

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Continuing our series on 5-level decisions, here's another problem for you. Once more, this is IMPs. Nobody vul, West deals. You are South, and you hold ♠10943 ♥A102 ♦93 ♣KQ74. The bidding proceeds vigorously. I'm just going to give a diagram until your 5-level decision comes up.

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♠	Dbl	2♣
2♥	4♠	5♥	?

West's 1♣ showed 2+, East's double was negative, your 2♣ showed 10+ points in support of spades (counting a point for the doubleton diamond since you have a fit, you have them), and the rest was natural. You have the opportunity to determine the fate of this deal with your balanced 9-count. I'm sure this was the last thing you thought of when you first saw your hand.

In favor of bidding:

- You have one more spade than your bidding has promised so far.
- You have the ace of their suit, and with your 3 hearts, it's inconceivable that partner has more than one heart on this auction.
- You can easily develop a trick in clubs.
- Partner has announced a good hand. He could also have cue-bid 3♥, so his values are likely distributional.
- You likely have 2 tricks on defense, so unless partner can provide 3 the opponents won't be going set more than the value of our game.

In favor of passing

- Balanced 9-counts usually should avoid doing something committal.
- You have a minimum for your auction.
- All your values are (presumably) in their suits. You can't be sure because your LHO hasn't really promised clubs.
- You have a hand with both offense and defense.

In favor of doubling

- All your points are in their suits; you will almost surely take two tricks on defense.
- You have 3 minor suit losers and no fillers in the trump suit; partner might not be able to take 11 tricks. In fact, if there is a trump loser, he might not even take 10. Partner might hold, for example. ♠AQJxxx ♥void ♦QJ10xx ♣xx. You don't know if partner's 4♠ was intended as a make or a save or simply a two-way action.

What is the "language" of your calls here? Because partner simply leaped to game, you have no idea what partner intended. If you do anything committal, you should be very sure.

5♠ is a strong opinion that your side should play the hand. This is emphatically not something you bid out of fear of defending. Taking 3 tricks is lots easier than taking 11.

Pass is noncommittal.

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Double is a strong opinion that your side should defend. Again, this is not an expression of doubt that your side can make 11 tricks. You should normally defer the final decision to partner when they have jumped to game.

What kind of hand would you bid 5♠ with here? ♠10943 ♥1032 ♦KQ ♣AJ104. This is a terrific offensive hand, guaranteed to cover a lot of partner's minor suit losers. And holding 3 small trumps is encouraging for offense, since that makes it more likely that partner has shortness. In general, you rarely want to take a push to the 5-level when you have a worthless doubleton in the opponents' suit.

What kind of hand would you double with here? ♠10943 ♥QJ10 ♦Q10 ♣KJ104. This hand is an offensive nightmare, and the last thing you want partner to do is count on you for any offense.

You have neither of these, so you should pass. Partner was attempting to push the opponents around, and he succeeded. He will probably pass the deal out, and you will take 5 tricks on defense. At the other table, your teammates allowed 4♠ to play, and it was cold. So you will lose 7 IMPs if you pass. If you had chosen to double you would have won 2. And if you had chosen to bid 5♠, you would have lost 10.

Should you have doubled? It's hard to argue with an action that, in retrospect, would have done 9 IMPs better than anything else you could have done. But partner had ♠KQJ762 ♥J ♦A84 ♣J95, so you unexpectedly had two trump tricks since both heart honors were in front of your ace. If you trade the two rounded suit Jacks for the ♦Q, and give partner a 4th diamond in exchange for one of his clubs, then partner will make 5♠ easily. You would still have beaten 5♥ three tricks, though. But partner could just as easily have held ♠AQJ762 ♥5 ♦KQ42 ♣95, when 5♠ would make on the spade finesse and you now would have only 4 tricks on defense. So, as I said, you couldn't really have known whether double was right.

Next week, we'll look at a deal where partner tells you that he expects to make his game. This changes the default meanings for your possible calls over their save.