

BIDDING GAME OR NOT

Your partner is the dealer and opens 2♥. East passes and this is your hand:

S	South
♠	A74
♥	87
♦	KQJ3
♣	A1042

You have several choices. These choices are not clear cut. In fact, I put this hand to a bridge polling site, BridgeWinners.com, and out of 34 votes, 33 selected a pass. These are generally high level tournament players, used to a "weak" weak-two from their partners. Whereas a disciplined 2-level opening in first seat is 8-10 points, these players often see their partners opening with 5 or 6 HCP.

When I put the same hand to my local bridge club, I only got 1 pass vote. The majority opted for 2NT. This bid is conventional, asking partner to further describe their hand; either by naming a feature or classifying their strength and quality of trump suit. Another large number of votes were for 4♥. These club players are used to a more disciplined opening bid in first position.

At the table, I raised the pre-empt to 4♥. Here's why:

I think we can make a game. When making a decision on raising to game over a pre-empt, it isn't points that are important. You should be thinking tricks. A normal (disciplined) weak-two opening is from a 6-card suit and should be able to take 5 tricks. That is based on losing 1 of the trump tricks. That means that you must provide 5 tricks as well for a major suit game. Here you have 4 sure tricks: the two aces and two of the three diamond honors. All you need is one more trick from your partner. If he has the ♦A or either black king, you have 10 tricks. If he has the QJ in those black suits, you have a 50% probability of making game, based on a successful finesse.

Assuming you are in 4♥ and East leads the ♠K. Plan the play for North:

N North
♠ 852
♥ KQ9432
♦ A8
♣ 85

East leads ♠K

S South
♠ A74
♥ 87
♦ KQJ3
♣ A1042

North has 2 spade losers, 1 or 2 heart losers and 1 club loser. Given the lead, the spade and heart losers are considered "fast" losers. They will lose whenever the opponents lead the suit. The club loser is a "slow" loser, meaning you have a first round stopper and thus have a chance to discard it on the long diamond suit. The trick on this hand is to limit the heart losers to one - the ♥A.

You need the hearts to break 3-2, the most normal break. You also need the ♥A to be in West. You have to lead the heart twice from the dummy up to your ♥KQ. If West plays low on the first heart, you go back to the dummy with a low diamond and finesse again. West does best by holding up his ♥A and forcing you to use the club ace - dummy's last entry - to run the diamonds. To counter this, you should lead another heart from your hand, forcing West to win. Now they can take their two spades, but you win any return and discard your club loser on the good diamonds.

This is the entire deal:

D 9	N North	W West	N North	E East	S South
	♠ 852 ♥ KQ9432 ♦ A8 ♣ 85	♠ 63 ♥ AJ5 ♦ 76542 ♣ KQ3	♠ KQJ109 ♥ 106 ♦ 109 ♣ J976	♠ 852 ♥ KQ9432 ♦ A8 ♣ 85	♠ A74 ♥ 87 ♦ KQJ3 ♣ A1042
	W West	E East			
	♠ 63 ♥ AJ5 ♦ 76542 ♣ KQ3	♠ KQJ109 ♥ 106 ♦ 109 ♣ J976			
	S South				
	♠ A74 ♥ 87 ♦ KQJ3 ♣ A1042				
			4♥ N	NS: 0 EW: 0	

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You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/y7lblquj> , or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.

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