

HAND OF THE WEEK

© 2020 Craig Biddle

Vol. 1 No. 6 Page 1

This week's edition is going to start a series of several deals involving 5-level decisions. I have been involved in a lot of those recently, and they are immensely important at both matchpoints and IMPs. Nobody gets them all right, but the more often you get them right, the better your results will be. More importantly, when you become known for getting these types of deals right you will start to attract better partners.

My first exhibit is a freak hand. Vul against not at IMPs, you look at ♠2 ♥AQ43 ♦KJ65432 ♣2. Aside from the fact that this is a fantastic Nil hand at spades, it's pretty good for bridge too. And it gets better instantly, because partner deals and opens 1♥. RHO chimes in with 2♣, and it's your turn. You have lots of choices.

- 3♣ is an obvious candidate, you have a hand worth forcing to game in hearts and you only need enough to invite game for this cue-bid.
 - The only real flaw with this bid is that it takes partner totally out of the loop. It keeps the opponents in the dark, too, which is a good thing.
- 4♥ is a possible call. You'd like to shut out the spade suit, since it's very likely that the opponents have at least 9 of them and they almost surely have 8.
 - This hand has too many high cards and too much strength for a bid that will make it hard for partner to bid again. Note that you're practically cold for slam opposite ♠Axx ♥KJxxx ♦Ax ♣xxx, partner will never believe that 12 tricks are possible, let alone nearly inevitable.
- 4NT (keycard for hearts) is an even more effective way to shut out the spades.
 - You won't miss a slam if it's there if you bid RKC, but you will feel really foolish if partner has ♠QJxx ♥KJxxx ♦x ♣KQx, down 1 at the 5-level when the opponents probably can't make more than 8 or 9 tricks in either black suit.
- 2♦ is an obvious possibility.
 - This will be best if partner has the hand I cited in discussing 4NT; the opponents won't have enough of a fit in either black suit to become serious nuisances, and since partner would bid 2NT with that hand, the opponents might decide to retire from the auction. You will, of course, make sure we get to 4♥ later. And you will have described your hand, there will be no question in partner's mind that he should double anything the opponents bid at the game level.
- 3♠ and 4♣ would be GF splinter raises.
 - I don't like the 3♠ splinter at all. Your LHO will undoubtedly double this to get his spades into the auction, and the auction may well become hell for your side.
 - I do like the 4♣ splinter. Your LHO will think about bidding spades, but may be afraid of the defense starting off ♣A and a ruff, heart to opener's Ace, and another club ruff. If the opponents are going to compete to the 5-level, you would much rather that they did it in clubs than spades.

So my finalists are 2♦, 3♣, and 4♣. I reject 4♥ because my hand has too much slam potential, and 4NT because it has too much risk of going down at the 5-level. I reject 3♠ because it just begs LHO to double to show the spades I know he has. I like 4♣ more than 3♣ because it requires my LHO to make a big commitment to show spades and easy for him to double to show club support. As far as 2♦ goes, it

HAND OF THE WEEK

© 2020 Craig Biddle

Vol. 1 No. 6 Page 2

will work very well when partner is short in diamonds and very poorly when partner has a good diamond fit because that increases the likelihood that they can compete effectively in spades.

At the table, the player who held this hand bid 2♦, his LHO bid 3♠ (promising a fit in clubs as well as long spades), opener passed, and RHO raised to 4♠. When you bid 2♦, you were planning to bid 4♥. Do you want to go to the 5-level to show your hearts now?

You'd better. Concealing good 4-card support from partner when you clearly have sufficient offense to go to the 5-level is just plain bad bridge. The only excuse for failing to show good 4-card support immediately is that you are willing to catch up later. Over your 5♥, LHO bids 5♠ and this gets passed around to you.

You know your side has at least half the points in the deck. Do you want to do anything more? The first thing to think about is, how good a picture do you think you painted of your hand for partner? I think you have done exceedingly well. Partner should have pictured you with at least 10 red cards at his last turn, yet he neither doubled nor passed.

If he had a void or singleton diamond, he surely would have doubled 5♠. Also, if he had good defense in the black suits he would have doubled. This does not bode well for your defensive prospects. I think double is out.

Should you bid one more? You didn't think you had slam potential in the first place. If you had been more optimistic about slam, you would have bid RKC immediately. Nothing in this auction has caused you to become more optimistic about your side's high level prospects. And partner has all your side's values in the black suits, in front of a hand that made a 2-level overcall and bid again. You are unlikely to be beating this more than 1 trick, and if RHO has both black aces you might not beat it at all.

It's weird to have a hand this good opposite an opening bid and allow the opponents to play undoubled at the 5-level. But you have little reason to think you can make 12 tricks and you can see many possible layouts where the opponents can take 10 or 11. Doubling for a 1-trick set when you weren't sure you were making what you bid to push them there is bad bridge. So you pass.

This works out well, your teammates got doubled in 4♠ and made an overtrick, while you scored two tricks on defense as well. So you earn a nice 6 IMP swing for your well-reasoned 5-level decisions.