

The Coolest Gizmos and Gadgets



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A gizmo for the defense!

This column has focused on suggestions for some terrific bidding gizmos and gadgets, especially ones that can be used without altering your current system: Gizmos and gadgets that simply use idle space. This month's topic is a bit different, though the concept of using idle space is still in effect.

As declarer, you should absolutely love it when the opponents tell you they play "jack denies a higher honor and 10 or 9 promises zero or two higher" as their opening lead convention. It makes decisions so much easier at trick one. Consider this situation: Left-hand opponent leads the jack, denying a higher honor. You have the A-3-2 in your hand and the Q-6-5 on the board. If the opponents were playing standard leads, the location of the king would be a mystery, but with this lead convention (frequently called "journalist" leads), you know the king is sitting behind the queen, so not only will you *not* put up the queen now, you won't do it if LHO gets in and leads the suit again. Many times have declarers in this situation benefited by *not* putting up this queen. Thank that silly lead convention for picking up those extra tricks over the years.

Now for the gizmo. In the latter stages of play, a situation can come up that effectively uses the "jack denies higher and 10 or 9 promises 0 or 2 higher" agreement to the benefit of the *defense*! Let me illustrate. Suppose you find yourself on lead behind the dummy and you determine that a

switch to a certain suit is critical. Say the Q-3-2 sits on the board and you happen to lead the jack from behind it. If you're playing standard honor leads in the middle of a deal, how would your partner know what to do with the A-8-7 after declarer plays low? If you led from the K-J-10, he must play the ace and return one, but if you have just the J-10-9, he must duck and potentially take two tricks by preserving the ace to take the king later. If, however, you play that the jack denies a higher honor and the 10 or 9 shows zero or two higher in the middle of a hand, when you switch to the 10, partner will know that declarer either has the king and the jack or neither. In both of those cases he must win the ace and return the suit, knowing he will not blow a trick.

That's a terrific example of how using "jack denies" can help your side on defense.

Another situation where this agreement will help the defense is when you choose to lead into the A-J-x on the board when you're "over" the dummy. You might be doing this because you're otherwise endplayed or you might be doing it because you feel it's critical. Anyway, say you switch to the 10. Declarer plays low. With the K-x-x, should partner put up the king or duck it? It depends on whether you led from the Q-10-9 or just the 10-9-x. If you have the queen, partner must play the king, so that you can later win the queen and the 10. But if declarer has the queen, part-

ner will give declarer three tricks if he puts up the king, whereas ducking will hold declarer to two tricks. Thus, by agreeing that the lead of the 10 or the 9 in the middle of the deal shows zero or two higher, you can overcome the unknown. It is true that the expert player will make better-than-average guesses, but what expert would not want to go right as often as possible?

One notable exception to this gizmo is when you lead a jack or 10 and the card below it is in the dummy. That would suggest that you are making a *surrounding* play. For example, if you switch to the jack, and the 10-x-x is on the board (you are behind the dummy), you probably have something like the A-J-9 and are hoping to pick up the entire suit if declarer has the Q-x-x and partner the K-x-x. This is superior to leading low, which will give declarer a trick by ducking from Q-x-x. Thus, a surrounding play takes precedence over the "jack denies" gizmo.

Within an experienced partnership, this situation will come up many times per year. It is very satisfying to make the correct play over and over again. Look for it! □