

You

♠KQJ954

♥

♦KJ97542

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Just to remind you of your student days, this puzzle will be in the form of an essay question.

I actually encountered the hand pictured above in a recent BBO session. The question is, what is the best opening bid for this hand? You should consider pass, 1/2/3/4 spades, and some number of diamonds. Consider how your answer might change depending on the vulnerability (neither, both, your side vul, opps vul).

Please submit your answer in the form of an essay, stating what bids you considered and your reasoning for choosing (or not choosing) them. There is no right answer. I hope to get some interesting responses to this question, and quote them in my answer to this puzzle. (If you wish to submit an answer, but not be quoted, that is fine as well; just indicate that in your email.) So this is your chance for your 15 minutes of fame as a BIL Puzzle Solver!

Send your answers to me: bilpuzzles@bridgesights.com

The Answer

Thanks to all of you who sent in your thoughtful responses. There is no right answer. I will present the answers I received, and give my opinion at the end.

From 1eyedjack

For me the choice is between Pass and 1D.

It will snow in hell before this hand gets passed out. Fear of passing for fear of its being passed out is not a rational fear. Fear of passing for fear that partner will never place you with such strength IS a rational fear but only from lack of partnership understanding. If you agree beforehand that pass might contain such a hand the fear is ill founded, and opening 1-suit is not much better from that standpoint.

I do not expect Pass to be a popular choice among a panel of experts. I have however had good success with the "check and raise" to use a poker term out of context. When the opponents open as expected I usually have available the mechanism to show an extreme 2 suiter, when there are fewer options to get that aspect across if I open the bidding, otherwise than bidding my second suit several times (which had also better be forcing if below game). If I initially pass and subsequently show a hand that appears willing to contest the auction to just about any level, a partner with an intellect above that of a Zabriskian Fontema (a particularly dull life form from E E "Doc" Smith's lensman series) should be alert to the reasoning and subsequent potential.

As well as not fearing a "pass out" neither do I fear that the opponents will outbid me if I open 1D. I have the boss suit and I have enough of them that I would be quite happy to introduce it for the first time if needs be at the 5 level. So I have no particular reason to conceal which is my longest suit. At IMP scoring, at least, I am not particularly bothered if I end in a Diamond game instead of a fractionally higher scoring Spade game. Likewise, at the slam level minor v major considerations are discounted (at IMP). I might have reservations at MP scoring. I do not see the vulnerability particularly affecting my decision, at least not nearly as much as the scoring format.

On balance I favour a 1D opener of the two, but I cannot cogently explain why, beyond gut feel. Even the "check and raise" strategy will not get quite this level of power across, and passing leaves me slightly ill prepared if partner opens the bidding (in my void) rather than the opponents.

Nice hand.

From salty warren

How do we bid this monstrosity? Let's see. 10 high card points (HCP). Two voids, though, so the hand is much stronger than that. Opposite an average unhelpful partner (xx in spades, xx in diamonds), I can reasonably expect to lose 1 spade and 1-2 diamonds, depending on split and who holds the missing diamond honours. Sure, I could lose more if things break poorly, but on average I don't have all that many losers in my hand.

Two-suiters are notoriously hard to bid. The two conventions I know for showing a 2-suited hand, Michael's Cuebid and Unusual 2NT, both require the opponents to bid first. This leads to the notion that my distribution may be easiest to describe if I start with a pass. The drawback may be that partner will never believe that I'm much more than 5-5 in my two suits. Also, will partner believe that I'm this strong?

I play a version of these two conventions known as Minimax - I only use the conventions if I'm OUTSIDE 12-16HCP. I really don't have a strong opinion on how to assess the true HCP value of my hand, but the danger of trying to use Michael's or Unusual after passing the first round, partner will not believe that my hand could possibly be worth much more than an 11 point 5/5 hand. My hand is, in my opinion, much stronger than this.

Ergo, I won't be passing.

I have three styles of opening bids to me - normal (i.e. 1D, 1S), preemptive (opening a weak 2+D or weak 2+S, or more), or forcing (strong 2C). A forcing bid seems obviously out, so the question is whether to open normally or preemptively.

With a 6+ card suit and less than opening points, it is usually preferable to open preemptively. The rationale is that someone else has a strong hand, and is long in my short suits. Two thirds of the time (assuming I'm the dealer), it's going to be an opponent.

However, I've often heard that it is unwise to open a preemptive bid with a 4 card side major (i.e. xxxx x xxxxx xx). The problem with doing so is that preemptive bids usually set trump to be your suit, and the danger of missing out on an 8-card major fit is just too great. The danger with this hand is that, if I preempt in one suit, I may guess wrong and fit much better with partner in the other suit. This would mean either missing a fit with my 7 card suit, or missing a major suit fit.

Ultimately, I'm going to want to bid both my suits. This isn't always possible with 2-suited hands, but seems inevitable here. I expect to have a chance at the 4 level if partner has nothing useful, so I shouldn't be afraid of bidding more than once.

I have no idea what bidding a new suit after I've opened with a preempt means, and I'm betting most of my partners don't either. Partner may get the idea that I'm 6-5 or better, which isn't too far off, but partner may also come up with some other interpretation. I hate misunderstandings, and bidding bids that even I don't know what they mean is bound to lead to strife.

Besides, I think I have too much trick taking ability to open with a preemptive bid. In general, every successive bid you make should refine your previous bids. This means you gradually build up a picture of your hand. If I start with a 2-level bid, partner will never believe I can take so many tricks on my own. Also, if I start too high, I'll be at or past game and still not sure where I should be.

Ergo, I think I'll opt for a 1-level open.

There's probably something to be said for opening spades. If partner can't offer the AS, AD or QD, in other words, if slam is out of reach, 4 spades may be the best place to play, even though my diamonds are longer. At matchpoints, if both 5D and 4S are making (which would be reasonable-ish if partner has 2 of each suit, and one of my 3 missing cards), 4S rates to be a clear winner.

Still, I hate lying like that. Diamonds are a seven card suit, and if partner has Axx or xxxx or better, diamonds may be clearly the best place to play. In fact, due to my 7th diamond, I'm betting that diamonds are more likely to be playable in slam than spades.

If I open 1 diamond, which I'm inclined to do, the problem will be my rebid. I expect a lot of bidding before I bid again - there are 13 clubs, 13 hearts and 30 points unaccounted for. The bidding will likely be lively.

If I try to bid spades twice, that should show that I have at least 5+ spades, and by inference 6+ diamonds. However, I see two problems with this idea. The first is that, because of the crazy distribution, I might not get time to bid spades twice. Secondly, doing so might conceivably convince partner I have a 17+ point hand and want to drive to slam based on having enough points to bid 3 times AND distribution. That doesn't sound like my hand.

Ergo, I think I'll be aiming to bid a large number of spades next round, if at all possible. Ideally, I'd like to jump in spades, to show length in spades. The problem is that the following sequence:

1D (2C) 2H (3C)

4S

might be taken to be splinter. Without drawing up every single possibility, my fear is that in order to jump high enough in spades to be showing long spades, I may need to jump to 5S. This means partner would have to bid 6D to show preference to my diamonds. I'm not sure I'm strong enough to push quite this high.

(This is actually, I think, another argument in support of starting 1S. It's possible that a jump to 5D is probably less likely to end up being taken as a splinter bid. It also allows partner to correct to spades without going to the 6 level.)

Another problem that opening at the one level could bring is if partner is loaded with high card points in clubs and/or hearts. He may entertain thoughts of a slam in one of his suits, or notrump. The problem is that we actually offer very little in support of these contracts. We can not rough clubs or hearts if the other is trump, and our hand is VERY hard to lead to in notrump if partner does not have the AS or AD.

Still, with even one of the two missing aces, our hand isn't dead weight. Spades, especially may be a place for partner to throw his losers. All he really needs is Ax spades to be in business.

Enough deliberating. I need to bid before I have the director called on me.

I will open 1 diamond. Ideally, I would like my second bid to be 4 spades. If this is not a splinter bid, then I think I've done as well as I can describing my hand - two suits that can stand on their own at the game level, with no help from partner.

If the bidding continues such that a 4 spade rebid from me would be splinter, my choice may depend on vulnerability. At favourable vulnerability, if opponents are bidding clubs or hearts, I may chance a 5 spades. We may end up in an unmakeable 6 diamond contract, but did anyone ever expect this hand to be easy? Vulnerable, I would be tempted to pass my second bid, and try to bid spades the third time around. This might be a little optimistic of me (opponents may be at the 6 level by then, who knows?), but again, it feels like the best chance I have of describing my hand.

From rpakker

Curious hand. Opening depends on my partnerships-agreements. If we have multi-2 D on our system card I would have 2 H and 2 S free for strong openings. And 2 ? would have been my choice, because since this hand has 3.5 LTC-losers, I think it is strong. Really on the verge of opening with 2 ? . But this would cause some distress where ever I would bid that with this hand. And in a tournament surely someone would call for the director. I would not risk that. (Even not if the ? K was ? A?.. have to think about that..)

If your 2 S opening is weak with 6 card suit.. then it describes your spades nicely except that the rest of your hand is all but weak.. 2 S tends to describe a one suited hand.. this is strong 2 suiter.

If your 2 S means a weak hand with 5+ spades and 4+ in a minor then this bid is quite good describing your hand.. apart from insinuating you have a weak hand.

I never preempt in a minor with a 4+ card major beside it. So even if the the spades had been T98742 no 3 D opening.

Then bid pass? And let my dear opponents reach 4 H ? No thank you; 6 D and 6 S are imaginable with various rather minimal hands with partner.

So trouble everywhere.

This is exactly the type of hand for what is written on my system-card: Opening 1 C / D / H / S means 10+ HCP.

I pretend to not seeing I have 7 D 's and open 1 S . If partner bids 2 C , I bid 3 D indicating strength.. (ok..

I know I have no 16+ HCP.. but who does count HCP afterwards if 12 tricks are coming home?)
If partner bids 2 H (implying 5 H 's and no biddable C 's or D 's) I bid 3 D . (reverse and forcing for one round?).

And if the beloved opponents interfere?.. Do not really know.. depends to much on what partnerships doubles and redoubles mean. Most of the time only take-out-double seems to be described. Sometimes negative double.

So if the bidding was 1 S -(X)-2 C -(2 H) then surely opponents would have found there H 's fit.
I would now bid 4 D .. and leave it to partner to bid 4 S or 5 D ..

Thank you for the nice hand.

From Brandon

I would open 1 Diamond, then rebid 4 Spades.
I think pard will deduce that diamonds are longer than Spades, and that I have a powerful 2 suiter
Spades outranks hearts, so even if the opps jump the bidding and pard passes, I can probably bid 4
Spades on my second round

Missing 2 aces I would not want to go higher, and with this kind of distribution, the opps may get burned if they go higher.

They may encounter a 5-0 heart split. Or maybe I can double dummies Club bid (Lightner double).

While this could make a grand with 2 pointed aces and the Dime Q, and make a small with 2 of those 3, it could just as easily be down (maybe a ruff of the 2nd suit).

I'll forgo the risky slam and take the sure game

Steve Robinson would surely open 1 Spade, as would others. I don't agree

From Jay

With Favourable Vulnerability,

I will certainly look for a game. I would open 1S -- if the partner supports my bid with a limit raise then a jump to game in spades should be okay.

If partner responds with 1NT or Hearts or Clubs then I would rebid 3 D and pass a 3 S response from P.
The objective is without support from Partner stop at 3 D or 3 S

But with support in either of the suit there is a distinct possibility of game (or more depending on strength of Partner's hand) in the supported suit.

If Opps are vulnerable

I would open with a pre-emptive 2 S or 3 D and try and keep opps out of a contract by raising as needed and may even look for a game as under not vulnerable option.

If we are VUL or both are vulnerable

I would open with a pre-emptive 3 D and will only proceed further based on partner's bid.

Look forward to your analysis

From j.keenan

With 10hcps and 3 length pts in diamonds and 2 length pts in spades, along with two voids and only 3

losers....I would open 1diamond and reverse to spades on my next bid. I think this sequence would give my partner a clear picture of my hand.

From Kerrie

I would open one diamond then bid and repeat spades to 4or 5 level no matter what vulnerability. I know some people play canapé they may open 1s

Hondo's Opinion

Since there are no scientific ways to bid this hand, I decided tactical considerations were the most important. By this I mean what bid or sequence of bids is likely to make it as difficult as possible for the opponents and make it as easy as possible for our side.

That is why I did not even consider a pass. It is likely by the time the auction gets around to me again, the bidding will be at the 3 or 4 level, the opponents will have been able to exchange a lot of information, and our side will have not exchanged any information.

I considered opening 4S. This could work out well (or badly) and leaves the opponents little room to explore. However, I rejected that action as too unilateral. I also rejected all non-game level preempts (2S, 3D, and 3S) as bad tactics – I felt I needed to take a stand on this hand, either deciding to preempt at as high a level as possible or just open the bidding.

I decided that opening 1S was best. When the bidding gets back to me, I will bid diamonds at whatever level is required (assuming the opponents have not bid diamonds and partner has not raised spades). Hopefully, this will give partner as best a picture of my hand as possible so we can make a reasonable decision as to whether to pass, double, or bid on. The reason I chose to bid spades first and then diamonds is that I felt it would give partner a better picture of how good my spades were. If I bid diamonds first, partner might not think my spades were nearly as good as they are.