



Play & Learn

BY PAT HARRINGTON ✉ mrsbridge@embarqmail.com

After a weak two – responder's good hand

What makes a good hand opposite a weak two-bid? Points alone don't do it. Keeping in mind that a weak-two opening shows 5 to 10 or 11 high-card points and typically produces five or six tricks, choose your call with each hand below after partner's weak 2♠ opening is passed to you.

- ① ♠2 ♥QJ3 ♦QJ5 ♣AQJ752
- ② ♠A53 ♥QJ7 ♦KQJ ♣Q764
- ③ ♠K963 ♥A863 ♦— ♣A9754
- ④ ♠6 ♥KQ53 ♦AK73 ♣AK74

Answers:

- ① *You usually need more than 13 HCP to consider game over partner's preempt.* That makes sense because a preempt shows less than 12 points.
Rather than focusing on points, however, responder should try to count tricks. Opposite partner's five or six tricks, you need to provide five tricks to be confident about making game.
The preemptor has seven cards outside of his main suit to divide among the remaining three suits. While a side four-card suit is possible, holding three or fewer cards in a side suit is more likely. To make game opposite a weak two, responder has to provide *quick tricks* – aces and kings or ruffing value. By the time queens and

jacks are developed into tricks, opener may be void in those suits.

With this hand, can you picture losing the ♥AK and ♦AK right off the top? Then there's the matter of the trump suit. A 6-1 fit is playable, but you could easily lose one or two trump tricks. Your best call is pass.

- ② Now you have a fit and 15 HCP. No gimmick that counts points plus trumps works as well as good judgment. This hand has the *wrong kind of points*. You are unlikely to make game. If partner is minimum, you could lose two hearts, a diamond and two clubs. Even a maximum weak-two opener probably won't provide a solution for *two* of those losers.
You have the trump length to apply the law of total tricks to further the preempt to 3♠, but because you are quite strong, you might opt to pass and await developments. On a good day, partner could get to declare 2♠.
- ③ Now you have only 11 HCP. Do you pass again? Hopefully not before counting your tricks – three in high cards and probably at least two diamond ruffs for a total of five or more tricks. Bid 4♠.

- ④ With 19 HCP and a hand that should provide at least five tricks, you surely have the values for game, but which game? If you choose 3NT, what tricks are you planning to win? You need more than your own five or six tricks. If partner doesn't have the ♠A or an outside entry, you might not win any spade tricks in 3NT but you will definitely take spade tricks when spades are trump.

Opposite partner's preempt, don't place the contract in notrump without either a good enough fit to use partner's suit as a source of tricks or enough tricks in your own hand to make your contract. So bid 4♠.

When bidding game on power, don't apply the law of total tricks. The best place to play is often in the preemptor's long suit, even lacking the usual eight-card fit or better. If you were thinking about slam, your less than ideal trump fit should be a deterrent.

There are times when you won't be certain of the right contract. You might want to look for an alternative denomination or need to know if partner is at the top or bottom of the point range. Happily, a weak-two opening leaves enough room for you to make a forcing bid to explore your game prospects. We'll discuss those responses next month. ■