

Board 16
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

Conflagration -- Problem

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



♠ Q J 6 5 4
 ♥ 9 7
 ♦ A K
 ♣ A J 5 3

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1 ♦	1 ♠
3 ♦ ¹	4 ♠	All pass	<i>Pete</i>

1. Weak.
 4 ♠ by South
 Lead: ♦ 3

Criticizing partner tends to be bad for your bridge game. The two likely results are (1) partner is a hero, shrugs off the slights, and continues to play as well as possible; or (2) partner blows up the next board. My unnamed, occasional partner had been on my case, possibly contributing to my one unforced error of this pairs game, when this deal came up.

Partner's 4 ♠ was what a jump to game looks like. A cue bid of 4 ♦ should be used instead, when bidding game on power. This technique can be crucial, if the auction continues. Our auction was normal, and with my maximum overcall, I was thrilled when partner bid game.

Ouch, what a terrible fit! Possible losers include two hearts, two clubs, and a trump.

On the lead of the ♦ 3, the queen appeared on my right. The ♦ AK let me discard clubs from dummy, ostensibly reducing my club losers to one. The opponents have 18 HCP, so there is room for an important card in the West hand - especially bidding 3 ♦ vulnerable. I led the ♥ 7, trying to look like a man who wants to steal the ♥ K. When West did not fly ace, I let the 7 ride, forcing the ♥ Q. Back came the ♣ K.

This was the time to take stock. We place the ♥ AQ and possibly J, ♣ K and likely Q, and ♦ Q but not the J in East hand, probably 14 HCP already. What now?

Well, in the heat of battle, and under partner's watchful eye, I dithered and led another heart to the 9, 10 and Ace. East cashed the ♣ Q and led the last outstanding club. West ruffed my jack with the ♠ 7, and dummy overruffed. Can't put it off any longer, have to play trumps now. What would be your choice?

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Conflagration -- Solution?

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

N
W E
S

♠ Q J 6 5 4
♥ 9 7
♦ A K
♣ A J 5 3

NS 4N; NS 4♠; NS 3♥; NS 4♣; EW 2♦; Par +430

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♦	1♠
3♦ ¹	4♠	All pass	<i>Pete</i>

1. Weak.
 4♠ by South
 Lead: ♦ 3

Without any information beyond the bidding, it would clearly be correct to play the ♠ A, in hopes of felling the king. It works!

However, all the information I gained pointed to the ♠ K being in the West hand. My dithering has cost nothing, since West surely has the ♥ J left in hand. I don't need to discard anything, because the ♥ K and ♣ 5 are both good. If I play correctly now, all will be well.

After as much as five minutes of thought, the deciding factor for me was that West could have started with all four spades. I ruffed a heart to hand, led the ♠ Q and finessed, down 1. Good thinking does not guarantee a good result.

Partner immediately said, snidely, "I would have cashed the ace of spades, and made the contract!" Unable to control myself, I said loudly, "That was not a helpful comment!" A conflagration ensued that drew the director to the table. The surprise in the situation was not that I lost it, but that I used no four letter words!

Anyhow, that seemed to both clear the air and muzzle my partner. We kept our game together and won our direction, second over all. Apparently, a sharp retort can sometimes save a session. Don't count on it.