

Duck Duck Goose!

Did you ever play the Duck Duck Goose game when you were a kid? Once was probably enough if you did. So how does it apply to the game of bridge?

To know when to **DUCK** a trick in a bridge hand is a formidable weapon whether you're on offense or defense. And if you **DUCK** when you shouldn't you're likely to become the **GOOSE** at the table! So plan carefully.

Part I. Ducking on Offense

First let's deal with ducking when you're on offense. Since much is written about declarer play these types of ducking plays are fairly common and most declarers are well versed on their necessity. But just for the fun of it, let's review a couple that should be part of a declarer's repertoire.

Sometimes a declarer gains a trick or two or even makes a contract by using a ducking tactic at some point in the play of the hand. This maneuver is often necessary in a suit that's an important source of tricks as in the example below:

Example No 1:

	North		Contract: 3NT			
	♠ 7652		Opening Lead: ♦J			
	♥ AQJ54					
	♦ 96					
	♣ 53		Bidding:			
West		East	South	West	North	East
♠ 94		♠ QJ108	1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
♥ K6		♥ 9872	2NT	Pass	3♦*	Pass
♦ J10873		♦ Q42	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass
♣ KQ98		♣ 106				
	South					
	♠ AK3					
	♥ 103					
	♦ AK5					
	♣ AJ742					

*Checkback or new minor forcing

What's the best chance for nine tricks? Obviously it looks like the heart suit is a source of tricks so win the diamond lead and put the ten of hearts on the table. At the actual table that is exactly what South did. West covered the heart with the King and dummy won with the Ace. Declarer then tried to cash the heart suit but alas they split 4-2 with West having started with the Kx. Now declarer could only find 8 tricks.

So what should South have done differently. From the title of this article you should probably figure out that declarer's best chance was to **DUCK** and let West win the ♥King. Now if hearts break no worse than 4-2 declarer can get four heart tricks to go with two spades, two diamonds and one club for nine tricks.

Incidentally, if the King of hearts were in East's hand, it would be mandatory for East to **DUCK** smoothly when declarer leads the ten of hearts.

Example No. 2:

	North	
	♠ AQ3	Contract: 6NT by South
	♥ AKQ5	Opening lead: ♣K
	♦ J1098	
	♣ 76	
West		East
♠ 1096		♠ J8754
♥ J964		♥ 32
♦ 64		♦ 532
♣ KQJ9		♣ 832
	South	
	♠ K2	
	♥ 1087	
	♦ AKQ7	
	♣ A1054	

Here you have 11 top tricks.....3 spades, 3 hearts, 4 diamonds and 1 club. The secret is to find one more. Even if you don't know much about squeeze plays you've probably heard that for a squeeze to work you need to "rectify the count". This means that you need to be within one trick of your contract for a squeeze to have a chance of working. Therefore, on this hand, you need to **DUCK** the first trick and then hopefully take the next twelve via a squeeze. It is not my intent to

go into depth about squeeze plays but ‘ducking’ here is good technique so put it in your arsenal. Try it on this hand. West continues with the ♣Q and the rest is up to you!

(Clues: Watch your entries back and forth and think about West having four hearts to go with four or more clubs!)

Part II. Ducking on Defense

Ducking as a defensive ploy seems to be more difficult to understand and definitely harder to do at the bridge table. First of all it must be done smoothly to be effective and second of all one must rely on proper defensive techniques from partner for it to work.

Example No. 3

	North		Contract 3NT
	♠KQ87		Opening lead: ♣10
	♥K		
	♦AKQ65		Bidding:
	♣Q65		
West		East	West North East South
♠A93		♠J106	Pass 1♦ Pass 1♥
♥9864		♥A52	Pass 1♠ Pass 1NT
♦84		♦J10973	Pass 3NT (all pass)
♣K1098		♣J4	
	South		
	♠542		
	♥QJ1073		
	♦2		
	♣A732		

After declarer plays the ♣Queen from the dummy on the ♣10 lead, he can develop only 8 tricks if East ducks the ♥King. It’s a relatively easy play for East to **DUCK** as he should know that declarer probably doesn’t have both black Aces to use as entries to his hearts. East needs to do this ducking play in tempo. To hesitate and then duck provides partner with UI (Unauthorized Information). [Although this ‘slow ducking situation’ happens more often than it should, the director is rarely consulted and has a difficult task if he is as the Laws of Duplicate Bridge have done little to address it.]

Example No. 4:

	North ♠ 864 ♥ 92 ♦ 73 ♣ KQ8764		Contract 3NT Opening lead: ♥5 Bidding:												
West ♠ J973 ♥ K10753 ♦ 105 ♣ 105	East ♠ Q105 ♥ J84 ♦ KJ94 ♣ A93	South ♠ AK2 ♥ AQ6 ♦ AQ862 ♣ J2	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">South</td> <td style="width: 25%;">West</td> <td style="width: 25%;">North</td> <td style="width: 25%;">East</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>3NT</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	South	West	North	East	2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass		
South	West	North	East												
2NT	Pass	3NT	Pass												
Pass	Pass														

After South opens 2NT showing 20-21 HCP's, North has no problem bidding the NT game. Declarer wins the open heart lead and immediately leads the Jack of clubs. It is important here that West give count in the club suit so that East will **DUCK** until it's right to win his Ace. If East takes his Ace of clubs immediately North-South will make at least 10 tricks and probably 11. This very elementary example vividly portrays one of the primary objectives for ducking on defense.....and that is to cut the communications between the declarer and dummy.

Sometimes it is necessary to **DUCK** twice. Dummy may have something like KQJxx of a suit and you have Axx behind it. The same principles apply as above....partner giving you count so that you know when to win the trick in order to prevent declarer from enjoying the extra tricks in that suit.

Example No. 5:

North
♠ A10
♥ J1075
♦ QJ2
♣ J753

Contract: 3NT by South
Opening lead: ♠4

Bidding:

West
♠ 42
♥ 432
♦ K10965
♣ 1064

East
♠ KQ875
♥ A986
♦ 3
♣ K98

East	South	West	North
1♠	1NT	Pass	3NT

South
♠ J963
♥ KQ
♦ A874
♣ AQ2

On the ♠4 lead declarer plays the ♠10 from dummy and East needs to **DUCK** (but at the same time encourage) and let dummy's ♠10 win the trick. This play is necessary so that your partner West, if or when he gets in, has another spade to lead. If East were to win and continue spades West would have no more spades to lead when he got in. The defenders would then only enjoy the long tricks in the spade suit if East has two side winners. Since East has only one sure entry, a **DUCK** is in order.

It is unclear how declarer will attempt to make 3NT after East ducks the spade lead but surely he will first play on the heart suit. Again East needs to duck..... both the ♥K and ♥Q. Now declarer needs to decide how to attack the minor suits. What is clear is that if East-West continue to defend as well as they have started South's **GOOSE** is cooked.

Example No. 6: North

♠ KQ32
♥ KQ10
♦ Q87
♣ 853

Contract 6♣

Opening Lead ♦4

Bidding: Immaterial

West

♠ 9764
♥ J98
♦ 10964
♣ A4

East

♠ 105
♥ 432
♦ KJ532
♣ J76

South

♠ AJ8
♥ A765
♦ A
♣ KQ1092

It's fairly easy to reach a club slam so the problem is not the bidding but the play of the hand. It seems as though the only problem is the play of the trump suit as there are no worrisome problems in the side suits. The standard way to play this combination absent any contrary information is to lead from the dummy towards declarer's ♣KQ. If the first trump trick is won with the King or the Queen it is proper to return to dummy and lead another small trump usually playing East for the Ace. If West takes the first club honor king with the ace, declarer's best chance is to go to the dummy and finesse East for the jack.

On this particular combination it is necessary for West to smoothly **DUCK** the first club trick putting declarer at an agonizing guess when partner plays small on the second club off dummy. West must do this without thought. If West thinks about it at all, the ducking play becomes suspicious and will cause a wary declarer to think twice on his next play. Do remember though that bridge is not like poker where it is permissible to mislead your opponents by your mannerisms. In bridge such actions are considered unethical. So West must decide ahead of time in order to **DUCK** smoothly.

Example No. 7:

North
♠ 83
♥ QJT2
♦ KQ43
♣ 864

Dealer: West Vul: Both

Bidding:

North	East	South	West
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♣	X (all pass)

West	East
♠ QT9	♠ KJ6542
♥ K9853	♥ A74
♦ A2	♦ JT5
♣ A93	♣ 5
	South
	♠ A7
	♥ 6
	♦ 9876
	♣ KQJT72

When I first started to learn bridge my father would tell me “Perhaps it’s better not to win a trick if you don’t know what you’re going to lead on the next play”. To this day that advice is still worth considering. (Charles Goren later won the Bols Bridge Tip competition with the suggestion.)

When I played this hand I got it wrong. I was West. As you can see East-West need to beat 5♣ three tricks in order to penalize the North South pair for not letting them play and make their vulnerable game. I led the ♦A planning to get partner in with a spade for a diamond ruff. Declarer won the second diamond in the dummy and promptly led a club which I won. I then led a spade expecting partner to win and give me my ruff. Alas, partner has the wrong Ace!! However, the real fault was mine. My correct play is to **DUCK** the first club and win the second one giving partner a chance to signal his entry. Since I erred we only beat 5♣ two tricks for 500 instead of three tricks for 800 and I was the **GOOSE!**

Experienced players know the ducking plays well and usually know when to decline winning a trick that it is presented to them for the taking. It is used in a number of situations.... by declarer to cut off the opponents' communication in a suit and by defenders to maintain communication in a suit. It is also used to confuse or mislead declarer and/or defender. As such is can a real source of aggravation. But it’s also a weapon that is needed in your little bag of tricks and techniques.

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