

**REVISED AND UPDATED BY
BARBARA SEAGRAM**

**INTRODUCTION TO
DEFENSE**

SECOND EDITION

EDDIE KANTAR



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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

This book and its companion book, *Introduction to Declarer Play*, are in my opinion the two best bridge books ever written. Eddie Kantar has been my mentor and guru for many years. He is the kindest, most wonderful man who has always been very generous with his time to teachers everywhere. Without Eddie, I would not have had the success that I have had in teaching bridge. His bridge hands are legendary and a joy to work with. His pearls of wisdom have taught so many so much. We constantly have AHA! moments from our students when we use them.

I was asked to tweak and modernize this book. This was a privilege. I just wanted to see these books back in the marketplace so that students of today have access to this wonderful learning tool.

If you are fairly new to the game, read this book, use the techniques and then play a lot. Try to play duplicate as much as you can. It is *the* way to get better. Go over two or three hands each time after playing. Try sometimes to play against and with better players — that way you can ask for advice. Sometimes you will need a thicker skin. Bridge is a game of mistakes; it is impossible to be perfect. You will have good days and bad days... it's all in a day's work. Keep coming back for more; the good always outweighs the bad. It is a wonderful game and such good exercise for the brain.

Above all, have fun!

Barbara Seagram

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INTRODUCTION

There is no question that defense is the most difficult aspect of playing bridge. Many players become adequate bidders by simply memorizing the point count for various bids; others find that being declarer becomes easy with practice. But defense is a matter of *logic* and thus it requires not just experience but thought.

If you are a good defender it is almost impossible to be a losing player. At least half of your opponents' contracts can be defeated with a good defense, but the sad truth is that about eighty percent of them are fulfilled. Why? Because most players have not been well-drilled in the fundamentals of defensive play, which are:

- knowing the suit and the card in that suit to lead that will give partner the maximum amount of information
- knowing when to signal
- knowing when to play an attacking defense (taking your tricks as quickly as possible) as opposed to a passive defense (sitting back and waiting for your tricks)
- deciding what declarer is trying to do based on his manner of play.

To use a football analogy, this is the blocking and tackling of bridge. You cannot be a good bridge player unless you can do these things with reasonable skill.

In this book, we will be assuming the use of standard signals and leads. This is a system in common use throughout the world. It is important to note that there are other methods, some of which are equally good. You and your partner must agree on which methods you are going to use — what matters most is that you are both on the same page. Sometimes your opponents at the table will ask you what method you

are using. If you are following the principles described in this book, you can just reply: Standard.

One word about the text: in dealing with the dreaded 'he/she' problem, I decided to use 'he' for simplicity. If this offends any woman reading the book, I apologize.

Eddie Kantar

CHAPTER 1

THE OPENING LEAD AGAINST NOTRUMP

Some suit must be selected for the attack, and some one card of that suit must be the first to advance.

R.F. Foster

What you're going to learn:

- » How to decide which suit to lead against notrump
- » How to pick the right card to lead once you've chosen the suit

In order to be a good defender you must have some objectives in mind. What are they?

Go back and ask yourself how you play a hand as declarer. You try to 'establish', or set up, your tricks before the defense can establish theirs. You are fortunate in that you can see both your hand and the dummy and can usually tell which suit to establish. But even so you are almost always involved in a race.

The defenders, on the other hand, cannot see each other's cards and often will waste time trying to establish the wrong suit. However, the defenders have one great advantage that overshadows all else — they have the opening lead! In other words, in the great 'establishing' race the defenders always get off to a head start; and if you consistently make the proper opening lead, you will go down in history as one of the

world's greatest players, even though your bidding and defense may be just average!

Why is it so hard to make the proper opening lead? Opening leads are based on the bidding and your hand. Sometimes the bidding makes it clear which suit to lead, other times you will have a clear-cut lead in your own hand, but much of the time you will be forced to make an intelligent guess because the bidding will not have given much away. Consider these two bidding sequences by your opponents:

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

as opposed to:

West (you)	North	East	South
pass	1♦	pass	1♣
pass	3♦	pass	3♣
all pass			3NT

In both cases, as West you have to make the opening lead. In the first case your partner hasn't bid and the opponents have given away very little information. They may have a weakness somewhere but you cannot be sure where. On that first hand, you have a 25% shot at hitting your opponents' weak spot.

Now take the second case. South has excellent clubs and North has good diamonds. As West, you can eliminate a club or a diamond as a possible opening lead because you don't want to waste your time establishing the opponents' suits. You would select either a heart or a spade lead depending upon your hand. So, now you have a 50% chance of hitting the opponents' weak spot!

The important point is: listen to the bidding. *You must listen to the bidding; you can't even begin to defend unless you do.*

As a general rule, the declarer will establish his longest suit first, and the defense tries to do the same — the most logical way being to lead it. *That is why, with nothing else to go by, the opening leader leads a long suit.* Notice the key words, ‘with nothing else to go by’. However, many times you are provided with plenty of information: your partner may have bid, or the opponents may have bid your longest suit. In such cases you would probably select another lead.

Assume, for the sake of argument, that after listening to the bidding you have decided to lead your longest suit, as this is by far the most common lead against notrump. Which card do you lead? Let’s look at a hand.

Sitting West, you hold:

♠ A 8 6 5 3 ♥ J 7 4 2 ♦ Q 3 ♣ 8 2

The bidding has proceeded: 1NT on your right and 3NT on your left. It is your lead. Now, if you could peek into your partner’s hand and see that he had only one spade and five hearts you would lead a heart because that is your *combined* longest suit. Unfortunately, the rules do not permit this, so you must assume, because you have more spades, that spades is the longest combined suit. So you are going to lead a spade — but which spade?

Normally, when leading a suit that has four or more cards you lead your *fourth-highest card*. Fourth-highest means starting at the top and counting down four places. In this case your fourth-highest spade would be the five. Don’t make the mistake of starting at the bottom and counting up. *Start at the top and count down.*

That’s simple enough, isn’t it? What’s the catch? The first catch is that your suit may have a three-card sequence, which simply means three equal cards at the head of the suit. For example, QJ1042 would be an example of a three-card sequence.

Whenever you hold a three-card sequence or longer at the head of your suit you always lead the *top card of the sequence*. The top of a sequence rule takes precedence over the fourth-highest rule. If the third card (the lowest card) in the three-card sequence is missing by one spot (e.g. QJ92), it is called a **broken sequence**; it is still considered a sequence so the queen is led. However, if the third card drops off by more than one spot (e.g. QJ82), you revert to the fourth-best rule and lead the deuce against notrump.

TIP: Simply put, the rule for leading from a suit of four or more cards is this: lead fourth-highest unless the suit is headed by a sequence of three or more cards; if it is, lead the top of the sequence instead.

TEST YOURSELF

Which card would you lead from each of these combinations?

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. K J 7 6 5 | 4. K Q J 10 2 | 7. J 10 7 6 4 |
| 2. A 8 7 2 | 5. K Q 10 8 5 | 8. Q J 8 7 3 2 |
| 3. K Q J 2 | 6. K Q 8 4 3 2 | 9. J 10 8 5 3 |

Solutions

1. 6 Fourth-highest
2. 2 Fourth-highest
3. K Top of a sequence
4. K Top of a sequence
5. K Top of a broken sequence (the third card in the sequence is missing by only one spot)
6. 4 Fourth-highest (you must have a three-card sequence before you can lead an honor card)
7. 6 Fourth-highest
8. 7 Fourth-highest
9. J Top of a broken sequence

Sometimes you will have a choice of suits to lead. For example, sitting West you hold:

♠ Q 7 6 3 ♥ J 10 9 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ 5 4 2

Once again the bidding goes 1NT on your right, 2NT on your left, and everyone passes. It's your lead and you have two four-card suits. Which one should you lead? You should lead a heart — the jack, to be more specific.

TIP: When holding two long suits, one of which contains a sequence, you should lead the suit with the sequence.

When you lead the top of a perfect sequence, you never give away a trick — i.e. you never help the enemy. As a matter of fact, sequences are such fine leads that if you also had the ♠2 rather than the ♣2 you should still lead the ♥J, even though you had five spades and only four hearts.

Another possibility on opening lead is that your opponents may have bid your longest suit. Let's say you hold this hand:

♠ K 7 6 4 2 ♥ Q 10 4 2 ♦ J 10 7 ♣ 2

Again, you are West and your right-hand opponent bids 1♠, your left-hand opponent 2♣, 2NT on your right, and 3NT on your left. Your partner has been as silent as a mouse and it's your lead.

Had the opponents simply bid notrump without mentioning any suits, you would lead the ♠4. But spades have been bid, and it is usually a bad idea to lead suits the opponents have been bidding unless you have a strong sequence. So, we rule out a spade lead and lead our next-longest suit, hearts. The proper lead *on the bidding* would be the ♥2.

TIP: Usually, when you lead a suit the opponents have bid, you are saying, 'Let me give you a hand with making this contract.' Not recommended!

Now let's keep the same hand but assume that our left-hand opponent bids 2♥ instead of 2♣.

♠ K 7 6 4 2 ♥ Q 10 4 2 ♦ J 10 7 ♣ 2

Once again, you are leading against notrump, only this time your opponents have bid both of your long suits! When you do not have a sequence in either of the bid suits, you normally select a lead from a three-card suit. In this case you would lead the ♦J. But why the jack, when you don't have a sequence?

When leading from a *three*-card suit, you must keep a few important points in mind. The most important is that the ten, jack, queen, king, and ace are considered honor cards. If you hold two touching honors and exactly three cards in the suit you must lead the higher honor (the one exception to this is that with AKx you lead the king — that is because the lead of an ace against notrump has a special meaning, which we'll cover later in this chapter).

Remember that these are three-card holdings. If you have four or more cards in the suit you should lead fourth-highest or top of a sequence, depending upon the size of the third card under the touching honors.

If you have three cards in the suit to be led headed by either one honor or by two non-touching honors, you must lead your *lowest* card. For example, if you were to lead from Q104, you would lead the four. You have two *non-touching* honors, and from this type of holding you lead low. Also, if you had Axx, Kxx, Qxx, Jxx or 10xx, you would lead your smallest card

Finally, if you have three spot-cards, such as 842 or 975 or 653, lead the top card. This is called leading **Top of Nothing**.

Leads may be easier to remember if you repeat 'top of nothing', 'low from an honor', 'top of a sequence' and 'fourth-highest' a few times. A useful acronym is BOSTON — 'bottom of something, top of nothing' — but remember that top of a sequence always takes priority.

The easiest of all rules to remember when making an initial lead covers which card to lead with a doubleton. With a doubleton, *always* lead the higher card first. Very often partner will have thrown in a bid and you will be leading his suit. When you have precisely two cards in that suit, lead the higher card.

TEST YOURSELF

The time has come to do a little reviewing. Which card would you lead from each of the following holdings?

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. J 9 7 5 3 | 7. K Q 3 2 | 13. K J 8 6 4 3 |
| 2. J 7 5 | 8. K 10 4 | 14. Q 3 |
| 3. 5 3 | 9. K J 9 3 2 | 15. 9 6 2 |
| 4. Q J 9 7 3 | 10. A K 7 5 2 | 16. Q 7 4 2 |
| 5. A 2 | 11. 10 9 3 2 | 17. 10 6 3 |
| 6. K Q 3 | 12. 10 9 4 | 18. 4 3 2 |

Solutions

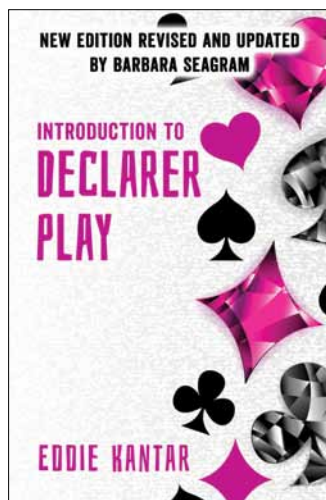
- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| 1. | 5 | Fourth-highest |
| 2. | 5 | Low from an honor |
| 3. | 5 | Top of a doubleton |
| 4. | Q | Top of a sequence |
| 5. | A | Top of a doubleton |
| 6. | K | Top of two touching honors, when holding exactly three cards |
| 7. | 2 | Fourth-highest, when holding two touching honors and more than three cards |

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EDDIE KANTAR (California, USA) is a member of the Bridge Hall of Fame, and former world champion. He is the author of numerous bestselling books on the game, and his columns appear regularly in bridge magazines around the world.



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