

## Bending the Rules

Bridge players, like great artists, need to understand the rules but also know when to break them. One such rule is "always return your partner's lead". The rule is a fine one, but a bridge player will tell you it is always wrong to say "always".

This hand was played in a GNOT event a few years ago

EW vulnerable, dealer West.

<b>NORTH</b>			
♠	862		
♥	QJ9		
♦	AT42		
♣	T82		
<b>WEST</b>	<b>EAST</b>		
♠	AKQ9	♠	J543
♥	T3	♥	K64
♦	QJ	♦	765
♣	A9543	♣	KQ7
<b>SOUTH</b>			
♠	T7		
♥	A8752		
♦	K983		
♣	J6		

<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>	
1C	Pass	1S	Pass	
3S	Pass	4S	All pass	

The two doubletons made the West hand unsuitable for a 1NT opening, so West started 1C, then jump raised East's 1S response to 3S, showing a fit and 16-18. This invited East to bid game with anything more than the bare 6 or 7 points, so game was reached.

What should South lead? Avoid a suit bid by the opponents and also (against a suit contract) avoid a suit headed by the ace without the king. That narrowed it down to a diamond, and South correctly led D3.

North won with the DA. What next? Partner's lead of a low diamond indicates an honour, which can only be the DK. That doesn't prove that a diamond back is the correct lead. The diamond trick can wait, as North deduced. She led HQ, a deadly shift not found at the other table. Now two heart tricks could be taken, and the other diamond trick cashed too, for one light.

The heart shift catered for the actual layout, where East had the HK and South had the ace, in which case the heart lead had to come from North rather than South. If East had had the HA instead of the king, then North's heart switch may not have done any good but it would not have done any harm either.

The key was that North wanted to lead hearts "towards the weakness" in dummy. It is not rare to encounter this sort of situation, where there is a limited future in the suit partner led, whereas another suit in dummy has two or three small cards and thus offers a more appealing target.

Another reason **NOT** to return partner's opening lead is if partner bid a suit and did not lead it, then clearly partner has a suit they can not lead away from and wants you to lead their suit once you gain the lead.