

Curly Cue -- Problem

Board 5
West Deals
E-W Vul



♠ —
♥ K 10 6 5
♦ J 8 7 4
♣ 9 8 7 3 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Dbl	1 ♠	?

When partner doubles one of a minor and RHO bids a major suit, we play curly cue: both cue-bids show invitational strength or better. Here's the curl: the minor cue-bid shows the major, and the major shows the minor.

What would you do as South seat, playing standard methods, and playing curly cue?

Board 5
West Deals
E-W Vul

Curly Cue -- Solution

		♠ A K 6 2	
		♥ A Q 9 2	
		♦ A Q 6 5	
		♣ 5	
♠ Q 7 4 3			♠ J 10 9 8 5
♥ J			♥ 8 7 4 3
♦ K 9 3 2			♦ 10
♣ A Q 10 6			♣ K J 4
		♠ —	
		♥ K 10 6 5	
		♦ J 8 7 4	
		♣ 9 8 7 3 2	

NS 4♥; NS 3N; NS 4♦; NS 2♣; EW 1♠; Par +420: NS 4♥=

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♣	Dbl	1 ♠	Pass
2 ♠	All pass		

Playing standard methods, bidding 2♥ would be aggressive. Not fully understanding the implications of curly cue, I passed as South. Playing curly cue, my other suit bids are according to the law of total tricks, with only a nod toward high card points.

My correct action was 2♥ (or an aggressive 3♥). Had I done either, our heart game would have been reached. Despite all those points, partner passed 2♠, thinking I had no suit to bid.

After a standard pass, North can double 2♠, hoping South can bid a red suit. This is not as safe as getting a curly-cue 2♥ advance.

Singleton -- Problem

Board 13

West Deals

Both Vul



♠ 3
♥ 9 5 3
♦ Q 8 7 3
♣ Q J 9 7 6

NS 6♦; NS 6♣; NS 1N; EW 1♠; NS 1♥; Par +1370: NS 6♣=; NS 6♦=

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 NT	Pass	?

Partner has shown 22 to 24 HCP in a balanced hand. Our 2 NT opening bid system applies. The only features we might use here are:

1. Bid 3 NT. With 26 to 28 combined HCP, partner will want to be in game.
2. Bid 3 ♠, a relay to 3 NT. We can then bid 4 ♠, showing both minors and short spades. If partner bids 4 NT, showing that spades are bottled up -- plus heart values -- we can pass.

Playing matchpoint pairs, what's your choice?

Board 13
West Deals
Both Vul

Singleton -- Solution

		♠ J 6 4	
		♥ A K	
		♦ A K J 2	
		♣ A K 4 2	
♠ 8 5 2			♠ A K Q 10 9 7
♥ Q 10 8 7 4 2			♥ J 6
♦ 9 6 5			♦ 10 4
♣ 8			♣ 10 5 3
		♠ 3	
		♥ 9 5 3	
		♦ Q 8 7 3	
		♣ Q J 9 7 6	

NS 6♦; NS 6♣; NS 1N; EW 1♠; NS 1♥; Par +1370: NS 6♣=; NS 6♦=			
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 NT	Pass	?

Not thinking my minor suits were worth exceptional handling -- slam seems unlikely -- I bid a pedestrian 3 NT. East slowly, deliberately and with great care, cashed six spades, down two. So goes life. 3 NT is a reasonable bid. It does not tell the opponents about any suit and does not imply slam interest. What are the chances that East will have a solid suit spade suit, and yet have remained silent. Swap the ♠ 8 and ♠ K; the same six tricks are available; but East, sitting behind the big hand, may lead something else.

Suppose we bid 3 ♠, partner relays to 3 NT, and we bid 4 ♠ showing shortness. We may choke on our tonsils when partner jumps to 6 ♦ (or bids 5 ♠, asking us to pick), even though slam should be made -- this time -- with a perfect fit. We might also get to an inferior slam when partner holds:

♠ A J 6 ♥ A K ♦ A 10 4 2 ♣ A K 10 9

If partner has a single spade stopper, East may not lead a spade against 3 NT -- and if East does, 3 NT may still be the best game. Highlighting spades basically commits us to five of a minor unless partner has a double spade stopper.

This situation is worth a simulation, but I'll have to leave that to the talented reader, at least for now.

Note that after a 1 NT opening, we can safely explore such a situation below 3 NT, for example:

♠ J 6 4 ♥ A 5 ♦ A J 4 2 ♣ A K 10 9

♠ 3 ♥ K 5 3 ♦ K Q 8 3 ♣ Q J 9 7 6

To show one spade, three hearts and 5-4 minors either way, in this partnership I would jump to 3 ♠. This lets partner declare a 4-3 heart fit, if propitious -- and lets the next opponent double for nefarious purposes. In other partnerships, we jump in the 3-card fragment.

Spades over Hearts -- Problem

Board 14

North Deals

None Vul



♠ Q 6 4 2

♥ A 7

♦ K 10 8 3

♣ K 10 3

West

North

East

South

1 ♥

Pass

?

Join me as South for this deal at matchpoint pairs. Is this hand worth forcing to game? What would you respond?

Board 14
North Deals
None Vul

Spades over Hearts -- Solution

		♠ A K 10 7	
		♥ K 10 8 6 4 3	
		♦ A 9	
		♣ A	
♠ J 5			♠ 9 8 3
♥ 9 2			♥ Q J 5
♦ 7 6 5 2			♦ Q J 4
♣ 9 8 7 5 2			♣ Q J 6 4
		♠ Q 6 4 2	
		♥ A 7	
		♦ K 10 8 3	
		♣ K 10 3	

NS 7♠; NS 6N; NS 6♥; NS 5♦; NS 3♣; Par +1510: NS 7♠=

West	North	East	South
	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠ ¹	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	3 NT ²	Pass	4 NT ³
Pass	5 ♣ ⁴	Pass	5 NT ⁵
Pass	6 ♠	All pass	

1. 4+ spades.
2. Serious slam interest. (Should provide a heart control.)
3. RKB spades (all suits are controlled).
4. 1 or 4 keycards (1430 responses).
5. We have them all. Any kings?

Let's look at the reasonable responses before we make the game-force decision:

1 ♠ -- I feel strongly that this bid should promise five spades, if we plan to force to game. I also like to play that this response promises Q-10-x-x, any five, or better, when not forcing to game. This requirement provides no advantage, and a potential disadvantage, unless we have agreed it with partner -- we had not.

1 NT -- This would be the bid if this hand is not worth a game force, and we had a Q-10-x-x agreement.

2 ♦ -- This bid forces to game. Partner is not particularly into light openings, so 2 ♦ makes sense. Furthermore, we have two useful-looking tens and our diamond suit contains a control (ace or king). This last feature is important, in case partner goes slamming. All systems go: 2 ♦ it is.

Partner's first responsibility is to bid 2 ♠, holding four of them. This is our last chance to find a 4-4 spade fit, and does not show extra values.

Over 5 NT, North would bid a grand slam holding ♥ K-Q-x-x-x-x, a source of tricks. Lacking the queen, the partnership could have a third-round loser. Since South will already be playing North for the ♥ K; it's dangerous to bid 5 ♥, because South should read that as K-Q-x-x-x. (If South had the ♥ Q, we'd be in a grand already.)

South knows the hearts can be ruffed good, but it might take two ruffs (assuming North has five). Our scrawny spade spots mean that an unfavorable split in either major could sink a grand slam. 6 ♠ is a fine contract. We are planning to ruff, and having all the keycards may allow us to make an overtrick, so we don't consider 6 NT.

Defending 3 NT -- Problem

Board 20
East Deals
Both Vul

			♠ —
			♥ Q J 9 6 5 4
			♦ K Q 9 8 7 3
			♣ 2
♠ 6 4			
♥ A K 8 3			
♦ 10 6 2			
♣ K 10 8 7			
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	2 ♠ ¹
Pass	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
3 NT	All pass		
1. Good suit (vulnerable).			
3 NT by West			



East's vulnerable weak two bid promises a good suit: two of the top three honors or A-J-10-x-x-x. West makes the only sensible opening lead, ♠ 6.

Partner wins the ♠ K, declarer following with the ♠ 2. Partner shifts to the ♣ 6, covered by the ♣ Q.

Who has the ♠ Q? The ♠ A? The ♦ A?

Plan the defense for West.

Board 20
 East Deals
 Both Vul

Defending 3 NT -- Solution

	♠ —	
	♥ Q J 9 6 5 4	
	♦ K Q 9 8 7 3	
	♣ 2	
♠ 6 4		♠ A K 10 9 7 5
♥ A K 8 3		♥ 10 2
♦ 10 6 2		♦ 4
♣ K 10 8 7		♣ 6 5 4 3
	♠ Q J 8 3 2	
	♥ 7	
	♦ A J 5	
	♣ A Q J 9	

NS 4♥; NS 5♦; NS 2N; EW 2♠; EW 1♣; Par +600: NS 5♦=

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	2 ♠ ¹
Pass	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
3 NT	All pass		

1. Good suit (vulnerable).
 3 NT by West

Partner wins the the ♠ K, declarer following with the ♠ 2. Partner shifts to the ♣ 6, covered by the ♣ Q.

Partner's play of the ♠ K denied the ♠ Q, so declarer has it. Partner's good suit must contain the ♠ A. Therefore, declarer has the ♦ A and six tricks ready to run. For the time being, the major suits are safe, but if declarer comes up with three club tricks, or two clubs and some other trick, 3 NT will be made.

Well, why are we fooling around? Take the ♣ K, the ♥ A-K and lead the ♠ 4 for one down -- next deal.

The ♣ 6 is a high spot, saying, don't return this suit. If we do, that's the contract on a platter. If we lead another spade, partner will probably lead another club, playing us for an original holding of ♣ A-K-10-x. Making four.

Who Has the Queen? -- Problem

Board 8

West Deals

None Vul

♠ Q 10 5
♥ A K J 5 3
♦ K J
♣ 10 7 4



♠ A 4
♥ 6
♦ A 10 9 8 7 6
♣ A K Q 3

6 ♦ by South

Lead: ♣ 6

After a convoluted auction with silent opponents, we declare a diamond slam. On the opening lead of the ♣ 6, we try the ♣ 10 from dummy, but it's covered by the jack. Our best chance to assure the contract may be to pick up the queen of trump.

What would be your plan?

Board 8

West Deals

None Vul

Who Has the Queen?

♠ K J 8 6 3		♠ Q 10 5
♥ Q 9 8 4		♥ A K J 5 3
♦ Q 4 2		♦ K J
♣ 6		♣ 10 7 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
		♠ 9 7 2
		♥ 10 7 2
		♦ 5 3
		♣ J 9 8 5 2
		♠ A 4
		♥ 6
		♦ A 10 9 8 7 6
		♣ A K Q 3

NS 7N; NS 7♦; S 6♥; N 5♥; NS 5♣; NS 3♠; Par +1520: NS 7N=

6♦ by South

Lead: ♣ 6

The ♣ 6 lead looks like a singleton or doubleton. That means the best shot in trumps is to lead a trump to the jack at trick two. When this wins, cash the ♦ K, lead to the ♠ A, and draw the last trump. We play safe, dumping a spade on a heart and losing a club at the end.

Declarer feared a club ruff if East won the ♦ Q, and so rose with the ♦ K at trick two, finessing on the way back. When this loses, declarer needs to pitch *two* cards on the hearts, a spade and a club -- clubs are not splitting, remember? The correct play is to finesse in hearts. If it loses, as the great Eddie Kantar used to say, "it only hurts for a little while."

If West does not return a heart, we can gain an edge by running off all our winners, coming down to

♠ - ♥ A K J ♦ - ♣ -

♠ 4 ♥ 6 ♦ - ♣ 3

If East seems to be protecting hearts and still protects clubs, we can drop the ♥ Q.

This is a no-risk squeeze. If we get this one wrong, no matter how, we are three down -- no big deal, since one down will be a horrible score.

Four Spades & Five Hearts -- Problem

Board 26

West Deals

Both Vul



♠ Q 9 8 3
 ♥ A 9 4 3 2
 ♦ Q 8
 ♣ 9 4

NS 4♥; NS 3N; NS 3♠; NS 3♦; NS 1♣; Par +620: NS 4♥=

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 NT ¹	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	?

1. 15 to 18 HCP on the convention card.

This is the rule that I play by, whenever our 1 NT opening systems are in effect:

Responder's transfer into a major suit denies holding four cards in the other major.

After a transfer, responder's subsequent bid of the other major shows *five* cards: invitational at 2 ♠, or forcing to game at 3 ♥. This works much better for 5-5 hands than the clunky bids showing 5-5 at the three level that experts gave up long ago.

Therefore, South bids 2 ♣, Stayman. North, of course, has no 4-card major and bids 2 ♦. South's specific shape and strength is a significant problem in our 1 NT system. Here are the options:

2 ♥ starts a crawl, showing a bad hand with 4-4 majors (or rarely 3=4=1=5). Opener must pass with three hearts.

2 ♠ shows an invitational hand with *five* spades. Because we play that a 2 ♠ response is a *size ask*, our Stayman bid promises a major. Accordingly, we don't bid a 4-card spade suit here.

2 NT is a natural invitation, giving up on hearts.

3 ♠ would be Smolen, promising five hearts and four spades (great!) and forcing to game (not so great).

What would you do?

Four Spades & Five Hearts -- Solution

Board 26

West Deals

Both Vul

		♠ K 7 5	
		♥ K Q J	
		♦ A K 6 2	
		♣ Q 8 7	
♠ A 10 4 2			♠ J 6
♥ 10 6			♥ 8 7 5
♦ J 4 3			♦ 10 9 7 5
♣ A K 6 2			♣ J 10 5 3
		♠ Q 9 8 3	
		♥ A 9 4 3 2	
		♦ Q 8	
		♣ 9 4	

NS 4♥; NS 3N; NS 3♠; NS 3♦; NS 1♣; Par +620: NS 4♥=

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	1 NT ¹	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	?

1. 15 to 18 HCP on the convention card.

I chose to go low with 2♥, which was not a success. In any range, a lower point count is more likely than a higher one, and my partner likes to overcall 1 NT on a decent 14. I would expect partner to hold 14 to 15 HCP as much as half the time, and 16 HCP another 20%. We have 25 combined HCP far less than half the time.

However, knowing where most of the cards are must be worth a point or two. The "lucky" club position on this hand is almost a certainty. If we need to elope with a spade, we know how to do that. While 2 NT would have been an absurd bid over a 1 NT *opening bid*, it makes sense here.