

HAND OF THE WEEK

Here's a nice constructive bidding exercise courtesy of Phil Goulding. You are in 3rd seat vul against not and hold ♠AK ♥KQJ753 ♦AK42 ♣K. Two passes to you. This is a clear 2♣ opening, and as we play, partner's 2♥ response shows either an ace or two kings. I trust you have all figured out that partner has an ace.

As an aside, our responses to 2♣ openings are:

- 2♦ is no ace and at most one king.
- 2♥ is, as I have told you, two kings or one ace.
- 2♠ is an ace and a king
- 2NT is 3 kings
- 3♣ is 4 kings, 2 aces, or one ace and two kings
- 3♦ is more (AKA "Partner, you didn't have a 2♣ opening.")

This is something I learned long ago. It has its drawbacks – for instance if you pick up something like ♠void ♥3 ♦AKQJ1042 ♣AK975 (don't laugh, Bernie Greenspan had this hand playing with me last week), you can't open 2♣ since none of the possible responses will help you. Indeed, you can't really risk opening 2♣ when you have any void. Don't worry, I have been not opening 2♣ with this sort of hand for 50 years now and it has NEVER EVER gone all pass. Even when I had 12 cards in the majors.

OK, back to the problem. Over partner's 2♥ RHO decides to make a nuisance bid of 3♣. One advantage of this response structure is that over any positive response, opener's double of an intervention is pure penalty. We are forced to game except after the 2♦ response, so if opener wants responder to bid something, he can just pass. They cannot play undoubled below game. And if opener passes and responder doubles, that's penalty too. Its basic meaning is that "I would have passed a takeout double for penalties."

Of course, you have something you want to say, so you say it. After your 3♥ rebid, partner raises to 4♥ and you have to decide whether you want to continue, and if so, how? What could partner have?

1. He has either the ♥A or the ♣A, or both.
2. He probably has a relatively balanced hand. Most people that use this method play that all jumps by responder after opener shows his suit are splinter raises. And this is true even after the negative 2♦ response, with the additional proviso that responder has to have either a king or the trump Queen. *i.e.*, not a total bust.
3. Partner can have an unlimited number of queens and jacks.

The key suit, of course is diamonds here. Asking for aces is surely absurd here, you know what the answer will be. But partner doesn't know that. And you might have a hand like this: ♠A2 ♥KQJ1053 ♦AQ4 ♣AK where, curiously, if partner has no ace slam is practically cold if partner has no ace and very iffy if he has one. And for those of you who play RKCB, you sometimes need to make sure your side has the king of trumps. For instance ♠AK ♥AQJ753 ♦AQ10 ♣A. If partner has the ♥K you can next bid 6♦ to tell partner you want him to bid 7 with the ♦K (and you will bid 6NT if he doesn't have it, or if partner denied the ♥K with the RKCB response).

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Vol. 1 No. 19 Page 2

None of those reasons apply to this deal, though. What you need for slam is either partner to have the ♥A and a queen, or the ♣A and third round diamond control. Can you communicate this to him?

Yes, you could simply bid 4♠ here, a cue bid. When you decide to cue-bid instead of asking for aces or key cards, you are telling partner that you have a problem that can't be solved simply by finding out about aces or key cards. If partner has the ♣A here, he will bid 5♣ and you will continue with 5♦, asking partner to bid on with anything extra. If partner has two kings, he should cue-bid the cheapest one. 4NT here would show the ♠K, 5♣ the ♣K and a red King, and 5♦ both red kings. You will surely be able to tell the difference if you had anything resembling a slam try.

Alternatively, you could just bid 5♦ directly over 4♥, this can't be a cue-bid since partner has no room to transmit any information without forcing to slam, and logically you would bid differently if you needed more information to bid a slam, or bid the slam if you didn't need any further information. So this bid asks for THIRD ROUND diamond control (the Queen or a doubleton). If responder doesn't have it, he must sign off in 5♥. If he has the ♦Q he can cue-bid his ace or the cheaper of his two kings. And if he just has a doubleton diamond, he can just bid 6♥.

Finally, if you cue-bid 5♣ you deny a spade control, partner must sign off without one, or bid 5NT with the guarded King, or bid slam with the A or KQ of spades.

In real life, partner had the ♣A and ♦Q along with 3 small hearts. So cue-bidding 4♠ or asking with 5♦ will get you to the ice cold 6NT and score 96% on the board. After the 4♠ cue, the bidding would continue with 5♦, partner will bid 6♦ to show the Q and you can bid 6NT. And if you ask with 5♦, partner's 6♣ will tell you what you need to know.