

268. An early solution

By Ron Klinger

Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

North

♠ AK93

♥ A8

♦ 63

♣ KJ1084

East

♠ 8542

♥ 43

♦ AQ8754

♣ 6

West	North	East	South
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4♥	Dble	Pass	4♠
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Pass	Pass	5♥	Dble
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Pass	Pass	Pass	
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North leads the ♠K: two – six (reverse count, showing an even number) – 10. What would you play at trick 2?

Suppose West switches to the ♦6: ace – nine – ten. Declarer plays the ♥3: five – king – ace. What would you do now as North? Decide before reading further. (*Answer later*)

This was yesterday's problem:

As dealer with only your side vulnerable, what would you do with:

♠ 10

♥ KQ109762

♦ KJ102

♣ 5

You have 9 HCP, generally taken as below the values for a 1-opening. Mind you, there are experts around today who would choose to open 1♥.

You have a powerful 7-card suit, suitable for a pre-empt. You are vulnerable against not. Would you choose 3♥ or 4♥ or something else?

Best approach is to count your losers and deduct from 13 (the number of cards you hold). That will give you your playing tricks. To count losers, consider only the top three cards in each suit. Count a loser for every ace, king or queen missing. Since you aim to play in a trump contract, a singleton is only one loser (except no loser for a bare ace).

You have 1 loser in spades, hearts and clubs and 2 in diamonds. Total: 5 losers. Deduct from 13 = 8 playing tricks. The modern style is to pre-empt at 3 tricks above the number of your playing tricks. That would be for 11 tricks here, but we do not pre-empt with 5♥ or 5♠. That means the hand is worth a 4♥ opening.

At unfavourable vulnerability, some experts prefer to use the Rule of 2 for pre-empts. Even so, that would qualify for a 4♥ opening here: 8 playing tricks + 2 for the pre-empt = 10 tricks and so 4♥.

The deal arose in Round 9 of the qualifying rounds in the 2018 World Teams. Of the six matches on BBO (Bridge Base Online), the choices were equally divided between a 4♥ opening (six times) or something lower (3♥ x 5, 2♥ x 1).

Bd. 15: Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

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	♥ A8	
	♦ 63	
	♣ KJ1084	
West		East
♠ 10		♠ 8542
♥ KQ109762		♥ 43
♦ KJ102		♦ AQ8754
♣ 5		♣ 6
	South	
	♠ QJ76	
	♥ J5	
	♦ 9	
	♣ AQ9732	

At most of the tables it went 3♥ : Double : Pass : 4♠, all pass or 4♥ : Double : Pass : 4♣, all pass. Where West led the ♥K, the 4-1 trump split limited declarer to 11 tricks. Where West led the ♣5 (an attractive start), declarer could win and play a diamond, win any return, ruff a diamond, draw trumps, discard the ♥8 on the sixth club for 12 tricks, +480. That happened twice when the ♣5 was led. At the other two tables where declarer received the ♣5 lead, declarer simply drew trumps and made 11 tricks. The ♥K lead (or the ♥4 when North became declarer) restricted declarer to 11 tricks.

In only one BBO match did the bidding go beyond 4♠. You already saw this auction at the top of page 1.

West	North	East	South
4♥	Dble	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♥	Dble
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Taking a sacrifice, vulnerable versus not is a brave decision. With 4♠ making, you need to go down doubled by only one trick to show a profit.

North led the ♠K. When South played the ♠6 (reverse count, showing an even number), North switched to the ♦6: ace – nine – ten. After the ♥3: five – king – ace, North played the ♣K: six – two (even number) - five. North returned a trump and South was one down, –200, a good result as 4♠ is unbeatable.

How might North have found the play of the ♦3 at trick 4 or trick 5 to take 5♥ doubled two down and +500 for North-South?

If West had a club loser, West might have played a club rather than a trump at trick 6. What was going on in diamonds? As West had opened 4♥ at adverse vulnerability with a spade loser, a heart loser and a club loser or two, it was highly likely that that West had the ♦K. In that case, West did not need any club ruffs in dummy and a heart return was futile.

A BBO commentator suggested that South might have helped North with the ♣Q under the ♣K as an alarm signal to do something unusual, in this case another diamond.

The solution should have come much earlier. What was the purpose of the ♦6 at trick 2? If declarer had a diamond loser, it wasn't going anywhere. If South had the ♦K as a winner now, it would still be a winner later.

North should have switched to a club at trick 2. Even if this went into the ♣A-Q with declarer, there was no useful discard in dummy on the second club winner. In practice, South would win with the ♣A and switch to the ♦9. That would be enough to point North to the right move after taking the ♥A on the first round of hearts.

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	South	
	♠ QJ76	
	♥ J5	
	♦ 9	
	♣ AQ9732	

This is what happened at the other table:

West	North	East	South
3♥	Dble	Pass	4♥ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	4♠	Pass	5♠ ⁽²⁾
Pass	6♥ ⁽³⁾	Pass	6♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) Playable in two or three suits

(2) Interested in six if you control hearts

(3) First-round heart control, ace or void

This was certainly a good shot by South. All that 6♠ needed was trumps to be 3-2, normally a 68% chance, a bit less here given the 3♥ pre-empt, but certainly reasonable. East led the ♥4 and with the spades 4-1, North had to settle for one down, -100 and -7 Imps. Had North-South collected 500 at the other table, it would have been worth 12 Imps instead of 7.

Problem for Tomorrow:

With neither side vulnerable, West deals and passes. What would you do as North with:

♠ J3
♥ J5
♦ K105
♣ KJ10753

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

Tried calling the tinnitus help line. No answer. Just kept ringing.

A great gift: *The Power of Pass* (by Harold Schogger and Ron Klinger). \$A25.00 Available from Suzie Klinger, post free until 2021: email suzie@ronklingerbridge.com or telephone 0411 229 705.