

TO OPEN OR NOT

You are the dealer with this 10 HCP hand. Do you open?

S	South
♠	AQ1074
♥	A87643
♦	7
♣	3

This hand is very deceptive. Yes it has only 10 HCP but it has many great features: It is 6-5 in the majors and all the points are in those two suits; it has only a 5 loser count – one spade, two hearts and one loser in each of the minors. This hand should excite you. There is a saying in bridge: six-five-come-alive.

Yes, you must open this hand. But with what bid? Normally, you open your longest suit but if you do open 1♥ and partner doesn't support hearts, you won't be able to rebid 2♠. That would be a reverse and requires at least 16 points. This misrepresents your hand and partner can get you too high. The best bid is 1♠, planning to bid 2♥ over partner's response. If need be, you can repeat the hearts, promising partner at least 5 hearts.

This is how the bidding progressed:

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

North's 2/1 response promised opening values. His jump to 3♠ showed slam interest. Now what would you rebid?

Normally you would start control cue bidding to make sure you have control of every suit, but you know you have 1st or 2nd round control of all four suits. You just bid 4NT and check for aces.

North responds 5♦. We are using Roman Key Card Blackwood, where 5 shows 0 or 3 key cards. The four aces and the king of trump counts as key cards. It's very possible that partner has no key cards so you should rebid 5♠. If partner has 3 key cards, rather than none, he will carry on to 6♠.

That is exactly what happened and you are in a small slam, West leading the ♦K. You get a look at North's hand. Hmm. He has twice as many HCP as you. No wonder he was interested in slam. Plan the play.

N	North
♠	K95
♥	K
♦	AJ98
♣	AKQ94

West: ♦K

S	South
♠	AQ1074
♥	A87643
♦	7
♣	3

As long as the trump suit behaves, you have no losers there. You have no minor suit losers but you have 4 possible heart losers.

When you are declaring a slam contract, it is often helpful to count winners. You have 5 spades, 2 hearts, 1 diamond and 3 clubs. That is 11 tricks and you need one more. The solution is a lot easier to visualize when counting winners. All you need to do is ruff 1 heart in the dummy and take your 12 tricks.

Start by winning the ♦A and playing 2 rounds of trump, saving one trump for the heart ruff. Unblock the ♥K and come to your hand by ruffing a diamond. Now ruff a little heart with the carefully preserved trump in the dummy. Everybody follows suit. Now come back to your hand with another diamond ruff and pull the last trump with your ♠Q.

Now win your ♥A and lead a club to the dummy. Unfortunately, the clubs don't run and you lose the last trick – making 6♣.

This is the entire deal:

3	N North	W West	N	E	S
	♠ K95 ♥ K ♦ AJ98 ♣ AKQ94	♠ 32 ♥ J952 ♦ KQ1042 ♣ 75	♠ J86 ♥ Q10 ♦ 653 ♣ J10862	P 2♣	P 2♥
	S South		P 3♣	P 4NT	P 5♣
	♠ AQ1074 ♥ A87643 ♦ 7 ♣ 3		P 5♦	P 5♠	P 6♣
			P 6♠	P 6♣	P 6♣
			6♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0		

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/y8xbxlt2> , 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.

© David Germaine 2017