

HHBC Pre-Game Talk 14/12/2024

Board 20 (from 7/12/2024)

Dealer: W

Vulnerability: All

You are South and hold the following hand →

South		V
♠	Q J 9 6	
♥	A 10 9 7	
♦	A 5 2	
♣	Q 3	

West deals and opens 1H.

You partner doubles for takeout.

East passes.

What action do you take?

Firstly, we need to consider what partner has shown with their takeout double.

Recall the STOP acronym: Shortage, Tolerance, Opening strength, Partner pick a suit!

So, partner's double suggests that they have an opening hand with short (2 or less) hearts and at least three cards in the unbid suits.

We hold 13 HCP, so we need to be thinking about being in a game contract.

With hearts well stopped and a balanced hand, one action we could take is to simply bid 3NT. This is a practical bid that will almost always end the auction immediately, and will often be a fine spot to play. Note that we are not worried about the club suit because partner has shown an opening hand, so has around 12 HCP and, most likely, some of those points will be situated in the club suit.

But what about our four spades? Won't we miss a spade fit?

The answer is yes: bidding 3NT will cause us to miss our spade contract.

Is this a problem? Potentially! If partner has only a singleton heart and four spades, then 4S will almost always be a better contract.

So how do we get to 4S?

One way is to simply bid 4S directly. But there is a problem with this; partner never promised four spades with their takeout double! (Some players make takeout doubles promising four cards in the unbid majors but this is quite archaic and ill-advised as you'll find yourself often needing to pass with perfectly good competitive hands!)

Bidding 1S is no good because we've just made the cheapest possible response to a takeout double and, unless partner is particularly strong, partner will pass and we'll be left in mourning. 2S and 3S also don't work because they are non-forcing - partner can pass those too!

So a good strategy here is to *bid the opponent's suit!*

When responding to a takeout double, we can bid the opponent's suit to say the following:

Partner, I have a good hand of 10+ HCP but I am not sure where the contract should end up.

Let's explore this further!

This way, if the takeout-doubler has four spades in their hand, they will simply bid them and - *presto!* - a spade fit has been found and you can happily raise to 4S.

If the doubler doesn't have 4 spades, they can bid notrumps to show a stopper, bid their five-card suit, or bid their cheapest four-card suit. At this stage, we will know that we don't have a spade fit and we can bid 3NT.

On this hand, the auction could go as follows (starting from dealer West):

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1H   X   P   2H*
P    3C  P   3NT
All Pass
  
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The North-South hands were as follows →

The Play:

West leads the HK.

Counting our tricks, we note that we have seven tricks: 1 heart, 3 diamonds, and 3 clubs. We need to build two more tricks to make the contract.

Note that we will have two tricks in hearts if the opponents continue to play them. We should also note how many hearts East could hold. Since West promised five hearts with their opening bid, East can have at most just two hearts. As such, we should duck the first heart trick and win the second one so that East has no more hearts left to play to their partner.

After this, we should work on developing a spade trick. If West wins a top spade and plays two more rounds of hearts, we simply need to win the fourth round and pray that East wins the other top spade. When this happens, West cannot get in again to cash his last remaining heart and we will end up with 9 tricks and a massive 600 points!

Here's the full hand:

North		V
♠	10 8 3	
♥	5 4	
♦	K Q 7 4	
♣	A K 9 5	
South		V
♠	Q J 9 6	
♥	A 10 9 7	
♦	A 5 2	
♣	Q 3	

North		V	
♠	10 8 3		
♥	5 4		
♦	K Q 7 4		
♣	A K 9 5		
West	D V	East	V
♠	A 7 5 2	♠	K 4
♥	K Q J 3 2	♥	8 6
♦	J 10 6	♦	9 8 3
♣	J	♣	10 8 7 6 4 2
South		V	HCPs
♠	Q J 9 6	12	
♥	A 10 9 7	12	3
♦	A 5 2	13	
♣	Q 3		