Partnership Bridge

By Pamela and Matthew Granovetter
www.bridgetoday.com

Pamela: No matter how long you play with the same partner, something will always come up that you haven't discussed. It might be very basic — for example, I once saw Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell have a disaster when they misunderstood a Gerber reply. When their ace-ask was doubled by an opponent, they reached a grand slam off an ace! Sometimes the disaster comes about in a less straightforward manner. Take this deal, for instance. I was playing with a regular partner and sat North:

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Dlr: North    ♠ 5 2
Vul: Both     ♥ K 7 5 2
              ♦ 4
              ♣ A K J 6 5 2
♠ A K J 9            ♠ Q 10 8 7 6
♥ 10 9 4      N     ♥ J 8
♦ Q 8 5     W   E   ♦ 7 6
♣ 7 4 3       S     ♣ Q 10 9 8
              ♠ 4 3
              ♥ A Q 6 3
              ♦ A K J 10 9 3 2
              ♣ —
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West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	5♣	Pass	5♦
All Pass			

West led the ♠K. We play sound opening bids, and although my high-card total was only 11, I had a good playing hand with 2½ quick tricks, so I began proceedings with 1♣. My partner responded 2♦, a strong jump shift, which is supposed to show either a one-suiter with diamonds or strong diamonds with a club fit (he was treating his hand as a one-suiter because of the seventh diamond).

I rebid 3♣ to show my long suit, not bothering with hearts, since he wasn't supposed to hold four of those. Now he bid 3♦. I bid 3♥, looking for 3NT, and he bid 4♥. What was that? It seemed to me he was looking for a spade control for slam and I didn't have it. I retreated to 5♣ and he corrected to 5♦, which failed by a trick when they cashed two spades and the queen of diamonds was offside third.

We were cold for 11 tricks in hearts! Where do you think we went wrong? Should I have recognized that he did hold four hearts after all, or did he forsake discipline by treating his hand as a one-suiter?

Matthew: Your partner was at fault. His 4♥ bid should have been based exactly what you said, a probe for a spade cuebid. You could easily have held one spade and two diamonds and he could have held one fewer heart and one more diamond. Playing disciplined bridge, you can never pass that 4♥ bid. A strong one-suiter should be reserved for just that — a strong *one*-suiter!

With two-suited hands, there's no reason to jam the auction, which is why the jump shift is reserved for a one-suiter. Admittedly, your partner's diamond suit is greatly superior to his heart suit, but that doesn't change the nature of his hand. It's strange how players who would never lie about aces over a Blackwood bid will lie about other agreements in their system. Let's see how the auction might go had he bid his hand properly:

Pamela	Partner
1♣	1♦
1♥	?

At this point, it depends on your agreements for rebids. We play the jump to 3♥ as forcing, and after that North should bid 4♣, a cuebid, denying a control in spades. South then signs off in 4♥. If you play a jump rebid to 3♥ as invitational, you will have to do something else with the South hand. One idea is fourth-suit forcing, followed by a heart raise (many play 2♠ as fourth-suit forcing here, rather than 1♠), with the same conclusion. Another idea is to jump to 4♦ with the South hand as a 6–4 raise to game, but that does not allow the partnership to cuebid below game. Even if South pushes to the five level, perhaps with a 5♥ bid over 1♥, the partnership will survive because of the 3–2 heart split.

Pamela: It's true that a simple 1♦ response works better, but I sympathize with my partner's strong jump shift. I'm not sure how we can reach slam otherwise, if I hold something like:

♠ A 8 7 5   ♥ K 4   ♦ Q 4   ♣ A 6 5 3 2.

In that case a grand slam is a good bet with an ordinary opening bid! After 1♣–1♦; 1♠, reaching even six is difficult.

The Last Word (Matthew): In a good partnership, you mustn't violate the rules you set up. Otherwise, you undermine partnership trust and performance. Since you know that partner is forced to bid only 1♦ with a two-suiter no matter how strong a hand he might hold, you will always be aware that slam is in the picture. And when partner next bids hearts and follows up with diamonds again, you'll make a move with your good controls. ❑