

358. Play thing

By Ron Klinger

Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
4♠	Pass	Pass	?

What would you do as South with:

♠ A
♥ A2
♦ AK10975
♣ K872

The choices seem to be Pass, 4NT for the minors, 5♦ or Double for penalties.

To pass smacks of extreme pessimism. It could be right, but chances of it being right are low. Many (most?) play double of a 4♠ pre-empt as takeout. That would not be available as you might hear a 5♥ reply. Double for penalties is certainly an option, but you might well be disappointed in the outcome. West has opened 4♠, vulnerable versus not. West would be expected to have at least 7 playing tricks for that action, perhaps eight. Two down doubled giving you +500 figures to be a fine result, but who is to say that dummy might not provide a trick. You have 4½ quick tricks, but you might not have two diamond tricks or even one. Chances are that you will beat 4♠, but will you collect enough to compensate you for your side's game or slam if that is available?

The choice between 4NT (2 or 3 places to play) and 5♦ is an easy one. The imbalance in the two suits is too great for 4NT. It normally shows at least 5-5 in the two suits. You might do that with a 6-5 pattern, but not with a 6-4 pattern, especially not with 6 excellent and 4 modest. Imagine that partner has a 2-5-3-3 pattern with ♦x-x-x and ♣Q-x-x. Partner will choose 5♣ and how would you like to play that with Q-6-3 opposite K-8-7-2?

There is no guarantee of success, but the practical choice is 5♦. You bid that and everyone passes. West leads the ♣4 and this is what you see:

North
♠ 10
♥ K107
♦ 64
♣ QJ109653

South
♠ A
♥ A2
♦ AK10975
♣ K872

Trick one goes: ♣4: six – ace – seven. East switches to the ♠8: ace – two – ten. Plan the play.

Have you made up your mind already? Good. What were your thought processes during your planning?

You have lost a club and have no more losers in spades, hearts or clubs. The only possible loser(s) now are in trumps. If trumps are 3-2, you have no worries, but what if they are 4-1? If you have banged out ♦A, ♦K, and trumps are 4-1, you will be all right if the singleton was the ♦J or ♦Q. If the singleton was a low diamond, you will lose two tricks to the ♦Q, ♦J and go one down.

Is it likely that the diamonds are 4-1? Without any bidding, a 3-2 break occurs 68% of the time (roughly 2/3) and a 4-1 break 28% of the time (roughly 1/4), so that the 3-2 break is much more likely. However, here West has opened 4♠ vulnerable vs not. That makes it more likely than usual that diamonds are 4-1 with West having started with a singleton diamond. The good news is that there is a safety play in diamonds to guard against the 4-1 split with East having ♦Q-J-x-x.

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	North	
	♠ 10	
	♥ K107	
	♦ 64	
	♣ QJ109653	
West		East
♠ KQJ975432		♠ 86
♥ 64		♥ QJ9853
♦ 2		♦ QJ83
♣ 4		♣ A
	South	
	♠ A	
	♥ A2	
	♦ AK10975	
	♣ K872	

After ♣4 to the ace and the ♠8 switch, won by South, the recommended play is ♦A, followed by the ♥2 to the ♥K and the ♦6. If East follows low, play the ♦10 or ♦9. With the actual layout, you would win this trick, cash the ♦K and concede a diamond trick to East. If West happens to win your diamond with the ♦J or ♦Q, there is only one trump missing. Your ♦K will capture it when you regain the lead at trick 6.

It does not help East to insert an honour when you play the second round of trumps from dummy. You would capture East's ♦J or ♦Q and return the ♦10 to knock out East's remaining diamond honour. Your ♦9 will then draw East's last trump.

The deal originated in a club duplicate pairs. Even though North-South can take four tricks against a spade contract, only one pair managed to do that. Top score for East-West was 4♠ doubled, ten tricks +790. The other positive scores for East-West were 5♦ doubled, one off, E-W +100, +86%, and 5♦ undoubled, E-W +50 +74%. I guess South simply banged down the ♦A and ♦K.

North-South collected 200 (average) from 5♠ doubled twice and from 5♠ undoubled once (the only defenders to collect their four tricks against spades). North-South scored 80% for 5♣, 12 tricks, +420. Top North-South went to 6♣, 12 tricks, +920.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer East : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1NT (15-17)
Pass	?		

What is your plan of bidding with

♠ A964
♥ 8
♦ K107654
♣ 108

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

A perfectionist walked into a bar . . . Apparently the bar wasn't set high enough.