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Dear Eric,
This deal came up in a recent tournament.
Matchpoints, North-South vulnerable:

| | | | |
|-------------|----------|--------------|-------------|
| <i>West</i> | | <i>East</i> | |
| ♠ 6543 | | ♠ A | |
| ♥ Q2 | | ♥ J10765 | |
| ♦ AJ94 | | ♦ Q1063 | |
| ♣ K84 | | ♣ A72 | |
| <i>West</i> | | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> |
| | | | 1♥ |
| | | | 1♠ |
| Dbl | 2♠ | 3♦ | 3♠ |
| 5♦ | All Pass | | |

The contract wasn't down off the top, but as the cards lay, it had no play.

Opener suggested West bid 4♦ instead of game. West suggested East might pass, with a **borderline** opener and points in his short suits, rather than bid 3♦ freely. East-West were not playing "good-bad 2NT." Responder said that even with the 11-point hand, if the ♠A were the ♥A, game is on one out of two finesses.

Who do you think is right on this one? Is the East hand an opener? Should he rebid 3♦? Is West justified in committing to game once he does?

Bill Treble, Winnipeg MB

Our Readers Ask

This is about style, not dogma or personal opinion. Most would open and I'm not inclined to argue with anyone's choice in this area. Against passing is the likelihood that getting your fifth heart into the game will often be difficult, and you do have four controls with combining 10s. Surely, every good partnership would have an opinion on whether this hand should be opened.

Not playing good-bad 2NT (or a variation) is another partnership choice. (Ed. note: *Playing the treatment called "good-bad 2NT," opener — in a competitive sequence such as the one in question — can differentiate between very good hands with game interest and those that just wish to compete. With good hands, opener can bid his second suit directly at the three level. With a bad hand like the one in the example, opener rebids 2NT first to warn responder that opener simply wishes to compete to the three level. Responder is usually required to rebid a temporizing 3♣ after which opener either passes — if that's his suit — or bids 3♦ or even rebids his own suit. Responder then knows which type of hand opener is competing with.*) I'd consider this decision very important, and would like to get my side to 3♦ without overstating my hand, but without this gadget available, East is more hopeful than confident that 3♦ will not get him overboard.

Note that the West hand is not a classic negative double, as it lacks primary support for one of the two unbid suits. When East thinks fondly of competing in diamonds, it's because he revalues his hand in support of diamonds, but we can see that this is a false premise, because West feels he is strong enough to double with imperfect support for the minors, intending

to convert clubs to hearts. Fair enough, considered in isolation, but as East is affected by West's style, it's a partnership issue that needs discussion.

We can chalk this up to East and West simply not being on the same page, but if they're serious about improving their partnership, they need to adopt a different attitude — one that allows them to avoid blame and focus on clearing up the uncertainty. It's easy to see why both partners bid as they did, and easy to see that they have not done enough work on an area of competitive bidding that is bread and butter. One answer is to adopt a version of good-bad 2NT so East can bid 3♦ in two different ways — one showing a hand like this on the other a better one. A different solution is to have East pass over 2♠ and hope West can reopen, and bid 3♦ only with a better hand. A third solution is to bid 3♦ with this hand, but double or bid 4♦ with a better one.

As any of these treatments is perfectly playable, all that matters is coming to an agreement and living with it. Isn't it always like that?

New youngest LM

Adam Kaplan of New Port Richey FL became ACBL's youngest Life Master March 2 when he and Jim Somma, also of New Port Richey, won a nine-table charity game at the St. George Duplicate Bridge Club in Port Richey. Kaplan earned his gold card at the age of 10 years and 43 days, eclipsing the record held for more than a decade by Dan Hirschman of Ann Arbor MI. Full details will be published in the May issue.