

Back-to-Back

by [Larry Cohen](#)

I teach a one-hour lesson on hand evaluation, and in the 2000 Maastricht Olympiad, back-to-back deals caught my attention.

First,

My partner, David Berkowitz held:

♠ J 3
♥ A 10 9 3
♦ A J 8 3
♣ 10 7 4

With nobody vulnerable he was the dealer, and he opened 1NT. No, this hand isn't worth 15-17, but we play that 1NT is a mini-notrump in this position, and it showed 10-12. With two aces and reasonable spots, this was a nice 10-count. But, watch what happened to it.

David's LHO passed, and his partner, yours truly, responded 2♥, natural and to play. Already his hand has improving. David's RHO jumped to 4♠. David couldn't do anything but pass (I could have had nothing!). When 4♠ came around to me, I surprised everyone by bidding 5♦! Yes, a hand that signed off in 2♥ was now bidding on the 5 level. Surely, I must have lots of shape (some would say, I had lost my mind). Now how do you like David's 10-count? Consider that he could have had all 10 points in the black suits and had the usual two-small and three-small in my suits. The 4♠ bidder passed and so did David (he didn't need to correct to hearts and give them more maneuvering room). David's LHO doubled and everyone passed. A high spade was led and David put down his dummy with pride!

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

♠ J 3
♥ A 10 9 3
♦ A J 8 3
♣ 10 7 4

♠ A K Q 9 8 6 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> </table>	N	W	S	E	♠ 10 7 2
N						
W						
S						
E						
♥ 6 4		♥ 8 2				
♦ —		♦ K 7 5				
♣ A 9 8 2		♣ K Q J 5 3				

♠ 4
♥ K Q J 7 5
♦ Q 10 9 6 4 2
♣ 6

West	North	East	South
	<i>David Berkowitz</i>		<i>Larry Cohen</i>
	1 NT	Pass	2♥
4♠	Pass	Pass	5♦
Pass	Pass	Dbl	All pass

The defense took the obvious three tricks for down one, only 100 points. In spades they would have made 450 or 480 depending on which red ace David leads. Maybe David would have saved in 6♦ (300). In any event, I was lucky to catch such a dummy. And if anyone asked David to evaluate his 10-count, I think he'd say that this was the best balanced 10-count he ever tabled in dummy.

On the very next deal, I held this 8-count. Watch it grow:

♠ 9 8 7 6 5
♥ Q 9
♦ K 8 4 2
♣ K 2

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Red against white I was in second seat. The dealer passed, and so did I. My LHO opened 2♦, alerted. This was the Olympiad, and almost everyone outside of America used 2♦ as Multi – to show a weak two-bid in either major. David overcalled 2♥ (natural), and the dealer now bid 2♠. Hmm, this was interesting. I passed for the time being, and the 2♦ opener also passed, confirming that his suit was spades.

David reopened with three diamonds, natural.

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	Pass
2♦	2♥	2♠	Pass
Pass	3♦	Pass	4♠!
Pass	5♦	All pass	

Wow! My 8-count was now spectacular! I had four diamonds to the king in support, as well as the heart queen, which had to be a huge card. David rated to have a void or singleton in spades; nothing wasted there. My club king also rated to be a useful card. So, what could I do to show how strong my hand had grown?


I cue-bid 3♠. David would know I had diamonds with him. If I had hearts I wouldn't have passed on the previous round. Over my cue-bid, David bid 4♣! That suggested he had some clubs as well, and confirmed to me that he was likely to have a spade void. I wanted to jump to slam, but contented myself with another cue-bid; 4♠. Should such a cue-bid show a spade control? No. Not when partner is known to have shortness. In fact, such cue-bids (usually as jumps) are called Bluhmers (after the late Lou Bluhm) and are used to say, "Partner, I have nothing wasted in your short suit; all of my cards are working."

David bid 5♦, and I contented myself with a pass. After all, he had bid only 2♥, non-forcing at his first opportunity.

This was the full deal:

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	Pass
2♦	2♥	2♠	Pass
Pass	3♦	Pass	4♠
Pass	5♦	All pass	

David ruffed the spade lead and laid down the diamond ace. He led the ♦J next and let it ride. This was a safety play; if the diamond jack lost to East's queen, David was safe from any club attack. When the ♦J held, he ended up with twelve tricks and 620. (Our teammates bought it in 4♠ doubled and escaped for down one).

So, on back-to-back boards, we saw a flat 10-count, and a plain-looking 8-count grow into two of the best dummy's either of us has ever tabled.