



Adventures in Bridge

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This Week in Bridge

(503) Power Shifts and Surround Plays

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Level: 8 of 10 (4 of 6)

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General

When we are on defense and gain the lead in the middle of the hand, we often attack dummy's weakest suit. This is particularly true when dummy is on our right. If dummy's weak suit has no honors, then we frequently have little risk in the way that we attack this suit. But when there is an honor in the dummy then we must attack this suit by leading the right card. Frequently the way that we will attack an honor holding in the dummy will be to lead a higher honor. This play allows us to surround dummy's honor and prevents declarer from playing low and making use of dummy's honor to win the trick. Here we look at how to attack certain holdings in the dummy.

Power Shifts

Before we look at traditional surround plays for the defense, let's look at a couple of examples where it seems crazy for partner to play the card they have played. In these situations, we will look at how we can differentiate a "normal" holding in the suit we are attacking from an extremely powerful holding.

Attacking Dummy's Queen

Example 1

If the dummy holds Qxx+ and is on our right, then attacking this suit is attractive when we hold no honors. But if we have a strong holding, like the Ace and King, then we need to know how to attack this suit. Here is a simple agreement with partner to help them place honors around the table.

Qxx

AKJ

From this holding, we shift to the King. Playing the King without the Ace would be a wild play, so it will be clear to partner we have the Ace – especially when declarer does not capture our King with the Ace. This play of the King, with the Queen in the dummy, is a *Power Shift* and promises that we have the Queen completely surrounded – that we hold the Ace-King-and-Jack behind the Queen. We can cash the King, shift to another suit to get partner on lead, and then get partner to lead this suit back through dummy's Queen.



Example 2

From a weaker holding, without the surrounding cards, we want partner to know that we need them to have a stronger holding.

Qxx
AKx

From this holding we play the Ace, so that partner knows that we do not have such a powerful holding.

Qxx
JTx AKx
xxx

Here we play the Ace and then get partner back on lead to lead the Jack through dummy's Queen.

Attacking Dummy's Jack

Example 3

We can make a similar play when dummy has the Jack.

Jxx
KQT

Shifting to the Queen, with the Jack in the dummy on our right, lets partner know that we have a *Power Holding* around the Jack.

Example 4

If we have the KQ behind dummy's Jack but we do not have the surround card of the Ten, then we shift to a higher card.

Jxx
KQx

Here we play the King. If partner discourages, denying the Ace, then partner knows that we do not have the Ten and should not play this suit without the good holding.

Jxx
T9xx KQx
Axx

After we play the King, when partner gets back in they return the Ten through dummy's Jack.



Traditional Surround Plays

There are other holdings where we shift to an honor above dummy's honor to allow our side to take a maximum number of tricks. These plays are called surround plays. (Power shifts are a variation of these surround plays).

Example 5

```
      Txx
Axx      KJ9x
      Qxx
```

From this holding East attacks by leading the Jack. From this play, the defense can take all the tricks. If East or West attack this suit by leading any card other than the Jack, then the declarer has a stopper in this suit.

Example 6

```
      Txx
Kxx      AJ9x
      Qxx
```

This is a similar position where playing the Jack makes for a surround play.

Example 7

```
      Txx
A98      KJxx
      Qxx
```

In this position, East leads the Jack. Although East does not have the surrounding card of the 9, the defense can still take all the tricks because West has the 9 and 8.

Example 8

```
      Jxx
      AQTx
```

In this position East leads the Queen. If South has the King, then they will win the trick, but this leaves East well positioned around dummy's Jack. If West has the King, they can encourage (or even unblock), and allow the defense to take all the tricks in this suit.

Conclusion

Here we have looked at how to attack a suit in the dummy that contains an honor when we have a powerful holding of our own. Learning how to attack these holdings in the dummy is a bit of technical skill, but one that is extremely valuable when you face these types of situations. Attacking these types of dummy holdings in the wrong way can be extremely costly. Learning these surround plays and power shifts will improve your defensive card play.