

HAND OF THE WEEK

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I am going to start writing up interesting deals from a first-person perspective. Some of the deals I have played with Phil, and when our system was involved I will try to make up a standard auction. But this deal is just a bread and butter competitive auction.

At matchpoints, you pick up in 4th seat with none vulnerable, ♠Q982 ♥K94 ♦A104 ♣Q54. The auction proceeds:

LHO	Phil	RHO	me
Pass	1♦	1♥	

My first decision, how to enter the auction. But it's not a tough one, double shows exactly 4 spades, and that's what I want to do. The auction accelerates from here.

Dbf

Pass	2♦	Dbf
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RHO's double is takeout, suggesting extra values and support for the black suits. Now I have choices.

1. I could redouble, showing a good hand, 10+ HCP, willing to defend. This could be right if partner had something like ♠Kx ♥Jxx ♦KQJxx ♣K10x, not eager to rebid 1NT with such a shabby heart stopper; they would be in trouble with no 8-card fit and us having the balance of the high cards and a suit to tap their strong hand with.
2. I could cue-bid, showing similar strength but support for partner. Since partner is likely to have 6 or more diamonds, this seems preferable to redouble to me. And I will usually have a tolerance for partner's long suit, a hand like ♠Q982 ♥KQ94 ♦10 ♣Q654 should just pass 2♦ here because it will be easier for partner to make use of his diamond length when they are trumps than in notrump.
3. I could bid 2NT, again showing similar strength, but suggesting notrump as the best strain. And this call, unlike redouble or the cue-bid, is strictly limited since I could also bid 3NT with the values to force to game.
4. I could bid 3♦, a pessimistic view of my game potential. This might be right, but I reject it because it's very unilateral, since partner will pass without significant extra values.

It took you much longer to read this than it did for me to select my next call, I consider 2NT to be the standout call because it lets partner know the most about my hand.

2NT

3♣	4♦	Pass
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Well, this is a fine kettle of fish. It's decision time. My choices are obvious here, I must either pass or raise to game. There could conceivably be a third option here, a cue-bid with extraordinarily slamish values, but those I don't have. That would be appropriate with something like ♠Axxx ♥Axx ♦Kxx ♣Qxx, since partner would NEVER expect an invitational range hand to have three key cards. And he could perfectly well have something like ♠Kx ♥x ♦A10xxxx ♣KJ10, which would be perfectly consistent with his auction. He would go slowly until he knew that I had values AND a fit, since declaring with a hand like this when there are no dummy entries is not a lot of fun. But a secondary issue with this hand

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would be that I would probably have considered three key cards and a fit to be suit-oriented and would likely have cue-bid at my previous turn.

So let's list the pros and cons of this situation, where pros are indicators to bid game and cons are indicators to pass.

Pros

1. I have great diamonds in context.
2. I have a well-placed ♥K.
3. Partner is unlikely to regard side queens with fondness, his hand is likely all aces and kings. Of course, I can probably only expect two aces and a king or an ace and two kings. I'm inclined to expect AAK rather than AKK.
4. Partner will be able to place most of the high cards on the auction. And the strong hand may well be endplayed on opening lead.
5. Partner might have a useful void.
6. Partner would likely have regarded holding two small clubs a very bad feature after RHO's free 3♣ bid.

Cons

1. One or both of my black queens is likely to be wasted.
2. Eleven tricks is a lot of tricks. I will likely be providing only 3 of them, so I need to construct a hand for partner that has 8 winners with only 3 cards above a queen.
3. Partner is likely to be short in one of their bid suits, otherwise he would likely have gambled out 3NT.

OK, it's quiz time. Take a few minutes and try to construct a hand justifying bidding game here. If you can't, then you will have to pass. If you can, then you are allowed to bid 5♦. I'm giving you a couple of minutes, I actually probably took 30 seconds or less. This was not one of my "take my glasses off and bury my face in my hands" thinks. But I do this a lot faster than most of you, because I have had a lot more practice.

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OK, I put Phil on an 8-card suit with an ace and two kings and bid game. And I assumed that one of the high cards would be in spades, since he would have known that that card would be valuable. He actually had ♠KJ ♥106 ♦KJ987532 ♣A. Good game, right? OK, now you get to play it.

Dummy ♠Q982 ♥K94 ♦A104 ♣Q54

Declarer ♠KJ ♥106 ♦KJ987532 ♣A

LHO leads the ♣2 to the 4, 6, and ace. What do you know about the club suit?

You cash the ♦K and LHO discards a small heart. You now cross to the ♦A and RHO plays the Queen. Now what?

Phil made a nice play here, he ruffed a club. The play to the first trick tipped him off. LHO was likely to hold most of the missing cards, but not all of them. And for sure LHO had started with the ♣K32 – he would be unlikely to lead low from K2 and he simply can't have any of the other club spots (well, I guess LHO could have held KJ2 and RHO 1098763), since RHO clearly has a long sequence.

Why did Phil ruff the club? He wanted to give LHO a safe exit IN CASE HE DIDN'T HAVE THE ♥A. After all, LHO could hope for Phil to have started with ♠Kx, leaving his partner with the ♠J when there would be nowhere for Phil to put one of his hypothetical two small hearts.

And it worked like a dream. LHO won the spade, thought for a bit, and laid down the ♣K. And it was necessary, because RHO had been dealt ♥Ax.