

THE WORKING HORSE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks and gratitude for your contribution

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Please note that South is the declarer in all the examples you find in this book.

INTRODUCTION

I started playing duplicate bridge at the age of eighteen. I achieved my first success – the championship of my home town in Poland – one year after. It took me eleven years to win the European Championship (Birmingham 1981) and fourteen years to win the Olympic gold (Seattle 1984).

Today, I follow the career of an extremely talented Polish player Michał Klukowski who, before turning twenty, has two world championships and several European championship medals under his belt. As an experienced bridge teacher and coach, I am fully aware of the consequences. Michał graduated from the primary school of bridge and proceeded directly to the Bridge University in Poland; he, together with many other players from his generation, lack solid foundations provided by the secondary school of bridge. They can execute a double or criss-cross squeeze in no time. They excel at false splinters and cue bids, aggressive preempts or merciless penalty doubles. However, they often have difficulties using basic bridge players' tools.

Every bridge player needs a “Working Horse” who neighs tirelessly hand in and hand out; who never stumbles in counting up to thirteen or forty and can anticipate what happens in trick seven and prevent a simple endplay. Do you remember ‘Boxer’ from Orwell’s novel “Animal Farm”? A huge working horse, strong, laborious and helpful. Imagine Boxer at the bridge table, pulling the defenders’ wagon from the first trick until the last.

This book is not only for new players who seek to make further progress, but also for young bridge experts who would like to fill the gaps in their bridge education.

Krzysztof Martens
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CHAPTER 1

LEARNING TO THINK

The title of this chapter, left without explanation, would sound insulting, since thinking is an inherent ability that is mastered to varying degrees through our interactions with the environment that we live in. Thus, to be taught something that we can easily grasp by ourselves is rather annoying, since we believe that it is probably us who should be giving advice to others.

“Learning bridge-thinking” would perhaps be a better title, but this will in turn insult the intelligence of those who correctly assume that the whole book is about bridge. So, without hesitation, we shall leave the original, somewhat arrogant title!

All discussions will begin with the 40 high cards points (hcp) each deck of cards contains; thirteen cards in each suit and thirteen tricks available in each board. These will be supplemented with elementary information as to bidding and hypotheses about declarer's plans and assets. Our hand discussions will be based on all or some of the aforementioned factors.

Many of these problems also concern the opening leader, but compared to defenders in later stages of the play, the opening leader acts under conditions of greater uncertainty.

The most important choices, often decisive in the case of defeatable contracts, are made at the defenders' first opportunity to lead. After the opening lead, a relatively detailed defensive scenario should be worked out. It is often the last chance to make up for any wrong opening lead.

The importance of the bidding cannot be overemphasized; defenders must bear this in mind constantly, sometimes as late in the play as the trick before the last. All the available implications from the auction, including the negative ones, will be depicted.

Plenty of valuable hints will be inferred from the declarer by analyzing his plans and looking for the purpose behind all his moves; this information will contribute greatly to the construction of a successful plan. For this task, we need the assistance of our partner who will provide us with information derived from his own experience in bridge as to which strategy he follows in the game, what he discards and the line of defense he adopts.

The **defensive plan** must take the following points into account:

1. The distribution of hcp and suits.
2. The number of fast tricks available to us.
3. The number of fast tricks available to the declarer.
4. The number of tricks we have to develop.
5. The number of tricks a declarer has to develop.
6. The minimum assets required to set the contract and the position of the remaining honors within the calculated strength of partner's hand sufficient to set the contract.
7. Predicting the necessity to use one or more of defensive techniques, such as ducking, rising, unblocking, false carding etc.
8. The anticipation of partner's problems and thinking of ways to remedy them.

To appropriately define the field of our discussion, a few words about the defensive play techniques are in order. The technical issues will be presented in many contexts, not necessarily in relation to any particular hand, with an understanding that the readers possess at least an elementary knowledge of the topic. The area of signaling, however, has been omitted almost completely. There will hardly be any mention of the count, attitude, standard or reverse signals, etc. The reason is that the issue of signaling would immensely expand the scope of the book and would weaken the picture of defensive play we seek to present here: defense as an exercise in logical thinking. With such an approach, signaling is but an addition, certainly a very useful addition that even the author makes use of on a daily basis and without which playing at a high level of professionalism would not be possible.

EXAMPLE 1

Significant value we can hope for in partner's hand

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

Vul: None

Lead: ♦A

W	N	E	S
1 ♦	X	3 ♦	Pass
Pass	X	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

After our diamond ace lead, we can see that the dummy proved to be adequate to the auction. Partner follows with the four (showing an odd count), and declarer with the nine. What should our next move be?

LEARNING TO THINK

SOLUTION 1

Partner's bidding is preemptive. From the count of our hand and dummy's hcp (14+21), it is evident that the only significant value we can hope for in the partner's hand is the trump king. Therefore, the defense is expected to take one trick each in spades, hearts, and diamonds. Where can the fourth trick come from?

Placing the trump king in partner's hand calls for an immediate heart switch. Playing the heart ace followed by another heart will guarantee us a heart ruff; a step that declarer cannot avoid.

Full hand

	♠	A Q 6		
	♥	K Q J 7		
	♦	5 2		
	♣	A K Q 8		
♠	9 5 3		♠	K 4
♥	A 6		♥	10 5 3 2
♦	A K Q 7 3		♦	J 10 8 6 4
♣	J 4 2		♣	6 3
	♠	J 10 8 7 2		
	♥	9 8 4		
	♦	9		
	♣	10 9 7 5		