

SOME TIPS ON DEFENCE

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Lavinthal signals

Hy Lavinthal is a famous name in bridge. He devised the 'suit preference' signal. You may know one example of this as the McKenney discard. In this signal your first discard shows where your strength is without wasting a possibly important card in that suit. For example, defending a spade contract, a discard of a high heart suggests a diamond (the higher of the other two suits), and a low heart suggests the lower suit (clubs). This was popularised by McKenney, but the concept should be credited to Lavinthal. The Lavinthal principle extends much further than just to discards.

♠76	
♥8654	
♦K763	
♣A62	
♠Q83	♠5
♥2	♥KQJ10973
♦9854	♦QJ10
♣QJ854	♣73
	♠AKJ10942
	♥A
	♦A2
	♣K109

Here is a famous hand from years ago, showing a rather spectacular example. East opened with 4H and NS bid to 6S by South.

West led the ♥2 to the 4, 7 and Ace. South played three rounds of trumps, with West now on lead. He had to choose between diamonds or clubs. As you can see, a club lead would be fatal. But West had no trouble finding the diamond lead and the slam went off. How did he pick it right? Because East told him. On the second and third leads of spades, East played the ♥K followed by

the ♥3. This strong high/low signal in hearts (Lavinthal style) strongly suggested diamonds. East knew that a diamond lead was safe, and West got the message.

There are some other lessons to be learnt from this hand. In giving signals to partner, don't pussyfoot around. The KQJ109 are all equals. You may think that playing the Q or J may convey the same message. But make the message for partner totally clear.

Another common situation where the Lavinthal signal is vital to your defence:

You hold ♠872 ♥A ♦AJ9872 ♣954. You have shown diamonds in the bidding. The opponents are in 4S and partner leads the ♦2 which you decide is probably a singleton. You cash your ♦A. What card do you return for partner to ruff?

Lavinthal applies. Lead of the highest card suggests that partner, when he ruffs, should return a heart (the higher of the non-trump suits). So you lead the ♦J, partner ruffs and returns a heart. You take the ♥A, and return the ♦9 (your now highest diamond), partner ruffs and returns a heart for you to ruff. Your signalling has allowed you to take the first 5 tricks before declarer gets into the action. Had your outside Ace been the ♣A, then you would have returned your lowest diamond. If you didn't have any preference for partner's return suit, you would have used a middle diamond, the 9 the 8 or 7)

Some more Lavinthal situations:

- Against a suit contract, partner leads an Ace to trick 1, and a singleton appears in dummy. It seems likely that partner will want to shift suit. Show him what you would like.. A low card suggests a shift to the lower of the non-trump suits, and a high card suggests the higher of the non-trump suits. A 5, 6 or 7 tends to be neutral

- Partner knows from the bidding or play that you have a long suit that is now not relevant e.g. you now have the ♥J9652. Against 4S, in discarding, show your preference – the ♥J shows diamonds, the ♥2 shows clubs, and the 6 or 5 is neutral. No need to use a potentially useful card in another suit as a signal when you have an otherwise useless suit to give a strong signal.

- Occasionally against a suit contract you will find yourself with AK doubleton in a side suit. If your normal lead from AKx is the Ace, then to show the doubleton you would play the King, then the Ace. If from AKx you lead the King, then from the doubleton you play Ace, then King. Whatever, on the second lead partner should know you have AK bare. At trick 2, he should give a Lavinthal signal to suggest a switch to get him in to give you a ruff.

The Rule of 11

We learn this as beginners, but should always be using it routinely. It applies where partner is making the standard lead of the fourth highest of his long suit. Presume partner leads the $\spadesuit 6$. The rule says: subtract the six from 11, and that tells you the number of cards (in this case, five) in the other three hands (including yours and declarer's) higher than the 6.

For example, against 3NT partner leads the $\spadesuit 6$ and you see the $\spadesuit 98$ in dummy. You hold the $\spadesuit Q105$. So do your sums. $11-6=5$. There are 5 cards in the other three hands higher than the 6. You can see 4 of them – the 98 in dummy and Q10 in your hand. So declarer has only one card higher than the 6. You play the $\spadesuit Q$ and declarer plays $\spadesuit K$. You now **know** that your side can take all the rest of the spade tricks. Here was the distribution:

	98		Why 11? Whilst there are 13 cards in each suit, the cards run in effect not from 1-13, but from 2-14, with
AJ763		Q105	11,12,13 and 14 being J,Q,K, and A. If you lead the
			6, there are 14-6 i.e. 8 cards in the whole suit
	K32		higher than the 6. We know that, if we are leading
			fourth best, then 3 of these are in the leader's hand.

To allow for this, let's subtract 6 from 11 (instead of 14) to see how many are in the other hands.

If you were leading third highest instead of fourth, there would be two higher in leader's hand, so you would use the rule of 12. If leading fifth highest, you would use the rule of 10.

Tips for rare occasions.

A few tips for rare occasions, but, when they do arise, will pay off in gold.

You are on lead against 3NT, and you hold $\clubsuit AKJ1073$. You may or may not have an outside entry. How do you play this?

Tip: have this agreement with partner. When I lead an Ace against 3NT, I want you to drop an honour under the Ace if you have one (remember a 10 is an honour). Otherwise give me a count showing an odd or an even number of clubs. (lowest card = odd number and highest card = even number).

If partner drops the $\clubsuit Q$, you are delighted and will probably be able to run off the top 6 tricks. If the $\clubsuit Q$ doesn't appear it is best to switch and hope that partner can get in early to return the club through declarer's Queen. Of course declarer may have the Queen doubleton and partner's count card may indicate this. You may not always get this right, but you will more often than not.

You would adopt the same approach with $AKQ10xx$, but not $AQJ10x$.

Some other tips against 3NT:

- A double of an uninterrupted auction to 3NT (where no suits have been bid

e.g. 1NT – 3NT) says to partner 'Lead a spade. I have a running spade suit.'
Hasn't turned up yet, but one day it will if we live long enough!

- A double of 3NT where dummy has bid a suit says 'Lead dummy's first suit'.
- In a competitive auction, a double of their 3NT says: if we have bid only one suit, lead that suit. If we have bid more than one suit, lead your suit and not mine.