

A Second Look

What Are We Thinking? — Lessons from the Fifth Chair

A FEW HANDS FROM THURSDAY'S NKY FOUR-IS-ENOUGH GAME

Thursday afternoon at the Erlanger Lions Club brought another round of the NKY Four-Is-Enough duplicate game — and this week, the cards had something to say before the bidding even started. Of the 24 boards in play, 7 contained a hand with a void. The probability of that happening by chance is roughly 1 in 10,000, which is compelling evidence that Cordell's dealing machine is broken again. The Fifth Chair — that invisible observer with all four hands in view — has again picked a few of the most interesting deals to discuss. These discussions assume Standard American bidding; you can review all the hands online at <http://www.nkybridge.org/>. Find a partner and join us for this relaxed game again on July 2.

When to Open Light – In First Chair!

East holds only 10 HCP, but this hand is much stronger than the point count suggests. The 5440 shape is a distributional powerhouse — with voids and singletons, trick-taking potential can be enormous once a fit (likely) is found. Before opening this hand light, check that the rebid will be convenient. Here if partner bids diamonds, we'll continue bidding hearts up the line. And of course if partner bids a major we have a simple raise. In the event partner has no four card major, maybe we'll still find a fit in clubs. So have faith, and open 1♣.

West responds 1♠, and East has an easy raise to 2♠. If left alone, that likely will end the auction as west's hand is fairly weak. However, both North and South may feel tempted to enter the auction. If they are wise, they will resist. While South holds a seven-card diamond suit, which looks appealing, South also holds only 4 HCP. A vulnerable preempt here could easily go for a phone number. And North, while holding 16 HCP has already heard about 20 HCP from the opponents. Partner must be broke. Even bidding 2♥ with this hand could yield an option for 500 points for E/W on a double. It turns out N/S can make 3 or 4 in the diamond suit, but let's say they get there. This lets East know the true value of the diamond void, and possibly pushes the E/W side into their 4♠ makable game.

At two tables, N/S did enter the auction and survived, recording +110 or +130 in 3♦. The result was lucky, as East should not sit for that contract if they know about spades. The contract alone suggests South entered the auction with a dangerous preempt (and got a bit lucky to keep West from the auction and find North with the best possible cards). As East, I would double 3♦, even with only 10 HCP, and West can still then find 4♠. Reevaluating your hand based on the auction is important, and once East knows that the

Dir: East
Vul: N/S

♠ K Q
♥ A 9 8 5 3
♦ A 4 2
♣ K 9 3

♠ J 10 9 5 4
♥ K J 7
♦ K 10 7
♣ Q 6

NORTH
WEST
2
EAST
SOUTH

♠ A 8 3 2
♥ Q 10 6 2
♦ - -
♣ A 8 5 4 2

16
10 10
4

♠ 7 6
♥ 4
♦ Q J 9 8 6 5 3
♣ J 10 7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	4	-	-	-
S	-	4	-	-	-
E	2	-	1	4	1
W	2	-	2	4	1

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Play it again

Board No 2 N/S Vul Dealer East									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
12	1	3♦	S	♠J	4	130		3.88	0.13
10	4	3♦	S	♣Q	3	110		2.63	1.38
6	5	2♠	W	♣9	5		200	1.38	2.63
2	9	4♠	W	♥A	4		420	0.13	3.88

West	North	East	South
—	—	1♣	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

opponents hold diamonds, the deck has only 30 points that truly matter. The pairs who played spades and collected +200 or +420 for East-West found the right result. The table that played 2♠ making five demonstrates just how well these hands fit together. In this case the 3♦ bid works out, but that seems to be playing results; the North-South pair who judges well to stay out likely wins in the long run.

Reverse-bids tell an important story.

Dir: South
Vul: None

♠ A K Q 7
♥ - -
♦ Q 10 8 6 4 3
♣ A 10 5

♠ J 10 8 5 4
♥ Q 8
♦ A J 2
♣ K 3 2

WEST NORTH EAST
11 SOUTH

♠ 2
♥ A J 10 9 6 5 2
♦ 9 7 5
♣ Q 8

15
11 7
7

♠ 9 6 3
♥ K 7 4 3
♦ K
♣ J 9 7 6 4

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
N 3 2 - 2 -
S 3 2 - 2 -
E - - 2 - -
W - - 2 - -

View Larger Play it again

Board No 11 None Vul Dealer South

NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
10	7	4♥*	E	♦K	-2	300		4.00	0.00
11	2	2♠	N	♥9	3	140		3.00	1.00
12	4	4♣	S	♥Q	-1		50	2.00	2.00
5	9	4♦*	N	♠2	-1		100	1.00	3.00
1	8	3♥	E	♣6	3		140	0.00	4.00

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	3♥	Pass
Pass	3♠	All Pass	

South and West both pass. A frisky West might open 1♠, but that decision is unlikely to end well on this hand. More on that shortly. North opens 1♦, the correct choice with a six-card suit. The plan is to come back and bid the spade suit later, as a reverse, if the auction permits.

Unsurprisingly, East preempts 3♥. South has nothing to say — though a pass here may be partly strategic, hoping partner will reopen the auction with a double. With a void in hearts and opening values, North is well-positioned to continue the auction, but doesn't hold a hand that wants to see defense of hearts. Instead, make a reopening double, but the better call is 3♠, completing the reverse. This sequence shows at least five diamonds (probably six as with less distribution double would be more likely) and four spades. The North hand wants game if South holds a fit and anything reasonable; this auction asks South to place the contract.

There doesn't appear to be an 8-card fit for trump, and so South judges well to pass 3♠. The heart king is likely worthless opposite shortness, and so a 4-3 spade fit will have to do. One table even made 3♠, showing the contract is not hopeless — but the 5-1 spade break makes the play difficult.

The West hand may be tempted to double 3♠, but really should not. North has shown tremendous

strength, and partner has preempted. Five tricks may come, but that really isn't guaranteed. And if North is 7-4, doubling could push them back to a makable diamond contract when spades is down.

The best result for N/S comes when E/W can't resist bidding 4♥ at some point. South, knowing North holds reversing values — at minimum an opening hand with 5+ diamonds and 4 spades — has an easy double. That double collected +300 at one table, the top score on the board. The best idea for E/W is simply to let N/S play 3♠ undoubled and (hopefully) take their +50 quietly.

As for the frisky 1♠ opener in the West seat — because of the 5 card spade suit it's very tempting to open the 11-count. I've been known to make the bid. Here North will bid 2♦ and East (liking sitting opposite an opener) will likely bid 4♥. South may find a double, but even if not, +100 for N/S will be an above average board.

What the heck is a REVERSE?

Reverse bids generally occur by opener, when the second suit bid is of a higher rank than the first suit bid. Because such a bid often forces the side to at least the 3 level, it must also promise more values than a simple opening hand.

On opening, North surely expects someone will bid hearts, and is prepared because of the strength of the hand to go right on and "reverse" into spades (with or without partner). It doesn't work well as the cards lie on this hand, but it is still the right call with 15 HCP and a void.

Want more info?

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/reverses>

Which of the following hands might consider opening bid followed by a reverse?

- ♠AK85 ♥3 ♦AQJ74 ♣K62
- ♠AQJ6 ♥AKJ85 ♦K3 ♣72
- ♠AKJ4 ♥K3 ♦Q2 ♣AQJ85
- ♠J ♥AQ84 ♦K3 ♣AKJ752
- ♠AQ95 ♥KQJ83 ♦- ♣KJ852
- ♠AJ94 ♥AKJ852 ♦73 ♣4
- ♠KQJ83 ♥KQJT742 ♦- ♣6

My answer would be to reverse on ALL of these hands. The more distribution you have, the fewer points are needed (however if you reverse with 12 points as on the last hand here, you probably shouldn't sit for partner's double!)

The Double That Blocked the Heart Fit

Dir: North
Vul: None

♠ 10 5 2
♥ K Q 10 2
♦ A 7 6
♣ 10 8 6

♠ K 9 8 3
♥ A J 9
♦ K 5 4 3
♣ Q 2

NORTH
WEST 17 EAST
SOUTH

♠ J 7 4
♥ 8 7
♦ Q J 10 9 2
♣ 9 5 4

♠ A Q 6
♥ 6 5 4 3
♦ 8
♣ A K J 7 3

9
13 4
14

♣♦♥♠N
N 4 - 5 1 2
S 4 - 5 2 2
E - 1 - - -
W - 1 - - -

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Board No 17 None Vul Dealer North									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
9	7	4♥	N	♠4	4	420		4.00	0.00
4	11	2♥	N	♦Q	5	200		3.00	1.00
1	10	3♥	N	♦9	3	140		2.00	2.00
8	5	3♣	S	♦5	4	130		1.00	3.00
12	6	2♣	S	♦3	3	110		0.00	4.00

Auction at Our Table

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1♣
X	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	3♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

On this hand, presume that North and East both pass and South opens 1♣. West holds 13 HCP and faces an interesting decision. The hand is not ideal for a takeout double — she would prefer 4-4 in the majors. But the dealing machine isn't always compliant, and West should pretend the ♣2 is a heart and double anyway. West holds the master suit (spades), and if she doesn't act now, it is possible that the East/West side will be shut out of the auction entirely when they should be in. Note that if East bids 1♥ or even jumps to 2♥, West should be happy to leave it there even on a Moysian (4-3) fit.

The double has a subtle but important effect on North. Without it, North would respond 1♥ — a simple, natural bid showing four or more hearts. But after a takeout double, a new suit at the one level promises a five-card suit. North's four hearts don't qualify. North may choose 1NT, or simply pass and wait. East bids 2♦ more or less by force, and South — holding a singleton diamond — may try 3♣. If South instead passes and lets the auction come back to North, North may balance by bidding the hearts, and N/S find their fit after all. Without the

double, the auction likely goes 1♣ — 1♥ — 4♥ (or 4♦ splinter), and N/S reach their ideal spot. One table did find 4♥ and collected +420.

At our table, N/S landed in 3♣. The play was instructive. The opening diamond lead was won by dummy's ♦A. South led trumps, and with West known to hold points from the takeout double, playing for the drop was the percentage play — and the club queen fell as hoped.

South then led a heart toward dummy. West paused to think. She knew the hearts were setting up, and also at this point should know she never wants to be the one to break the spade suit. So West ducked the first heart, hoping declarer would be tempted into a spade lead. Declarer was not tempted and ruffed a diamond to return to hand and lead a second heart. Now West should take the ♥A; letting it go a second time is too risky. After this West exits a 3rd diamond, leaving South in the awkward position of having to spend his last trump.

South runs the remaining hearts, and then must decide what to do with spades. If he finesses, West wins the ♠K and leads her last diamond, East claiming the final two tricks for a -110 top. As always though the bidding tells a story. Declarer should not finesse since West's takeout double strongly suggested the ♠K was sitting behind declarer's ♠A. Play the ♠A and take +130 even though this still won't be great if several pairs find their way to hearts.

To Open or Not to Open

Dir: North
Vul: N/S

♠ K 10 9 8 5 3 2
♥ 5 3
♦ J 4
♣ 10 4

♠ A Q J 7
♥ 10 8 7 6 2
♦ Q 3
♣ Q J

NORTH
WEST 21 EAST
SOUTH

♠ - -
♥ A K J 9
♦ A 8 7 5 2
♣ K 8 5 2

4
12 15
9

♠ 6 4
♥ Q 4
♦ K 10 9 6
♣ A 9 7 6 3

♣♦♥♠N
N - - - -
S - - - -
E 2 3 6 - 4
W 2 3 5 1 4

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Board No 21 N/S Vul Dealer North									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
5	11	3♥	W	♣10	5	200		4.00	0.00
12	7	3♥	W	♣10	6	230		3.00	1.00
2	10	4♥	W	♠5	5	450		2.00	2.00
9	8	4♥	W	♠2	6	480		0.50	3.50
1	6	4♥	W	♠10	6	480		0.50	3.50

North holds a seven-card spade suit here, but is vulnerable with two losers in each side suit. If she chooses to open, 2♠ is the better call — 3♠ overstates the hand and puts N/S at much greater penalty risk. Either way, East has a powerhouse and will double and West faces an interesting decision. With ♠AQJ7, passing to defend a vulnerable 3♠ doubled should be automatic — E/W can likely take six or seven spade tricks for a fine result. But pass becomes less attractive over 2♠. With the almost certain 9-card heart fit, game is near certainly and slam is not out of the question. To ask that question, West should cuebid 3♠ (game forcing values). East bids 4♦ (showing the 5-card suit) and West now bids 4♥ (essentially setting hearts as trumps). Now East should really love the hand. The void in spades seems useful and holding second round controls in every suit, East simply jumps to 6♥. This makes easily unless North finds an unlikely diamond lead.

If North Passes

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	3♠*	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

* splinter — singleton or void in spades, heart support

If North smartly passes (I was not smart), East needs to plan for all three suits and start with 1♦. From there he can reverse into hearts and bid clubs later if needed. When West responds 1♥, East has a perfect 3♠ splinter, showing a void or singleton in spades with strong heart support. West, however, will not be excited: his spade holding looks far less useful opposite a splinter than opposite a cuebid, and the auction will likely die in only 4♥.

The Play: In 6♥, the play is straightforward once you think it through. There is no reason to finesse for the ♥Q — with North known to hold a long spade suit from the preempt, the queen will either drop or not. A second spade is also needed, achieved by using the QJ♠ to create a trick via a ruffing finesse. And the second diamond in the West hand disappears on the K♣ as long as the opening diamond lead isn't found. Making 6.

There are fifteen important words in the English Language: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, clubs, diamonds, hearts, spades, notrump, double, redouble, and most importantly PASS. -Attributed to Charles Goren

A Second Look is written by Joe Nolan and edited by Claude 4.6. All typos, misbids, and other errors should be attributed to Claude.

BONUS Hand: Notrump is overrated

Dir: West
Vul: None

♠ Q 10 6 3
♥ K J
♦ 9 8
♣ J 9 7 3 2

♠ 4
♥ 9 5
♦ A 7 5 3 2
♣ A 10 8 6 5

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
24

♠ K 9 8 5 2
♥ A Q 8 7 3
♦ Q J 10
♣ - -

7
8 12
13

♠ A J 7
♥ 10 6 4 2
♦ K 6 4
♣ K Q 4

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	1	4	3	2	1
W	1	4	3	2	1

View Larger Play it again

Board No 24 None Vul Dealer West									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
6	11	4♥	E	♣4	-1	50		3.25	0.75
2	7	4♥	E	♣4	-1	50		3.25	0.75
1	9	3♥	E	♣K	5		200	1.38	2.63
5	4	3NT	W	♥K	3		400	0.13	3.88

On a misfit auction, with fewer than 26 HCP, the last place you should want to be is notrump. Yes, you might get lucky and make. But more often than not you are too high and can score better playing in the best available 7 card fit. On this hand, East opened 1♠ and South chose double. The bidding continued around the table with 2♦, 3♣, 3♥, pass, 3NT. North leads the ♥K and immediately regrets it (but it's a logical lead, sensing the misfit and expecting South to have hearts). Declarer wins and leads the ♦Q.

South pauses to assess. On a misfit, the goal is to cut communication. That communication comes from a likely diamond fit, so we start by playing the ♦K to force the QJ to be won in dummy. After this, declarer must lead a major and tries a spade. South should duck smoothly, preserving the ♠AJ tenace over East's ♠K. If North has no spade help the will probably make it regardless. North wins and judges the position perfectly — leading the ♥J. This forces the ♥Q from dummy and severs all communication between the East and West hands. South wins the next trick and only now shifts to the ♣K. West can cash the ♦A and two remaining diamonds, but the rest of the tricks belong to N/S: two spades, two clubs, and a heart for down 1. The broader lesson here is one worth remembering: notrump is a powerful contract, but bidding 3NT on a thin misfit isn't likely to make without substantial luck (in the form of misdefense).