

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 4th 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 3rd 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 4th 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 4th and 5th 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!