

## A Balancing Decision

I played with Kathy Harper (from California) on May 26 in the NYC Regional Open Pairs. I had never played with Kathy before, and I was happy when she called Honors Bridge Club explaining that she wanted a pro partner for that date, and that we were able to make arrangements.

I was South and held the following hand, Not-Vulnerable vs,

Vulnerable: ♠843 ♥K3 ♦A9752 ♣963. After 3 passes Kathy opened 1♥, I responded 1NT and she rebid 2♥. This was passed around to West, who balanced with 2♠. It went pass-pass, back to me. It is your decision now. Think about it, as this decision is what this month's hand is all about.

I immediately considered 3 different possible actions: Double, Pass, or 3♥.

I felt that West was being impertinent - not able to open in 3rd seat yet balancing at the 2-level at unfavorable vulnerability. I wanted to double, since 3 small spades was a good spade holding, considering that I had already denied holding 4 spades. But as I looked at my hand, I could not see where the defense would win 6 tricks. I had about 1 1/2 or 2 tricks, and I did not see where I could count on partner to have 3 1/2 or 4 tricks. I think doubling would be too reckless - it might be successful 10-20% of the time, but would more often lead to a bottom score. I decided not to risk doubling. Pass is certainly possible. It is a shame probably go -110 on a hand where I expected to have a good chance to go +110. I certainly would prefer to do something else if I can think of something appealing.

How successful would a 3♥ bid be? If partner has a good 6-card heart suit and 2 side tricks, it can make. That is not unreasonable to hope for - it certainly seems better than doubling 2♠. The problem is that 3♥ might not make. Partner's hearts might not be so good, or the suit might break badly, or partner might only have 1 side-suit trick. Still, down one is better than letting the opponent's make 2♠.

Well, I might bid 3♥. Before bidding 3♥, are there any other bids to consider?

Yes, I did think of one other bid. That was 2NT. If partner has as little as 6 good hearts and the ♣A, then I can see 8 tricks in Notrump. And partner certainly is better than that. She has a 6-card heart suit and did not open a weak 2 bid in 4th position. (In 4th seat I expect a weak 2 to be between 9-12HCP). My ♥K and ♦A would fill in her gaps perfectly. Partner would not even need to have a spade stopper, as the opponent certainly doesn't have more than 5 spades (since he didn't open a preempt in 3rd position). And if partner holds 3 spades, then playing in Notrump could be vital to prevent an opposing spade ruff.

The more I thought about it, the more I liked bidding 2NT. It certainly should not be a hand with a spade stopper and 9HCP - I would probably double 2♠ with a hand like that. No, it should be a hand like the one that I held - a key heart honor that looks like it might help run the suit, and a side quick trick.

So, I bid 2NT, and played there, and made it, with a club opening lead. This was the entire hand:

	<b>Dummy(Kathy)</b>	
	♠QJ5	
	♥AQ7652	
	♦64	
<b>West</b>	♣A4	<b>East</b>
♠K10762		♠A9
♥104		♥J98
♦QJ		♦K1083
♣K1085	<b>Declarer(Jeff)</b>	♣QJ72
	♠843	
	♥K3	
	♦A9752	
	♣963	

We got all the matchpoints for +120. The spade ruff beats 3♥. Apparently the ruff was found at all tables that reached 3♥. It is a little surprising that every table found the ruff, but is expected at most tables where West bid spades.

Incidentally, if I held the West hand I would have opened the bidding 1♠. In my partnership with Gail Greenberg we have lots of ways to bid Drury in interference, so we don't have to get to the 3-level. And the 1♠ bid serves 2 good functions: 1) it takes away lots of bidding space from the opponents making it tougher for them to find the best contract, and 2) it serves as a lead-directing bid. It can happen that the opponents find a penalty double when we have no place to run to, but that is exceedingly rare. I think the gain, especially in matchpoints, is well worth the risk.