

HAND OF THE WEEK

© 2020 Craig Biddle

Vol. 1 No. 2 Page 1

Again playing matchpoints, you deal with none vulnerable and see ♠K87 ♥Q95 ♦Q94 ♣J853. Even in my style with Phil, this is not an opening bid (not even a preempt) so of course I passed. The bidding proceeded:

Me	LHO	Phil	RHO
Pass	1♦	Dbl	1♠

This looks like it's shaping up to be a part-score battle. Do you want to participate?

I can see 3 possible calls here.

1. Pass. True, I have 8 points, which is normally considered to be enough to bid 1NT here. But I could easily see LHO leading a high spade spot to RHO's Ace and a diamond coming back, to be followed in quick succession by a lot more diamonds after my Queen loses to the K or A.
2. 2♣. Phil asked me to bid a suit, and poor as it is, I have one. But we are often not ready to hear partner bid the other minor when we have doubled a minor suit opening. And that goes double for us; we would regard ♠QJxx ♥AJ10xx ♦xx ♣Kx to be a routine takeout double, planning to correct a club response to hearts. This is not everyone's style, and I don't recommend that you adopt it without a lot of discussion. I was a hard sell on this one, since I much prefer the traditional meaning of that 2♥ call, which is, "I can make a game opposite very little if you have support." Most people play that way, too, I think.
3. 1NT. And damn the torpedoes.

Since damn the torpedoes is the basic philosophy that Phil and I live by, I bid 1NT. And I never had another bidding decision to make, since the auction proceeded:

1NT	2♦	Pass	3NT
-----	----	------	-----

They say that 3NT ends all auctions. It certainly ended this one.

It's your lead. Let's think about how the various suits lie.

- Spades – Phil probably has 3 or 4, RHO probably has 4 or 5, and that leaves LHO with from 1-3 of them. It's possible that LHO has the stiff Ace, and that it's necessary to knock that out to kill the diamond suit. But that seems unlikely.
- Hearts – If I had to bet on Phil having more cards than anyone else at the table, this would be my bet. And I have a nice holding to help establish the suit. But RHO likely has a stopper and some length.
- Diamonds – no thanks, I have no death wish.
- Clubs – as with spades, RHO likely has length and a stopper there, too. Since this is also my longest suit, I think LHO may well be short there.

I think a good first guess is that LHO is 2=3=6=2 (♠♥♦♣ in that order). That could give RHO 4=3=3=3 and Phil 4=4=1=4. But I'm still leading a heart since, as I said above, Phil and I would routinely double with 4♠5♥. LHO puts down dummy, and I see:

Dummy ♠3 ♥A7632 ♦AK108652 ♣void

HAND OF THE WEEK

© 2020 Craig Biddle

Vol. 1 No. 2 Page 2

What???? OMG!!!!!! LHO (a student playing with a strong pro on my right) has bid this hand like a burger-flipper. But this may well be a disaster for us; RHO will surely pick up my $\diamond Q$, and they could easily have 11 fast tricks. But the first trick goes quickly; 2, 10, K. I can see 9 tricks for declarer, but he thinks for a bit. That's a good sign, declarer may well be worried that $6\diamond$ is on and is trying to construct a plausible layout where that's not the case.

Meanwhile, I'm pondering, too. I'm steeling myself to play low in tempo if the next card I see is the $\diamond J$, and I am hoping that partner has the $\spadesuit A$, which will give us a chance to get our hearts going. Eventually, the $\diamond J$ hits the table, I play low smoothly, and declarer hops with the $\diamond A$. That's good news (declarer IS worried that $6\diamond$ is making) and bad news (declarer still thinks he can make 10 tricks to beat those who miss the slam). Phil pitches a low club, and declarer shrugs his shoulders and plays a spade.

Phil hops with the Ace and shifts to his small heart, RHO pitches a small spade. Wow. Declarer is surely $5=1=3=4$; Phil and I rarely double with $5\spadesuit$, and the hearts and diamonds are absolutes. I play the QUEEN of hearts here, unblocking for Phil's 10-8, and declarer wins and plays a heart back. Phil puts up the $\heartsuit 10$, smothering my 9, and cashes the 8. I am careful to pitch my $\clubsuit 3$ so we don't have an accident, and Phil plays a spade to the Jack and my King. Phil would have cashed any available club winners before playing the spade since he couldn't be sure I had the $\spadesuit K$, so I know that declarer has the $\clubsuit A$. So I play my last spade, but of course declarer has the $\spadesuit J$ and he claims with the marked diamond finesse. Declarer's hand was $\spadesuit QJxxx \heartsuit K \diamond Jxx \clubsuit AQ9x$

Rate declarer's play of this hand. I don't rate it very highly. He is looking at 24 HCP between his two hands, and his RHO made a takeout double and his LHO showed strength. Are we using a Pinochle deck? Even with the modern hyperaggressive style, that's a lot of bidding on two flat hands. I think he should have cashed the $\clubsuit A$ and hooked the diamond; even if that loses he will have 2 hearts, 6 diamonds, and a club, and for that to be wrong I have to have bid 1NT on two small diamonds and then have the $\clubsuit K$, too. And if the diamond finesse wins, he has +430 in the bank, beating all the diamond declarers who get a spade lead.