

Hand of the Week 10/29/19

By Doug Doub

Hand Evaluation: Upgrades, downgrades, and splinters.

Every session that you play, you will face numerous bidding decisions. What is your hand worth? Should you bid or pass? What should you bid? How much should you bid?

We have the “point count.” Can't you just count your points and shape and bid accordingly? Not if you want to be consistently correct. The point count has significant limitations. The location of your honors, the nature of your honors and fit make a huge difference.

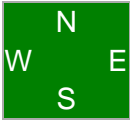
One of the best “gadgets” that has ever been invented is the “splinter bid.” It is defined as an unusual jump that shows a good hand with a fit for partner and shortness in the bid suit. Take a look at the East hand on board 26 today. ♠QJT5 ♥5 ♦AT5 ♣AKJT7.

You open 1C, and partner responds 1S. What is your rebid? This was a good hand to start with, and partner's response has improved it considerably. It has 15 HCP, and the singleton is worth an extra point in support of spades, for a raw count of 18. However, that still understates the hand's value. There are three tens in suits with higher honors that all add to the playing strength of the hand. The spade support is great, the controls are excellent, and the clubs are a good source of tricks on the side. I suggest that you insist on game with a splinter bid of 4H.

If you do not evaluate the hand so highly, then you should bid 3H as a splinter raise. This “jump reverse” is not needed as natural bid. A 2H rebid would be strong and forcing. We have no use for a 3H bid as “stronger and more forcing.” Logically, it can be used as a splinter, showing a raise to three of partner's suit, with a singleton in the bid suit. Thus, it would typically show about 16-18 support points. Then bidding one higher (4H here) would show 19 to a good 20 or so support points. With more than 20 support points, you can make the jump reverse, and then bid game when partner signs off, or bid more if he jumps to game.

Partner's hand is ♠A9642 ♥A32 ♦QJ9 ♣Q4. Over a 4H bid, he would drive to slam, checking for key cards if that is part of your methods. Over a 3H bid, he would suggest a slam with a 4H cue bid, and you would drive to slam from there. If opener makes either of the sensible choices, you will reach an excellent 6S, and make seven. Had you reached 6S today, you would have received 17 matchpoints on a 17 top.

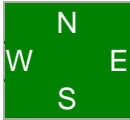
Here's the complete hand on the next page:

Board 26		
East Deals	♠ 3	
Both Vul	♥ J 8 6 4	
	♦ K 8 6 4	
	♣ 9 8 6 2	
♠ A 9 6 4 2 ♥ A 3 2 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ Q 4		♠ Q J 10 5 ♥ 5 ♦ A 10 5 ♣ A K J 10 7
	♠ K 8 7	
	♥ K Q 10 9 7	
	♦ 7 3 2	
	♣ 5 3	

Now let's look at board 27. In second seat, with no one vulnerable, you hold ♠KQ9872 ♥97 ♦KQ2 ♣J4. RHO passes, and it's up to you. The spades are strong, and there are eleven HCP. What do you bid? Your honors in spades and diamonds are nice, especially having connected honors. However, the hand has no aces, no tens, and the jack of clubs is of dubious value. All of these are negative features. Additionally, second seat preempts should tend to be more disciplined (ie. sounder) than those in first and third seat. One opponent has already announced a poor hand, so the value of obstructing the opponents has gone down, while the value of sending partner a clear message has gone up. I suggest that this hand should be opened 2S.

Partner has ♠A ♥AK865 ♦8653 ♣QT3. He has a clear pass of your 2S opening. At double dummy, the opponents can hold you to 2S. On the normal heart lead, you should win the ace, and play a low club to the jack. LHO would have to underlead his ace of diamonds at that point to hold you to two. Almost certainly he would not find that play and you would score +140 and sixteen of the seventeen available matchpoints. Only five of the 18 pairs who played this board managed to stop in 2S.

The complete hand:

Board 27		
South Deals	♠ 4 3	
None Vul	♥ Q J 3	
	♦ A 10 4	
	♣ A 9 8 5 2	
♠ K Q 9 8 7 2 ♥ 9 7 ♦ K Q 2 ♣ J 4		♠ A ♥ A K 8 6 5 ♦ 8 6 5 3 ♣ Q 10 3
	♠ J 10 6 5	
	♥ 10 4 2	
	♦ J 9 7	
	♣ K 7 6	

How did you do on these boards?