

308. In fear of spades

By Ron Klinger

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ J105
♥ AK102
♦ --
♣ KQJ1095

Decide on your answer before going further:

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

North
♠ J105
♥ AK102
♦ --
♣ KQJ1095

South
♠ 7642
♥ Q6
♦ AKJ105
♣ 74

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

(1) 4+ spades

(2) 3 spades

(3) Puppet to 2♦

(4) Natural, not prepared to play in 2♦

West leads the ♥8. Plan the play. (*Answer later*)

This was yesterday's question:

Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ J105
♥ AK102
♦ --
♣ KQJ1095

Board 6: Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

North	
♠ J105	
♥ AK102	
♦ --	
♣ KQJ1095	
West	East
♠ AK3	♠ Q98
♥ 85	♥ J9743
♦ Q8763	♦ 942
♣ A86	♣ 32
South	
♠ 7642	
♥ Q6	
♦ AKJ105	
♣ 74	

The deal comes from the semi-finals of the 2020 Australian National Open Teams.

After 1♣ : Pass : 1♠ : Pass, North might well consider bidding 2♥. Yes, it is a reverse and you have only 14 HCP, BUT: (1) Your clubs are solid, much better than K-Q-J-5-4-2. (2) Your hand includes three tens, all supported by higher honours. (3) You have 5 losers, the typical strength for a minimum reverse. (4) Opposite as little ♠A-K-x-x-x, you have decent prospects for game.

HANS North-South:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West led ♦3: ♥2 – ♦9 – ♦A! Nabil Edgtton (S) South could have won with the ♦10 or ♦J, but fearing a spade switch, he won with the ♦A in the hope of receiving a diamond continuation by the defender who had the ♣A. South knocked out the ♣A. West shifted to ♠K, ♠A and the ♠3 to the ♠Q. South had the rest, 9 tricks, +600.

It is true that 3NT could be beaten if spades were 4-2 on some layouts and the defenders attack spades soon enough, but even if spades are 4-2 or 5-1, you might survive if: (a) the defenders might not lead spades or switch to spades – that is an advantage of bidding 1♣ : 1♠ rather than 1♣ : 1♦. (b) spades are 4-2, you survive if the doubleton is A-K, A-Q, K-Q or 9-8 if there is no spade lead or if the hand with the doubleton also has the ♣A. (c) spades are 5-1 if the singleton is the ace, king or queen and there is no spade lead or if the ♣A is with the hand with the singleton spade.

TRAVIS North-South:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	All Pass	

Sartaj Hans (W) thought for some time before passing out 2♣. That was a good decision. It is true that West has 13 HCP, but it is usually wise to trust the opponents' bidding when they are vulnerable versus not vulnerable. Giving in to 2♣ is unlikely to be costly. Had Hans backed in, North-South might have found 3NT.

North's 2♣ rebid was restrained. One would not carp with a 3♣ jump-rebid. East led the ♠8. West won with the ♠K and switched to the ♥8: two – nine – queen. South pitched two spades on the ♦A, ♦K and played on trumps. The result was ten tricks, North-South +130, but –10 Imps.

Board 6: Dealer North : North-South vulnerable

North	
♠ J105	
♥ AK102	
♦ --	
♣ KQJ1095	
West	East
♠ AK3	♠ Q98
♥ 85	♥ J9743
♦ Q8763	♦ 942
♣ A86	♣ 32
South	
♠ 7642	
♥ Q6	
♦ AKJ105	
♣ 74	

In the other semi-final, [DON](#) North-South:

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

(1) Fourth-suit stopper ask for 3NT

If South's 2♦ was natural, it is an underbid and why bypass the spades? If I am going to bypass 1♠ in this sequence, I would rather start with 1♣ : 1♠. If 2♦ was conventional, there was no alert in the BBO records. There is a good case for playing 1♣ : 1♦, 1♥ : 1♠ as natural (opener could be 4-4-0-5) and for fourth-suit-forcing, one can bid 1♣ : 1♦, 1♥ : 2♠.

East led the ♠Q (not recommended – you will see why – the standard lead from Q-x-x is the bottom card, so here the ♠8). West overtook the ♠Q with the ♠K. Why? Maybe West feared that the ♠3 was a discouraging signal and East might switch to a red suit. A heart switch would allow 5♣ to make. Probably West assumed that East had started with ♠Q-J-x or ♠Q-J-x-x and overtaking could not cost.

West cashed the ♠A at trick 2 and played the ♠3. North won with the ♠J and played trumps. The result was one down, East-West +200. Even though they did not extract the full penalty available, +200 should have been a very good result for [DON](#), since their North-South pair at the other table reached 3NT (see their auction in the middle of page 1).

Against 3NT, West led the ♥8. How should South play? As the cards lie, it works to win with the ♥Q, cash a top diamond, the ♦K preferably to create some ambiguity) and then knock out the ♣A. You make 5 clubs, a diamond, and three hearts.

No doubt South was afraid to adopt this line for fear of losing a club and then 4 or 5 spades, but the result was disastrous. Trick 1 went ♥8: ace – seven (reverse count) – six. Declarer played the ♣K, ducked, and the ♣Q, taken by the ace. West returned the ♥5. What was South to do? To win with the ♥Q would leave dummy marooned. To win with the ♥K, would leave the heart suit unguarded and no access to South.

Declarer opted to win with the ♥Q. South exited with the ♠2: king – five – nine (reverse count). West switched to the ♦3: ♥10 – ♦9 – ♦J. South exited with the ♠4: ace – ten – eight and West exited with the ♠3. East won and shifted to the ♦2. South played ♦A, ♠7, ♦K and had to concede the last two diamonds, 10-5, to West's Q-8. That was two down, East-West +200 and 3 Imps to [JACOB](#).

You can understand South's fear of the spades, but one might foresee the later difficulties if you win trick 1 in dummy rather than hope for a favourable spade position and win trick 1 with the ♥Q.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer West : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
3♠ ⁽¹⁾	?		

(1) Could be very weak

What would you do as North with:

♠ K
♥ 10964
♦ AJ8764
♣ A2

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

To this day, the boy that used to bully me at school still takes my lunch money. On the plus side, he makes great Subway sandwiches.