

## AVOIDING HEART BREAK (BAD BREAKS)

This is a hand that Lauren and I bid/played in 2011.

*Barbara*

♠ 8  
♥ A 8 3 2  
♦ A K Q J 7  
♣ K Q 7

*Lauren*

♠ Q 10 9  
♥ K Q 9 7 5  
♦ 6 5 3  
♣ A 4

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
3♠ (1)	Double	4♣ (2)	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♠ (3)	Pass
6♥	All Pass		

- (1) Splinter, spade shortage, 4+ hearts, game values
- (2) 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> round cue bid
- (3) 2 key cards + ♥Q

South led a spade to North's Ace, and North returned a club, won with the Ace.

This was an excellent contract, so Lauren thought about what could go wrong. The only concern was if trumps broke 4-0. She was missing the J-10-6-4, which meant that she could only deal with four hearts in North's hand. *[If South held all four hearts she always had a heart loser. Check it for yourself.]*

Therefore, Lauren led a heart to the Ace first and noted, with a smile and nod to me (leaving me puzzled), the South showed out. She could now finesse North's ♥J-10-6-4, because she had kept the 'double tenace' intact. She led another heart and North split her honours, so then Lauren took the safest re-entry to dummy, a spade ruff, to finesse in hearts again, making her 12 tricks.

Lauren had been learning about the various card combinations, such as this one, so was particularly excited to have utilised her knowledge at the table, when it mattered.

*[As it happened, North had a diamond void. If she had played Lightner doubles, she could have doubled 6♥ to ask for the lead of dummy's first-bid suit – defeating the contract anyway.]*

Knowing your safety plays (or card combinations) is very important, especially at Teams (where safety comes first, as I keep mentioning).

Here are a couple of other examples:

♠ 9 5  
 ♥ 10 9 8 5 4  
 ♦ K J  
 ♣ A Q 10 4

♠ A J 8 7 4  
 ♥ A K 6  
 ♦ Q 10 8  
 ♣ K 8

South is playing in 4♥, with West leading the ♠10 to his partner's Queen and your Ace.

You have a diamond loser and spade loser, so have to ensure that you have no more than one loser in trumps. It should be time to allow for bad breaks!

Cashing the ♥A and ♥K will be wrong if East has four hearts, ♥Q-J-x-x. *[If West has ♥Q-J-x-x, you will go down regardless.]* However, this holding is not one where you lead the ♥10, finessing, on the first round. Then if hearts are 4-1 with East, but West has a singleton honour, you will lose to the singleton honour, and still have another heart loser.

The safety play on this combination is to cash one top heart first. If both players play a low heart, then you cross to dummy and lead the ♥10, finessing – which will pick up the ♥Q-J-x-x should East hold it. If West plays an honour, then you should just cash the other top heart, because either West has ♥Q-J doubleton, or East has four hearts with one honour, so you just have one losing heart.

Here's the full hand, so you can check for yourself.

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

Finally, we played this hand in 6NT, by South, but in 6♠ the same principle would apply. You have 9 winners outside the spades, so have to ensure only one spade loser.

♠ A J 4  
♥ A 10 4  
♦ K Q 8 2  
♣ Q 7 5

♠ K 9 8 6 2  
♥ K Q 2  
♦ A 5  
♣ A K 6

At Pairs you would probably play 'with the field', cashing the ♠K, then finessing the Jack (see last week's column). However, this was a teams match, so ensuring your 12 tricks was the priority.

If you cash the King, then finesse the Jack, you will go down when East has ♠Q-10-x-x. Is there a safety play that is 100% for 4 tricks, if spades are 4-1?

Yes – though it is not one that would automatically occur to you at the table, and it's worth laying out these cards, then placing the various spade combinations with both East and West.

The 'correct' line is to cash the Ace first (the honour in the short hand), then cross to South to lead a spade towards dummy's Jack, covering whatever card West plays. If West has Q-10-x-x, you either win the Jack, or the play of the Queen makes both the Jack and King into winners to ensure 4 spade tricks. On the other hand, if West shows out, you play the Jack, and East wins the Queen. However, now you can win the next trick in dummy to lead a spade towards your ♠K-9-8, finessing East's ♠10.

Safety plays in suits are extremely challenging to remember, and reading about them doesn't seem to lock them into your memory bank. Play these hands out for yourself and acquire improved mastery.

**Barbara Travis**

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