

The dangerous opponent (in a NT-contract)

An introduction for beginners

There is often a lot of confusion concerning the concept of the "dangerous opponent". First of all both opponents may be dangerous. The definition is:

An opponent is dangerous, if declarer doesn't want him be on lead.

There are mainly 2 reasons why an opponent may be dangerous:

- 1) If he has a long suit to cash.
- 2) If he can lead through one of your minor honors.

Your duty as declarer is NOT to give the lead to a dangerous opponent.

This can be done in different ways:

1. Often you have the choice to which opponent you lose a crucial trick.
The standard example is a suit where you are missing the Q only.
Holding AJ10xx (AJ10xx in your hand) - K9xx (K9xx in dummy) you learned "with 9 never".
But this saying is not true, if you don't want a certain opponent on lead. In that case you finesse the dangerous opponent for the Q to prevent him from getting the lead. No problem if the other (non dangerous) opponent gets the lead.
2. If you have to lose the lead twice, lose it to the dangerous opponent first.
3. There are many techniques to make an opponent dangerous or not. They are mostly associated with the hold-up-play. Examples:
 - a. You hold AJx – xx (AJx in hand, xx at dummy), LHO leads a small and RHO produces K or Q
Take the A and RHO is the dangerous one, who can lead through your Jx.
Hold up twice (hoping RHO has only 3 cards) and LHO is dangerous, because only he can cash out the suit.
 - b. You hold KQx - xxx, LHO leads low and RHO play the 10 or J.
Take the K and RHO is dangerous, because he can lead through your Qx.
Hold up and RHO will be exhausted of the suit, while LHO is the dangerous one, who can cash out the suit.

The decision to hold up or not depends not on rules, but on the analysis of the whole hand and your plan in 4 steps:

1. How many sure tricks do I have?
Count your sure tricks (not the potential ones) in every suit.
2. How many additional tricks do I need?
Subtract the number of sure tricks from the number of tricks you need to make your bid.
3. Which suit(s) may provide these additional tricks?
No problem to identify the possible suit(s), but often difficult to decide, which one to establish is better. This decision depends on probabilities and the answers to question 4)
4. What may happen while I try to establish my additional tricks?
 - a. How often will I lose the lead?
 - b. To which opponent will I lose the lead? Can I control this?
 - c. Which opponent is dangerous? Can I control this?

The questions 1), 2) and 3) are easy to answer in a flash, but question 4) maybe very difficult. To answer question 4) you must imagine the whole play of the hand in advance and if possible take precautions in case there are distributions possible, that may be dangerous for your contract.