

Third Overall in Fall National LM Pairs – Denver, 11/19/05

Playing with Ed Schulte of Tampa, we scored a 69% game in the final session of the 2-day national championship Life Master Pairs in Denver, to rise from deep in the pack to third overall. The following hand contributed to our excellent score.

I held ♠KJ97653 ♥A7 ♦J ♣K104. In second position I opened the bidding with 1♠, partner replied 2♥ (game-forcing), I rebid 2♠, and he rebid 2NT. Now what?

Although I usually have a 6-card suit for my 2♠ rebid, I could have a 5-card spade suit when rebidding 2NT may be unappealing and I don't have enough extra strength or extra length for a rebid at the 3-level. It is used as a catch-all rebid on weak hands such as: ♠AQJ75 ♥754 ♦KQ5 ♣74 or ♠AQ976 ♥AQ ♦9764 ♣J4.

But, before I rebid my spades again, I should consider that the auction is reaching high levels quickly. If I rebid 3♠, it can be very hard to agree upon a heart fit and have room for slam investigation. My spade suit is missing 3 honors, and it might be right to play in hearts. Is this a good time to bid 3♥? I don't think so – I think it would be a major distortion of my major suit distributions and might put us into the wrong major suit. Should I bid 3♣ to save bidding space, therefore allow partner to either repeat the hearts or show spade support? That is much more appealing than bidding 3♥. Saving bidding space in auctions like this can be very helpful in reaching the best trump fit. Still, if I rebid 3♣ partner may not let me play in a 7-1 spade fit, when he has 4-card club support. It would not be a bad risk to bid 3♣, but I felt it was more important to mention my good 7-card suit again. I bid 3♠.

Partner now cue bid 4♣ which is a cue bid supporting spades. The cue bid shows slam interest and the club ace-- it can't be a shortness cue bid due to his 2NT rebid. That is very good news. What is your next bid?

You could cue bid 4♦ which guarantees either 1st or 2nd round control (ace, king, void or singleton), or you could bid 4NT (1430 Key Card Blackwood). This is matchpoints, and overtricks are very important. I had hopes of discarding my losing diamond on partner's long hearts, and I figured that a cue bid of 4♦ would discourage a diamond lead. When making a bid like this, you also need to consider the likelihood of losing the ability to bid 4NT on your next bid. I judged that partner was very likely to rebid 4 of a major suit, so I would not lose my ability to bid 4NT, and that even if he continued bidding at the 5-level, that I would probably be able to handle the auction with cue-bids. I considered the lead-inhibiting value of a 4♦ bid worth the risk of not being able to bid 4NT on my next turn.

Over my 4♦ cue bid, partner cue bid 4♥ and I bid 4NT. Partner bid 5♠ showing 2 key cards with the spade queen, and I signed off in 6♠. The opening lead was the ♥2. How do you plan the play?

Dummy
♠ A Q
♥ K 10 9 6 4 3
♦ Q 8 7
♣ A 3
Declarer
♠ K J 9 7 6 5 3
♥ A 7
♦ J
♣ K 10 4
Opening Lead: Heart 2
Contract: 6 Spades

You count 7 spade tricks, 2 hearts, and 2 clubs. If hearts break 3-2, then you can draw trump and set up the long hearts, using the club ace as an entry to the good hearts to take all 13 tricks. But that ♥2 opening lead looks very menacing. If the hearts are breaking 4-1, then you cannot draw trump and set up the heart suit--you lack entries and will end up with 2 losers. You can ruff a club in dummy to set up a 12th trick, but after trumping in dummy you will still have trouble getting off dummy to draw the trumps, and may still lose a heart ruff and a diamond trick. What is your best line of play?

Based upon the opening lead, I decided that it was very likely that hearts were dividing 4-1, so I took the only line of play that should make the contract. I trumped the third club with the spade ace, and I overtook the spade queen with the king. For my line of play to work, I needed the spades to either divide 2-2 (42%) or for them to be 3-1 with the 10 being singleton (an additional 12%).

Normally a 3-2 heart break (68%) would be a better line of play than my 54% play in the spade suit, but considering the opening lead, my line of play was much more likely. And I was right.

And, I got a bonus. After I drew trump, I kept leading trump and squeezed my RHO, who couldn't protect both the ♥QJ and ♦AK. This was the end position:

	North	
	♠	
	♥ K 10 9	
	♦	
West	♣	East
♠		♠ —
♥		♥ Q J
♦ 9 6 5		♦ A
♣	South	♣
	♠ 3	
	♥ 7	
	♦ J	
	♣	

On the lead of the ♠3, dummy discarded a small heart, and East had no winning option. If he discarded a heart, I would take the last 2 tricks with dummy's hearts. In fact, East discarded the diamond ace, hoping that his partner held the diamond jack. I then cashed the diamond jack and heart king, to score all 13 tricks. We got 72 ½ matchpoints on the board, out of a maximum of 77.

I don't think this hand is anything spectacular, but it is a good example of good solid bidding and play. You have to make good plays like this to have a chance to place high in major national championships. We won 70.31 masterpoints for finishing third overall. I won over 116 masterpoints in the tournament.

This was the entire hand:

	<u>North</u>	
	♠ A Q	
	♥ K 10 9 6 4 3	
	♦ Q 8 7	
<u>West</u>	♣ A 3	<u>East</u>
♠ 4 2		♠ 10 8
♥ 2		♥ Q J 8 5
♦ 9 6 5 4 3 2		♦ A K 10
♣ Q 8 6 5	<u>South</u>	♣ J 9 7 2
	♠ K J 9 7 6 5 3	
	♥ A 7	
	♦ J	
	♣ K 10 4	