

HAND OF THE WEEK

Here's a nice deal from the BBO Main Bridge Club last week. You are South and see ♠A103 ♥J96 ♦AQ8532 ♣K. Nobody is vulnerable, and this is being scored at IMP pairs. Partner deals and bids 1♥, and RHO (Don't they always?) bids 1♠.

W	N	E	S
	1♥	1♠	?

What should you bid here? It would be reasonable to bid 2♦ here, but is it best? Let's talk about what all your sensible bids mean here.

1. You could decide to raise hearts. Here, 2♥ would be a normal single raise, 6-9 points and support. But because the opponents are in the auction, and LHO may be about to bid 3♠ (or even 4♠), we want better definition. Here are two sensible raise structures. I recommend the 2nd for serious partnerships only.
 - a. Most of you should adopt this.
 - i. 2♥ shows 6-9 and exactly 3-card support. Adding definition to the single raise will help partner make a better decision over a spade raise to any level by LHO.
 - ii. 3♥ shows 6-9 points and 4 or more hearts. We have differentiated our degree of support. This is reasonably safe because (a) the opponents have at most 4 hearts between them, and so (b) you were probably going to take the push to the 3-level if the opponents competed to 2♠ anyway. When you know you're going to a particular level in a competitive auction, going there right away usually works best.
 - iii. 2♠ show 10+ points and 3+ card support. If the opponents bid, partner will pass if he has a minimum (12-13 HCP) with only 5 hearts and not a lot of shape. If he has good spades and only 5 trumps, he can double, too. This is penalty because you have found a fit. If LHO passes, partner can sign off in 3♥, or make a game try by bidding 2NT or 3 of a minor, or bid game. With a slam try, partner will start with a game try, or he has the option of jumping to 3♠ or 4 of a minor with a slam invitation and a singleton or void. You will then sign off if you don't have 10 points without including the K, Q, or J of partner's short suit, or do something else if you do have 10 points. Note that, while we normally want 33 points to bid a slam, by having partner tell us that a particular K, Q, or J doesn't matter, we now only need 27 points for slam because partner's trumps will make up for those missing 6 points. So partner needs 17 points (not counting the K, Q, or J in the splinter suit) to make this bid.
 - iv. 4♥ shows no defense and a good fit, at least 4 trumps and a singleton somewhere. If you have a side ace, you can't make this bid.
 - b. If you're really serious.
 - i. 2♥ and 3♥ are unchanged.
 - ii. 2♠ now shows 10+ support points and exactly 3 trumps.
 - iii. 2NT shows 10+ support points and 4 or more trumps.
 - iv. 3 of a minor shows 10 support points, 4+ card support, and 5+ cards in the bid suit. This lets partner know whether we have a double fit (partner will bid

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- aggressively and take the push to 5♥ unless he has 2 fast spade losers) or a misfit (partner will bid conservatively and double if they compete to 4♠).
- v. Splinters and 4♥ are unchanged.
2. You could decide to bid diamonds. Whether or not your unobstructed auction 1♥ - 2♦ is game forcing or not, your 2♦ here starts with a good weak 2-bid and is unlimited and forcing. BUT you do not promise a rebid. If partner has enough points to want you to bid again, he has to cue-bid spades if your LHO passes. By making the cue-bid, partner is telling you that he has extra values. If you also have extra values (a king more than a minimum for your auction, or a queen more and a fit for partner) you can drive to game either by bidding one you are sure you have a good chance to make, or by bidding a new suit to force.
- a. When you should raise:
- If you have 6-9 support points, you should NOT bid your side suit. Later, if it seems convenient and you don't have to force the bidding higher than the cheapest available number of hearts, you can bid you diamonds "on the way" to 3♥ to show partner what your hand looks like. When you do decide to bid a new suit like this, you should have a reasonable 6-card suit (good enough for a vulnerable weak 2) or a really good 5-card suit like KQJ10x.
 - If you have 10-12 support points you should make your appropriate strong raise, since slam partner will likely not have slam interest and you might as well keep the table in the dark because you have two opponents to fool and you are not really fooling partner. When you have this hand type, though, if partner signs off in 3♥ you should continue to game anyway. 3♥ making 6 is embarrassing no matter how few points you have. 4♥ making 6 when you have about 23 HCP between you is less of an issue.
 - If you have 13+ support points and your side minor is only 5 cards long, you should make your appropriate strong raise so as to not complicate the auction.
- b. When you should bid diamonds:
- You should only bid diamonds if you have slam interest and are going to be willing to bid 5♥ over 4♠ (or 4♠X).
3. Should you bid notrump? No! You have a known 8-card major suit fit and a singleton, and in addition have only one spade stopper. Sure, 3NT might be best, but it's so unlikely that you should just focus on getting to the right red suit contract.

So what's best here? If your LHO bids 3♠, partner passes, and RHO bids 4♠, are you going to bid 5♥? I think you should. If this auction happens, your partner will have a really good idea of what your hand looks like, and will be able to bid the good slam if he has ♠2 ♥AKQ105 ♦K64 ♣Jxxx as he will know you are making a slam try based on long diamonds and a heart fit, and he has 4 of the 6 top red honors. He will know you have the rest of what's needed.

In real life, partner had ♠85 ♥AKQ7543 ♦void ♣AQ54 and 7♥ was cold. Your LHO will pass, partner will jump to 3♥, and you will just drive to slam. If you have a way to find the ♦K on the way, you will get to a grand slam but since it's actually your singleton club that allows the 13th trick, my guess is that you will just get to the slam that the field failed to bid for the most part. So you will win 8.27 IMPs.

Why did the field miss the slam? Most of them opened 4♥ and only one pair got to slam after that start.

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Should you open 4♥ with that hand? I don't think so, you have too much slam potential. Note that you can make a slam if partner has ♠3 ♥J1062 ♦Q8765 ♣K32 by ruffing a spade and a club in dummy. If you can make a slam when partner has a normal single raise, you have too much to open 4 of a major.