

HAND OF THE WEEK

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My weak two bid style has devolved over the years. And with Phil, I even open weak two bids that scare me. Here, Phil was the weak two-bidder. And he had a good one by our standards.

Your hand is ♠KQ942 ♥1065 ♦-- ♣K7432. You are the dealer and nobody is vulnerable. We allow great latitude in 1st and 3rd seats when not vulnerable, but there are a few restrictions. We are not allowed to have 5332 shape unless our suit is very strong. We are not allowed to have 4 cards in the other major ever. And in 2nd seat, or vulnerable, we are considerably less wild. Here, though, we would open 2♠ if the ♠K were the 3.

My hand was a slam try opposite an old-fashioned weak 2, but here I just bid game. Maybe we have a slam, but it's more likely that an opponent will misjudge and hand us a juicy 5-level penalty. The opening lead was the ♣J and you see:

Dummy: ♠A83 ♥AK9 ♦K10965 ♣A8

Your hand: ♠KQ942 ♥1065 ♦-- ♣K7432

What's your plan?

Losers – one heart.

Winners – 5 spades, the ♥AK and ♣AK.

Potential winners – a club ruff? One or two long clubs?

Potential losers – a club overruff or a long defensive trump on a 4-1 break.

Plan A - ♣A, ♠K-A, club to the King, club ruff, diamond ruff, draw the last trump. If spades are 3-2 and clubs are 3-3 you're making 6. If spades are 4-1 and clubs 4-2 and the club ruff in dummy stood up, you will cross to a high heart, ruff another diamond with your last trump, and try to cash the last high heart for your 10th trick. If the club got overruffed, you will ruff in, draw the last trump if necessary, give up a club, and still have a trump in hand as entry to the long club for your 10th trick.

Plan B - ♣A, ♣K, club ruff. If clubs are 3-3, this is equivalent to Plan A. If clubs are 4-2 with length on your right, LHO can ruff the third club with the 10 or J to force the ace and you may lose a trump trick to the other one after you lead a trump to hand and lead the 4th round of clubs. If LHO started with ♠J10x(x), he can ruff up, but whether he started with 3 or 4 spades you will pitch a heart from dummy on the club, ruff a diamond to hand after the defense knocks out one of the high hearts, draw the last trump, and be able to ruff your 3rd heart in dummy. 12 tricks. You'll only make 11 if LHO started with a doubleton spade, though. And if LHO has the club length so RHO can overruff the 3rd club, you'll make 10 tricks.

So plan A is better than plan B, then? Not quite. What if the ♣J was singleton? If LHO also has 3 trumps, he will ruff the ♣K away and with only one more trump in dummy you'll be held to 5 spades in hand, one ruff in dummy, two top hearts, and the ♣A. Your 5th club won't set up, and you'll be down 1 unless the defense makes a big boo-boo in diamonds.

But plan B is immune to having the ♣K ruffed away, since you will always be able to ruff two clubs in dummy, even if LHO leads a trump back at trick 3.

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So plan B is better then. Well, let's look at plan C. Win the ♣A, lead a low club, and duck in hand. If everyone follows, and LHO started with 4 clubs, he can lead a club now and RHO will likely be able to overruff dummy. That will be your last loser, though, unless LHO started with 4-4 in the black suits. And you would have lost that overruff with plan A as long as RHO was the one with the 3rd trump. And if clubs started 3-3, you will take 11 tricks unless trumps are foul. You could even cash the ♠AK and if trumps are 3-2 pitch a heart from dummy on the ♣K, ruff a diamond back to hand, ruff a heart, ruff another diamond back to hand, and claim 12 tricks.

This second round duck to preserve a high-card winner for later in the day is a useful tool. It's particularly useful if LHO has preempted and your holding in the suit is Axxx in dummy and xx in your hand. If you put up the ace, it might get ruffed away. But you can duck twice, ruff the third in hand, draw trumps, and cash the ace later.

When your weak two bid standard sinks low enough, you should play new suit responses not forcing. This came up twice for us in the past couple of weeks. The first time, Phil opened 2♥ and caught me with ♠A98742 ♥-- ♦Jx ♣AKJ32. I bid 2♠, and Phil, with ♠10 ♥A98xx ♦A10xxx ♣xx, passed. We lost 3 spades and two clubs. The second time was more fun. Phil opened 2♥ in first seat at favorable and I had ♠J9 ♥A98x ♦K9xxx ♣xx. I bid 2♠ again. Later I fell from grace. The auction proceeded Double on my left, 3♣ on my right, 3♥ on my left, and 3NT on my right. I should just pass here. But I bid 4♥, we got doubled, and went for -300 against their vulnerable game. What's wrong with that, you ask? Well, the only game they can make is 4♠ (which our teammates duly reached at the other table against less imaginative opponents. 3NT was going down 2 as Phil had 6 hearts to the K10 and the opponents' hearts split 2-1. Really, when I bid 4♥, my LHO should have figured it out, since he knows me pretty well. But hey, there would have been no story then.