

Board of the Week 53

By Dick Chapman

Today's board was played at matchpoints, not vulnerable vs. vulnerable. You are West holding:

♠A10872 ♥A2 ♦A5 ♣Q752

East deals and opens 1 spade. Wow, your good hand just got better. You start with a Jacoby 2NT call.

[Side note to newer players: 2NT over an opening call of 1 heart or 1 spade promises 4+ trump support and game forcing values. Responder is asking for a further description of opener's hand. Opener's first responsibility is to bid shortness at the 3 level (or if two-suited, Opener bids a lower second suit at the 4 level to show shortness in the other two suits). If there is no shortness, Opener will reveal strength. There are variations, but many pairs bid 4 of the major with 11-14, 3NT with 15-16, and 3 of the major with 17+. The call of 2NT and all rebids by opener are alerted.]

Opener rebids 3 clubs to reveal a void or singleton in that suit. Extra wow, you love that because your club weakness is opposite partner's shortness. Your red suit honors are not wasted. And you have a fifth trump. You hold only 14 points but it's more like 18 in terms of playing strength. What is your call now?

You certainly don't want to blast 4 spades. No, you can either cuebid 3 diamonds or bid 3 spades as a strength-showing device. You decide on 3 spades. The auction continues:

	1♠
2NT (Jacoby GF in ♠)	3♣ (singleton or void)
3♠ (slam try)	4♣ (void)
4♦ (control)	4♠
4NT	5♣ (1/4 key cards)
5♦ (do you have the trump queen?)	6♥ (yes, and the heart king)
6♠	Pass

It was a fun auction¹. The combined hands:

♠A10872	♠KQJ94
♥A2	♥KQ10
♦A5	♦QJ876
♣Q752	♣

Some Easts would bid 4 hearts instead of 4 spades. Now you are East and must make as many tricks as possible on the lead of the club jack.

The slam practically plays itself for 12 tricks. But you know that despite only 28 combined points, much of the field will be in slam. So you want an overtrick if it's possible. Ponder what the best way is to score 13

tricks while I listen to Renee Fleming sing "O mio babbino caro" from Gianni Schicchi (Puccini).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sf-tjXevlyQ>

I continue the discussion on the next page, but make your plan before you read further. Yes, it's easy to take the diamond finesse, and it's 50% to be working. Is there a better way?

Hint: there are (at least) three other ways to play this hand for 13 tricks, so you have to decide which is best.

¹ Bidding accurately" is more important than "a fun auction" but let's all admit we like fancy auctions. A 13-call slam auction is much more enjoyable than 1NT-3NT. And we do want to have fun, don't we?

A second way is to ruff four clubs, thus scoring 5 trumps, 3 hearts, 1 diamond, and four club ruffs. You have to get to dummy multiple times, only one of which can be a trump to dummy's ace. You can't draw the final trump until all the club ruffing happens (a dummy reversal). Things could easily go wrong.

A third way: discard a diamond on the third heart and execute a ruffing finesse in diamonds. But this is no improvement over a straight finesse: both cases are 50% shots that South holds the diamond king.

A fourth way: discard a diamond on the third heart, then try to ruff out the diamond king. This works if that king is K, Kx, or Kxx. It might not work if the king is Kxxx, but I haven't studied the layout that closely.

One pair was in the grand slam (I'm impressed, are you?) and this fourth method was chosen. Declarer ruffed the club lead, drew one trump, tossed a diamond on the third heart, returned to hand with a second trump, and led a second diamond intending to ruff and return via club ruffs to continue the pattern. Lo, the diamond king fell on the second lead of the suit and Declarer claimed 13 easy tricks.

Others made 13 but I don't know how the hand was played at those tables. They may have taken any of the four methods I have described.

I'm neither bridge expert nor mathematician, but it seems to my feeble brain that ruffing out the diamond king is the superior line of play, better than a 50% finesse. Here's the full hand:

	♠65 ♥9843 ♦9432 ♣AK9	
♠A10872 ♥A2 ♦A5 ♣Q752		♠KQJ94 ♥KQ10 ♦QJ876 ♣
	♠3 ♥J765 ♦K10 ♣J108643	

You now discover the diamond king was onside and it didn't matter which way you played it. Why didn't I tell you that at the beginning? Oh, come on, bridge wouldn't be fun if we knew where the cards were.

By the way, only 6 of the 14 pairs in the field bid the slam. I don't know the auctions but 2 stopped in 5 spades and 6 stopped in 4 spades. This board is a very good example of the usefulness of the Jacoby 2NT convention. You find out if your values are wasted. Here they were not, so the slam try makes sense.

If East had shortage in either red suit, or no shortage, West would stop at 4 spades and expect to make it. But, as noted, club shortage is exactly what West wants to hear. Also, with a fifth trump and 2 short suits, West should think "cross-ruff" the minute East calls 3 clubs in response to Jacoby 2NT.

See you at the table.