

FRIDAY MORNING GENTLE DUPLICATE

03/01/2025



♠ Q 10 8 6 2 To bid, or not to bid, that was the question facing my delightful young partner, Josie Mittra (just 9), on this hand last Friday morning. After 3 passes, Josie understandably chose to pass, as did 2 others. Those that opened 1♠ started a competitive auction between spades and hearts. Despite not scoring particularly well on this hand, we went on to win the session, and Josie played with a skill and confidence that belies her age.

So, back to the question – to bid or not to bid? You can use the so-called rule of 15 to decide whether to open such a hand in 4th seat. If the number of spades you hold added to your points comes to 15 or more, you can confidently open 1♠. Why? Holding 10 points, you know that the remaining points will be evenly distributed round the table, and a part-score in spades, the highest-ranking suit, is most likely to win the auction.

As responder to a 4th seat opening bid, you should always assume partners bid is up to scratch. East's hand here is worth a bid of 3♣.

However, North should overcall 2♥, and now, if systems allow, East can make an Unassuming Cue Bid (UCB) of 3♥ to show a good raise in spades. 3♣ can now be used pre-emptively if you hold 5 spades and little else.

What should South do? South can be confident that they hold 10 hearts, and that East-West have at least 8 spades. That gives us a total trick count of 18 under the Law of Total Tricks (LoTT). If East-West can make 9 tricks in Spades, then North-South should also be able to make 9 in hearts. South also has good defence to spades, so pushing the opposition into a making game is somewhat mitigated. South should bid 4♥. Yes, this is to the level of fit and may even make, but more importantly, even if you are doubled and go one off, -100 is better than -140. Even if you are vulnerable, not many pairs would double 4♥.

Should West bid 4♠? It's very close. For West, the total trick count is 18 or 19, possibly 20 (partner and RHO could have 5 spades and 5 hearts each). If you could be sure it's 20, you can bid 4♠ with some confidence, but otherwise, you should probably pass. With the 5th spade and singleton heart, I would fancy my chances and bid 4♠, but that's just me.

Do note that the Law of Total Tricks is not an exact science, but it can be useful in competitive auctions.

As you can see, North should make 9 tricks in hearts quite easily losing to just the ♥K, ♦A and ♣AK.

4♠ by West is not a great contract. Assuming you navigate the spades successfully, and take the heart finesse for a club discard, unless North leads diamonds during the play, the contract is destined for failure. Your best chance is to finesse diamonds twice. You could try eliminating hearts and clubs before taking the first diamond finesse to endplay North, but that won't work here. North can exit with a heart or club, and even though this gives a ruff and discard, West still needs the second diamond finesse to succeed.

Board 17

North Deals

None Vul

♠ Q 10 8 6 2

♥ 5

♦ A J 9 6

♣ K 9 3

♠ 4

♥ A 9 6 4 3

♦ K Q 8

♣ J 10 8 2



♠ A J 5

♥ Q J 8 7 2

♦ 5 2

♣ Q 7 6

♠ K 9 7 3

♥ K 10

♦ 10 7 4 3

♣ A 5 4