

Surround Play made easy

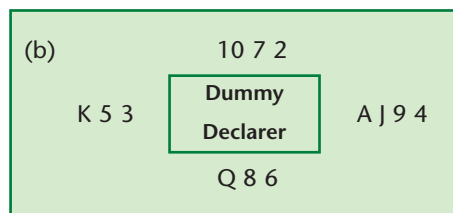
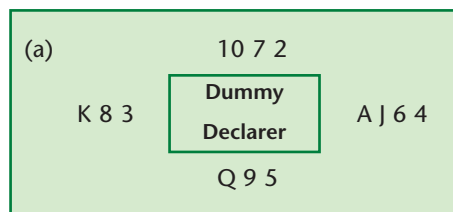


Freddie North

MOST bridge players have a pretty clear idea of standard leads from an early point in their learning curve. Top of a sequence or near sequence, fourth highest from a broken suit headed by an honour, MUD and so on. All this is routine stuff and is well documented in elementary text-books.

What is not so well known are the situations where a little fine-tuning is essential if the maximum awards are to be achieved. The technique involved is called 'Surround Play' and may arise whenever the intermediate cards in a suit are of significant value.

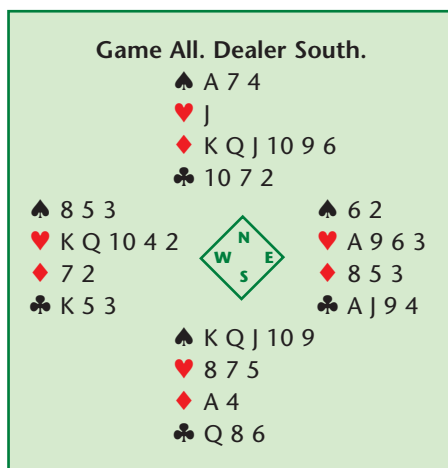
Consider these two situations with East to lead:



In (a) East is powerless to avoid declarer making one trick in the suit. A low card is run to dummy's ten which forces West to win with the king. Subsequently dummy plays towards the Q-9 to establish a winner. Obviously, neither the ace nor the jack would enable the defence to take more than their two tricks.

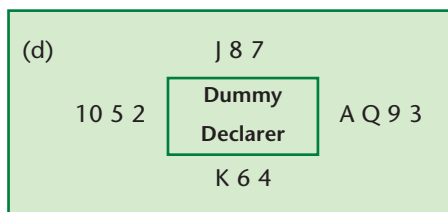
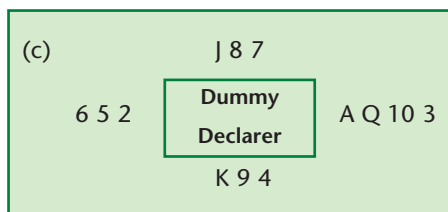
In (b), the jack and the nine surround the ten providing a totally different scenario. By playing the jack (no other card will do) the queen is captured by West's king and then the ten is trapped by East's A-9 on the way back.

Let's see this play in a full deal.



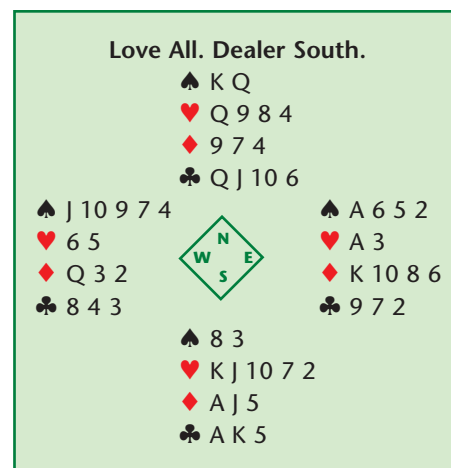
West leads the king of hearts against South's contract of 4♠ and East must make two key plays. Firstly, he overtakes his partner's king with the ace, and secondly, he switches to the jack of clubs: no other card will do if the contract is to be defeated. This piece of fine-tuning arises because the jack and nine of clubs form a 'surround' over dummy's ten. Let's say declarer covers the jack of clubs with the queen. West wins and returns the suit through dummy's ten enabling East to make both the ace and nine. Note that the same result could not be achieved if it were West who played clubs first, or if East played the four, or if East cashed the ace originally.

Position (c) is perhaps the easiest of all to recognise:



East wants three winners from this suit so he plays the queen as he has a surround position over dummy's jack. Suppose his holding is slightly inferior, e.g. A-Q-9-3. If the jack is in dummy, then the queen will still be correct if the layout is as in (d).

Here is another instructive example:



West leads the jack of spades against South's contract of 4♥ (1♥ - 3♥ - 4♥). East wins the ace of spades. What now?

There is only one card in East's hand that will seal declarer's defeat. Noting the surround layout (the ♦K-10-8 over dummy's nine), East switches to the ten of diamonds. If declarer wins the ace, the defence have their two tricks. If declarer plays the jack, West wins and continues the suit through dummy's 9-7 up to East's K-8. One down is the inevitable outcome, but this would not have happened had East merely switched to the six of diamonds which declarer could run to dummy's nine.

Note a major key element of Surround Play: *the second-highest card is led and that is the one that sets the scene*. The top and third highest lurk in the undergrowth waiting to pounce in a pincer movement as soon as the suit is returned. □