

by Steve Moese

There’s a famous teaching question: *What is the minimum HCP count for two hands combined to make 12 tricks in a small slam?* More on that later.

Sometimes you have a very special hand whose trick taking potential is not directly related to its HCP strength. Here is a hand that I played with my partner during the January 18-22, 2021 Silver linings games. This one was from Thursday’s open pairs.

Here is my partner’s hand for board 13 sitting East in second seat. Right Hand Opponent (RHO) opens 1♦ playing 2/1.

E	campbellps
♠	3
♥	AJ8643
♦	10876
♣	AJ

What do you choose to do? While you have 6 hearts and 10 HCP, you also have 2 Aces. This makes a weak jump overcall inappropriate. So, 1♥ seems right. Modern Losing Trick Count says 6.5 Losers. (7 losers is an opening hand). Left hand Opponent (LHO) makes a negative double. Partner (me) comes to life with a 4♦ bid. What could that mean? Unusual jumps especially in the opponent’s known suit are splinter bids. This shows 0/1 ♦ cards and 4 or more trumps (♥s) in a hand worth game opposite normal values in partner’s hand. (Note that an overcall can be as weak as 6 HCP, so a splinter

raise here shows great playing strength (not just pure power). Opener continues with 5♦! This has to show a good independent suit as responder doesn’t promise more than a tolerance for ♦s. Over 5♦, either 5♥ or Pass could be right. However, we are in a force (the 4♦ Splinter sets up a **forcing pass**¹ situation). Pass here would show no wasted ♦ values in East’s hand (while 5♥ would indicate a defenseless hand not interested in going to slam).

W	N	E	S
	1♦	1♥	X
4♦	5♦	P	5♠
6♥	P	P	P

Partner chose pass – a very important clue to communicate. Partner knows that we have complementary singletons (my ♦ and her ♠ shortness). This means our HCP are likely working very well. Pass is better than 5♥. South optimistically continued to 5♠!! After some thought partner (me) bids 6♥!! All pass. Pass me the oxygen bottle.

Before we get to the full reveal, let’s take a look at the auction from West’s (my) perspective. After hearing (1♦) – 1♥ –

W	SteveMoe
♠	A984
♥	KQ109752
♦	J
♣	3

(X) I review what I know. Partner has a vulnerable overcall in second seat. We are most disciplined bidding in second seat so the hand should resemble an opening bid. North and South have values roughly 18 HCP at a minimum. My hand suggests they have a potential ♦ fit, and if they do have a 4-4 spade fit they might have trouble with a 4-1 split. I almost couldn’t believe my ears. I hold 7 cards in a suit partner overcalled while Vulnerable and only 5 losers. If the opponents have a 4-4 fit, then our combined total trumps are at least **4+4 + 7+5 = 20!** A 20-trick hand means that if we can make

¹ What’s a **FORCING PASS**? Whenever we are in a game force, or have shown at least invitational values and a fit opposite an opening hand, if opponents bid freely to the 5 level, a pass by the first to bid is forcing, and shows NO WASTED VALUES IN THEIR SUIT(S). This suggests partner make the final decision (they cannot declare undoubled), and could still lead to bidding slam (Note please that the strongest possible action is passing then pulling at the 5 or 6 level). A Double instead of pass suggests wasted values and no desire to bid on in our strain. Bidding simply to 5 of our strain suggests a hand that has great offensive value but little defense (useful shortness, e.g. voids, are usually present). Balance hands with soft values are better to defend and should double. Hands with almost all A’s and K’s (transferrable values) make a forcing pass if a K above minimum opening or invitational strength. We call A’s and K’s transferrable because they work best both on offense and on defense. For a great discussion of the Forcing Pass see Robson and Segal’s book Partnership Bidding at Bridge: The Contested Auction, pp 45-52, published free on the internet at: <http://bridge.mgoetze.net/robson-segal.pdf> Don’t miss this gem – it will change how you view competitive bidding forever!

Optimum: NS 6Sx; -500
LofT: 22-23 = -1

♠ Q J 5 2
♥
♦ A K Q 5 4 3 2
♣ 7 5

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher
Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ A 9 8 4
♥ K Q 10 9 7 5 2
♦ J
♣ 3

♠ 3
♥ A J 8 6 4 3
♦ 10 8 7 6
♣ A J

10 12 10
8

♠ K 10 7 6
♥
♦ 9
♣ K Q 10 9 8 6 4 2

	♠	♥	♦	NT	
N	4	2	-	4	-
S	4	2	-	4	-
E	-	-	6	-	3
W	-	-	6	-	3

10-trick in ♥, they can make 10 tricks in their best fit. I also have 2 singletons – a very valuable holding because we eliminate many side suit losers.

I choose a descriptive and somewhat optimistic 4♦ splinter. While I don't have the HCP strength for that bid, I do have the playing power – the fancy bridge term is a HIGH Offensive/Defensive Ratio (High ODR). If I am going to bid to the 4-level in any event I should choose the most descriptive bid along the way.

When opener rebids 5♦ I surmise we do not have wasted values in Diamonds.

Partner's forcing pass confirms that inference. When RHO bids 5♠ out of the blue, I now believe we don't have any wasted ♠ values. So now the only question is whether we have 2 quick losers. If we don't, I have to double 5♠. If we do have 3 Aces then 6♥ seems unavoidable. While it seems somewhat of a guess, recall partner made a forcing pass. That suggests she is more likely to hold 2-3 Aces. I bid 6♥ and hold my breath. It goes all pass! I am reasonably sure she is going to make this hand.

13	N	♠ QJ52 ♥ ♦ AKQ5432 ♣ 75	W N E S	1♠ 1♥ X 4♦ 5♠ P 5♠ 6♥ P P P
W SteveMoe	E campbellps	♠ 3 ♥ AJ8643 ♦ 10876 ♣ AJ		
♠ A984 ♥ KQ109752 ♦ J ♣ 3	S	♠ K1076 ♥ ♦ 9 ♣ KQ1098642		
			G E	NS-0 EW:0

The Play: South led their singleton ♦ won by North's ♦A. North switched to the ♣7, won by declarer's ♣A. ♠ to the A and partner claimed on a cross ruff! There were no trumps to draw! Here is the full hand.

Notice we had a rare 13 card trump fit. The opponent's best trump fit is clubs (10 Cards) so this is an extremely rare 23 trump hand!

Looking at the traveler, we were the only pair to bid the cold slam. Interestingly two pairs played 5♥X making 6. I cannot understand this result. Making a penalty double at the 5 level

with a void is very likely wrong – the void strongly argues to bid one. Note – both defenders have a void! Whoever doubled talked their partner into believing that they held one or two heart tricks opposite the void in plain sight. When I hold a void in a competitive 5-level decision, I rarely pass unless I know for certain partner has a strong balanced hand.

Result	EW Points	Score
1/18	0.90	64.58%
6♥E=	1430	100.00%
5♥xE+1	1050	81.25%
5♥xE+1	1050	81.25%
5♥W+1	680	50.00%
5♥E+1	680	50.00%
5♥E+1	680	50.00%
6♠xN-2	500	25.00%
5♦N-1	100	6.25%
5♠N-1	100	6.25%

Double Dummy we find that 6♥ is best EW, but a sacrifice in either ♠ or ♦ by NS is par for the hand

These hands are what I enjoy most about the game of bridge. No, it's not about the size of the score so much as it is about communicating well and thinking through what the evidence says leads to the best result. Sometimes we get these opportunities right, sometimes we get them wrong.

If I can draw an analogy to golf, I am a very high handicap player. I rarely enjoy my golf score and my goals are modest. However, I always remember that one drive for 275 yards down the middle of the fairway, or a single iron shot that reaches the green in 2 only 6 feet from the hole. Those special moments are what keeps me coming back to play.

This hand is one of those special moments, a real gem. I hope you have your special moments too. See you at the tables.

TEACHING ANSWER:

	♠ A109876 ♥ -- ♦ -- ♣ 10987654	
♠ K ♥ AK10986 ♦ AJ2 ♣ KJ2	N W E S	♠ Q ♥ QJ75432 ♦ KQ ♣ AQ3
	♠ J5432 ♥ -- ♦ 109876543 ♣ --	
Hand Evaluation	NORTH HCP: 4 Trumps: 6 MLTC: 4.5 QT: 1	<i>HCP=High Card Points</i> <i>QT = Quick Tricks</i>
WEST HCP:19 Trumps: 6 MLTC: 5 QT: 3.5		EAST HCP: 16 Trumps: 7 MLTC: 5 QT: 2.5
	SOUTH HCP: 1 Trumps: 5 MLTC: 6 QT: 0	<i>MLTC=Modern Losing Trick Count</i>

If you follow the example from the hand above and think about working HCP a bit, you can build the hand yourself. First, we recognize that if we hold the Ace of trumps, then give a single K and single Queen to the opponents, we can construct a 6-5 trump fit with no losers. Then we can imagine that two voids and honorless length in different side suits will allow 1) a cross ruff to score trumps singly, and 2) one of the long side suits to set up for extra tricks. Here is a possible construction (have fun on your own working out another with only 5 HCPs).

Bidding: What might the auction look like? Let's assume West deals and uses 2/1 Game Force.

W	N	E	S
1♥	3♠	4N	7♠
X	XX *	All Pass	

*=Hey, my problem, my solution! Of course, there's no redouble in real life. But have you bid and made 7♠ XX yet? Now's the time! 🤔

Play: East will likely lead a red suit, but it doesn't matter. North ruffs in hand and plays the ♠ a great the fall thereon. Now a cross ruff begins, with declarer watching to see which minor suit sets up length winners.

Post Mortem: Notice that this hand is a double SLAM swing- both sides can make slam but neither side can legitimately make a grand slam.

The lesson? HCP are most valuable in our long suits and combined length. Also, with long trumps, a void can cancel the power of opponent's top tricks in that suit, setting up later winners. Anytime you KNOW you have complementary shortness and substantial trump length, bid 1 (or 2) more!

