

## The Listening Post II: The dog that didn't bark

By Neil Kimelman

In the last BC issue *The Listening Post* article looked at hands where it was right to pass, and listen to the opponents, in order to determine whether to bid more, and if so, how high. However the same principle applies to low level auctions, and listening to partner, as well as the opponents.

In one of his cases, Sherlock Holmes put it another way, "...the dog that didn't bark..." In that situation Holmes took inferences from something that did not happen. Specifically when a suit is not mentioned, and how it should affect your bidding decisions. Here are three recent hands from the same game that demonstrate this occurrence:

### Hand 1

Playing matchpoints in 4<sup>th</sup> seat with neither vul you pick up an 'action' hand: ♠- ♥A43  
♦Q8653 ♣QJ963. On the plus side, this hand has a lot of potential. However it is hard to evaluate accurately, and your diamond suit spots are poor. You are thinking of bidding an unusual 2NT for the minors, and do get an opportunity when the bidding starts 1♠  
Pass 1NT to you. Should you bid 2NT?

I didn't. My thinking was, 'Where are the spades?' Yes, LHO has at least five, but East likely has less than three. Partner is highly favoured to have at least four spades. If partner has spades, this hand might not play well for them. Maybe you are thinking that the opponents could have a heart fit. Yes, they could, but then you still have the option of bidding notrump later in the auction. The full deal:

### North

♠AQ1086

♥Q75

♦AK10

♣K10

### West

♠-

♥A43

### East

♠K9743

♥KJ92

♦Q8653     ♦74  
♣QJ963     ♣75

South

♠J52  
♥1086  
♦J92  
♣A842

The opponents bid to a slightly aggressive 4♠ which went two down. Had I bid 2NT we likely would have been down two in three of a minor.

### Hand 2

Playing matchpoints in 4<sup>th</sup> seat with neither vul you pick up ♠6 ♥AJ952 ♦A8 ♣J9432. Neither vul. At my table my RHO opened 1♣ and I bid a normal 1♥. The bidding continued:

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♥
1♠	2♥	Dbl	?

The double showed extra values. What is your call? I made the 'automatic' bid of 3♥ with my extra shape and hoping to ruff clubs in dummy. Had I paused for a second I may have reconsidered my call. Partner likely has long spades. Where is there a fit? A better choice might have been to listen and then decide whether to compete. The full deal:

North

♠J7542  
♥Q87  
♦QJ64  
♣10

West

East

♠6	♠KQ1083
♥AJ952	♥1043

♦A8           ♦932  
♣J9432       ♣A6

South

♠A9  
♥K6  
♦K1075  
♣KQ875

Had I passed, LHO would have bid 2♠, and partner likely would have doubled, likely ending the auction. I did scrape out +140, but it could have easily been -50. +300 would have been a clear top.

Hand 3. East holds ♠AQ754 ♥2 ♦Q63 ♣A1062.

West   North   East   South

          1♠    2♥

2♠    3♥    ?

At the table I bid 3♠ with little thought.

The full deal:

North

♠KJ8  
♥984  
♦K98742  
♣K

West

East

♠10963       ♠AQ754  
♥KJ103       ♥2  
♦105          ♦Q63  
♣954         ♣A1062

South

♠2

♥AQ765

♦AJ

♣QJ873

Had I passed, we would have been plus against 3♥ or 3♥ doubled. Had I paid attention and listened to the auction, and looked at my hand, I think the pass of 3♥ is a standout.

Don't forget you have a partner, who may be better situated to determine whether to compete further.