

Learning Points – Just Because It’s There Doesn’t Mean You Should Bid It February 19, 2008

by Steve Moese; edited by Mike Purcell

N Deals	♠ 9862		
EW Vul	♥ J94		
	♦ QJ		
Mike	♣ 10653		
	Steve		
♠ AQJ1073	N	♠ 5	
♥ A5	W 9 E	♥ K762	
♦ 72	S	♦ K1083	
♣ AK2		♣ QJ98	
	♠ K4	<u>Duplimate:</u>	
	♥ Q1083	E: 6N, 6♠, 6♣	
	♦ A9654	W: 5N, 5♠, 5♣	
	♣ 74	EW: 3♥, 3♦	

Here is a hand with where the result depends on who declares. No, this isn't about skill in declarer play. Rather it's about the location of key cards and suit controls. Who mentions the destination strain first will declare, and a slam bonus might be in the balance.

Mike and I play Precision. When partner opens 1♣ (16+ HCP any shape), we can force game at the one level in many cases and use the remaining space to explore slam. Precision requires responder to have 5+ cards in a major (and typically 6+ cards in a minor) to respond to the Strong Club opening in a new suit. With East's 1444, opposite opener's likely holdings there's a better than 83% chance we'll find a 4-4 fit. East's jump to 2♠ showed 8+ HCP, and 1444 pattern, specifically a singleton spade. West bid 4♠, showing a minimum hand and a self-sufficient spade suit. Since this can be as small as 16 HCP, East had no motive to continue bidding. Duplimate double dummy analysis says East can make a small slam in any of three strains. Should East bid any of the slams? It depends.

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♠
	Passed Out		

South led the ♥3

In a pairs event, you should bid a slam if you believe the field will bid slam, and not bid it if the odds are worse than your risk limit. Many play that a small slam should be bid if it's at least 50% likely to make, and 100% likely to be bid. Some like a higher success probability (say 55% to 60%). Look to Kit Woolsey's excellent book Matchpoints to see how the expected yield from your bidding choice affects how high you should bid. Because these calculations are too time-consuming to do at the table, we fall back on simple guidelines.

What's the success probability for a small slam by East? Given the actual cards held, the Spade suit must provide 6 tricks. This can only happen in one situation: the trump king is onside and doubleton. There are 64 ways six cards can split between 2 hands. There are only 5 ways East can make 6♠ (K2, K4, K6, K8, or K9 onside). $5/64 = 7.81\%$ a far cry from 50%-60%.

In a team event, even an 8% chance might be a right risk to take if you are behind and need Imps. This state-of-the-match judgment is easier to take in Teams than in Pairs. In pairs whether the slam will be bid, and whether the best scoring strain will be chosen, as well as the likelihood of overtricks all affect the potential matchpoint outcome – these are very hard to estimate with accuracy.

Curiously, the ♦K in East's hand stops the run of that suit unless North can get on lead. Even then NS can take only 2 diamond tricks if East ducks because the suit blocks. The two red suit doubletons and the absence of wasted values in ♣ help enable 12 tricks.

Bidding Post Mortem

With 18 HCP West's hand is a minimum 1♣ opener. However it is control rich. 3 Aces and 1 King add up to 7 controls (there are 12 in the deck). In general 10 controls enable a small slam and 11 enable a grand slam. Consider that the biggest hand anyone can hold is 37 HCP and it contains all 12 controls ($37/12 = 3.08$). Every control is roughly proportional to 3 HCP, West can assert the value of the hand lies between 18-21 HCP.

If West rebids 3♠ showing extras, East will bid 3NT in pairs, and either game in teams. In pairs the extra 10 points for the same number of tricks will be worth as much as bidding and making the slam, with much less risk.

Natural bidding systems like Standard American, SAYC, Goren, and 2/1 Game Force will all have West bid first after 3 passes. Several possible auctions can land EW in 4 Spades or 3NT declared by West. No standard approach can have East declaring in spades. However all these approaches can have East declare some level of NT. Here are a few possible sequences...Which would you and your partner use to get to game? Would you get to slam?

North	East	South	West	
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠	While this is a possible auction, there are reasons why West should not bid this way. West implies a weakfish hand with great spade length and distribution useful to make game opposite most responder minimums. Likewise a 3NT jump rebid by West is inaccurate (Spades not solid, diamond gap).
Pass	1 NT	Pass	4♠	
Pass	Pass	Pass		

North	East	South	West	
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠	If you're comfortable jump shifting into a three card suit, this auction is right on overall strength and high card location. Responder has enough to commit the side to game.
Pass	1 NT	Pass	3♣	
Pass	3 NT	Pass	Pass/4♠	
Pass				

North	East	South	West	
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠	One approach supported by Ken Eichenbaum is to use the 2NT rebid by opener as a general game force with one of 2 kinds of hands: 1) A strong jump shift in a 2 nd suit, or 2) a strong one suiter. West has the strong one suit hand. This agreement has value since many 2/1 GF bidders open 1NT with a 5 card major so the invitational raise is not necessary. This also allows an immediate jump shift by opener to show highly distributional hands that are otherwise difficult to bid precisely.
Pass	1NT	Pass	2NT	
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♠	
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass/4♠	
Pass				

North	East	South	West	
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠	Here's the natural auction many would likely use. In all these cases, it's up to West whether to play in NT or Spades. As far as slam bidding goes, RKC will tell East that the partnership is missing two key cards, enough to keep EW out of slam, and East rueing the 4NT bid.
Pass	1NT	Pass	3♠	
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass/4♠	
Pass				

4 ♠ making 6 for +480 by East was worth 9.5 of 11 matchpoints.

You don't have to bid them all even when Duplimate says they're there, particularly in matchpoints.