

Ultimate Defence 18

I would now like to turn the spotlight on the other side of the table, the partner of the person with the opening lead. But for the sake of consistency, you will remain sitting South and North will be making the opening lead.

Dealer South All Vul

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

The possible bidding:

W	N	E	S
			NB
1C	NB	1H	NB
1S	NB	3S	NB
4S	NB	NB	NB

North starts the defence with the jack of hearts. This is covered by the queen, and South wins the ace. What should South do next?

Of course if YOU were South you would immediately know the answer to that, because you can see all four hands. One of the rules I have for defenders is: whenever you play a card, make sure you have a reason for playing that particular card. Then, your intelligent partner will know how to proceed, based on the reading of your reason for making the play.

South could return a heart. The reason: North might be able to ruff the second heart. But how likely is that? For North to have a singleton heart, West would have three of them, and hence most likely a singleton diamond. Unlikely, and even more unlikely that a heart return will defeat the contract.

It is most likely that North's lead is from J10x and that declarer is the one with the singleton heart. The king will therefore provide a discard for declarer. So, there is no sensible reason to return a heart.

South could return a club, hoping for a third round ruff. North would need to have the ace of clubs, plus a spade entry before South's second trump is drawn. What are the odds on that? And returning a club could be disastrous if North has the queen and this solves a finesse problem for declarer. So, there is no sensible reason to return a club.

What about a trump? To return a trump in this situation can only mean one thing: South has nothing better to do, and has not been able to think enough to find a reason not to lead a trump. Normally a trump lead suggests that you either want to be totally passive, or you want to prevent ruffs in a side suit. How will you and partner be able to remove enough trumps from dummy to stop diamond ruffs? You won't. So, you have no reason to shift to a trump.

What about a diamond? What are the chances that North's ace (if he has it) will run away on a run of clubs or dummy's second heart? Or, in a different layout, that North's king will never take a trick unless you do something useful, something based on a reason to do so. Can you now see that there is no reason to lead back a heart, switch to a club, or lamely switch to a trump? Switching to a trump will suggest that South has the ace of diamonds and wants to prevent a ruff, and North could be forgiven for returning a diamond when in with a trump, giving declarer a trick with dummy's queen. As it happens, it wouldn't matter in any case as North would never make the king anyway.

Defence goes both ways. North has made the best opening lead and South has to cooperate by doing the right thing in the follow up.

Always have a REASON for playing any card as a defender and you will start to become a good defender.