

394. Heartbeat . . .

By Ron Klinger

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♦ ⁽¹⁾
4♥	Pass	Pass	?

(1) Playing a strong 1♣ system

What would you do as South with:

♠ 108
♥ 2
♦ KQ107
♣ AKJ732

Make up your mind before reading further.

This was yesterday's question:

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♣

What would you do as West with:

♠ AK
♥ AK106543
♦ A8
♣ 109

This is a strong hand for a pre-empt, but you are entitled to pre-empt with a good hand (a) if partner is a passed hand or (b) there is an opening 1-bid in front of you or (c) both. The deal is that if you do pre-empt with a strong hand, your bid has to be at game-level, so here 4♥.

If you chose not to bid 4♥, then your path would be a takeout double, followed by a strong bid in hearts.

Suppose the auction goes:

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♣
Dble	1♠	Pass	2♣
?			

What would you do with the West cards now? (*Answer later*)

When the deal arose in a quarter-final match in the 2020 Spingold (USA Knock-out Open Teams), both North-South pairs were playing a strong 1♣ system. That is why North opened 1♦ with the hand at the top of the page. At the other table, Eric Rodwell (S) opened 2♣ (5+ clubs, 10-15 points) and West also jumped straight to 4♥. The plan after such a jump with a strong hand is that you will double any further bid by the opponents.

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ J6532	
	♥ QJ987	
	♦ J2	
	♣ 5	
West		East
♠ AK		♠ Q974
♥ AK106543		♥ --
♦ A8		♦ 96543
♣ 109		♣ Q864
	South	
	♠ 108	
	♥ 2	
	♦ KQ107	
	♣ AKJ732	

As almost all pairs play a double of a pre-empt for takeout, when it went 2♣ (5+ clubs, 10-15 points), 4♥ by West was passed out. North could not double for penalties and South was not prepared to venture further. Jeff Meckstroth (N) led the ♣5. South won with the ♣K and cashed the ♣A, North discarding the ♦J. South switched to the ♠10. In the fulness of time, West lost three hearts and a diamond as well, three down, giving North-South +300.

You will have often seen in this column that it usually pays to trust the opponents when they bid to a high level when vulnerable versus not vulnerable. That was not the case this time, because of the bad trump break, although opposite other layouts 4♥ might be cold.

At the other table, after the auction at the top of page 1, South bid 5♣. With equal length minors or diamonds longer, South can bid 4NT, so that here South's 5♣ in theory showed longer clubs than diamonds. Still, it was not a good idea, despite the promising 6-4 pattern (and 4NT if 5-5 minors would not have worked well either).

Had 5♣ been passed out, South figures to lose 2 spades, a heart, a diamond and a club, three down, -500. North can reach dummy via the ♦J in order to take the club finesse. If South plays the clubs from the top, that would be four down and -800.

Apparently North took a different view of South's 5♣ and gave preference to 5♦. East doubled that, all pass. West led the ♥K and was no doubt delighted not to be in 4♥ with the sight of those hearts in dummy. East discarded the ♠4 on the ♥K. West shifted to the ♠K, followed by the ♦A and the ♦8, won by the ♦J.

South finessed the ♣J and cashed the ♦K, discovering the bad trump break. Then came ♣A, ♠K, ♦Q and a club exit. The defenders had the rest. South made 3 diamonds and 3 clubs, five down doubled, -1100 and -16 Imps.

South might have gained 11 Imps instead of losing 16 via a different action:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♦ ⁽¹⁾
4♥	Pass	Pass	Dble ⁽²⁾
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) Playing a strong 1♣ system

(2) Primarily for takeout

South declined to take this action, of course, because of the fear of partner bidding 4♠. However, if you have an agreement that the double is for takeout and a removal of 4♠ by North to 5♣ by South is to play, then you can afford to double. You gain when partner can pass for penalties, as here. You are no worse off if partner bids 4♠ and you remove to 5♣ than if you had bid 5♣ at once. The takeout double is particularly attractive given that you are playing a strong 1♣ opening and 1♦ was limited to 10-15 points. Then if you double 4♥ and partner bids 4♠, you can remove to 4NT (equal length minors or diamonds longer) or 5♣ with longer clubs.

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ J6532	
	♥ QJ987	
	♦ J2	
	♣ 5	
West		East
♠ AK		♠ Q974
♥ AK106543		♥ --
♦ A8		♦ 96543
♣ 109		♣ Q864
	South	
	♠ 108	
	♥ 2	
	♦ KQ107	
	♣ AKJ732	

When the deal arose in a game on BBO, the auction went this way:

Dealer East : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♣
Dble	1♠	Pass	2♣
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

I am not proud in saying that I was the one who bid only 3♥. As it happened, it worked out all right, as I went only two down undoubled, -200, but 3♥ was a significant underbid (not usually my style). Over 2♣, West should be bidding 4♥. Partner can have a yarborough opposite and 4♥ is still a good bet.

(a)	East	(b)	East
	♠ 9742		♠ 9742
	♥ 872		♥ J2
	♦ 975		♦ 7543
	♣ 864		♣ 864

With 10 trumps, the chance of a 2-1 break is 78%. That makes 4♥ a strong chance opposite East (a) unless there is the possibility of a trump promotion after a club lead and three rounds of clubs. Even then, you might survive by ruffing with the ♥10 when South began with ♥-Q-J doubleton. Opposite East (b), you can ruff the third club with the ♥10 and survive when South began with ♥Q or ♥Q-x, yet with either (a) or (b), East would be passing 3♥ in the auction above.

Problem for Tomorrow:

With only East-West vulnerable, East deals and opens 1♦. What would you do as South with:

♠ J953
♥ AQ109
♦ AJ54
♣ J

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

I went to this horrible bar called The Fiddle. It was a vile inn.