

Two Slams -- Problem (1)

Board (1)
 East Deals
 None Vul



♠ A
 ♥ A Q J 9 7 3 2
 ♦ 8 5
 ♣ A Q 10

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	?

Join me as South for two deals in a club game, playing matchpoint pairs.

Using losing trick count, our hand has four losers: one heart, two diamonds, and one club. If partner provides one winner, then we should have a game. However, we could easily lose two clubs -- and with only the ♠ K or even the ♦ K, partner may provide no winner. While this hand is a borderline 2 ♣ opening, we open 1 ♥.

Partner surprises us with a game-forcing 2 ♣ response. What now?

Two Slams -- Solution (1)

Board (1)
 East Deals
 None Vul

♠ K J 5 4	<table style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 9 6 3 2
		N									
W			E								
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♥ 10 8 5 4	♥ K										
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♠ A
♥ A Q J 9 7 3 2
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<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	3 ♥ ¹
Pass	4 ♦ ²	Pass	4 ♠ ³
Pass	4 NT ⁴	Pass	6 ♥

All pass

1. hearts are trump, start cue bidding
2. first or second round control
3. Kickback (asks for keycards in hearts)
4. One or four key cards (1430 response)

6 ♥ by South

Lead: ♣ 8

Made 6

Playing the 2/1 game force system, it's a terrible idea to make a 2/1 in a suit not headed by an ace or king. It's too hard to sort out slam bidding unless the suit contains a first or second round control. Partner has the ♣ K!

For us, a 2 ♥ rebid would not show more than the original five hearts. (Some partnerships promise extra length for 2 ♥, but then they wind up bidding 2 NT on 5-3-3-2 hands lacking a stopper in an unbid suit.) Given the club fit, it's worth jumping to 3 ♥, which says, "hearts are trump - start cue bidding." We need to ask for key cards in hearts, because we could have a lay-down grand slam opposite, for example:

♠ J 8 7 ♥ K 6 ♦ A 7 4 ♣ K J 9 6 2

Playing Italian-style cuebids, partner bids 4 ♦, nominally their cheapest first or second round control. Lacking a spade control, partner bypassed that suit. What about clubs? Partner already promised a control in that suit, remember? 4 ♣ would promise two of the top three honors in this case. Partner's 4 ♦ cue bid is just what we need. Missing one of the keycards, we subside in 6 ♥.

We carefully win the opening lead on dummy with the ♣ J. Notice that, even if clubs are 4-1, we can win the second round with the ace, overtake the queen with the king, and the ♣ 9 will win the fourth round of the suit.

Assuming any club shortness is with West, we can safely lose a trump trick there. When we lead the ♥ 6, the ♥ K pops up. We still need to lose a trump, which we proceed to do, on the fourth round. If a diamond is returned, we plan to rise with the ace and claim.

This slam is not great, but it would be pusillanimous not to bid it.

Two Slams -- Problem (2)

Board (2)
 East Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ A K 8
 ♥ K J 10 4 3 2
 ♦ 5
 ♣ Q 9 5



♠ J 4
 ♥ Q 8 7 6 5
 ♦ A 2
 ♣ A J 4 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	4 ♦ ¹	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	4 NT ²	Pass	5 ♠ ³
Pass	6 ♥ ⁴	All pass	

1. Splinter raise.
2. First or second round spade control.
3. Let's bid a slam!
4. OK!

6 ♥ by South
 Lead: ♦ K

With this scrawny hand, we open with one heart. Partner surprises us with a splinter raise, which promises at least four card trump support and a singleton or void in diamonds. Furthermore, it's best to restrict this bid to a hand of normal opening strength, about 12 to 14 high card points, what I call a "game splinter"-- lacking another option, a bigger hand would bid 2 NT, a forcing 4-card raise -- this issue was undiscussed in this partnership.

The literature does not go into detail about what to do after partner splinters over our major suit opening bid. We should start by treating the king, queen and jack of the short suit, as if they were small cards, even if accompanied by the ace. Their trick-taking power is severely limited, and furthermore, by not being in other suits, they are not improving partner's cards in those other suits. The ace counts, but has diminished value. For example, suppose that (on some other deal) partner holds: ♦ 5 ♣-Q 9 5 Without help, partner expects to take one trick a quarter of the time with these four cards (0.25 tricks on average), depending on locations of the top clubs. If we have one ace in these suits, it's better to have it in clubs, where we expect to take two tricks half the time (1.5 tricks on average). If the ace is in diamonds, that is one trick, but the value of partner's queen is unchanged. The ♣ A is worth more than that, because even if the ♣ K is behind the queen, that defender may choose (or be forced) to lead from it, giving us the queen. Combined honors are better than isolated honors. Furthermore, our doubleton diamond is wasted opposite shortness.

So, our scrawny opening bid is still that. We rebid 4 ♥, the wet blanket. If our hand contained the ace of trump, instead of the queen -- a solid opening bid, as re-evaluated -- we would have bid a suit between the splinter and 4 ♥ -- oops, there is none!

Our hand could be much worse (♦ K Q J) for our 4 ♥ bid than what we hold. This was early in the session - did partner remember that 4 ♠ was Kickback, so 4 NT was a cue bid? Well, with two aces and the fitting ♣ J, we are bidding a slam. In case partner wanted to know about keycards, we show two with, landing us in 6 ♥. Oops, we need ♣ K doubleton onside (8%), stiff king onside, or stiff ten offside, maybe 9% total. 6-card support notwithstanding, partner should pass 4 ♥. Too late for that - plan the play!

