

HAND OF THE DAY – THURS. EVE.

BROUGHT TO YOU BY TAIGABRIDGE

20	♠T9		
W dealer	♥QJ975		
Both vul	♦KQ7		
	♣J93		
♠KQ82		♠A54	
♥AK8		♥32	
♦J8		♦96532	
♣T652		♣AK4	
	♠J763		
	♥T64		
	♦AT4		
	♣Q87		

Combine your chances!

This is primarily a declarer-play problem, but how hard of a problem it is depends how high you bid on the East-West cards.

Should West rebid 1NT? That's a style question. If your partnership has agreed to respond in a 4-card major even with a diamond suit, the 1NT rebid with 4 spades is almost risk-free. Even if you don't have this agreement, you might consider rebidding 1NT on this hand since, in light of your ♥AKx, it's almost impossible that your partner will be able to suggest notrump after 1♣-1♦-1♠.

Should East-West continue higher than the 1-level? If you play sound opening bids or a 16-18 1NT opening, East is worth an invitation to 2NT. If your partner opens all of his 12s and some of his ugly 11s like mine does, you might pass. If you do raise to 2NT, West is borderline to accept the invitation.

On the obvious heart lead, you have seven top tricks, with a chance for one more in each black suit if the suit breaks 3-3. To test the clubs you'll have to duck a club and then see if they break 3-3 when you get back in. If the spades break 3-3, the suit will run. A careful declarer will win 4 spade tricks even against some of the 4-2 breaks: when you cash the first two spades, North follows with ♠T then ♠9, and South follows with ♠7 then ♠3. If your opponents routinely signal count, you can now be sure the spades broke 4-2 and finesse your ♠8 with almost complete confidence. (Even against non-signallers, the odds are strongly in favor of taking the finesse after North plays two of the three missing high spades.)

You can afford to lose the lead *one* more time without having hearts run against you (N-S are very unlikely to switch to diamonds the first time they get in.) This gives you time to try *both* black suits – and on this deal, they both work. A score of 150 would have been a near-top; almost everyone took only 7 or 8 tricks.

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