

195. Trump Liability

Playing in a pairs' contest against opponents I don't recognize, I hold in first position:

♠3 2 ♥A 10 6 ♦A Q J 8 7 ♣J 3 2

Vulnerable against not, I open **one diamond**. West on my left passes, and partner responds **one heart**. East passes and I rebid **one notrump**. West and partner pass, and East reopens with a **double**. I pass, as does West. Partner pauses and then reluctantly bids **two diamonds**. Again there are two passes before West **doubles**. Upon inquiry, we are told that this is a penalty double. Three passes follow. The bidding has been exciting:

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	Dbl	All Pass	

West leads the five of spades and partner puts down a hand with three useful values:

♠ A 9 7 4
♥ 7 5 3 2
♦ 9 6 4
♣ K 6

♠5 led

♠ 3 2
♥ A 10 6
♦ A Q J 8 7
♣ J 3 2

Initial evaluation:

I have up to seven losers if everything goes wrong. I play low on the opening lead and East wins the king. He lays down the king of hearts, which I duck, and switches to a trump. I insert the queen and West wins the king.

West reverts to hearts, and I win the jack with my ace. I play a spade to the ace and ruff a spade, West following with the queen.

It is time to confront clubs and I lead low towards dummy with some degree of confidence. West wins her ace and exits with a club to the king. My luck is holding so far. I play the last spade from dummy; West plays the jack. It makes no sense to ruff low, so I play the jack of trumps, West discarding a club. When I ruff my last club in dummy, I have managed six tricks; and if East has the ten of trumps, I can make this contract. But surely West has that card along with the other diamonds. This is my picture of the hand:

♠ —	♠ —
♥ 7 5	♥ Q x
♦ 6	♦ —
♣ —	♣ Q
♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ 10
♦ 10 3 2	♦ A 8
♣ —	♣ —

West has too many trumps! I lead a heart. West has to ruff her partner's trick and lead a diamond away from her ♦10x. My ♦A8 bring my trick total to eight for +180 and a good score.

The full deal:

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

Points of Interest:

- As often happens at match points, the double was a good idea because +200 would have been a top. But West committed three errors that let declarer slip through an eighth trick.

- The first was not playing trumps at every chance after winning the king of diamonds.

- The second was rising with the ace of clubs. Declarer had only one club loser, but the defense should have contrived for East to win this trick. West should play low on the club. Declarer ruffs back to his hand, and plays the jack of clubs. West must duck this as well.

- The third error was more elusive. When declarer ruffed the fourth spade high, West should recognize that her long trump was a liability. She should underruff with a low trump. When partner has good tricks, small trumps get in the way, and it is often good practice for a defender to reduce to the number of trumps in declarer's hand.