



A Further Guide to Declarer Play

For the Exciting Game of Bridge

Warren Watson

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Preface

Playing the Dummy More is a further guide to declarer play for the exciting game of bridge. Being a good declarer will improve all aspects of bridge skill including bidding and defending. A player will compete more in the bidding if he is confident with his declarer play, and this will lead to better bridge results. As a defender, knowing what a good declarer does helps determine what cards the declarer holds by his actions.

If you like the Watson bridge book, *Playing the Dummy*, you will like this book, its successor, *Playing the Dummy More*. The examples are different and are given in the same order as lessons at a teaching table on BBO, Bridge Base Online¹.

At the very least, these examples will be review and cement the basics into the reader's declarer play. If his declarer play is aimless and tends to react to what the defenders do and not react ahead of time, this book is needed.

If the reader has any questions, wishes to be sent updates or wishes lessons at \$25 CAD an hour on BBO and over the phone, he can contact the author at warren.t.watson@gmail.com.

In addition to this book, a player must analyze the hands he plays. If he is a kitchen bridge player, he must play the cards on the table in front of himself so he can look at the hand afterwards. The long edge of the card points to himself if his side won the trick, and the long edge points to the defenders if they won the trick. After the play, all hands can be looked at and discussed.

Was a slam in a minor missed by playing 3NT? Could the declarer play be improved? Was the lead good and the defensive footprint small (Opening only one suit without costing a trick)? Looking at how the experts play the hands on BBO is also a good tool, and it is easier to review the hands. My BBO id is WT_Watson.

If the reader plays often and reads all twenty-one Watson bridge books, he will be a good player before long.

¹ Bridge Base Online, <https://www.bridgebase.com/v3/>





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1. Pushing is Good

Does being aggressive mean light openings, offshape takeout doubles and risky overcalls? No. A player must have consistent openings, takeout doubles with the proper shape and sound two-level overcalls. Can a player pass with points? Yes, absolutely.

If an opponent opens first, and a player does not have the correct hand to compete, he must pass and hope that a partner with the correct shape and low points will see the auction dying at a low level and compete. How low is low? If the auction is dying out at 2♠ or below, a player must be aggressive. The most important rule to balancing is the following.

If the opponents are willing to play the one-level or the two level, a player who does not have length in the suit should push. The safest way to push is often a takeout double to give partner a choice of suits. However, the correct shape must be held. Balancing with three-cards or more in the unbid suits is better with a double.

It goes without saying that if there are only two unbid suits, three cards in an unbid suit is far from ideal. The player should ideally be five-four, but four-four may be okay.

The last Watson bridge book produced before this one is called the Passivity Proscription. It is almost an entire book on not being passive. Of course, judgment is important, but it comes down to shape.

Yes, there is a minimum of 6 HCP needed because a hand which cannot respond to a 1♣ opening by partner generally does not try to be the declaring side. However, pushing is not based on an opening hand so the opponents know how to take two way finesses.

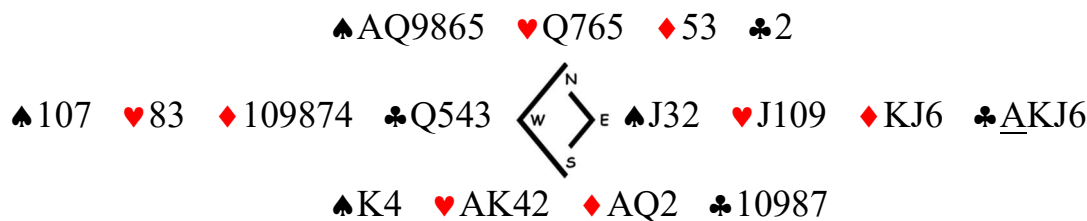
Having confidence as a declarer makes bidding better. Furthermore, a good declarer also makes for a good defender because as a defender, they are aware of what a good declarer is trying to do. They know something about his hand by what the declarer does at his first opportunity and later in the auction. For example, if the declarer does not immediately draw trump, he may be wanting short-hand ruffs.





Board 1: Passing with 16 HCP

Both vul.



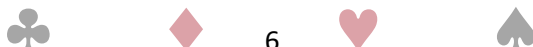
W	N	E	S
		1♣	P
P	1♠	P	2♣
P	2♥	P	4♥
all pass			

South does not have a bid over 1♣. He has no five-card suit for an overcall, and the four-card suit is not strong enough for a very rare four-card one-level overcall. The suit has two of the top three honours or three of the top five honours, but the smallest card is not the 8.

He also does not have a double. He has two cards in an unbid suit and four-cards in the doubled suit.

He does not have a 1NT overcall because he has no club stopper. He cannot double and bid Notrump over 1♠ because he still does not have a club stopper, and a double then Notrump is the next range up after 15 to 18. A double then 1NT shows 19 to 20. Therefore, South must pass.

North is short in clubs and will bid 1♠. He does not preempt because his partner very likely has an opening hand, and he has a side four-card major. Jumps are not done when two suits may be bid if given the chance. Jumps are not weak in the balancing seat because a pass not a preempt stops the opponents from bidding more.





The Overcall Cuebid:

North must not go nuts over 1♠. He starts with a cuebid which says he has a limit raise or better with support or a full opener or better without support. The cuebid also says, “Tell me more.”

North bids 2♥, and South raises to game. It makes slam, but this one is almost impossible to bid without knowing North has a stiff club. North knows South is strong, but he does not know there is nothing wasted in clubs and that South has a finessing position over East in diamonds.

A player has the luxury of passing with points accompanied by the wrong shape. This will never be wrong if his partner is a good balancer. The partner must be unwilling to let the opponents play at the one or two level unless:

- He has four of the suit or more,
- It is a diseased hand.
 - He has a stiff (singleton) in partner's (only) suit.
 - He has five cards in any suit bid by the opponents.
- The opponents have lots of points but are passing because of a misfit.

Pushing by balancing is good and is aggressively done.

Bridge Solver Online²: 6♥-NS, 6♠-NS, 3NT-NS

The bridge solver online line shows which contracts can be made double dummy. That means hands are visible, so that all guesses, such as two-way finesses, are determined correctly. The solver was run for every hand whether there is a footnote or not.

The .lin file in Appendix F contains all the examples with the student always sitting South. The hands can be imported into a teaching table on BBO just as easily as into the online bridge solver.

² Bridge Solver Online, Bo Haglund's double dummy solver module, Retrieved August 1, 2023 from <https://mirgo2.co.uk/bridgesolver/> See Appendix F for the .lin files of all the examples.



Board 2: A Balancing Double is a One-Level Overcall



reverse of 2♦ would normally show 16+, but when partner cannot respond, it is 18+.

As with Board 1, North does not go nuts and jump to 4♥. He cuebids 2♣ to show a full opener. South bids his longer major and four-card suits up the line. He bids 2♥. North bids 3♥, and South knows North has a full opener with four hearts. Therefore, he passes. South also has the minimum he could have. If that was all that was needed, North would have gone to game himself.

West leads the ♠Ace, and East gives count with the ♠3. When South wins the third spade, he takes the heart finesse and draws trump. He plays a small club towards the North hand, and plays diamonds when he is in the North hand. He does not need to use an entry to the South hand to play diamonds. He loses two spades, one diamond and one club for +140.

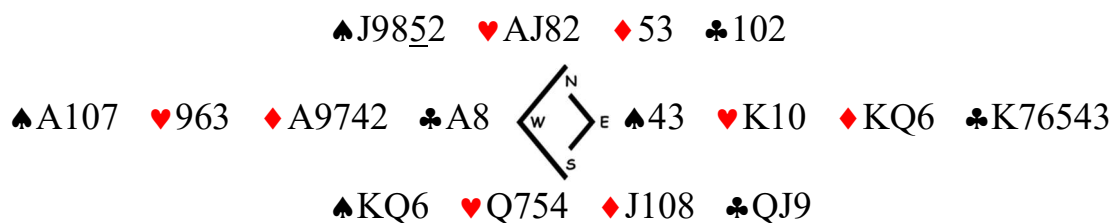
Bridge Solver Online: 3♥-NS, 2♠-NS, 1NT-NS, 1♣-EW





Board 3: Not Selling out to 2m

Neither vul.



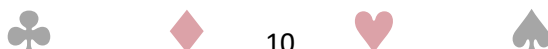
W	N	E	S
		P	P
1♦	P	2♣	P
2♦	P	P	dbl
P	2♠	3♦	all pass

2m means 2♣ or 2♦, and in the next example, 2M means 2♥ or 2♠. Should South balance? Yes, no question. Four-four in the majors would be better but every unbid suit has three or four cards.

Should North or South bid 3♠ and refuse to defend? No. Getting the opponents to the three-level is sufficient. It also gives partner a suit to lead.

This hand is the same as Board 8. The only difference is the table is rotated so the student, sitting South here, has the East hand of Board 8 and the balancing decision.


Bridge Solver Online: 1♥-NS, 2NT-EW, 4♣-EW, 6♦-EW





Board 4: Not Selling out to 2M

Both vul.

				♠KQ85	♥8	♦832	♣Q10752				
♠J102	♥AK62	♦AQ109	♣64		♠964	♥109743	♦J5	♣A83			
					♠A73	♥QJ5	♦K764	♣KJ9			

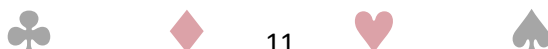
W	N	E	S
1♦	P	1♥	P
2♥	P	P	dbl
3♥	all pass		

It is certainly easier to sell out to 2♠ than it is to 2♥. Over 2♠, the contract must be at the three level and over 2♥, 2♠ is possible. Regardless, the opponents should be not be allowed the two-level when they have a fit.

If the auction dies at a low level because of a misfit, it is dangerous to balance. Balancing is most common when one opponent is a minimum opener and his partner is a simple response of 6 to 9. It is not the opponent's auction just because they opened. Players must compete.

South has a very marginal hand to compete over 2♥, but he should. Just as he should compete over 2♥, he must be silent over 3♥. His bidding was a success. He did not win the contract, but that is okay. He got the opponents to the three-level.

Bridge Solver Online: 2♣-NS, 1♦-S, 1♠-S, 3♥-EW





2. Common Card Combinations

The best way to play card combinations is to get the opponents to lead the suit. If an elimination and endplay are not available, an avoidance play may dictate how card combinations with a two-way finesse are played. Otherwise, card combinations are played the standard way which may depend on entries. The common card combinations are listed in the rest of this chapter.

2.1 Missing the Queen

Eight Ever Nine Never

This is a rule with many exceptions which applies to eight and nine-card fits missing just the Queen. With eight cards, the Queen is ever (always) finessed, and with nine cards, the Queen is never finessed by cashing the Ace and the King.

Exceptions are:

Eight Never:

The finesse in an eight-card fit is refused when

- A ruff is possible.
- The bidder is behind the Ace and the King.
- The danger hand is behind the Ace and the King.

Nine Ever:

The finesse is taken in a nine-card fit when:

- Distribution is afoot and trump is likely three-one.
- An avoidance play is needed.
- The defender marked with points is finessed for the Queen.

AK43

J1098

The Ace is cashed and then the Jack is run through. Eight ever finesse, and nine never finesse.





AK432

J1098

The Ace and the King are cashed. When cashing the King, the Jack can be led as a ruse in case the defender is cover happy. Eight ever finesse, and nine never finesse.

KJ98

A765

Safety Play: For one loser, but not two, the King is cashed, and a small card is played to the 9.

For no losers, the Ace is cashed, and if East drops the Queen, the ten is finessed. If East plays small, the finesse is to the Jack.

2.2 Missing the King

A9876

QJ10543

In an eleven-card fit, the declarer plays for the drop by pretending to run the Queen through in case the defender is cover happy. He plays the Queen to the Ace whether it is covered or not. With limited entries, the Ace is cashed.





2.3 Missing the King and the Jack

AQ102

654

A small card is finessed to the 10 and then to the Queen.

AQ102

6543

For no losers, the 10 is finessed, and then the Queen is finessed.

For one loser, small is played to the Queen and if it loses, a small card is played to the 10.

AQ10987

654

Safety Play: For one loser, but not two, the Ace is cashed and small is played to the Queen. For no losers, small is played to the Queen.

AQ72

6543

The Ace is cashed and a small card is played to the Queen. If two rounds of trump must be played quickly, the finesse is taken. However, there is always one loser no matter what, so the safety play is the best method.





AQ762

543

With no entries to the North hand, a card is ducked in both hands and then small is played to the Queen.

A1095

Q876

There are two equal methods depending on entries.

- If the South hand has two entries, small is played to the 10 and then the Queen is run through. If West shows out, the Ace is won, and small is played towards the Queen.
- If the South hand has one entry, the 5 is played towards the Queen. If East plays small, the 8 is finessed. If the 8 loses to the Jack, the entry is used to run the Queen through.

The following is the inferior method but is used if the South hand has no entries or the spots are small. The Ace is played and a small card is played to the Queen. However, this is the proper method for a nine or ten-card fit.

A1095 Cash the Ace and play small to the Queen.

Q8764

For no losers, the Queen is run through hoping East has a stiff Jack. The Ace could be cashed hoping either West or East has a stiff King.

When the spots are small, the method for a nine or ten-card fit is used.

A532 Cash the Ace and play small to the Queen or the Ten.

Q1064

A532 Cash the Ace and play small to the Queen or duck.

Q764





2.4 Missing the King and the Queen

AJ1054

9876

A small card is played to the Jack, and then a small card is played to the ten. If the finesse can only be done once because of entries, or if trump have to be removed quickly because a ruff is imminent, the Ace is cashed hoping for a singleton honour to fall.

AJ93

765

A small card is played to the 9. If that forces the King or the Queen, a small card is played to the Jack next. If the 9 loses to the 10, the Ace is cashed next and a small card is played towards the Jack.

AJ43

765

A small card is played from both hands. The Ace is then cashed, and a small card is played to the Jack.

2.5 Missing the Ace and the Jack

Q1032

K54

Typically small is played to the solitary honour and then back to the tenace (two honours with a gap).

With limited entries, the Queen is played. The King is cashed to play small to the 10.





KQ103

542

Small is played to the King, and if it loses or East may be ducking, then small is played to the 10. If the King wins, then small is played to the Queen.

With only one entry to the South hand, small is played to the 10.

2.6 Missing the Jack

A1076

KQ8

The Ace, the King, and the Queen are cashed, and this is better than a finesse.

Pages of card combinations are shown in the Bridge Encyclopaedia by Francis. It is recommended to learn the combinations in this chapter first.





3. Short-Hand Ruffs

The most important declaring principle is that short-hand ruffs gain a trick and long-hand ruffs do not. There are exceptions shown in chapter five. In fact, long-hand ruffs not only do not gain a trick, they may also jeopardize the contract if the trump split badly.

The very first question the declarer asks himself is “Are there any short-hand ruffs?” The only time a declarer does not pursue short-hand ruffs is when he has a long source of tricks where his losers can be pitched once trump are gone.

The main reason to delay drawing trump is the short-hand ruff. Trump is usually not touched until all short-hand ruffs are taken unless there is sufficient trump as with a five-five fit, for example.

The declarer also does not start a short-hand ruff either until the return to his hand is setup if more than one short-hand ruff is needed. The defenders should switch to a trump (if it does not cost a trump trick) when the dummy shows ruffing ability or when the declarer does not immediately draw trump.

