

## HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 21 Page 1

Here's another hand for you to defend along with me. The opponents are vul and you're not, it's IMPs. The opponents are playing 2/1, and are very aggressive. Partner deals and passes, RHO opens 1♠. You hold ♠Q10853 ♥Q96 ♦82 ♣A84. No they didn't psyche. It's not that unusual for you to hold 5 cards in the suit they opened on your right. And it's very unethical for you to huddle before passing. Just pass in tempo.

LHO bids 1NT and self-alerts it as semiforcing. What does THAT mean? It means they might have a 3-card limit raise in spades, or a 2NT invitation. Opener is only allowed to pass if he wouldn't accept either game try. I am not a fan of this treatment, but 1NT forcing is very much out of favor, and either is an improvement over the SAYC 1NT response that denies 3-card support or an invitational hand.

Partner passes, RHO bids 2♦, and of course you pass. Bidding 2♠ here with this hand is asking for -1100. If you had, say, ♠AQ10853 ♥Q9 ♦2 ♣A842 you could bid 2♠ here to show your hand, more or less. You could still go for a number, but you could make a game if partner has, say, ♠J ♥KJxx ♦Axx ♣Kxxxx. On a diamond lead, you'd ruff a diamond in hand at trick 2 and force an entry to dummy in hearts. When you got to dummy you would ruff the last diamond, play Ace and a club to the K, take the spade finesse (RHO must duck), and lead the last high heart. If RHO ruffs this, you overruff. You have 8 tricks in the bag, and you still have the ♠AQ behind the K for two more tricks and your contract. Yep, that means the opponents were bidding on air. People do that nowadays. More likely, though, you would just be in a partial where you have 7 or 8 tricks with normal play and they wouldn't be likely to double you since RHO's spades would be poor.

Back to reality. After your pass, LHO raises diamonds, and RHO bids 3NT. Partner leads a 4<sup>th</sup> best ♥3, and you see:

Dummy: ♠AK742 ♥8 ♦QJ43 ♣K102.

Your hand is ♠Q10853 ♥Q96 ♦82 ♣A84.

Before you play the ♥Q, pause a moment to think. LHO likely has about 11 points, and you can see 8 in your own hand and 13 in dummy. So partner has about 8 points. As far as shapes go, partner has 1-3 spades, 4 or 5 hearts, and likely 2 diamonds. He could have 3, but raising this 2♦ rebid on 4 is not entirely safe, since opener could have 5 spades and 3-3 in the red suits with a maximum for a non-1NT opening. And partner likely doesn't have more clubs than hearts here.

With a preliminary guess as to the limits of the unknown hands' shapes, you play the ♥Q and declarer wins the ace. OK, if declarer has the ♥AJxx (partner has led the ♥3, so hearts are 5-4 one way or the other) and ♦AKxxx, partner has all the rest of the high cards and declarer has only 8 tricks. And this hand is a complete max, many people would just respond 2♦ to force to game. But declarer doesn't have that hand. He leads the ♠9 to the 6 and king, you play the 3 to give (standard) count to help partner. He will know you have 5, since if you had 3 declarer would have raised spades.

Now declarer plays the ♦Q from dummy, you give count with the 8, declarer plays the 7, and partner wins the King. Now partner plays the ♠J, dummy plays the 2, and you overtake. Declarer pitches the ♥2. Time for a long think now. You have acquired a lot of information about the deal. Now it's time to solve the puzzle and see if you can send declarer to the gallows.

# HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 21 Page 2

1. What was the original heart distribution?
2. How many diamonds did declarer start with?
3. What high cards does declarer have?
4. How many tricks can declarer take?
5. Is there a sure-trick way for you to ensure that you can take 5 tricks?

## Answers

1. Declarer started with 5 hearts, partner with 4.
2. Declarer likely has 5 diamonds, he could have 6 or 4.
3. Partner has shown the ♠J and both red kings, since your lead convention is that you don't lead 4<sup>th</sup> best from a 4 card suit that has no ace, king, or queen. So declarer has at least the red aces and the ♣Q. Partner likely has one of the rounded suit (hearts and clubs) jacks and declarer the other. Even without this agreement about leads, partner would often have chosen to lead a club even from ♠J6 ♥Jxx3 ♦Kxx ♣QJxx and partner is likely to have 5 clubs.
4. Declarer has 2 spade tricks, one heart, and 3-5 diamonds. If declarer has the ♥K, and 1=4=5=3 shape, he has 2 spades, 2 hearts and 4 diamonds. And if declarer has those high cards and 1=4=6=2 shape, we are once again in the realm of hands where declarer might have chosen an original game force. But this also gives partner ♣QJxxx, and he would surely have led a club at trick 1. So it's extremely unlikely that declarer will make 9 tricks if you defend correctly. What's the correct plan?
5. Lead the ♠8 (lower of equals to tell partner your entry is in the lower suit) to knock out the King in dummy. Declarer will take their diamond tricks, but will have to lead a heart or a club. If a club, you will know what to do, and if declarer leads a heart, your suit preference signal will tell partner what to do.

The full deal (from declarer's perspective) was:

Dummy ♠AK742 ♥8 ♦QJ43 ♣K102

Your partner: ♠J6 ♥K543 ♦K65 ♣J753 Your hand: ♠Q10853 ♥Q96 ♦82 ♣A84

Declarer: ♠9 ♥AJ1072 ♦A1097 ♣Q96

Did declarer have a better approach available? As the cards lie, declarer could have played hearts from the top at trick 2, dropping the 9 and setting up 4 heart tricks. But the diamond finesse would still have been necessary, and the heart 9 is not a favorite to drop. Declarer's plan was to win the diamond finesse, repeat it but reserve the 4<sup>th</sup> round as a late entry to hand, and try to guess clubs for two tricks, making 2 spades, 1 heart, 4 diamonds, and 2 clubs.

Did partner defend well? No, he made two errors. When declarer led the ♠9 at trick 2, he should have unblocked the Jack. Declarer almost certainly would have started with the Q if he held Q9 doubleton, and if he had 109 doubleton covering the first spade would make the suit awkward for declarer, who could not then afford to overtake the ♠10 without setting up partner's 85 behind the 742. And if declarer had weaker spade holdings, the J is just in the way, as it is here. And with ♦K65, he should have ducked the first diamond to help you count out the hand.

## HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 21 Page 3

Should the opponents have bid differently? I think declarer should have bid 2♥ over 2♦, in case opener had ♠AK742 ♥Q83 ♦Q43 ♣K2, a hand that is much too devoid of intermediates to upgrade to a 1NT opening. But it's not the fashion today to make minimum bids with maximum values. And perhaps their opener would have made the careful 3♥ call over the 3♦ raise.