

# ANSWERS TO MIKE'S BRIDGE LESSON

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You have probably heard conversations like this: "I played the two on partner's opening lead and he switched to a club. We played great suit-preference defense on this board."

Here is a deal showing this idea in action.

♠ A Q 4  
♥ 10 6 3  
♦ Q 10 9 8  
♣ 6 5 3

♠ 7 3  
♥ A K Q 9 7  
♦ A 6 2  
♣ K J 9

You	North	Partner	South
1♥	Pass	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

South's 2♠ shows a six-card suit and a full opening bid. North's raise is invitational and South accepts.

You lead a high heart (ace or king, according to your agreements). East plays the 2. What does that ♥2 mean to you?

Does it mean East hates hearts?

Does it mean East wants a club lead?

Does East have a singleton heart?

I can tell you that whatever it means, the term "suit preference" is not going to be part of the answer. When you make an opening lead, there will be rare cases where your partner can make a suit-preference play, but for the most part, you should ignore that possibility and assume your partner is giving you information.

Here are the questions again, with answers.

Does partner's ♥2 mean he hates hearts? It's not certain. What you do know is that your partner played the 2, and the message might be that he does not see a future in your leading more hearts. You can lead more hearts, but be aware that partner's signal is unclear.

Does it mean he wants a club lead? He may want a club lead. He may want a diamond lead. At this moment, he cannot

tell you what he wants. It seems he does not want you to continue hearts. You have to sort the rest out for yourself.

Does he have a singleton heart? He may. He may not.

Let's say that your partner plays the ♥8 at trick one. Is he asking for a diamond lead? The answer is that he is telling you that he likes hearts. You usually will lead more hearts, but if you decide to lead something else, that is your choice.

There are times when your partner will tell you to lead more hearts and you will correctly decide to lead something else. There are times when your partner will tell you he does not want more hearts, but you will see that leading more hearts is best.

Remember this: Using this deal as an example, you know that your partner has a lousy hand. He will have very few messages he can give you. Basically, he can say to you that he does not care for more hearts or he can say that he does want you to continue with the suit.

Here is a rule you can count on: Your partner's messages are seldom going to be foolproof. You may know enough that you can disregard his message to do something else. You still have to think. The full deal:

♠ A Q 4  
♥ 10 6 3  
♦ Q 10 9 8  
♣ 6 5 3

♠ 7 3  
♥ A K Q 9 7  
♦ A 6 2  
♣ K J 9

	N	♠ 8 5
	W	♥ 8 5 2
	E	♦ 7 5 3
	S	♣ Q 8 7 4 2

♠ K J 10 9 6 2  
♥ J 4  
♦ K J 4  
♣ A 10

It turns out that the defense has to lead a club before the ♦A is knocked out. You may guess to lead a club, but you should not lead a club because East played the ♥2. This is not an easy problem. Still, if you lead a club saying that East's ♥2 was a suit preference, you and your partner are going to have problems. □