

♠♥♦♣ GETTING TO SLAM ON A PASS ♠♥♦♣

You have dealt yourself this 18 HCP hand and open 1♥. West passes and partner responds 2♣. You are playing 2/1 game forcing, which means that a response at the 2-level shows an opening strength hand. Therefore, you are both forced to continue bidding until at least game is reached.

S	South
♠	AK4
♥	AQJ103
♦	95
♣	A32

The first and second round of bidding is devoted to finding a strain. Agreeing on “where” to play takes precedence over “how high”. If East passes, your rebid is 2NT, showing a balanced hand of either 12-14 points or 18-19. If you had 15-17 you would have presumably opened 1NT. Your suggestion is to play in notrump if partner can’t support hearts.

But East overcalls 2♦. Interference by the opponents is disruptive to your search for a strain – that’s for sure. But it also gives you two additional bids that you wouldn’t have if they just passed. You can now add “double” and “pass” to your toolbox.

The double, in a game force auction like this one, is a penalty double. You have 26 or more points so they are soundly outgunned. Doubling for penalty requires you to have a trump stack, though. You can’t set them at the 2-level on just high card points. East expects to take most of his 8 tricks in diamonds, so you need at 2 or 3 diamond tricks to go along with your side’s honors in the other suits.

The other bid you have available now is the “forcing pass.” A pass of 2♦ can’t mean you want to give up after partner has just told you he has an opening hand himself. You and North are committed to either play in game or double them for penalty. So, if you pass, you are saying you have nothing to suggest at this point and you want to invite your partner to make a suggestion. He can either bid on or make a penalty double himself. That is why it is called a forcing pass. He can’t pass your pass!

West passes after your pass and partner bids 3♣. This bid promises 6 clubs and denies 3 hearts. East passes and it’s back to you. You should like your chances in clubs. You have a known 9-card fit, and you can add a point for the doubleton diamond, as well as for the 5th heart. Your heart suit gets another point for being a quality suit, having 4 honors.

Your hand is now worth about 21 points. Partner has a minimum of 12, so you have at least 33 points between you.

You show your preference for a club slam by bidding 4♣. If you had rebid 5♣, you would be saying you are not interested in slam. That is called "fast arrival." When you jump to a game bid you are showing a negative attitude toward going further.

At this point, partner will start cue bidding his next suit over clubs where he holds a first or second round stopper. He rebids 4♦. Now you know you have control over all 4 suits and you can use Blackwood to check on your aces. You bid 4NT and partner responds 5♠. You are using Key Card Blackwood, where 5♠ shows 2 key cards plus the ♠Q. There are 5 key cards: the four aces and the ♠K. Since you have 3 keycards, you know you have all the necessary honors except the ♥K. You can find out about that king by next bidding 5NT.

There are several ways of reporting on kings. The original way is by showing the number of kings, excluding the ♠K which North already reported on. One king is two steps, or 6♦. The more modern approach is to bid the suit of the king you have, starting with the cheapest suit if you have more than one. If you have no kings, you return to 6♣. Remember, your 5NT bid is more than just asking for kings. It is telling your partner you have all the key cards and you are interested in a grand slam.

North responds 6♥, saying he has the ♥K. Now you can count "14 tricks" on any lead; 2 spades, 5 hearts, one diamond and 6 clubs. You end in 7NT.

West leads the ♦4 and North puts down this dummy:

N	North
♠	J63
♥	K5
♦	A2
♣	KQ10976

West leads ♦4

S	South
♠	AK4
♥	AQJ103
♦	95
♣	A32

You test the hearts and find they break as expected, 4-2. The clubs break 2-2. You can claim your grand slam – even though you “passed” during the bidding.

Look at the entire deal:

11 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ J63 ♥ K5 ♦ A2 ♣ KQ10976	P 2♣ 2♦ P P 3♣ P 4♣ P 4♦ P 4NT P 5♣ P 5NT P 6♥ P 7NT
W West		E East
♠ 98752 ♥ 8764 ♦ 43 ♣ 84		♠ Q10 ♥ 92 ♦ KQJ10876 ♣ J5
	S South	
	♠ AK4 ♥ AQJ103 ♦ 95 ♣ A32	7NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <https://tinyurl.com/vchrdpy>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the “Next” button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on “Play” you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.