

## February 2018

You are playing in a Pairs event when you pick up the following hand.

### Bidding

Dealer West

E-W vul

East	W	N	E	S
♠ KQ6	pass	2NT	3H	4S
♥ KQJ8754	all pass			
♦ 65				
♣ 7				

The bidding has been short and sweet.  
Partner leads the ♥10 and dummy goes down

### North

♠ A3  
♥ A62  
♦ A83  
♣ AK832

### East

♠ KQ6  
♥ KQJ8754  
♦ 65  
♣ 7

Declarer wins this in Dummy, cashes the ♠A followed by the ♠3. You win this with the Queen partner following with the ♠5 and ♠9.

Plan your play.

## Initial Analysis

If you automatically reach for the ♥K and if this holds, follow with the ♥Q hoping for a trump promotion, read on – this article is for you.

Here's the problem. If declarer is sitting with the last heart and we fail to take that trick then we are almost certainly going to get a bottom. If on the other hand there is no heart trick to take but we can set up a quick trick for partner in diamonds we need to do that now. But what if we switch to a diamond, won by the Ace in Dummy, and declarer returns to his hand with a club then plays another spade? We are now faced with our worst nightmare; do we try a heart or a diamond? Is it just a guess? Well, for many of us alas the answer to that question is a yes.

When we are defending, apart from the 13 cards we hold in our hand, the biggest clue as to how best to defend the hand comes from seeing the Dummy as now we can better visualize where declarer's possible weaknesses lie. On this particular hand clearly it is with the red suits. Note in passing that North by opening 2NT has chosen to upgrade his 19 point hand; a good decision given his strong 5 card suit and the fact he holds all 4 aces and a king, the best possible 19 point combination.

The next source of information as to how best to defend the hand comes from the bidding. Does South have to hold at least 6 cards in spades for his bid, or could he be winging it with a 5 card suit and high cards in the minors? If the latter then a heart continuation could work out well. On the other hand, if he started with 6 spades is it possible he holds 3 small diamonds in which case we would be better off attacking that suit? If he started with 3 clubs to the Queen this would be another good reason for attacking his only other entry in Dummy.

So far in our thinking we have ignored our partner and let's face it – for most of us partner is just another obstacle to overcome, another mystery at the table who at best holds all the remaining cards we haven't placed with declarer. For many of us defending is just a simple extension of being declarer, it's you against them.

So here's my first tip gleaned from that great American player Mike Lawrence. When you hold exactly 3 cards in the trump suit and you can afford to do so, peter. On this hand my partner has played his trumps bottom up confirming that he started with two. So now I know for sure that declarer started with 6 and although we may have one more heart trick there will never be a trump promotion.

So we try a diamond switch and it goes ♦Q, ♦K won in dummy with the Ace. Declarer returns to hand with a club and plays a third round of spades which you win. Do you now try a heart or a diamond?

And here's my second tip. What did partner discard on this trick? If he failed to discard a heart it's because he didn't have one. If he's awake he knows what your problem is here. At the table he discarded a heart on this trick so you give up on hearts and instead play your last diamond. Declarer wins this with the jack, crosses to dummy with a club and returns to hand by ruffing a heart. He makes the remaining tricks on a squeeze.

The full hand

**North**

♠ A3  
♥ A62  
♦ A83  
♣ AK832

**West**

♠ 95  
♥ 109  
♦ K10942  
♣ J964

**East**

♠ KQ6  
♥ KQJ8754  
♦ 65  
♣ 7

**South**

♠ J108742  
♥ 3  
♦ QJ7  
♣ Q105

**Final Analysis**

Declarer played the hand well. He knew East had started with exactly 3 spades, 7 hearts 2 diamonds and 1 club. He simply played off his remaining spades coming down to the ♦7 and ♣10. West surrendered.

Not all hands have a happy ending but this article underlines again that with better defensive agreements and a cooperative partner you can take at least some of the guessing out of the game.

And that's my final tip. Start thinking of the person sitting opposite you as your partner. If you can do that you'll be surprised by how much your game improves.