

## The Advancing Player



# Good Defenders Save Their Partners From Headaches

By Maritha Pottenger

### Hand #1

♠J85  
♥AQJ  
♦10532  
♣QJ2

♠10973  
♥865  
♦64  
♣8754

♠AK62  
♥K103  
♦K98  
♣A106

♠Q4  
♥9742  
♦AQJ7  
♣K93

After two passes East opened 1NT. I also passed, and 1NT was the final contract.

I led the 7♥ (**second highest from 4 bad**—conventional for NT). Partner has to figure out if that is second-highest from four bad; top of nothing from three to the 7; or 4<sup>th</sup> best from K1097. He elected to insert the J♥ to find out. That lost to the K♥ and Declarer cashed the A♠ and K♠ (with my Q♠ falling doubleton) and a spade to partner's J♠. I discarded the 4♥ on this round, not knowing the heart situation. [From my point of view, it appears that I have led into Declarer's AK10 or AKQ10 on the opening lead.]

Partner then returned a low diamond, which totally misled me. Low usually promises an honor and the 10 is NOT good enough. **Partner should cash the Q first to tell me what is going on!** Then partner can lead the 5♦ (and I will know that the 3 and 2 are missing when Declarer plays the 8, and that Declarer's King is guarded, and that partner's 5 is top of nothing NOT low from an honor). I can win my J♦, and return a heart to my partner's A♥. Partner will then lead the 10♦, and Declarer's K♦ will be dead meat. We will take 4 diamond tricks. Since I believe (from play at trick #1) that DECLARER owns the A♥, and I have just seen the A♠ and K♠ from Declarer's hand, I am perfectly willing to believe that my partner has the K♦!

My heart discard cost us a trick. If North had won the A♥ and returned the Q♥ at tricks #1 and #2, I would NOT have discarded a heart. I would have discarded a club instead. Then, with best defense, we get 3 hearts; 4 diamonds; and 1 spade. The ONLY time the A♥ followed by Q♥ at tricks #1 and #2 will hurt is if I have led EXACTLY top of nothing from three small. If I have led from 4 to the 10, or four to 9, or even from the K1073, the A♥ followed by Q♥ can never hurt, and will **clarify the suit mightily for partner**.

If Declarer elects to DUCK the Q♥, North can continue with the 3<sup>rd</sup> round. On that variation, however, North must switch to the 10♦ (when in with the J♠), catering to the diamond holding that I had. (North will have a count on the spade suit, and I'll have given a discouraging club, so playing me for great diamonds is the best chance.)

After my heart discard, if North switched to the EITHER the 5♦ or 10♦, we will still be OK, because I will know that North does NOT have the K♦ and will not give East a trick in the suit.

**Part of the job of a good partner is to make things EASY for your partner on defense.**

When you know something that is important for your partner to know (such as ownership of the AQ♥), let her in on the secret.

And remember that **BOSTON rules**: Bottom Of Something (**low promises an honor**) and Top Of Nothing. (High spot card denies an honor.)

### Hand #2

♠J4  
♥K105  
♦108753  
♣1087

♠KQ76  
♥64  
♦Q2  
♣KQ642

♠A1052  
♥982  
♦A94  
♣J92

♠983  
♥AQJ73  
♦KJ6  
♣A5

Defensive signaling is challenging on this hand. South opens 1NT and West overcalls 2♠ (spades & a minor). Note that the West hand meets Mel's Rules for overcalling a strong NT. All pass.

**North leads a low heart because it is the ONE suit in which partner is likely to have something from this auction.** South wins the Queen. The “instinctive” return with the South hand is to lead the Q♥ to “force out” the King if partner does not have it. A little thought will stop South from that instinctive move. **West is known to be 5-5 OR 5-4 in the black suits.** (Although it is NOT clear cut, South—going by the numbers—assumes that West's minor is CLUBS rather than diamonds because South and East have 6 diamonds and only 5 clubs between them.)

If West has a singleton heart, South's return will not matter. However, if West has a doubleton heart, and is only 4-5 in the black suits, **South desperately needs North to lead a diamond** before the A♣ is forced out of the South hand. The ONLY chance to get North in is if North owns the K♥ and West started with two hearts.

South should return the 7♥ (original 4<sup>th</sup> best if that's your agreement on leads) to give partner count. Partner will note that the 3♥ is missing and figure out that South opened 1NT with a 5 card heart suit. North knows as well as South that West owns 9 or 10 black cards.

So, there is no future in hearts. **It is North's duty to lead the minor WHICH IS NOT WEST'S MINOR in case South needs North to finesse something!** Since Dummy is 3-3 in the Minors, but North has 5 diamonds and only 3 clubs, it is clear to North that West's minor is clubs. So, **lead the 8♥ so partner can score her King.**

If North does not win the second round of hearts and shift to a diamond, South will be end played when in with the A, and West will have time to discard two diamonds from Dummy on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> rounds of the club suit. West will then take 5 spade tricks; 4 clubs; and 1 diamond for 10 tricks instead of being held to 9 tricks with the diamond shift.

It is true that North COULD overtake the Q♥ with the K♥, and shift to the 8♦, but that would be totally WRONG if West turns out to have 3 hearts and only 1 diamond and North has blown the chance to take the third round of hearts. Again, **it is South's duty to save North from a defensive headache by returning the 7♥ at trick #2.**

### Hand #3

Dlr: North

Vul: None

♠-

♥J976

♦9873

♣QJ875

♠Q109643

♥53

♦Q2

♣643

♠AKJ87

♥A10

♦KJ64

♣K9

♠52

♥KQ842

♦A105

♣A102

The defense here was all about **trusting partner**. Bidding was wild. East opened 1♠ and South overcalled 2♥. West jumped to 4♠ and North bid 5♥. East took the push to 5♠ and everyone passed.

The lead was the K♥, and **North signaled encouragement**. This is vital because after East takes the A♥ and pulls trumps, she will attack diamonds. South will duck the first diamond and win the A♦ on the second round. Now, **in order to get a 2-trick set, South must trust that North has the J♥ (from that encouraging signal)—and ONLY 4 hearts**. Then, South can UNDERLEAD her Q to get to North's J♥ in order to get the club lead from the North, so that N/S get TWO club tricks.

*If South is too afraid to underlead the heart, she will simply cash the A♣, and cash the Q♥ and settle for down 1.*

There is a **very important inference here** that makes it easier for South to trust North's heart signal. **SEQUENCES take priority in signaling** (whether you are playing upside-down or right side up). So, if North HAD held the J♥ AND 10♥, s/he would have dropped the J♥ to guarantee the 10♥. Therefore, North has the J♥ and East has the 10♥, and it is safe for South to underlead the Q♥.

Of course, alert readers will note that EAST could have avoided the down 2 result by DUCKING the first round of hearts. North is the dangerous hand who can finesse East's vulnerable K♣. (South should hold both minor Aces for the 2-level overcall.) If East DUCKS the first heart, South can never get North in to lead a club through, and E/W lose only 1 heart, 1 diamond, and 1 club for down 1.

With the favorable club position and North's spade void, N/S can actually take 12 tricks in hearts (assuming a spade lead and NOT a psychic diamond lead), but good luck getting there!