

## The Advancing Player

# Negative Inferences In Bridge

By Maritha Pottenger

[marithapottenger@gmail.com](mailto:marithapottenger@gmail.com)



There are lots of negative inferences in bridge. I like to refer to “the dog that didn't bark” from the Sherlock Holmes story. Holmes says to Watson: “Behold the dog, Watson.” Watson (his straight man) replies: “What about the dog? The dog didn't do anything.” Yes, Sherlock intones portentously, “The dog did not bark. Therefore, the dog knew the murderer.” [Cue ominous music in the background.]

People overlook lots of negative inferences. What did the opponents NOT lead? What did the opponents NOT bid (e.g., did not make negative doubles, did not make support double; bid 2 suits but did not do Michaels or Unusual 2NT, etc.). When opponents discard, what suit do they avoid discarding? Being alert to these clues will help you in playing and defending bridge hands!!

Here are a couple of examples from play on BBO.

### Hand #1

*Partner*

♠Q74  
♥AQJ863  
♦AKJ10  
♣-

♠A10  
♥954  
♦976  
♣96432

♠KJ865  
♥K  
♦Q54  
♣QJ108

*Maritha*

♠932  
♥1072  
♦832  
♣AK75

Dlr: East Vul: E/W

West	North	East	South
		1♠	Pass
Pass	2♥	X	Pass
3♣	3♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Robot East opens 1♠ and South and West pass. North bids 2♥. (Some people would double first.) and Robot East doubles. Even with two quick tricks, you decide as South not to be encouraging, so you pass,

awaiting developments. West bids 3♣ and North bids 3♥. If you were SURE that East would lead a club, you would happily raise to 4♥, but you are looking at the “death holding” in spades—which usually has the result of ♠A; ♠K; spade ruff—especially on this auction. You fully expect spades to be 5-3-2-3 around the table. So, you pass.

Alas, the lead is a club—the ♣Q. As Declarer, North, there is an important **negative inference here: why did East NOT lead a spade?** East must **not** be looking at the ♠A and ♠K. Therefore, **West has ONE of the top spades. Ergo, East has all the other HCP to make up its opening hand.**

So, take two top clubs, discarding two spade losers. Play a heart to the Ace (no finesse when you “know” where the King is). The singleton King falling is your reward. Pull trumps and play diamonds from the top—you know where the Queen is. You lose one spade and one diamond.

## Hand #2

	<i>Partner</i>	
	♠4	
	♥AK1075	
	♦J9543	
	♣KJ	
♠AKQJ102		♠53
♥QJ3		♥9862
♦10		♦AKQ7
♣1073		♣865
	<i>Maritha</i>	
	♠9876	
	♥4	
	♦863	
	♣AQ942	

Dlr: East Vul: E/W

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♠	2♥	Pass	Pass
2♠	3♦	4♠	X
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West opens 1♠ in 3<sup>rd</sup> seat, and partner overcalls 2♥. East passes and you pass. West rebids 2♠ and North now bids 3♦. (You expect 5-4 in the reds as you think North might have bid Michaels with 5-5.) East now comes alive with a 4♠ call.

You double that. East must have secondary spade support, so they do NOT have a big cross ruff. Your 4 trumps will be a huge nuisance. Partner has the red suits, and you have clubs. E/W are NOT coming to enough tricks.

Partner leads the ♥A and can tell that your 4 is your lowest outstanding heart. Since you play upside down attitude, partner knows that is from either the Q4; J4 or singleton 4. So, she continues with the ♥K, and you discard the ♣2 (encouraging) Partner actually has a problem now. If she gives you a heart ruff with her lowest heart (suit preference for hearts), you will probably cash ♣A and play a club to her King,

but that might block the club suit. Or, she can try cashing the ♣K BEFORE giving you the heart ruff. **he negative inference available here is that you did NOT bid over 2H.** If you held 7 or 8 clubs with your singleton heart, you probably would have bid 3C. So, cashing the King of clubs first and THEN giving South a heart ruff leads to a 3-trick set. Giving the heart ruff and then partner playing Ace of clubs and a club to your King gains a 2-trick set. Since E/W are vulnerable, it is a great board either way.