

When to Go Active

- **Dummy or declarer has a threatening side suit**
- **Both sides have bid side suits**
- **They have bid vigorously, with slam interest**
- **They have bid a small slam**
- **3NT is being attempted with a reliance on a long running suit**
- **Anytime our tricks might go away**

Going Active on Defense

If declarer is going to set up a long suit for discards, we must take our tricks quickly in the other suits, before the long suit can be established.

--Edwin Kantar, Defense Bridge Play Complete

Defenders must always remain cognizant of the means that declarers use to gain tricks. The two chief means are ruffing in the short hand and establishing long suits. Of these, establishing suits predominates. When the suit he wants to establish is breaking badly, or when an abundance of missing honors and spot cards are badly placed for declarer, then we need not fear that suit. Indeed, that is a condition for leading trump, so that we can avail ourselves of what will come our way. But we are not always so lucky. Sometimes side suits do break for declarer. Sometimes his missing cards are placed to his benefit. Or, he may have more than one suit that he can establish, and both are not likely to go bad. When things are going well for declarer in this regard, then the defenders are left with no better option than to work fast to grab what they can before it's too late. Whenever you see or hear that your tricks may go away on a long suit, you must become active, even to the point of taking risks.

Sometimes we are not aware of the threat of a suit until we see dummy. That is often too late. We will fare best, as always, if we pay attention to the auction and try to stay aware of long-suit threats, so that we can go active even on our lead. Here are the conditions for which we must be on alert:

- Dummy or declarer has a threatening side suit
- Both sides have bid side suits
- They have bid vigorously, with slam interest
- They have bid a small slam
- 3NT is being attempted with a reliance on a long running suit
- Anytime our tricks might go away

West	S	W	N	E
♠ A 10 7 6 2			1 ♣	P
♥ A 3	1 ♥	1 ♠	3 ♥	P
♦ K J 9	4 ♥	P	P	P
♣ 8 7 3				

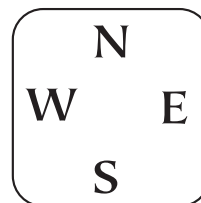
Is North's strength concentrated in a good club suit that can serve for discards? Well, there is nothing in your hand to dispute it, and partner will be weak on this auction. So now that we have established that you need to go active, just how do you do that? Your two aces are probably tricks, and the king of diamonds may be. Where could another come from? Probably not spades, your length portends shortness for declarer. That leaves diamonds. Partner can't be expected to have the ace, but if he has the queen, just two measly points, you may take the contract down.

NORTH

♠ K J 8
♥ K J 7
♦ 6 4
♣ A K Q 9 5

WEST

♠ A 10 7 6 2
♥ A 3
♦ K J 9
♣ 8 7 3



EAST

♠ Q 4 3
♥ 10 6 2
♦ Q 8 7 5 3
♣ J 6

SOUTH

♠ 9 5
♥ Q 9 8 5 4
♦ A 10 2
♣ 10 4 2

Partner shows up with the queen, but North

has only 2 diamonds. Have you gained nothing, then? Perhaps but declarer better be sharp. How would you play the hand?

An unsuspecting declarer will win the ace of diamonds and lead trump. You will duck the ace on the first round, winning your ace on the second. Now you cash the king of diamonds and lead the jack. South can ruff in dummy, but look! He cannot return to his hand to draw the last trump and your partner is going to win a trump trick. Declarer could have combatted this problem by leading a spade at trick two. This establishes his king of spades for 2nd round control of spades, when thereafter he can ruff a spade back to his hand. Your active lead may not have, in itself, been a total guarantee, but I think it will set a lot of declarers, don't you?

Listen to this auction. Can you hear a long suit in it?

West	S	W	N	E
♠ 9 3			1 ♣	P
♥ A 7 6 4 2	1 ♠	1	3 ♣	P
♦ K 10 5 3	3 ♠	P	4 ♠	P
♣ 8 6	P	P		

North's club bid followed by a jump rebid can be heard a mile away. Again it's time for an active defense, and again our diamond suit takes our preference.

	NORTH		
	♠ K Q 7 ♥ 8 5 ♦ A 7 ♣ A Q J 9 7 2		
WEST	N W E S	EAST	
♠ 9 3 ♥ A 7 6 4 2 ♦ K 10 5 3 ♣ 8 6		♠ 5 2 ♥ Q J 9 3 ♦ Q 8 6 4 2 ♣ K 4	
	SOUTH		
	♠ A J 10 8 6 4 ♥ K 10 ♦ J 9 ♣ 10 5 3		

Declarer will win the ace of diamonds and draw trump in two rounds, ending in his hand. He tries the club finesse, but his luck is bad and partner is in. Pard knows you have no trump tricks and no club tricks, and he should see that you'll soon have no tricks at all if doesn't do things right. Maybe he will remember a little poem:

*when dummy sits to your right
lead the weakest thing in sight.*

Even if partner doesn't cash the queen of diamonds first, you'll still be alright as long as the queen of hearts goes on the table.

Ket's tune our ears to another auction:

West	S	W	N	E
♠ K J 7 6 2	1 ♦	P	1 ♥	P
♥ A 8 3	2 ♣	P	3 ♦	P
♦ 9 4	5 ♦	P	P	P
♣ 10 8 6				

This should sound like double trouble. Both North and South have shown a second suit. Combine this with two other factors: they have expressed strength and avoided notrump. They are strong and shapely. Any tricks you have are about to go away. You better make a plan to get what you can. The heart ace should hold up. But will you get a spade trick? You never will unless you lead it now.

	NORTH		
	♠ 10 8 3 ♥ Q J 10 7 5 ♦ K J 8 3 ♣ K		
WEST	N W E S	EAST	
♠ K J 7 6 2 ♥ A 8 3 ♦ 9 4 ♣ 10 8 6		♠ A 9 5 ♥ K 9 4 2 ♦ 7 2 ♣ 7 5 4 3	
	SOUTH		
	♠ Q 4 ♥ 6 ♦ A Q 10 6 5 ♣ A Q J 9 2		

Isn't there risk, you may ask, in leading away from these kings, as we've been doing? Couldn't we be finessing ourselves? Indeed there is a risk, and certainly we could be finessing ourselves. But the greater risk is the long suit that we know to exist. Without an active attack, we will never get our sidesuit tricks anyway. Look at the layout of the hand we just led to. If we don't try the spade suit, all of dummy's spades will go on declarer's clubs, and he will take 12 tricks. When we led the spade, we would have done well finding partner even with just the queen to force South's ace, establishing our king. Holding the contract to 5 could have been enough for a solid score. Setting the contract was unexpected. When side suits are about, we must be willing to take risks to collect our tricks.

This sort of risk-taking aggression should also be taken when the opponents bid a small slam in a suit contract. They will have plenty of resources. The best we can do is to attack aggressively.

<u>West</u>	S	W	N	E
♠ 10 5	1 ♠ P		2 ♣ P	
♥ 8 7	2 ♥ P		3 ♦ dbl	
♦ Q 8 6 3	3 ♥ P		5 ♠ P	
♣ A 10 7 5 2	6 ♠ P		P	P

South has shown a two-suiter, with at least 5 cards in each major. North ventured to the 3 level on his own, but only to bid diamonds instead of 3 NT, even though all the stoppers are accounted for. This suggests extra strength; he didn't want the bidding to close at 3NT. He again shows power by jumping to 5 spades. North stops short to express some concern about diamonds. South's raise to 6 spades says not to worry about it. East's double of 3 diamonds never was for penalty. He certainly didn't expect North-South to play 3 diamonds. He was doubling to show that West might want to lead a diamond - a lead-directing double. This double caused North to question the slam. South showed no fear. Therefore West should not lead a diamond.

West shouldn't lead a diamond because the opponents have shown no fear of it. Neither should he lead a heart or a spade unless he is feeling suicidal. That would bring him to a club lead by the process of elimination. But the Rules of Thumb tell us not to

lead an ace from space and not to underlead an ace. What is West to do? He should use his head and think. South has shown 10 cards in the majors. North has shown 5 clubs. South apparently has one or two clubs. If he has two of them, then how many would that leave for East? Just one. West should lead the ace of clubs and another.

		NORTH			
		♠ A 7 6			
		♥ Q 6			
		♦ A 9 2			
		♣ K Q 9 8 3			
WEST		<div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div>		EAST	
♠ 10 5				♠ 8 4 2	
♥ 8 7				♥ 10 5 4 3	
♦ Q 8 6 3				♦ K J 10 7 5	
♣ A 10 7 5 2				♣ 4	
		SOUTH			
		♠ K Q J 9 3			
		♥ A K J 9 2			
		♦ 4			
		♣ J 6			

Did this lead have to work? No, it didn't have to. In this case it did. If West decides to play it "safe" by leading a diamond, South simply wins, pulls trump, knocks out the club ace, and claims the rest of the tricks. What is "safe?" Playing it safe is not always the safest thing to do.

The opponents try notrump based on a long suit

Playing 3 notrump is simply a matter of taking nine tricks. If one player has a long running suit, say 7 cards long, he is almost there, regardless of point count. One somewhat popular bidding convention called Gambling 3NT tries to avail itself of the trick taking capabilities of a seven-card suit. The Gambling 3NT convention calls for the opening bid of 3NT to show a hand holding a seven card suit headed by the AKQ with NO outside stoppers. If the opener's partner thinks they can make it, he passes, and they try 3NT. Aggressive leads are required

against Gambling 3NT. Passive actions allow the gamblers time to round up 9 tricks.

The opportunity to open a Gambling 3NT doesn't come up very often. Indeed, I would call it a rare bid. But a similar sort of auction arises with a much greater frequency. This auction begins with a preempt, with partner answering with a bid of 3NT.

<u>West</u>	S	W	N	E
♠ Q 6 5 4 2			3♦	P
♥ J 7 5 4	3NT	P	P	P
♦ 8				
♣ A K 3				

There is no way to know which suit to attack. But there is a way to try to find out. Start with the ace of clubs. Then look at dummy for clues, and look for a signal from partner. If partner likes clubs, we'll continue. If he doesn't, we'll select a major suit to switch to.

NORTH

♠ 8 3
♥ 10 6
♦ A Q J 7 6 5 2
♣ 7 6

WEST

♠ Q 6 5 4 2
♥ J 7 5 4
♦ 8
♣ A K 3



EAST

♠ J 9 7
♥ Q 9 8
♦ K 4
♣ 10 8 5 4 2

SOUTH

♠ A K 10
♥ A K 3 2
♦ 10 9 3
♣ Q J 9

As it turns out, partner likes your club lead and signals high. You continue your ace and another, and South's efforts go for naught.

Summary

When the opponents show a side suit that can be established, that spells trouble. If the suit is not going to break, or if there are other difficulties to its establishment, it need not be a threat. But often it is a threat. In those circumstances, you must become active and take risks to establish and collect as soon as possible whatever tricks you can. Even if you do not set the opponents, you can often get a good board simply by preventing or limiting overtricks. So go active when a side suit is present. Listening to the auction will often make it clear that you need to become aggressive.

Frequently the threat of the long suit is accompanied by strong bidding. The opponents bid confidently to game. Or they bid a small slam. Or they show slam interest. Vigorous bidding invites defensive aggression. Don't turn down the invitation.

Sometimes the long suit can be threatening even when the bidding takes a more chancy direction, such as trying to come to a fast nine tricks in notrump based on a preemptive or gambling suit. Again, seek aggressive action to counter a long running suit.

