

Taking Care of Partner. . .with John Koch

Playing in a club game against capable opponents, I hold as East:

♠7 6 4 2 ♥K Q 10 7 ♦7 ♣8 7 5 2

At favorable vulnerability, partner is dealer and opens **one heart**. North, on my right, **doubles**. I try to make it difficult for the opponents by jumping to **three hearts**. South is not deterred and bids **three spades**. Partner passes, and North raises to **four spades**. The full auction:

West	North	East	South
1♥	Dbl	3♥	3♠
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

Partner leads the ♥A and this is what I see:

♠ A Q 8
♥ 9 6 4
♦ A K 4 3
♣ A 9 3

♠ 7 6 4 2
♥ K Q 10 7
♦ 7
♣ 8 7 5 2

→ ♥A

Declarer plays low from dummy and I encourage with the ♥10. Partner continues with a heart to my queen and declarer ruffs. Declarer goes to the ♦A and ruffs another heart, as I throw the ♥K. Now he leads the ♠J, which holds, and follows with the ♠10, covered by partner's king and dummy's ace. Declarer thinks for a minute and cashes the ♠Q, discarding a club and partner—the ♥5. Oh no! Partner has just discarded the setting trick!

Declarer now leads the ♦K. I can ruff and we can cash a heart, but that is only three tricks. We also need a club trick, which means I have to lead the suit unless partner has both ♣KQ. There is no hurry to grab my ruff, so I throw a club on the

high diamond. On the next diamond, I throw another club. When declarer leads a fourth diamond, I ruff. What now?

Partner still has the ♥J, so it can't be right to put him on lead with a heart at this point. We need a club trick, so I lead a club. Declarer plays small and partner produces the ♣J. Dummy wins the ace, but has nothing but clubs and partner wins his ♣K and ♥J for down one.

The full deal:

♠ A Q 8
♥ 9 6 4
♦ A K 4 3
♣ A 9 3

♠ K 9
♥ A J 8 5 2
♦ 10 8 5
♣ K J 4

♠ 7 6 4 2
♥ K Q 10 7
♦ 7
♣ 8 7 5 2

♠ J 10 5 3
♥ 3
♦ Q J 9 3 2
♣ Q 10 6

Points of Interest:

- The heart discard was an obvious mistake. West can afford to throw a low diamond or even a club on the third spade and the clear message of East's ♥K was an unblocking play to emphasize the usefulness of West's hearts.

- West's heart discard surrendered the setting trick, but East must keep his head and redirect his attention to other chances—clearly in the club suit. There was nothing to be gained by taking the ruff early, so East delayed until dummy was out of diamonds. When declarer turned up with five diamonds, his patience was rewarded. There was also no haste to cash the defense's second heart trick, which would have endplayed West in clubs.