

Honor Thy Partner

by Jeff Rubens

Winner of the third BOLS Bridge Tips Competition was brainy Jeff Rubens of New York — math professor, bridge writer and theorist, and successful player.

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!

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.

Board 3			
South Deals			
E-W Vul			
		♠ K 10 9 8	
		♥ Q 9	
		♦ A 10 9 4	
		♣ Q 10 3	
♠ 5 4	♠ A Q 7 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♥ A 6
♥ K 10 8 7 5	♥ K 7 5 2		♦ 8 6 5
♦ 8 6	♣ J 6 2		
♣ 9 7 4 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 NT	1 ♣
3 NT	All pass		Pass

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.

BOLS TIP: *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.*