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[Ed Hoogenkamp](#)[Guest Authors](#)[Peter van der Linden](#)[Sjoert Brink](#)**How could you...!**

In my view enjoying bridge is closely connected with the code of conduct that is valid at the bridge table - or should be valid. I have clear-cut ideas about how a bridge player should behave at the table. In theory most players will agree with me, but in practice things can turn out rather differently...

Bridge easily leads to conflicts between partners (and conflicts with opponents of course, but that is not the topic of this column). That figures; after all, partners will have to solve problems together in every single deal. Sometimes these problems are quite difficult. Usually one of the two gets a tougher problem to solve than the other: for instance when that player lacks certain information which his partner has. You will recognise the following, very common situation: you are waiting for partner who has won a trick and is considering his return. It stands out a mile that he must

play back a club, since you hold a tenace over dummy's high club. You will make two club tricks and the contract is down. Piece of cake, end of story, next deal. It won't get any clearer than this.

Still, partner takes his time thinking. What is he waiting for? You are getting impatient. Why does this have to take that long? Just put that club on the table, so we can get on with the next deal... More time is passing. Your impatience changes into anxiety. He won't play a heart, will he?

After another seemingly endless thinking pause partner finally pulls a card from his hand. You hardly dare to look and when you finally do, it is the ♥7 that catches your eye. Declarer wins and claims his contract.

'How could you return that heart?!' is your instinctive reaction. Usually you sound hurt (after all, you have suffered badly while partner was thinking endlessly). Often you add: 'I had the ace-queen of clubs over dummy's king!'

Not surprisingly partner will not cheer up after receiving this information. He has just given away a contract after thinking long and hard over his return. In itself that was enough to put him in a bad mood. Next he turns out to have disappointed his partner badly, something the latter makes abundantly clear. On top of that he gets lectured as well: 'My sequence in throwing diamonds showed I wanted a club return, didn't you see that?' All in all this is almost sufficient to give up bridge and become a member of a ping pong club.

Now what is it that happened? Not much really. Partner played the wrong card, something he has done before and will do many more times if he keeps on playing bridge. And so will you, by the way. After all, that is what the game is all about. Sometimes it really is impossible for him to see what to play. Another time he misinterprets your signal. Again another time your signalling just was not clear enough. And then there is the possibility that he *did* take his best chance - a chance you have failed to notice since you were obsessed by that desired club return. Unfortunately taking his best chance didn't help partner; taking the smaller chance would have ('operation successful but the patient died')...

In the end it does not really matter. What matters is the way you cope with your disappointment. My advice:

After a 'disaster' never start with: 'You should...' or 'Couldn't you...'

But always with: 'Maybe I had something better...?'

At once you will notice a kind of relaxation in the discussion. You suggest that maybe you could have done better and usually partner will now do likewise. What matters is that things will always go wrong in bridge. Coping with that is a skill in itself and virtually every partnership can avoid a lot of irritation if both players start realising this. Try not to begin by searching for the culprit - which is exactly what many partnerships do.

I experienced a fine example of this on a club match. Against a 4♥ contract I found the inspired lead of an unsupported ace in a five-card suit. I continued the suit and my partner ruffed. He switched to a club, which I won with the ace. I gave partner a second ruff, so we made the first four tricks. Declarer claimed the rest. Down one.

Dummy snatched the travelling score sheet from the board. At once she saw they had scored a bottom on the deal. Her brain worked overtime. 'You should have...you should have...you should have drawn trumps first, of course!'

Even now, many years later, I can still clearly visualise the desperate expression on declarer's face.

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