

HAND OF THE WEEK

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In 4th seat, with none vul at matchpoints, I pick up ♠K1092 ♥A7 ♦KJ1054 ♣107. The auction begins:

LHO	Phil	RHO	me
Pass	Pass	1♣	

This isn't a problem for most people, 1♦ seems obvious. And of course it's first on my list. But because Phil and I play equal level conversion takeout doubles, I can safely double with this strength and pattern. But my values are too concentrated in my long suits, and I will go with the flow at matchpoints since Phil and I are way above average card players in this field. At IMPs against a strong team I would double, hoping to find spades without telegraphing my shape.

The auction continues:

			1♦
1♥	2♦	2♥	

It's clear to me to compete here, the points are pretty evenly divided, and I don't want to let them play an 8-card fit at the 2-level. But the question is do I want to show my spades? Here are the pros and cons of bidding 2♠ on the way to 3♦, as I see them.

Pro

- Spades outrank hearts, and if we have a 4-4 spade fit I want to find it since we will be able to compete level on level.
- It's descriptive, and by describing my hand Phil will be better able to judge the further auction. For instance, if THEY have a 4-4 spade fit, Phil may be able to double 3♥ if they bid it. And Phil would be the only one at the table who knows this until someone puts down a dummy.
- A spade lead may be best against 3♥, for instance if Phil has ♠Qx.

Cons

- It sounds like a game try, and I really don't want to get to the 4-level with no short suit and only one ace.
- Not only might I get too high, but it may encourage Phil to double 3♥ thinking I have a better hand.
- It allows the opponents 3 extra bids on the way to 3♥.

The last con point is decisive for me – I do not want to leave them room to find THEIR double fit. This could encourage them to bid 4♥ on a magic 20 point double fit. So the auction concludes:

			3♦
3♥	4♦	Pass	Pass
Dbl	All Pass		

LHO leads the ♦2, trying to protect his side's high cards, and Phil tables the dummy.

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Dummy: ♠AJ6 ♥63 ♦A86 ♣98652

Me: ♠K1092 ♥A7 ♦KJ1054 ♣107

I see that he has made quite an imaginative 4♦ call. His hand, with two aces and no short suits, looks like a perfect cooperative double here, showing all of the following.

1. Minimum trump length for his auction.
2. Above-average high card strength and defense for his auction.
3. Relatively balanced shape.
4. No source of side-suit tricks.

I'm happy, though, to be in this contract. If RHO is, say, 4=4=1=4 we probably have no defense against 3♥. And I have lots of play for this, because of my great intermediates in my two suits. And, in fairness to Phil, he was allowed to consider that I had bid 3♦ under the gun when he could have had a considerably weaker hand. I did push the boat out a bit to bid 3♦ without soliciting Phil's opinion.

OK, now that I have decided that I'm happy to be in this contract, what is my target? Do I want to go all out to make, or should I just make sure I get 9 tricks? To some extent this requires me to assess their chances in 3♥ as the play proceeds. But it's never too early to think about the defenders' shapes. What do I know right now?

- Neither opponent has more than 4♠.
- LHO has 5♥ and RHO has 4. Support doubles generate a lot of information for both sides. My advice to you is to always look to see if the opponents are playing support doubles when opener has raised responder's major suit response.
- LHO does not have a singleton in either minor. He wouldn't lead a singleton trump deuce, and he surely would have led a singleton in partner's suit.

So their possible shapes [LHO/RHO] are 4=5=2=2/2=4=3=4, 3=5=2=3/3=4=3=3, 3=5=3=2/3=4=2=4, 2=5=4=2/4=4=1=4, and 2=5=3=3/4=4=2=3. So I have no fear of an enemy crossruff. Looking at how many tricks they have in hearts, with the 1st pair they have 8, the 2nd is 7, the 3rd is also 7, the 4th is 9, and the 5th is 8. So I need to make a serious effort to make this, since it's very unlikely that they were making 3♥.

I play the ♦6 from dummy and RHO plays the 7 to my 10. What did I learn from this trick? I don't think diamonds are 4-1, since that would mean that LHO led from ♦Q932. I don't think he would do that; that trump holding might cause me considerable worry. And it's usually best when you are defending with 4 trumps to lead your side's best combined fit to force declarer to ruff.

What's my plan now? I decided to draw all the trumps and then play clubs to get a spade count. On the 3rd trump, LHO pitches the ♥2 and RHO follows with the Queen. So I lead a club and LHO puts up the ♣J in 2nd position, which holds the trick. LHO plays a low heart to RHO's Jack. I win and play another club, which LHO wins with the Ace and RHO follows with the Queen. LHO cashes the ♥K. Now he goes into the tank. While he's thinking, what do we know about the deal now?

- Clubs are 3-3. If LHO had only 2 of them, he would have led a low heart so partner could play a club. And, of course, the fall of the ♣Q reinforces this deduction.

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- LHO started with ♥K and ♣AJ. RHO started with ♥QJ ♦Q ♣KQ.
- Spades are also 3-3 since each opponent started with 7 red cards.

Now for the big question: Who has the ♠Q?

Meanwhile, LHO has failed to realize that he can lead a heart with impunity here if RHO has a high spade, since I won't be able to get to dummy twice to establish and cash the long clubs. Or maybe he did, because as you should surely have figured out, it's much more likely that RHO opened a ratty 10-count in 3rd seat NV than that LHO doubled a part score with two small trumps, only 8 HCP, and no points in the unbid suit.

I was not put to the test, though, since LHO shifted to a spade here. I suspect that, just as I had a count on his hand, he had one on mine and decided that I would have bid 2♠ over 2♥ with four to the King. He may even have hoped that partner had ♠K10x and a two-trick set was available.