

COMMON ERRORS ON DEFENCE

On both the deals we are going to look at today, you are East defending after the specified opening lead from partner.

What is your plan after West, your partner, leads the 6♥ against a 4♠ contract, reached after North raised South's weak 2♠ bid to game, and these are the hands you see in front of you:

<i>Dummy</i>	<i>You</i>
♠K 5	♠7 2
♥Q 3	♥A 9 7 4
♦A 7 2	♦JT 9 4
♣AK 9 8 7 4	♣QJ 6

A common mistake is to win partner's opening lead and blindly return the same suit. Returning partner's suit is *very often* the right thing to do, but if you do that here, declarer will make an overtrick. Here's the full deal:

	♠K 5	
	♥Q 3	
	♦A 7 2	
	♣AK 9 8 7 4	
♠T 6 3		♠7 2
♥K J 8 6 5		♥A 9 7 4
♦K 8 3		♦JT 9 4
♣T 2	♠AQJ 9 8 4	♣QJ 6
	♥T 2	
	♦Q 6 5	
	♣5 3	

Partner will win the K♥, but then declarer can win the next trick, and will quickly draw trump, cash the ♣AK and ruff a ♣, which sets up the suit. North's A♦ provides the needed entry to cash the good small ♣s. Declarer will end up pitching both ♦losers. Preventing this from happening is **all up to you**. You know that you will win at most two ♥tricks. **The long suit in dummy is a scary sight.** Although you have a ♣stopper, you may not actually have a ♣trick.

A long suit in dummy that has the potential to provide discards suggests considering taking as many tricks as you can get early. Where else besides ♥s are defensive tricks possible? Only in ♦s. A switch to the J♦, top of a sequence, does two good things. It traps declarer's Q♦ and allows the defenders to knock out the A♦ entry early, before declarer can use the long ♣suit. If you return a ♥, partner cannot safely lead ♦s.

Good defenders are aware that there are some suits that only one partner can successfully attack.

On our next deal, South opens 1♠ and then jumps to game after North's response of 2♠. West leads the A♥. What is your defensive plan as East?

Dummy

♠ J 5 2
♥ 8 7 5 3
♦ 9 7 2
♣ A J 6

You

♠ 9
♥ Q 9 2
♦ Q T 4 3
♣ K T 9 5 3

What ♥ will you play at trick one? When we *like* partner's lead, we typically give a *positive* signal (either high encourage, or low encourage, depending on your partnership agreements). But it's always a good idea to look for clues from the dummy first. Assuming partner has the K♥, implied by the A♥ lead, the defenders could win three ♥ tricks, provided declarer has three of them.

But that doesn't defeat the contract. You need to score your K♣ as well. Don't make the common mistake of signalling by rote. The best way to get all your tricks is to play a discouraging ♥ at trick one. Here's the full deal:

	♠ J 5 2	
	♥ 8 7 5 3	
	♦ 9 7 2	
	♣ A J 6	
♠ T 8 3		♠ 9
♥ A K T		♥ Q 9 2
♦ J 8 6 5		♦ Q T 4 3
♣ 8 7 2	♠ A K Q 7 6 4	♣ K T 9 5 3
	♥ J 6 4	
	♦ A K	
	♣ Q 4	

Now, it's up to West to find the best defence. Believe it or not, there is a scary "long" suit in dummy – ♥s. West has only three ♥s so there is a danger of making dummy's fourth ♥ good. A ♣ switch lets East cash the K♣ and then continue ♥s. If West switches to a ♦ instead (she has to guess which minor), there's *still* time for West to win the second ♥ and lead a ♣.

Had the defenders cashed all three ♥s before switching, declarer would be able to reach dummy to discard the ♣ loser on the good fourth ♥.

Less experienced players often make the error of failing to recognise that a weak four-card suit in dummy is a possible place to discard a loser.