

Board of the Week 45

By Dick Chapman

Today's hand is a "non-trump coup." The board was played in my 24-year long online foursome on BBO, where it is pairs play scored at imps.

	♠J ♥AK108763 ♦109 ♣763		
♠AQ1086 ♥J ♦KQ ♣Q9854	V: EW D: S	♠532 ♥ ♦J876532 ♣AKJ	
	♠K974 ♥Q9542 ♦A4 ♣102		
South	West	North	East
Pass	1♠	4♥	4♠
All pass			

What do you think about this auction? The opening 1 spade was routine. There is a lot to be said for preempting at these colors, so 4 hearts by North is ok. East, you have a very, very good 9 count in support of spades. 4 spades is the money call playing for imps, where you push to bid vulnerable games.

South has to decide whether 4 spades can be defeated. Looking only at the South hand, I can see possible 2 tricks: a diamond and maybe a spade. The hearts are worthless. Partner rates to be short in spades, so with this hand and these colors I'm bidding 5 hearts.

West, if 5 hearts, do you push to 5 spades? I would. Your partner raised to 4 spades at unfavorable colors. There are some tricks in that East hand even if you don't know where they are. 5 spades is the call.

If 5 spades came around to you in the South, would you push to 6? You might beat 5 spades! Or you might not. It's close. "The five level belongs to the opponents," but this is "bridge" and not "bridge sayings." Holding four spade cards, I would not sacrifice 6 hearts. Later we will see that double dummy it does make 5 spades, so the par score is 6 hearts doubled, down 3, NS -500. And indeed I made 11 tricks for EW +650. But should I have made 11? Hmm, let's see.

I was sitting West and got it for 4 spades. The play was pretty easy, and fun. I ruffed the heart king and led a spade up to my 10, losing to the jack. I was playing South for KJx or KJxx in the suit, and playing North for the 9 or 9x. Ok, It's imps and I can still make 4 or 5, what next?

North led the diamond 10, won by South who returned a diamond, won perforce in hand. Now over the club ace and the last spade from dummy, 7 by South. I have to decide whether North would preempt 4 hearts holding J9 of spades. I say no, how about you? So I put in the 8 and it held. Had it lost to the 9, the suit is breaking 3-2 and I can draw the last trump and claim, so still no worries. It didn't lose, but West is still holding the K9 while I hold AQ6.

It seems easy now: over to the king of clubs and run diamonds, discarding at will. Whenever South tires of discards and decides to ruff, I can overruff, draw the last trump, and claim. And this is what happened.

Now for the fun question. On the line of play I just expressed, do you see how the defense can hold this to 10 tricks? Here is the board with 6 tricks remaining and the lead in dummy (East):

	♠ ♥A10873 ♦ ♣7	
♠AQ6 ♥ ♦ ♣Q98	V: EW D: S	♠ ♥ ♦J8765 ♣J
	♠K9 ♥Q954 ♦ ♣	

The problem is I have too many trump. In order for a trump coup to succeed, declarer must be leading through defender. But notice what happens if, as four diamonds are led, South discards all four hearts (rather than ruffing in, as actually happened). Declarer can discard three winning clubs but then must ruff the fourth diamond, thus being forced to lead from AQ to defender's K9 rather than being in dummy leading through that K9. There is no trump coup, and I should end up with only 10 tricks. For the coup to work I needed 2 spades and 4 clubs in hand, not 3 and 3.

But the double dummy analysis says it makes 11 tricks. With no trump coup, how could that be possible? Oh me, I let that silly jack of spades score. The double dummy play was to put up the queen on the first spade, then go to dummy with a club and put up the 8 on the second spade. Back with the second club and play on the diamond suit. As reported, South can visualize 3 trump and 3 neutral cards in Declarer's hand and can avoid the trump coup by merely discarding. In this line of play and defense, it makes 11 tricks (losing one spade – to South – and one diamond). If South panics and ruffs in, it will make 12. So my spade finesse was the problem, as losing that trick exposed me to making only 10 tricks.

The traveler is on the next page, and you will see that my score is 4.4 imps for our side. The trick I gave

away on the finesse (and got back on the non-coup) was worth 0.7 imps. Making a 12th trick might have been another imp, but I didn't run that hypothetical traveler through my homemade cross-imp spreadsheet and therefore can't say for sure.

The traveler:

Contract	Score	EW Imps
6♦xE=	1540	14.6
4♠xW+1	990	9.53
5♦xE=	750	6.2
4♠W+1	650	4.4
5♠W=	650	4.4
4♠W+1	650	4.4
4♠W=	620	3.73
5♥xxN-2	600	3.27
5♥xN-2	300	-2.33
5♥xN-2	300	-2.33
5♥N-2	100	-6.13
5♥N-2	100	-6.13
5♥N-2	100	-6.13
4♥N-1	50	-7.2
5♠W-1	-100	-9.4
4♠W-2	-200	-10.87

Two other questions are whether EW can make 6 clubs or 6 diamonds. The answers are no and no. 6 clubs can't be made if the defenders lead trump, and 6 diamonds can't be made if the defenders lead a spade.