

I picked up the following hand in the evening duplicate April 12, 2007 at Honors Bridge Center in Manhattan:

♠K8 ♥983 ♦Q9 ♣AJ8632.

My RHO, a good player playing with a weaker player, opened 1♣. I was vulnerable, vs. not-vulnerable and passed. My LHO bid 1♠ and surprisingly, my RHO rebid 2♣. This was passed around to partner (Gail Greenberg), who doubled. This is the type of hand that will probably win about 3 tricks on defense, as trump endplays are likely. Therefore, it is not automatic to pass, but there is no good alternative. It seemed like the best chance to get a plus score so I passed. Against 2♣ doubled, I led the ♥9, which showed either 0 or 2 higher cards in hearts.

1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass	Dummy	East-West Vulnerable
2♣	Pass	Pass	Double	♠A9432	
Pass	Pass	Pass		♥A64	
Opening Lead: ♥9				♦753	
				♣109	
West (Jeff)					East (Gail)
♠K8					
♥983					
♦Q9					
♣AJ8632					

Partner won the ♥K at trick one and shifted to the ♠5 (3rd and 5th best). My ♠K lost to dummy's ace. Dummy led the ♦3, partner played the ♦2, declarer played the ♦J, and I won the ♦Q. Now what?

I didn't take enough time at the table to think everything out. It felt right to return a spade to partner, and prepare to ruff spades in my hand. But there is a much better defense. You must take time to figure out who has what cards.

First of all, why is declarer rebidding a mediocre 5-card club suit? Declarer must be unbalanced or otherwise would have rebid 1NT. Being a stronger player than his partner he surely would love to be declarer in noTrump. What is declarer's short suit?

Secondly, why didn't partner bid a sandwich 1NT over the 1♠ bid? That should guarantee 5-5 in the red suits at this vulnerability. So you can assume partner is not 5-5 in the red suits. So what is partner's distribution? Partner must be at least 4-4 in the red suits for her balancing

double. And partner is void in clubs. We play upside-down count and attitude, so partner's signal showed an even number of diamonds. Does partner have 4 hearts, 6 diamonds and 3 spades, or does partner have 5 spades, 4 hearts and 4 diamonds?

If partner held 3-4-6-0, then declarer has 3-3-2-5, and would have rebid 1NT or supported the spades. Therefore, partner has 5-4-4-0 distribution, and declarer has 1-3-4-5.

Now you know not to return a spade, as it will help declarer score his small trumps and endplay you later. So, what is your best return?

Your best return is the ♥2, a false-card advertising a 2-card heart suit. That may mislead declarer and help you score your small trumps. When I show the entire hand below you can see how that is the best defense.

But, I was lazy and returned the ♠8 at the table. That led to the following interesting position. Declarer ruffed the spade, led a diamond to his ten, cashed 2 hearts, and led another diamond, which I trumped, leaving this position:

1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass	Dummy	East-West Vulnerable
2♣	Pass	Pass	Double	♠943	
Pass	Pass	Pass		♥	
Opening Lead: ♥9				♦	
				♣109	
West (Jeff)				East (Gail)	
♠					
♥					
♦					
♣AJ863					

By now I knew that declarer had ♦x ♣KQ74. What is my best defense? I needed 3 tricks to defeat the contract. Take some time thinking about this situation. It is good to learn how to figure out these situations.

My first impulse was to play the Ace and Jack of clubs, to nullify the value of dummy's clubs. But, if I did that, declarer would win the ♣Q and lead his last diamond, which I would have to ruff and then give him the last two tricks, as I lead into his ♣K7.

So I considered shifting to the ♣J, but again I saw that declarer would prevail, as upon his leading the last diamond I again would be unable to prevent him from taking 3 tricks.

So, I shifted to a low club. That left declarer with 2 losing options, as long as I defended correctly. At the table declarer won dummy's ♣9 and led a losing spade, discarding his last diamond. Now I trumped and led the ♣J, nullifying the value of dummy's remaining club spot card. He won and at trick 12 had to concede two club tricks to my ♣A8. I endplayed him, instead of having him endplay me.

Declarer's option would have been to overtake the ♣9 with an honor and lead his last diamond from his hand. If he did this, I would again have to defend very carefully. What would be my best defense?

Strangely, I would have to trump with the ♣J and lead a small club to dummy. Dummy would win trick 11, but then again my ♣A8 would take the last 2 tricks, as declarer would have the ♣K7.

This was the entire hand:

	Dummy	E-W Vulnerable
	♠A9432	
	♥A64	
	♦753	
West (Jeff)	♣109	East (Gail)
♠K8		♠QJ1075
♥983		♥KJ102
♦Q9		♦K642
♣AJ8632	South	♣---
	♠6	
	♥Q75	
	♦AJ108	
	♣KQ754	

Now let's see what my proper defense earlier would have accomplished.

After winning the ♦Q, if I played the ♥3, declarer would probably win the ♥A in dummy and repeat the diamond finesse. His best play now would be to cash the ♥Q and lead the ♦A. I would ruff and lead my high clubs (♣A and ♣J). This would prevent him from trumping his losing diamond in dummy. He would win the ♣Q. We would both be down to 3 clubs and one side-suit card. If he now led his losing diamond, partner would win the ♦K

while I discard my last spade. In the end-game I would get endplayed and would have to give him a trick with his ♣7. He would still be down one, but I would have avoided the delicate end-position that I actually faced at the table. In general, I prefer to defend from a stronger position. Only that final endplay would prevent declarer from going down 2 tricks. It is a much stronger defense to make declarer endplay you to escape for down one, than for me to calculate the end game carefully and manage to endplay declarer to barely beat the hand.

Now a comment about the opponent's bidding. If I held the South hand I would have opened 1♦ and rebid 2♣. While I avoid bidding a 4-card diamond suit before a 5-card club suit, I would do it on this hand in order to describe the main characteristics of my hand---my 2-suited hand in both minors. I have found that to be preferable to rebidding a bad 5-card club suit on this type of hand, which partner might pass with a weak hand and short clubs.

I hope my readers found this hand to be as interesting as I did. I think it is challenging to find the heart continuation upon winning the ♦Q, and it was also challenging to solve the 5-trick end-position that I actually faced at the table. Finally I admire my partner's shift to the ♠5, instead of shifting to the ♠Q. She accurately felt that it was relatively safe to shift to a small spade, and that the spade count was most important to me.