

## From the US Team Trials. 8/20/2006

This month's hand is a good example of how to defend when the opponents bid aggressively. Aggressive bidding is typical of the modern expert player, and is often successful as we will see in the October 2006 hand-of-the-month.

Thirty-two teams entered the 2006 USBF team trials, trying to win the right to represent the USA in the 2007 Bermuda Bowl. Sixteen teams were eliminated in the round robin. Our team qualified and began the knockout phase against the current World Champions, the Rose Meltzer team. I was playing with Gail Greenberg, and our teammates were Danny and JoAnn Sprung, and Alex Ornstein with JoAnna Stansby. Our opponents had won the World Championship two months earlier, but now had a slightly different lineup. Kyle Larsen played with Rose Meltzer, Alan Sontag played with Roger Bates, and now Bart Bramley and Mark Feldman replaced a leading Swedish pair.

Gail and I were playing against Alan Sontag and Roger Bates when I held this hand, nobody vulnerable.

♠ 85
♥ KQ8
♦ A864
♣ KQ95

Partner dealt and passed, and Roger opened 1Heart on my left. They play a form of Precision Club, so the strength of the 1♥ bid is from around 10-16 points. While I had enough strength to bid, I was too weak to overcall 1NT and had no other good bid available, so I passed. Alan Sontag responded 1♠, Gail passed, and Roger rebid 1NT showing around 11-13HCP. Now I doubled, happily asking partner to bid a minor suit. This double could be made with a weaker hand and good distribution in the minor suits. Here I was close to maximum strength for my double.

Well, the bidding took an unexpected turn. It went pass by Alan and pass by Gail. And now Roger Bates bid 2♠. What would you do now?

Gail could have two different types of hands for her pass of my double. In both cases she has to have some length in the opponents suits. Typically she will be passing because she wants to defeat 1NT doubled. But she could have an unattractive hand that hopes on a good day to defeat 1NT but feels

that we are better off losing 180 points if they make their contract, than we would be if we bid a contract and presumably got doubled.

So, my hand could be a lot weaker than it really is, and her hand could potentially be fairly weak. Furthermore, doubling the opponents at 1NT is not a game contract (unless they redouble), while doubling 2♠ is a game contract (worth 470 points if they take 8 tricks).

Am I good enough to double the 2♠ contract, or should I just pass?

Well, I figured that partner was very likely passing 1NT doubled because she expected to defeat the contract, and that I could hardly have a better hand than this for this auction. If I had held 3 spades, I would have started with a takeout double. I clearly had a maximum hand with 2 trump, something that partner would like.

Furthermore I figured that if our underdog team was going to have a chance to defeat our opponents, that we needed to take calculated risks on hands like this. Therefore I doubled the 2♠ bid. And it worked great. This was the entire hand:

Nobody Vulnerable	Dummy (Bates)	Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT
	♠AJ6	Pass	Pass	Double	Pass
	♥97632	Pass	2♠	Double	Pass
	♦J93	Pass	Pass		
Gail	♣AJ		Jeff		
♠Q1097			♠85		
♥AJ5			♥KQ8		
♦K75			♦A864		
♣1064	Declarer (Sontag)		♣KQ95		
	♠K432				
	♥104				
	♦Q102				
	♣8732				

Gail led the ♦5, and upon winning the ace, I shifted to the ♠8. Alan misread the heart position, and continued diamonds at trick 3. Gail won and continued attacking in spades. Later, when she won the ace and jack of hearts, she managed to draw trump and the contract went set 3 tricks for 500 points.

If Alan had chosen to try to trump a heart in his hand, he could have gotten out for 300 points.

I found this hand interesting because it is not too often that you get to double the world champions for 500 points on a part score deal. Their aggressive bidding system lets them steal many contracts, and they rarely get punished for penalties. I am sure they have a large net gain by bidding aggressively. It was fun to find a way to punish them.

I also wanted to consider whether or not I should double with my hand when playing weaker opponents. And yes, I still think it is the right bid.

After the hand my friend Alan said "nice double". That was nice. He is a classy player.