

Dear Readers,

I just love opening my emails. It's a rare day that I don't get an email from one of you or a Vu-Bridge subscriber asking me to arbitrate a disagreement. Usually it's about bridge, but a surprising number expect guidance on other subjects too, which of course I have. I feel like Dear Abby sometimes. Here's an offering.

Dear Marti, here's a hand we would appreciate your thoughts on. I'm showing the bidding and the North/South hands. E/W didn't bid, and West was the dealer. I'd like to know what South's rebid should be. Also, who has limited their hand and who is the captain. Thank you for settling this disagreement. (P.S. I'm not saying which hand is mine or which is my wife's. I don't want to bias you.) Signed, Arguing in Ohio

North

♠J 4
♥8 5 2
♦AKJ 9 2
♣Q 7 4

South

♠AQ 10 9 3
♥A 4
♦Q 5
♣K J 5

N	S
1♦	2♠
3♦	??

Now, Readers, you know I rarely dwell on hands. There are so many much better equipped to do it than me. BUT sometimes (often) I just can't keep my mouth shut. Here I am with my first cup of coffee, trying to unscramble a mess like this. I hardly know where to start.

First, let's look at North's opening bid. North, in my opinion, should never open that hand unless in 3rd seat. With less than 12 HCP, you should apply the Rule of 20 (add your HCP and 1 point for every card in your two longest suits...the North hand comes to 19, and 19 ain't 20!) This hand doesn't meet the Rule, and is really rather pathetic, with its wasted Jx in spades. This hand should be passed, awaiting further developments.

South, on the other hand, has a very nice opening hand, with 16 HCP and a 5-card spade suit. No problem there. At this point, South's opener is an unlimited bid.

Now, back to North. Good things happen to people who do good things. Since he passed first time, North can now bid 2♦, fully describing his hand. Partner will know he has exactly 10 or 11 points since he named a new suit at the 2-level. South will also know North doesn't have spade support, or he would have bid 3♠. And finally, South will know North has a baadddd suit somewhere, or he would have bid 2NT, showing 10-12 points after an original pass. North has also limited his hand, and thrown the Captaincy right in South's lap. Remember, making YOUR problem your PARTNER'S problem is a GOOD thing!!

When the bid gets back to South, he is in a great spot to make a decision. South knows Pard's exact point count, and with South's stoppers in the unbid suits, he's in a perfect position to bid 3NT. It turns out the opponents can take three heart tricks and the ♣A.

Anyone playing the hand should go right for the club promotion instead of messing with the spade finesse. If the finesse loses, that combined with three heart losers and the club ace will set you. If you don't mess with the spades, take your diamonds, the promoted clubs and the spade ace and heart ace, you romp home. But that's a story for another day.

The bidding as shown makes my head ache. You've got South making a strong jump shift over North's bad opener. (I like Weak Jump Shifts, in and out of competition, because there are so many better ways to show strong hands...again, a story for another day.) Then you've got North rebidding a 5-card suit. Honestly. Each error compounds the one before it. All this before I've even had my second cup of coffee.

The good news is that the writer and his partner, while fighting over the wrong cause, are sincerely trying to improve their games. I both admire and respect that, and as a teacher truly enjoy students with that kind of dedication. I just know they'll end up successful players, if they don't kill each other or divorce first.

Please let me hear from you. I love your emails, and I have advice on any subject. Some of it is even right.