

327. Obvious Sacrifices

Playing in an online pairs' game against unknown opponents, I hold:

♠ 9 8 ♥ A 10 8 7 4 3 ♦ A ♣ A K 6 5

We are vulnerable against not. East, on my right, deals and opens the bidding with **two diamonds**. I have a routine overcall of **two hearts**. West, on my left, jumps to **four diamonds**, and partner bids **four hearts**. East and I pass, but West soldiers on to **five diamonds**. Partner passes, East passes, and it reverts to me. My agreement with partner in sacrifice situations is that pass in "first chair" is mildly optimistic, showing reasonable trumps and about three tricks but probably a doubleton diamond. My actual hand is quite good. I have the magic singleton in the opponents' suit. I might trade the ace of diamonds for values in the black suits, but I won't turn back what I was dealt. Partner bid game under some pressure. He is likely to have a reasonable hand with spade cards. If so, I must have some play for eleven tricks. I decide to try **five hearts**. Again two passes and East **doubles!** I have apparently done the wrong thing. There is no further bidding. The full auction

West	North	East	South
—	—	2♦	2♥
4♦	4♥	Pass	Pass
5♦	Pass	Pass	5♥
Pass	Pass	Dbl	All Pass

West leads the king of diamonds and this is what I see:

♠ A K J 7
♥ 9 6 5 2
♦ 3 2
♣ 10 9 3

♦K led

♠ 9 8
♥ A 10 8 7 4 3
♦ A
♣ A K 6 5

On the surface I have only two losers, but apparently trumps are not breaking. I win the ♦A and test the trump position immediately with the ♥A. As feared, West shows out, throwing a spade. The spade discard is significant because I cannot imagine

West throwing a spade with fewer than five. (If West had only four spades, I might throw two club losers on the spades with the help of the spade finesse).

My main chance is to play East for 2=3=6=2 distribution. I cash the ace and king of clubs; both follow. Now I cross to the ace of spades and ruff dummy's last diamond. The moment of truth! I play a spade to the jack. It holds! I throw a club on the king of spades as East discards a diamond.

I have completed my elimination. I exit with a trump. East wins and cashes his other heart, but is left with nothing but diamonds. When he leads one, I ruff in dummy and throw my club loser. I have my eleven tricks.

The full deal:

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

Every partnership should have forcing-pass agreements when the opponents make an obvious sacrifice. The basic understanding is that the opponents will *not* play the contract undoubled, which frees up your side's first pass as an expression of your offense-defense potential. There are three choices: (1) My hand is so obviously offensive that I think we can make a five-level contract; (2) I have doubts; and (3) mild optimism. In the first case, you bid five of your suit; in the second, you double; and in the third, you *pass* the decision to partner.

What do you need to make one of these three choices? Ultimately, it may depend on your table feel or the sophistication of your partnership. The following is a suggestion: In the first case, you should have great cards based on your previous bidding *and* a singleton diamond. In the second (when you have doubts), you should have a doubleton diamond and a minimum for your

previous bidding. In the third case (the forcing pass), you have good values and probably a doubleton diamond.

These agreements are only suggestions. They may be modified on the fly depending on the level of aggressiveness of the opponents. The point is that they should be discussed by all serious partnerships.