

Witness for the Defenceless – Part 1

“You can observe a lot just by watching” – as the great philosopher Yogi Berra once said. Many bridge enthusiasts would see their scores improve if they would just spend a little time observing the cards their partners play and trying to understand if a message is being sent.

Communication between partners is a vital component of defence at bridge. Both players need to be on the same wavelength in order to gain the maximum number of tricks for their side. Some less experienced players appear not to have discussed defensive carding at all.

In these periodic musings I hope to show examples of plays at this bridge club where defenders gave away unnecessary matchpoints because either they were not sending signals or the signals they were sending were misunderstood. Names have been withheld to protect the guilty.

<p>♠ 8542 ♥ KQ8 ♦ K842 ♣ 105</p>		Vulnerable: None			
		Dealer: North			
		Bidding:			
<p>♠ KQ10 ♥ A1097 ♦ AQJ ♣ Q98</p>		North	East	South	West
		Pass	Pass	1♣	1NT
		Pass	Pass	2♣	Pass
		Pass	Pass		
<p>♠ A73 ♥ 43 ♦ 3 ♣ AKJ6432</p>				Opening Lead: ♠ K	

West made the good lead of the ♠ king against South's 2♣ contract. Declarer could see 5 losers: 2 spades, 1 heart, 1 diamond and an almost certain club based on the bidding. South saw no point in holding up so he played the ace at trick one, as East followed with the 6. South now played the ace of clubs and then a low heart towards the dummy. West rose with the ace, cashed the ♠ queen and continued with a low heart. South happily won the king and immediately cashed the queen to pitch a losing spade and ended up making an overtrick for a very good matchpoint score.

What went wrong for the defence? Apparently West and East weren't playing basic attitude signals. The partner of the opening leader is expected to show whether or not he likes the lead by the size of the card he plays to trick one. Playing standard signals East should play the ♠9 to say: partner, I like the suit, please continue when you next get in. In that way, East-West would have scored

the five tricks they were entitled to. In this case West had no clue as to the whereabouts of the ♠ jack so thought he may as well switch.

<p>♠ J1065 ♥ QJ7 ♦ A84 ♣ AQ2</p>		<p>Vulnerable: North South Dealer: East</p>																	
<p>♠ Q32 ♥ 964 ♦ J962 ♣ J109</p>		<p>Bidding:</p> <table><tr><td>North</td><td>East</td><td>South</td><td>West</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>1♥</td><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td></tr><tr><td>Dbl</td><td>Pass</td><td>1♠</td><td>Pass</td></tr><tr><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>		North	East	South	West		1♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass	1♠	Pass	Pass	Pass		
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Pass	Pass																		
<p>♠ K987 ♥ 85 ♦ 1073 ♣ K654</p>		<p>♠ A4 ♥ AK1032 ♦ KQ5 ♣ 873</p> <p>Opening Lead: ♥9</p>																	

East might have opened 1 NT but instead chose 1♥. After 2 passes, North decided to make a “balancing” double, although 1 NT would have been acceptable in the pass-out seat. East passed and South bought the contract cheaply in 1♠.

West led the ♥9 which was covered by dummy’s queen and won by East’s king. East promptly cashed the ♥ ace and played a third heart which was won by dummy’s jack as declarer pitched a diamond from his hand. Declarer next called for the ♠jack, won by East with the ace who then played yet another heart.

Declarer gratefully pitched his last diamond loser from his hand and ruffed in the dummy. He eventually made 2 overtricks for a complete top on the board.

A few things went wrong in this defence, starting with the opening lead. When leading partner’s bid suit it is standard practice to play a low card when holding any 3 or 4 cards to try to give him an idea of how many tricks might cash. The play of a high card, such as the 9, should indicate a holding of at most a doubleton, perhaps even a singleton.

Had West started with the recommended ♥4, East could have deduced that there was no hurry to continue the suit as declarer could never play hearts to his own advantage. Even if the opening lead was a singleton, declarer could scarcely have a way to get rid of heart losers in the dummy.

Although West’s lead got the defence off to a rocky start, East compounded the problem by playing a fourth round of hearts knowing full well that declarer was void in that suit in both dummy and his own hand resulting in the dreaded “ruff-sluff” that enabled declarer to score his second overtrick. Just a little care by both East and West would have resulted in an average board instead of a complete zero.