

Learning Points Missed Game Double Jeopardy Snapdragon & Maximal

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E Deals
EW Vul
 Mike

♠ A10972
 ♥ 65
 ♦ A95
 ♣ K102

Steve

♠ K5	N	♠ 86
♥ 109832	W 6 E	♥ AQJ4
♦ Q632	S	♦ KJ104
♣ 97		♣ 865

♠ QJ43
 ♥ K7
 ♦ 87
 ♣ AQJ43

DeepFinesse:
 NS: 6♠ 6♣ 5N
 EW: 1♦ 1♥

East	South	West	North
1♦*	2♣	2♥	2♠
3♥	3♠	Passed Out	
East leads ♦J			

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Competitive bidding is a fine art, balancing uncertainty and psychology with the intent to have opponents make the final decision with the least amount of useful information. Sometimes just being present in an auction can tip the final decision in your favor. Often the textbook obstructive call can be ineffective, guiding opponents to their best spot. A deliberately wrong call can have unexpected subtle impact. Preempting in hearts on this hand would likely have helped opponents reach their game. While slam makes on their 24 HCP, we could not imagine our opponents bidding their way there. Implying strength and vulnerability considerations kept two minimum hands out of their best spot.

The Bidding

Steve: Mike and I play Precision. In this hand there's only small differences compared to Standard or 2/1 Game Force. I open 1♦

(*alerted*: 11-15 HCP at least 2 cards in the ♦ suit). I would have opened 1♦ with this hand in Standard and 2/1 (where partner would know I have 4 diamonds). South bid a natural 2♣ overcall as expected. There's something to be said for a 1♠ call instead.

Mike: I know the right thing to do here is pass, however I feel like causing trouble. Because Steve and I are playing Precision, I know he is limited to 11-14 HCP in most situations, sometimes a distributional 15 HCP (We open 1NT with balanced 15 HCP hands). Opponents could very well have game in this auction if we have the red suits and they have the black suits. I will execute a frisky 2♥ free bid, typically promising at least 10 HCP at the 2-level and forcing to discourage opponents. Hopefully my partner has hearts or if I get doubled for penalty, diamonds. This bid will mislead my partner, but I am hoping it will mislead the opponents more.

North: West gave North the classic "50 HCP deck" problem. Our vulnerability contributed to the ruse. North has to be thinking: "East has at least 11 HCP, West at least 9-10 HCP, and East 11 HCP. That leaves partner with room for AQJ of clubs and an outside Q for 9 HCP, maybe a K tops for 10 HCP. North has a sound hand and a good spade suit. The simple 2♠ bid sounds competitive and weaker than North's hand is. The Snapdragon Double – a good hand, a sound 4th suit (spades) holding, and a good fit for overcaller's suit – solves this problem nicely. This allows the 4th seat bidder in very competitive auctions to warn partner off by bidding the 4th suit directly: *weak hand, no fit, destructive, might be lead directing*. Do you use Snapdragon?").

Steve: Mike's 2♥ bid fit my hand well so 3♥ was an easy call. Like North, I see too many HCP in this deck (with ♥AQJx in partner's suit I would usually expect Mike to be at full value. Less in his suit would indicate a possible weak action on his part). Either way, the 3-level is right with a 9 card fit (Law of Total Tricks). I will bid 3♥, ratchet up the pressure on opponents and see what happens. If Mike passes, he either has very flat 10 HCP minimum (or frisky hand).

South also caught West's virus: "East has 11 HCP, I have 13, West has 10, that leaves partner 6 HCP. Must be trying to compete in ♠. Since we have a 9 card fit we should be safe at the 3-level (Law of Total Tricks)." 3♠ by South ended the auction.

The Play

Partner led a ♦, and Declarer drew trump with a successful finesse. 5 clubs quickly followed (dropping dummy's two losing ♦'s). We managed to take our ♥A.

3♣ making 6 for -230 gave East-West 10 of 11 Match Points.

The Bidding Revisited

Partner's weak but strong sounding free bid completely fooled all 3 players at the table. The impact caused both North and South to miscalculate each other's potential strength. Two key competitive conventional calls were missing at this table, and they would have helped steer North-South to game.

To succeed after the free bid by West, North must be able to clearly show near-opening count in ♠. Whether a double by North is Snapdragon or not it might be a better option than a competitive sounding 1♠. Here 2♣ by North would sound preemptive and 3♣ sounds like a splinter bid (shortness in spades in support of clubs).

Armed with knowledge about North's strength, South concludes game is attractive. Even over East's ♥ raise, East can bid 4♣ directly. With any doubt at all South can involve partner in the final level decision by employing a Maximal double.

When the sides are bidding competitively in touching suits, a double instead of a 3-bid in partner's suit represents a game invitation in that suit. A raise (the 3-bid) is to play. When the two suits do not touch the "gap suit" bid at the 3 level becomes a general game invitation (artificial), and a double is for penalties.

East	South	West	North
1♦*	2♣	2♥	Double[1]
3♥	Double[2]	Pass	4♣

Here's how the auction might have gone: [1] Snapdragon: I have a good spade suit, a near opening hand or better and a fit for Clubs. Does this help? [2] Maximal: Yes, indeed my

values are sound and I fit your spades too. We should play game. Note here that enterprising North-South players could punish East-West, setting 3♥ 2 tricks for -500 and a near bottom score. Without a strong hand in spades South would simply bid 3♣. [3] says "Let's play 3♣, don't think about 4♣ partner unless you have several tricks up your sleeve".

East	South	West	North
1♦*	2♣	2♥	Double
3♥	3♣[3]	Pass	Pass

East	South	West	North
1♦*	2♣	2♥	3♦[4]
3♥	3♣[5]	Pass	4♣[6]

An alternative approach for North South would be for North to begin with a **support cue bid**. With 2 suits to choose from we like to cue the lower ranking suit with an invitational hand, and the higher ranking suit with a game force. Here 3♦ [4] is an invitational support cue in clubs.

3♣[5] tells a good hand with at least 4 spades. How do you like 'dem apples? 4♣ [6] says I love apples, and Spades! Note while South's ♥K is in good position for 3NT, the weak doubleton in diamonds warns against that bid.

Finally, don't let double dummy analyses fool you into miscalculating hands. North-South have 24 HCP and shouldn't bid slam off 2 key cards with no distribution to compensate. While slam makes double - dummy, the two major suit finesses must work, and clubs must break 3-2. That's about a 17% probability *a priori*.

I'd rather pick the Giants to beat the Patriots in the Super Bowl...oops!

Remember it's not the one result this one time – it's all the results over time that count.