

356. The four bridge bears

By Ron Klinger

Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

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

(1) Negative double, 4+ hearts

As North is a passed hand, the range for the negative double is 6-11 points. If North has 10-11 points, the heart length is expected to be exactly four cards. With 10-11 points and 5 hearts, North could bid 2♥ unless the hearts are extremely weak.

Playing pairs, what would you do now as South with:

♠ KJ108
♥ AJ
♦ 4
♣ AKQJ32

This was yesterday's problem:

Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

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

What would you do as North with:

♠ 7
♥ K10986
♦ K96
♣ 9654

There was a surprising range of choices, which seemed reminiscent of the Goldilocks fairy tale. Some Norths passed and that was too little (and too timid). Some Norths bid 2♥ and that was too much (even for a passed hand). Some bid 2♣ and that was merely misguided. If you are strong enough to bid 2♣, you are strong enough to make a negative double. Some doubled to show 4+ hearts and 6-11 points and that was just right.

As for today's problem, South has 19 HCP and 7 almost sure winners. As partner has shown 6+ points, you want to be in game, but which game? You cannot expect partner to have 6 hearts. With that, North would have started with a weak 2♥. You could head for 5♣, but if you can make 5♣, you can often make 3NT with an overtrick. Playing pairs, you want to be in 3NT when feasible rather than 5-of-a-minor.

'Hang on,' you are thinking, 'What about the diamonds? I have a singleton diamond. What if they lead diamonds and rattle off the first five or more tricks?'

It is true that 3NT is risky, but bridge is fundamentally a risk-taking game. If you are averse to risk, bridge is not a game for you. If you can't stand the heat, stay away from the furnace. The key is to know which risks are worth taking and which should you avoid.

Here are the clues for taking the plunge and jumping to 3NT: (a) you are likely to receive a spade lead (b) partner might have values in diamonds and (c) as partner has a singleton or void in spades, 4-5 hearts and likely shortage in clubs, there is a strong chance that North has length in diamonds and that includes at least one diamond stopper.

Dealer West : East-West vulnerable

North	
♠ 7	
♥ K10986	
♦ K96	
♣ 9654	
West	East
♠ A9543	♠ Q62
♥ 54	♥ Q732
♦ AQ103	♦ J8752
♣ 107	♣ 8
South	
♠ KJ108	
♥ AJ	
♦ 4	
♣ AKQJ32	

As it happened, North was not short in clubs, but did produce a potential stopper in diamonds (and an actual one in practice) even with the minimum 6-point holding.

Top score on the board went to Matt Mullamphy who did jump to 3NT after North's negative double and East's raise to 2♠. As expected, West led a spade, the ♠4: seven – queen – king. South cashed the ♣A, followed by the ♥J. Maybe West would cover with the ♥Q? When West played low, South won with the ♥K, returned to the ♣K and cashed the ♥A. Maybe the ♥Q would be doubleton.

When all followed low on the ♥A, South cashed four more clubs. West came down to ♠A-9, ♦A-Q. Dummy was left with ♥10-9, ♦K-9 and South had ♠J-10-8 ♦4. South played the ♠10, discarding the ♥9 from dummy. West took the ♠A and cashed the ♦A. West should now have exited with the ♦Q, leaving dummy with the ♥10 loser. West erred by playing the ♠9 and South made the last two tricks with ♠J-8 for 11 tricks and +460.

There was only one other pair in 3NT, the auction going Pass : Pass : Pass : 1♣, 1♠ : 2♣ : 2♠ : 3NT, all pass. West led the ♠4: seven – queen – king. South rattled off the six club winners, followed by ♥A, ♥K and a third heart to East's ♥Q. West collected two aces, but had to give declarer the last tricks, North-South +430, 93.3%.

Three Souths were in 5♣. At two tables it went Pass : Pass : Pass : 1♣, 1♠ : 2♥ : 2♠ : 5♣, all pass. North's 2♥ was a significant overbid. At the third table: Pass : Pass : Pass : 1♣, 1♠ : Pass : Pass : 2♣, 2♦ : 3♣ : 3♦ : 5♣, all pass. Each West led the ♥5. One South made 12 tricks, +420, 86.7%, after ♥5: nine – queen – ace. The others made 11 tricks, +400, 76.7%, when the play began ♥5: six – seven – jack.

An amazing number of Souths played in a club part-score, making 12 tricks, +170, 53.3%, or 11 tricks, +150, 23.3%. South's rebid was frequently a huge underbid. Examples.

- (1) South 1♣, North 1♥, South 2♣, all pass
- (2) South 1♣, West 1♠, North Double, East 2♠, South 3♣, all pass
- (3) South 1♣, West 1♠, North 2♥, East 2♠, South 3♣, all pass

Top score for East-West came after this auction:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
1♠	2♥	2♠	3♣
3♣	Pass	Pass	4♥?
Pass	Pass	Pass	

East led the ♣8. West scored two aces and East made the ♥Q and received a club ruff, East-West +50, the only plus score for East-West and 100%. South's choice of 4♥ is mystifying. A penalty double of 3♣ would yield +800 or +500, a top score instead of an absolute bottom.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer West : Both vulnerable

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

(1) Forcing for one round

What would you do as West with:

♠ A10
♥ QJ9763
♦ KQ10
♣ 86

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

I am not superstitious, but I am a little stitious. (Steve Carrell as Michael Scott in 'The Office')