

DEFENCE 4 – WHAT SHOULD I DISCARD?

Dealer: S

Vul: Both

	♠ AK4	
	♥ Q1073	
	♦ A10	
	♣ 9754	
♠ 753		♠ Q1098
♥ 952		♥
♦ Q742		♦ J983
♣ Q106		♣ AKJ83
	♠ J62	
	♥ AKJ864	
	♦ K65	
	♣ 2	

One of the hardest things in bridge is knowing what to discard when defending. The above hand is a warning to those who don't know the basic principles.

South was in 6H, after showing a singleton club in the bidding. As you can see, South is in trouble. There is an inescapable club loser, and also a spade loser unless the SQ falls in 2 rounds or the defence do something silly.

West led a trump – often a good idea when the opposition have shown shortage somewhere. South drew 3 rounds of trumps and East had 3 discards to make. She incautiously let go 2 clubs.

South then led a club. East won and returned a club which South ruffed. South went to dummy with the SA and ruffed a third club. With all the defenders' clubs gone, the C9 was now good and the losing small spade was thrown away on it.

What went wrong? There are 2 very good principles to keep in mind when defending. The first is a good bridge maxim:

WHEN DEFENDING, KEEP LENGTH WITH DUMMY

This means keeping the same number of cards as dummy in suits. It prevents dummy creating a length winner. In the above example, East should have kept 4 matching clubs with dummy.

However, this bridge maxim hides a deeper truth:

IF YOU KNOW YOU ARE THE ONLY DEFENDER WHO CAN GUARD A SUIT, YOU MUST KEEP THAT SUIT. IF YOU HAVE TO THROW SOMETHING, THROW A SUIT WHERE YOU ARE NOT SURE IF YOU ARE THE ONLY GUARD AND HOPE PARTNER CAN GUARD IT

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On this hand, East should have realised that with South having a singleton club, partner has 3 clubs, and East is the only defender who can guard the 4th round of clubs. She **MUST** keep 4 clubs **PERIOD**.

What about spades? East can't be completely certain she's guarding spades (partner might have the jack) but in the absence of West signalling the jack, I'd assume you're in charge of this suit too.

Thus, East's 3 discards are clear:

1. She can afford to let go of one club but **MUST** keep 4 clubs
2. She can let go one spade but probably should keep the spades covered, and
3. The third discard must be a diamond – just hope partner can guard this suit or declarer can't set anything up in it. The fact declarer is drawing trumps and not trying to ruff diamonds is a clue that there are no losers there and you can safely throw a diamond.