

225. A better tool case

By *Ron Klinger*

Today's deals come from Session 4 of the 2017 Spingold (USA Open Teams) Round of 16 match between MITTELMAN and NICKELL.

How would you and partner bid the East-West hands with West the dealer? North-South pass throughout.

Board 60: Dealer West : North-South vulnerable

West	East
♠ AJ9654	♠ KQ2
♥ 3	♥ Q1064
♦ AKQ7	♦ J8
♣ 97	♣ AKJ10

As you can see, there are 12 easy tricks in 6♠.

When the deal was replayed in a game on BBO, the auction with mostly natural bidding went this way:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♠ ⁽²⁾	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

(1) Forcing to game

(2) Two key cards and the ♠Q

West has 5 losers and East should have a 7-loser hand or better to force to game. (East actually has 6 losers.) Using the Losing Trick Count for West, $5 + 7 = 12$ and $24 - 12 = 12$ tricks are likely. That is why West jumped to 4NT after 3♠. The doubleton club with no control there is a concern, but West figured / hoped that East would have club control because of the 2♣ bid or that there would be 12 tricks available even without club control as long as there was no club lead.

That worked out well, East-West +980, but it might have been defeated on a club lead if the two hands looked like this:

West	East
♠ AJ9654	♠ KQ2
♥ 3	♥ AK64
♦ AKQ7	♦ J8
♣ 97	♣ QJ103

Without a club lead, West can draw trumps and ditch a club loser on dummy's second heart winner.

In the Spingold, Eric Rodwell (W) – Jeff Meckstroth (E) had a highly artificial auction, starting with 1♣ (16+ points) and ending in 6♠ by West.

This was yesterday's problem:

Dealer West : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
<i>Hanlon</i>	<i>Weinstein</i>	<i>Amoils</i>	<i>Levin</i>
1♠	Pass	2♣ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠ ⁽²⁾	Pass
?			

(1) Natural, forcing to game

(2) Strong, slam interest

What would you do next as West with:

♠ AJ9654
♥ 3
♦ AKQ7
♣ 97

West bid 4♦ cue-bid, showing control in diamonds and denying control in clubs. East had club control, but lacking heart control, he signed off in 4♣. To West, the 4♣ indicated no club control with East and so West naturally passed 4♣. West made 12 tricks, +480, but that was 11 Imps to **NICKELL**.

East could have bid 5♣ over 4♦ to show control in clubs and invite slam if West had heart control. That would have turned out all right with the actual West hand, but reaching the 5-level was not safe. West might have two or three low hearts and even 5♠ might fail.

I suspect that East-West are not a firm, regular partnership and their slam bidding methods might be found wanting. Better approaches to slam bidding exist and can be found in *A Good Game of Modern Bridge*. Here is one of them.

West	East
♠ AJ9654	♠ KQ2
♥ 3	♥ Q1064
♦ AKQ7	♦ J8
♣ 97	♣ AKJ10

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
?			

(1) Game-forcing

After spades have been agreed at the 3-level, to bid 4♦ as a cue-denying club control wastes bidding space. Having agreed spades with a game-force in place, almost no pair would want to use 3NT as an offer to play. Almost always 4♣ will be safer and score better anyway.

Instead, we can harness 3NT here as a 'pivot bid' to ask partner for club control. East now bids:

4♣ = club control, no diamond control
4♦ = diamond control + club control, no heart control
4♥ = hearts control + diamond control + club control
4♠ = no club control either

You gather much more information this way.

With the hands above, West bids 3NT over 3♣ and East bids 4♣, club control but no diamond control.

West's bids now are:

4♦ = diamond control, no heart control
4♥ = heart control + diamond control
4♠ = no diamond control either

West	East
♠ AJ9654	♠ KQ2
♥ 3	♥ Q1064
♦ AKQ7	♦ J8
♣ 97	♣ AKJ10

Using these methods, the full auction now could go this way:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
3NT ⁽²⁾	Pass	4♣ ⁽³⁾	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♠ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

- (1) Spade support, forcing to game
- (2) Asking for club control
- (3) I have club control, no diamond control
- (4) Two key cards plus the ♠Q

That would be the recommended auction. Other choices are possible:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
3NT ⁽²⁾	Pass	4♣ ⁽³⁾	Pass
4♥ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♠ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

- (1) Spade support, forcing to game
- (2) Asking for club control
- (3) I have club control, no diamond control
- (4) I have heart control + diamond control
- (5) Two key cards plus the ♠Q

In the above sequence, East knows the partnership has control in all the outside suits, but judges the hand is not good enough to push on to slam. No worries. With 5 losers, West has enough to ask for key cards.

Another sequence:

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♠ ⁽¹⁾	Pass
3NT ⁽²⁾	Pass	4♣ ⁽³⁾	Pass
4♥ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♥ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass	6♠	All Pass

- (1) Spade support, forcing to game
- (2) Asking for club control
- (3) I have club control, no diamond control
- (4) I have heart control + diamond control
- (5) Two key cards, no ♠Q

These methods are not difficult once you become used to them. Importantly, if partner denies control in a suit, you must sign off in the agreed trump suit if you also lack control in that suit. If partner denies control in a suit, any cue-bid you make promises control in that suit as well as control in the suit in which partner lacks control.

It is the same idea as the bidding after 4NT asking for key cards and the reply. A sign-off at the 5-level means two key cards are missing. Bidding 6 in the agreed suit says that a key card is missing or that the combined values cannot be enough for a grand slam, while 5NT says that the partnerships holds all of the key cards and the trump queen and a grand slam might be possible.

For success at teams, accuracy in slam bidding is essential Partnerships should practice, practice, practice.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♣	Pass
1♦	Pass	1NT	Pass
Pass	2♣ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	2♥
Pass	Pass	3♦	?

(1) Takeout, both majors

What would you do next as South with:

♠ 97

♥ AQ76

♦ 103

♣ KJ1097

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

Grammar humour: A run-on sentence walks into a bar it starts flirting. With a cute little sentence fragment.