

Letting auto-pilot take over is not normally conducive to high quality bridge. But sometimes partner's signal can help you snap out of it!

Sitting in the East seat you hear the following auction:

West	North	East	South	
	Pass	1♣	1♠	
Double	Pass	1NT	2♠	Contract 2♠ by South
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Lead ♣8

♠ 7

♥ 6 5 2

♦ Q J 10 6 3 2

♣ Q 10 5

East

♠ A 4

♥ Q 9 8

♦ K 9 5

♣ K J 7 3 2

The defence against 2♠ begins very nicely. Partners ♣8 lead goes to the ♣5, ♣J and declarer takes their ♣A. At trick two declarer leads a diamond and partner wins the ace in order to continue with the ♣4 confirming a doubleton. You take the ♣K and return your ♣2 to signal for a diamond as partner ruffs. Partner dutifully follows your signal, but declarer trumps your ♦K then plays the ♠K around to your ♠A.

With four tricks in the bag already and dummy completely dead, you naturally continue with the deluge of clubs. On the fourth club, declarer throws the ♥4 and partner throws their last diamond, while on the fifth and final club declarer throws the ♥7, and partner throws the ♥3, encouraging. What should you play in this ending?

♠

♥ 6 5 2

♦ J 10

♣

You (East)

♠ 4

♥ Q 9 8

♦ 5

♣

As always, we must start with what we know. Declarer is surely marked with a 6-3-1-3 shape, so they have one heart and four trumps left. Partner has two trumps and three hearts. The top two hearts rate to be split both on the bidding and partners failure to lead a heart.

The auto-pilot play is to play a diamond. There doesn't seem much that can go wrong, and we might promote a trump trick for partner – for example, if they are down to ♠ 10 x at this point. It certainly does look like declarer is trying to avoid a trump promotion.

Could it ever be wrong to play your diamond? Yes. If partner has the ♥A and an unpromotable trump holding, declarer will throw their last (losing) heart on the diamond and partner will be forced to ruff with their trump trick.

So, does the ending look like this in **A** (play a diamond?) or **B** (play a heart?)

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

There are plenty of clues, but partner has given you one clear signal at just the moment you need it. Their encouraging heart discard when declarer is marked with only one more heart to everyone at the table simply must show the ace. If that is the case, it can never be wrong to lead a heart and it might be the only way to avoid declarer throwing their ♥K away.

If partner didn't have the ace of hearts, they could make their need for a trump promotion as clear as possible by throwing a high (discouraging) heart. Even the king (denying the ace) would do the trick nicely!

Point to remember when you are not too sure what is going on, conduct a quick recap on what spot cards partner has played. Partner is on your side after all – even if it doesn't always feel like it!