

A Losing Option By Roger Lord

Dealer: South
Vul: East-West

	North Dummy		
	♠4		
	♥AKJ		
	♦K875		
	♣A9764		
West You		East	
♠J105		♠A3	
♥9842		♥Q1065	
♦A9		♦Q10643	
♣KQ105		♣J8	
	South		
	♠KQ98762		
	♥73		
	♦J2		
	♣32		

South	West	North	East
3 Spades	Pass	4 Spades	All Pass

Opening Lead: Club King

This deal is taken from the recent Backstoppers Pro-Am event. You are West. Cover the East and South hands. South preempts three spades, and North raises to four.

Defend four spades. We will assume that you make a normal opening lead of the club king. Dummy's ace wins, partner plays the eight and declarer the three. The spade four is led from dummy, partner follows with the three and declarer wins his queen. At trick three, declarer exits with the spade nine.... Hey! Wait a second, not so fast.

Did you follow to the first spade with the true card, the five? Look at the entire hand. Declarer would have no choice but to continue with a small spade, which would drop East's ace and set up South's king.

When following to the spade queen, West must falsecard—he must play the jack or ten. Declarer now has a choice of which spade to lead out of his hand, the small spade or the king. He may believe that LHO held J10 doubleton, in which case the king would smother the remaining honor while it forces the ace. Since West can follow with the five, his remaining honor sets up.

Defender's play is termed an obligatory falsecard. Whereas this deception might fool declarer, it cannot do any harm to defenders, and it cannot matter whether it fools partner.

Which declarer play is the better? There are two answers to this question.

Answer One: If LHO lacks strategic experience and/or appears to be asleep, assume that he is not falsecarding. Play to smother the honor –lead the king.

Answer Two: If LHO is known to be aware of such a stratagem and appears to be awake, play a low spade, hoping to drop the ace. The reason is that, in a random deal, there would have been just one possible spade combination—J10 doubleton opposite A53—where the king lead would win, whereas there would have been two spade combinations—J105 opposite A3 and J103 opposite A5—where the low spade would win.