Improving Your Defense

Learning to Think Like Declarer

Introduction

Both our bidding and our defense benefit from good declarer skills.

Bidding, because we have a greater appreciation of how strength and shape affect our trick-taking ability and can bid more accurately.

Defense, because we are better able to anticipate how a hand might be played and can take steps to hinder declarer's efforts.

Declarer Play

Let's stay with declarer play for just a minute more…

Suppose you are in a contract and need another trick or two.

What are some of the basic tools you have for building additional winners or eliminating losers?

Ruffing a loser (in the short trump hand), establishing dummy's long suit, and promotion (taking a finesse, forcing out the opponents' high cards).

Defense

Now put yourself in the defenders' shoes…

You have heard the auction. What does it suggest to you about declarer's plan for play of the hand? Which of the common options will declarer go with?

If you can get a sense of what declarer's line of play will be, you can sometimes find a way to foul it up.

Thinking Like Declarer

Here's how a defender might create an advantage:

If declarer is thought likely to establish dummy's suit, the defenders should try to develop and cash their own tricks quickly. An active defense (leading away from honors, for instance), even at the risk of giving away a trick, might be necessary.

If declarer is apt to try to ruff losers, lead trumps (at any time during play of the hand).

If dummy is balanced, and declarer will have to try to build winners out of dummy's high cards, defend passively. Avoid giving anything away. Let declarer do all the work.

Similarly, if the declaring side conducted an invitational auction, they have no points to spare. Don't give anything away.

These tips won't always work, but they'll help you gain defensive tricks in the long run.

Examples

Let's see how this works…

Before the opening lead (Examples1)

After the opening lead (Examples2)