

# HAND OF THE WEEK

Continuing our series on 5-level decisions, here's a third type of problem for you. Once more, this is IMPs. Everybody is vul, East deals. You are South, and you hold ♠A103 ♥QJ10543 ♦94 ♣J3. RHO deals and bids 1♣, promising at least 2 cards. They are playing their 1NT as 15-17, so if East has only 2 clubs, he will most likely have 11-14 balanced.

Would you bid here? If so, what? Your choices are:

Pass – prudent, but you could be awkwardly placed if LHO bids 1♠ and RHO gives a single raise. In that case, you will know that partner is very unlikely to hold as many as 3 spades, and therefore it would have been safe to bid.

1♥ gets your suit into play, and will be best if partner has something like ♠KJ982 ♥K2 ♦A105 ♣1072. Here, your side has 8-card fits in both majors and they have 8-card fits in both minors. But one of the weaknesses of these opponents' methods is that it is hard for them to find minor suit fits. When you can bid a major over a nebulous 1♣ (or a Precision-type 1♦), you should do so.

2♥ also gets your suit into play. In comparison with 1♥, this will work better when partner has two or fewer spades, it's unclear whether it will be better or worse when partner has 3 or 4 spades, and it will lose when partner has 5 or more spades unless he has a very good hand. Plus, this is a far better description of your hand than a 1♥ overcall.

Put me in the 2♥ camp. At IMPs, -800 against vulnerable opponents is less of a tragedy when they have game than it is at matchpoints, since you would lose 4 or 5 IMPs, which is close to the average IMP score on a board.

LHO bids 3♣, partner cue-bids 4♣, and RHO bids 5♣. Here's the auction so far.

West	North	East	South
		1♣	2♥
3♣	4♣	5♣	?

To recap, East's 1♣ showed 2+, Your 2♥ was a weak jump overcall, and West's 3♣ showed 5+ clubs and was a 1-round force.

What did partner's 4♣ show? He could have bid either unbid suit as a strong game invitation here, not forcing but seldom passed. It would make no sense to treat either 3♦ or 3♠ as signoffs; if partner has no hope of game he should just retire from the auction. And if he has a game forcing hand he can just bid game, he has a good idea of what your hand is. So partner is telling you he thinks you can make 4♥.

Why does he do this instead of just bidding game? Because he wants to get you involved in case the opponents bid again, he's not sure what to do on his own.

RHO does bid 5♣. Now what should you do? First we have to assess what the opponents' hands look like. West has a constructive hand with a good club suit, probably at least QJ10xx. If he had a game invitation or better with long clubs, he would cue-bid 3♥. West is likely to be short in hearts; it would be too dangerous to risk getting to the 3-level with 3 or 4 hearts since he has no guarantee that North has any hearts at all.

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And what does East's hand look like? He probably has an unbalanced hand, surely with at least 4 clubs and likely more. And he has extra values, too, or possibly extra shape. With some minimum opener like ♠K2 ♥72 ♦A1085 ♣AJ1072 he would likely just go quietly at this vulnerability.

What are your options here?

One again, your double warns partner against bidding more. ♠KJ10 ♥QJ10543 ♦94 ♣J3 would be the sort of hand you might double with here. And you would bid 5♥ yourself if your hand was something like ♠A103 ♥QJ10543 ♦J94 ♣3 since all your cards are likely to be working. So pass shows something in-between.

But, and this is a very important concept, Partner's cue-bid that forces you to bid game means that your side isn't allowed to pass the hand out (at least if he hasn't declined a chance to open the bidding). So there is another class of hands that you would pass with. If you have an extraordinary playing hand (♠A103 ♥QJ10543 ♦J94 ♣void) you can pass now, and then bid after partner does what he was planning to do. If he doubles, you bid 5♥, and if he bids something you have an easy 6♥ call. This concept is called a Forcing Pass, and Eddie Kantar once wrote a whole book about it.

Also note that if you think for a long time here, you are more or less required by the ethics of the game to make the noncommittal call. Thinking for a long time and then doubling or bidding is likely to result in a director call, and a potentially adjusted score.

So, given your options, your hand is a standout pass, and partner will double since he knows you have some potential defense. Now what should you lead?

I am in the camp that believes that if you lead a spade or a diamond against 5♣ after you have preempted in hearts and partner has raised, you should be leading a singleton. And I know a lot of excellent players who agree with that position. So your choices are the ♥Q or a trump. Since partner has shown a good hand, I think the trump lead is a standout. You will get in with your ♠A eventually, and you will be able to play a 2<sup>nd</sup> trump. This will likely limit the opponents to at most 9 club tricks, and give you the best chance of maximizing your score.

What would you lead if partner had merely bid 4♥ and allowed 5♣ to play? I think it would be right to lead the ♥Q, trying to make sure you get all the heart tricks you deserved and hoping for the best, since you will be happy to beat them one undoubled.