

Hand of the Week 10/22/19

By Geof Brod

Lead Director

You're playing in the recent regional in Danbury. The event is a bracketed Swiss teams. Your team qualifies for the top bracket so you rate to be playing a number of expert pairs. And sure enough as you sit down for the first match and you find you have drawn the best team in the field.

The first two boards pass by uneventfully and then you pick up ♠6 ♥KJ5 ♦KJ1072 ♣A943. Your partner opens 2♥. No one is vulnerable and the next hand overcalls 2♠. If you could be confident that your partner always held 6 hearts, it would be quite reasonable to jump to 4♥ as either a make or a save. This partner however has imaginative ideas regarding weak 2s and could easily be on a poor 5 card suit when not vulnerable. You could bid 2NT to find out more about the hand opposite and whether hearts is a 5 card suit, but instead, you elect to make the mildly obstructive call of 3♥. You regret your conservatism immediately as the hand on your left now bids 4♥ showing a hand with spade support that is too good to merely jump to 4♠.

Your RHO signs off in 4♠. Lefty, however, isn't through. He bids 5♣ and your partner reenters the auction with a double. Your partner has clubs and he is strongly suggesting that whatever the final contract he would prefer a club to a heart lead. Importantly, he can't do this with a string of, say, 5 weak clubs simply because he knows that if the opponents were to rest here, they would go down. He must have decent high card values in the suit. He wants a club lead.

Your RHO passes. This is, in context, mildly encouraging. If he really hated his hand he would immediately sign off in 5♠ showing zero interest in a higher level contract. Lefty makes another try with a cue bid of 5♥ and your RHO now jumps to 6♠. Everyone reflexively gathers up their bid box cards, but when it gets to your partner he puts the red card on the table. Yes that's right, he thinks they may well go down and he's upped the ante.

The somewhat complicated auction has been:

<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>You</u>	<u>West</u>
2♥	2♠	3♥	4♥
Pass	4♠	Pass	5♣
Dble	Pass	Pass	5♥
Pass	6♠	Pass	Pass
Dble	All Pass		

It's your lead, but first a word of explanation. You're entitled to know more about your partner's second double.

At an expert level, doubles of freely bid slams are treated as conventional. They ask for a specific lead. It isn't always clear what is wanted, but there are some rules of thumb that can be helpful. They go like this:

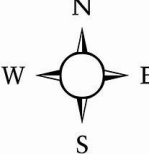
1. if dummy has bid a side suit on the way to slam, lead dummy's first bid side suit;
2. if dummy has not make such a bid, then lead declarer's first bid side suit;
3. if none of these conditions apply, make an unusual lead, one that you wouldn't consider in absence of the double; and
4. finally, whatever you do, never, never, never lead a trump.

Was that helpful? Perhaps not. Well then, one final clue: frequently, partner makes such a double when he has a side suit void and wants a ruff.

Over to you.

You led a diamond? Well done!

Time to look at the entire hand:

Dlr: N Vul: None	♠ 98 ♥ Q98762 ♦ ♣ KQJ75	♠ KQJ743 ♥ 3 ♦ A6 ♣ 10652
♠ A1052 ♥ A104 ♦ Q98543 ♣		
	♠ 6 ♥ KJ5 ♦ KJ1072 ♣ A943	

You lead the diamond Jack; declarer suspecting what is about to happen, plays low from dummy and partner ruffs. Partner has done well, he's gotten you off to a lead that gives you a chance to beat the slam but he does need to be careful with his continuation. If he should play his remaining trump at trick 2 with the idea in mind of cutting down on club ruffs in dummy, declarer will make his contract. At trick 3, declarer will cash the diamond ace, then ruff 3 clubs in dummy while ruffing 3 diamonds back to his hand and voila, he emerges with a 12th trick as dummy's 6th diamond sets up and can be used to get rid of declarer's last club. The heart Ace serves as an entry to the long diamond. But partner gets it right returning a club, tapping the dummy and effectively removing the late entry to the long diamond.

All very gratifying but in actuality partner's double probably wasn't necessary. On a normal club or heart lead, declarer's entry problems are such that on reasonable defense he rates to go down especially when he has no reason to suspect a diamond void with North. The only losing leads are a trump, which gives declarer the timing to set up 3 diamond tricks, or a wildly unlikely king of diamonds.

At the other table, your teammates bid to just 5♠ and then double the opponents when they take a 6♣ dive. The singleton heart is led but at this table there was no weak 2♥ bid by the north hand and it is not clear in the defense that heart ruffs are available. Six clubs goes down just one trick. So it's plus 100 at both tables for you, a 5 imp gain - somewhat disappointing after all the excitement at your table.