

27. Mistaking Preference for Support

When you've bid two suits, you've shown five cards in your first suit, and usually only four cards in your second suit. Often, therefore, your partner will take you back to your first suit.

Do not assume partner is supporting you. Partner is merely giving you preference between your two suits, quite possibly with only two cards in your first suit.

Take the auction 1♥-1♠-2♦ (you opened 1♥, partner responded 1♠, you rebid 2♦). Partner will go back to 2♥ with many hands of 6-9 points — with these shapes for example: 5♠2♥2♦4♣, 5♠2♥3♦3♣, 4♠2♥3♦4♣.

Bearing in mind partner's 2♥ is a preference bid, not support, what would you bid now with these openers (the auction has proceeded 1♥-1♠-2♦-2♥).

| | | |
|--------|--------|--------|
| ♠54 | ♠Q2 | ♠2 |
| ♥AJ972 | ♥AJ872 | ♥AJ972 |
| ♦AKJ3 | ♦KJ63 | ♦AK983 |
| ♣Q3 | ♣AQ | ♣AJ |

With the first, pass. Remember, partner has shown no more than nine points — there is no game.

With the second, move with 2NT. This implies about 17 points with stopper(s) in the unbid clubs. If partner does have three hearts, she can always return to 3♥/4♥.

With the third, move with 3♦, showing your fifth diamond (ie 5♥-5♦) and extra values. Over to partner, who now knows your hand very accurately.

What Happened

Admittedly the 5-1 heart split was unfortunate but 4♥ was a markedly inferior game to 3NT. Down two.

Dealer: South, Vulnerability: Neither

| | | | |
|--------|---------|---|---------|
| | ♠KJ1092 | | |
| | ♥J3 | | |
| | ♦63 | | |
| | ♣K432 | | |
| ♠A753 | | N | ♠864 |
| ♥7 | | W | ♥Q10984 |
| ♦Q1087 | | E | ♦KJ9 |
| ♣Q1085 | | S | ♣J9 |
| | ♠Q | | |
| | ♥AK652 | | |
| | ♦A542 | | |
| | ♣A76 | | |

What Happened

| S | W | N | E |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1♥ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 2♦ | Pass | 2♥(1) | Pass |
| 4♥(2) | end | | |

(1) Correct preference bid.

(2) Oops. Confusing preference and support.

Contract: 4♥, Opening Lead: ♣5

What Should Have Happened

| S | W | N | E |
|--------|------|-----|------|
| 1♥ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 2♦ | Pass | 2♥ | Pass |
| 2NT(1) | Pass | 3NT | end |

(1) Not assuming heart support, South opens up a new avenue, implying this sort of strength (to bid on facing weakness).

Contract: 3NT, Opening Lead: ♣5

What Should Have Happened

Declaring the superior 3NT, you win the first club trick with ♣A then, eyeing up the spade sequence, lead ♠Q and overtake it with ♠K, so that you are in dummy to continue with ♠J. West wins ♠A and leads ♣Q but you win ♣K and cash ♠109 and (given the 4-3 split) the lowly ♠2. The ♥AK and ♦A bring your trick tally to nine — game made.

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