

# Learning Points – Thin Game? Try Hope & Caution

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Declarer Play LEVEL: Intermediate

Tuesday Evening January 5, 2010, Cincinnati Bridge Association  
 Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513)  
 631-8070 . Mr. Bob Veverka, Director. Mike & I play Precision.

East Deals None Vul MPs	♠ K9543 ♥ 964 ♦ 73 ♣ J109	Mike
♠ 7 ♥ KJ75 ♦ J10864 ♣ AQ6	N W 30 E S	♠ AQJ82 ♥ 832 ♦ 9 ♣ K842
Steve	♠ 106 ♥ AQ10 ♦ AKQ52 ♣ 753	EW:3N

Optimists say a thin game tests you skill. This 21 HCP hand is so ugly the result can only be described as a fix.

## The Bidding

East opened with the ♠ suit and a rule of 19 opening. Some might make a weak-2 on a 5-card suit. Many will pass. South has a sound 2♦ overcall, and West trots out the negative double to show values and at least 4♥. North passes and East completes describing the shape of his hand. South passes perhaps thinking there's been too much bidding already. West now has a decision to make.

East	South	West	North
1♠	2♦	Double <sup>1</sup>	Pass
3♣	Pass	3N	All Pass

North leads ♦7  
 1 = Negative, 4+♥ and 8+ HCP

West knows East is short in the red suits. West could have 5♣s+, but 4 is likely. West hopes partner has some extras since he chose to bid at the 3 level. West's concerns are the misfit in ♠

and the extra length in ♦ - South's suit. Rejecting the pass, West chooses 3N as a compromise, knowing he is short values for this bid. Perhaps something good will happen.

## The Play

Declarer can count 4 tricks (1♠ & 3♣s), and needs to find 5 more. But where? West can count 1 or 2 losers in ♠s, 2 or 3 losers in ♥s, 3 losers in ♦s, and 0-1 losers in ♣s. The ♠ finesse can offer only 1 additional trick unless the ♠K is doubleton outside – poor odds. Same with a 3-3 break in ♣. Something good in ♥ might be in the offing. The opening lead suggest South has the ♦AKQ. Since North failed to bid at any point, South might be rich in ♥ as well.

South takes the ♦Q and ♦A (showing the ♦K) and switches to the ♣7. South wins the ♣A and continues ♦s. South wins and leads the ♥Q. South takes the ♥K and clears 2 more rounds of ♦s. While the ♠ finesse is tempting, it is unnecessary! 2 rounds of ♣s confirms the 3-3 break. The 4<sup>th</sup> ♣ allows a ♥ pitch by declarer. The ♥8 off the table now forces South to take the ♥A. (Ducking allows Declarer to win the ♥J and gain an overtick with the ♠ finesse). South could do nothing more than return the ♥10 to West's ♥J, the ♠Q pitched from dummy. The ♠A took the final trick. 3NT making 3 for +400 was worth 6 of 8 MPs.

East Deals None Vul MPs	♠ K95 ♥ 9 ♦ ♣ J10	
♠ 7 ♥ J75 ♦ ♣ A6	N W 30 E S	♠ AQ ♥ 8 ♦ ♣ K84
	♠ 106 ♥ A10 ♦ ♣ 75	

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
MPs	-	6	-	0	8	4.5	3	4.5	1.5	1.5	7
Score	-	400	-	140	1400	300	200	300	150	150	500

## Post Mortem

Well overbid? Perhaps. East's opening 1♠ bid is consistent with aggressive bridge (rule of 19 – all HCP in both suits). Note, West might do better passing South's 2♦ intending to convert a takeout double by partner to penalty. East with such a minimum will either pass, or bid 2♠. Doubling implies more defense even with great shape – East has shape but less defense than promised. If East bids 2♠, West will bid 2N.

Playing in 3♣ didn't stand to be worth many match points. With 7 ♣s between both hands, a 3 level contract would not be easy to manage.

The ♠ finesse at trick 8 seemed to risk the contract unnecessarily. By delaying the finesse, the defense was forced to cash out, yielding 9 safe tricks for declarer. Thin games are a good way to sharpen you declarer skills and strengthen your partnerships!

Making 3NT with 21 HCP will usually outperform the field. That's why we call it a FIX!

### Negative Doubles

Does a negative double in a minor-major sequence promise both unbid suits? As originally conceived, yes. However the modern approach focuses on the unbid major suits and competing. Here are a few standard bidding situations to consider. With a weak hand (6-9 HCP), *always have a tolerance for partner's suit* before you double (2 or 3 cards). Choose to show the major(s) in preference to NT (you can bid NT later). Avoid negative doubles with "Quacks"/a poor fit for partner. Remember partner might have to bid a 3-card major under duress. At the 3-level be practical-might be your last shot at 3N.

Negative Double	Meaning
1♣-1♦-Double	6+ HCP, <b>Both 4 card Majors</b> . With only one major bid it (just as if the overcall wasn't there)! <i>Double with a weak 54 major patterns, intending to pass partner's preference. With a stronger hand bid your 5 card major then bid again. Partner will interpret a reverse (♥ then ♠ by you) as game forcing. With a game force, double then cue bid, intending to bid your 5 card suit if partner does not mention a major.</i>
1♣-1♥-Double	6+ HCP Exactly 4 ♠, might not have 4♦
1♣-1♠-Double	6+ HCP, 4+ Hearts, might not have 4♦. Or any hand with 11+ HCP, 4 Hearts. Note, with stoppers in ♠ and 4♥ double 1 <sup>st</sup> .
1♥-1♠-Double	6-10 HCP, at least one minor unsuitable for a free bid at the 2 level. Also 11+ HCP 44+ minors.
1♠-2♥-Double	10+ HCP with at least one minor. Inference cannot make free bid.
1♠-2♦-Double	8+ HCP 4+♥ or 11+ 4 hearts. <i>2♥ instead of Double shows 5+ cards, 11+ HCP forcing one round.</i>
1♦-2♣-Double 1♣-2♦-Double	8+ HCP with 5-4 majors, 10+ HCP with 4-4 majors, 10+ HCP with a 4 card major. <i>Partner does not promise both majors on this auction. Be careful.</i>
1♦-2♠-Double	10+ HCP 4♥. 10-12 HCP with 5+♥ and shortness elsewhere. <i>Not a penalty double. Pass for penalty and expect partner to convert.</i>
<b>Troublesome Sequences:</b> 1♦-3♣-Double 1♣-3♦-Double 1♥/♠-3♣-Double 1♥/♠-3♦-Double  <i>Be careful!!!</i>	10 + HCP enough points to invite game and an inability to make a free bid or bid NT (<12+ HCP, no 5+ Cards in suit, or missing stopper). <i>Typically promises one 4 card major. Here, getting to a major fit is one possibility. With a game going hand, no stopper and no 4 card major you can double if and only if partner knows to expect you have no major and no stopper. [Marty Bergen has a treatment he calls the Thrump double – game going hand denying a stopper for 3NT. With a stopper in opponent's suit, opener bids 3NT. Often 9 tricks are easier to find than 10 even when we own an 8 card major suit fit]. Opener must not assume that the negative doubler fits their one 4 card major. Opener bids a single 4-card major at the 3 level, 3N with a stopper in their suit, or cue bid opponent's suit with no stopper and both 4 card majors to give partner a choice of major games. After opener's major suit preference, 3N by the negative doubler would imply 4 cards in the other major.</i>
1♣/♦-3♥/♠-Double  1♥-3♠-Double 1♠-3♥-Double	You promise a great hand (13+HCP) with the other major. Showing minors, doubler has a game going hand with no NT stopper and 4-4+ in the minors. Bergen recommends playing negative doubles →5♦ - opponents have trumps (you'll never hold a trump stack & a standard penalty double). Others play high level doubles as cooperative = 3 cards in their suit. This helps partner decide the right next step.

Opener's continuations:

1. A direct cue bid forces game, saying nothing about distribution or stoppers. Simply treat opener's 3 level cue bid as Western (Asking for a stopper) and show a NT stopper if you have one.
2. All jumps below game are invitational, regardless whether the doubler promised that suit.
3. Double and triple jumps to game in a major are weaker than a cue bid.
4. The only reverse for opener after your negative double is when partner opens 1♣ and later bids 2♦. A reverse at a higher level is forcing to game.
5. A 1NT rebid promises a minimum balanced hand (maybe no stopper). A 2NT rebid (over opponent's 2-level overcall) promises more than a minimum and a stopper. Both deny interest in a major.

### **Learning Points**

1. Contracts are impossible only if you lose hope. Stay focused!
2. Where are the key cards? What are your best chances? Plan your attack.
3. Assume the cards will be where you need them, within reason.
4. Postpone finesses that, if they lose, will lose your contract.
5. Even so-called simple conventions have their nuances. Talk with your partner!

Key Words: Thin game, Plan the play, Clues from Defense, avoid the finesse, Negative Doubles