

198. A better mousetrap

By Ron Klinger

Dealer East : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	?

(1) Natural, 4+ diamonds, 11-21 points

(2) Fourth-suit, forcing to game

What would you do as South with:

♠ 83
♥ AKQJ7
♦ AJ54
♣ A7

Partner's 3♣ is asking for a club stopper or 3-card spade support. You do not have 3-card spade support. To bid 3♠ would imply a 3-5-4-1 pattern. You do have a club stopper, but you are much too strong to bid 3NT.

Partner's 3♣, forcing to game opposite a possibly minimum opening, shows 13+ points and you have 19 points. You could simply bid 6NT, but who's to say there isn't a grand slam available.

One option is to mark time with 3♥ and see what happens next. You can always bid 6NT later.

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	?

(1) Natural, 4+ diamonds, 11-21 points

(2) Fourth-suit, forcing to game

What now?

The expectation for 3♠ is a 6-card spade suit. You have support for spades, but you are much too strong for 4♠. You could bid 4NT, but will partner take that as key cards on spades or as a hand that was too good to bid 3NT over 3♣? There is room for disagreement here and it is worth discussing this situation with partner.

To remove ambiguity, you can bid 4♣. This should be taken as a cue-bid with doubleton spade support. It cannot be a natural bid. Partner might read it as a 2-6-4-1 pattern.

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣ ⁽³⁾
Pass	4♦ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	?

(1) Natural, 4+ diamonds, 11-21 points

(2) Fourth-suit, forcing to game

(3) First-round or second-round club control

(4) First-round or second-round diamond control

What now?

There is little point in cue-bidding 4♥. That would show heart control, but it would also imply a minimum hand. You might as well continue with 4NT, asking for key cards.

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣ ⁽³⁾
Pass	4♦ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♠ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass	?

- (1) Natural, 4+ diamonds, 11-21 points
- (2) Fourth-suit, forcing to game
- (3) First-round or second-round club control
- (4) First-round or second-round diamond control
- (5) Two key cards plus the queen of trumps (spades)

What do you do now with:

♠ 83
♥ AKQJ7
♦ AJ54
♣ A7

You now know partner's spades are headed by the A-K-Q. If partner has six spades, you are likely to make 6 spades, 5 hearts and ♦A + ♣A, 13 tricks. It is possible that partner has only five spades, very good ones, of course, perhaps ♠A-K-Q-J-x. Now you have only 12 tricks. Partner might also have the ♣Q, say, and now a grand slam would not be such a good bet.

It cannot hurt to bid 5NT. This tells partner that no key cards are missing and asks for kings. It also allows partner to bid a grand slam with sufficient tricks. Perhaps partner has 7 or 8 spades to the ace-king-queen.

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
Pass	3♣ ⁽²⁾	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣ ⁽³⁾
Pass	4♦ ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♠ ⁽⁵⁾	Pass	5NT ⁽⁶⁾
Pass	6♦ ⁽⁷⁾		

- (1) Natural, 4+ diamonds, 11-21 points
- (2) Fourth-suit, forcing to game
- (3) First-round or second-round club control
- (4) First-round or second-round diamond control
- (5) Two key cards plus the queen of trumps (spades)
- (6) As described above
- (7) The ♦K, no ♣K.

You now have enough information for your final decision. What is it?

If partner can produce six spade winners, you can count 13 tricks (6 spades, 4 sure hearts – they could split 5-2 – 2 diamonds and the ♣A). That does not mean you should jump to 7♠. If partner does have the six spade tricks expected, you can also make 7NT and that must be a safer bet. If partner has 5 spade winners and your hearts provide 5 hearts, you also have 13 tricks in no-trumps. Essentially, if 7♠ makes, 7NT figures to make, too.

The deal arose in the semi-finals of the Yeh Cup Online Open Teams, organized by the Taiwan Contract Bridge League between Australia II (Renee Cooper – Ben Thompson, Andy Braithwaite – Arjuna De Livera, Matt Mullamphy – Ian Thomson – Ron Klinger) and New Zealand I (Nick Jacob – Geo Tislevoll, Matthew McManus – Michael Ware, James Coutts – Justin Mill). New Zealand won the 14-board match by 37-23.

Board 7: Dealer East : Both vulnerable

	North	
	♠ AKQ1042	
	♥ 3	
	♦ K3	
	♣ Q965	
West		East
♠ 75		♠ J96
♥ 864		♥ 10952
♦ Q87		♦ 10962
♣ K10843		♣ J2
	South	
	♠ 83	
	♥ AKQJ7	
	♦ AJ54	
	♣ A7	

On the actual layout, both 7NT and 7♠ make. So would 7♥. Australia II bid to 7NT, +2220, New Zealand I to 7♠, 2210, no swing. Playing their complex Crunch System, Michael Ware (S) – Matthew McManus began 1♠ (10-20 points, 4+ hearts, could have a longer minor) : 1NT (relay, game-inviting or stronger), 2♣ (diamonds) : 2♦ (relay), 3♣ (exactly 2-5-4-2) : 3♦ (relay), 4♥ (7 controls, A = 2, K = 1) and on to 7♠ after a couple more asking bids. It is okay to reach 7♠. It makes if spades are 3-2 or the ♠J is singleton, better than a 70% chance. The problem in this auction was that North was doing the asking. It was much easier to bid 7NT when South found out about North's hand.

You would want to be in 7NT if the deal looked like this:

	North	
	♠ AKQ1042	
	♥ 3	
	♦ K3	
	♣ Q965	
West		East
♠ 7		♠ J965
♥ 8642		♥ 1095
♦ 876		♦ Q1092
♣ K10843		♣ J2
	South	
	♠ 83	
	♥ AKQJ7	
	♦ AJ54	
	♣ A7	

7♠ cannot be made. Say, West leads a heart against 7NT. South wins and plays ♠A, ♠K, finding the bad news. After ♠Q, discarding ♣7, cross to ♣A and play five rounds of hearts. With one heart to go this is the position:

	North		
	♠ 104		
	♥		
	♦ K3		
	♣ Q		
West		East	South plays the ♥7 and discards dummy's ♠4. West throws the ♣10, but what does East do?
♠		♠ J	
♥		♥	
♦ 876		♦ Q1092	East has to hang on to the ♠J and discards the ♦2. Now ♦K, finesse the ♦J, cash the ♦A and South's fourth diamond is the thirteenth trick for South
♣ K10		♣	
	South		
	♠		
	♥ 7		
	♦ AJ54		
	♣		

7♠ will fail, but 7NT will also be all right if the layout is also like this:

	North		
	♠ AKQ1042		
	♥ 3		
	♦ K3		
	♣ Q965		
West		East	
♠ 7		♠ J965	
♥ 8642		♥ 1095	
♦ 10862		♦ Q97	
♣ K1084		♣ J32	
	South		
	♠ 83		
	♥ AKQJ7		
	♦ AJ54		
	♣ A7		

After a heart lead or a spade lead, again South plays ♠A, ♠K, ♠Q, discarding ♣7. Then ♣A and five rounds of hearts brings you to this ending:

	North		
	♠ 104		
	♥		
	♦ K3		
	♣ Q		
West		East	
♠		♠ J	
♥		♥	
♦ 10862		♦ Q97	
♣ K		♣ J	
	South		
	♠		
	♥ 7		
	♦ AJ54		
	♣		

When South plays the ♥7, West is squeezed. Needing to retain the ♣K, West discards a diamond. Now ♦K, finesse ♦J, cash ♦A and again South's last diamond wins the last trick.

A similar squeeze will operate if East has the ♣K-x or longer and ♦Q-x-x-x and West has ♠J-x-x-x. There is no reason why declarer in 7♠ would choose to finesse the ♠10.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

North

♠ KJ4

♥ A754

♦ A

♣ AK863

East

♠ 953

♥ KQ102

♦ KQJ932

♣ --

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

West leads the ♥J: ♥4 from dummy . . . Which heart do you play as East?

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

If you build a better mousetrap, Nature will build a better mouse. (Lawrence Block)

New book: *The Power of Pass* (by Harold Schogger and Ron Klinger). \$A25.00 Available from Suzie Klinger, post free until 2021: email suzie@ronklingerbridge.com or telephone 0411 229 705.