

# Board of the Week 11

By Dick Chapman

Freak hands provide little or no educational value, but they are fun to play. In fact, I used to play Goulash tournaments on BBO, where every hand had wild distribution. Here and only here the hands are truly rigged! Since everyone knows that normal bridge strategy doesn't work in those tournaments, the bidding is always crazy-wild.

But in real bridge, partner won't know you have a freak. At a recent LRDBC open pairs event, matchpoints, no one vulnerable, you are West holding these cards:

♠AKJ1095 ♥92 ♦QJ104 ♣5

North deals and opens 1 spade (!). It's hard, but you ethically keep a straight face. Partner overcalls 2 clubs and South bids 2 hearts. Wow, what do you do?

I passed, hoping North would bid 2 spades and partner might double to protect my pass. But North passed the 2 heart call (wasn't it forcing?) and now partner bids 3 clubs. What now? Decide before reading further.

- Pass is perhaps the best option, just play it and move on. It either makes or it doesn't.
- 3 diamonds wouldn't be forcing (you passed first time) but you could easily find partner with 1 or 2 of that suit and down you go, so that's out.
- 3 hearts isn't in your agreement but might imply a spade stopper and ask partner to bid 3NT with hearts stopped, otherwise you are going to play 4 clubs. Second best option?
- 3 spades implies hearts are stopped and asks for a spade stopper, so that's out.
- 3NT is out given the bidding at the table.

Well, what did you decide? My call: four spades. I didn't say it's the best call, I'm only saying it's what I bid. North asks, partner says "no agreement." North doubles, and then it got wild. Partner bid 5 clubs and I bid 5 spades, which of course was doubled. Check out this hand:

	♠Q8632 ♥A ♦A763 ♣Q87	
♠AKJ1095 ♥92 ♦QJ104 ♣5		♠7 ♥K83 ♦K98 ♣AK9642
	♠4 ♥QJ107654 ♦52 ♣J103	

It makes 4NT, 4 spades, 4 diamonds, and 4 clubs from either East or West (NT because of the stiff heart in North and no entry to the South hand).

My partner wasn't in on the joke, so thought that 5 clubs was required. Was it? Decide and read my opinion later in this piece.

One could argue that making any bid that's wild like my 4 spade call changes our game from bridge to poker. But here's my defense: partner knows it's not shortness, because partner will have shortness in the spade suit. If both East and West have shortness, South would be raising spades. In the absence of an agreement, I have to guess what partner will guess my bid means. I guessed partner would know that three spades is the "bid NT or clubs" call, so four spades (which can't be shortness) would be "this is where I want to play" call.

By the way, East's explanation "no agreement" is correct. In the absence of an agreement, don't tell the opponents what you think the call means. What you think might come from the context of your hand, and the opponents are not entitled to know what's in your hand. If there is no agreement (and there certainly wasn't in this case), just say that. If you do have an agreement but can't remember, say that and maybe the opponents will look at your convention card. If you have an agreement, they are entitled to know what it is.

Had North not doubled, the 5 club bid is somewhat understandable. The joke among us intermediate and intermediate plus players is that "all confusing bids are forcing." But it's my opinion that East should pass the double and leave it up to West to unscramble the mess by bidding a suit or redoubling for rescue. In today's hand I would have passed the double and made the contract.

Maybe. I got so frustrated at the situation (which of course I caused), I called the wrong card from dummy and went down two tricks for -300. But it didn't matter: either -100 or -300 is a zero on the board, as all the other EW players went plus. I'll pretend that if I had played four spades doubled, I would have made it (losing a spade, diamond, and heart only).

The no trump bidders won the board with +400 or +150. If South is quiet, some level of NT is a reasonable landing spot. If East passes 4 spades doubled and I pay attention to discards, our side gets a +590 top instead of the zero we actually got. If I pass 3 clubs, we bring in 130 for a next-to-bottom. If I bought lottery tickets (which I don't) and if I won the big prize, I would be on my yacht. There are a lot of ifs in bridge and life.

See you at the table.