

## BOB'S DEFENSE PHILOSOPHY

There are several key techniques on Defense, all of equal value, and all of which you use in every single hand you ever defend. On average you will have the following roles: 1/4 Declarer; 1/4 Dummy; 1/4 Opening leader and 1/4 3<sup>rd</sup> seat. So, there are just 3 active roles in every hand at Duplicate:

- (1) The Declarer.
- (2) The Opening Leader – Defender.
- (3) The Other Defender.

You don't have to know 127 "things" to Defend well, as you certainly do to Bid and Declare well: only a half dozen or so as Defenders. But learning "the few things" doesn't mean you win on Defense: it means you recognize when they are appropriate to use during the play of the hand and execute them better than your competitors.

Your competitors are not the opponents at the table, but the other pairs defending these hands in your direction – N/S or E/W.

Defense starts – when the first bid occurs: NOT when the first card is played.

Some players are bored on Defense and basically just follow suit, hoping to Declare the next hand. I hear them say: "East-West (or North-South) got all the cards today". Don't believe anyone who tells you "the cards were stacked". There's no such thing: ACBL Sanctioned pairs games play only with 100% randomly dealt hands. Team game hands are shuffled and dealt at the table, so they are not technically random.

The things we will learn and practice about Defense are:

5 Phases of Defense – Bob's "Process" of Defense – Part I
Convention Card Sections relative to Defense.
Techniques During the Play of the Hand– Part II
Leads – Opening, follow-up, Journalist style, aggressive, passive, neutral
Signals – Count and Attitude and Suit Preference
Discards – First Discard and subsequent discards
Unblocking – Maximizing defensive tricks by "getting out of partner's way"
Counting – everything, all the time
Visualization – Recalling the bidding, and as play progresses, picture hidden hands
Inference – If Declarer does "this" instead of "that", what does that imply?

*Note: HCP = High Card Points*

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Bob's Defense at Duplicate is composed of two Parts:

Part I is an overview of the process of playing a hand at duplicate.

It is an original presentation of a way of defending, authored by Bob, called Bob's 5 Phases of Duplicate Bridge.

The Phases are:

1. During the Auction
2. The Opening Lead
3. The Dummy Appears
4. Declarer's Play Plan Appears
5. During the Play of the hand

Techniques used by defenders during Phases 1 - 4 are included in Part I, following this page.

Part II is a summary of the techniques used by defenders in Phase 5 - During the Play of the Hand: Leads, Signals, Discards, etc.

As you are familiar with defending techniques and know that there are alternatives, Part II will include Bob's personal recommendations for defensive techniques although he plays different techniques with various partners.

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### PART I – THE 5 PHASES OF A DUPLICATE HAND

#### PHASE 1. DURING THE AUCTION.

Listen to every bid and visualize what the bidder holds in HCP and Shape. This includes your partner, too. Pay particular attention to his bids.

Listening to the auction helps your bidding;

Remembering the auction helps your defense.

The level of the final contract announces the number of tricks the declaring side thinks it can take, in a strain (suit or Notrump) of their choice. Competitive auctions, where 3 or 4 players bid, may be overbid deliberately, especially by not-vulnerable pairs for a scoring advantage.

#### Techniques:

(1) Know exactly what the implied HCP and shape is for every bid by opponents and partner. Most bids mean the same as they would if you made them. If bids are alerted or conventions are used, ask at your turn or before the opening lead about the shape and HCP if you don't know exactly what the bid means. It's your right to do so. Do it.

(2) Count – Count – Count. Every bid has shape and HCP parameters, so keep a running mental count of shape and HCP for each opponent and for partner during the auction.

If this is too difficult for you to do tomorrow, then, before play starts, decide what it would mean if you had reached that final contract with your partner. Then ask questions to clarify any opponent's bid. That is your right before the opening lead is turned up; that's why "Any questions, Partner?" is the opening leader's standard question before the opening lead is turned up. But start immediately teaching yourself to Count – Count- Count – everything.

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(3) Before the opening lead, when opponents declare, estimate what HCP your partner has. If opponents are in a NoTrump or major suit game, they have about 25 HCP together, on average. That leaves 15 HCP: subtract your HCPs and the remainder is an estimate of partner's HCP. Minor suit games are about 29 HCP.

If they declare 1 Notrump or 2 of a suit, they have about 20 HCP. Estimate partner's HCP the same way: 20 minus your HCP is about her HCP total. Count.

Shape is less mathematical: Opening Major Suit bids are usually 5+ Cards long; but rebids make them a card longer, and they may be 6 cards long in the first place. And how many HCP are in that opening hand? Minimum? Lots? Who knows?

Opening Minor Suit hands can be anything from 2 to 8 cards long, with 3 bring a very common length. Rebids jump to 6: we don't rebid 5 card suits; so, an opening Club bid we figure for 3-4 cards, but a rebid of 2♣ promises 6.

Responses to openings will usually be 4 cards long, especially if in a major suit. Later rebids of the suit lengthen the response length by one card per rebid.

Notice we didn't say anything about HCP in opening and response suits: there isn't any way to know. We can estimate the entire hand Shape/ HCP, but not how many HCP are in any given suit. [1♠ - P - 2♠ - P P ...] We can guess right now about total shape and HCP, but we have no idea where the HCP are: Right? Overcalls [1♥ - 2♣ ...] are 5+ cards long, but, most importantly, they promise substantial HCP as well.

But, in a minute, the dummy will appear, and many questions about HCP and Shape in all 4 hands will begin to be answered – to defenders who have Count – Count-Counted during the auction. Obviously, counting Shape will be much simpler when the dummy is down, but estimating Shape will help in selecting the best lead *before* the dummy is seen. Do it.

### PHASE 2. THE OPENING LEAD.

The Opening Lead starts the defense and Play; its Style may be Active or Passive.

Both defenders must mentally picture both the dummy's and Declarer's shape and HCP. The leader chooses a Defensive Style and Defense Plan before making the opening lead. Hopefully, 3<sup>rd</sup> seat envisions a similar Defensive Style and Plan. "Style" means Active or Passive.

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A "Defensive Plan" is the answer to "How do we best work our Style?" If we're picked "Active", how do we make the Opening Lead and subsequent plays? "Passive" is more common and easier. "Active" is always dangerous, but sometimes necessary.

### What Determines Active or Passive Initial Defensive Style?

If the dummy has high trick-taking potential, as in a Two Over One auction leading to a Slam contract, it may call for an Active Defensive Style to cash defensive tricks before Declarer can pitch or ruff her losers: they are the Defenders' winners. The Defensive Plan then may be to lead Aces and/or Kings to aggressively start the play.

If dummy's bidding has been bland or simply supportive, or the contract level is low, an initial Passive Defensive Style is usually best. It is the default Style if there is no indication of exceptional shape or HCP from dummy's bidding.

Another major variable is if there has been competitive bidding. If not, then it amounts to some general "Rules" (see Part II) for Opening Leads in a Notrump or a Suit contract, because the opening leader has no idea what, if anything, partner holds to compete with.

If neither defender has bid, then the initial Active or Passive Style and other opening lead questions are much more difficult. The opening leader must estimate the probable value of the dummy, based on its bidding, and decide whether to start an Active or a Passive Defense. An Active Style choice by the opening leader is rare without competitive bidding.

Don't "favor" one Style or the other: it's certainly not correct to tell yourself "I'm going to be an aggressive defender." Every hand presents a unique challenge; there's no "general" winning Defensive Style.

You might want to be an aggressive bidder: that's different. However, your partners will compensate if they think you are too aggressive. Best not to be known as either aggressive or conservative. Then partners will trust your bids, as you should trust theirs. If they can't trust yours, you'll soon be playing only BBO.

1. Example: if West has overcalled South with 2♠, but South gets the contract:

If West leads the ♠K, she has good Spades, probably headed by the ♠KQJxx or ♠KQTxx. She is starting the attack with her strong suit. If East is on lead – North is the Declarer – but East didn't support West's Spades and leads a low Spade, he could

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have a Spade honor but not many HCP, as he didn't raise. If he leads a middle or high Spade, he has no honor and/or maybe a doubleton Spade.

If he doesn't lead a Spade, he doesn't have any, unless he makes a strong Top-of-Honor Sequence lead, like the ♦King from ♦KQJx. That does not deny holding Spades.

An important Partnership Agreement: If partner overcalls with Spades, showing strong HCP there but you don't lead Spades, you must have an obvious strong lead of your own, or no Spade to lead. This also says you can only overcall in Spades with a strong suit: not just a "collection of Spade cards." At least KJT96; not K8642.

An Overcall is a strong suit of 5 or more cards: not the same as an opening or balancing hand, which can be just "a bunch of cards." This is a vital distinction: overcalls are strong suits; so partner should be confident in leading them. Also, you may be passed out and end up declarering in that suit, without support from partner. Would you rather declare with KJT96 or K8642?

2. However, if partner has made a "Balancing" bid in Spades, he may not have many HCP strength in Spades. Balancing auctions are quite different than Competitive auctions: be aware of the difference. Examples:

(a.) S    W    N    E  
1♥ - 1♠ - 1NT - P  
2♥ - P - 2NT - all pass

A simple competitive auction. East is on lead, and West has overcalled in Spades. She should have 5+ good Spades, and East should lead a Spade, regardless of her strength or length in the suit. If she doesn't lead a Spade, but leads the ♣K, she has a ♣KQJx or something similar: in other words, her own safe source of tricks in this contract, in addition to West's Spade trick possibilities. This way, she doesn't finesse West, either. North DOES have Spade stoppers.

(b.) S    W    N    E  
1♥ - P - 2♥ - P  
P - 2♠ ...

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Another competitive auction with just a "Balance". West chose to bid rather than pass out N/S's 2♥'s, so her 2♠ call shows some HCP and length in Spades. With either or both length and HCP strength, she might have bid 1♠ in the first round. "Spades are the Boss suit"

(c.) S   W   N   E  
1♥ - P - 2♥ - P  
P - 2♠ ...

A Balancing Auction. An apparently similar auction to (b). but different in subtle ways.

When N/S try to quit at 2♥, showing about 20 HCP and 8+ Hearts, West bids 2♠ showing 5+ Spade length and competitive HCP strength, but not promising a lot of Spade HCP. She figures the hands are equivalent in HCP – 20 ish.

Why? Holding Spade HCP and 5+ Spades, she would have overcalled 1♥ with 1♠ on the first round. It only promises about 8+ HCP at the 1-level. Keep these distinctions in mind during the auction: North/South did try to stop at 2♥.

### Phase 2 Summary: The Opening Lead

Passive is the default Style when it's not apparent about dummy's trick-taking possibilities or if there's an obvious opening lead, like ♣Q from ♣QJ10x. The ♣Q may appear aggressive, but it's quite safe and therefore technically Passive in Style.

Lacking an obvious lead, the important factor is whether defenders have bid. Keep the distinctions described above in mind. Unless there is an obvious high card sequence available, you should lead partner's bid suit. Finally, a consideration is what dummy has bid, and what his / her bids implied ?

Often, leading trump will be an effective Passive choice, because it will take two trumps out of Declarer's inventory. It may reduce dummy's ability to ruff Declarer's losers and is less likely to be a "bad" lead as would a lead away from an Ace or King in a side-suit be, for example, a "Top of Nothing" suit that finesses partner.

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### Phase 3. The Dummy Appears.

The physical appearance of the dummy fills in a large part of the mental picture of all four hands in both HCP and Shape, and defenders' expectations about the dummy are confirmed or modified. This may lead to a change of the Defenders' Style and/or Plan, but a defender has made the Opening Lead, reflecting Active or Passive style, before the dummy is seen.

Two basic things are possible when dummy appears:

- A. Dummy shows no exceptional trick-taking abilities from what the bidding implied: it looks like what the Opening Lead Defender (and her partner, hopefully) expected. If this is the case, defenders will continue the Opening Leader's choice of Active or Passive Style.
  
- B. Dummy shows unexpected trick-taking value like some unexpected running suit possibilities or ruffing values not predictable from the bidding. It may not show HCP, but a side suit singleton, for example, adds trick-taking value in a suit contract. If this is the case and the defender chose a Passive Defensive style, then the defense may need to switch to an Active Style when they get in.

Unfortunately, it may be too late if declarer has gotten in and pitched or ruffed his losers. It's difficult to switch from Passive to Active after the Opening Lead, but simple to switch from Active to Passive at any time.

As soon as the dummy appears, and the Defensive Style choice is seen, both defenders should start visualizing what Declarer's Play Plan will be. How? Ask yourself: "How would I play this hand now that dummy is down, and with the shape and strength everyone has shown during the auction?"

There may be alternative ways to play a hand, but at least get your mind into declarer's mind as she looks at the dummy before starting the play. If she starts the play the way you would have started it, then you are probably right in predicting her Play Plan, and that might lead you to confirm or adjust your Style or Plan.

### Phase 4. Declarer's Play Plan Appears.

Declarer, after a "minute or so" to make his Play Plan, will start to work that Plan by playing from the dummy. Usually, Declarer's play to the first few tricks will show



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observant Defenders what his Play Plan is and may once again suggest changes to Defenders' Plan and/or Style. Compare what you see at the start with the Play Plan you would use: chances are you will match much of the time.

Then, try to visualize where the defense is going to get its tricks to set or prevent overtricks by Declarer. (A somewhat different defensive tactic at Pairs or IMP events.)

### Phase 5. During the Play of the Hand.

Declarer may attempt to hide his plan temporarily, stealing tricks early or end-playing or squeezing Defenders. Defenders should constantly ask themselves: "Why is he doing that?" or "Why isn't he doing this?" if Declarer does something that Defenders wouldn't do or doesn't do something that Defenders would do as the Declarer.

Anything unusual can provide clues to an unexpected Declarer Play Plan. For example; "Why hasn't he claimed yet?" Does that mean he doesn't have all the remaining tricks, so your partner must therefore have ... what? There are "Rules" or Techniques in Part II about how and what to lead, discard, signal attitude and count and suit preference to "communicate" with partner during the play of a hand.

## BOB'S DEFENSE CONVENTION CARD SECTIONS

LEADS (circle card led if not in bold)		DEFENSIVE CARDING	
Versus Suits	Versus Notrump		Vs Suits vs NT
Xx xXxx	Xx xXxx	Standard	■ ■
xXx xXxxx	Xxx xXxxx	Except	■
AKx T9x	AKJx AQJx	<i>Coded 9's, 10's, Jacks</i>	
KQx KJTx	AJT9 AT9x	Upside-Down	
QJx KT9x	KQJx KQT9	Count	□ □
JT9 QT9x	QJTx QT9x	Attitude	■ ■
KQT9	JT9x T9xx	FIRST DISCARD	
LENGTH LEADS		<i>Upside Down</i>	■ ■
4 <sup>th</sup> Best vs NT ■		OTHER CARDING	
Primary signal to partner's leads		<i>none</i>	
Attitude ■			
SPECIAL CARDING ■ ASK			

**LEADS:** I play Coded 9's, 10's and J's leads, 2<sup>nd</sup> high from Top of Nothing, "Standard" 3+ honor sequences and Boston leads. "Coded 9's, 10's and Jacks is also known as Journalist Leads". BOSTON means "Bottom of Something; Top of Nothing." aka "Upside Down" leads and attitude signals and first discards.

- xx** Count? Standard: Hi-Lo is Even. Attitude? High is "No"; Low is Yes"
- xxx xxx** 2<sup>nd</sup> highest: not the Top of Nothing. (An exception to Boston.)
- AKx** Ace from Ace and King. With AK doubleton, lead the King first.
- KQJ** Top of an honor sequence
- JT7** Lead of a Jack denies higher honors, but often includes the 10. "Pushers"
- T9x** A Coded 10: shows either 2 or no higher cards (honors) in the suit.
- KT9x** The lead of a Nine also shows exactly two higher honors or none,

**Why Coded Leads?** Our non-Standard Lead often tells partner the honor situation in all 4 hands on the first lead of a suit. She looks at her hand and at the dummy and asks herself: "Could my partner have 2 honors higher than the 9 or 10 that she led?"

**DEFENSIVE CARDING.** Standard Count, Upside Down Attitude and First Discard.

**Why Upside Down?** In "Standard", if you play a 9 on partner's first lead of a suit, do you suppose Declarer will read that signal as a "Yes"? But what if you play a 3 – an Upside Down "Yes". We don't waste high intermediate cards like 8s and 9s as positive signals, because they may later become "pushers" or "threat cards" or sometimes even tricks. Same with our First Discard: a Low card means "Yes"; and a High means "No", giving our partner guidance about the suit played.