

Board of the Week 46

By Dick Chapman

This hand could have been written by the late, great Eddie Kantar. Except that he writes just a wee bit better than I do (sells more books, too). Played in a casual BBO event, scored at imps:

	♠A1085 ♥K107 ♦7654 ♣42		
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	V: EW D: S	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	
	♠KJ76 ♥AQ3 ♦AKQ ♣AKJ		
South	West	North	East
2♣	Pass	2♠*	Pass
4NT**	Pass	5♦***	Pass
6NT			

* 7-9 hcp

** Blackwood

*** 1 ace

I'm not a fan of point-showing steps, but this was the auction and the contract. Some might bid this

2♣ – 2♦

3NT (I do have a four card major) – 4C (Stayman)

4♠ – 6♠ (maybe 6NT with that balanced hand and playing matchpoints).

With 25-27 hcp, some pairs open 3NT if not holding a four card major, and 2♣-2♦-3NT if holding one. Methods vary, and this article isn't about the auction anyway. 6NT is the contract and you get the diamond jack. What is your plan? Give it some thought before proceeding.

One problem is the possibility of a 4-1 spade break. You can afford to lose a spade, but you also have a problem with the club suit. If you lose a spade, the club finesse better come in, right?

WRONG. Take a second look.

Ok, take a third look. Remember the hint: this is a hand that Kantar would have written about. Do you know his books ("Take Your Chances") and his repeated theme ("search for alternate ways to make a contract before you take a finesse")? If you haven't read them, you should.

The solution is on the next page, but I hope you will spot that extra chance before you peek.

You are missing Q9432 of spades. You will finesse the queen, losing a trick half the time, or maybe more than half because of that pesky 9. With x-ray vision, you can pick up any 4-1 split: A108x in dummy and KJ7x in hand will guard against Q9xx in either hand (if, with that superpower, you see the queen in one hand or the other). But the declarer at our table did not have this superpower and lost a spade. Declarer later took a club finesse, losing. Down 1, sorry partner.

Since you are in hand after trick 1, you might as well play a low spade to the ace, then run the 10. It might lose to the now-bare queen in West but then the suit is breaking 3-2 and you don't have to worry about a pesky 4-1 division (you would still have to bring in the rest of the tricks, of course). If the 10 holds (or East covers with the Queen and you find West holding a low singleton), the contract is assured and you now have a shot at 13 tricks, as you will see in a moment.

Let's say you guess the spades wrong or otherwise can't avoid a spade loser. Are you taking the club finesse? Not yet, Kantar would say. You have one more chance. Try this: run 3 diamonds and check for a 3-3 break. If they are indeed breaking 3-3, you have 12 tricks: 3 spades, 3 hearts, FOUR diamonds, and 3 clubs.

Based on the lead of the ♦J, you don't expect the suit to break 3-3, but what does it cost to try? Nothing. If the diamonds aren't breaking, then and only then do you take the club finesse. Here is the full board that we played (I was West), with the club queen offside:

	♠A1085 ♥K107 ♦7654 ♣42	
♠3 ♥J9865 ♦J109 ♣Q1095		♠Q942 ♥42 ♦832 ♣8763
	♠KJ76 ♥AQ3 ♦AKQ ♣AKJ	

If the diamonds don't break, you go to the heart king and take the club finesse, playing for the layout shown below. In this case you must use your other superpower to will that club queen to jump into the East hand, like this:

♠3 ♥J9865 ♦J109 ♣10985	♠Q942 ♥42 ♦832 ♣Q763
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With the actual layout, Declarer can make 7 NT. Do you see it? Ace of spades, 10 of spades (let it ride or cover the queen). Now 3 diamonds to find the favorable break. Over to the heart king to discard the club jack on the 13th diamond; then lead the third spade through the Q or Q9 (depending on how East addressed the second spade). You win 4 spades, 3 hearts, 4 diamonds, 2 clubs.

The board was played 16 times. The traveler:

	Result	Score	Imps
1	6NS-1	-50	-9.93
2	6NS-1	-50	-9.93
3	7NS-1	-50	-9.93
4	4NS+1	460	0.13
5	3NS+2	460	0.13
6	3NS+2	460	0.13
7	3NS+3	490	0.87
8	3NS+3	490	0.87
9	3NS+3	490	0.87
10	3NS+3	490	0.87
11	5NS+1	490	0.87
12	3NS+3	490	0.87
13	3NS+3	490	0.87
14	3NS+4	520	1.67
15	6NS=	990	10.73
16	6NS+1	1020	10.93

Notice that only one pair made 13 tricks, and both the defense and declarer play at that table were so bad that it would make a bridge teacher cry. West unguarded the club queen, East didn't keep parity in spades, Declarer didn't take advantage of a good spade in dummy, etc. It's "BBO", not "bridge." If you want to play "bridge" you come to the Little Rock Duplicate and find real players who know what they are doing.

Notice it was a 19 imp swing from being down 1 to making. Hint: if you bid a slam, it's good to make it.

Did you spot the extra chance that Kantar writes about? The 3-3 diamond break, I mean. See you at the club.