Play the known Card

By Kitty Cooper

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Suppose as declarer you hold K9xx opposite AJx and finesse the Jack, which wins; your only hope for four tricks now is to play the Ace and King and hope that the suit splits 3-3. But what do you do when the Queen drops under the Ace?

<div align="center">

♥854

♥AJ7   ♥K962

♥Q103

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Against many players it's clear to lead a low card from dummy and insert the nine expecting the next hand to show out. Declarer "knows" that the queen will next fall under the king. But what if a sly defender plays the queen from Q10, a play which cannot cost since the queen and the 10 are equivalent cards after the Jack is played. Declarer must judge whether you have played the Queen holding the 10, in which case declarer should play the King, or whether you have played the Queen because you had no choice, in which case declarer should finesse the nine. Here's a hot tip: If you make declarer guess what to do, sometimes declarer will get it wrong.

The above example is an easy one, which we would expect any decent defender to do.

Once when we were playing behind screens I was declaring a hand and took a finesse through Steve's screenmate (the person on the same side of the screen as him), playing Steve's Queen then his Ace and then ruffing one of his two remaining cards with the deuce of trump. What made this so difficult for Steve (other than his usual difficulties whenever he is dummy!) is that his screenmate was showing him her hand and he could see that she held KJ109. And yet she resolutely held on to her King until the bitter end, thus giving me the certainty that I could play to ruff the third and fourth cards of the suit without fear of being over-ruffed. Steve said later that he felt like grabbing the King and throwing it on the table!

So the next time you're known to hold a card, give some thought to whether you can safely play it the next time the suit is led.

This article was co-authored by Kitty's husband, the late Steve Cooper, and previously appeared in the District 17 newsletter. ♣