

HELPING PARTNER OUT

People often ask me for advice about how to be more successful with high-level sacrifice decisions. It's not an easy topic, however many times you or partner can be more helpful in solving these situations.

Here's a hand which came up when I was playing with my daughter, Lauren. Sitting South, she held:

♠ 6
♥ K Q 9 8 7
♦ 7
♣ A J 8 7 3 2

The auction (North-South Vul):

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♥
Double	2♦ (1)	3♠	4♥
4♠	Pass	Pass	5♣
Double	5♥	Pass	Pass
Double	All Pass		

(1) This showed a good raise to 2♥ or better. (Bidding 2♥ immediately shows a weaker raise, which can be important for opener's later decision-making.)

Here is the full hand:

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

Once East-West had bid to 4♠, Lauren had no intention of defending. However, rather than bidding 5♥, she bid 5♣ to show a distributional hand without defence (in the knowledge I had a decent hand). She wanted to deflect me from doubling a high-level contract, and she also wanted me to think about a sacrifice or the best lead.

Sitting North, it was obvious to me that Lauren held some 6-5 shape. Therefore, not only did we have a double-fit, but so did East-West (despite diamonds never being bid). I was happy to play in 5♣ X or 5♥ X, but I would have chosen to defend 5♠ (undoubled).

It is this sort of descriptive bid, rather than South just bidding 5♥, that helps the North hand make the right final decision. Furthermore, if the vulnerability had been reversed, I would have been happy to save at the 6-level.

What happened at other tables? Most Norths doubled 5♠. (I suspect it was tougher for West to bid 5♠ with his doubleton club, because I had removed 5♣ X to 5♥.)

Here are some other examples for you to think about:

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

At one table:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2♥	3♠ (weak)	4♥
4♠	All Pass		

At the other table, South made a descriptive bid en route to 4♥:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2♥	3♠	4♦
4♠	5♦	All Pass	

Since South was always planning to bid 4♥ (even with his minimum), he stopped to show his second suit. Sometimes it will help North to double, sometimes it will help North to find the best lead. In this case, however, North knew to bid on to 5♦ or 5♥ - which proved to be a good save.

It's interesting that both Wests, with spades being so dominant, chose to over 1♠ rather than show 10 cards in their hand via a Michaels Cue Bid.

For those who play Ghestem (specific two-suited bids) or, as in some cases, that 2♥ shows the higher two unbid suits, and 2NT shows the two extremes (in this case, spades and clubs), that would allow East to jump to 4♠ quickly, shutting out the sacrifice.

Then there's this hand:

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

At one table (East-West vulnerable):

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♦	1♥	2♥ (1)
4♦ (2)	5♦	5♥	Pass
Pass	Double	All Pass	

(1) Cue raise for diamonds. (I play fit-showing jumps after intervention, so South could have bid 3♣, and now North is unstoppable – bidding 5-minor, and saving in 6-minor if pushed.)

(2) Splinter bid (3♦ would be the cue raise).

5♥ X made in comfort, for +850 to East-West.

At the other:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1♦	1♥	2♥
4♦	5♣	5♥	6♦
Pass	Pass	Double	All Pass

Meantime, with a known massive double fit in the minors, South was always going to bid to the 6-level – whether it was making or a save. This time the contract was failing, but -300 was cheap insurance (and sometimes the slam will even make!).

And finally, here's my confession...

This was the hand I held as North:

♠ A K Q 10 7 6 3
 ♥ K 7 4
 ♦ 2
 ♣ 3 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1♦	Pass
2♣	4♠	5♦	5♥
6♣	All Pass		

What lead should you make?

It's pretty obvious really – partner didn't overcall 1♥, so his 5♥ bid was a lead-directing bid. Your best lead is the ♥K, to make things really clear for partner. Then you'll take 6♣ down 2 tricks.

I was not concentrating (last-board-itis is a common affliction), and led the ♠A. 6♣ made 13 tricks, and partner was furious with me to boot! He'd made this fantastic bid to guide my defence.

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

Help your partner by making descriptive bids when it is possible that your side will be left with a high-level decision about whether to sacrifice or not, and what suit to lead.

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