

Hearts A' Flutter



Three successive boards, all with a similar theme, that of doubling heart contracts. Are your nerves up to it because in two cases, there will be no bloodbath!

Let's start with a bidding problem, or maybe it isn't!

<p>♠ A 9 ♥ K 9 7 6 4 ♦ J 7 6 4 ♣ 5 2</p>	<p><i>West</i></p> <p>1 ♠</p>	<p><i>North</i></p> <p>Pass</p>	<p><i>East</i></p> <p>1 ♣</p>	<p><i>South</i></p> <p>1 ♥</p>
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You are North and it is your turn. "The Law" suggests that with 10 trumps that you bid all the way to 4♥ and that you will be "protected". So, will you?

The Akarana website does not give us the bidding at the various tables though only one pair ended as declaring in 4♥x. If others did bid 4♥, then the opponents saved them by bidding 4♠ over the top. However, either more caution should be exercised or else vulnerable 1 level overcalls should be rather better at adverse vulnerability than the South hand on Board 5.

<p><u>Board 5</u> North Deals N-S Vul</p>	<p>♠ A 9 ♥ K 9 7 6 4 ♦ J 7 6 4 ♣ 5 2</p>	<p>♠ 10 3 ♥ 5 2 ♦ A K 10 8 ♣ A K 8 7 6</p>
<p>♠ K J 8 7 6 5 ♥ J ♦ Q 3 ♣ Q J 10 9</p>		<p>♠ Q 4 2 ♥ A Q 10 8 3 ♦ 9 5 2 ♣ 4 3</p>

With West having no reason to lead spades with such a good holding in the other black suit, the damage was a comfortable +800 for the defence.

There were no nervous defenders on the above board but what's your feeling here as North?

♠ J 10 6 4	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
♥ Q 10 9	Pass	Pass	1 NT	Dbl
♦ J 6 3 2	2 ♣	?		
♣ 7 2				

1NT showed 12-14. Partner's double was 15+ and West showed clubs and a higher suit. You have the option now of doubling for take-out or passing. If you double, there is every chance that partner may double a different suit should the opposition run. Also, partner might expect rather more hcp from you and may bid accordingly. So, would you?

If you did (I did!), you will soon be given the rather less appealing prospect of defending 2♥x as the bidding proceeded:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	1 NT	Dbl
2 ♣	Dbl	2 ♦	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

You really have nowhere to go as partner's double of 2♥ was for penalties. At least your heart holding was not unreasonable.

Your next problem was the opening lead. When, in such a situation, your side has the majority of the high cards, you are supposed to lead a trump to cut down the chance of the opposition getting tricks by ruffing. In the above, there is no guarantee that your side does have the majority of the high cards...and indeed did not!

Is a trump lead, therefore, still a good idea?

You do know dummy's shape in two suits. The run from 2♣x suggests a doubleton club while your partner would hardly make a penalty double of 2♥ with less than three. Therefore, dummy has three hearts and two clubs. So, should you lead a trump?

It would have been a good idea. ♥10 goes to partner's king and declarer's ace. West can now score a club ruff if you choose to discard but has no comfortable exit off dummy. Let's say declarer exits ♦10 which South wins to lead ♥5. North wins and if they cash their remaining heart and then play ♠J, South will soon become end-played when West exits a club. If North retains ♥K, the end result could be 2 down if declarer plays ♠Q on the second round of the suit.

There was, though, a happy ending to the initial lead of the ♠J with the defence taking three trump tricks (2 with club ruffs) ♠A, ♥K and ♠10 at trick 13 for a very relieved North. A trump lead seems to guarantee one down with chances of even two down while a non-trump lead gains the defence 6 tricks at best. All of which leads back to the question of whether 2♣ should have been doubled...

Cards away and on to Board 6. You are still North and have a rather better hand this time:

So, once more, the question is “do you double”? If you do, the chances are very strong that you will be defending 2♥x. They are vulnerable. Are you up for it?

<u>Board 6</u>	♠ A J 4	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
East Deals	♥ —	1 NT	Dbl	1 ♥	Pass
E-W Vul	♦ K 10 6 4	Pass	?	2 ♥	Pass
	♣ A K J 7 5 2				
♠ Q 7 6	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: green; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ K 9 5 2			
♥ 8 4		♥ A Q J 10 7 5			
♦ A J 8 5 3		♦ Q 7			
♣ 10 9 8		♣ 4			
	♠ 10 8 3				
	♥ K 9 6 3 2				
	♦ 9 2				
	♣ Q 6 3				



My heart had fluttered once too often!

I called my as yet unbid 6 card suit and played there. The damage to 2♥x this time would only be +200 but next time, partner’s hearts could have been better. 3NT was on offer if South valued their two honour cards very highly though the opportunity for a good score had probably been passed over by nervous North. You have to give up - 670 occasionally in the pursuit of large plus scores.

Richard Solomon