

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. 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 23.

The Stolen Bid

After two passes, West picks up a monster hand. Initial examination of the hand suggests 5♦ will be cold on at least 90% of possible distributions for the remaining 39 cards. This is a textbook strong 2♣ opening, and West starts there. North, sitting on a nice 8-count with two aces and the majors, considers the vulnerability and meekly passes.

Playing Standard American, East responds 2♦, the standard waiting bid that promises nothing beyond “I heard you.” West continues with 3♦, which should be treated as forcing, and East — with a decent 5-card major — should mention it by bidding 3♠.

At this point West has learned enough. Partner has a useless spade suit and possibly very little else. West shows the strength of the hand by bidding 5♦ which he expects to make. Were East to hold better cards, a raise to 6 should be a consideration. As things stand, East, by virtue of 2♦ the waiting bid, gets to steal West’s thunder and play the hand.

You might think it will make 6 with the ♦K sitting in the right spot. Alas, there is no way to reach the East hand to take either of the required diamond finesses, and making 5 is the limit on the hand. You might be wondering:

Should West mention clubs along the way? Not really. 5♦ is essentially cold — the only real danger is an unlucky diamond break. Unless partner mentions clubs, that strain is unlikely to yield a better contract.

How would West ever find out whether partner holds the ♦K or the ♥A? The 2♦ waiting bid unfortunately doesn’t tell us much of anything, when we’d like to learn something right away. The fix is a control-showing structure over the strong 2♣, for example treating 2♥ as “no ace or king” and anything else as showing at least one such card. Playing that system, the auction here would proceed 2♣ – 2♥ – 5♦, with West signing off knowing with near certainty that slam isn’t there. If instead East bids 2♦ to show at

Dir: East
Vul: N/S

♠ A 7 6 3 2
♥ A 9 8 4
♦ 10
♣ 8 7 2

♠ - -
♥ K Q
♦ A Q J 8 6 5 3
♣ A K Q J

NORTH
WEST 2 EAST
SOUTH

♠ Q J 10 8 4
♥ 10 5 3
♦ 7 2
♣ 9 5 4

♠ K 9 5
♥ J 7 6 2
♦ K 9 4
♣ 10 6 3

8 22 3 7

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

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Board No 2 N/S Vul Dealer East									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
13	10	4♦	E	♥6	5		150	5.00	0.00
2	6	5♦	E	♥2	5		400	2.50	2.50
4	9	5♦	W	♦10	5		400	2.50	2.50
5	12	5♦	E	♥2	5		400	2.50	2.50
7	8	3NT	E	♥2	3		400	2.50	2.50
14	11	5♦*	W	♥A	5		550	0.00	5.00

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♦	Pass	3♠	Pass
5♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

least one ace or a king, that call is 100% forcing to game, and now West has room to explore - he still needs to make sure the control card is red! If the auction goes as above through 3♠, West should probably still be fairly cautious – but can afford to bid 4♦ (still game forcing), surely setting trump and hoping partner may find a cuebid.

Many Roads to 480

North holds a six-card spade suit and next to nothing else, and with this vulnerability and a side 4 card club suit, probably should open 2♠. That occurred at one table, and East likely competed with 3♥. South surely raised to 4♠ ending the auction (West might consider bidding on, so might East, but the vulnerability makes this dangerous).

Pass by North is equally an option. This makes for a more interesting auction as East should open and has the choice of one or two! A natural 1♥ hands South a textbook strong Michaels cuebid — 2♥, showing five spades and five of a minor. North, already sitting on six spades and a stiff diamond, loves this news and can jump straight to game regardless of any action by West.

If East instead opens a weak 2♥, South doubles for takeout, preparing to follow up with another bid. North, hearing partner promise spades, still raises directly to 4♠. In both cases, an optimistic South might have a look at slam, which is cold as the cards lie.

Board No 16 E/W Vul Dealer West									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
7	4	4♠	W	♦K	6	680	3.00	2.00	
12	6	4♠	W	♦K	6	680	3.00	2.00	
9	13	4♠	W	♦K	6	680	3.00	2.00	
14	5	4♠	W	♦K	6	680	3.00	2.00	
1	2	4♠	W	♦K	6	680	3.00	2.00	
8	10	5♠	W	♦K	7	710	0.00	5.00	

West	North	East	South
2♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
4♠	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Board No 9 E/W Vul Dealer North									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
8	13	4♠*	S	♥7	6	790	4.90	0.10	
4	1	N/A				480	2.50	2.50	
14	2	4♠	S	♥7	6	480	2.50	2.50	
11	12	4♠	N	♣A	6	480	2.50	2.50	
5	7	3♠	S	♥7	6	230	0.10	4.90	

Losing Trick Count: Bidding The Ice Cold Slam

West holds a good distributional hand — seven spades to the ace-king, a stiff diamond, and precious little else. First-seat vulnerable, with 7 losers, perhaps argues for some restraint, and I opted to open 2♠. I'm curious as to whether I had any company.

The North/South pair, sitting on very little between them, are wise to stay silent. Any interference, particularly by North in diamonds, may simply help the East/West pair identify their slam.

The captancy belongs to East, who should be choosing simply between game and slam. She starts with 2NT, the conventional ask for a feature. If West can show a minor suit king, then 6♠ is at worst on a finesse in the spade suit. As it turns out, West does something better — bidding 4♠. Yes partner, I do have a feature, and it comes in the form of a great spade suit probably with a seventh spade. I know this isn't the call you are expecting, but I hope you will take time to figure it out! East reevaluates — partner is 7 loser and we are 6 loser. Normally, that is not slam. But the East hand can be treated as 5 loser due to the 10 card spade fit (discount one of those spade losers). With only 12 losers on losing trick count, we want to be in slam. 6♠ bid and made.

If West opens 3♠ instead, suggesting a 6-loser hand, the math is even simpler. We no longer need to discount our spade loser to find 12 losers and bid slam.

Losing Trick Count

Losing Trick Count is a quick way to estimate how many tricks two hands should produce once a fit is found. For each suit, look at the top three cards (or fewer, if the suit is shorter): anything that isn't the ace, king, or queen counts as a loser. Some tips:

- Most basic opening bids are 7 losers
- Subtract the number of losers from 24 to estimate how many tricks your side can take (remember, this assumes you have at least an eight card fit in trumps). This means:
 - 14 combined losers = major suit game
 - 13 combined losers = minor suit game
 - 12 combined losers = slam

On Board 16:

- West has 7 losers: one spade, two hearts, one diamond, and three clubs
- East has 6 losers: three spades, one heart, one diamond, and one club

On Board 13:

- North has 5 losers: two spades, two hearts, and a diamond
- South has 8 losers: one spade, two hearts, three diamonds, and two clubs

The Super-accept – and more Losing Trick Count

North's 17-count is a textbook 1NT opener, and South with six-card heart suit and only five points, transfers with 2♦ with the plan of passing 2♥. North should have other ideas, holding only a 5-loser hand in hearts. But an advanced tool is needed to get beyond 2♥. The tool is the *super-accept*, a bid showing a maximum hand with a great fit (at least four trumps). Partnership agreement determines what bid to make to super-accept; my preference is simply to bid one step higher, in this case 2♠.

South has 5 HCP and six hearts. North has shown 17 HCP and 4 hearts. Should South be interested? We can say yes from two perspectives:

- 6+4 = 10 (the Law of Total Tricks says yes)
- 6+7 = 13 (despite only 5 HCP, south holds a 7 loser hand and the super-accept should be no more than 6 losers. So losing trick count also rather emphatically says yes)

So South should guide the partnership to 4♥, but there is a catch. We want North to declare, but North hasn't actually bid hearts yet. So if South simply bids 4♥, South will declare. To solve this problem, South first retransfers: 3♦ asks North to bid 3♥, restoring hearts to North's side of the auction. Once North obliges, South raises to 4♥ and the strong hand declares as desired.

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Once there, 4♥ is a comfortable make on any lead. Unless East finds a spade lead, the ♠5 will be pitched on the ♠Q for making five.

Two found their way to game here. Did they use the super-accept? Or did they get pushed there when the East/West pair unfortunately chose to compete in spades. My bet is on the latter. In general, I wouldn't use a super-accept very often (the drawback is it can get you too high). On this hand, however, if it is in your toolbox it should definitely be used.

A Second Look is written by Joe Nolan and edited by Claude 4.6. All typos, errant bids, poor declarer plays, and any other fumbles should naturally be attributed to Claude.

Dir: North
Vul: All

♠ Q 10 6
♥ Q 10 7 6
♦ A 7
♣ A K Q 10

♠ A K 4 3
♥ K 3
♦ K 9 6
♣ J 7 4 3

NORTH
WEST
13
EAST
SOUTH

♠ J 9 8 7 2
♥ 8
♦ Q J 4 3
♣ 8 6 5

♠ 5
♥ A J 9 5 4 2
♦ 10 8 5 2
♣ 9 2

17
14 4
5

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

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Board No 13 Both Vul Dealer North									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
14	4	4♥	N	♦Q	4	620		4.50	0.50
8	12	4♥	N	♦Q	4	620		4.50	0.50
13	1	2♥	N	♦Q	5	200		3.00	2.00
7	9	3♥	N	♦Q	4	170		1.50	3.50
11	5	2♥	N	♠9	4	170		1.50	3.50
10	2	3♥	N	♠9	3	140		0.00	5.00

The Sinful, Lucky 3NT

North's hand is a bidder's dream with 7 diamonds, 5 clubs, and only 4 losers (if you find a fit). Picture partner with the King of Diamonds and the Queen of Clubs – slam on 17 total HCP. It's a great hand for a suit contract. So why are two pairs in 3NT?

The answer is almost assuredly "it's matchpoints". Yes, the same number of tricks in NT will score better than in diamonds or clubs. But if you play NT on this hand, you deserve a spade lead from West to the ace, a spade back which you duck to the queen, and a heart shift to the king and ace. East gets in with the ♣Q and finds a heart through the J9 into the QT – down at least one maybe two. All the while 11 tricks in a minor being cold. 'Nuff said. Don't be the North player who lets a hand like this sit in 3NT because "it's matchpoints". In addition to possibly turning a positive score into a negative, you may also be missing slam.

So how will this auction go? The bidding starts simply enough with 1♦, but with West sitting on seven spades and East holding a decent hand of her own, this auction has every chance to get loud. One possible start:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♥	Pass
1♠	3♣	Pass	3NT
Pass	?		

This is where North has to say NO to no-trump. You've jumped to show strength, but the strength is as much in length as HCP. So what's the bid? 4♣. Game forcing 100% (after all you were in game already). From the 4♣ bid, South should infer that partner is very distributional, at least six diamonds and five clubs, perhaps even better. South must choose both the suit and the level. Evaluating the South hand at this point is difficult, since any or all of the major suit cards may be wasted. 5♣ is the best choice. Why is this better than 5♦? The answer is the ruffing value in the diamond suit if the contract is played in clubs.

Let's suppose East/West both meekly pass. Now the auction is:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	3♣	Pass	3NT
Pass	?		

Hand analysis interface showing cards, a bidding board, and a trick count table.

Dir: North
Vul: E/W

♠ 5
♥ - -
♦ A 9 8 6 4 3 2
♣ A K J 10 5

♠ Q 10 9 8 7 6 3
♥ Q 7 3
♦ 7
♣ 7 6

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
25

♠ A 2
♥ K 10 8 5 2
♦ Q J 10
♣ Q 9 3

♠ K J 4
♥ A J 9 6 4
♦ K 5
♣ 8 4 2

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

View Larger Play it again

Board No 25 E/W Vul Dealer North

NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
14	10	3NT	S	♥Q	5	460		4.90	0.10
13	2	5♣	N	♠A	5	400		3.10	1.90
12	9	5♦	N	♠A	5	400		3.10	1.90
6	7	4♦	N	♠A	4	130		1.30	3.70
1	5	3NT	S	♠10	-1		50	0.10	4.90

Similar scenario and similar bid, North should proceed to 4♣ and give partner the best information to decide the contract.

Now a frisky East/West pair may compete to the three or even four level in hearts or spades. We've asserted that North should not allow a no-trump contract by South, but should she respect a double? The answer is absolutely – as long as we've bid both our suits, if South produces a double late in the auction, that should be honored. The opponents are vulnerable, and 500+ is surely likely.

What about the play in 5♣? Misplay this hand with me! After Henry cashed the spade Ace and led a heart, I won and took the club finesse. Henry won and I needed the rest of the tricks. I won the ♠K, drew a second round of trumps, and played the king and ace of diamonds, ruffing the third round of diamonds with dummy's last club. I then cross back to hand with a ruff and draw the last trump before running the diamonds.

This was pretty lousy declarer play. The contract is cold on normal suit breaks, and my line can easily give away down 1 or more. Can you figure out what I should have done instead to ensure I make my contract?