

# PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR ACTIVE AND PASSIVE DEFENSE

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Defense is a difficult subject for students and teachers alike. This did not faze Eldad Ginossar[1], affectionately known as “Gino.” His first lessons at the Chicago Duplicate Club, after relocating to his new hometown of Chicago, IL. from Israel, was on defense. By that time, he already had more than 15 years teaching experience and the author of “Power Up Your Bridge Game” [2]. Fred Gitelman was quite impressed with how “smiley Gino” actually enjoyed the game while competing at the highest levels. Gino’s Power Up Your Bridge Game book is for the Intermediate and Advance levels. He covers a lot of ground on defense, including advance hand evaluation concepts, such as the Offense-Defense Ratio (ODR) as well as practical guidelines on active and passive defense.

As Larry Cohen pointed out during his keynote address at the ABTA virtual mini-Convention, we have an aging student population. This also correlates with the findings from Henry Meguid’s poll of the ABTA membership at large. Computing on defense (Counting the distribution and visualizing the opponent’s hand) is challenging at best, if not daunting to our senior students. Strategies and guidelines resonate with them and relatable to their life experiences.

Gino has generously agreed to share his strategies on active and passive defense with the teaching community.

## Active and Passive Defense

Rush to cash or promote your winners is active defense, or aggressive defense as Larry Cohen calls it. Passive defense focuses on losing the initiative without losing tricks. You play the “waiting game” as your winners will not go away. Active and Passive Strategies are opposite lines of defense.

## The Passive Strategy

As defender, passive strategy should be the default. It works best when the declarer has plenty of work to do.

Indications for a passive defense are mostly found by looking at the dummy:

- A balanced dummy with scattered values.
- A “winnerless”, “boring” dummy.
- A “dead” dummy – without entries.
- Opponents with balanced hands and 8-cards trump contract.
- You/Partner holds winners in dummy’s side suits.
- No indications suggesting for an active defense.

This slide of Gino’s summarizes the Passive Strategy best:

Editor’s note: the slides you see in this article are not a facsimile of Gino’s slides. They have been presented as text, for ease of reading on a range of computers, tablets, and smartphones.

### Passive Strategy in a Shell

- Be patient
- Wait for your winners
- Let the declarer do the work
- Lose the initiative
- Safely ‘get out’ of your hand
- Beware of cashing winners
- Avoid breaking a new suit
- Avoid starting a frozen suit
- Do not underlead honors
- Force declare to ruff

A note on this slide.

Gino’s presentations are not static. He uses fly-ins as each new concept is introduced. At the end of the lesson, they become a “natural” summary as such. He often uses powerful imagery to reinforce or as a memory aid. For those of us who have seen Henry Meguid’s professionally produced and interactive presentations, Gino’s is in the same league.

## Active Strategy

The two main indications for an active defense.

### When to Rush for your Winners

- Dummy shows a “threatening side suit.
- To give/receive a ruff  
(when not holding a natural trump trick)

### Capture the Dummy

When the dummy has a long-running side suit containing many potential or sure winners, this should signal an alarm to the defenders that declarer will dump losers under the dummy’s winners. This calls for an active strategy.

Similarly, when you need to give/receive a ruff, you have to do it ASAP before declarer draws trump.

## Active or Passive?

The questions to ask:

### Strategy defending against a NT contract

Should you establish the suit you have led,  
or switch suits?

### Strategy defending against a suit contract

Be active or passive

Gino promotes "Thinking Defense." He coined the concept "Capture the Dummy" to help students develop their intuition skills instead of the "almost impossible" Computing on Defense. As soon as the dummy is tabled, both defenders need to Capture the Dummy. As both are looking at the SAME dummy, they often reach the same conclusion on which strategy to choose.

Gino used this deal to illustrate the process.

Dealer East  
Vulnerable: North/South

♠ A 2	♠ 8 6 5 4 3	♠ K 7
♥ Q J 4	♥ 8 7	♥ A 10 9 6 2
♦ K Q 10 9 2	♦ J 7	♦ A 8 3
♣ 10 3 2	♣ A 8 7 4	♣ Q 9 7
	♠ Q J 10 9	
	♥ K 5 3	
	♦ 6 5 4	
	♣ K J 6	

West	North	East	South
		1♥	P
2♦	P	2NT	P
4♥	All pass		

As dummy comes down, both defenders look at the dummy  
– **Capture the Dummy!**

Diamonds in the dummy are strong indications to be aggressive - the Active Strategy.

From the bidding, East did not use Jacoby 2NT as the first

response and raised to 4♥ as the rebid. This probably indicates an 8-card trump fit. Holding the ♥K, South realizes that declarer probably will try to finesse, which will fail. South has to switch to clubs upon gaining the lead – Not Spades, Not Hearts (Trump), Not Diamonds (the Threatening Dummy). Leading "Low from 3" - "Bottom of Something" would suggest honor holdings in clubs.

North has to analyze partner's lead. The ♠Q is likely the top of a sequence, promising at the least the ♠J or a singleton. If the ♠J were a singleton, that would put declarer with 5 spades. East would have open with 1♠ instead of 1♥. With no winners in spades, North realizes the need to discourage continuation in spades.

A successful defense might go like this:

♠Q won with the Ace.

♥Q led, losing the finesse to the ♥K

♣6 led to the Ace.

Dummy's diamonds advertise PANIC – Cash Your Winners. When North wins with ♠A, "Trusting Partner", North would return a low club. Declarer's ♠Q is end-played.

Defenders take 4 tricks off the bat. Declarer is down 1.

## Personal Experience

The pandemic has beached me. The silver lining is that I had been able to take lessons for professional growth as well as playing some bridge while taking short breaks in my online teaching. Taking pointers from Gino, the Passive Strategy has served me well playing with pickup partners. Gino is like a Larry Cohen, a Robert Todd, entralling the students and have them thirsting for more.

[1] <https://www.bridgewithgino.com>

[2] Bridge Book Press, Lexington, NC.

Eldad  
Ginossar

