

# Do You Speak Bridge?

This is an ordinary part-score hand. But look closely. You will be surprised to see how much information is going back and forth between East and West.

<b>Dealer: S</b>	♠ K 7 3		
<b>Vul: N-S</b>	♥ 10 8 4		
	♦ K Q J 9		
	♣ 10 9 3		
♠ Q J 10 4	♠ A 8 6 2	N W     E S	♥ J 5 3
♥ Q 9			♦ A 8 6 4
♦ 7 2			♣ Q 7
♣ J 6 5 4 2			
	♠ 9 5		
	♥ A K 7 6 2		
	♦ 10 5 3		
	♣ A K 8		

West	North	East	South
			1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

West leads the






Some leads stand out. When you have a hand this poor, you won't often have a lead you like unless your partner was able to bid something. With a good sequence in an unbid suit, you don't have much to worry about.

The  $\overline{Q}_{\spadesuit}$  lead shows a sequence headed by at least the  $\overline{QJ}_{\spadesuit}$ .

Declarer covers with the  $\overline{K}_{\spadesuit}$  and East wins the first trick with the  $\overline{A}_{\spadesuit}$ . He returns the  $\overline{2}_{\spadesuit}$ .

East's  $\overline{2}_{\spadesuit}$  is a very informative card. East has two or four spades. If East had three spades, he would return his middle spade, not his lowest. West may be able to use this information. When you are defending, you want to learn declarer's distribution if you can. Knowing declarer's shape is a huge asset to a defender. Here are some holdings East might have and how he would play.

	East would take his ace and return the eight.
	East would take his ace and return the eight. As you can see, West is not entirely sure what is happening at this point. West does know, however, that East does not have four spades.
	East would take his ace and return the two. West knows that East has two or four spades and, significantly, knows that East does not have three spades.

This information does not have to be important on every hand, but when it is important, it can be crucial.

**South plays the  $\overline{9}$  and West wins with the  $\overline{10}$ .**

West is not positive about whether East has two or four spades, but can make a pretty good inference. If East has two spades, South has four. This is against the odds since South is known to have long hearts.

**West leads the  $\overline{J}$ .**

West decided to continue spades on the theory that there was nothing better to do. East would need really good clubs for a club switch to be right. If East had really good clubs, he might have led them himself after winning the first trick.

**South leads the  $\overline{A}$ , West plays the  $\overline{9}$ , North the  $\overline{4}$  and East plays the  $\overline{5}$ . South continues with the  $\overline{K}$ , West and North follow suit, East plays the  $\overline{3}$ .**

Did you notice that East played the  $\overline{5}$  and then the  $\overline{3}$ ? What do you think he is doing or do you think he has no idea?

East is doing something good. Asking you what East is doing is a serious question. There is a signal that you can use to your advantage. It is a little known signal, but it is an important one so I will let you in on it.

When a defender plays high-low in trumps, he is giving a count signal to his partner. Here, East played the five and three of trumps. He is telling West that he has three or five trumps. Yes, three or five. In trumps, you give a different count signal than you do in the other suits. With three or five or once in a lifetime, seven, you give a high-low to say you have an ODD number. If you play low and then high, you are showing an even number of trumps. It is true that you may choose not to give a count signal in trumps, but if you go out of your way to play high-low, then you do promise three.

Why do this?

The reason is that your partner can use the information. If he knows how many trumps you have, he can work out how many declarer has. Here, South opened  $1\heartsuit$ . He usually has five but may have six. When East plays high-low, West knows that East has three hearts and declarer therefore has five, not six. This can be very important.

The next question is why not give the same count signals in trumps as you do in the other suits? Why not play a high-low shows two? The answer is logical. If you have the  $10x$  or the  $Jx$  or the  $Qx$ , you may not want to signal with the higher card. It might be important. If you have the  $1043$ , the  $J43$ , or the  $Q82$ , you can give a high-low with your little cards if you wish. Since you will usually need three cards in order to feel safe in playing high-low, the trump count signal was changed so that you could signal without giving away a trick to do so.

**South leads the  $\overline{5}_\diamond$ , West plays the  $\overline{7}_\diamond$ , North the  $\overline{K}_\diamond$ , and East the  $\overline{4}_\diamond$ .**

Yet another signal. West plays the  $\overline{7}_\diamond$  to let East know that he has an even number of diamonds. East is likely to have the  $\overline{A}_\diamond$  and will want to know how many diamonds South has. As you can see, if East takes the first or second diamond, South will be able to run the diamond suit and get rid of a club loser. West, by signaling how many diamonds he has, is able to tell East when to take his  $\overline{A}_\diamond$ . That is what happens here.

**North leads the  $\overline{Q}_\diamond$ , East plays the  $\overline{6}_\diamond$ , South the  $\overline{3}_\diamond$ , and West plays the  $\overline{2}_\diamond$ .**

East had to make a decision about whether South has one diamond or three diamonds. West, remember, showed an even number, which is two or four. If West has two, South has three. If West has four, South has one. Count signals can tell a lot, but they can't tell everything. In this case, East concluded that South probably started with three diamonds and not just one. There is always the possibility that West has just one diamond. In this case, it is not likely because with a singleton diamond, West might have led it.

Care to know why East guessed that South had three diamonds and not one?

East decided that if South had one diamond, he would have five clubs. This distribution is a bit less likely than the one that actually exists. Using defensive signals will help, but you still have to think.

**North leads the  $\overline{J}_\diamond$ , East goes up with the  $\overline{A}_\diamond$ , South plays the  $\overline{10}_\diamond$ , and West discards the  $\overline{2}_\clubsuit$ .**

Do you see why East was correct to take his  $\overline{A}_\diamond$  now?

East saw West play the  $\overline{7}_\diamond$  and  $\overline{2}_\diamond$ . At the start of this trick, the only missing diamond was the  $\overline{10}_\diamond$ . If West had the  $\overline{10}_\diamond$ , he started with the  $\overline{10}_\diamond \overline{7}_\diamond \overline{2}_\diamond$  and that is impossible if you are playing with a good partner. Your partner should not play the  $\overline{7}_\diamond$  and  $\overline{2}_\diamond$  with three diamonds. That is a good way to lose your partner's trust.

East, trusting West's signals, went up with the  $\overline{A}_\diamond$ , dropping South's  $\overline{10}_\diamond$ . South tried to be a crook, but could not succeed. Give him some points for trying.

**East leads the  $\overline{J}_\diamond$ , South plays the  $\overline{6}_\diamond$ , West discards the  $\overline{J}_\clubsuit$ , and North plays the  $\overline{10}_\diamond$ .**

This play has nothing to do with signals. It just happens to be the right play.

THE SITUATION – Declarer has drawn all the trumps BUT ONE, leaving you with a high trump.

## Rule

When you get in and have a good trump, it is often right to cash it. Always think about taking it and only if you see a reason not to should you do something else. The huge majority of the time, you will do best to take it.

East, following the rule, takes his  $\overline{J}_\diamond$  and gets a discouraging club from West.

At this moment in the defense, East has three choices. He can lead his last spade, which declarer will probably ruff. He can lead a diamond to dummy's  $\overline{J}_\diamond$ , a horrible, horrible play. He can lead a club.

No player would ever lead a diamond. They would play a spade or a club.

The spade is correct. Why lead a club when you don't have to? South has three clubs and sooner or later will have to lead them. Why lead one for him? Best is to lead the spade. If South ruffs, as he usually will do, he will lead clubs from his hand.

## Rule

Ninety-nine percent of the time, it is better for you that the other side makes the first lead in a suit.

Say that South has the  $\overline{K}_\clubsuit \overline{J}_\clubsuit \overline{2}_\clubsuit$  opposite the  $\overline{10}_\clubsuit \overline{9}_\clubsuit \overline{3}_\clubsuit$ . If East leads a club from his  $\overline{Q}_\clubsuit$ , South can make two tricks. If South has to lead the suit first, he will get only one club trick. In other words, East does not want to be the one to open up the club suit.

Not wanting to lead clubs, East plays his spade.

East leads the  $\overline{6}$ <sub>♠</sub>, South ruffs with the  $\overline{7}$ <sub>♥</sub>, West plays the  $\overline{4}$ <sub>♠</sub>, and dummy discards the  $\overline{3}$ <sub>♣</sub>.

South wins the  $\overline{A}$ <sub>♣</sub> $\overline{K}$ <sub>♣</sub> and loses the last trick to West's  $\overline{J}$ <sub>♣</sub>.

## Post Mortem

South makes his contract exactly, losing two spades and one trick in each suit.

This hand is not a big deal in the overall universe of bridge hands, but it is a good one in that East-West had a lot of things to do along the way. The only play that contributed to a gain was for West to signal in diamonds so as to show East when he should play his  $\overline{A}$ <sub>♦</sub>.

The other items that I mentioned are also important in principle. I promise you that all of the points I made will save you some tricks at one time or another.



This lesson is from Mike Lawrence's Computer Program *Defense*