

Defensive Problem -- Solution

Board 3
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ 4 ♥ Q 10 8 5 ♦ A 6 4 2 ♣ 10 9 8 2		♠ J 3 2 ♥ K J 6 2 ♦ J 10 ♣ K Q J 3	♠ Q 7 ♥ A ♦ K 9 8 7 5 3 ♣ A 7 6 5
♠ A K 10 9 8 6 5 ♥ 9 7 4 3 ♦ Q ♣ 4			
West <i>Selma</i>	North <i>Sheila</i>	East <i>Pete</i>	South <i>John</i> 3 ♠
All pass 3 ♠ by South Lead: ♥ 5			

Your partner and both opponents are experts, in this matchpoint pair game. Playing standard carding in this new partnership, you lead the ♥ 5. Dummy plays small and partner wins the ♥ A.

After some thought, partner cashes the ♣ A. This is a highly unusual play, establishing dummy's clubs, with the ♠ J a likely entry. Preempters also have been known to have voids - leading the ♣ A could have been a disaster. Think of this play as an "alarm clock" lead. Wake up and take notice!

Partner now leads the ♦ 9, and you win declarer's ♦ Q with the ♦ A. What do you make of that? The lead of the high card says, "do not return this suit." Partner would have led low, to ask for a diamond back.

Partner clearly wants something special from you, and in this case, it must be a ruff. Can it be in diamonds? No, because that would give declarer six diamonds, along with at least six spades, a heart and a club. So returning a trump or a diamond is clearly wrong.

Did partner have the singleton ace of hearts or clubs? In either case, declarer will have four cards in that suit, and likely a singleton in the other. Go back to the opening lead. Declarer knows partner has the ♥ A, since you would not underlead it. You are looking at the ♥ Q. If declarer had a singleton heart, would he not put in the ♥ J, hoping to establish the ♥ K for a discard? Declarer has likely ducked to ♥ 9743. Lead a heart. Obtaining this fourth trick holds declarer to 140, a fine defensive score.

If you would have returned a club, at least you were thinking along the right lines. Had declarer played the ♥ J at trick one, a club could well have been the correct return.

- Pete Matthews, Jr.