

Returning partner's suit by Sandra Landy

English Bridge *April, 2008*



You are West on lead to 3NT. The bidding has been simple. South opened 1NT and North bid 3NT.

Your hand is

♠ K J 6 3
♥ 9 8 2
♦ 6 5
♣ K J 6 4

Since Stayman has not been used, you decide to lead spades rather than clubs. You choose the ♠3, because our agreement is to lead the fourth card down from the top, when leading from a long suit, headed by an honour and without a sequence. When dummy goes down it looks to be a good choice.

♠ 7 4
♥ K 7 5
♦ Q J 9 8 3
♣ A Q 9
♠ K J 8 3
♥ 9 8 2
♦ 6 5
♣ K 8 6 4

Dummy plays the ♠4 and partner wins the ♠A, declarer playing the ♠2. That is good news and it's even better when partner returns the ♠9, declarer plays the ♠10 and you win your ♠J. What do you do now? As always, stop and think before you play a card.

Think about the high cards

You have seven points, dummy has twelve.

Declarer has 12-14 points to open 1NT.

Even if declarer has a maximum of 14, that still leaves 7 HCP for your partner.

If declarer has a minimum for 1NT, partner will have 9 HCP.

Partner has already shown 4 HCP with the ♠A, but that still leaves 3-5 HCP in partner's hand.

That means declarer has not got all the points you can't see. Declarer is likely to have some work to do, to come to nine tricks.

You should always do that simple sum when dummy goes down. Declarer should be thinking before playing to trick one and so should you! Knowing what you can expect partner to hold, helps you plan the defence.

Think about the cards already played

So far eight spades have been played and you can see two more in your hand

♠ K J 8 3	♠ 7 4	♠ A 9 ? ?
	♠ 10 2 ? ?	

The three spades that you can't see are the ♠Q, ♠6 and ♠5. If South started with just three spades, that is ♠Q 10 2, you should play your ♠K now and drop South's now bare ♠Q. That is, you want the cards to be distributed like this, so you can cash four spade tricks.

♠ K J 8 3	♠ 7 4	♠ A 9 6 5
	♠ Q 10 2	

But if South started with ♠Q 10 6 3, playing your ♠K will create a spade trick for South and maybe give the contract. To make four spade tricks, you need partner to get the lead and play back his last spade.

♠ K J 8 3	♠ 7 4	♠ A 9 6
	♠ Q 10 5 2	

Now both your ♠K and your ♠8 will win tricks. Get a pack of cards and put out the spades in different ways to see how to maximise the tricks you can win. But you do need to have an agreement with partner to solve the problem of what to play at trick three.

Our Agreement

- If partner originally had three spades, partner returns the highest remaining spade. So with ♠A 9 6 partner returns the ♠9.
- If partner originally had four or more spades, partner returns the original fourth highest. So with ♠A 9 6 5, partner must return the ♠5. If partner has four spades, declarer must have started with ♠Q 10 2 and when you play your ♠K, declarer's ♠Q will fall under the ♠K and your fourth spade will be a winner.

Occasionally partner will have started with five spades, in which case the position after two rounds of spades is:

♠ K J 8 3	♠ 7 4	♠ A Q 9 6 5
	♠ 10 2	

Partner returns the ♠6. Now when you cash the ♠K, declarer will show out and you can play your ♠8, overtaken by partner's ♠Q to cash the fifth spade trick and get 3NT down.

Can this go wrong?

There is only one time this agreement can go wrong. That is when the suit is distributed

♠ K J 9 3	♠ 7 4	♠ A 6
	♠ Q 10 8 5 2	

After two rounds of spades you have K 9 and declarer has Q 8 5. If you cash the king now, you give declarer two spade tricks.

Declarer won't have five spades very often, although some people do open 1NT with five spades. It is more likely to be five when the suit led is a minor.

But consider this hand

♠ A Q 9	
♥ K 7 5	
♦ Q J 9 8 7	
♣ 7 4	
♠ 8 6 3 2	♠ 10 7
♥ 9 8 2	♥ Q J 10 4
♦ 5 4	♦ K 10 6 3
♣ K J 9 3	♣ A 6
♠ K J 6	
♥ A 6 3	
♦ A 2	
♣ Q 10 8 5 2	

You lead the ♣3. East's ♣A wins the trick. If South carelessly plays the ♣2 at trick one, East can tell that South started with FIVE clubs and continuing clubs will set up winners for South. East should switch to the ♥Q at trick two. Not returning clubs warns partner that there is a problem in the club suit. It doesn't say I have some nice hearts and I want to play them! But when this hand was played Ron was declarer and he did something really clever. At trick one he played the ♣5. Now East thought West held the ♣2 and must have five clubs. So East returned the ♣6 and West thought East had four clubs and cashed his ♣K, giving Ron two club tricks and the contract! West should have looked a bit harder at the small cards, where is the ♣2? If declarer has it then he is trying to mislead the defenders.

Quick quiz

Play the right card on partner's lead. The card underlined is played from dummy. If you win the trick, underline the card you would return. Put the cards on the table to help work out what declarer might hold

Lead	Dummy has	You hold	You play?	Declarer	You return?
♦3	♦J <u>8</u> 4	♦A 7 5	♦A	♦6	♦7
♦3	♦J 8 <u>4</u>	♦A Q 5	♦A	♦6	♦Q
♦3	♦8 <u>4</u>	♦A 10 7 5	♦A	♦2	♦5
♦3	♦J 8 <u>4</u>	♦A Q 7 5	♦A	♦6	♦5
♦3	♦ <u>Q</u> 4	♦K J 7 6	♦K	♦5	♦6
♦3	♦Q 7 <u>4</u>	♦A J 8 2	♦J	♦5	♦2