

# Honor Thy Partner

By Jeff Rubens (USA)

Car A signals for a left turn but starts to turn right then suddenly brakes to a stop. Whereupon Car B, travelling behind A at a normal distance and speed, crashes into a tree.

Bridge 'crashes' are often of this sort. One defender makes a losing play but his partner was at fault.

There is not only a loss on the deal, but also a drop in partnership morale. We seem to mind more when partner causes us to make the fatal move than when he makes it himself.

A player should be alert to partner's problems as well as his own. Everyone tries to help partner by signaling, but better players should aim to go further still.

For example, a good partner tries to remove undesirable options. If you fear that partner may duck his ace in front of dummy's king-jack, you can prevent this by leading the suit yourself. If you cannot get in to lead the suit, perhaps you can discard the queen behind dummy's king-jack!

One measure of a defender's thoughtfulness is how he plays in this sort of situation:

	♠ J	
	♥ 10	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	
♠ Q		♠ —
♥ J		♥ 5
♦ —		♦ 10
♣ —		♣ —
	♠ 7	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9	
	♣ —	

East is on lead at notrump and does not know who has the jack of hearts. But he does know that West has the queen of spades and no diamonds. Leading the five of hearts cannot lose a trick no matter who has the spade seven and heart jack. Leading the ten of diamonds also cannot lose a trick ... provided West guesses correctly which card to keep. A strong defender will not let his partner face this guess.

Where players fall down is in failing to notice that partner may have a problem. Once the problem is seen, protective measures are usually quite simple.

South Deals  
E-W Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
3NT			

West led the seven of hearts to the nine, ace and deuce. As East, what do you return?

In play, East mechanically returned his remaining heart and it was natural for West (who needed only for East to have another heart and one entry) to duck. The defense was now separated from its five tricks and declarer made his contract.

West played the fatal card, but the king of hearts was 'lost' by East. His immediate heart return could accomplish nothing except giving West a headache. East should lead something else at trick two – the eight of clubs, for example. When East leads his remaining heart later, West knows that he is not expected to duck, and now the contract must fail. Note that nothing is lost in the unlikely event that West has the king and jack of hearts.

You can keep the sleepest partner free from harm by removing his losing choice altogether.

South Deals  
Both Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
-	-	-	1SA

West led the five of spades to the six, ace and jack. East returned the two of spades to the queen, king and nine. As West, how do you plan the defense?

West can see seven tricks for the defense: five spades, one diamond and one club. But unless East leads a club early in the play South will strike first with two hearts, four diamonds and a club.

The average West, having reasoned this far, leads the spade four at the third trick. Then, East may win and unthinkingly return a spade. West will win the argument that follows, but South will make his contract.

A good defender scores points before the post mortem by playing the seven of spades before leading the four. When East wins he is out of spades and has no alternative to the winning club switch.

My BOLS bridge tip is:

***Honor thy partner.***

***Show that you treat his problems as your own and actively help him solve them***

Amazingly, this will improve not only partner's defense but also his overall performance. He will be playing more carefully in order to be worthy of your respect.