

Who Do You Trust?

As I am sure you have noticed, I have given each of these little "fireside chats" an easy to remember short theme, I have found it easy to construct a variety of hands around a particular theme. I couldn't think of anything to say today, but thanks to a Google search, I think I came up with a great topic. I was sitting around thinking about this pandemic crisis and my growing cabin fever, and before you know it, I started reminiscing about a time from my childhood in which I remembered being very much shut in - even much more than today. I grew up in Worcester, MA. My father had a good paying job as an electrician, but there was a period in which he worked for US Steel and was out of work for 2 years, and times were tough. He was trying to raise 3 kids by himself, and was forced to ask his sister to let my older sister live with her while he, my older brother, and me stayed for a short while in the only place he could afford - a one room apartment in a boarding house. It wasn't terrible, but certainly not a great arrangement. While I vividly remember some details, this was about 60 years ago and a lot is a blur. For example, I recall the address was 22 Catherine St. I also remember that my Dad was a terrible cook and we had a steady diet of Dinty Moore Beef Stew that we ate in the house's common kitchen area. I also remember that since I wiggled and squirmed at night, I was relegated to sleep on a cot, while my big brother got to share the bed with our Dad. But my greatest remembrance was a very joyful one. Every day after I walked home from school, I looked forward to turning on the black and white TV in that tiny, crowded room to watch a quiz show that I loved. The name of the program I had long since forgotten, but I distinctly remembered its' host was the famous comedian Johnny Carson. Thanks to Google, I just learned that Ed McMahon got his start as Johnny Carson's sidekick on that show, and the show aired every day at 3:30 PM Eastern. I also learned that lots of school kids watched the show each afternoon just like me! The show was called "Who Do You Trust", and according to Wikipedia, English teachers across the country were outraged by the title, as they strongly preferred the more grammatically correct "Whom Do You Trust?".

So, pardon the long intro, but this is how I came to today's topic. Frequently, in the game of bridge, one has to decide "Who, or should I say, WHOM, should I trust?" - partner or the opponents. Today we are going to look at some common situations in bidding, play and defense that will attempt to answer this often very difficult question. Most of you will have no problem with today's hands. A few may find some of the hands to be more of a challenge. I'll share with you some expert pointers on how to help solve some of the tough decisions you may face.

But, please rest assured. I promise you that if you don't get all of these situations correct, nobody will have to sleep on the cot - or eat that dreadful Dinty Moore Beef Stew!

Who Do You Trust?

Matchpoints
North Deals
N-S Vul

	♠ A K 10 9 8											
	♥ 8 7											
	♦ 5 4											
	♣ A Q 5 2											
♠ Q 6 2	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> <table style="border: none; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 7 3	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ A K J 9 6 2		♥ Q 5 3										
♦ A K		♦ Q J 3 2										
♣ K 4		♣ 10 9 6										
	♠ 5 4											
	♥ 10 4											
	♦ 10 9 8 7 6											
	♣ J 8 7 3											

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♠	Pass	Pass
4 ♥	All pass		

4 ♥ by West

The most common situation in which you should trust your partner is the suit preference signal - especially in a ruffing situation. North leads a high spade, and West falsecards with the Q, as South follows with the 5. North thinks about the distribution, and his overall chances of beating this hand, and decided rightly in this case to play his partner for a doubleton - not 4 small. He cashes the other top spade and when his partner hi-low's to show a doubleton, he continues with his lowest spade - the 8 - signaling for the lower of the two non-trump suits. This is a clear signal for a club shift, which, as you can see will defeat this contract 2 tricks for a very good matchpoint result. But, South has to be alert to be watching the spots - especially if declarer plays the 6 and 7 of spades at tricks 1 and 2, disguising his 2. If South isn't paying attention, the 8 may look like a high card, and he may very well come back the 10 of diamonds. If he does, West will win. Cash 2 high hearts in hand, cash his other high diamond in hand, and then cross to dummy's Q of hearts to pitch his two club losers on the Q and J of diamonds.

So there are two lessons here.

#1) When trying to decide whether or not to trust your opponent, think about the overall distribution as well as your most likely chances for success - including viable alternatives

#2) In an obvious ruffing situation, you must pay very careful attention to the spots that are played, and trust your partner to tell you how to defend - provided you stay alert!

"Fante di Fiori!"

2004 Life Masters Pairs

Orlando, FL

West Deals

None Vul

♠ 8 6 3		♠ 9 4 2
♥ 10 4 2		♥ K 3
♦ A 9 8 6 4		♦ Q 7 2
♣ K 2		♣ J 10 9 7 3
♠ K	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
♥ A Q 9 8		
♦ K 10 3		
♣ A Q 8 6 5		
♠ A Q J 10 7 5		
♥ J 7 6 5		
♦ J 5		
♣ 4		

West	North	East	South
<i>Jon Green</i>		<i>Aquino</i>	
1 ♣	Pass	3 ♣	3 ♠
4 ♣	4 ♠	Dbl	All pass

4 ♠× by South

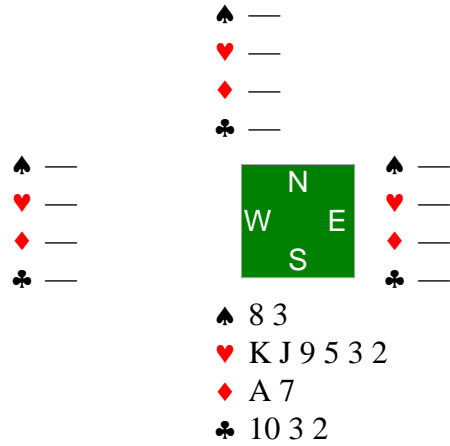
Opening Lead A of ♣

This hand, from the 2004 Life Master's Pairs Final in Orlando, FL is an illustration of a fairly common variation on the suit preference signal. It's also an exceptional example of trusting one's partner!

The auction was as follows. Jon opened 1 ♣, and after North passed, I made a preemptive jump to 3 ♣. South intervened with 3 ♠, and Jon bid 4 ♣, which showed extra values. When North raised to 4 ♠, I made a speculative matchpoint X. It might have backfired, but on this hand it helped us finish 2nd Overall in this major North American Championship!

On Jon's lead of the A of ♣, declarer played the 2 from dummy, as I followed with the J. Since it is clear that you don't want partner to continue clubs, count is hardly important, and this is absolutely, positively a suit preference situation. I very high card asks partner to play the higher (non trump) suit, a very low card asks for the lower suit. A middle card indicates no particular strong preference. Jon had no problem reading the Jack as a suit preference signal for the higher suit - in this case, ♥. He reasoned that if I had a singleton heart, declarer with AQxxx of ♠ and Kxxxx of ♥, would probably had bid differently, so he placed me with the K of ♥, and duly shifted to the 8 of ♥ at trick 2, unblocking the suit. I won the K, returned the 3, and Jon won the Q and continued with the A, which won the trick and the 9, which was ruffed in dummy with the 8, as I overruffed with my 9. I shifted to a diamond, which South won in dummy, and led a spade as I followed low. Since (as you learned from an earlier session), "the dog didn't bark" by not leading a high diamond, I was marked with the J of ♣, K of ♥, Q of ♦. If I also had the K of ♠, I probably would not have preempted, so declarer rose with the Ace dropping partner's stiff K for down only 2. +300 was worth 81 out of a possible 90 matchpoints for Jon and me. This hand was given a lot of international publicity! It was not only published in the NABC daily bulletin, but it appeared in England, India, and Italy. I couldn't understand the Italian, but in addition to getting a great result, I learned that the Jack of Clubs was called the "Fante di Fiori!"

Who Do You Trust?



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	2 ♥
Dbl	3 ♥	3 N	All pass

3 NT by East

Now let's switch gears a bit.

This was a hand I picked up a couple of weeks ago. I opened the bidding 2 ♥ in third seat, and the auction proceeds, X - 3 ♥ - 3N All pass. No I had to decide whether to lead a heart or not. Who do you trust? It sure sounds like East has the AQ of hearts, doesn't it? But partner did raise. If he has as little as Qx, it looks like a heart will set this. So, I lead my 4th best heart..

Here was the complete hand....

Who Do You Trust?

North Deals
None Vul

♠ A Q J 6 ♥ 4 ♦ J 10 8 2 ♣ A J 7 6	♠ K 7 5 4 ♥ 10 7 6 ♦ 9 5 4 ♣ K Q 5	<div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; background-color: green; color: white; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ 10 9 2 ♥ A Q 8 ♦ K Q 6 3 ♣ 9 8 4
♠ 8 3 ♥ K J 9 5 3 2 ♦ A 7 ♣ 10 3 2			

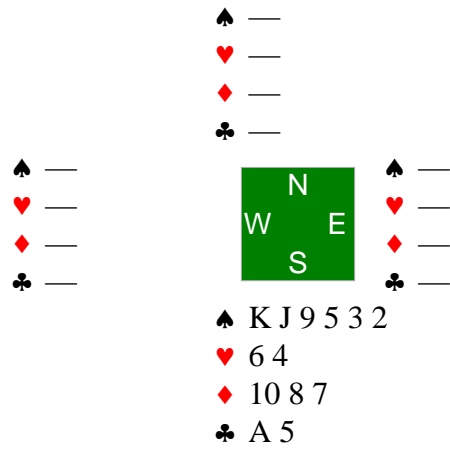
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	2 ♥
Dbl	3 ♥	3 N	All pass

3 NT by East

Well, as you can see, the heart lead was, as one of my favorite partner's might say, indeed 4th best! A club, a diamond, or a spade all would have been better!

As it turns out, just the other day, an eerily similar hand was dealt to me.

Who Do You Trust?



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	2 ♠
Dbl	3 ♠	3 N	All pass

3 NT by East

My, this hand looked familiar! Well, remembering my gaffe from just the day before, I was determined not to give declarer his 9th trick this time! Instead of leading a spade, I passively led the 6 of hearts. Here was the complete deal:

Who Do You Trust?

East Deals
None Vul

♠ A 7 4		♠ Q 10 8
♥ 10 8 7 5		♥ K 9 3
♦ 2		♦ K Q 6 5 4
♣ Q 9 6 3 2		♣ J 8
♠ 6	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
♥ A Q J 2		
♦ A J 9 3		
♣ K 10 7 4		
♠ K J 9 5 3 2		
♥ 6 4		
♦ 10 8 7		
♣ A 5		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	2 ♠
Dbl	3 ♠	3 NT	All pass

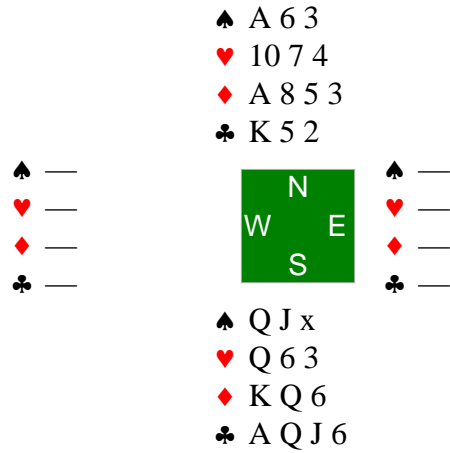
3 NT by East

Oh my God! The opponents cheerfully took the first 9 tricks! If I led a low spade, we would take 6 spades and the Ace of clubs - down 3!

This is a very common auction. Do we have to guess what to lead? Thanks to a convention called McCabe, we will never have to guess again! Here's a very simple overview of how it works. After any weak 2 bid followed by a takeout double, a new suit by the weak 2 bidder's partner says, "I am raising your suit, but I know you will be on lead and I want you to lead my suit. If your RHO now passes, you MUST not pass partner's bid. It is forcing you to bid your suit at the cheapest level. If, on the other hand, partner raises your suit after the takeout double, he/she is either promising an honor in your suit, or has nothing else she would like you to lead. So, on the first example, you would have led a club, and eventually set the contract one trick. On the second example, you would happily lead your suit - and rattle off the first 7 tricks!

McCabe is an excellent convention, but it has many variations and many different sequences. The ones I shared are the most common. There are several more aspects to this, including how to run to a suit of your own, after a weak 2 is doubled. I don't want to spend too much time with this today. I just suggest you discuss this in detail with your favorite partners, and form your own agreements. It will certainly save you a lot of guessing! Let's look at some different situations...

Who Do You Trust?



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

Opening Lead 2 of ♥

3 N by South

You may recall that in my very first "Shark's Pointers Online", I shared with you a 1975 "Shark's Pointers" article that was entitled, "You Can Count On Your Opponents". On that hand, I showed you how logical deductions were made from the bidding, as well as the discards and carding of your opponents. In many, many situations you truly can trust your opponents to give you helpful information.

Here's a very common situation. You are declarer in 3 NT. West leads the 2 of hearts. East wins the K and returns the 9. West started with KJxx and they score the first 4 tricks. On the 4th heart, East signals with the 10 of ♠, and West shifts to the 9 of ♠. You know that a finesse is 50%, whereas a 3-3 split is only about 36%, but there is no reason to suspect foul play. You might be getting bamboozled, but I would rise A, run 4 clubs and hope for the diamonds to split 3-3, or for the same hand with the K of ♠, to have started with 4 diamonds.

Who Do You Trust?

South Deals
Both Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT

Pass	3 NT	All pass	
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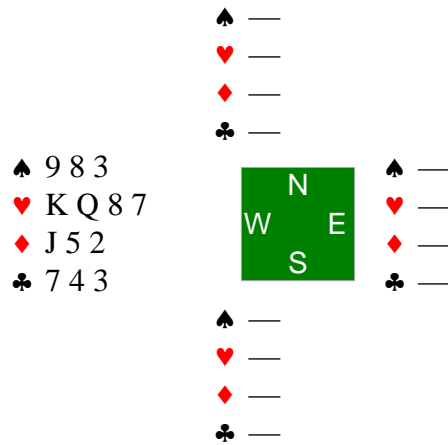
Opening Lead 2 of ♥

3 NT by South

Here was the complete deal. East did start with both the K of ♠, and 4 diamonds, but on the fourth round of clubs was forced to part with a diamond, and the contract made.

So, like here, there are some obvious clues from the opponent's carding. The caviat as defender is to not steer declarer down the path of success! There is absolutely no benefit to East telling everyone at the table were the K of spades is. Declarer showed 15-17 points, dummy has 11 hcp and his partner has already shown 5 hcp. He's looking at 6. So his partner can have at most 3 hcp, and as little as 1 hcp. With 4 tricks in, he would have been smarter to have played a low spade!

Who Do You Trust?



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

4 ♠ by South

I'm going to end today's presentation, picking up from the suggestion on the last hand with a little twist on this theme of "Who Do You Trust?"

You're sitting West, and you hear this auction. What do you lead? Most folks will lead a trump. You ask if there is an agreement as to what the 3H bid is, and you are told it could be a second suit or a help suit game try. Well, North said he didn't like hearts and South still bid game, so it sounds like a passive defense is best and you lead the 9 of spades...

Who Do You Trust?

South Deals
Both Vul

♠ 9 8 3	♠ A 6 2	♠ 7
♥ K Q 8 7	♥ 6 5 4	♥ A 9
♦ J 5 2	♦ K Q 10 9	♦ 8 7 6 4 3
♣ 7 4 3	♣ 10 8 5	♣ A J 9 6 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K Q J 10 5 4	
	♥ J 10 3 2	
	♦ A	
	♣ K Q	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

4 ♠ by South

After your trump lead, South unblocks the A of diamonds, cashes two more spades ending in dummy, and proceeds to discard 3 hearts to just lose 1 heart and 1 club. Had you led a high heart, partner would overtake, cash the A of clubs and continue a heart to your Q and ruff the 3rd round for the setting trick!

Many experts will make a "lead-inhiting" 3H bid. Be careful, and be alert to the fact that your normal lead might be best even on an auction such as this!

There are no guarantees!

Who Do You Trust?

IMPs
West Deals
None Vul

♠ 6 3	♠ A Q 9 4	♠ 8 7
♥ Q 5 4 2	♥ 8 7 3	♥ A K 9 6
♦ A 9 3 2	♦ K 6 4	♦ 10 7 5
♣ Q 7 3	♣ K J 10	♣ 9 8 4 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K J 10 5 2	
	♥ J 10	
	♦ Q J 8	
	♣ A 6 5	

Opening lead 2 of ♥

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

4 ♠ by South

The last couple of hands suggested that there are times when disinformation is the best strategy for winning bridge. This final example is my favorite.

The opening lead is the 2 of hearts and East wins the A and K then leads the 9. Declarer ruffs high. Draws 2 rounds of trumps. He now leads a diamond towards dummy, West playing low. He now returns a diamond to his Q and West's A. West returns a diamond and declarer wins in hand. At this point, it should be clear to both opponent's that the whole hand depends upon declarer guessing who has the Q of clubs.

I'm sure you have all seen a situation like this before. South will probably play an extra round of trumps in order to glean as much info as possible. On the 3rd round of trumps, both opps can pitch a heart. But West now has a couple of options. Playing against an expert declarer, he should pitch his 4th diamond. This will make it clear to declarer that he started with 2 spades, 4 hearts, 4 diamonds and therefore only 3 clubs. This will give declarer enough info to know your partner started with 4 clubs, therefore being a little more likely to have started with the Q. Against a non-expert declarer, West should pitch a low club without hesitation, giving the impression he started with 3 small clubs! Chances are pretty good that declarer will go wrong now, playing a low club to dummy's K and run the J, losing to West's now solitary Q!

My final Shark's Pointer for today is this:

When you know the contract depends upon the location of a specific Q, the hand that doesn't possess the Q should defend as if he is guarding that card. The key tha has the Q, should discard as though he didn't have it!