

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 invited the players to submit a few of the most interesting deals to discuss. I was not at the table for this one, so everything here comes from the records and from what the cards themselves have to say. These discussions assume Standard American bidding; you can review all the hands online at <http://www.nkybridge.org/>. Cordell gave a pre-game talk on defensive signals, and a reminder of the key points appears below. Find a partner and join us for this relaxed game again on September 10.

Which Slam? Who Should Decide?

Dir: South
Vul: All

♠ A K 8
♥ K J
♦ K J 10 8 7 6 3
♣ 9

♠ J 10 7 2
♥ Q 2
♦ 9 2
♣ K 10 8 5 4

NORTH
7
SOUTH

♠ 5 3
♥ 9 8 7 6 4 3
♦ A 5
♣ 7 3 2

♠ Q 9 6 4
♥ A 10 5
♦ Q 4
♣ A Q J 6

15 6 4 15

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NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
8	5	6NT	S	♣8	6	1440		4.00	0.00
10	9	6♦	N	♦A	6	1370		2.50	1.50
11	6	6♦	N	♠5	6	1370		2.50	1.50
3	1	3NT	S	♣5	4	630		1.00	3.00
12	4	3♦	N	♥9	6	170		0.00	4.00

Three pairs found slam on Board 7, and one of them found 6NT for the top. Let me say at the outset that 6NT seems lucky rather than correct — worth understanding why before we admire the score.

South opens 1NT, 15-17. East/West likely pass throughout. North now knows the side holds at least 30 points and with a 7-card diamond suit should immediately want to investigate a diamond slam. They should have no interest in 6NT at all — the stiff club and the distribution argue against that, especially if the combined holding is 30 HCP.

Depending on your methods, there are different roads to the right spot. Playing Standard American, I've always liked 2♣ in this situation. When Stayman is followed by 3♦, that tells partner we have a big hand, lots of diamonds, and interest in a diamond slam.

West	North	East	South
			1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♦	Pass	5♣
Pass	6♦	Pass	Pass
Pass			

At this point South is uncertain and should bid 3NT, confirming only a doubleton diamond. North hopes for at least one diamond honor and forges ahead with 4♦. Ideally this bid is a convention called Minorwood, which asks for keycards. Playing 1430, South bids 5♣ — the fourth step, showing two keycards and the diamond queen.

So we're off an ace. Do we bid six? Think about the lead coming around to North. If the missing ace is in clubs, no problem — we have a singleton. If it's diamonds, that is hopefully all we lose. And if it's hearts, the lead comes into our king-jack, so even if the suit is led we lose only one trick. I'm all for bidding this slam; it seems odds-on to be makable. As the cards lie it's cold, with only the diamond ace to lose.

One final comment. Should South correct 6♦ to 6NT? Absolutely not. Respecting hand captaincy is an important part of any partnership. South is not the captain on this hand. North has taken control and South is simply answering questions — it's North's job to place the final contract.

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.

Hearts or NoTrump? SIX!?!?!?

Dlr: East
Vul: N/S

♠ 4 3 2
♥ - -
♦ 10 9 7 6 5 4 2
♣ K 10 9

♠ A Q 7 5
♥ Q 8
♦ Q J 3
♣ 7 5 4 2

NORTH
WEST
2
EAST
SOUTH

♠ K J 9
♥ A J 9 6 5 2
♦ A K
♣ A 3

3
11 20
6

♠ 10 8 6
♥ K 10 7 4 3
♦ 8
♣ Q J 8 6

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

View Larger

Play it again

Board No 2 N/S Vul Dealer East

NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
8	4	3NT	W	♦10	-1	50		3	1
12	1	4♥	E	♦8	-1	50		3	1
6	10	4♥	E	♦8	-1	50		3	1
9	7	3NT	E	♣Q	3		400	1	3
3	11	6NT	E	♥4	6		990	0	4

This board starts with a decision by East. Dealt 20 HCP and six hearts (and a five-loser hand if hearts are trump), there are really three candidates for the opening bid: 1♥, 2♣, or 2NT. I don't like 2♣ here. For starters if you happen to be playing 2♥ no ace or king, partner is sure to respond with that bid when you should be declaring the hand. Furthermore, five losers alone isn't sufficient for the bid, and the heart suit quality just isn't there. A 2NT opening can be justified, and on a frisky day I might try it. But you'll never be able to let partner know you have six hearts after that bid. I think 1♥ is the best choice.

The North/South hands should stay out. South has nothing (and likes the opening bid); North's diamonds are ratty and the hand is terrible — they should refrain from the silly preempt and let this be an East/West auction. Unless playing Flannery, West responds 1♠.

East's choices are now limited: 3♥, 4♥, or 3NT. West didn't pass, so with at least 26 combined HCP, we need to force game. Without a specific partnership agreement to the contrary, 3♥ is not game forcing. So the choices are 3NT or 4♥. Neither is perfect, but if partner has decent spades, we have four spades, one heart, two diamonds, and a club off the top — eight tricks, and we can hope either the long hearts or partner's hand provides a ninth. The club suit is a worry, but 3NT is my choice. If partner is big, they'll go further. Here 3NT ends the auction.

West	North	East	South
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	3NT	Pass

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass		

The Alternate Reality

You want to know how one pair arrived at 6NT, right? This was the auction (don't try this at home):

West	North	East	South
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♥	Pass	6NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

This illustrates a classic problem in bridge. West is the captain on this hand, knowing East's hand almost exactly (5 hearts, balanced, 18-19 HCP). 3NT should always be the end of this auction. But East, having 20 HCP and feeling that maybe 2NT was an underbid, feels a need push on. I think it is perfectly ok to devalue the East hand to 19 (on the heart suit quality alone, that seems justifiable). But once we do that, it will seldom improve our score to do something other than accept partner's choice of contract. Of course 6NT here needs a little bit of help from the defense in order to make.

The Play in 4♥

What does South lead? Importantly, South should expect two natural heart tricks. So this is a hand not to lead a singleton — we don't want to be ruffing diamonds with a natural trump trick. Instead, try to force declarer to take early ruffs and cede trump control. The suit for that is clubs. Lead the ♣Q.

When dummy comes down and North shows up with the ♠K, forcing declarer to ruff clubs should produce at least three heart tricks in the end. Each time we're in, we make declarer spend an extra trump. And when declarer leads a diamond, we ruff once and eventually win the ♥K10.

So you want to defend, right? Well 4♥ can be made. Lead to the ♥Q (south may lose a heart trick by taking the king) and cash the ace. Now play spades, ending in dummy. When they break 3-3, pitch the ♣3 on the spade while South ruffs with a natural trump. Even finding the best lead, the defense is only entitled to three trump tricks.

The Play in Notrump

You always have 4 spades, 1 heart, 3 diamonds and 1 club. On a club lead, I recommend you claim nine tricks and make your contract.

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A Contract in Every Suit

Dir: East
Vul: None

♠ 10 8 5 3 2
♥ K 8 3
♦ 7
♣ Q J 4 2

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

NORTH
14
SOUTH

♠ K Q 9 6 4
♥ 9 5 2
♦ A 8 6 4
♣ 10

♠ A J 7
♥ J 10 7 6
♦ K 5 3
♣ 9 7 6

6 16 9 9

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

View Larger Play it again

Board No 14 None Vul Dealer East

NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
12	7	2♦	W	♠5	3	110	3.25	0.75	
6	4	3♣	W	♠10	3	110	3.25	0.75	
11	9	4♠*	N	♥J	-2	300	1.38	2.63	
5	1	4♥	E	♠K	5	450	0.13	3.88	

Board 14 produced contracts in all four suits! This tells us that the auctions were likely a bit wild. East deal and passes. South has a bit of distribution, 9 HCP, and a decent spade suit. It's tempting to open 2♠, which misleads by only one spade card. Opening 1♠ misleads by at least an ace in value and should be rejected outright. The spade contract probably came about by south choosing to open.

After two initial passes, what should West open? In either minor, the hand is four losers. So should we open 2♣? While not unreasonable, with distributional hands like these I prefer to bid both suits (and am willing to go to the 4 level on my own hand), so I would open 1♦ and hear from partner.

North passes and East bids 1♥. Having not bid before, South certainly should stick in 1♠ if only to direct the lead. To show the strength and the distribution, West jumps to 3♣. North may support spades in this scenario, bidding three or even four. Another option is to see if the opponents land in part-score first before bidding 4♠. It looks like someone may have done that, but over 3♣ it seems like East should bid 3NT.

I'm not sure how the auction ever died in 2♦, but the 4♥ Contract is interesting.

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

After the 1♠ overcall, perhaps we get a support double from the West hand. Maybe 2♠ or 3♠ from North, and 3NT from East. Now West doesn't like it and pulls to 4♥.

The contract is made by ruffing spades in dummy, losing the ♥K and ♦A along the way. But it can also be set, by opening with the singleton ♣T — North gets in on the ♥K and can give a ruff. The ♠K lead presents opportunities for declarer to make even on the Moysian fit.

The Three Defensive Signals

There are three standard ways to signal and each has its moment:

- Attitude — do I like this suit? Give it the first time *partner* leads a suit.
- Count — how many do I have? Give it the first time *declarer* leads a suit.
- Suit preference — what should you lead next? Give this signal only when your card cannot mean anything else.

There are also two styles to choose from, and you and partner need to agree. With standard signals, high cards give positive attitude and even count; low cards do the opposite. Upside-down signaling reverses this, low card suggest continuation or even count.

Partnerships also should have some agreement as to what their first discard means. I like [Lavinthal](#) — where you always discard something you don't like, and the size of the card is suit preference for the other two suits.

Two more things worth remembering:

- Taking tricks is the point. Never throw away a trick just to send partner a message. Sid Kilsheimer, a nationally-rated director with whom I enjoyed playing for 9 years, taught me that signals should rarely be made with face cards, tens, or nines. Even sevens and eights win the third round of a suit on occasion.
- Be aware that not every card from partner will be a signal. Partner may have nothing to tell you. My partners will tell you (sometimes to their chagrin) that I will make inference from the auction, my hand, and dummy before maybe, hopefully looking at their signal.

The Cards Behind the Points

Dlr: North
 Vul: None

♠ A K 10 6
 ♥ K 9
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ A J 7 5 2

♠ 9 3
 ♥ J 10 5
 ♦ A Q 5 3
 ♣ 9 6 4 3

NORTH
 WEST 17 EAST
 SOUTH

♠ Q J 7 4
 ♥ A Q 8 2
 ♦ 10 8 7
 ♣ 10 8

15
 7 9
 9

♠ 8 5 2
 ♥ 7 6 4 3
 ♦ K J 9 2
 ♣ K Q

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

View Larger Play it again

Board No 17 None Vul Dealer North									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
8	6	3NT	N	♠Q	3	400		4.00	0.00
7	3	2NT	N	♦8	5	210		3.00	1.00
5	10	2♣	N	♦10	-1		50	1.50	2.50
4	1	2♠	N	♥A	-1		50	1.50	2.50
12	9	2♥	E	♣K	2		110	0.00	4.00

Board 17 looks like a hand that belongs to North/South, and on paper it does — 15 opposite 9. But the position of the East/West cards is advantageous, and the traveler shows it.

With 15 HCP, North opens a slightly off-shape 1NT, which from a double-dummy perspective is the last of the makable contracts. East and West will usually stay out. South bids Stayman — yes, you should check for a heart fit — North bids spades, South invites with 2NT which should end the auction.

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

East is on lead and knows North has spades and South has hearts. Probably neither is a great lead, so pick a minor.

If you pick diamonds, the result is stupendous. West wins as cheaply as possible and should find the shift to the ♥J. North covers, East returns the ♥2 to the ten, and the defense collects four heart tricks and two diamond tricks for down one.

Or, in the other universe, West leads a club. Declarer starts by running off five clubs and one spade, which forces discards from East/West and probably leads to at least making two.

The 1♣ Alternate Universe

Suppose North opens 1♣ instead. East sticks in 1♥ as a lead-directing bid, and East/West somehow wind up playing 2♥.

West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

The defense should cash the ♠K and ♠Q and shift to a spade. Now North taps declarer by continuing clubs. The ♥2 would be overruffed, but any ruff eventually helps make one of South's hearts good. The defense should be able to pick up two clubs, two spades, and at least one heart. Declarer has a lot to do here, and it's hard to draw trump without worrying about setting up the club suit.

Director's Corner

When playing with Sid at the Lafayette Duplicate Bridge Club, I recall an amusing story that he told of his days as a national director. A pair came to him midway through the game and reported that they had come to realize they just played a board for the second time. The boards had been incorrectly passed to the wrong table, which shouldn't happen — but it does sometimes.

The ruling in this scenario is that the replay is invalid. What made this ruling quite hilarious was that the pair managed to get a result that was worse than the first, even though they the location of every card in the deck!

Sid also had a great way to get slow players moving — when a notoriously slow player entered the field, the story goes that as he sold the entry, Sid would deliver their second and final warning for slow play right there at the registration desk.

Want to submit a hand for discussion in A Second Look? Click the QR code or [this link](#) and provide the hand number (as well as the auction if you remember it and any particular question you might have).

