

Board of the Week 27

By Dick Chapman

Before I start, I will state my general belief that for club players, you don't win with elaborate systems and elegant, sophisticated play. You win at the club level by playing your cards fundamentally well. Let's see how it goes today. As East you hold this hand, both vulnerable:

♠AK752 ♥2 ♦9732 ♣A98

The auction:

West	North	East (you)	South
Pass	1♥	1♠	2♥
2♠	4♥	All pass	

You kick off with the ace of spades.

	♠3 ♥ ♦ ♣	
♠9 ♥ ♦ ♣	V: EW D: W	♠AK752 ♥2 ♦9732 ♣A98
	♠J104 ♥984 ♦AJ1086 ♣107	

Partner furnishes the 9 (udca), declarer 3, and you ponder your next move. What is your card at trick 2?

(Jeopardy theme)

Ready? The 9 of spades is discouraging. It's possible partner has 4 spades, thus a second (and third) spades will get ruffed. This might set up a forcing defense, but declarer might have 6 hearts and partner only 3. It's also possible partner has ♠986 and declarer has ♠Q3 and thus a spade trick. Think some more.

Or this: the 9 of spades could well be suit preference for diamonds (the higher of the two side suits). Aha, you decide, that's what it is. What diamond do you lead?

I was West. My partner, Alex Z, led the diamond 2 and we racked up a near top on this layout (next column):

	♠3 ♥AKQ53 ♦KQ54 ♣QJ3	
♠Q986 ♥J1076 ♦ ♣K6542	V: EW D: W	♠AK752 ♥2 ♦9732 ♣A98
	♠J104 ♥984 ♦AJ1086 ♣107	

I ruffed this second trick. Because the 2 of diamonds is suit preference for clubs, I dutifully lead the 6 of clubs. Partner won the ace and back came a second diamond ruff. The club king made it down 2.

Astute readers might notice 4 spades can be made on a combined 18 points held by EW (with diamond ruffs in dummy), and indeed one pair bid and made that contract for the top EW score. Two other EW pairs were in the spade game but failed by one trick. Most of the field was in 4 hearts by North down one on the same ace of spades lead. Down 1 is a "normal" result, scoring 1 spade, 2 clubs, and either a diamond ruff or a natural heart trick.

Was our result lucky? No, it was good partnership understanding. Partnership trust is paramount in defense. West's 9 of spades was screaming for a diamond, and East must trust that signal. My partner did trust me. Then East must know to put out the 2 of diamonds rather than the routine, passive 9 or 7. Finally, West must know that East's signal is suit preference for clubs.

This is the kind of hand you see in a newspaper column. The problems in columns are rather academic, but here we were at the table, playing real bridge and encountering the same themes the columns present.

Final question: should West double 4 hearts? You would have to ask the experts. It didn't look right to me. See you at the table.