

PeterHow Week 1 – Genesis

Welcome to Peter's Hand of the Week! Or PeterHow as I like to call it. These hands will either be a recent hand I played or other illustrative hands. I will occasionally throw in some bidding instruction either from standard hands which seem not too well-understood by the North-Eastern brethren (and sisterhood), or related to bidding conventions.

So, a word at the start. I don't believe that either bidding or play is a matter of 'opinion' or 'style' or 'doing as you see it at the time'. It's undoubtedly the case that there is only one correct way to play over 95% of hands. And it's my conviction that there is only one way to bid over 95% of hands. So, no messing about with 'think about this, think about that; you can't have a bid for every hand; my style is ... ; my intuition is ... '. If you're of that school, then you might find my stuff interesting but you might also find it hard to swallow. All I can tell you is that it works and it works almost all of the time. And no other player I've come across uses a more 'intuitive' approach and bids more effectively than I do (even if I say so myself).

This is the hand for this week: You're South (dealer):

♠ 10
♥ K 7 4 3
♦ K
♣ A K J 9 7 5 4

You open 1C, your LHO overcalls 1S and partner doubles. RHO passes. This one hand raises several questions, only some of which I'll look at here:

- what exactly does your partner's double say?
- how do you evaluate this hand accurately. It's only 14 HCP but is it actually weak opposite partner's double?
- What are your options for showing the hand?

Firstly, partner's double is for take-out, it's a *Negative* double as everyone else likes to call it or a *Sputnik* double as I like to call it. It guarantees 8pts minimum, it's unlimited (partner may literally have 20pts) and it pretty much guarantees exactly 4 Hearts (though there is one exception, which we may look at, some other time). It says nothing about Diamonds (the other unbid suit). Partner may have no Diamonds at all (or, more likely, a singleton).

So, in light of this, how about your hand? What's it worth? There is no way you can assess your hand as weak. For intermediate players, the easiest way to assess opening hands is to add 1 HCP for every card over 4 in any suit. With 3 extra clubs, your hand becomes worth 17 pts.

Those of you who know about the Losing Trick Count, which is a very accurate way of assessing hands once you've found a fit (Hearts in this case), will see that you have a 5 loser hand (max). Partner has at most a 9 loser hand. Using those calculations, you can make 10 tricks between the 2 hands even if your partner only has 8pts.

Whilst an absolute beginner could be forgiven for only bidding 2H and someone into their second week of bridge could be forgiven for bidding 3H, this hand is actually worth 4H.

Which is what South bid. You might also like to consider that South could also have bid 4D or 3S. These high-level jump bids are *Splinter* bids and they show this type of hand, with enough for game, a fit for partner's suit and a shortage in the splinter suit. Maybe I'll discuss these at another time.

Anyway, 4H is not a bad bid, after which the auction progressed:

| S | W | N | E |
|--------|------|--------|-----------------|
| 1C | [1S] | Dbl | Pass throughout |
| 4H | | 4S (1) | |
| 5C (2) | | 5D (3) | |
| 5H (4) | | 6H (5) | |

Bid (1), which introduces a new suit after a suit has been agreed, is not natural. Anyway, you probably knew that as it's the opponents suit. It's the beginning of slam explorations, which means that North will have at least an opening hand himself. He's counting on you for a 17+pt hand (which, in light of distribution, you have) and combined with his strength, he's eyeing big bucks.

Bids 1, 2 and 3 are all *Cue Bids*. After the suit was agreed with the 4H bid, these bids show *controls* i.e. with an agreed trump suit, they say that 'we won't lose 2 tricks in this suit'. So they show the Ace, the King, a singleton or a void. The Ace or void holdings are known as *first round* controls and the King and singleton holdings are known as *second round* controls.

In this case all the bids (1), (2), (3) show first round controls on a classical approach. Bid (1) may be treated as either showing 1st or 2nd round control (South doesn't know which it is), on some interpretations.

By the time the 5D bid is made, both players know there is no chance of losing 2 quick tricks (like the opponents cashing the Ace and King) in any side suit and they also know that the opponents won't be able to cash 2 Aces. Notice that all this was achieved without a whiff of the mighty Blackwood or even the much-loved Roman Key Card Blackwood. All the side suits seem secure but what about Hearts?

North may only have xxxx in Hearts, in which case, you have no chance of a slam. This explains why South bid 5H rather than committing himself to 6H, even though he knows the side-suits are safe from the opponents cashing 2 tricks. North thought for some time before he bid 6H and after K \heartsuit lead, North laid down his hand, commenting that maybe he should have let 5H go. These are the N/S hands.

\spadesuit A 9 8 5
 \heartsuit A 10 6 5
 \diamondsuit A 10 8
 \clubsuit Q 2



\spadesuit 10
 \heartsuit K 7 4 3
 \diamondsuit K
 \clubsuit A K J 9 7 5 4

How do you play the hand?

You're laughing if Hearts are 3-2, you have 12 tricks, just losing one Heart. You're crying if Hearts are 5-0, you must lose two Hearts. Which leaves a possible 4-1 break to consider. You're with the weepers again if East has four Hearts but you're back with the gigglers if West has four Hearts and that's what you should cater for. Take the opening lead in dummy, come to hand with K♥, both East and West follow small. Lead low to the ♥ K 10 5 and if West plays low, put the 10♥ in. If East shows out, you're looking pretty. If East follows, you're looking cute, having lost your only trick to East. Had West inserted the ♥J, let him have the trick. Come back to hand with a Spade or Diamond ruff (or a club if West returns a club) and claim the rest of the tricks.

Remarkably, when this hand was played exactly half of the seven pairs played it in Hearts and one pair managed to let the auction die in 4C (6C is actually easier than 6H and 6NT is better still). 4C, eh? Gerber gone wrong perhaps? A tale for another day.