

18. Failing to support partner

Think of partnership bidding at a basic level. There are two distinct phases to the auction. First, trying to find a fit. Second, once the fit is found, deciding how many tricks to contract for.

It follows that if you know what the trump suit is, you must tell partner immediately. Otherwise partner thinks she's in the first phase, ie trying to find a fit, while you (alone) know you're in the second. "You say tomato, I say tomayto."

Respond to partner's 1♥ opener with these.

| | |
|---------|--------|
| ♠ 74 | ♠ AQ74 |
| ♥ K852 | ♥ Q852 |
| ♦ AKJ62 | ♦ J102 |
| ♣ 32 | ♣ 32 |

With the first, simply jump to 4♥ (you are worth game, with all your honours nicely in your long suits). I hear players (after bidding 2♦) retort, "I thought you'd want to hear about my diamonds." Actually, no. Partner wants to hear that the issue of the trump suit has been resolved. Fail to support hearts immediately and partner will never believe you have four cards.

With the second, I hear players (after bidding 1♠) say, "I couldn't decide whether to bid 2♥ or 3♥ so I thought I'd temporise." Bidding 1♠ will only confuse partner. You have to decide straight away whether to bid 2♥ or 3♥ — I'd opt for 3♥ given the small doubleton — and the ♦J10 plus-value.

What Happened

N-S languishing in 2♥ (plus three).

What Should Have Happened

West leads ♦A v 4♥, East encouraging with the ♦10, and

Dealer: South, Vulnerability: Neither

| | | |
|---------|--|---------|
| ♠ AJ42 | | ♠ Q1095 |
| ♥ Q632 | | ♥ 10 |
| ♦ J32 | | ♦ Q1085 |
| ♣ 42 | | ♣ KJ83 |
| ♠ K876 | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div> | |
| ♥ J98 | | |
| ♦ AK64 | | |
| ♣ 109 | | |
| ♠ 3 | | |
| ♥ AK754 | | |
| ♦ 97 | | |
| ♣ AQ765 | | |

What Happened

| S | W | N | E |
|---------|------|--------|------|
| 1♥ | Pass | 1♠ (1) | Pass |
| 2♣ | Pass | 2♥ | Pass |
| Pass(2) | Pass | | |

- (1) Oops. Failing to support is a major error.
- (2) South is right to pass — he thinks his partner has made a reluctant preference bid and could easily have ♥xx.

Contract: 2♥, Opening Lead: ♦A

What Should Have Happened

| S | W | N | E |
|--------|------|--------|------|
| 1♥ | Pass | 2♥ | Pass |
| 3♣ (1) | Pass | 4♥ (2) | end |

- (1) Natural game try ("trial bid").
- (2) Clear to accept with four reasonable trumps, a side ace and only two clubs (so much better than three small clubs).

Contract: 4♥, Opening Lead: ♦A

continues with the ♦K then ♦6 (a heart switch holds you to ten tricks). You ruff then cross to ♠A to finesse ♣Q. You cash ♣A and ruff ♣5, West discarding ♠7 (best). You ruff ♠2 and ruff ♣6 (West discarding ♠K). You now cash ♥Q, cross to ♥AK, drawing West's ♥J98, and enjoy ♣7. Eleven tricks made. andrew.robson@thetimes.co.uk