ace and queen of clubs, East continues hearts and dummy is down to two trumps in dummy with none having been drawn. The hand rapidly starts to fall apart and declarer must be careful not to go more than one down.

### Problem 3 (NSW weekend congress)

East Deals ♠ A J 9 4 2  
 E-W Vul ♥ 8 2  
 ♦ 10 9 7 5 3  
 ♣ 10

♠ Q 7 6 3  
 ♥ 10 7 4 3  
 ♦ K  
 ♣ 8 7 5 3

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | N |   |
| W |   | E |
|   | S |   |

♠ 8 5  
 ♥ A J 9  
 ♦ J 6  
 ♣ K Q J 9 6 2

♠ K 10  
 ♥ K Q 6 5  
 ♦ A Q 8 4 2  
 ♣ A 4

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      |       | 1 ♣  | Dbl   |
| 1 ♥  | 1 ♠   | Dbl  | 2 ♦   |
| Pass | 3 ♦   | Pass | 3 NT  |
| Pass | Pass  | Pass |       |

3 NT by South

| Trick | Lead       | 2nd      | 3rd      | 4th      |
|-------|------------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1. W  | ♣ 8        | 10       | <u>J</u> | 4        |
| 2. E  | ♣ K        | <u>A</u> | 3        | ♦ 3      |
| 3. S  | <u>♠ K</u> | 3        | 2        | 8        |
| 4. S  | ♠ 10       | 6        | <u>A</u> | 5        |
| 5. N  | ♦ 5        | 6        | Q        | <u>K</u> |
| 6. W  | ♣ 7        | ♦ 7      | ?        |          |

After we catch a beautiful club lead from partner, declarer holds up one round then wins and cashes the ♠ K-A before finessing in diamonds to partner. Partner now plays the ♣ 7.

In spades, it is virtually impossible for declarer to have the ♠ Q, not only from the play but the bidding. Clearly the contract is going at least three down, but we would like partner to cash their spade trick before leading a club to us (as partner will not get in again).

We must leave partner on lead, but only one card caters to all situations: the ♣ 6. At the table, partner did not get the message immediately and continued with the ♣ 5, but we were able to underplay with the ♣ 2 to leave partner still on lead.

With no clubs left, partner could now be certain that we held the ♥ A as an entry and was able to cash their spade trick before playing a heart over to our hand. Declarer was down four in a contract they could have made (partner's ♦ K was singleton).

### Problem 4 (Miles – 'Defensive Signals')

South Deals ♠ 9 7 3  
 E-W Vul ♥ J 9 6  
 ♦ A Q 10 8 5  
 ♣ 10 6

♠ J 8 6 4 2  
 ♥ A 5 2  
 ♦ 7 6 4  
 ♣ Q 5

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
|   | N |   |
| W |   | E |
|   | S |   |

♠ Q 5  
 ♥ 7 3  
 ♦ K J 9 3  
 ♣ K J 9 7 2

♠ A K 10  
 ♥ K Q 10 8 4  
 ♦ 2  
 ♣ A 8 4 3

|      |       |      |       |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
|      |       |      | 1 ♥   |
| Pass | 2 ♥   | Pass | 4 ♥   |
| Pass | Pass  | Pass |       |

4 ♥ by South

| Trick | Lead | 2nd | 3rd | 4th |
|-------|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. W  | ♣ Q  | 6   | ?   |     |

Another great lead from West. Where do I sign up to play with such an accurate opening leader?

East can see two things: partner's club lead is from shortage, so declarer has a long weak club suit they would like to ruff; also, dummy's diamond suit is pretty dead. But things aren't so clear to West. If East and South let West win the first trick, it's not at all clear what West should play at trick two.

East can see the right defence. Knowing that club ruffs are useful for declarer and that dummy's diamonds are not a threat, East must cover with the ♣ K at trick one. Whether declarer wins or ducks, East will win the defensive club trick and can find the trump shift to start killing the ruffing power.

Of additional note is that West should trust East's line of defence. Without stoppers in diamonds East could not afford to defend this way, so West should continue leading trumps and trust that the diamonds aren't coming in.

To beat 4♥ would be a nice partnership achievement, but there's no excuse for not finding the right defence as East.