

SHAPE BEATS HCP

North is the dealer and opens 1♦. Your RHO overcalls 1♥ and it's your turn with this 5 HCP hand:

S	South
♠	A1098632
♥	9
♦	
♣	J10842

Some would respond 2♠, a weak jump in modern bidding, showing a hand that doesn't want to compete but is long in spades. It's value is disruptive because it pushes the opponents to advancing the overcall at the 3-level. But this hand is better than that. It has 7 spades, a void and a singleton. It has a losing trick count (LTC) of 6 and since partner's LTC is normally 7 or less, there are enough tricks for a game somewhere. I think, a better bid is 1♠. This is forcing and allows for the search for the proper strain.

West advances with a cue bid of 2♦. This shows support of his partner's hearts and at least an invitational strength hand. Your partner makes a negative double, denying spades and hearts, and East passes. East's pass is called a "forcing pass." East certainly doesn't want to play in 2♦ doubled, but he is leaving the next bid up to his partner.

You are still searching for a suit, so you should show your second suit since you can do it relatively cheaply at the 3-level – 3♣. Your partner has indicated tolerance for clubs. West passes, presumably having told his entire story in his first bid. Partner raises your clubs to 5♣, which becomes the final contract.

West leads the ♥6 and you this dummy come down:

N	North
♠	
♥	J74
♦	AK9654
♣	AQ93

West leads ♥6.

S South
♠ A1098632
♥ 9
♦
♣ J10842

You have a unescapable heart loser, no diamond losers and a possible loser to the ♣K. Your real problem is the spade suit. You can try to set up the spades by playing the ♠A and ruffing the next 2 or 3 spades, but this loses if the clubs break 4-0 or 3-1. There will not be enough trump left to regain the lead once they take the ♣K.

A safer plan would be to cross ruff spades and diamonds, taking 8 club tricks using the trumps separately. You will give up the finesse against the ♣K, but you plan to lose only the initial heart lead and the one trump.

You win the second heart and take your ♠A. Now you cross ruff the two pointed suits, being careful not to play the ♦AK first. You must use the small trump first before they can be overtrumped. Then the later ruffs will use your high trump and even though the opponents will be out of spades and/or diamonds, they will only be able to overtrump with that already conceded ♣K.

You can take 11 tricks with these two hands. If you had originally made the 2♠ response, you would have ended up setting the opponents in their heart contract only 2 or 3 tricks. Not enough to compensate for the game contract your way. Incidentally, even though your partner is void in spades, 4♠ makes; losing only 2 spades and a heart the way the cards lie. Both of these unusual game contracts were made possible by the unusual shape of these two hands – despite holding only 19 combined HCP.

This is the entire deal:

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5♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0

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You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/y7a3qgv6>, 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.

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