

Board of the Week 42

By Dick Chapman

Let's take a look at an interesting board played recently at the club. Both West and East have problems here. So does South, but that comes later.

Matchpoints, both vulnerable. Hold the West hand:

♠J2 ♥K1054 ♦AKQ652 ♣5

North deals and passes. Partner East opens 1 spade, and RHO South calls 2 hearts. You have an easy 3 diamond call. North passes. Partner 4 spades, South passes. Back to you.

Pass could be right, but you have a very, very strong idea that the heart ace is on your right. If partner has the ace of clubs and solid spades, slam could also be right. You have the best 13 point hand you could expect. Will you get the ace of hearts and a heart ruff? That doesn't look to be the case; it's more likely partner is short in hearts than North. After much thought, you try 4NT with the idea of stopping in 5 spades if you must.

Partner 3 diamonds, 0 or 3 key cards. Guess which one. Ha, ha. You now bid...what? Think a second before reading further.

You have already decided South has the ace of hearts so partner has the ace-king of spades and the ace of clubs. Surely partner has the spade queen as well, but it costs nothing to ask, as you want to stop in 5 spades on an 8 card fit missing the spade queen and an ace. Your call is 5 hearts. The next step over the initial RKC response (if that step isn't 5 of the agreed suit, of course) asks for the trump queen. In response to the queen-ask, partner bids

- 5 of the agreed suit if not holding the trump queen
- 6 of the agreed suit if holding the trump queen and holding no king of a lower suit
- 6 of a lower suit if holding the trump queen and the king of that lower suit.

Now partner bids 6 clubs ("I have the spade queen and the club king") and you happily bid 6 spades.

Ok, East, now let's look at your cards. Try to forget the cards above, but remember the auction. Here you go:

♠AKQ9853 ♥♦9 ♣AK1076

1 spade, 2 hearts by lefty, 3 diamonds by partner, back to you. You could bid 4 clubs but partner is never going to figure out you have 7015 shape. At any rate you bid 4 spades. Partner 4NT, you 5 diamonds (3 key cards¹), partner 5 hearts, you 6 clubs (spade queen

¹ You have a "useful void" and considered 6 hearts (odd number of key cards and a heart void) but you have not discussed this with partner so elect to just report key cards, three. Besides, you are sort of in the

and the club king), partner 6 spades. It's all over, right?

As Johnny didn't say, "not so fast, bridge breath!" You go into the tank a long time. Everyone at the table is highly ethical: no one is giving any expressions and you aren't looking at partner. You are on your own for this one. Make a call before reading further. 6NT was on your radar for a honkosecond. Partner's strong bidding and ace- and queen-ask strongly suggest the ace or king of hearts, but "strongly suggest" and "promise" are two different things.

Wait a second. What the heck is a honkosecond?

It is a scientific term, the shortest known length of time. It is equal to the time span between the light turning green and the car behind you blaring the horn for you to move.

But I digress. Back to the table, it's pass or 7 spades. Which? Make a call before reading further.

dark as to West's hand and intentions, so you don't want to blast to the 6 level on a guess. You are going to let West make the next move.

What did you do? Let's say you call 7 spades and get the club queen for a lead:

♠J2 ♥K1054 ♦AKQ652 ♣5		♠AKQ9853 ♥ ♦9 ♣AK1076
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It looks pretty good. Win the club ace, ruff a club with the spade 2. Ruff a heart low, ruff a club with the jack, ruff another heart low. Draw trump in three rounds. Now three diamonds to pitch 2 clubs, making the contract.

This worked but wasn't the best line of play. You don't need two club ruffs! Better would be to ruff one club, then jack of spades, back to hand with a heart ruff, and draw trump. This caters to the possible 4-0 trump break. You win two clubs, ruff one, and put the other two on the diamonds.

Ok, that was pretty easy, but now you are South holding these cards:

♠4 ♥AQ972 ♦107 ♣QJ932

Nine points, a fair but not great suit, and two suited. Do you overcall 2 hearts? Let's say yes and the auctions continues as described. What is your opening lead? Give this some thought before reading further.

Without a certain way to set (a Lightner double, for example), the best lead against a grand slam is often a passive trump. Let's say you lead the spade 4.

Finally we see the full deal:

	♠1076 ♥J863 ♦J843 ♣84	
♠J2 ♥K1054 ♦AKQ652 ♣5		♠AKQ9853 ♥ ♦9 ♣AK1076
	♠4 ♥AQ972 ♦107 ♣QJ932	

As the cards lie, the trump lead doesn't help your cause. Both defenders follow to the spade, so declarer knows the suit is breaking 3-1 or 2-2. Club ace, ruff a club with the jack, heart ruff, draw trump, diamonds to discard two clubs, and claim.

Today the killer lead is a diamond, eliminating the late entry to the diamonds and related club discards. Without x-ray vision, declarer might not make the contract. But with 52 cards in view, here is the play (next column):

Win the diamond ace, club ace, ruff a club with the 2, heart ruff, spade jack to eliminate South's single trump), and two top diamonds to discard clubs while South (holding no trump cards) helplessly discards and North (still holding two trumps) helplessly follows suit. Now a second heart ruff, draw the final two trumps, and claim.

Oddly, this line needs the spades to break 3-1! If they are 2-2, there is a completely different play: ruff a diamond at trick 2, draw trump in two rounds ending in dummy, then play KQ of diamonds to exhaust the suit; the 6 of diamonds would then be the third club discard you need (no club ruffs using this line of play).

So, on a diamond lead should declarer play for trumps to be 3-1 (the first line of play, depending on one defender to have long diamonds and long trump) or 2-2 (setting up the diamonds and accessing them via the jack of spades)? I will leave that to the experts.

We don't play bridge double dummy, so a diamond lead is unlikely. On a diamond lead and the actual layout, the play to make 7 is exceedingly lucky. Declarer might expect South to be short in both trump and diamonds, but that's pretty thin reasoning and won't always hold true. But maybe Declarer will be forced, out of desperation, to take the correct line of play, and the contract makes on pure luck.

The traveler for this board reported one pair in 6 spades making 7 on the lead of the diamond 10, so kudos to that South for the insightful lead and to that East for finding the winning line of play. I want that East standing beside me at the casino! All the others making 13 tricks got a non-diamond lead. Neither pair in the grand slam got a trump lead, which, as reported, wouldn't help the defense this time.

Bridge is fascinating for lots of reasons, and this hand is one of those reasons. See you at the table.