

## HAND OF THE WEEK

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Bridge is more and more becoming a game of “chicken.” And that may sometimes lead to unusual situations. Here’s a nice deal that you all need to know about. Nobody vul, partner deals and passes, RHO opens 2♦. You hold ♠AK98432 ♥KQ8 ♦AK ♣2. What is your bidding plan?

First of all, you should bid as though partner has about 6 points. Weaker hands are rare; even here as a passed hand partner will have 6 or more points about three times as often as he has 0-5.

With a six card suit you can bid at the 2-level, your approximate order of strength is:

2-level with about 11-15 points, usually you will expect to take about 5-6 tricks opposite a doubleton and a useful Queen, you expect to have a decent chance to make if partner has 3 card support and a 6 useful points.

Jump to the 3 level with about 16-18 points, expecting to take about 7 tricks opposite the same disaster hand, and to make if partner has a fit and 6 useful points.

Double and bid your suit at the 3-level with about a trick more than the direct jump to the 3-level.

Jump to the 4-level with a hand that expects to take more than 8 tricks opposite the disaster hand and doesn’t rate to take more than 2 tricks on defense.

Double and jump to game with more than 8 tricks and a reasonable expectation of taking more than two tricks on defense.

OK, which group does this hand fall into? With 19 points, you are too strong to just jump to 3S. Suppose partner has ♠65 ♥J108xx ♦xx ♣Qxxx. How many tricks will you take? Usually, 2 hearts, 2 diamonds, and 6 spades. Do you have more than two defensive tricks? Yes! So you have a double and bid game hand.

You double. Now LHO bids 2♠, natural and forcing, partner passes, and RHO bids 3♦. Now what?

Your takeout double promised either takeout shape or a strong one-suited hand. If you had a takeout double shape, and wanted to still encourage partner to bid, you would double again. This second double shows an ace more than a minimum takeout double, and if you had a spade holding like ♠Q9xx you would probably deduct a point or two from your double. So you would double here with, say, ♠Q943 ♥KQ83 ♦A ♣AK52. And if you had a heart one-suiter, you would bid the appropriate number of hearts.

What would you do with six of a minor after a weak 2 on your right? This is a tougher question. Usually, you try to bid notrump with those hands if they are more than a minimum. But sometimes, you have something like ♠Q93 ♥KQ8 ♦7 ♣AKQJ52. You would overcall 3♣ if two of your 3 queens were deuces, and maybe even with less. So this hand, with a very good likelihood of taking 7 tricks in notrump, is way too good to bid 3♣ right away. The usual solution is to double and then cue-bid. This does not promise 4-card support for whatever partner bid, it asks partner to show a stopper. If you DO have 4-card support, you will take 3NT out to partner’s suit at the 4-level. But in general, I don’t know of any good solutions to the full spectrum of minor suit hands. Usually you just have to underbid or overbid. Even my double then cue-bid sequence has flaws. Is partner supposed to bid 3NT with a really bad hand and a diamond stopper? I don’t know, and if anybody does know, they’re keeping it to themselves.

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But back to our problem. If you had a hand with a lot of clubs and about 7+ tricks, you would probably have to double. Hopefully, partner will do the right thing, but you could end up watching partner play 3♥ with ♠Jxx ♥108xx ♦J10xx ♣9x. It won't be pretty. And you might get doubled. Did you do the wrong thing by bidding again? If partner has this hand, yes. But on average, no, it's right to bid again. Give partner ♠AJx ♥108xx ♦J10xx ♣9x and 3NT has good chances opposite your Q93 ♥KQ8 ♦7 ♣AKQJ52.

OK, I've rambled on, but meanwhile you have to do something over 3♦. What's it going to be? Well, you were going to bid 4♠ if possible. Is it still possible? Then that's what you should bid. If LHO really has all 6 other spades, of course you're going down several, doubled. But the chances of a 6-0-0 break in spades are extremely low, and people have been known to psych after partner's weak 2. And your hand is so good that the odds of a psych are considerably higher than normal; usually a forcing new suit response allows for the weak 2-bidder to jump to game with good 3 card support and a max. So you know that the 2♠ bidder has at most ♠QJ10xxx ♥AJx ♦?? ♣??, where he has about 6 or more points in the minors. How likely is that? Not very.

And your 4♠ bid will have a happy ending. Partner will think, hmm, you have about 9 tricks in spades for your double then bid game auction, and I have ♠J76 ♥A732 ♦106 ♣Q1098. I think I'll cue-bid 5♥ here with my spade support and ace. And you will bid 6♠ which makes easily since the 2♠ bidder had the singleton Queen.

The psych makes it tough on you, but you shouldn't let the opponents deflect you from your plan either with bids or plays. And even getting to 4♠ would have gotten you a decent score since most people just bid game with that hand over the weak 2.