



Play & Learn

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Bidding over preempts

As South, with nobody vulnerable, you hold:

♠ 3 ♥ K Q J 7 4 ♦ A 8 4 2 ♣ 6 4 2.

West	North	East	South
3♠	Db1	4♠	?

Before reading further, what's your call?

Partner's double is for takeout. Generally, doubles of preempts through 4♥ are takeout-oriented. Even when the preempt is above 4♥, double is not unilaterally for penalty. Many players agree that these doubles show general strength and can be taken out with a hand having enough distribution to expect to make a high-level contract, but may also be passed for penalty. Make sure you know how your partner intends a double of a high-level preempt.

Here, North has made a clear takeout double of 3♠. It's reasonable to expect North to have three-card or longer support for the unbid suits, with spade shortness and a hand worth about 16 points, including distribution. If East had passed 3♠, you would happily bid 4♥. But East bid 4♠. What's that all about? Whose hand is it?

Raising partner's preempt to game could show a hand strong enough to expect game to make, or the raise could be furthering the preempt in an attempt to steal the contract.

Given your 10 HCP and partner's double, it's likely that East is extending the preempt just to make life difficult. Annoying? Yes. Unfair? No. With the right hand, raising the preempt and

bidding to go down is good bridge.

Because a 3♠ opening tends to show a seven-card suit, expect East to have at least three-card support. Notice that would give partner a doubleton spade, which is consistent with the spade shortness needed for a takeout double.

What action did you take?

While East's 4♠ might elicit thoughts that involve some not-so-nice four-letter words, you won't vocalize any of them – including pass. You can't pass when partner, who has taken a strong action, has no clue that you have strength. Your decision is whether to bid 5♥ or double for penalty. What's the right decision? Examining the complete deal will reveal your best call:

Dlr: West ♠ 8 6
 Vul: None ♥ A 10 8 2
 ♦ K Q J 6
 ♣ A J 3

♠ K Q J 9 7 4 2	N	♠ A 10 5
♥ 9 5		♥ 6 3
♦ 3		♦ 10 9 7 5
♣ 10 9 8		♣ K Q 7 5
♠ 3		
♥ K Q J 7 4		
♦ A 8 4 2		
♣ 6 4 2		

If you chose to double 4♠ with South's hand, your side will collect 100 points.

What if you chose to bid 5♥? Your unavoidable losers are one spade and two clubs, so 5♥ is down one, giving E-W plus 50.

There is a game that makes. By

North, 5♦ cannot be defeated. Before drawing all of East's trumps, declarer ruffs a spade loser. Once trumps are drawn, South's five-card heart suit allows for a club discard. No discard is possible in 5♥. More tricks are often available in a 4-4 trump fit than in a 5-3 or even a 5-4 trump fit. If South declares 5♦, however, the opening lead of the ♣10 defeats the contract. But nobody is likely to reach 5♦, not with a sure heart fit and little room for exploration.

Is 5♥ a bad bid? I would be tempted to bid 5♥ with South's hand based on 10 HCP, the singleton spade and the nice five-card suit. Preempts make you guess, and you won't always guess correctly.

Does the fact that 4♠ goes down only one make 5♠ down two a good sacrifice for E-W? Not this time. A good sacrifice goes down less than the value of a game the opponents can make. You should expect a sacrifice to be doubled for penalty. The problem here is 5♥ does *not* make. Defending 5♥ will give E-W a plus score. Bidding 5♠ turns that plus into a minus. That's called a phantom sacrifice and is not winning bridge.

Without exceptional distribution, we're generally content when our sacrifice pushes the opponents one past game. As the late expert Ed Manfield's 1987 winning Bols Bridge Tip suggests, the five level belongs to the opponents. N-S should double if E-W continue to 5♠, and settle for collecting plus 300. ■