

THINKING BRIDGE

By Eddie Kantar

(From - NABC - FALL 2010 - ORLANDO - FLORIDA)

Column 1. Subject > **Card combinations**

A working knowledge of the common card combinations from both the declarer's and the defenders' point of view is basic to playing good bridge.

The following diagrams illustrate card combinations that should be on your must know list. Equally important is the ability to differentiate the best play of a card combination in isolation - perhaps when it is the only problem you have - as opposed to the context of the entire deal. And don't forget the bidding! In most cases, the play of a card combination might differ depending upon these variables:

1. The number of tricks needed. Consider this card combination in a 7♠ contract.

♠5 4 3 2

♠A Q 10 7 6

Obviously, you can't afford to lose a trick, and the best play for five tricks is to lead low to the queen, hoping (praying) East has K-x-(x).

Change the contract to 6♠ with no side suit losers, and it's different.

If an overtrick is not a concern (more about that coming up), you have to know what the correct play is for four tricks. It happens to be to lay down the ace, guarding against a singleton king in the West hand. If no honor falls, cross to dummy and lead up to your Q-10-7-6. The two spades remaining are the KJ, and unless West has them both, in which case you were always a dead man walking, you will lose one trick.

Had you led low to the queen first and lost to the king, there would be two spades still in play: the jack and a low one. Now you have to guess whether West started with K-J doubleton, in which case the ace is the winning play, or a singleton king, in which case leading low to the 10 is the winner. If you start with the ace, you don't have this problem.

2. The form of scoring. The strategy of how to play a particular combination often depends upon the form of scoring.

At matchpoints, you sometimes risk your contract for the sake of an overtrick or two, but only if you have more than a 50-50 chance of succeeding or you feel you need a top board. Otherwise it is a losing proposition.

3. When playing a doubled contract, a super contract, or playing IMPs. When playing a doubled contract or one so good that most of the field won't even smell it, or when playing IMP scoring, perhaps in a knockout match, the overriding concern is safety first, not overtricks. This often alters the play of a particular combination as the previous example showed.

More card combination advice tomorrow, plus some example deals.