

INTERESTING HANDS: Redouble and Inferences

By Thomas Rush

Let's take Board 5 from Monday, May 6 2024, in person at BCoH:

The diagram shows a bridge hand with the following components:

- Top Left:** Dlr: North, Vul: N/S
- Top Right:** Optimum EW 920, EW 6C=
- Center:** A trick count box showing '5' with 'NORTH' above and 'SOUTH' below.
- Bottom Left:** A box with numbers: 6, 17, 10, 7.
- Bottom Right:** A table with columns for suits (♣, ♦, ♥, ♠, N) and rows for directions (N, S, E, W).

Hand Cards:

- North:** ♠ K J 10 4 3, ♥ 10 6, ♦ J 9 8, ♣ J 7 4
- West:** ♠ 8, ♥ A K 9 8 7 3, ♦ A 6 5, ♣ A Q 3
- East:** ♠ Q 9 2, ♥ 4, ♦ K Q, ♣ K 10 9 8 6 5 2
- South:** ♠ A 7 6 5, ♥ Q J 5 2, ♦ 10 7 4 3 2, ♣ - -

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	1	-	1	-
S	-	1	-	1	-
E	6	-	4	-	3
W	6	-	4	-	3

East was looking at a 10-count with appealing distribution but not a lot else to recommend it. Before you hear any calls, you evaluate the hand as follows:

- Flaw: The KQ doubleton aren't worth what they would be as KQx or longer; they're probably only one trick, vs. a possible two tricks if you'd had a third diamond.
- Flaw: Qxx of spades isn't worth nearly as much as QJx, or even QTx. In fact, modern Losing Trick Count counts Qxx as three losers (QTx as 2½, and QJx as 2 losers)
- Flaw: The club suit has some body (the T98), but this would be a considerably better hand were the queen of spades in with the clubs (and spades were, say, 962)
- Strength: The seven-card club suit is a good thing, and the spots in clubs mean it will be harder for things to go terribly wrong if you play clubs
- Strength: 7321 shape has better trick-taking potential than 7222. (7411 or 7420 are even better!)

When North passed as dealer, your intrepid East, with a bias for action, decided that a 1C opener was better than a pass. He reasoned that his hand had too much defense for opening 3C, and that it would never be safer to bid than it was now, when N/S knew the least about each others' hands. South made the World's Lightest Takeout Double. I don't recommend a direct-seat takeout double with this weak a hand; partner may get way too frisky, or, may decide on making a penalty double, expecting you to have more than one defensive trick. If E/W find a fit and stop at a low level, you will know that it's now safe to balance under the time-tested truisms that 1) If they have a fit, we have a fit, and, 2) If the opponents have a fit and stop at the

2-level, the points are about 50/50 (well, okay, 20-20!) between the two sides, so balancing becomes relatively safe, whereas acting in direct seat has many possible pitfalls.

Then, after Pass - 1C - X, what is West's best call?

Let me suggest it's the often-neglected Redouble card. The redouble has some very clear messages, among them are:

1. I have ten or more high card points. With my ten and your 12+, this hand is clearly our hand, we shouldn't sell out below the three level unless we can double the opponents for penalty.
2. If we play 2NT as a limit raise or better after a double (The Jordan convention), then Redoubler is suggesting that he doesn't have a fit for his partner, increasing the chance that the opponents have at best a 7-card fit, and increasing the likelihood that your side may have a successful penalty double in your future, especially at this vulnerability (we're non-vul, opps are vulnerable, often as good as money in the bank!)
3. If you remember to redouble with 10+ counts, then the implication is that an auction like 1H - X - 2D is natural, limited to less than 10 HCP, and non-forcing. This has been part of standard bidding going back to the mid-1900s, although I'll concede that expert practice may have changed (to what, then? Enlighten me!).

The auction so far is Pass - 1C - X, XX. What should North bid?

In this situation, his partner's TO double promised support for the three unbid suits; if North has a clear preference for which suit should be trump, he should bid it. He doesn't show any values by bidding. Consider: East has opened the bidding, South has shown an opening hand (OK, so he lied on this hand), and responder has redoubled showing at least a near-opening hand. There aren't more than a very few points that North can have. His bid just expresses a preference for which strain to play. Here, North has a very easy 1S bid. With 4-4 in the majors, he'd pass, letting South pick trump (since S might be 4-3 in the majors).

Now the auction has gone

Pass - 1C - X - XX

1S - ??

What should East do?

Think back to what West's redouble said – among other things, “Partner, it's our hand, we may be able to score a crushing penalty if you have your normal defensive strength.” This implies that:

- 1) If Opener double's his RHO's suit, it is strongly penalty-oriented, NOT some kind of takeout request
- 2) If Opener has the hand that suggests the opponents are in trouble because he has length and strength in their suit he should make that double, which then helps further describe his hand. Opener might double on a hand like QJT8, Ax, xx, AQTxx; trump don't split well for declarer, opener is probably sitting over any club values North has,

and responder is sitting over doubler's red-suit values. Plus, North is broke, or nearly broke, and will NOT have fun playing the hand.

- 3) Now, here's the logic that many find counter-intuitive until they've had it explained. If my partner's redouble has said, "It's our hand, the opponents may be in deep trouble", when should I bid in auctions like this? Most commonly, people think that opener should bid to show extra values, say a king over minimum (15 or 16 HCP). But let's reflect. If our partner has told us that the opponents are in trouble (my 12 or more, partner's 10+ minimum, and we have no known fit), aren't the opponents in MORE trouble if opener has a stronger hand than he promised? Yes!

Therefore, opener should only bid over the redouble (or his RHO's bid after the redouble) if he opened a hand based on distribution, with LESS defensive strength than his partner expects. And golly, if there's ever a hand that fits that description, it's the gruesome 10-count that East opened in second seat here! I consider it mandatory that East bid 2C over North's 1S (or, over the redouble on hands where North passes) to describe his hand to his partner: Long clubs, opened on distribution, less defense than you expect, Partner!). Another hand that would tend to pull the redouble is, say, KTxx, x, AQJxxxx, x, which might take only one trick on defense, but which most advanced and expert players would open.

Now we stand at

Pass - 1C - X - XX
1S - 2C - P - ??

What should West bid? I'll suggest that a simple 2H should suffice. "Partner, I heard your 2C bid, I know you're distributional and weak, but I've got a really good hand with at least five good hearts, and we may still have something." This should be a forcing call!

East should resist the urge (in my opinion) to bid 2NT, and just repeats his clubs to show no heart fit: 3C

Pass - 1C - X - XX
1S - 2C - P - 2H
P - 3C - P - ??

At this point, West has a right to be a bit frustrated, but he should also keep his thinking self engaged. What can partner have opened on?

- No more than the KJ of clubs (in a seven card suit? Eight cards?)
- Not much in hearts, would have raised with any three, and might have raised with as little as Qx
- Kxxx of spades wouldn't have been enough (that looks more like a 3C opening)
- It's a good time to agree to use **Minorwood** (a bid of 4 of our minor asking for key cards and much safer than 4NT Blackwood or RKC, because you can still play at 4NT or 5C), but even if you don't, 4NT sounds like the key card ask, and West could see too many paths to 12 tricks for him to give up on a slam:

Pass - 1C - X - XX
 1S - 2C - P - 2H
 P - 3C - P - 4NT
 P - 5D* - P - 6C
 P P P

*5D was one in a 30/14 response

South cashed the Spade Ace and shifted to a diamond, won in the East hand. Declarer drew trump in three rounds, led a diamond to his hand and a heart to the King. Dummy's two aces took care of his two low spades.

This was an interesting hand for me on several levels:

- The "light" opening bid, unwilling to cede the playing field to the opposition
- South's immediate TO double, which I believe is not a winning call
- West's redouble to begin showing his big hand; 1H would have left him at a loss for forcing calls later on, and cut way back on chances E/W could score a big penalty double
- North knows which strain he prefers, so he bids it, and would do so with a yarborough and the same shape!
- East's 2C bid after partner's redouble to show a distributional hand with less than the expected number of defensive tricks
- West's forcing 2H call to see if they had a heart fit in addition to their now known club fit
- West deciding he couldn't get more useful information from East other than a count of key cards, and asking with 4NT (although 4C Minorwood would have been better if agreed upon before this hand!).

I hope this article has been helpful; feel free to drop me a note and share your comments. Redoubles are one of the black or arcane arts, but you'll benefit by studying how to use them effectively after partner opens and RHO makes a takeout double. That XX call can be a powerful tool!

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I'm looking for requests to discuss other recent BCoH or Choose Houston hands. Send me a note to PlayBridgeWithThomas@GMail.Com along the following lines:

"On May 11 Choose Houston (or BCoH club), my partner and I had (this problem) – (thought we should have gotten to slam, stopped in a partscore, got to the wrong strain, let the opps steal the contract, etc.). Our auction was – (four bids per line, please, as I've done in this article)." Other details are fine, but at least tell me date, game, problem, and auction if at all possible. I'll look forward to hearing from you!