

Our Readers Ask



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Dear Eric,
I held as West
♠AK105 ♥AQ64 ♦85 ♣754
and opened 1NT (12–14 HCP).
The auction continued (opponents
silent):

West	East
1NT	2♦ ⁽¹⁾
2♥	3♦
3♠	

(1) Transfer.

Now what would 5♣ by responder show? I think that since 4♣ would be a cuebid, 5♣ must be a singleton. Am I crazy? Partner's hand:

♠J62 ♥KJ983 ♦AKQ2 ♣9.

Partner didn't actually bid 5♣ but 4♥ instead, and we missed the slam. Is there any other way to get there from here?

Russell Gowen

For starters, you still needed the spade finesse, even with the perfect fit, so it's no big deal either way. Look at it the other way: if you had reached 6♥ with your combined 27 HCP and the spade finesse had lost, you would have achieved a very poor result.

A few things:

1. Over 3♦, your 3♠ in traditional usage shows values in spades, perhaps with a diamond fit, looking first for the best game. To set hearts as trumps, bid 3♥ (3♦ was game forcing).
2. In your methods, your idea about 5♣ is eminently sensible, although many would treat 5♣ as a void rather than a singleton and some would define it as Exclusion Blackwood (assuming partnership agreement about which suit was trump).

Over 3♥ you could adopt something I call the shortness rule: when a player shows nine or more cards in two suits and a fit of eight or

more cards is confirmed in a game-forcing auction, that player's next bid in a new suit shows shortness. With no shortness, bid 3NT/4NT/old suit to show a 5–4–2–2 pattern. Here, using the shortness rule, the bidding might go:

West	East
1NT	2♦
2♥	3♦
3♥	4♣
4♠	5♦
5♥/6♥	

with the final bid being a matter of judgment by opener.

The shortness rule has many applications:

- Notrump auctions involving transfers and second suits after a fit is located, e.g., 2NT–3♦; 3♥–4♣; 4♥–5♦ shows diamond shortness: Similarly, 4♠ would show spade shortness.
- Smolen sequences after a fit is located, e.g., 1NT–2♣; 2♦–3♥; 3♠–4♣ or 4♦ shows shortness in the minor bid.
- Fit-showing jumps, where the jumper's next bid in a new suit shows shortness. For example, Pass–1♠; 3♦–3♥; 4♣ or 4♥ would show shortness.
- After a game-forcing 2/1 response, a new-suit rebid and two-level support, e.g., 1♠–2♣; 2♦–2♠; 3♣ and 3♥ both show shortness.
- After immediate two-suit agreement, e.g., 1♠–2♦; 3♦–3♠; 4♣ and 4♥ both show shortness.

This agreement applies only when a genuine fit is assured. With no fit or if another strain might be better (as in reverse and jump shift auctions) or if the auction is not game forcing, opener shows length (fragment) instead. □

West hands for May's Bidding Box

Bid these hands with a partner.
The East hands are on page 59.
Scores appear on page 29.

1. North deals. No one vulnerable. North opens 1♠. South bids 2♠ if possible.
♠— ♥J93 ♦K9743 ♣A10986
2. East deals. N–S vulnerable.
♠Q4 ♥AK875 ♦AJ87 ♣K9
3. South deals. E–W vulnerable.
♠7642 ♥J1073 ♦7 ♣K862
4. West deals. Both vulnerable.
♠A10654 ♥96 ♦AJ82 ♣K8
5. North deals. E–W vulnerable. North opens 3♣. South bids 4♣ if possible.
♠KQ103 ♥Q94 ♦AK1086 ♣3
6. East deals. No one vulnerable.
♠A63 ♥94 ♦AQJ83 ♣K62
7. South deals. N–S vulnerable.
♠AK72 ♥KQJ5 ♦Q ♣AKQJ
8. West deals. Both vulnerable.
♠K8652 ♥J2 ♦J103 ♣AKQ