

## HAND OF THE WEEK

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I have two hands for you this week. Both are from matches I played partnering Fred Schenker. The first is just a simple bidding problem, so I won't bore you with a lot of details. Fred deals, with only the opponents vulnerable. He opens 1♥, and you hold ♠652 ♥832 ♦QJ105 ♣QJ2. Your choices are Pass, 1NT, and 2♥.

2♥ is the normal bid, you have 6 points and a known 8-card fit.

1NT, for us, would be natural and not forcing, up to about 10 points.

Pass is, of course, your weakest option.

We've all been conditioned to raise partner when we can, and that was my first thought. Fortunately, I thought again. Unless partner has 3 cards in a minor, the QJ of that suit is purely a defensive value. So, unless he has 3 cards in each minor, my hand is worth 6 points defending and 3 points supporting partner. And if he does have 3 cards (or more) in each minor, he has by necessity at most two spades. So I decided to pass. (My decision was made easier by the fact that his 1♥ was limited to at most 17 HCP, but I believe I would make this bid in normal methods also.) Another way to reach this conclusion is to adopt Kit Woolsey's point count – count your points normally, then subtract ¼ point for each Queen or Jack and add ½ point for each ace. In Kit's world, this is an aceless, 4333, 5-count. I suspect he would endorse my pass.

My LHO balanced with a double, Fred jumped to 3♥, and I passed again. Here, of course, I was again influenced by the idea that the playing strength of his hand was limited. In addition to a maximum of 17 HCP, he probably has at least 5 losers. And nobody bid spades yet, so he probably has two or more of them. So I passed once again. Fred's hand was ♠AJ ♥KQJ10974 ♦8 ♣K95 and he lost a trick in each suit. At the other table, their 1NT response was forcing, and their player chose that response. In the forcing notrump structure, 1NT followed by a preference to opener's first suit can be either a very weak hand with 3-card support, or normal single raise values with a doubleton. Obviously, their responder was planning to bid 2♥ next. But that would have been doubly insufficient, because their opener rebid 4♥. Down 1.

My second deal is a defense problem. Think along with me. As dealer, at favorable vulnerability, I chose to open 1NT with ♠A7653 ♥Q5 ♦AK7 ♣K97. My LHO chose to jump to 3♦, passed around to me. Fred's double would have been negative, simply showing values without a good bid to make. So I had an easy pass.

Fred chose to lead the ♠J, and dummy tabled ♠Q1084 ♥K10842 ♦543 ♣Q.

For reference, my hand was ♠A7653 ♥Q5 ♦AK7 ♣K97.

Declarer played small, I ducked with an encouraging spot, and declarer won the K. Now declarer led the ♦10 to the 8, 3, and my King. What do you know about declarer's hand?

- They have exactly 6 diamonds. There are people who might bid 3♦ with only 5, but they inhabit the I/N games and I don't play in those.
- They have 2 or 3 spades. Fred wouldn't lead the Jack from a 3-card holding.
- They probably have at least 3 clubs; if they have 2 Fred has 7 and if they have 1 Fred has 8. So declarer is either 3=1=6=3, 3=2=6=2, 2=2=6=3, or 2=3=6=2.

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What about high cards? Declarer is known to have started with the ♠K and ♦QJ, Fred the ♠J. Unaccounted for are the ♥AJ and ♣AJ. If declarer has all of them, I'm not going to beat this, and this is IMPs so I'm not thinking about holding overtricks just yet. But an idea strikes me. Has it struck you, too? Stop and think about it for a minute.

I could just draw trumps here, and maybe I should. But declarer clearly knew this was a possibility. So why, if they have the ♣A, did they not play for a club ruff in dummy? The only sensible answer is that Fred has the ♣A. So before drawing trumps, I cash the ♣K. This will make it clear for Fred that he should win the next club if he can. And it will also let him see that I started with ♠A ♦AK ♣K, so he will not play me for the ♥A.

Should I cash the ♠A as well? Probably, since if Fred has both side aces (a) declarer has a weird 3♦ bid, and (b) Fred would have bid something with at least 10 cards in hearts and clubs and two aces. And if declarer has the ♥AJ, they can drop my Queen and may well be able to run 5 heart tricks since they will also know that I started with ♠A ♦AK ♣K and I have to have another card somewhere. I could, of course, have the ♣KJ and Fred the ♥Q, but since I could have both, they will likely play for the drop.

And also, I can see that we are very likely to be able to make 3NT if Fred has ♥Jxx(x); we will have 6 or 7 club tricks, ♠A, ♦AK, and our combined heart stopper.

Fred's hand was ♠J2 ♥J96 ♦8 ♣AJ86543. He could have made a negative double and then corrected to 3NT if I bid a major, showing doubt about notrump. I would have expected him to have something like ♠xx ♥Axxx ♦7 ♣Axxxxx for that auction, and would have been charmed to take my chances in 3NT.