I Love This Game

SABINE AUKEN

World's #1 Ranked Woman Bridge Player

edited by Mark Horton

foreword by Zia Mahmood

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331 Douglas Ave.
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Foreword

I first saw Sabine Auken (Zenkel then) on VuGraph around twenty years ago in Turku, Finland. I was there to do commentary on the European Bridge Championships, as at that time of year the weather was too cold to play golf.

Being a conscientious commentator, I neither noticed the fact that she was a stunning blonde nor that she was wrapped in a closefitting leopard skin mini-dress — naturally I was totally absorbed in the magic of her card play. Since then, with the rest of the world, I have followed her progress from skilled competitor to multiple World Champion as a fan, a friend and even, on pleasant occasions, a partner.

While she and her long time partner, Daniela von Arnim, were taking over the mantle of the premier ladies pair, she married and moved from her native Germany to the Chicago Board of Options Exchange. A few years later she married again, finally settling in Copenhagen with her husband, Jens Auken, a prominent lawyer and bridge champion.

Of her many victories, none have been more thrilling than that in the Venice Cup Final in Paris in 2001. Her bridge story makes fascinating reading, but if you asked her for her greatest achievement, it would be her two gorgeous sons, Maximilian and Jens Christian.

Sabine has proved herself equal to the best of men — is she the best woman player ever? That I leave to your judgment as you follow her career and observe her brilliancies. You will look into her mind and life as she reveals all her secrets, except the one I really want the answer to: Whatever happened to *that* dress?

Zia Mahmood
London
September 2005

Foreword 2

The atmosphere is charged with electricity. You are part of a vast crowd, and the air is rent with chants of "Allez la France" and "Deutschland, Deutschland." (With France 'at home' there are considerably more of the former.) A mixture of groans and cheers greets every action. You will have guessed that we are in Paris for the final of a major sporting contest but if you think that we are at the Stade de France watching the final of the World Cup you are wrong. (Although strangely enough, the preliminary stages of this sporting contest were held in that very stadium.) No, we are in a vast ballroom at the Concorde Lafayette hotel, where it is standing room only for a bridge match — the last sixteen boards of the 2001 Venice Cup final between Germany and France.

Let me introduce the *dramatis personae*:

In the blue corner — sorry, in the Open Room — representing Germany, are Sabine Auken and Daniela von Arnim. Sabine's many achievements include once holding the speed record for becoming a Life Master in the USA, a feat she managed in 6 weeks in 1989. She and Dany have been partners for as long as I can remember and they have a host of major titles including a Venice Cup, the one they helped to win in Beijing in 1995. Two things might help them here: one, that in 1995 they easily defeated France in the semifinals, and two, that they came from behind in the final session in Beijing to take the World title. Oh yes, I forgot to mention the small detail that they are 47 IMPs in arrears in this current match. They are opposed by the brilliant Catherine D'Ovidio and Veronique Bessis who, like their German counterparts, are used to standing on the podium at the end of a major event.

In the Closed Room, Germany have Pony Nehmert and Andrea Rauscheid (now Reim). Pony — a nickname derived from her curly hair that has stuck — and Andrea — I christened her the *Wunderkind* on account of her age — were on the team in Beijing and delivered a title-winning card in the last session. (Andrea lives for the game — once when asked out for dinner by a hopeful suitor, she replied, "No thanks, I have my Bridge magazine.") They are mainstays of the German team. Just in case they need additional incentive, if they win, the German Bridge Federation has promised to buy them new dresses for the Victory banquet.

They are facing Bénédicte Cronier and Sylvie Willard. Bénédicte's numerous titles include the Generali World Individual Championship. I have enjoyed some happy days with her and her equally famous husband, Philippe, at their apartment in Paris. I interviewed her partner Sylvie Willard in Faro after one of her many championship victories. If I listed all the titles these four players have captured — to paraphrase a line from *Jaws* — we would need a bigger book.

It's no secret that I tend to cheer for Germany (except when England plays them at soccer!) but the 47-IMP deficit is significant. The French are very close to the ultimate prize — will they show any sign of nerves?

Join us now as Sabine describes one of the most exciting matches in the history of the game and at the same time takes you into her world of top-level bridge.

Dr. Siegbert Tarrasch, a famous German chess Grandmaster, wrote, "Chess, like love, like music, has the power to make men happy." That bridge can have a similar effect, Sabine shows in this book.

Mark Horton
November 2005

Introduction

With just sixteen of the original ninety-six deals left in the final of the 2001 Venice Cup, Germany trailed France by 47 IMPs. If you were looking for a sporting metaphor you would perhaps equate it to being down 0-3 at half time in a soccer match. In a contest between equally matched contestants, that sort of lead does not normally get overturned. The players were to ply their skills on VuGraph in front of a huge, noisy and mostly partisan audience, for as luck would have it, the venue was Paris.

There we were, just sixteen deals to go in the final of the 2001 Venice Cup; in a couple of hours it would be all over. A series of unlikely events had led to both teams being there. The French had originally failed to qualify when the formidable squad of Bessis-d'Ovidio and Cronier-Willard decided not to compete. They wanted to play in the national trials, competing to represent France at the European Championships in the Open Series, and the French Bridge Federation, in its wisdom, decreed that if they wanted to play in the open trials, they couldn't also participate in the women's trials. As a result, a totally new French women's team appeared at the 2001 European Championships in Tenerife. Ultimately, it failed to finish among the top five teams there, which was the condition for a berth in the Venice Cup.

The 2001 Venice Cup was due to be played in Bali in November. The events of September 11th and the fear and insecurity that followed in their wake had made it impossible for the World Bridge Federation to carry through with its original plan. José Damiani, the WBF president, managed to accomplish the unbelievable feat of moving the World Championships from Bali to Paris in only a few weeks. As the new host country, France was entitled to place a team in both the Venice Cup and the Bermuda Bowl. The French had learned a valuable lesson and were in no doubt that their women's team should include Bessis-d'Ovidio and Cronier-Willard.

Our own German team would not have been able to participate with its usual line-up in Bali either. My partner Daniela was four months pregnant with her first child and was advised by her doctor not to travel to Bali. She was supposed to be replaced by Anne Gladiator, which would have been the revival of a very old partnership. Anne and I won our very first international championship together in 1985, the EC Women's Pairs

Championships in Bordeaux. Anne was very excited about this opportunity and invested a lot of time and effort in discussing system notes with me and making family arrangements that would allow her to take the 2½ weeks off to go to Bali.

When the championship site was moved from Bali to Paris, Daniela became available again, which created an unusual situation. Who had the rightful place on the team? There were many different issues to consider, both from an ethical and a sports point of view. Needless to say this was quite an emotional affair. Did you really believe bridge was only about playing cards? It's about time you changed your mind. In the end Daniela was back on the team and Anne was left on the sidelines. I can only guess how disappointed she must have been, though she hardly showed it. When I returned home from Paris she had sent me an email congratulating the whole team on our success and stating that she felt she had contributed to this success significantly — by not playing!

Was this destiny? The scenario that would have been impossible in Bali had become reality in Paris: it was France against Germany in the final of the Venice Cup. The French had outclassed the field in the round robin and had won every one of their knockout matches in superior fashion. Our own way through the round robin and the knockouts had been much rockier and our troubles had continued into the final. After a disastrous start we had actually managed to climb back to almost level, only to see the French strike back immediately in the penultimate segment. They were leading us by 47 IMPs going into the last sixteen deals. That seemed like a lot to overcome, but make no mistake, we were not disheartened.

The French were playing very solidly, but bridge is a funny game. Our systems were sufficiently different from those of the French that it seemed possible to get all the deficit back and more. There was no need to try for swings by making unusual bidding decisions; the difference in methods could be expected to take care of that. Our strategy was simple: Play well and be lucky!

-1-

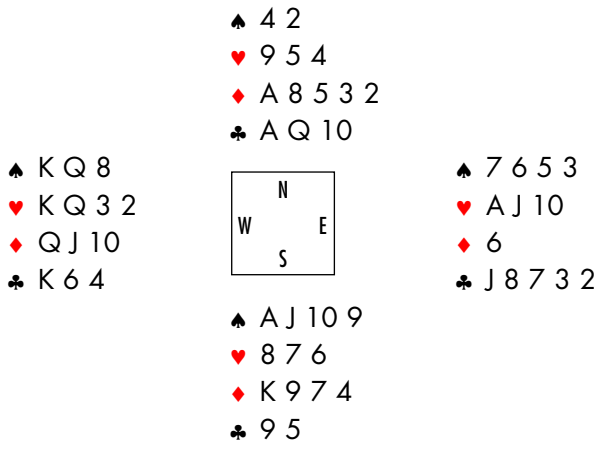
Mini Comeback

On the first board of the championship session, Daniela and I would be playing against Catherine d'Ovidio and Veronique Bessis in the Open Room on VuGraph. Our teammates, Pony Nehmert and Andrea Rauscheid would be playing against Bénédicte Cronier and Sylvie Willard in the Closed Room. As usual, the start of play in the Open Room was delayed to give time for results from the Closed Room to come in for comparison in the VuGraph theater. For security reasons, however, all players had to be in place from the start of official playing time.

You might expect there to be a lot of tension in the air, but you would be wrong; anticipation, yes, but hostile tension, no. We were all sitting on the floor chatting and exchanging our views on life before the start of play. This is part of what makes coming back to the championships again and again a fantastic experience. It is like being part of a large family. It is wonderful to know that you share an interest with friends from all over the world.

But when it was time to sit down at the table it was a different story. There would be no favors; it would be a stern fight. Who would be best when it mattered?

Board 1. *Dealer North. Neither Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
	pass	pass	pass
1NT[1]	all pass		

1. 14-16 HCP.

The defenders started with three rounds of diamonds and declarer, sitting West, used dummy's heart entries to play spades towards her hand. South won the second spade and played back her remaining diamond. When North left her partner on lead the club switch meant one down, -50.

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*d'Ovidio*	*Dany*
	1NT[1]	pass	pass
dbl	redbl	2♣	2♥
2NT	pass	3NT	dbl
pass	pass	4♣	pass
pass	dbl	all pass	

1. 10-12 HCP.

In the Open Room, the redouble showed a five-card suit other than clubs. Unwilling to let the auction die in two clubs, Dany bid two hearts. The

French pair now lost their way, but Catherine judged incredibly well, smelling out what had happened, and pulled 3NT doubled to four clubs. This was also doubled, of course, but would not be quite as disastrous as 3NT.

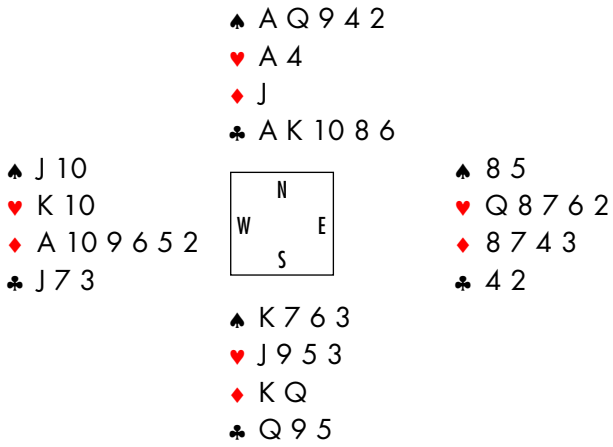
Dany led the four of diamonds, which in our methods indicated either a doubleton or a four-card suit. Winning the first trick with the ace I tried to figure out what was going on and finally decided that Dany's two heart bid must have been meant as pass or correct. Although it was not something we had ever discussed, it was just bridge logic. The lead was clearly from a four-card suit and we had no more diamond tricks coming. However, for her double of 3NT, Dany surely had a major-suit ace. It didn't matter which one; with two sure trump entries, I would always be able to arrange a spade ruff. So at Trick 2 I switched to a low spade, which Dany of course ducked. When I regained the lead, I could play a spade to her ace and get my spade ruff for down two and 300 points. First blood to us. It wasn't much, but it was a start: 6 IMPs on the long way back.

After the match was over, a lot of people remarked on the fact that we had been able to generate points in a set of deals that was basically not very swingy. Indeed, some commentators even described them as dull. It helped that we were playing different methods from those adopted by the French. The IMPs won on the first board can easily be credited to our use of the mini-notrump.

When deals involving a mini-notrump opening are reported, one often reads comments like: "Reaching the good game was made easy by the methods." "Once again a success for the mini-notrump." "As soon as North knew that South had any values, she had every reason to go past game." "XY's mini-notrump jockeyed the opponents into an unmakeable game." These statements pinpoint two big advantages of the mini-notrump:

1. Partner immediately knows the general hand type, including high-card range and approximate distribution. This often makes it easier to determine the final denomination and level of contract. Hands that open a mini-notrump are usually passed in any standard system, but of course the pass could be a variety of hands from 0-11 HCP. If your system requires you to pass initially, by the time the bidding gets back to you as opener, the opponents' actions may have made it impossible to describe your hand any longer. Compare that with being able to open a mini-notrump. A good example is this deal from the European Championships in Montecatini in 1997, where our teammates Pony and Andrea outbid our Italian opponents.

Dealer South. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	Pony		*Andrea*
			1NT
pass	2♥*	pass	2♠
pass	3♣	pass	3♠
pass	4NT*	pass	5♣*
pass	6♠	all pass	

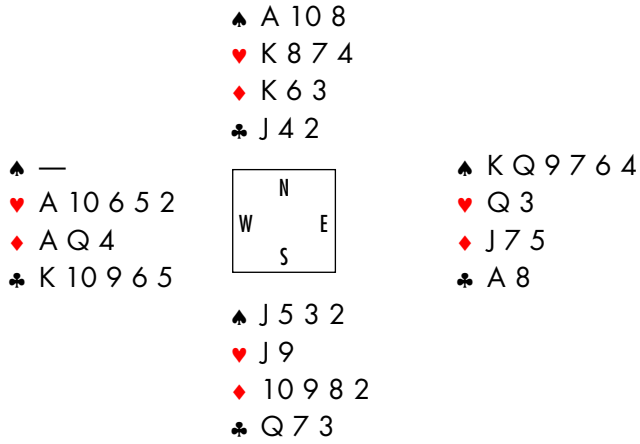
The slam is cold on any lead, with declarer able to establish a diamond trick for a heart discard or throw both diamonds on dummy's long clubs. It was easy for Pony to bid the slam after Andrea had opened the bidding and admitted to a reasonable hand with spade support. If she had passed initially, however, the opponents might have been able to get in the way, for example, by opening a weak two in the West seat, which may have made it difficult to determine that slam is an excellent contract.

2. After an opposing notrump opening, it is often difficult in defensive bidding to find both the best level and the best denomination. One major problem is that there is no cuebid available. Another is that even in experienced partnerships it is often unclear how weak or strong a particular action is. This is exactly what befell the French on the first board of this set. They were on totally different wavelengths as to what their respective bids promised.

Another example occurred in the semifinal of the 1995 Venice Cup in Beijing, by coincidence also against the French, if nothing else proving the fact that we have played against one another innumerable times by now.

And it has always been a fair and challenging experience.

Dealer North. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*Saul*	*Dany*
	1NT	2♥[1]	pass
3♣	pass	3♠	all pass

1. Promises spades.

Three spades is an uncomfortable contract, but cannot be beaten on the actual lie of the cards. However, neither can 3NT nor four hearts be beaten, and as our teammates duly reached 3NT in the other room, we chalked up 10 IMPs.

This deal was played at four tables in the Bermuda Bowl and at four tables in the Venice Cup. Interestingly enough, at the four tables where North did not open 1NT, East-West had no trouble at all bidding a makeable game. That 3NT went down at one table when Bobby Wolff chose an unfortunate line of play and Philippe Cronier put up a brilliant defense is a different story.

At the four tables where North opened 1NT as either a mini or weak notrump, only one East-West succeeded in getting to 3NT — when the Chinese Ming Sun simply bid 3NT with the West hand over her partner's two spade overcall. One can certainly question the merits of this bid. To me it proves how difficult it can be to investigate scientifically the right level and denomination after an opposing weak-notrump opening. None of the other pairs faced with the problem overcame it successfully.

Most experts follow the philosophy that it is important to get into the bidding over a strong notrump with almost any excuse. The emphasis, though, is on finding the best denomination and fighting for the partscore on the theory that game will usually not make anyway when one of the opponents holds a strong notrump unless the partnership has a huge fit.

However, things are different over a weak notrump; now the partnership also has to sort out whether it possesses enough values to bid and make a game. Therefore experts tend to bid more constructively against weak notrumps than against strong ones — the rule of thumb being the weaker the notrump the more constructive the overcall. Still, we are all only human, and in many of us, a mini-notrump opening provokes a feeling that the opponents are trying to steal the butter off our bread. We go out of our way to try and punish this annoying opening or at least win the bidding battle. Austria's Jovanka Smederevac, like Oscar Wilde, could resist anything but temptation on this deal from the semifinal of the same 2001 Venice Cup:

Dealer South. N-S Vul.

	♠ A 7 ♥ 4 2 ♦ K 9 5 3 ♣ K 8 7 4 2	
♠ K 8 2 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ Q 8 7 4 ♣ Q J 6	N W E S	♠ Q 4 3 ♥ J 8 6 3 ♦ A J 6 ♣ A 10 5
	♠ J 10 9 6 5 ♥ K Q 10 5 ♦ 10 2 ♣ 9 3	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany	*Erhart*	*Sabine*	*Smederevac*
			pass
1NT	pass	pass	2♣[1]
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

1. Majors.

Our defense wasn't perfect, but we still managed to set the contract by two tricks and extract a penalty of 500 points. This resulted in 11 IMPs when the bad 3NT contract was reached by the East-West pair at the other table and duly went down one. Jovi's balancing action would have been perfectly acceptable against a strong notrump. Partner could easily have held quite a good balanced hand and their side could have been on for a partscore. Against a mini-notrump, however, it was ill advised. Partner would certainly have doubled the mini-notrump with 13 HCP or more, meaning the deal very likely belonged to the opponents. Her action didn't have much of an upside, only a lot of risk. I can't help thinking that Jovi fell victim to that very human feeling here: "You are not going to steal from me."

A partnership playing the mini-notrump can often exploit that human weakness. On the above deal I held an opening bid myself and would at least have invited game opposite a standard opening bid. Opposite a mini-notrump, however, it was clear to pass, even had I been a little stronger. Game is very unlikely and there is always the chance the opponents will balance. Punishing frisky opponents is much more lucrative than bidding and making a thin non-vulnerable game. And it is much more enjoyable; that is very human, too!

Of course, following this strategy might once in a while result in missing a game that the rest of the world would bid. Consider this deal from the final of the 1995 Venice Cup in Beijing:

Dealer South. E-W Vul.

	♠ A 10 6 5 ♥ K 10 8 ♦ A 9 4 ♣ Q 4 3	
♠ 4 2 ♥ J 9 4 ♦ Q J 7 5 3 2 ♣ A 6	N W E S	♠ K 8 7 3 ♥ A 6 3 2 ♦ 6 ♣ 9 7 5 2
	♠ Q J 9 ♥ Q 7 5 ♦ K 10 8 ♣ K J 10 8	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Picus	*Sabine*	*Pollack*	*Dany*
			1NT
all pass			

Unfortunately East did not succumb to human weakness here in the reopening position. She passed out 1NT with a smile on her face and watched Dany take ten tricks. Believe it or not, there are players who would consider it a matter of personal honor to reopen the bidding with the East hand against a strong notrump. They might even be right; mind you, but that's not the case against a weak notrump. Rozanne Pollack, though, is not one of those players and her pass was rewarded with 6 IMPs. As can easily be seen, any bid by her would have resulted in something resembling an earthquake.

Actually our hands meshed very well on this deal and 3NT would have been an excellent contract. With the above hand, with all its quick tricks and intermediates, I was surely taking the principle of not pushing for a thin non-vulnerable opposite a mini notrump a bit too far. Still exactly the same action was chosen by Jeff Meckstroth in the concurrent final of the Bermuda Bowl. So how bad could my pass possibly be, if one of the most aggressive bidders in the world did the same thing? That was at least some consolation.

Knowing that partner will very often be reluctant to look for a thin non-vulnerable game, one should never open a mini-notrump with a hand that would be considered a nice minimum opening in standard methods. My own personal rules are never to open a mini-notrump with:

- 12 average HCP and 4-4 in the majors.
- 12 HCP and a decent five-card suit.
- a hand that Al Roth would have opened with a smile on his face.

Playing a mini-notrump fits very well into a strong club system, as the simple notrump rebid is used to show 13-15 HCP and all stronger hands start by bidding one club. When playing standard methods, this idea is more complicated and a partnership would have to adjust its notrump rebid ranges in a way not everyone might feel comfortable with.

Whether the mini-notrump is for you is really a matter of taste, temperament and how you like to play this game. For me, playing the mini-notrump signals a certain free-spirited non-conformist attitude towards life in general

and towards bridge in particular. Playing the mini-notrump is an expression of personality in much the same way as a player's style of dress.

Have you ever looked at the way people dress when they participate in a tournament? If you have, you surely noticed a diversity of styles and approaches. There doesn't seem to be any consensus as to how to dress appropriately for a bridge competition. Does it matter? Does the way a player dresses have any significance at all?

For me it does. Of course, there are all sorts of old wives' tales. Very often women get accused of dressing in an especially sexy way when playing in a mixed event in order to distract their male opponents. If you have heard of any incident where this approach has been successful, please let me know! It is widely acknowledged that men in general have a great ability to focus on every single deal to the exclusion of anything else around them. The most famous example of this is a story involving the late British expert Terence Reese. Friends who were making a bet on the outcome once sent a naked woman into a room where Reese was playing. He never even blinked an eyelid. Mind you, I wouldn't try this on Mark Horton.

Once in a while a woman can achieve a hilarious result. I remember an incident when Daniela and I were playing in a European Open Pairs Championship and our attire could easily be described in the above-mentioned manner. In a particular round, one of our opponents seemed to be having a particularly good time, laughing continuously even though we butchered them on all three deals. When I saw my screen-mate again at the final victory reception, curiosity got the better of me and I asked him how he could possibly have enjoyed himself so much when he was getting such bad results. "Well," he answered. "You have such beautiful legs. But it's all useless — I'm gay."

For a reason that is beyond me, the bridge world does not regard a woman who dresses so one can see this is really a woman as a real bridge player. Instead, she is immediately classified as a bimbo. At a recent tournament in America, a male player looked me up to tell me: "I have never been to a tournament where so many people are speaking so highly of how well one particular player plays. But why do you dress like someone who cannot play at all?" Was this a compliment? Apparently to be recognized as a bridge player a woman has to go about in sackcloth.

I feel very strongly that in order to achieve your best at the bridge table, you have to be in a balanced state of mind. You have to feel comfortable and good about yourself. As far as I am concerned, the way a person

dresses both contributes to and expresses how that person feels about themselves. It also expresses their attitude toward what they are involved in at the time. Unfortunately, at bridge tournaments one can regularly find people who dress quite carelessly, at times even in dirty clothes. To me that sends the signal, "This thing is not really important; I couldn't care less." How will anyone with such an attitude ever win anything at all?

Marlene Dietrich once said, "I dress for the image. Not for myself, not for the public, not for fashion, not for men." You may not agree with her, but there can be no doubt that the way bridge players dress plays an important role in the image of bridge. The reason is that we are all only human; most of us judge others and very often what they are doing as well by the way they look.

Have you ever read Zia's book *Bridge My Way*? If not, go to the bookstore immediately and hope it is still available. One of my favorite parts is Zia's explanation of a theory by American Roger Stern, who maintains that everyone is bound to play at different levels of ability at different times. I agree 100% with everything he says, adding only that factors such as style of dress can mentally influence at what level you play. These are three levels, or 'heats', in Roger Stern's theory:

Heat 1: This is the magic heat. You play above yourself. You are no longer a bridge player. You're an artist, a poet. The cards respond to your touch. They fly, sing, come alive for you. In addition, everything, luck included, is going for you. You're invulnerable – you can't make a mistake.

Heat 2: This is your normal level or standard. You play as you would expect to: middle of the road.

Heat 3: You wish you'd stayed in bed. You play terribly and out of luck. Every finesse is wrong; every suit breaks badly. The opponents play like champions and you lose with a capital L.

Stern goes on to explain that a player analyzing correctly which heat he is playing in can greatly improve his results by adjusting his game accordingly.

In Heat 1: Get involved. Take control. Make daring decisions. Be strong – remember, you own the table.

In Heat 2: Plod along, doing your normal thing.

In Heat 3: Beware. Take a back seat. Play passively and with caution. Whenever possible, let your partner make the key decision and stay out of the way. Just try to stay alive.

If you are depressed, have a dark outlook on life and don't really care much about anything, you are much more likely to find yourself in Heat 3. If you think positively, are full of self-confidence and in general feel good about yourself, you are much more likely to be playing in Heat 1. For me, few things encourage a positive mood better than dressing well. You don't agree? Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor, had something to say about it: "I'm nothing to look at, so the only thing I can do is dress better than anyone else." And look what happened — a king abdicated his throne for her.

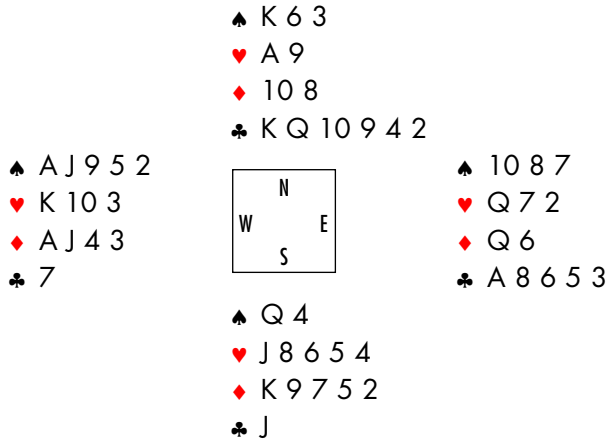
-2-

Raising the Ante

It had been a promising start. If we could manage a few more results like the last one, our opponents might start getting nervous. It is not always easy playing the last set of a long match when one is ahead by quite a substantial, but by no means safe, margin. One hopes for a quiet set of deals with a lot of sequences like 1NT-3NT, with a standard opening lead and a standard line of play that quite likely will be duplicated at the other table. One's mind is set on playing defensively and not taking any risks.

When the deals are very distributional and when it is very difficult to judge what happened at the other table, one can easily be trapped into getting worried. The same is true when one has made a few unlucky decisions or made a few mistakes. It is the uncertainty that can get to you. How are our teammates faring at the other table? How many IMPs have we lost? Are we in any danger of losing the lead? These and similar thoughts may cross your mind, and they are deadly. Instead of concentrating on what is most important, namely trying to do your best on the deal you are currently playing, you become distracted, wasting energy on things that have already happened or are happening elsewhere and on which you have no influence. Along with many other things, bridge is also a psychological war.

Board 2. *Dealer East. N-S Vul.*



Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
		pass	2♥
2♠	all pass		

Dany's two heart opening was a two-way bid; it showed either a weak one-suiter with spades or a weak two-suiter with hearts and a minor. Over Veronique's two spade intervention, I had the method but no desire to compete in three clubs, which was just as well. It probably would not have escaped undoubled and would have been booked to go two down; even that would have required careful declarer play.

In two spades, Veronique took ten tricks. Indeed, there is no lead and no defense that can prevent declarer from winning ten tricks if she times the play correctly. Was this a good or a bad result for us? When you are trailing by as many IMPs as we were, you had better think positive. Being pessimistic won't get your IMPs back. Who knows? Maybe the French would bid too high in clubs at the other table and get doubled; even two clubs doubled would win us another IMP. Or maybe Andrea and Pony would find a way to bid game. One thing was sure, the South hand would not be opened at the other table, which would automatically lead to a different bidding sequence.

In fact, this is how it went:

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
		pass	pass
1♠	2♣	pass	pass
dbl	pass	2♠	all pass

It is probably just too difficult to discover the nice mesh of the East-West hands, which makes four spades a very reasonable contract, despite only minimal values and lacking any spectacular distribution. On different play and defense, our teammates scored +140 and we lost 1 IMP back to France.

The score was now France 215, Germany 173.

Daniela's and my philosophy in the bidding is to open all distributional hands with almost any excuse; we don't have very strict suit quality requirements. When we catch a fit with partner, we can immediately preempt to the limit. No opponent who is continuously confronted with that kind of competitive problem can guess right all the time.

Many years ago, we played a defensive two-suiter scheme, where we would only use the artificial bid that immediately showed the two-suiter with either weak or strong hands; with intermediate hands, we would start by bidding first one suit and then later, with luck, the other. The idea was to give partner a better impression of the hand's strength, thus making it easier to judge whether to bid game or not.

I discussed this philosophy with Jeff Meckstroth. He said that he and Eric Rodwell had once played the same way, but then later decided that it was much more important to tell partner about the hand's two-suited nature as quickly as possible. It puts partner in a much better position to preempt to the limit and make the right high-level competitive decision. I found this difficult to argue with and Daniela and I have happily been bidding our two-suiters ever since.

If you are as enthusiastic as I am about getting those weak one- and two-suiters off your chest as quickly as possible, then you will find there is a little snag. There are not nearly enough opening bids at the two-level available to cover all combinations; at least, not if every bid can only show one hand type. So in Daniela's and my system, almost all two-level openings are multi-meaning. We play the following structure:

2♦ either a weak one-suiter in hearts or a weak two-suiter with spades and a minor

2♥ either a weak one-suiter in spades or a weak two-suiter with hearts and a minor

2♠ either a weak two-suiter with both majors or a weak two-suiter with both minors

Some people who favor multi-meaning two-level openings also like to include a strong variant, e.g. the Multi 2♦ opening, which often shows either a weak two in one of the majors or a strong balanced hand or something similar. I very much dislike such a method; partner will almost never be on firm ground as to whether there is a weak or a strong hand opposite. That makes it impossible to preempt effectively, thus totally defeating one of the main purposes of a weak opening and rendering it a much more harmless weapon.

Can it really be that important to get the first blow in? Is it not more convenient to show a weak two-suiter later in the auction? And is it not advisable to define requirements for opening weak twos very closely, so that partner can better judge whether to stop in a partial, bid game or even search for slam?

Well, just like the mini-notrump, this is a matter of taste and temperament. If you are the safety type that likes to feel comfortable knowing all the time what is going on, the control freak that cannot stand it when things get totally out of hand, then don't adopt the approach I favor. If you are the adventurous type, however, and love to feel the adrenaline flowing in your blood, because it gets you to perform better, then go ahead, jump into the cold water. Any doubts? Let me convince you with this deal from the 1993 Venice Cup and Bermuda Bowl in Santiago:

Dealer North. Both Vul.

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

First, let's take a look at what happened in the Bermuda Bowl final between Norway and the Netherlands:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Grotheim	*Westra*	*Aa*	*Leufkens*
	pass	pass	1♦
1♥	3♠[1]	dbl	4♣
4♠	5♣	pass	6♦
pass	pass	6♠	dbl
all pass			

1. Splinter.

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
de Boer	*Helness*	*Muller*	*Helgemo*
	pass	2♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

At the first table everybody bid like a gentleman, pretty much drawing a blueprint of the whole distribution. Everyone judged perfectly and the par contract was reached, six spades doubled down one.

At the other table, however, Bauke Muller, coming from a country commonly known for being very liberal and giving its citizens the freedom of choice, did not feel restricted by rigid rules. He boldly started with a two spade preempt in second chair, not seeing any need to preserve the possibility of playing in a jack-high four-card heart suit when he held a six-card suit headed by the KJ10 on the side. This had the effect of completely silencing his opponents, letting him chalk up +650 in his final four spades contract when the other side was cold for a vulnerable slam. And his opponents were none other than the formidable pairing of Helgemo-Helness from Norway, not exactly a pair one could accuse of being timid bidders.

And what happened in the Venice Cup, where we faced the United States?

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Nehmert	*Meyers*	*Vogt*	*Schulle*
	2♦[1]	pass	2♥[2]
pass	3♣	3♠	5♣
5♦	pass	5♠	6♦
dbl	all pass		

1. One major or both minors, 4-11 HCP.
2. Pass or correct.

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Sanborn	*Sabine*	*McCallum*	*Dany*
	2♠[1]	pass	2NT
3♦[2]	dbl[3]	pass	5♦
pass	pass	5♠	6♦
dbl	all pass		

1. Both majors or both minors, 4-9 HCP.
2. Both majors.
3. Both minors maximum.

Both Jill Meyers and I had a toy in our bag for opening the North hand with a multi-meaning bid that included both minors. The auction soon accelerated. Since it looked to the East-West pairs as if North-South were saving, the final contract at both tables became six diamonds doubled, making twelve tricks for a flat board.

Eric Kokish covered both the Bermuda Bowl and the Venice Cup finals for the World Championship book. He considered it quite risky to basically commit the North hand to the three-level vulnerable, but wrote in his commentary: "Given what transpired at both tables [in the Venice Cup], neither [North] is likely to revise her fearless approach to the game." Yes, Eric, you are absolutely right.

The above deal occurred in the penultimate 16-board segment of the 128-board final of the 1993 Venice Cup. It was the first time we had ever reached the final of a World Championship. Going into that set we were trailing the United States team by 73 IMPs, and badly needed to get some IMPs back. Dany and I had a fantastic set: whatever we touched turned to gold. At the end of the set, our opponents were quite obviously rattled, and we left the playing room with high hopes of having recovered a large portion of our IMP deficit. However, it was not to be. The American North-South in the other room, Jill Meyers and Kay Schulle, had also done extremely well. We only won the set by 8 IMPs, leaving us without any realistic chance to emerge victorious from the final. We were behind by 65 IMPs with only sixteen deals to go.

I was devastated. Daniela and I had played every match but one during the round robin and we had played every single board in the knockout stage. It had been a long and exhausting two weeks with a lot of successes and failures, a lot of emotional ups and downs, but this was just too much. First the joy of anticipation and the hope of being within striking

distance, and then the agony of disappointment. It is good to have a team captain with broad shoulders. For the first time ever at a bridge tournament I started crying. I have never done it since. Besides being a psychological war, bridge is also an emotional rollercoaster.

This deal from the semifinal in the same tournament is a proof of how eager we are to show our two-suiters as quickly as possible:

Dealer West. Both Vul.

	♠ 10 6 4 ♥ K 10 4 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ A J 9 4	
♠ A K J 5 ♥ 9 ♦ J 9 8 4 2 ♣ K 10 2	N W E S	♠ 2 ♥ A Q J 8 7 5 ♦ 10 ♣ Q 7 6 5 3
	♠ Q 9 8 7 3 ♥ 6 2 ♦ A Q 7 5 3 ♣ 8	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Flodqvist	*Sabine*	*Ryman*	*Dany*
			2♦[1]
pass	2♥[2]	pass	2♠
pass	pass	3♥	pass
3NT	dbl	4♣	pass
pass	dbl	all pass	

1. Weak one-suiter with hearts or weak two-suiter with spades and a minor.
2. Pass or correct.

We were playing against Sweden in a cliffhanger, and going into the last sixteen-board segment were trailing them by 28 IMPs. It was still early in the set, but things were going quite well. When the above deal came up, we were actually only 16 IMPs behind, though we didn't know that at the time, of course.

Daniela, perhaps excited about picking up a two-suiter when it so often seems to give an opportunity to create a swing and also about having the

momentum, mistakenly opened the South hand with our 2♦ bid. What was wrong with that? She opened out of turn! Nobody noticed and the bidding proceeded as if nothing unusual had happened. The Swedes quickly bid to 3NT and I chanced a double. I was by no means sure we could beat this contract, but the wind had been blowing at our backs so far in this set. I felt that getting a number at this point would be just the right medicine. When Mari Ryman escaped to four clubs, I doubled even more happily, wrong in theory, but right in practice as it turned out.

Dany led her singleton trump, and I won with the ace, cashing the king of diamonds to continue with a second round of trumps. This defense is very strong, but declarer can still prevail. One of various winning lines involves finessing me for the ten of hearts, stripping me of my exit card in diamonds and finally endplaying me in hearts, squeezing Daniela in spades and diamonds in the process. The only choice at my disposal would be whether to give the last tricks to declarer or to dummy.

This line is certainly easier on paper than in practice, even though after the bidding and initial defense declarer should have quite a good picture of the whole deal. A clear disadvantage of aggressively bidding two-suiters is often tipping off declarer to the right line of play. (I was hoping I wouldn't have to admit to this drawback of aggressive bidding here, but I feel I need to be honest and lay all cards on the table. Nothing is perfect.)

However, it is not always so easy to keep a cool head in the heat of battle. There were no finesses and no endplay, so when the smoke had cleared, declarer was down two for 500 points to us. In the other room, our teammates also had a good result when Waltraud Vogt managed to take ten tricks in three clubs on a spade lead, giving us another 130 points and 12 IMPs.

In my mind, this deal was the match-breaker. I had the distinct feeling that all our opponents wanted to do afterwards was get the whole thing over with, race out of the playing room and compare scores, hoping they still had enough to win the match. But we didn't; we just wanted to sit in our chairs, waiting for more things to come. Momentum was clearly on our side and the match was up for grabs. When we had finished playing, we knew there had to be a chance we had pulled this one off. Our teammates were still playing, so we hurried into the VuGraph room to find out the score. When we entered, the audience started clapping. Then we knew for sure; it was a poignant moment.

As I've just admitted, the approach of aggressively bidding two-suiters can work to the opponents' advantage when they end up as the declaring side, knowing a lot of information about the deal. But it can also work the

other way around when the opponents make descriptive bids themselves, trying to overcome the enemy preempt and win the bidding war. Very often on distributional deals, it is extremely difficult to judge to which side the deal belongs, and many experts make an effort to exchange as much valuable information with partner as possible in order to make the right high-level competitive decision.

Witness this deal from our quarterfinal match against the United States:

Dealer South. Neither Vul.

	♠ A Q 6 ♥ J 6 3 ♦ J 9 8 3 ♣ A K 7	
♠ K J 8 7 3 ♥ A K 8 2 ♦ Q 7 ♣ 5 3	N W E S	♠ 9 5 4 2 ♥ Q 9 7 5 4 ♦ K ♣ Q 6 4
	♠ 10 ♥ 10 ♦ A 10 6 5 4 2 ♣ J 10 9 8 2	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Meyers	*Sabine*	*Montin*	*Dany*
			2♠[1]
dbl[2]	2NT	3♥	3NT
pass	4♦	pass	4♥
dbl	pass	pass	4♠
pass	5♦	all pass	

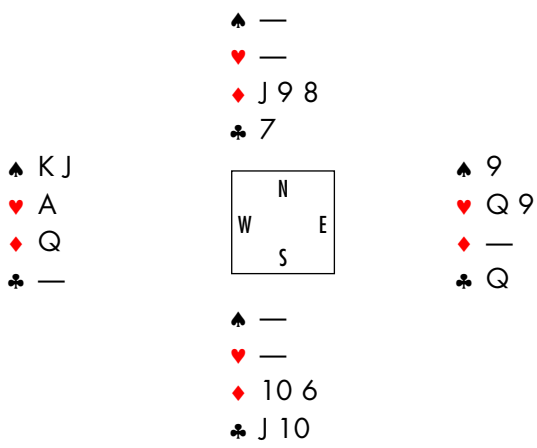
1. Weak, majors or minors.
2. Takeout, promising both majors.

This was an exciting deal to declare. Jill Meyers won the heart lead with the king and switched to a spade. At first sight this looked like a very straightforward deal. There was a heart loser and a diamond loser; if I could play the club suit without a loser, I would make the contract. The traditional way of doing this is to finesse for the queen, but my instincts were warning me: "Not so rash!"

When you have been a woman all your life, you learn to listen to your instincts. I knew now was the time to start thinking — before playing to Trick 2, not afterwards. West's double of our artificial two spade opening had been takeout promising both majors. East's three heart bid indicated longer hearts than spades, since with equal length she could easily have cuebid one of our suits. Thus West had to have five spades and four hearts and East four spades and five hearts. Taking this further, it seemed likely that their minor suit distributions were 2-2 and 1-3. Surely with a void in one of our suits they would not have let us play five diamonds but would have bid on instead.

Was all this knowledge useful for anything? Yes, because while it was uncertain which opponent held the club queen, I felt fairly confident that West had the king of spades to justify her takeout double. In that case, if all my assumptions were correct, the position of the club queen was totally irrelevant. Can you see it? It really is a beautiful deal. At Trick 2, I finessed the spade queen. My heart beat faster as I watched my screenmate, Randi Montin, play to this trick. It would look so stupid to take a losing finesse with a singleton in dummy when there weren't even any apparent losers to discard.

When she followed low, I couldn't help a happy little smile; now I knew this would be a great deal. Using the ace-king of clubs as re-entries to my hand, I could now ruff all my major-suit losers in dummy, cashing the spade and diamond ace on the way. The club queen hadn't dropped, but I knew that if my calculations were correct, whichever opponent won the trump exit would not have the club queen. They would have to give me a ruff and sluff. So it proved, when the position before the second round of trumps was:



Jill Meyers had no counter when she won with the trump queen.

The set had not gone well so far for our opponents, and when this deal was over, I could sense an air of disbelief and a feeling of resignation. They seemed to be thinking: "How are we supposed to beat this team if they continue to play like this?" We, on the other hand, were flying high. Everything was going our way and, to stay within Zia's terminology, we were playing in Heat 1. When you reach this point in a long match, it is important not to get overexcited or lose focus. Try to continue in the same vein as long as it lasts and pile up as many IMPs as possible. One thing is sure: there will be a next set and your opponents, having regrouped, will try to strike back with full power, doing just as bad and maybe even worse things to you than you did to them before.

Daniela and I do not have any strict suit requirements for using our two-level openings. They are simply defined as showing 4-9 HCPs. With more, we open at the one-level; with less, we pass. We like the combination of constructive and obstructive elements. Bridge is a battle of minds and, just like in a real war, in the long run it is a big advantage to strike the first blow. When Ron Andersen and I wrote our book *Preempts from A to Z*, we started the first chapter with this quote: "Twice armed is he who knows his cause is just; but thrice armed is he who gets his blow in fust!" Nathan Bedford Forrest knew what he was talking about.

Making life difficult for the enemy is the key idea here. If the opponents are deprived of their well-oiled bidding machinery and prevented from getting into one of the sequences they have been practicing for decades, where everybody is on 100% firm ground as to what every single bid means, they will on average have a much harder time reaching their best contract.

Our approach also allows for a lot of negative inferences. We know that when partner doesn't open the bidding, she doesn't have 5-5 distribution, nor does she have a six-card major or a seven-card minor. The only excuses for not opening the bidding are if your hand is too weak or you are holding a four-card major on the side that could be considered a serious candidate for becoming the trump suit. Thus if a passed hand all of a sudden gets involved at the three-or four-level later in the bidding, it can only be because there is a huge fit for partner or because there is a four-card major on the side. Voilà!

It has long been policy at international bridge competition to restrict conventions like our two-level openings to team events at the very highest level. They are forbidden at all other international championships. The rationale is that bids that do not unequivocally specify at least one suit are simply too difficult to defend against, because the opponents do not have a cuebid available. Have you ever heard of a chess player that was barred

from using a new ingenious strategic move he had developed because his opponents weren't aware it was possible to play this way and didn't have enough time to think of a counter strategy? Have you ever heard of a tennis player who was prohibited from using a new technique he had developed for his serve because his opponents had trouble returning the serve? No? Neither have I.

I can certainly sympathize with that policy at pairs tournaments where pairs usually play only two or three boards against one another. It would be extremely difficult for any pair to work out effective defenses against a host of artificial and unusual bidding sequences. In that case, there is merit in limiting the number of allowed conventions and approaches. On the other hand, one could argue that if at least some of the restrictions were removed, more people would start playing unusual treatments and more people would become accustomed to playing and defending against them. It would no longer be such an uncomfortable experience. It is amazing how adaptable we human beings can be. Players having to defend against new treatments would discover new angles to the game they never knew existed. It would widen their bridge horizon. What an appalling thought!

Every society in history seems to have run through a cycle. Once a society had gained superiority, had grown fat and complacent, it totally stopped development, doing everything it could to try to hold on to the status quo. And then it went under. Now let's be honest, aren't we beginning to see some parallels in the bridge world? When will we ever start learning from our mistakes?

I do understand a bridge expert's desire to be allowed to devote himself to what he is best at. He thoroughly analyzes a bidding sequence he is familiar with, allowing him to correctly diagnose the layout of the whole deal. Then he beautifully performs the play like a plastic surgeon, finishing with an exotic entry-shifting trump squeeze without the count that nobody has ever heard of. Will that make the VuGraph audience cheer? They will be clapping politely for sure, because the commentators will tell them to do so. But will it make the VuGraph theater resound like a football field with a noisy and cheering crowd, as happened in Paris? I doubt it.

It is often said that in order for bridge to become a spectator sport, we have to simplify our bidding systems to make it easier for the average bridge player to understand and follow what is going on. I disagree with this. It is the excitement and entertainment factors that play the most important roles here. To my mind, simplifying bidding systems does absolutely nothing to increase the excitement and entertainment value of our game; quite the contrary.

The last sixteen deals in the Paris Venice Cup have been widely acclaimed as one of the best VuGraph shows ever. The spectators were on the edge of their seats, with the mainly French audience cheering their home team on with cries of "Allez la France!" I call this entertainment — and it was made possible because our two teams were using different bidding systems and approaches to the game. I assure you, if it hadn't been for that, these last sixteen deals would have entered the annals of World Championships as one of the dullest sets ever. Instead, wherever I go, people ask me, "Are you the partner of the famous player who took a first-round finesse against the jack of hearts to win the World Championships for Germany?"

Goethe's Faust complained, "There are two souls in my breast." I think this must be true for mankind in general. It lies in human nature to explore and discover. It also lies in human nature to be suspicious of new ideas and developments, and to cling to traditional ways that have survived the test of time. When Galileo Gallilei proclaimed the earth wasn't the center of our solar system, but that the earth and all the other planets revolved around the sun, he was taken to court and convicted of heresy by the Roman Catholic Church. Today we learn about the solar system in kindergarten. Van Gogh only sold one of his paintings during his lifetime. Today, you have to be a multi-millionaire to afford one. And Wilbur and Orville Wright were laughed at for their dream of making humans fly; they had to leave their country to attract any genuine interest. Today we have space shuttles exploring the universe.

So when we are told that experts have to simplify their bidding systems because the general bridge playing public does not understand them, I like to reply with the words of Galileo Gallilei: "I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forgo their use." And when he left the court that had convicted him of heresy and had forced him to recant the findings of his astronomical research: "Nevertheless, it (the earth) moves (around the sun)."

-3-

The Double That Never Was

Most likely nothing eventful IMP-wise had happened on Board 2, so we were hoping for something more exciting to happen on Board 3.

Board 3. *Dealer South. E-W Vul.*

	♠ K J 8 4 ♥ 9 6 4 ♦ K 5 ♣ 9 8 6 2	
♠ A 9 7 2 ♥ 7 2 ♦ A Q 10 8 4 ♣ K 3	N W E S	♠ 10 5 3 ♥ A K Q J 8 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ A 10
	♠ Q 6 ♥ 10 5 3 ♦ 9 7 6 ♣ Q J 7 5 4	

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
			pass
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
1♠	pass	2♣[1]	pass
2NT	pass	3NT	all pass

1. Fourth suit forcing.

The East-West hands fit extremely well: barring bad breaks, slam is practically laydown in either red suit or in notrump without a spade lead. Even with a spade lead, it will make if the diamond finesse is onside.

Pony and Andrea had an unexceptional bread-and-butter auction to 3NT that would probably be duplicated by the majority of the field in any pairs competition. The hand's slam potential never came to light. As it turned out, none of the pairs in the Bermuda Bowl and Venice Cup final came close to bidding the slam. Or was there one?

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
			pass
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
1♠	pass	2♦[1]	pass
3♦	pass	3♥	pass
4♥	all pass		

1. Artificial game force.

I am not sure how much information Catherine had about her partner's hand, but when Veronique's four heart bid came back to her, she thought for quite some time. I could feel my heart beat faster and faster. Surely her meditation meant she was considering a move towards slam. There had to be a good chance we could beat six hearts with a spade lead. The king of diamonds rated to be well placed for us and an opening spade lead was likely to establish a trick for our side before declarer's spade loser(s) could be discarded on dummy's diamonds.

Thanks to Mr. Lightner I could make sure of a spade lead by doubling an eventual six heart contract. Or could I? A double of a freely bid slam would ask partner for an unusual lead and in our agreement that very often would mean dummy's first-bid suit. Would Daniela, looking at her hand, be able to work out that I wanted dummy's second-bid suit instead? I felt she would. I was getting increasingly excited and was willing Catherine to bid on. But she passed. Her pass was just like the little needle that takes all the air out of the balloon. My heartbeat went back to normal. Daniela led a standard club and, just like at the other table, declarer took twelve tricks for no swing. The score was still France 215, Germany 173.

I doubt there is any single convention in bridge that has been responsible for more triumphs and disasters than the Lightner double. Originally invented by Theodore A. Lightner, the concept is brilliant. Good players are unlikely to bid slams that will go down because they simply don't have enough high cards, so you're not going to find yourself in a position to double them for penalties very often. Mr. Lightner found it more useful to give the double of a freely bid slam a conventional meaning: "Partner, make an unusual lead, a lead you would not normally have thought of." This will be an unusual lead that the doubler knows will set the slam for sure or that he considers to be the defenders' best chance of beating the contract. "But!" I can see you raising your finger. "How will partner know what the right unusual lead is? Is this always so clear?" Well, it is not and that is where the disasters come from. Try your luck on this deal from the Life Master Pairs at the 2002 American Fall Nationals in Phoenix, Arizona that caused Zia a few gray hairs.

Sitting South at unfavorable vulnerability, Zia held this hand

♠ Q J 9 7 5 3 2 ♥ Q 10 8 ♦ 3 ♣ 7 6

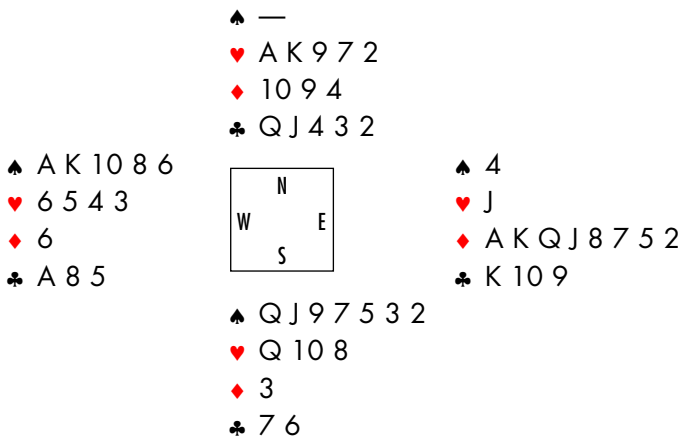
with the bidding going

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	Sabine		*Zia*
		1♦	2♠
pass	pass	3♠	pass
5♥	dbl	6♦	pass
pass	dbl	all pass	

After his partner's six diamond bid, West remarked: "I guess I misunderstood my partner's three spade bid, he probably wanted me to bid 3NT with a spade stopper." Now it was Zia's lead.

Zia is usually a very fast player, but here he considered his choice very carefully for quite some time. A trump lead was clearly out of the question. If I had wanted a heart lead, I would have passed the final six diamond call, having doubled the odd five heart bid. So it had to be either a spade or a club. A spade or a club, a spade or a club. What should it be? Out came the seven of clubs.

Dealer East. N-S Vul.



From then on, nothing could prevent declarer from taking twelve tricks. Only a spade or the queen of hearts lead and a spade switch would have beaten the contract. To be honest, I hadn't been worried about what Zia was going to lead at all. With my hand, I didn't think six diamonds had a snowball's chance in hell of making. The opponents had bid the slam after an obvious misunderstanding. I held a void in partner's suit, the ace and king in one side-suit and a stopper in the other side suit. How could that contract possibly be making?

Well, it could! I think both Zia and I were stunned and we started laughing. What else could we have done? To me it is one of the fascinating aspects of bridge that this kind of thing is possible and keeps happening. The East-West players will probably tell their grandchildren about how they stumped the great Zia and scored up a doubled slam against him. Bridge is the only sport I know of in which, from time to time, an average player has the opportunity to score a big goal against an expert. Who doesn't enjoy the uplifting feeling of a once-in-a-lifetime experience?

Our result on this deal gave rise to a discussion between Zia and his regular partner, Michael Rosenberg, on the subject of Lightner doubles. Three days later, they finally realized that it was simply too complex a topic. It is impossible always to find the right lead after a Lightner double without the guidance of strict rules. So they made this rule: if opening leader has bid a suit, the Lightner double of a slam always asks him to lead his own suit.

Making a set of rules in a regular partnership is eminently sensible. The downside is that occasionally one will be unable to make a Lightner double because partner would not be able to deduce the right lead. However, there is

no doubt in my mind that the certainty of always knowing what suit partner's Lightner double is asking for more than makes up for those missed chances.

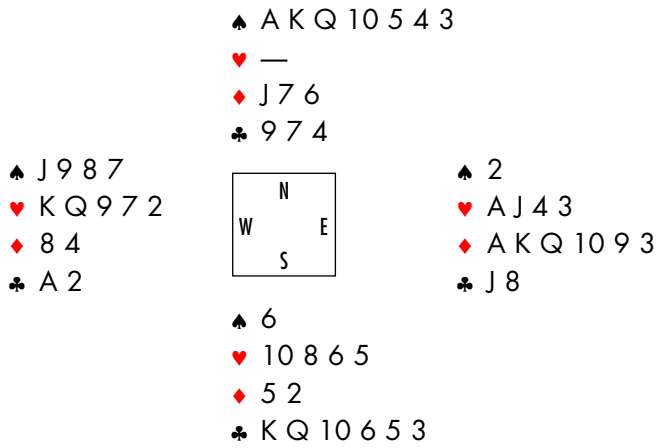
You think you would always guess right? Then see how you would have fared on this problem. Texan Seymon Deutsch faced this on the very first board of the world championship final against Austria in Venice 1988. He was playing in his very first Olympiad, and was en route to winning the first Olympiad title ever for the United States.

♠ 6 ♥ 10 8 6 5 ♦ 5 2 ♣ K Q 10 6 5 3

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Kadlec	*Wolff*	*Terraneo*	*Deutsch*
	4♠	5♦	pass
6♦	dbl	all pass	

Well? Clearly partner made a Lightner double, asking for a non-spade lead, in this kind of auction usually based on a void. Judging that partner's void was much more likely to be in clubs than in hearts Deutsch led the king of clubs, just like you and I and the rest of the world would probably have done.

Dealer North. Neither Vul.



Curtains. Only a heart lead would have beaten the slam.

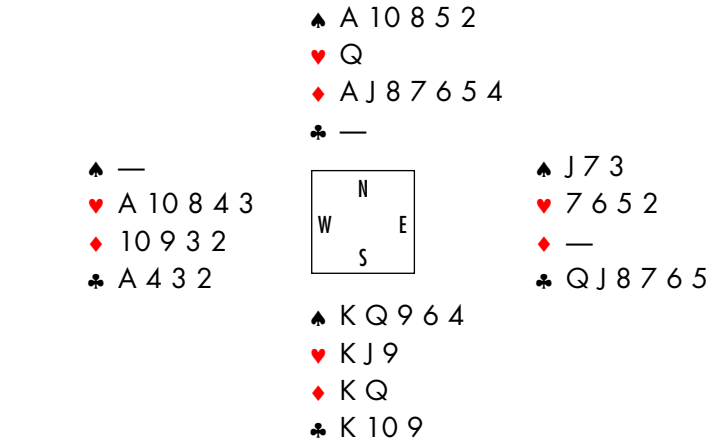
Daniela's and my rules for Lightner doubles are as follows:

- Lead dummy's side-suit.
- If dummy has bid two side-suits, use your judgment.
- If dummy hasn't bid a side-suit, lead declarer's first-bid side-suit.
- If no opponent has bid a suit, lead the highest unbid suit.

That last rule would have been very useful on the above deal, virtually dictating the heart lead. Note that playing this set of rules, it would not be possible for North to double with a club void; partner is forced to lead a heart no matter what. Nevertheless, there is a good chance to find the club lead when it is right, because there is a negative inference available. As the opponents are most likely prepared for a spade lead and partner didn't double for a heart lead, a club lead should certainly be taken into consideration. Negative inferences are an extremely powerful weapon in partnerships that have firm agreements and can trust one another to stick to those agreements.

Trust was also the issue for my husband, Jens, on opening lead on this deal from the first Marlboro China Cup Invitational Bridge Tournament in Beijing in 1996.

Dealer South. E-W Vul.



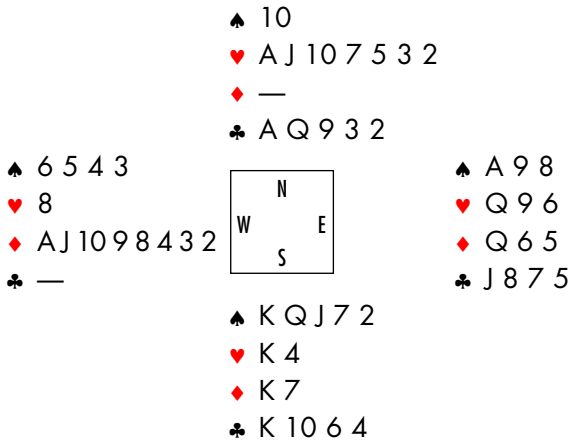
West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Jens Auken	*Weinstein*	*Koch-Palmund*	*Stewart*
			1♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
pass	5♣	pass	5♥
pass	7♠	dbl	all pass

Imagine that your opponents bid a grand slam despite the fact that you hold two aces, and your partner doubles. Would you be tempted to lead one of your aces? It had better be the right one then! Jens trusted his partner

Dennis' double, which asked for a diamond lead. After ruffing the opening diamond lead, Dennis had an easy heart return looking at dummy and could thus get another ruff to set the contract three tricks. That's quite a difference to what would have happened if partner, left to his own devices, had led the wrong ace. Long live the Lightner double!

Rhoda Habert from Canada had a similar problem in our semifinal match at the 2000 World Team Olympiad in Maastricht.

Dealer East. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Kraft	*Sabine*	*Habert*	*Dany*
		pass	1♠
3♦	3♥	pass	4♦
pass	6♥	pass	pass
dbl	all pass		

I do not know what the Canadians' partnership agreements were for this kind of situation, but they didn't seem to be on the same wavelength. Clearly Beverly Kraft was hoping for a club lead when she doubled the final 6♥ contract. Rhoda Habert, however, seemed to believe the double called for dummy's first-bid suit. She started with the ace of spades, but not before she had given the problem a good deal of thought. She must have been torn between whom to trust more, her partner or the opponents. Would we really have been bidding like this with a ten-card spade fit between us?

She finally decided that partnership trust was more important than anything else and did what she believed their agreements indicated. When the

ace of spades survived the first trick, she accurately switched to a club for the ruff. When I later misguessed trumps, the contract was beaten two tricks for 300 points and 13 IMPs to the Canadians, because Canada stopped safely in four hearts at the other table.

I may be biased, but I feel our opponents got very lucky on this board. My spade and diamond holdings could easily have been reversed, in which case the ace of spades lead would have been disastrous. On the other hand, one might argue that Daniela and I got what we deserved on this board, because we actually weren't on the same wavelength either. I took Daniela's four diamond bid as agreeing hearts and a better hand than a four heart bid, whereas she meant it more as a general choice of games. If I had interpreted it correctly, I would of course have bid six clubs instead of six hearts, a contract that cannot be beaten despite the bad breaks. In hindsight, I should have done that anyway, no matter what her four diamond bid meant; I simply didn't think of it at the time.

The result on this board was critical. With four boards to go in the match, we were trailing Canada by 36 IMPs. If I had done the right thing by bidding six clubs, we would have picked up 9 IMPs instead of losing 13 IMPs, a swing of 22 IMPs. That would have reduced our deficit to 14 IMPs, giving us a chance to turn the match around over the remaining three deals. As it was, the match was over after this deal.

Sadly, I have to record that our loss to Canada in Maastricht was also the most unpleasant match I have ever played in international competition. It is a very unfortunate yet undeniable fact that there are a small number of expert players who cannot control their temper and at times behave very badly at the bridge table, often in a way that easily can be interpreted as intimidating. Many average players have been driven away from tournament bridge by this kind of behavior. Bridge administrators have tried to get the situation under control by imposing severe sanctions on the perpetrators, realizing how damaging they are for the image of bridge and for everybody's enjoyment of the game. You might expect that players in top international competition should be able to deal with an opponent's bad behavior and that they have learned to not let it affect their concentration and bridge judgment adversely.

Top players know how important it is to focus on every single deal, but it is still possible to distract them like all other mortals. And every little thought that distracts you from the deal you are currently playing is directly detrimental to your game. All of this may sound to you like making excuses for losing a match. But if someone behaves so badly that her partner after the match apologizes for the player's behavior during the match,

I cannot help the feeling that somehow justice did not prevail. And this is not about winning or losing. It was a sad day for my perception of bridge, how I would like to see it played and what I would like to see it stand for. Gladly there have been many good days since.

Very often a Lightner double is based on a void. Knowing this, the opponents will sometimes run to an alternative trump suit or even notrump to avoid the possibility of a ruff. A wicked thought is beginning to form itself. Is it possible to steer the opponents into the wrong contract? I was trying a little experiment in our quarterfinal match against France at the McConnell Cup in Montreal 2002. Come and think with me and discover how exciting holding even the most boring collection can become!

♠ J ♥ Q 9 6 3 ♦ J 9 7 6 3 ♣ 7 4 2

I was sitting North and our opponents bid as follows:

West	**East**
Willard	*Cronier*
1♠	2♣
3♣	3♠
4♥	4NT
6♦	7♣

I was sitting on the same side of the screen as Bénédicte Cronier. As North I was responsible for pushing the tray through the screen after her seven club bid and I knew I would have just a little time to think before the tray came back to us, quick!

Our opponents seemed to know what they were doing. They had a double fit in spades and clubs and Sylvie Willard had shown a diamond void by jumping to six diamonds over her partner's 4NT bid. It looked hopeless to me; surely seven clubs was going to make. What about seven spades, their other fit? Maybe my partner, Pony Nehmert, had a void in clubs and I could give her a club ruff on opening lead against seven spades. Surely if I doubled seven clubs, looking like a woman with a spade void, our opponents would run to seven spades instead. There was an added extra chance even if Pony didn't have a club void. Let's say their spade holding was something like

A K Q 7 6 opposite 10 5 4 3

'Knowing' that I had a spade void, declarer would have to take a first round finesse by running the spade 10 to capture my partner's presumed J982. What a coup that would be! The tray came back to me and I had to act quickly; any delay would have been suspicious and they might have smelled the rat. Almost the second I put down my double card, Bénédicte placed her seven spades card on the tray. Operation successful!

Dealer West. Neither Vul.

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

Unfortunately, the patient died. Pony couldn't ruff my club lead and there was no way to go wrong in the spade suit. All I had achieved was maneuvering our opponents into a higher scoring contract. But how exciting it was!

I had a partial success with a similar ruse a few levels lower at the 2000 Venice Cup in Bermuda.

Dealer East. E-W Vul.

	♠ A K Q J ♥ 10 9 8 6 ♦ 7 3 ♣ J 7 4	
♠ 10 4 3 2 ♥ A K 3 ♦ A J 10 ♣ 9 5 2	N W E S	♠ 8 ♥ Q 5 2 ♦ K 9 8 6 4 2 ♣ A Q 3
	♠ 9 7 6 5 ♥ J 7 4 ♦ Q 5 ♣ K 10 8 6	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*d'Ovidio*	*Dany*
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
2♥	pass	3♦	pass
3♥	pass	3NT	pass
pass	dbl	pass	pass
4♦	all pass		

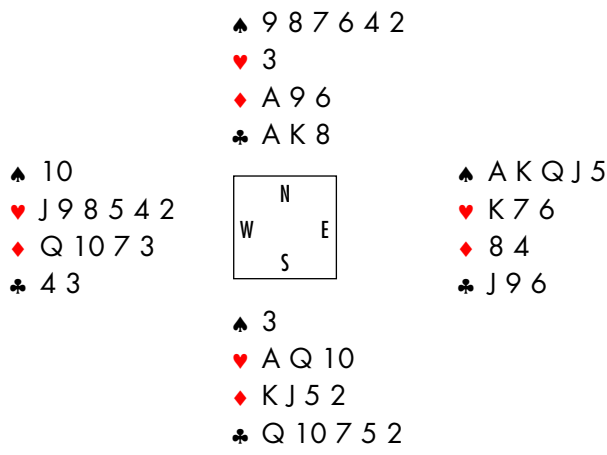
I had only four tricks against 3NT, but how were my opponents supposed to know that? Looking at all four top honors in spades, I was confident they would be worried and might try to find a different place to play. I doubled 3NT for a spade lead. And indeed, with a very unappetizing spade holding, Veronique Bessis decided that four diamonds might be a safer haven.

Our teammates in the other room, Babsi Stawowy and Katrin Farwig, had a more practical route to 3NT, with West declaring after bidding 1NT-3NT. The opponents took the first four spade tricks, but with the right view in diamonds, nine tricks were easy.

So why was this only a partial success? When dummy came down in four diamonds, Catherine, the declarer, looked at it in total bewilderment. Then she flung the ten of diamonds on the table, the same card that was also visible in dummy, announcing that she held fourteen cards! Our opponents were fined 3 IMPs for not counting their cards, but we lost our swing. What a bummer! Still, we were all laughing hysterically. Finally a semi-psychic double that worked and the result was scratched because it was a misdeal!

Two years later in Paris it was payback time. The Venice Cup final had just gotten underway; France and Germany were fighting for the big prize.

Dealer South. Both Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*d'Ovidio*	*Dany*
			1♦[1]
pass	1♠	pass	2♣[2]
pass	2♥[3]	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	dbl	4♣
pass	6♣	all pass	

1. Precision.
2. Promises at least 5-4 either way in the minors.
3. Fourth suit forcing.

When the opponents double us in 3NT for the lead, we are playing a doubt-showing redouble. (A redouble would mean "Partner, I am very much in doubt as to whether we can make 3NT on the requested lead. Please run if you don't stop the suit.") Therefore I was very sure Daniela had a void in spades since she ran from 3NT ahead of me. Now I felt all my values were working overtime and jumped to slam. It is possible to take eleven tricks in clubs, but the contract actually went down two, for 200 points to France.

What had gone wrong in our auction? I am well known for forgetting a little piece of system now and again, and Daniela felt it was too risky to redouble. Trying to avoid a disaster, she decided to take the bull by the horns and make the decision herself. Unfortunately, it didn't have the desired effect. When the deal was finished, Catherine said with a twinkle in her eye: "I remembered Bermuda." Touché! I recounted my cards, but there were exactly thirteen. Unlucky! Fortunately, one of the good things about playing teams is that one can always hope to be saved by one's teammates. Pony and Andrea scored a great result at the other table by doubling their opponents in 4♠ for 500 points and 7 IMPs to Germany.

-4-

Cherchez La Femme

The next deal turned out to be a clear candidate for inclusion in the next edition of Larry Cohen's *To Bid or Not to Bid – The Law of Total Tricks*. Larry, if only you had been there, your heart would have jumped with excitement over this new proof of your theory. Never mind that it caused Daniela a lot of mental work to master a difficult task.

Board 4. *Dealer West. Both Vul.*

	♠ 8 4 ♥ K 8 6 ♦ 7 6 3 2 ♣ A 6 3 2	
♠ Q J 9 5 3 ♥ Q 4 3 ♦ K J 10 9 ♣ 4	N W E S	♠ K 7 6 ♥ 10 5 ♦ Q 5 4 ♣ K Q 10 8 7
	♠ A 10 2 ♥ A J 9 7 2 ♦ A 8 ♣ J 9 5	

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
pass	pass	pass	1♥
1♠	2♥	2♠	all pass

In the closed room the bidding died at two spades. After a heart lead to the ace the defenders had lots of time to arrange their diamond ruff, so the contract had to go one down for 100 points to France.

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*d'Ovidio*	*Dany*
pass	pass	pass	1♥
1♠	dbl	2♠	dbl
pass	2NT	pass	3♥
all pass			

In our strong club system Dany had a maximum hand for opening one heart, which she expressed by doubling two spades. My 2NT asked for further description and we landed in our eight-card fit. On page 48 of Larry's book it clearly says in a little framed box that cannot be missed, "Never outbid the opponents on the three-level with sixteen trumps." The French declined to bid again, leaving Daniela with the challenge of finding a way to bring home three hearts. Which is exactly what she did in spectacular fashion.

The opening lead was the four of clubs. Correctly diagnosing it as a singleton Daniela rose with dummy's ace. It would have been superior to duck the first trick in case East had better diamond intermediates or two spade honors, which would guarantee an entry before Daniela could arrange her spade ruff in dummy and which would allow the defenders to promote the queen of trumps as a trick. But from then on everything was flawless and brilliant.

Next followed a spade to the ten to keep East off lead and for the same reason Daniela also ducked the jack of diamonds continuation. After Daniela had won the next diamond with the ace she started to do some counting. West's distribution appeared to be 5-3-4-1 and East's 3-2-3-5. It seemed likely that East had one spade and one diamond honor in addition to the club king-queen. Might Catherine not have bid more strongly if she also had the heart queen? If this analysis was correct, there was only one chance left for the contract.

Daniela took a deep breath and played the jack of hearts out of her hand, passing it when Veronique played low. When it held she could now ruff her spade loser in dummy and return to hand with a diamond ruff to finish drawing trumps for a breathless +140 and 1 IMP to Germany where it could easily have been 5 IMPs for France instead.

So thanks to Daniela's razor sharp analysis the Law prevailed: "The Total Number of Tricks on any deal is equal to the Total Number of Trumps."

Larry, I think you owe us a drink. Or do we owe you one?

Locating a missing queen is always a very rewarding experience and is often considered the domain of real experts. Most experts hate guessing and go out of their way to collect as many clues as possible to give them better

than 50/50 odds when they have to make the final decision. For situations where they cannot avoid a guess they often have their own private rules.

Some of my favorites are from the legendary Barry Crane, arguably the greatest matchpoint player of all times. When he had a two-way finesse for the queen in a situation of e.g. AJx facing K10x his rule was "The queen is always over the jack in the minors. In the majors it is always over the ten." Silly? Maybe, but sticking to rules like that in situations where it is simply impossible to dig up any clues as to the winning decision has an incredibly relaxing effect. It not only saves you from wasting brainpower on insoluble problems and spares you the agony of having to make a guess, but it also ensures that you consistently do the same thing in comparable situations, which is highly recommended.

When he was missing four to the queen Barry also had another rule, which takes your own distribution into account. If you hold one singleton in your combined hands, then play for the key suit to break 3-1 as well. If you hold two singletons they even out and the key suit will break evenly, so play for the drop. Why not?

The best-known rule for what to do when trying to find a queen is already taught to beginners: 'Eight ever, nine never', meaning with eight cards of the suit in your combined hands you should always finesse and with nine you should never finesse. So obviously this means with even fewer cards than eight in your combined hands you should also finesse. If you don't find this obvious you should probably be returning this book to where it came from and getting something else instead. But first read on for a little while and find out why it is so enjoyable to break the rules once in a while.

Dealer East. EW Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
Zhang	*Sabine*	*Gu*	*Dany*
		pass	1♦
pass	1♥	pass	3♣
pass	3NT	all pass	

The setting is the quarterfinal against China at the 2000 Team Olympiad in Maastricht, Netherlands. The organizers had decided to put the third segment of our match on VuGraph. Going into the set we were leading China by 30 IMPs, but by the time the above deal came up our lead had shrunk to 9 IMPs.

My one heart response to Daniela's one diamond opening was either natural or an artificial relay, which would promise at least game invitational values and didn't necessarily have anything to do with hearts. So against 3NT Gu started with the heart ace and continued with a low heart to Zhang's queen.

I won the jack of spades switch and advanced the club queen, which was taken by Zhang's ace. She persisted with another spade, which I again won to cash one high diamond and then two more rounds of clubs ending in my hand to collect as much information as possible before making the key decision in the diamond suit. Gu parted with her remaining low heart on the third round of clubs; on the two rounds of spades she had contributed the seven and the nine. She had played all her cards in natural fashion, which convinced me that her distribution was 3-4-4-2 with the spade queen and heart ace-king in high cards for sure.

I was beginning to feel an itch; it was starting to look suspiciously as if the diamond queen was doubleton offside. With the diamond queen in addition to her other high cards might not Gu have opened the bidding? Our opponents were playing Precision and Precision players tend to open most 11-point hands.

This was delicate; somehow playing on VuGraph always adds some extra spice to a situation like that. What would the commentators say if I went for the big play of trying to drop the doubleton queen offside and it turned out to be wrong? What would the spectators think? Surely they would all say I was playing to the gallery. For some reason it seems to be so much easier to have the courage of your convictions when no one is watching. It's sort of like the golfer who never can hit a drive at the first tee by the clubhouse where everyone is watching. In theory we all know that thoughts like that do absolutely nothing to help you find the winning line

of play, but believe me they are difficult to block out of your head. It was time to make a decision; I was rechecking my analysis, but couldn't convince myself that it was wrong. So a diamond to the king it was, dropping the queen for the ninth trick and the contract.

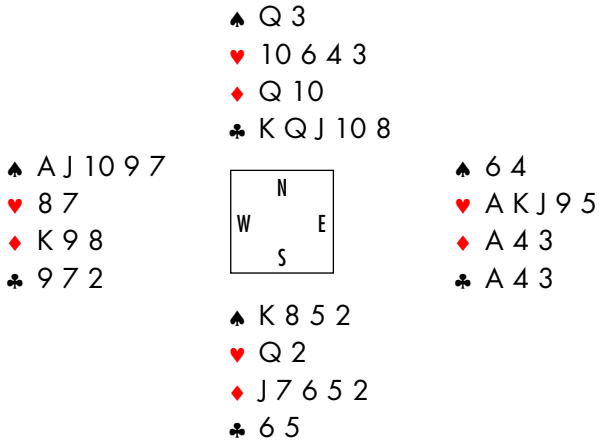
The next day I ran across Paul Marston from Australia right outside the MECC (the convention center where the championships were taking place). "Nice play in the diamond suit, Sabine," he said, waving from a distance. I was beaming (my usual reaction when someone makes me a compliment), but I couldn't help wondering what he would have said if that diamond queen had been onside.

Numerous ploys have been developed to try and find a missing queen and stories of players famed for never misguessing a queen have acquired cult status. Legend tells of a player who, privileged by nature with his body height, would always know where to find a queen. Once an opponent tried to trap him by hiding the queen of a key suit behind another card and then nonchalantly holding his hand so that declarer could very easily see his cards. Declarer promptly finessed him for the queen. The player almost exploded and burst out: "How could you possibly get this right? There is no way you could have seen the queen in my hand!" "No," declarer smiled, "but you were going out of your way to show me your cards."

Some of these ploys have even received their own name, like the Alcatraz Coup. As the name already implies, just like peeking in other players' cards the Alcatraz Coup is not exactly on the legal side. Imagine a holding of AJ10 in dummy and K32 in your hand. You call for the jack from dummy and when RHO plays low you discard a side suit from your hand. LHO will now either follow with a small card or attempt to win the trick with the queen. When he has played his card you correct your revoke knowing whether to play the king or a small card from your hand now. I recall being told that the original Alcatraz Coup actually comes from rubber bridge. A player with something like AJ109 opposite K432 in the trump suit would claim 100 points for honors and watch his opponents' reaction. Surely the one with the queen would start protesting!

Before you call the cops on me, let's get back to some more legitimate methods. How about squeezing your opponents a little to force them to tell you where the queen is? All it requires is a little bit of pressure and some patience.

Dealer West. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany	*Berkowitz*	*Sabine*	*Sanders*
pass	pass	1♣[1]	pass
1♠	pass	2♥	pass
2♠	pass	2NT	pass
3NT	all pass		

1. Precision.

I am taking you to the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, Switzerland, the setting for the second IOC Grand Prix in 1999. Under President José Damiani's leadership, the World Bridge Federation (WBF) has for many years now worked very hard to gain a place for bridge in the Olympic world. It marked its first success in 1995 when the IOC awarded the WBF the status of a 'Recognized Sport Organization'. Pursuing its goal, WBF started organizing the International Olympic Committee Grand Prix, which took place for the first time in 1998 at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne, presided over by Juan Antonio Samaranch, then President of the IOC. It was at the opening ceremony of that event that President Samaranch spoke his famous words: "Bridge is a sport and, as such, its place is here [in the Olympic Museum] like all other sports." It was a great moment.

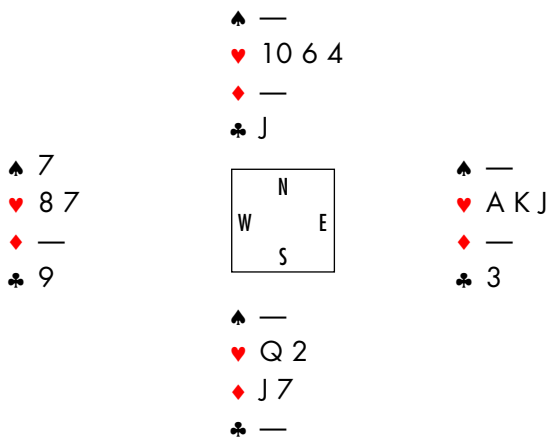
Participating at the first edition of this event were the Open Teams of all the countries that had been victorious at the Bridge Team Olympiad throughout the existence of the WBF: France, Italy, Brazil, Poland and USA, supplemented by China as representative of the Asian zone. With the success of the first event and since men, given enough time, realize they

cannot really thrive without women, there was to be a women's competition at the second edition of the IOC Grand Prix. This is where we are now.

The format for the women's competition was different from the men's competition. There were two teams, one from Europe and one from North America. Daniela and I had the honor of representing Europe at this memorable event, together with Veronique Bessis-Catherine d'Ovidio from France, Pat Davies-Nicola Smith from England and Maria Erhart-Sylvia Terraneo from Austria.

You have probably already peeked at the deal above and discovered another doubleton queen offside in a seven-card fit. We haven't reached the stage of wizardry yet — that will come later in the chapter. On this deal, the play simply developed in such a fashion that anybody who could count to thirteen would have dropped the doubleton heart queen offside; it was almost foolproof. A few more deals like that and you may feel tempted to get your old school abacus from the attic. Are you ready?

Carol Sanders started with a low diamond to Lisa Berkowitz' queen and my ace. The spade finesse lost to the queen and back came the diamond ten, which I ducked. Now Lisa switched to the club king and, when that was ducked as well, continued with the club queen. It was time to win some tricks, so I took my ace, repeated the spade finesse, cashed the spade ace and exited with a spade. Carol had no more clubs left and got off lead with a diamond to dummy's king. Lisa, having already discarded two clubs on the play of the spades, was beginning to feel uncomfortable and parted with a heart. The deal was an open book now, the situation before the play of dummy's last spade being:

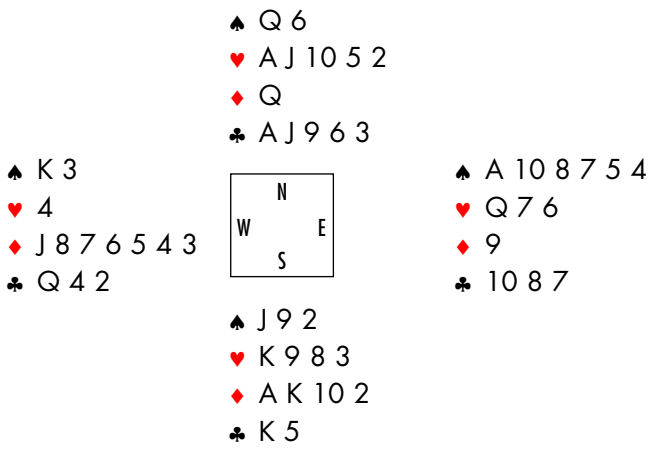


Lisa had to keep the winning club and accordingly pitched another heart. However, as North was marked with 2-4-2-5 and South with 4-2-5-2 distribution, I now knew there was no need to take the heart finesse. No matter who had it, it would come tumbling down under the king. Easy, isn't it? (Another way to look at it is that North has shown up with ♣KQJ108 and a couple of queens, yet failed to open the bidding.)

In all the above deals, the missing queen could be located by simple counting and logical deduction. The real beauty comes when another element is involved, table presence, an ability that is often described as the mark of a true natural card player. Having good table presence is a most powerful and very feared weapon: the slightest itch, the blink of an eye, a minimal change in posture can give away the lie of the cards to a player with great table presence. One claim to fame of another American legend, John Crawford, was that he would never misguess a queen. One day a friend bet him $100 that he would not be able to tell which defender held the trump queen on a deal he would prepare. Never one to refuse a bet, Crawford accepted. When everything was set and he came to the table, he looked at both defenders in turn and exclaimed in total astonishment: "I don't believe this! Neither one of them looks like he has got the queen!" His friend handed him a hundred-dollar bill in disbelief; he had removed the trump queen from the deck.

Time to enter the world of magic, the world of plays that cannot be explained by pure logic alone. Your heart has to be in it; your antennas have to be out. You have to be able to look into people's heads and understand human reaction; otherwise you will never be able to come close to performing a play like the ones I am about to show you.

Dealer South. Both Vul.



West	North	East	South
Ivanova	*Sabine*	*Halatcheva*	*Dany*

An unremembered and probably best forgotten bidding sequence

You will not find this deal anywhere on the Internet. As a matter of fact, unless you are in the habit of collecting souvenirs, you will not find it anywhere. I found it during my Easter holiday in the attic of my parents' house in Bulletin No.15 from the European Teams Championships in Turku, Finland in 1989.

The deal occurred towards the end of the Championships in our match against Bulgaria. Back in those days, the Bulgarian girls were the toast of the town. Deleva-Lorer had won the European Ladies Pairs Championships in Brighton in 1987 and they grabbed the bronze in Turku. In 1988, at the Team Olympiad in Venice, the Bulgarian squad had scored a Cinderella victory in the quarterfinals against the highly fancied team from the United States. Bridge players' hearts everywhere were beating for them to do well.

Germany, on the other hand, had not really distinguished themselves anywhere yet. All of a sudden, at this tournament, out of nowhere, we had reached the top. Having played steadily for more than a week we were a cinch to grasp one of the two qualifying spots for the Venice Cup in Perth, Australia, later that year. Nobody could have been more surprised than we were ourselves. For all those reasons the match between Bulgaria and Germany was shown on VuGraph.

I don't remember the bidding on the above deal. Somehow Dany and I must have had some kind of a misunderstanding, because we reached an ambitious six hearts contract. Not only were we off the first two spade tricks, but there also was a little hole in the trump suit. Ivanova found the sneaky lead of the three of spades, low from king doubleton. Halatcheva won with the ace and took her time considering what to return, finally hitting upon the nine of diamonds. Ivanova, who had anxiously been awaiting her partner's continuation, almost collapsed in her chair at the sight of the nine of diamonds. This did not go unnoticed by Daniela, who was sitting on the same side of the screen as Ivanova. What did this reaction mean?

Daniela reasoned as follows. Clearly West had led a spade away from the king and was hoping to beat the contract by taking two spade tricks after her partner had won the first trick with the ace. When East did not continue with a second round of spades, all hopes of another trick in that suit vanished, as did, apparently, all West's hopes of beating the contract. Thus West could not

possibly be looking at the trump queen, because otherwise she would still be very tense, hoping to score a trump trick. I always think having the courage of your convictions is quite heroic, especially when playing on VuGraph. Daniela had no qualms; she cashed the heart ace and finessed East for the queen on the next round, for twelve tricks. Wow!

Once up in the attic, I rummaged around a bit more. It was a real trip down memory lane, which brought out more than one sentimental tear. It is amazing what the sight of a 35-year-old rocking horse can do to you. Then I found a deal that dates back even earlier than the last one, to the 1987 European Championships in Brighton.

Dealer West. Both Vul.

	♠ A 8 ♥ 5 4 ♦ A K J 9 6 5 2 ♣ A 2	
♠ Q 7 6 5 2 ♥ Q 10 9 6 2 ♦ 7 ♣ 8 3	N W E S	♠ 9 4 3 ♥ A J 7 ♦ Q 4 3 ♣ K J 10 7
	♠ K J 10 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ 10 8 ♣ Q 9 6 5 4	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Smith	*Dany*	*Davies*	*Sabine*
pass	2♣[1]	pass	3♣
pass	3♦[2]	pass	3NT
all pass			

1. Benjamin – a strong one-suiter.
2. Acol Two in diamonds (we were not playing our strong club system yet!)

Brighton was the very first time that Daniela and I represented Germany on the National Women's team. I still remember sharing a room at a tiny family hotel, where in order to get to the bathroom I had to climb over

Daniela's side of the bed. There simply wasn't enough space to walk around it. In Brighton I also learned that a steak can be cooked in more than one way: rare, medium and well done, with all sorts of gradations. And I found out that avocado with shrimps is a very delicious appetizer. You get the idea.

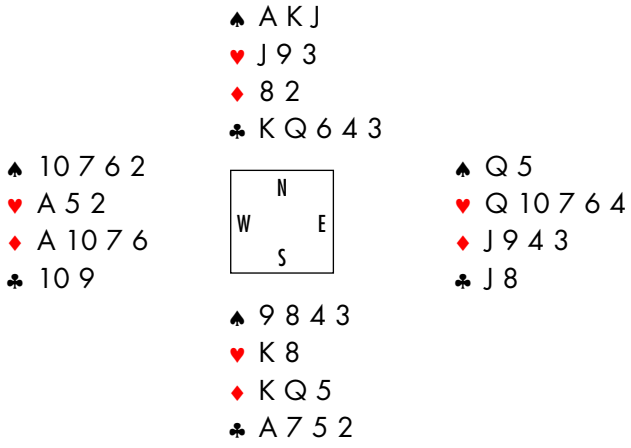
The above deal occurred in our match against the home team, Great Britain, facing their star pair, Nicola Smith and Pat Davies. The organizers had put us in the pit in the Open Room. Pits were commonplace in the days before VuGraph. The playing table was placed in a little arena surrounded by elevated chairs to give room to as many spectators as possible. On this occasion the pit was packed with spectators rooting for their home country; it was almost frightening.

Nicola Smith led the six of hearts against 3NT, fourth best from her longest and strongest. I followed low from dummy and there it was, this fraction of a hesitation that lasted maybe only a nanosecond. I doubt any of the kibitzers noticed anything. Our captain, Peter Spletstösser, who because it was so crowded was sitting so close behind me that I could feel his breath on my neck, said he hardly noticed anything. But to me it was like a light breeze from the sea that woke me up. When it had passed, Pat Davies played the jack of hearts and I was marveling at what had just happened. Suddenly it became crystal clear. Of course! She must have been thinking of playing the ace instead, but correctly inserted the jack, realizing that it was important to keep communications with her partner open. If my analysis was correct, surely she was also looking at the guarded diamond queen. Otherwise she could see nine likely tricks for me and would rather try for five heart tricks, playing partner to have led from king fifth. In that case I could only make my contract if I ducked the heart jack, because I would have to lose the lead in diamonds and the defenders' communication would be open to cash four heart tricks.

So I ducked. When Pat continued with the ace of hearts and another heart, the contract was safe. I knew the diamond queen was offside, but it didn't matter. I simply finessed, losing to the queen, but the defenders couldn't reach the West hand to cash their heart tricks and could do nothing to prevent me from scoring ten tricks. I was so proud.

One of the finest pieces of table presence involving finding a critical queen that I have ever seen occurred at the 2000 Team Olympiad in Maastricht. Italy was playing Poland in the final and the maestro Lorenzo Lauria was at the helm.

Dealer West. Neither Vul.



Lauria–Versace bid the North-South cards to the normal 3NT against Jassem–Tuszynski, against which Tuszynski sitting East led his fourth-best heart. Jassem won with the ace and returned the five, his partner contributing the seven to this trick with the air of a man who had led from only a four-card suit. Lauria knows his customers, however, and he was inclined to believe the heart five to be a true card. Instead of staking everything on a 4-4 heart break, when there would be time to establish a diamond trick, he started reeling off his club tricks, cashing the spade ace in the process; both opponents discarded two diamonds.

When he then asked for the spade nine from dummy, Jassem followed low and time stood still. The longer he spent thinking, the more convinced the VuGraph commentators became that he would actually go for the big play of dropping the spade queen offside, but nobody could come up with any convincing argument for why Lauria would seriously consider this huge play. Finally he made up his mind. Up went the king and down came the queen, for +400 to Italy.

Eric Kokish has long been one of the main contributors to the official World Championship books and he was also the one reporting on the final between Italy and Poland in Maastricht. From the occasions where I have been involved myself, I know that Eric is tireless in trying to get to the bottom of any deal to find out a player's motives for a particular bid or play. He doesn't just speculate; he actually corresponds via email with all the players involved in a match to make sure he has all the facts right and does everyone justice. As a result, his contributions to the World Championship

books are always wonderful tales with correct facts that have come to life with the players' own thoughts and comments.

Eric, how many hours has your day?

Of course the above deal merited further investigation by Eric. This is what Lauria says in the World Championship book regarding how he found the winning line of play:

"When I played the fourth club, West did not discard in tempo in a situation where everything should be clear, so he had something to think about. With queen fourth, he would have made up his mind already whether to discard a spade or a second diamond, so in my mind he could not have the spade queen."

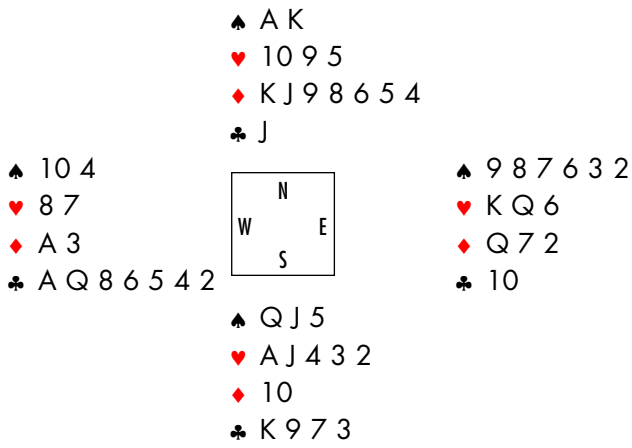
The next time you run across Lauria take a closer look. Doesn't he resemble Al Pacino playing the blind retired Lt. Colonel Frank Slade in the movie *Scent of a Woman*, who has the amazing ability to trace women by his enhanced sense of smell?

-5-

On the Razor's Edge

The score was France 215, Germany 174. We had shaved another IMP off the French lead with brilliant declarer play that, if nothing else, should make it clear that we were determined not to give up. Surely by now our opponents were on their toes.

Board 5. *Dealer North. N-S Vul.*



Both tables in the Open final reached four hearts by South on this deal, probably more on momentum than by science. Both Martel and Sælensminde overcalled North's one diamond opening with a weak two spades with the East hand, effectively depriving the opponents of two levels of bidding. Four hearts, however, can legitimately be beaten only by the ace of clubs lead. West can then give partner a ruff, regain the lead with the ace of diamonds and deal another ruff. Stansby managed to introduce his clubs into the auction and Martel then doubled the final four hearts contract to prevent his partner from leading a spade. Stansby

duly selected the ace of clubs as his opening shot and the contract had to drift one off. At the other table, Brogeland managed the same feat without a guiding double from partner — well done!

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
	1♦*	pass	1♥*
2♣	2♦	2♠	dbl
3♣	3♦	all pass	

Given much more room when Catherine took no immediate action with the East hand, we never really came close to bidding the thin game ourselves. Dany's one heart response was either a natural bid or a relay with at least invitational values. If it was a relay, the hand could either be balanced or contain a long minor suit. My two diamond rebid showed a minimum hand. I could have doubled two clubs to show a better two diamond bid. Considering that we tend to open very lightly, protected by our strong club system, I might well have chosen that action. Dany's double of two spades was competitive promising at least invitational values, but still not saying anything about hearts. As I couldn't be sure of a heart suit opposite, let alone a five-card suit, I rebid my diamonds one more time, judging game to be unlikely if Dany couldn't move on. Three diamonds had the distinctive advantages of being cold on any lead and being very easy to play. There were only two trumps, one heart and one diamond to lose, for +110 to Germany.

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
	1♦	1♠	2♥
3♣	3♥	all pass	

The Closed Room did not reach game either when Pony found yet another action with the East hand: introducing her spades at the one-level. This decision was influenced by her heart holding; with such good support she didn't want to preempt her partner from bidding a potential heart suit — certainly not an unreasonable thought. Here, however, the gentler action left the French enough room to find their fit and get their limited values across to stay in a makeable contract.

The defense that would beat 4♥ off the top would also make it very easy for declarer to claim nine tricks. So, Andrea did very well to lead her partner's suit instead against three hearts. After this, the deal developed into a ding-dong battle between declarer and defenders, with the fate of the contract changing back and forth. Luckily for Germany, the defense prevailed in the end for one undertrick and 100 points to Germany and 5 more IMPs in the bank. The running total was now France 215, Germany 179.

In my opinion, the three different contracts reached on this board at the four tables in play were a direct consequence of the different actions chosen by the respective Easts over the one diamond opening. What caused this obvious difference in approach?

Generally speaking, there are two groups of motives for overcalling an opening bid: constructive motives and obstructive motives. The constructive motives include looking for a makeable contract for your side or maybe even a good save against the opponents' contract. Another popular excuse for bidding is trying to get partner off to the best lead. Obstructive motives for overcalling involve taking up as much of your opponents' bidding space as possible to make it more difficult for them to find their best contract. Edgar Kaplan probably would have said there also is another reason for overcalling, and that is to show your presence at the table.

Clearly the two Easts in the Open final deemed their hand more suited for an obstructive move. Indeed they managed to push their opponents overboard – mission accomplished. Pony, on the other hand, could see the hand's constructive merits and thus didn't want to risk making it more difficult for her own side to find the best spot. Finally, Catherine did not want to commit to anything without having heard more. This approach often works when the deal belongs to the opponents and you do not want to give declarer any unnecessary help as to how to play her contract. You will have to decide for yourself which approach works best for you in the long run with a hand like East's. The important thing is to develop a philosophy and then to stick to it. If you switch back and forth, your partner will never know what is going on. If you are not consistent, you risk being wrong all the time and who needs that? The combination may mean that you will soon have to look for another partner.

My two favorite overcalls are two clubs over one diamond and two diamonds over one club. They often create a very difficult problem for the opponents, especially when they are playing a five-card major system. Overcalls are often countered with a negative double that says something about the majors. Ideally one would like to have both four-card majors for a

negative double of a minor-suit overcall, but that is not always possible. Realizing that it cannot be winning strategy in the long run to pass with a decent hand and no obvious bid, many people choose a negative double anyway, even with only one four-card major. That's when the trouble starts.

What is opener to do with a hand good enough for game, but with only one four-card major? He can hardly jump to game in his major without being sure of support opposite. How about cuebidding the opponents' suit instead? What does that mean? Does it ask for a stopper? Does it promise four cards in both majors and ask partner to choose? Or does it promise only one four-card major and is looking for the best game?

And what is poor responder supposed to do? Bid notrump with a stopper? Show his one four-card major even with a stopper? But what if partner cannot bid notrump over that? Help! This is all very confusing. Believe me, it is extremely difficult in these bidding sequences to investigate scientifically both the possibility of a 4-4 fit and the stopper situation. I have been there so many times before myself. For these reasons I prefer to stretch and overcall two clubs over one diamond and two diamonds over one club whenever possible, even when it may not be the most obvious bid. Was it on this deal?

Dealer South. E-W Vul.

	♠ 7 5 ♥ A Q 5 ♦ Q J 10 8 4 ♣ 10 9 4	
♠ A 10 4 ♥ K J 8 3 ♦ A K 6 ♣ A 3 2	N W E S	♠ K 9 3 ♥ 10 6 4 2 ♦ 7 5 ♣ K J 8 6
	♠ Q J 8 6 2 ♥ 9 7 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ Q 7 5	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Meyers	*Sabine*	*Montin*	*Dany*
			pass
1♣	2♦	dbl	pass
3NT	all pass		

This deal occurred in the second segment of the quarterfinals of the 2001 Venice Cup in Paris. It was one of those rare dream sessions where we simply couldn't do anything wrong. It is one to recall on bad days when everything goes wrong, to cheer you up.

After Jill Meyer's one club opening in second seat, I wasn't too concerned about shattering our chances of finding a playable spot, since Daniela was a passed hand. My mind was far more set on making life miserable for the opponents. So two diamonds it was. One might argue that Jill's 3NT rebid over her partner's negative double was a little bit rash and that she might have cuebid three diamonds instead to investigate alternative contracts. On the other hand, a delayed 3NT in many bidding situations carries the message that the stopper in the enemy suit has something left to desire. 3NT was a practical bid; there was no reason to assume a potential 4-4 fit in hearts would necessarily play better.

Here the 3NT rebid was directly detrimental to the Americans. 3NT had absolute no chance after my obvious diamond lead, because I had two entries in the heart suit to develop and cash our diamond tricks. At the other table, Pony and Andrea had the bidding to themselves and reached four hearts from the West seat, which Andrea brought home for a gain of 12 IMPs.

Next up is an advertisement for the weak notrump from the Venice Cup in Hammamet, Tunisia, 1997. Hammamet was a very sobering experience for our team. We had traveled there on a high note, full of expectations as titleholders from the 1995 Venice Cup in Beijing. The Venice Cup is the most sought-after title in women's bridge with, for me, the prettiest trophy. It is a large fish symbolizing the city of Venice, where the event took place for the first time. Each member of the winning team receives a small replica of it, a quite unusual trophy, and decidedly my favorite. I still remember how our team used to encourage one another in Beijing by repeating our slogan: We want the fish! It was not least a great togetherness that had led us to success in Beijing. There was no reason to fear that things would be different in Tunisia, even though we had lost the most supportive teammates one could ask for, Karin Caesar and Marianne Mögel. Sadly Marianne had suffered a stroke and was unable to play bridge at a high competitive level any longer. Marianne had always been the one who had been enamored with the fish the most, infecting the rest of us with her enthusiasm. It makes me very happy to know that she won it in Beijing on her last attempt and that I could be a part of it.

Generally speaking, there are two types of player on any team. There are those who use the team as a garbage bin for all their little problems and sorrows and always seem to have a lot of complaints. The 'I cannot sleep at night, my pillow is too hard' type. They tap the team of power and strength and have a demotivating effect. A Danish sports psychologist who some years ago was hired by the Danish Bridge Federation to give a lecture to the Danish top players terms them 'the emptiers'.

Then there are those who always contribute, be it with a smile or an understanding nod. They never burden the team with their little aches and pains. They always make you feel that you are on the same side and that you are working for the same goal. They are 'the fillers'. In all the years we were playing together, Karin and Marianne were always fillers, playing an important role in the team's many successes.

If you belong to those who believe the best team is the one with the six best individual players or the best three pairs, you may find yourself terribly mistaken. My mind is very clear on this point. There can be no doubt: the best team is the one where every member has a role and, more importantly, accepts that role and does everything to fulfill it as well as possible.

In teams with three equally good pairs, there will always be a very high risk that they will end up fighting for position and prestige, causing team members to lose focus on the task at hand, namely winning. It is the job of the coach, termed the non-playing captain in bridge competition, to make sure that every team member has a clearly defined role that suits his or her personality, temper and skills. What a job! It goes without saying that for a team to function well, the non-playing captain has to be someone who is respected by every single member of the team.

Sport psychology uses the term team cohesion; you and I would probably call it team spirit, but let's stick to the technical term here. There have been several studies trying to examine the correlation between a team's success and team cohesion. There are two forms of cohesion, task cohesion and social cohesion. Task cohesion is what I have described above, every team member understanding and accepting his or her role within the structure of the team. Studies have shown that a high level of task cohesion is very important for a team's success. Then there is social cohesion, which means team members having mutual respect for each other and accepting one another's faults; in short they like each other.

Interestingly enough, studies also show that social cohesion is not nearly as important as task cohesion for a team's success. At times, it may

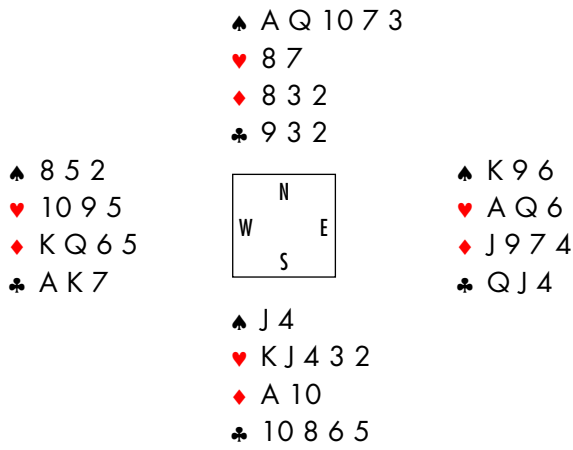
even have a negative impact. When everybody is having a good time and enjoys being together so much that they take their eyes off the ball and forget the task at hand, the social aspect becomes more important to them than the competitive aspect. Ideally one prefers teammates to like one another, but success is possible without social cohesion, as long as everybody shares the same goal and task cohesion is high. There are many well-known examples for this in the sports world, where team members really disliked each other and yet were very successful. If I am not mistaken, we can find them in the bridge world, too.

Taking it a little bit further, these findings also explain how it is possible for professional teams with a playing sponsor to be so highly successful, at times even winning world championships. Participating in high-level competition with a sponsor is a phenomenon unique to the bridge world; to the best of my knowledge, it cannot be found in any other kind of sport. In most cases, the sponsor's bridge skills are several levels lower than one would expect of a champion player. One may find it almost incomprehensible how it is then possible for such a team to hold its own in expert competition and consistently win major events.

Are the pros so much better than the rest of the field that they can overcome the sponsor's shortcomings? No, that's not it at all. The explanation is that in those teams, every member has a very clearly defined role. There is no haggling for position; the team's hierarchy is firm and easily understandable. There is no disagreement or infighting about who is to play in what sets and how much, because there is a very well thought-out strategy for when to play the sponsor. The two professional pairs will play the rest of the time; it's as simple as that. The members of such a team may not always be the best of friends, but they do have a common goal besides winning, the financial aim of trying to make a living. The better the team performs, the better their chances for a good income. Everybody is aware of that. I am convinced that it is the combination of these factors that constitutes the secret of success for these teams, allowing them to show up in the winner's circle again and again.

Going back to the Venice Cup in Hammamet, Tunisia, there were sixteen teams participating that would play a complete round robin. The top eight teams would qualify for the knockout phase. For reasons that I am still unable to completely understand, our team did not play up to its potential and in the end we failed to make the cut. There were the occasional highlights, though.

Dealer East. E-W Vul.



Our teammates, Anne Gladiator and Waltraud Vogt, bid the East-West cards effectively 1NT-3NT. South had no reason to lead anything but a heart, her longest suit, against that contract and with the ace of spades placed where declarer wanted it, the contract came rolling home with one spade, two heart, three diamond and three club tricks. A clear victory for the weak notrump.

The Italian opponents at our table were not employing that dangerous weapon and had to open the East hand with one diamond, which gave Dany and me the opportunity to tell each other in the bidding how to defend this deal.

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	Sabine		*Dany*
		1♦	1♥
dbl	1♠	pass	2♣
dbl	pass	2NT	pass
3NT	all pass		

Two clubs doubled would have been no walk in the park for us and I am not quite sure why East pulled her partner's double, but luckily for us she did, only to find herself in a far from laydown 3NT a short while later.

There are at least two good reasons for leading partner's suit, namely that it often is the best lead and it keeps partner happy. Bearing this in

mind, Daniela kicked off with the jack of spades. Appreciating the need to get on lead in order to play hearts through declarer, I covered Daniela's jack with my queen. Declarer refused to win this trick, as she could see that winning with her king would lead to certain defeat in the form of four spade tricks together with the ace of diamonds. Holding up the king to cut communications would have been successful if I had been dealt the jack of hearts. Here, however, things only got worse for declarer as I duly switched to a heart. Declarer hopefully played low, but Daniela won with the jack and put me on lead one more time with the ace of spades. Now another heart through her tenace was the final nail in declarer's coffin. When the smoke had cleared, the contract was down three tricks for 300 points to us, translating into a useful 14 IMPs.

While it is generally acknowledged to be a good idea to make an overcall to suggest the best lead, it is less common knowledge that making an overcall will once in a while guide the overcaller himself to find the best lead. No, I am not joking. I don't mean anything of the ilk of "good enough to bid – good enough to lead". This is a wise guy remark often made when someone has bid a suit, and then decides to lead something else, which turns out not to be to his side's advantage. Other popular smart remarks include "North overcalled two hearts to remind himself of what to lead". I don't mean that either. What I mean is illustrated by this next deal, another deal from our semifinal match against Canada at the 2000 Olympiad in Maastricht. It occurred in the next-to-last segment, which we were playing on VuGraph.

Dealer North. Both Vul.

	♠ 10 8 5 ♥ 10 ♦ 10 9 5 ♣ K J 10 8 7 6	
♠ A K J ♥ A Q 8 7 6 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ 4 2	N W E S	♠ Q 4 3 2 ♥ K 3 2 ♦ A Q 4 2 ♣ Q 3
	♠ 9 7 6 ♥ J 9 5 4 ♦ K 8 3 ♣ A 9 5	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Gordon	*Sabine*	*Thorpe*	*Dany*
	pass	1♦	pass
1♥	2♣	2♥	pass
3♣[1]	pass[2]	3♥	pass
4♥	all pass		

1. General force, asking for a stopper.
2. Daniela and I play a pass in this situation as an invitation to partner to lead the bid suit. A double would ask for a different lead.

If the defenders find the club lead against four hearts, declarer has to lose one diamond and two club tricks off the top and must divine the trump situation in order to make the contract. Nevertheless, there is no real reason why declarer should work that out. If the defenders don't take their two club tricks on the go, declarer succeeds easily by drawing three rounds of trumps and then discarding one club loser on dummy's fourth spade, rejecting the diamond finesse.

There were four other Norths playing in the semifinals who were faced with the problem of what to lead against four hearts. They all chose a diamond, but none of them had overcalled two clubs with the North hand like I had done. Now, admittedly that was not a rock solid overcall. Had the legendary Edgar Kaplan been commentating on VuGraph, he would probably have used one of his famous witty lines, saying something like: "Auken's overcall showed her presence at the table." But I am convinced that this overcall not only showed my presence at the table, but also told me that a club lead would be good here. Why? After my overcall, the opponent's auction became game forcing where they investigated their best strain, but they made no real effort to play in notrump. They didn't even offer 3NT as an alternative contract in an auction where it was not completely clear that there would be an eight-card fit in hearts. Ergo, I concluded that Daniela had to have at least one of the missing club honors with probably not too much length, since she didn't raise me.

A club lead looked eminently right. Declarer's fate was basically sealed after this lead. Dianna Gordon gave my ten of hearts a long look later in the play, but she decided it would be too big a position to take to play Dany for four hearts to the J9. She played for the normal 3-2 break instead, and the contract drifted one off.

This particular deal probably does nothing to change the opinion of those who feel that overcalling with a hand like mine here is simply putting your head on the block and asking for it to be chopped off. Nonetheless, I am a big believer in bidding whenever I possibly can, if only because with all other things equal, it often makes life more difficult for the opponents. It stresses them more when they know that they will hardly ever have a bidding sequence to themselves. Bridge is, among other things, also a psychological war, remember?

Admittedly, once in a while this approach ends in disaster. In the midst of those times, I recall this quote by Karyn Buxman: "If you're not living on the razor's edge, you're taking up too much space." Now, I don't know whether Mrs. Buxman plays bridge at all and it certainly was not bidding space she had in mind here. But she is an expert in the field of therapeutic humor, so how can this quote possibly fail to bring a smile on one's face when things have gone terribly wrong? And indeed, who would want to admit to taking up too much space in life?

Did I say that I believe in bidding whenever I can? Okay, I lied. Sometimes I prefer to see the opponents suffer.

Dealer East. E-W Vul.

	♠ K J 10 7 ♥ J 10 8 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ A K 2	
♠ A Q 8 6 4 2 ♥ K 7 3 ♦ J 9 ♣ J 8	N W E S	♠ 9 3 ♥ 6 4 2 ♦ K Q 6 5 4 ♣ Q 10 6
	♠ 5 ♥ A Q 9 5 ♦ 10 3 2 ♣ 9 7 5 4 3	

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	Sabine		*Pony*
		pass	pass
1♠	pass	1NT	pass
2♠	dbl	all pass	

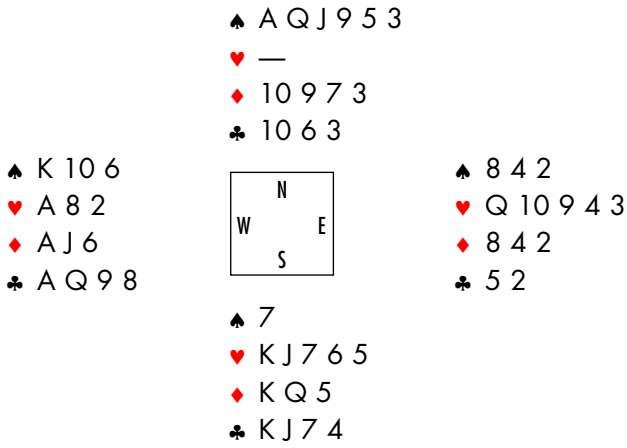
The routine bid with the North hand over a 1♠ opening on the right is a 1NT overcall showing roughly 15-18 balanced. However, routine bridge is not always equal to winning bridge. The above deal comes from the round of sixteen against China in the 2002 McConnell Cup in Montreal, where I was playing with Pony. Daniela had stayed home to become acquainted with her new baby girl, Lara. This deal illustrates dramatically how a crafty pass can be winning bridge. The final contract of two spades doubled was no picnic for the Chinese declarer; she had to lose three spades, two hearts, one diamond and two clubs for 800 points to Germany — more than enough to compensate for any potential game bonus, and that wasn't legitimately available anyway.

I think it is right to pass with the North hand over a one spade opening because I consider it unlikely that our side will make game if one spade gets passed out. In the unlikely event that we can make a game, the vulnerable undertricks in one spade rate to be adequate compensation for the non-vulnerable game bonus. If the opponents don't pass over one spade, but bid on, then there will be a very good chance to double them, making the initial pass a very lucrative position. The times to look out for this kind of strategy are when:

- The opponents are vulnerable. Preferably your side is non-vulnerable, even though occasionally it also may be right when you are vulnerable yourself.
- Your trumps are well placed behind the bidder.
- Your hand is fairly balanced. Wildly unbalanced hands are not well suited to this strategy, as one risks missing a huge fit. In this case, the opponents will also have a side fit, which they can use as reserve trumps in the play of the hand if the opening bid gets passed out. There will not be as many undertricks available as one was hoping for.
- You are no chicken and have no qualms about doubling the opponents.

Swedish expert Peter Fredin, for one, concurs. Witness this deal from the 2003 Cavendish Invitational Pairs Tournament in Las Vegas:

Dealer North. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Fredin		*Lindkvist*	
	2♠	all pass	

The common proceedings on this board were for North to open a weak two spades and for West to reopen with 2NT in the passout seat. East-West would then usually play 2NT or three hearts; the unlucky ones even doubled to the tune of 300. Not so Peter. "Why should I go down when they can?" says he and passes out North's two spade opening. He could not have been more right, because on a club lead, the defense managed two club tricks, a club ruff, one trump and two diamond tricks for one down, which earned his side 172 cross-IMPs when compared to every other table in the event.

Although the bidding situation here is a bit different from what I described before — inasmuch as Peter does not have trump strength well placed over the bidder and has no added upside for a potential later penalty double either — the principal idea is the same: Don't bid non-vulnerable against vulnerable opponents on hands where there is no guarantee that your side can win anything at all and where any potential non-vulnerable game bonus rates to be compensated by vulnerable undertricks. Peter, if I ever get a chance to play with you, I hope we pass a lot together!

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Roger, Over and Out

Unlike a multitude of other sports, most forms of bridge competition do not give the individual competitor the opportunity for instant comparison. An athletic runner knows whether he has to run that fraction of a second faster to win the race and, at times, that may even be the decisive element that spurs him on to unprecedented feats. A bridge player never knows whether he has to go for that risky second overtrick on the last board, bid a thin game or double the opponents in a touch-and-go contract in order to win the match.

In a team match the final outcome is computed by comparing the results at the two different tables. Even though a pair can have a good general impression of how good or bad their own results are, it can be very difficult for them to know whether they will win or lose the match. At no time do they know the results from the other table. Stories abound of big pleasant surprises or big unpleasant surprises, of smiling teammates or very upset teammates!

Some experienced knockout players make it a habit to try to keep track mentally of what is most likely to happen at the other table on any given board. This way they hope to have a better feeling for whether desperate measures are called for towards the end of the match or whether it is best just to play straight down the middle. This practice requires not only knowledge of your teammates' system and the system of your opponents at the other table, but also an insight into what strategic considerations may come into operation at the other table. Quite frankly this is far too hard for me. I have difficulty enough estimating my own game.

Believe it or not, there are estimation experts who can predict their score in a matchpoint game to a quarter of a percentage point. I am usually off by at least 5%, having let myself be influenced by how I think I have played myself. If I feel I have played well, I tend to overestimate my score, and if I feel I have played badly, I will estimate a much worse score than it turns out to be in the end. So, if you absolutely have to ask me at the end of a session how my game was, please don't get mad at me if my estimation turns out to be far off; it wasn't to deceive you.

Despite my poor abilities, it had not escaped my attention that nothing really decisive had happened yet in the set when the sixth board hit the table. More and bigger swings were called for, and there wasn't a lot of time left. I was hoping for more deals where we could get actively involved, because I felt the tide was in our favor.

Board 6. *Dealer East. E-W Vul.*

	♠ 8 6 ♥ J 10 5 ♦ 9 8 7 ♣ K 9 8 5 3	
♠ A 9 ♥ Q 7 4 3 2 ♦ K 6 5 ♣ 10 4 2	N W E S	♠ 10 7 4 ♥ A K ♦ A J 10 4 2 ♣ A 7 6
	♠ K Q J 5 3 2 ♥ 9 8 6 ♦ Q 3 ♣ Q J	

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
		1NT	2♠
dbl	pass	3♦	pass
3♥	pass	4♥	all pass

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
		1NT	2♠
3♦*	pass	3♥	pass
3NT	all pass		

This uneventful deal was not exactly what I had in mind. After the spade lead against four hearts it was natural for Andrea to take the diamond finesse into the wrong hand after drawing trumps, for eleven tricks and +650 to Germany.

In 3NT after a spade lead and continuation, Catherine trustingly relied on Daniela's bidding and my count signal at Trick 1 and finessed Daniela for the diamond queen, assuming I wouldn't have another spade to return even if the finesse lost. That meant an easy twelve tricks for +690 and 1 IMP back to France. The match score was France 216, Germany 179.

What is best: count signals or attitude signals? I suspect the debate will go on forever without any clear-cut solution. Each camp has its fervent followers with good and valid arguments. Yet nowhere in literature have I found a reflection upon the decisive difference between these two signaling methods.

Let's apply some basic communication theory. In its simplest form, signaling is communication between a sender (the partner of the one who led the suit) and a receiver (the one who led the suit), ideally based on an agreed upon set of codes. I say ideally, because it definitely will improve your results immensely if you are on the same wavelength as your partner. Unfortunately, that is not always the case, even in the best of partnerships.

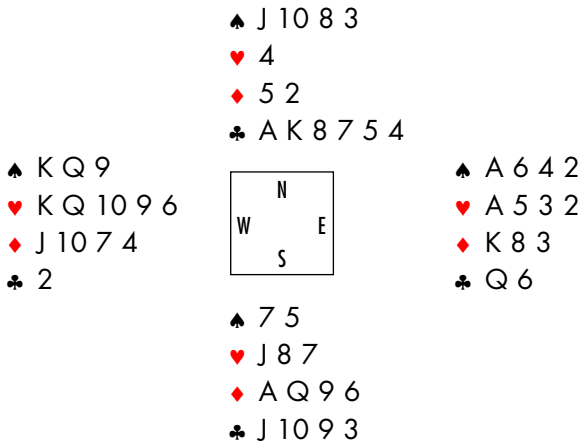
When playing attitude signals, the sender assesses the situation, taking into account all the information he has accumulated from the bidding, the opening lead, the play so far etc. and then makes a decision. "Please continue this suit," or "Please don't." The sender is the captain here.

When playing count signals, the sender doesn't make any decision at all; he simply shows what he has, either an odd or an even number of cards. Now it is up to the receiver to analyze the situation and decide on how to continue the defense. At times it may be easier for the sender to work out the correct defense and nudge his partner onto the right track by

giving a wrong signal. However, in the rudimentary form, playing count signals means the receiver decides how to defend.

The most important thing in every signaling situation is being on the same wavelength as your partner. Nothing could prove that fact better than the following deal from the 2004 Generali Masters in Verona, Italy.

Dealer East. N-S Vul.



The Generali Masters is an outstanding individual pairs tournament which only a select few of the world's best players have the privilege to attend, fifty-two players in the men's competition and twenty-eight players in the women's. All players are required to play the same, simple system. The carding method in use in 2004 was right-side-up carding (meaning high is an even number or a positive signal) with first priority on count. Despite the straightforward guidelines, being on the same wavelength was by no means an easy feat to achieve, as we are about to discover.

The event was played barometer style, meaning all tables were playing the same set of deals at the same time. Due to the bigger men's field, they got a head start, playing Thursday evening, while the women had the luxury of being able to watch and admire their deeds on VuGraph. There were actually two simultaneous transmissions on two screens next to one another in the VuGraph spectator room, doubling our pleasure. One was the internet online transmissions provided by BBO (Bridge Base Online) that would be watched and followed by bridge lovers all over the world; the other one was the onsite transmission that could be followed by everybody physically present.

The auction on this deal would typically go something like this:

West	North	East	South
		1♦	pass
1♥	2♣	2♥	3♣
4♥	all pass		

Four hearts is a very good contract, but it can be beaten if the defenders can resist the temptation to try to cash two club tricks and instead get their diamond ruff. After two rounds of clubs it will be too late, though, because declarer can ruff the second club and will be in a hurry now to draw the opposing trumps.

The North players started with the ace of clubs and the declarers, not having much to think about, asked for a low club from dummy, but now the paths diverged. Would our stars be sparkling here? The spotlight was on the South players. Would they be able to make it clear to partner not to continue clubs, but switch to diamonds instead?

On the BBO VuGraph the very young and promising talent from Argentina, Augustin Madala, contributed the nine of clubs at Trick 1, intending to show four cards in the suit. And his partner continued with… the king of clubs! Curtains down.

On the onsite VuGraph, the ingenious Alfredo Versace from Italy, clearly an aficionado of attitude signals, followed with the three of clubs at Trick 1, hoping to dissuade his partner from a club continuation. His partner continued with…the king of clubs! Different approach, same result.

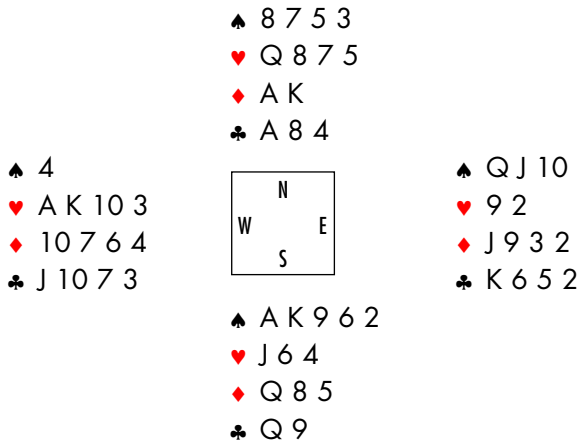
The VuGraph commentator, Jean-Paul Meyer from France, argued vehemently that having supported clubs in the bidding, it was mandatory to play the jack at Trick 1; that clearly had to be from four-card length.

Not convinced, I walked outside the VuGraph room to mingle with the players who had finished their round and were quickly comparing results with one another before the start of the next round. I ran across Alain Levy from France, whom I will always consider an authority in questions of this matter. So I asked him what he thought the right card was at Trick 1. "Why," he said, "the ten, of course!"

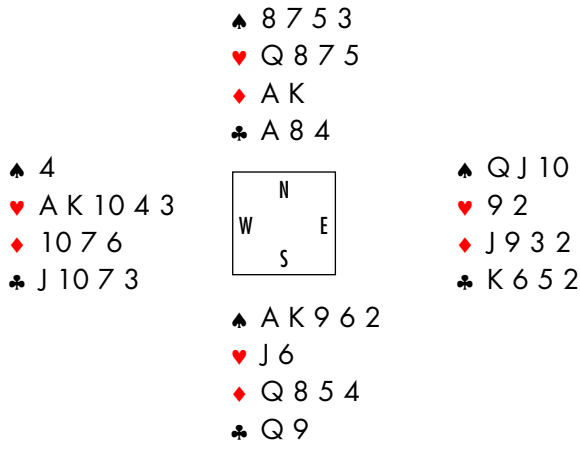
For whatever it's worth, I happen to agree with him. The agreed method of carding was to give first priority to count. But the nine is the wrong card here, because it could easily be from a three-card holding of J109. Thus it

is simply not clear enough. That leaves the jack and the ten, and they should have suit-preference undertones. The jack should say, "I have four cards in clubs and I prefer spades to diamonds", and the ten, "I have four cards in clubs and I prefer diamonds to spades". C`est ça! But it doesn't really matter what you or I or anybody else thinks the right card in this situation is; the all-important matter is that a partnership agrees on it.

A number of interesting deals can be found in bridge literature dealing with the subject of intentionally giving partner the wrong signal in order to make it easier for him to find the right defense. I find this area so fascinating and challenging that I would like to take a closer look at a couple of those deals. Audrey Grant uses this deal in 'Play Bridge', a supplement to the ACBL Bridge Bulletin:



South has shown a minimum opening bid and becomes declarer in four spades. Against this, West kicks off with a heart honor. If East now shows his doubleton, won't West give his partner a ruff and hope for another trick? On that defense the contract cannot be beaten anymore. So, the author argues, East should lie to partner in order to get him to switch to a club at Trick 2, beating the contract. At first sight, this looks eminently evident. But let's change the deal just a tiny bit and look again.

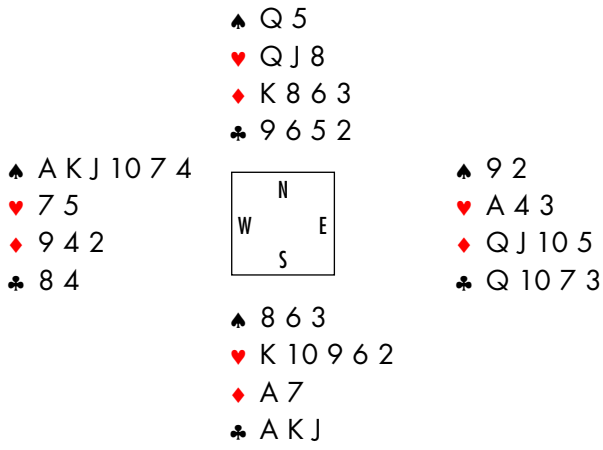


"What's the point?" you may ask. "It is even easier now to shift to a club at Trick 2." Not so! If East gives the wrong signal here, West will 'know' his partner either has three hearts or a singleton. Now might he not defend on the basis that his partner has a singleton, because if it is declarer who has the singleton, how the heck is this contract supposed to go down? As soon as he cashes his second heart honor, all set to give partner a ruff and hope for another trick somewhere, it is curtains for the defense. In this case, signaling honestly gives partner a much better chance of finding the winning defense.

I am not saying there is a right or wrong answer here, simply that there is no cure-all solution. What the advocates of the false signal method seem to forget is that not all that is gold glitters. In reality the signaler has to guess which hand his partner is more likely to have. If he signals correctly, however, then it is his partner who has to guess the correct defense. Is it possible at all to find the winning defense in the first variation above with an honest signal?

I think so. Opening leader can see that it might be vital to set up a club trick before the defense takes its heart ruff. On some layouts it doesn't matter at all what he does at Trick 2; it would only be wrong to switch to a club if declarer has something like ♠KQ962 ♥J64 ♦Q85 ♣KQ. Then declarer can discard a heart on the third club in dummy before touching trumps and the defensive heart ruff disappears.

I think you need to look at least one more example before making up your mind as to how to handle this kind of situation in your partnership. Exhibit No. 2 comes from Kit Woolsey's book *Partnership Defense in Bridge*.



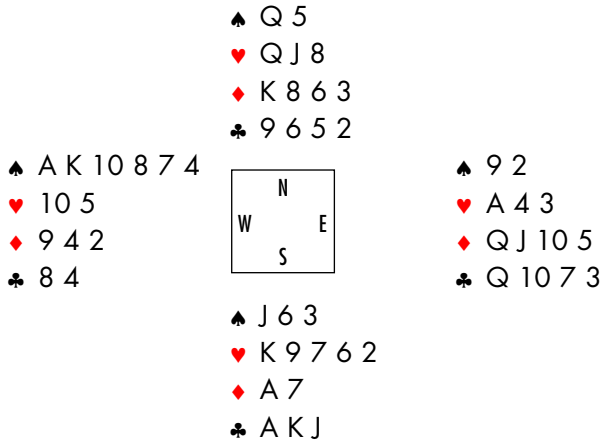
After having made a weak jump overcall over South's one heart opening, West leads a spade honor against four hearts. How should East signal? Woolsey's recommendation is not to show the doubleton here and to discourage a spade continuation. Then partner may be able to find the necessary trump switch at Trick 2. (Incidentally, a club switch will also beat the contract, because declarer cannot ruff his spade loser in dummy without running into an opposing club ruff.) Again this logic appears immensely plausible at first sight. But there are two snags here.

First of all, partner does not know your motive for discouraging a spade continuation. He may assume you are looking at three cards in spades and being the brilliant and foresighted player he is, he may switch to a diamond at Trick 2 in an attempt to break up an impending squeeze against you. This would be the only successful defense if declarer's hand were

♠ 6 3 ♥ K 10 9 6 2 ♦ A 10 7 ♣ A K J

Try it out for yourself!

Second, let's again change the deal just a little bit:



Now the only chance the defense has to beat four hearts is to start with three rounds of spades. Declarer will have to guess the location of the ten of hearts in order to succeed (ruff low now, or ruff high and finesse the nine later) and is he not a big favorite to misguess? So for the wrong signal to have any chance of success at all, the signaler has to guess his partner's hand correctly and even then he may not achieve the desired result, because partner in turn also has to guess correctly.

By now your head may be spinning and you may have this nagging feeling that there has to be a way out of this dilemma. Believe me, however you may turn and twist it, *somebody* has to guess. The best you can do is have a general principle and an understanding in your partnership whether it is the sender or the receiver of the signal who is supposed to guess in this kind of situation. That will give you a huge edge over most partnerships.

After long and thorough deliberations, Daniela and I have decided to put the onus of having to guess right on the signaler's partner. We stick to giving an honest count signal in this kind of situation, unless it is a very obvious situation and signaler can be 100% sure that the wrong signal will lead to the correct defense. The final and decisive reason for our decision was the ethical aspect. Have you ever been in the situation as declarer where, even though you took your time before playing from dummy at Trick 1, your right-hand opponent is still deliberating thirty seconds or so later over what card to contribute? How did you feel about that afterwards? Didn't you feel

there was some extra information passed across the table? Didn't that leave a bitter aftertaste in your mouth, especially when your opponents somehow managed to solve a difficult signaling situation successfully?

This is definitely a gray zone in bridge, and it will never be easy to get redress from the tournament director if you feel your opponents had an extra edge in this kind of situation due to their hesitation. I am not trying to say that this is an attempt to cheat. There definitely exist very complicated situations that require a player to take some extra time. The burden is now on the player's partner not to misuse the extra information (bridge law calls this 'unauthorized information') that may be derived from the hesitation. It goes without saying that this is a very sensitive area. Where to draw the line? Who is to say what is right and wrong here? You may be amazed to find out how many different kinds of views you can find on this subject in the world of bridge. Anyway, Daniela and I feel that by signaling what we have at Trick 1, we can avoid this awkward dilemma more often than not. That realization settled the issue for us.

This is also one of the reasons we are fond of the special carding agreement we have at Trick 1 against notrump contracts. I am going to show it to you now. Try it out once. Chances are you may never want to play anything else! When we don't have to play a card to beat dummy at Trick 1, we consistently contribute a standard card from the various holdings as follows, where X simply means any small card, H any honor card and S denotes the card we contribute at Trick 1.

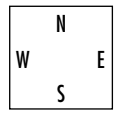
xS
Sxx
HSx
xxSx
HxSx
xxxxS

As you can see, this is basically not much different from giving count, but in a very special way. It is special, because we play the lowest card both from a doubleton and a five-card suit, the idea being that there is such a big discrepancy that one will always know from the bidding whether partner has one or the other. How this works in practice is aptly illustrated by a deal from the quarterfinals of the 1993 Venice Cup in Santiago, where we met one of the two United States teams present at the championships. Let's

look at it first as a defensive problem and see whether you can solve it with your favorite signaling system.

Dealer South. N-S Vul.

♠ 7 6 3
♥ 10 9 8
♦ K 6 4
♣ K Q 10 6



(dummy)
♠ K 9 5 2
♥ 6 2
♦ Q J 10 5 3
♣ 4 2

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Wei-Sender	*Sabine*	*Utegaard*	*Dany*
			pass
1♣*	pass	1♦*	pass
1NT	pass	2♣*	pass
2♥	pass	2♠	pass
3♥	pass	3NT	all pass

After the strong club, negative response, 17-19 rebid and Stayman, you start with the king of clubs, which holds the trick. What do you continue at Trick 2 if partner:

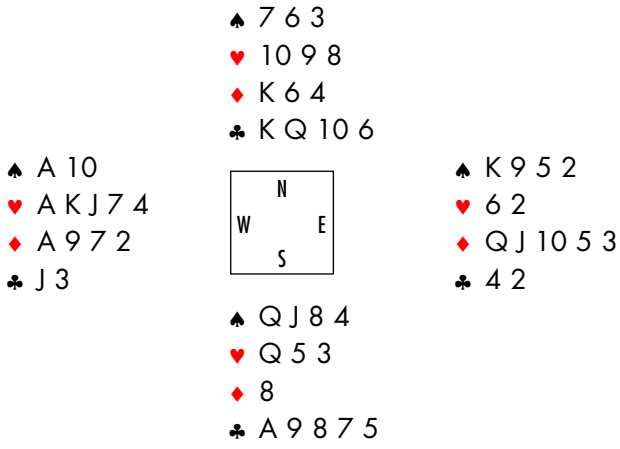
(a) has encouraged?
(b) has shown an odd number?
(c) has used whatever other method it is you employ?

Aren't you likely to continue with a low club in both (a) and (b), playing partner for either the ace or jack? Since it is not impossible that declarer has a four-card club suit you certainly want to avoid blocking the suit or, even worse, giving declarer a trick with the jack of clubs. After all, you have what looks like a sure trick in the king of diamonds. So you are hoping for either four club tricks and one diamond trick or, alternatively, three club tricks, one diamond trick and one trick somewhere else that hopefully partner can contribute.

I don't know whether you would have done the same in (c) as we did. Employing our methods, as described above, Daniela played the five of

clubs at Trick 1 and the three appeared from declarer. The five was the lowest outstanding club. Now look at the scheme above: the lowest card is always either from a doubleton or a five-card suit. The bidding excluded the possibility of it being a doubleton, so nothing was easier than to continue with the queen of clubs at Trick 2 to make 100% sure that the suit wouldn't be blocked. This was nice, as the full deal was:

Dealer South. N-S Vul.



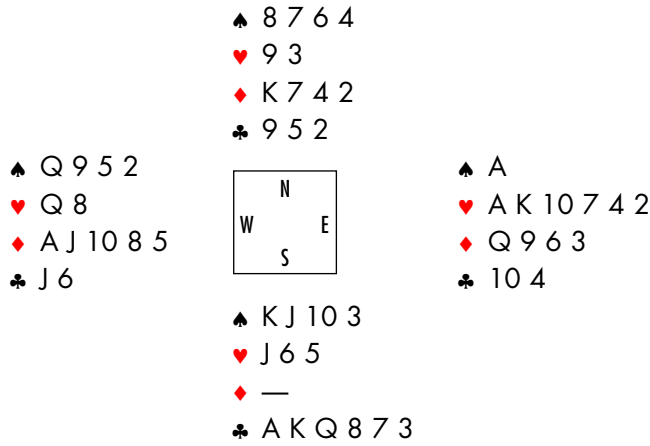
Now, admittedly it only meant one extra undertrick for another 100 points on a deal where declarer was always destined to go down. However, considering how many important matches have been won by a single IMP or even less, the chance to win an additional 2 or 3 IMPs shouldn't be sneezed at.

I will admit that our signaling system is not perfect either, but then there is no perfect system in the first place. The biggest flaw comes when signaler holds a three-card suit. In that case, it will often be very difficult for partner to determine whether it is with or without an honor. It will be necessary to use clues from the bidding, common sense, logic or perhaps just a guess. Still, this fits well with our general philosophy that it is the receiver of the signal who must decide on the defense and guess if necessary. Now think about how relaxing signaling at Trick 1 has become. One simply always plays the same card and never has to be afraid of giving away unauthorized information to partner.

Despite everything else, there are times when a false signal may not only get partner off to the most challenging defense but may also lead declarer to believe something funny is going on. This in turn may induce him to go down in a seemingly cold contract. Personally, I like to remember

this deal from the last ever Cap Gemini Ernst&Young Top Invitational tournament in The Hague in 2002.

Dealer South. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
De Wijs	*Sabine*	*Muller*	*Dany*
			1♠
pass	pass	3♥	pass
4♥	all pass		

You wouldn't have opened the South hand with one spade? Actually, that is the normal opening bid in our canapé system. We fancy a system and style where we can throw our four-card majors into the ring as quickly as possible. Anybody who wants to convince us otherwise will be hard pressed to do so. It's simply too much fun.

Daniela started with the king of clubs against four hearts — as we play Rusinow (meaning the lower of touching honors) on opening lead, this promised the ace. Feeling quite convinced that Bauke Muller had to have the ace of spades for his intermediate jump to three hearts, I saw my only chance to beat this contract was to magically generate a trump trick for us out of thin air. Accordingly, I pretended to hold a doubleton club by contributing the nine at Trick 1. Daniela obliged by continuing with a second and third round of clubs.

Muller knew, of course, that we were up to something when the third club hit the table into the double void. But what exactly was it? He knew that Daniela held a highly distributional hand, because she had been

thinking for quite some time about whether to bid over his three heart call before finally passing. Was I trying to secure myself a sure trump trick with J9xx by inducing him to ruff high in dummy? After all, I couldn't know that Daniela held a six-card club suit and that he was out of clubs in his hand as well. That was certainly a possibility.

Or were we just trying to conjure up a smoke screen in an attempt to create a trump trick where none existed? This kind of bluff and double bluff may be one of the most fascinating areas in bridge. To my mind, it would have taken supernatural powers for Muller to get this right. Not surprisingly, he didn't. He ruffed the club in hand, played a heart to the queen and finessed me for the jack of hearts on the way back. Not this time, though. As Oscar Wilde remarked quite correctly, "Never trust a woman who tells her real age." But if there is one thing I don't lie about, it is my age. Trust me.

I decided not to discuss here the merits of the different signaling systems on the market — high-low, upside-down, Italian, Scanian, revolving and whatever else there may be — because on the whole, I don't feel it makes much of a difference what you play. The important thing is that a partnership is on the same wavelength and feels comfortable with whatever it is doing.

I would rather use my page space to vent my anger on something I consider a bad habit, even though there probably are not many people who agree with me. In tournament bridge, it is common practice to ask your opponents what their carding agreements are (meaning opening leads, signals, discards and anything else that may be relevant); even more so in international tournaments where styles can differ widely. It is mind-boggling to me how often one gets the reply "We play standard" or "normal" or "natural". Even though the WBF convention booklet defines 'standard signals' as high-low signals where a high card encourages or shows an even number, I personally feel this term should be banned from the bridge vocabulary. There is no such thing as *standard*; to me, using the term signals a narrow-minded, self-absorbed and arrogant attitude. It basically says: "What I am doing is right and just and appropriate and is exactly what everybody else should be doing. What you ignorant fools are doing is abnormal, probably designed to trick the opponents and probably should be X-rated, if not totally forbidden."

In the United States, it is considered standard to use high-low signals; likewise in France. However, in France, they also think it normal to lead third and fifth in partner's suit against notrump, except when this suit is clubs, because that very often is not a real suit at all. In Italy, they like to

show their excitement with odd cards; even cards are reserved for suit preference. In Poland, nobody would ever dream of not leading low from a doubleton. In fact, they love leading doubletons so much that one could almost conclude they don't have one if they don't lead from it. In Norway, just to confuse the issue, a low card is encouraging when showing attitude, but when giving count, it shows an odd number. Needless to say, the Norwegians live at high risk of being accused of just wanting to bewilder their opponents.

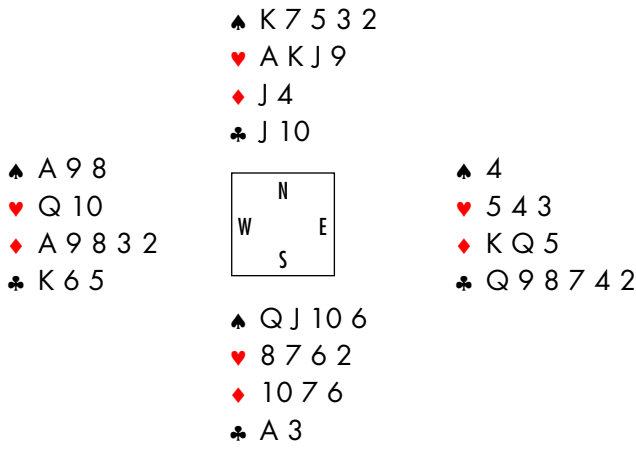
All of this is considered very 'normal' depending at what latitude you are located. For the sake of argument, let's assume a little Botswana man, who all his life has used odd cards to show an odd number of cards and even cards to show an even number of cards, comes to an international championship convinced that this is 'normal'. Indeed, once you come to think about it, doesn't it feel like a very easy and 'natural' thing to do?

What an outrage! Can you imagine how many times the tournament director would be called against him if he dared to use the words 'normal' or 'standard' when asked about his methods? Can we hear them clapping now in Botswana, Lithuania, Jordan, Ecuador and New Caledonia — all of them member countries of the World Bridge Federation? If you don't know where those countries are, go and look them up on a map. And don't 'standard' me; show me instead that you are one of those free spirits that populate the bridge world who know and respect that life can be lived in many different ways, thus making the bridge world such a wonderful and fun environment to be in. It is really not that difficult to say: "We play that a high card either encourages or shows an even number."

-7-

Small Matters

Board 7. *Dealer South. Both Vul.*



Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
			pass
1♦	1♠	pass	3♦[1]
pass	3♠	all pass	

1. Distributional raise with defense; in some jurisdictions possibly termed a 'mixed' raise.

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
			pass
1NT[1]	pass	3♣[2]	pass
3NT	all pass		

1. 14-16 HCP.
2. Invitational, weak suit.

We reached three spades at our table and the play did not give cause for any headaches. We soon chalked up +140. This didn't feel like a bad result and it seemed there was a potential to win 7 IMPs here, as East-West can take ten tricks in clubs. In reality, however, it may be very difficult for them to find their club fit at all, unless they play negative free bids, where a bid at the two-level in competition would be non-forcing. With this agreement, East could have bid two clubs in the Open Room auction. In practice, none of the four East-West pairs in either final managed to find its club fit.

In the Closed Room, Andrea and Pony were fortunate to escape unscathed from a little adventure. Andrea fell in love with all her controls, intermediates and her five-card suit and so she upgraded her hand to a 14-16 HCP notrump opening. Pony in turn liked the vulnerability, which gives such a nice extra bonus for bidding and making games. She invited game by bidding three clubs, a bid that also might have the advantage of shutting out the opponents' potential spade fit. Andrea, never one to decline an invitation, accepted and there they were, not exactly where they belonged. Let's blame it on juvenile exuberance; I am sure they won't mind.

Luckily for Germany, though, the defense slipped. After cashing their four heart tricks, Bénédicte did not find the spade switch that would have ensured three down, but continued with a diamond instead. Now Andrea had time to establish the club suit and the defense had only five winners for one down and 1 German IMP instead of 4 French IMPs. With almost half the set played, the score was France 216, Germany 180.

Interestingly, the same misfortune befell the Norwegians Aa–Grotheim in the Bermuda Bowl. Their American opponents had also climbed to 3NT after a weak notrump opening by Martel. So what went wrong? How did two world-class partnerships manage not to achieve the maximum number of vulnerable undertricks on this deal? It should be possible for North to work out that a spade switch is right more often than not. For sure, there must be a way in any serious partnership for South to inform partner that after cashing all the hearts, a spade switch might not be such a bad idea.

Once again, it all has to do with signaling and so often the problem starts at Trick 1. How should South react on the ace of hearts lead? Assuming that you play attitude signals in this situation, should you encourage or discourage a heart continuation? Both South players solved this problem by encouraging 'slightly' at Trick 1: Willard, playing high-low signals, contributed the seven of hearts, her second highest; Grotheim, playing upside-down signals, contributed the six, his second lowest. Pairs that use attitude signals at Trick 1 usually follow that up by giving count on the next trick, so

both Souths next played the two of hearts and then their remaining hearts in normal order. This sequence of play did not have any air of 'I like spades' about it and both Norths duly missed finding the spade switch.

So often the right defense can be found by using one's gray cells and applying cool and clear logic. But think about how much easier things become when partner helps out a little and tells you what you need to know. South has so many heart spots to work with that it should be possible to send a positive message about spades. Talk it over with your partner and determine what message each sequence of spot cards should carry in your methods. You can make life so much easier for one another!

To give you some inspiration, here is what Daniela and I would have done. Remember our methods at Trick 1 against notrump? From four small, we always play the second lowest, so the first card is easy: the six of hearts. When partner now continues with the king of hearts, we don't feel we have to follow through by contributing the lowest. We would much rather be able to say something about whether and how much we like other suits. On the above deal, it would work like this:

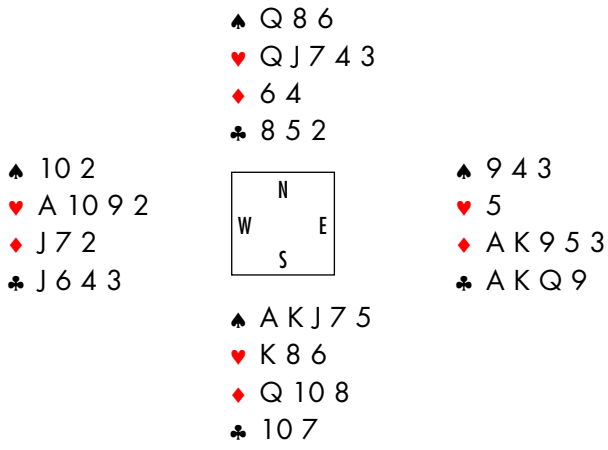
2 7 8	The normal order. "I don't have much to say about the other suits. Please just do what you think is right."
8 7 2	This is a command. "I am crazy about spades."
8 2 7	This is an invitation. "It's probably not such a bad idea to switch to spades."
7 2 8	This is the other command. "I am crazy about diamonds."
7 8 2	This is the other invitation. "It's probably not such a bad idea to switch to diamonds."
2 8 7	"If you put a gun to my head asking for my preference, then I like spades better than diamonds."

On the deal in question, it feels about right to use the order 8 2 7. It is just barely possible that declarer has the king of spades instead of the ace, in which case you would rather play spades from your side. Isn't it amazing how many messages one can send with those small cards? If anybody ever gives you a bridge problem with lots of small x's, tell him you want the real spots. They do matter!

Suit-preference signals are commonly used when trying to show partner where one's entry is in order to give partner a ruff or to cash an established suit. Combined with accuracy and trust, suit-preference signals can be a powerful weapon in a partnership's defensive arsenal, as Marianne

Serf and François Stretz from France demonstrated with this exemplary piece of perfect partnership harmony from the 2002 European Mixed Pairs Championships in Ostend.

Dealer East. Both Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Serf		*Stretz*	
		1♦	1♠
pass	pass	2♣	pass
pass	2♠	all pass	

East-West have an easy ten tricks available in either minor, so one down would not have given the French pair a good matchpoint score. Not to worry — they cooperated beautifully to do much better.

Serf led the two of diamonds to her partner's king. Stretz in turn informed his partner about his club holding by thoughtfully cashing the queen before switching to his singleton heart. This had the advantage that Serf now knew the inconspicuous jack of clubs would be an entry to give partner not only one, but two heart ruffs. Accordingly, she won with the ace of hearts and returned the two as a suit-preference signal for clubs. Stretz didn't doubt her at all. He ruffed the heart and trustingly underled his club honors to receive another heart ruff for the magical +200, the kiss of death for the opponents. (This is what a matchpoint score of -200 is popularly referred to when all the opponents can make is a partscore. Since I became enthralled with the magical world of Harry Potter a couple of years ago, I have personally been referring to it as the Dementor's Kiss. If Harry played bridge, he would surely agree.)

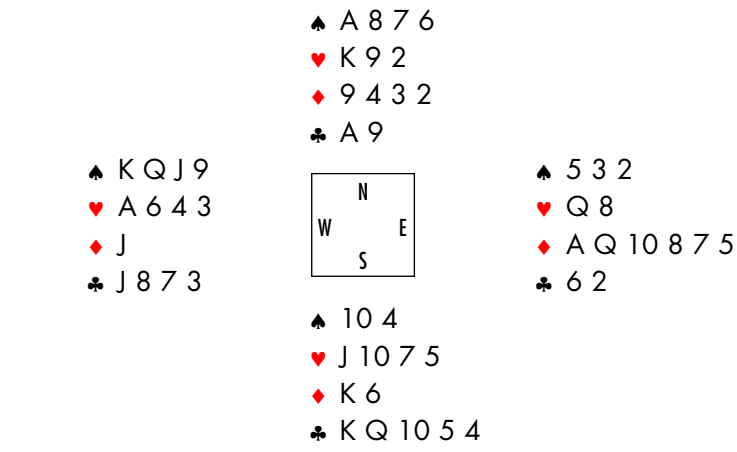
There was nothing spectacular about the above deal, just clean craftsmanship performed by a pair who knew what they were doing. If they had played on VuGraph, no doubt they would have received a round of applause and appreciative nods.

Partnership trust was also the central issue on the next deal and it allowed me to break a very well-known rule.

The summer of 2003 brought a reunion with a good old friend, Barry Goren. Barry and I became friends during my stay in the United States in the early nineties. This time, he came to visit us in Denmark loaded like Santa Claus with bags filled with gifts for the kids. I think he liked his stay, though I am not sure whether it was the Danish food, the Danish hospitality or the Danish girls. Thanks to you, Barry, I finally got to do some sightseeing in Denmark!

It so happened there was a bridge tournament going on at the time, the Copenhagen Bridge Week, and of course we had to try our luck. The below deal comes from the pairs event, which may explain why everybody bid so much.

Dealer West. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Goren	*Fredin*	*Sabine*	*Knut Blakset*
1♣	dbl	2♦	2♥
pass	pass	dbl[1]	2NT
all pass			

1. Competitive.

Against the final 2NT contract, Barry started with the king of spades and, when it was ducked, continued with the queen. When that was ducked, he persisted with the jack.

Knut Blakset is one of the most imaginative players I have ever met, blessed with an eye for special card constellations and unusual treatment of suit combinations. When he finally won with the ace of spades, he knew the club suit was unlikely to yield five tricks. Having listened to the bidding, he also had a good overall picture of the deal. Barry's distribution rated to be 4-3-1-5 or 4-4-1-4, and for my double I should have a bit more than just the diamonds. That could only be the queen of hearts. He had a chance for a little swindle here and if I held the doubleton queen, the little swindle could turn out to be a big coup. It took Knut about three seconds to analyze all this and at Trick 4 he asked for a low heart from dummy.

Barry is a very helpful person, so I was sure by the order he had played his spade honors that he was trying to tell me where his entry lay. That order was K-Q-J from top to bottom, saying very loudly that his entry was in hearts. Up went my heart queen and down went the contract. If I had followed the rule here and played second hand low, my queen would have fallen under the king on the next round of the suit and declarer would have had eight tricks. Besides everything else, this was also a moral victory. You really feel lousy when you fall from grace in such a situation, letting your opponent triumph. Trust me, I have been there so many times before.

Even though the principle of giving suit-preference is very simple — a high card asks for the higher remaining suit and a low card asks for the lower remaining suit — at times it may not be so obvious which suit partner is asking for. A classic dilemma arises when partner has to use honor cards for suit preference to prevent declarer from cheaply inserting a low card. Exclusively for you, I designed this example to illustrate my point. Your hand is a bit disappointing:

♠ 3 ♥ 5 4 ♦ 10 8 7 5 ♣ 9 8 6 5 3 2

Not surprisingly, the opponents quickly reach game after your partner opened the bidding with one spade:

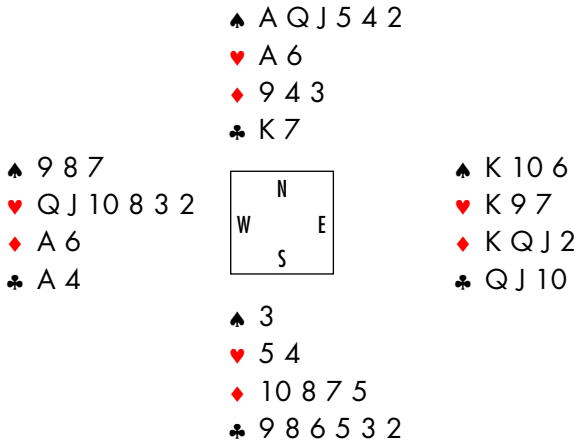
LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1♠	1NT	pass
4♦[1]	pass	4♥	all pass

1. Transfer to hearts.

With some hopes of getting a ruff, you lead your singleton spade and see this dummy:

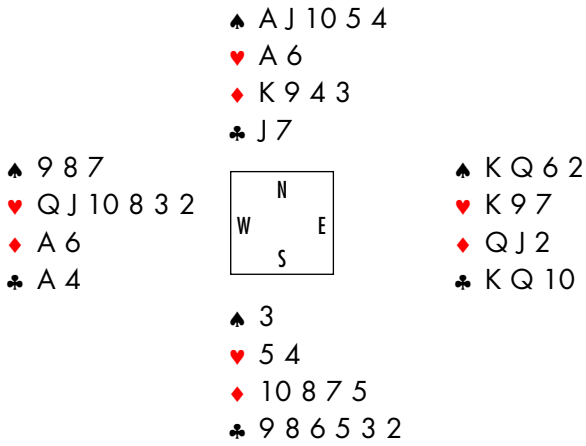
♠ 9 8 7 ♥ Q J 10 8 3 2 ♦ A 6 ♣ A 4

Lo and behold, partner wins with the ace of spades and returns the jack to declarer's king, which you ruff. So far so good, but now what? Does partner want a diamond or does he want a club? Should you play for this layout and return a club? (Incidentally, a trump return would do as well, but that is beside the point.)



Note that partner couldn't afford a low spade. He had to play an honor at Trick 2; otherwise declarer could just put in the ten, which would not be so difficult after the bidding and opening lead. On the ensuing club switch he could then rise with the ace and discard dummy's club loser on a diamond.

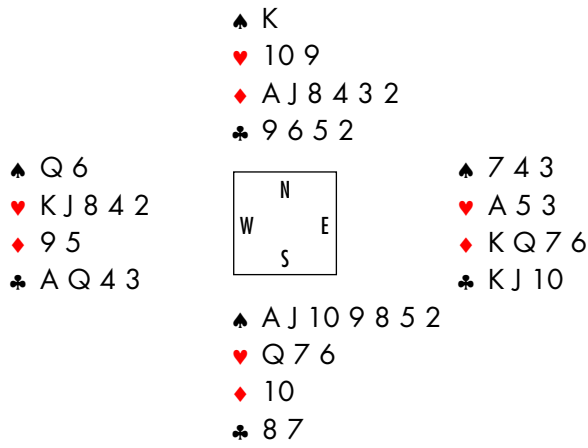
Or do you play for this layout and return a diamond?



You really don't have a snowball's chance in hell to know what's right here. You need either a good nose or good agreements. To eliminate guessing in this kind of situation, Daniela and I have the following rule: The queen and the ten always ask for the higher remaining suit and the jack always asks for the lower remaining suit. (That means that in the second layout, we would actually return the spade ten at Trick 2.)

Don't relax now; the suit-preference headaches are not over yet. Sometimes you may not be in doubt as to which suit partner is asking for, but does he have an honor or is he asking for a ruff? I found this deal for you from the 2003 edition of the NEC Cup in Yokohama, where in an all-star final, England met Poland.

Dealer East. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Armstrong	*Lesniewski*	*Callaghan*	*Martens*
		1♣	3♠
dbl	pass	4♦	pass
4♥	all pass		

Marcin Lesniewski deduced quite correctly from the bidding that his partner was likely to be short in diamonds, so he started with the ace of diamonds against four hearts. Next he continued with the eight of diamonds, suit-preference for spades, ruffed by his partner. Now Martens was at a crossroads; there was no doubt that partner was asking for a spade return, but which hand did he have? This one?

♠ K ♥ 10 9 ♦ A J 8 4 3 2 ♣ 9 6 5 2

Or this one?

♠ K 6 ♥ 10 9 ♦ A J 8 4 3 ♣ 9 6 5 2

In the first case, Martens would have to cash his ace of spades and then give partner a ruff to beat the contract. In the second case he would have to underlead his ace to receive another diamond ruff. Three gray hairs later, Martens finally got it wrong returning a low spade to his partner's king, meaning declarer's second spade loser now disappeared on a high diamond.

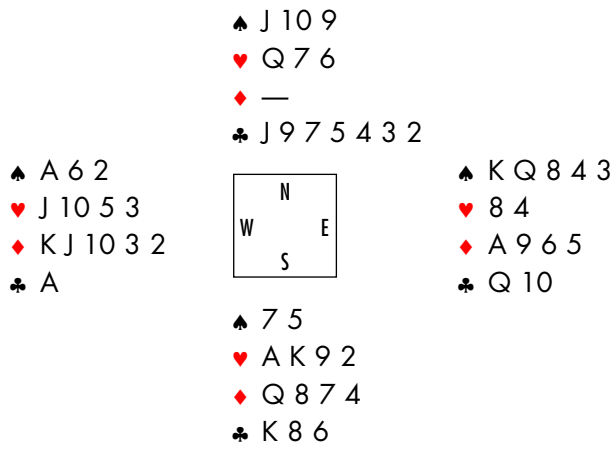
I am not going to tell you that I have the perfect solution for this kind of dilemma, because I don't. However, Daniela and I have the following agreement for situations where it may be unclear whether partner is signaling for an honor or a ruff. When we have plenty of cards to work with, the highest card always shows the honor in the higher remaining suit; the next highest card asks for the ruff in the higher remaining suit. Correspondingly, the lowest card shows the honor in the lower remaining suit, whereas the next lowest card asks for the ruff in the lower remaining suit.

Of course, you have likely already spotted a snag here. There is no way for South to know on the above deal whether partner's eight is his highest diamond or his second highest. Quite right, but on a different day when he returns the jack, at least you will know for sure that he is showing you the king of spades and not asking for a ruff. That will already give you an edge over other pairs that don't have this kind of agreement.

I happen to think that North, playing the above-described method, should play the four of diamonds at Trick 2. Look closely at the whole deal. At Trick 1, declarer contributed the five of diamonds and at Trick 2 the nine will appear; North knows that. So the four of diamonds will seem like quite a high card to South; after all, North could have led from ♦AJ432 or ♦A8432. So South is bound to get it right now. Yes, I do know declarer may have been falsecarding, but the point is that the four of diamonds can never be the lowest card. It is just too unlikely that someone would lead a diamond with only a four-card suit like ♦AJ84. Once the four is diagnosed as not being the lowest, the conclusion is obvious. Partner can hardly want a club ruff; if anything at all, he is asking for a spade ruff.

As if all these problems weren't enough, you also need to be on the same wavelength as partner as to whether you are in a suit-preference situation or not. From the semifinal of the 1993 Venice Cup in Santiago against Sweden:

Dealer South. Both Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Astrom	*Sabine*	*Ødlund*	*Dany*
			1♥
2♦	2NT[1]	3♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

1. Competitive hand with clubs.

Dany led the king of hearts against four spades and I knew exactly what I wanted: a diamond ruff and maybe even two! In an effort to direct Daniela's attention to that possibility, I threw my queen under the king. The only problem was that there was no way for her to know this wasn't a true card. Taking the card at face value, Daniela continued with the ace of hearts, planning to give me a third-round ruff. When I followed to the second round of hearts, she, of course, realized where the wind was blowing from, but it was too late. The ensuing diamond ruff only prevented the overtrick.

I fell victim to a very common disease among bridge players: wishful thinking. I wanted the queen of hearts to be a suit preference card, only it wasn't. Had I simply given correct count on the king, as our agreement dictates, Daniela would have had a much better chance of working out the correct defense. If she were able to identify my signal as a three-card holding, she would know that I had long clubs, three hearts, possibly a few spades and therefore not too many diamonds. It occurred to me afterwards that instead of introducing that meager club suit in the bidding, it would have been a much better idea to support Daniela's hearts; after all, queen

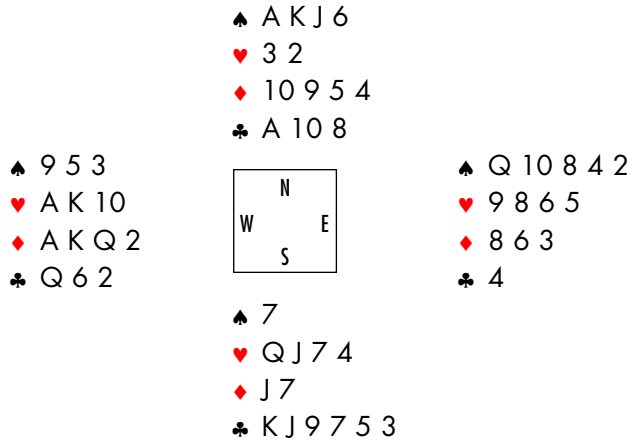
third isn't so bad. Then the queen of hearts at Trick 1 would really have been screaming for a diamond switch.

There was another lesson learned here: Support your partner whenever you can. And the first lesson? Have very clear agreements on which situations you treat as suit-preference.

–8–

Kill Point

Board 8. *Dealer West. Neither Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
1♦	all pass		

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
1♦	1♠	pass	2♣
dbl	3♣	all pass	

Andrea's one diamond opening in the Closed Room was left in peace and the contract proved to be unbeatable. When the defense didn't go for the spade ruff and ensuing uppercut, instead trying to kill dummy's ruffing power, the result was an overtrick for +90 to Germany.

Would you or wouldn't you overcall one spade with the North hand over West's one diamond? The vote in the final of the Bermuda Bowl and the Venice Cup in Paris was three to one in favor of the overcall, as both North players in the Bermuda Bowl also opted for the more aggressive action. That doesn't necessarily make it the right thing to do, although the perpetrators will usually excuse it with the good suit quality and the easy opportunity to enter the auction, knowing it might be desirable but inconvenient to enter the auction later. At least, this is my standard excuse. Whatever the merits of this particular overcall, here it allowed North-South to find their best fit and stop at a makeable level. However, makeable does not equal laydown, and there was some work to do.

After cashing the ace-king of diamonds on opening lead and seeing partner give count with the three and suit preference for spades with the eight, Veronique switched to the three of spades. Daniela won in dummy and played a heart to the queen and ace, East giving count with the eight. The spade continuation went to the jack and queen and was ruffed in hand. Veronique won the next heart with her ten and exited with her last spade, which Daniela could win in dummy with the king while she discarded one of her two remaining heart losers from hand. Now came the moment of truth. It was time to form an opinion as to the trump distribution and the location of the trump queen. Decision time!

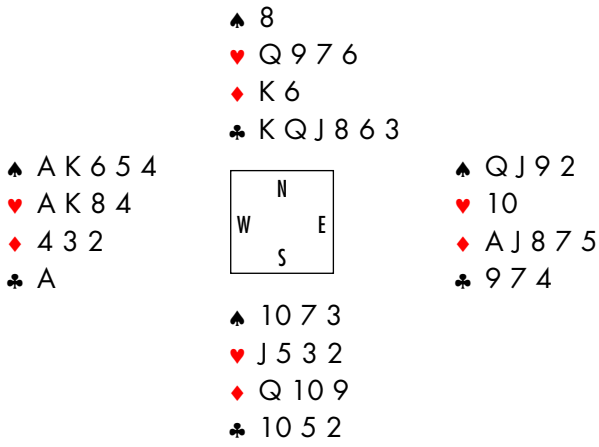
Daniela remembered the bidding. Veronique had doubled two clubs for takeout; didn't that imply shortness in clubs? Yes, that had to be it! Daniela was very well aware that she had reached the critical moment of the deal, but she used the wrong clues in her analysis. What she should have done was take the opponents' distribution signals into account. As a rule, the French signal their distribution very honestly and they had done so on this deal. Catherine had shown an odd number of cards in both spades and diamonds and an even number of cards in hearts. That could only mean her distribution was 5-4-3-1, which left a 3-3-4-3 distribution for Veronique. As she didn't open a 15-17 notrump, she had to have the club queen to bring the high card point total up to 18, which would explain her bidding. Daniela, however, focused too much on the bidding, which so 'obviously' seemed to indicate club shortness, and thus misguessed the layout of the trump suit, her only misguess of the set. France scored 50 points for one down, but that still meant 1 IMP to Germany. France now led us 216-181, and there were eight deals to go.

Do you remember the Bols Bridge Tips Competition run in the 70s, 80s and 90s? A large majority of all the world's very best players submitted tips

and ideas on how to improve one's game with valid points for average and expert players alike, a true little treasure chest. My own husband, Jens, submitted a tip entitled 'kill point'. He believes there is a certain point on many a bridge deal where a player's action irrevocably seals the contract's fate; it is the point of no return, the final threshold, which he calls the kill point. Once you are past it, the deal is over. Therefore a player should take stock at this point and consider his action very carefully before proceeding to the next trick. Developing an ability to spot kill points will greatly improve your game, not to mention your results.

You are about to see how disastrous and embarrassing the failure to spot a deal's kill point can be. Come and share the experience with me. The venue is still Paris, but turn back the clock a few days to the quarterfinal against the United States I team.

Dealer East. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Sanborn	*Sabine*	*Levitina*	*Dany*
		pass	pass
1♠	3♣	4♠	pass
5♣	pass	5♥	pass
5♠	pass	6♠	all pass

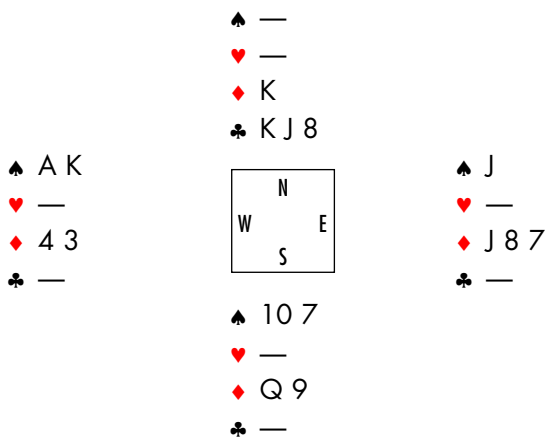
I started digging my own grave by 'psyching' a weak jump overcall, trying to take advantage of Daniela's passed hand status to muddy the waters a bit. This wasn't exactly what I achieved. How would you play six spades looking only at the East-West hands? Doesn't it look at first sight like you need

the king and queen of diamonds onside to be able to succeed? Or maybe a singleton diamond honor in South, in which case one can cash the ace of diamonds and later lead towards the jack. What are you going to play for?

Because of my bidding, Kerri Sanborn considered it unlikely that I would hold both diamond honors or diamond length and came up with a brilliant plan. After winning my club opening lead, she continued at Trick 2 with a diamond to the ace and — wait a minute!

Did you spot it? Kill point! This was not the time to blindly follow second hand low. I had to go in with the king to avoid being endplayed later. Why did I fail to do that? I even saw it coming and still I played low. The answer is that I wanted to play in tempo in order not to give away the position to declarer by thinking too long. That was an illusion and the only thing I gave away was the contract by not taking enough time to think at the critical moment. I didn't even manage to play in tempo anyway; I hesitated just slightly.

This kind of faux pas does not go unnoticed by a declarer of Kerri's caliber. She was a little taken aback and reconsidered her plan. What was my hesitation about? Could I possibly be so cunning as to duck with both diamond honors? If I did have a doubleton diamond honor and had spotted the impending endplay, why then had I played low? Finally she shrugged her shoulders and played for me to have made a mistake. How right she was. Look what happened. She won with the ace of diamonds, eliminated all the clubs and hearts and drew just one round of trumps by cashing the queen in dummy to reach this position:



At this point she simply exited with a diamond, which I had to win with my now lone king to give her a ruff and sluff. Boy, did I feel miserable.

This brilliant piece of declarer play was not found by anybody else in the Venice Cup quarterfinals. It was, however, duplicated by two other shining stars of the bridge world in the Bermuda Bowl, Alfredo Versace for Italy and Bob Hamman for the United States — interestingly, in their quarterfinal battle against one another. That means one great Italian player and one great American player also failed to rise with the diamond king at Trick 2. I wonder whether they were suffering from the same disease that I was.

So remember this the next time you are worried about pausing because it might give the show away to declarer. If you are not 100% sure about the position, it will, in the long run, pay to take your time. Trust me, more points and matches have been lost by not thinking when it was required than by stopping to think in awkward situations and tipping declarer off to the right line of play.

I wonder whether it is more embarrassing and painful to have a notion of having reached a critical moment, only to fail to think it through, or not even to realize that one has arrived at the kill point of a deal. The latter is exactly what happened to me on a deal from the first stage of the German Open Trials for the European Championships in Malmö in 2004. "Open?" you may wonder. "Why are two women trying to qualify for the open team? Why are they not satisfied with continuing to play in women's competition, where they have been so successful?"

Bridge has something unique and outstanding to offer that hardly any other sport can come close to. People from different cultures and societies, from different age groups and of either gender can all compete against one another on equal terms. However unlikely such an outcome may be, the underdog always has a chance to emerge victorious against the favorite, even though at times the chance may be only minuscule. It is this aspect of the game that will keep me enamored with it forever.

Considering that the differences between men and women have always been and always will be intriguing to the human race, it is only natural to ask: "Are men and women equally good bridge players?" Not surprisingly, many have asked this question and many have tried to give an answer, not infrequently a politician's answer. (My definition of a politician's answer is one that uses a lot of words, but doesn't really say anything at all; least of all does it answer the question.)

Let me be totally unpolitical here and say it once and for all: Men are better bridge players than women. Now that we have settled that difficult issue, we may want to investigate the reasons. Let's start by taking a look at what others have had to say about this explosive topic.

Zia, in his book *Bridge My Way*, arrives at the same conclusion: men and women are different and men are better bridge players than women. He notes the contention of a psychologist friend of his that one of the main factors that make a top player is a high level of testosterone. Testosterone is a hormone found in much greater quantities in males than in females. Its general effect is to increase energy, sex drive, aggression, appetite and muscle mass. I really had to smile when I found this explanation and thought of the average male bridge player one meets at tournaments. Maybe for this reason, maybe for others, Zia concludes his deliberations by saying: "I haven't got the courage to discuss this subject any more — it's far too explosive." Chicken! I will take a deep breath now and plunge into deep waters. Let's give the floor to a woman.

In an article in the English *Bridge Magazine*, the top English woman player, Sandra Landy, also brings up the testosterone aspect. Maybe there is something to it after all. Then she mentions a factor that has always been my own personal explanation for the mystery. Men are more single-minded, whereas women are multi-tasking. Yes, Sandra, I totally agree. Men have a much better ability to forget everything around them and to totally focus on a task at hand; nothing and nobody can disturb their train of thought. On the other hand, they are completely incapable of doing more than one thing at the same time. My husband, Jens, is unable to blow his nose while reading the newspaper. I have long given up talking to him while he is busy opening a bottle of wine; he wouldn't hear what I am saying anyway.

Have you ever heard the American expression: "He cannot walk and chew gum." Notice *he*; never *she*. *She* notices everything around her; nothing and nobody can escape her attention. Have you ever wondered why little children almost always cry, "Mummy, please help me" and almost never, "Daddy, please help me"? It's because they are very clever and have learned early that Daddy is busy and won't hear them anyway. Mummy, on the other hand, may be talking on the phone, frying the potatoes for dinner and giving water to the dog, all at the same time, and she will still hear the cry and have at least one hand to help. Although women can do all this, it is much more difficult for them to devote their concentration to just one thing and block everything else out of their minds. This, to my mind, is the main reason men are better bridge players than women.

Opinions are divided on whether or not women should be able to compete in Open competition at all. Some feel that men should stick to competing against men and women should stick to competing against women. But 'open competition' is a unique feature of the game of bridge

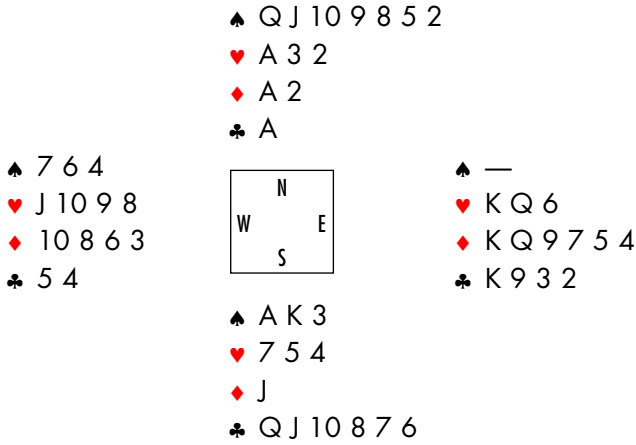
and to me it makes all the difference. How many other sports offer men and women the chance to match wits on equal terms, not just on select and highly publicized occasions, but every day? There are those who hold the political view that bridge would be well advised to conform to other sports and stick to pure men's and pure women's competition; no open competition. Among other things, this segregation would facilitate bridge's quest to gain access to the Olympic Games. Right now, bridge's unusual structure of concurrently running a women's competition and an open competition in which both men and women can compete could alienate other sports. I strongly disagree with this view.

It cannot be denied that bridge has an image problem and finds it difficult to attract the interest of young people who prefer other pastime activities. A successful marketing campaign for any product focuses on the unique and outstanding qualities of the product. That is what catches people's eye and gets them interested, and in the end they may buy the product. Even if they don't buy it, they will at least have heard of it. But who wants to buy something that is just like everything else and has nothing special to recommend it? Who even wants to hear about it? The answer is no one. If we want to promote bridge and to gain the public's interest, let's focus on the unique and special features of bridge. Let's not make it just another one of those games.

I am not afraid to say that the current structure is a success. The fact that men and women are playing in partnerships together and are competing against one another at ordinary, everyday tournaments, results in a highly positive social effect. In international top open competition, where female participation is rare, nobody minds the presence of occasional token women players who can usually hold their own. On the contrary, they add an extra element of charm to the game, making it livelier and more colorful. Female successes in open competition are always highly publicized — they are good for the game. For the women players themselves, it is an extra incentive that they might one day have the chance to play in open competition. In short, the current structure is accepted, enjoyed and viewed favorably by most players. Why change something so gratifying and successful? What is it they say? If it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Daniela and I, having been so successful in women's bridge and acknowledging that Open competition is more challenging, decided to pursue our goal of becoming as good as we can be. With this in mind, we took our places in the battle for a place on the German Open team.

Dealer West. Neither Vul.

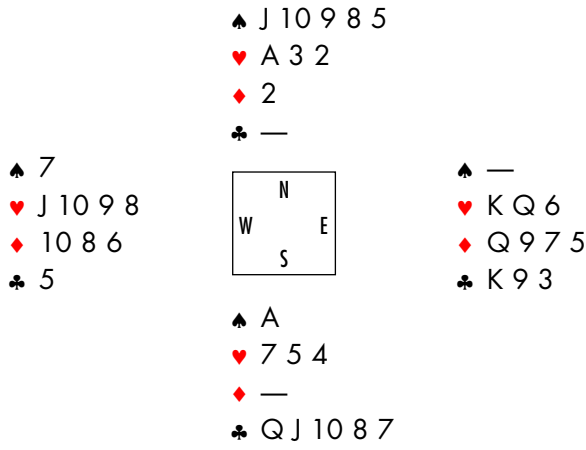


West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Schüller	*Sabine*	*Linde*	*Dany*
pass	1♣	3♦	dbl[1]
5♦	5♠	pass	6♠
all pass			

1. GF, no biddable five-card major.

The opening lead against six spades was the king of diamonds. Looks good, doesn't it? Happy to have escaped a heart lead that would have complicated matters considerably, I took inventory and could see plenty of tricks. The plan was to draw two rounds of trumps, ending in dummy, cash the ace of clubs on the way and then take the ruffing finesse in clubs against the king. Depending on its location and the distribution of the club suit, there would be twelve or thirteen tricks, with the third trump in dummy being a convenient re-entry.

So at Trick 2, I cashed the queen of spades and — stop! Did you miss the kill point? It's over. Believe it or not, the contract could not be made any longer. You don't believe me? Well then, watch what happened. Still unsuspecting, I cashed the ace of clubs, entered dummy with a trump and asked for the queen of clubs, West following low. Now it began to dawn on me what evils might befall me. This was the position:



If I discarded a heart now, East would win his king of clubs and destroy dummy's trump entry by playing a diamond. West would still have a trump left to ruff the next club and I would have to concede a heart trick in the end. To prevent this from happening, I discarded my little diamond from hand, so I would be able to ruff a diamond return in hand, thus preserving the dummy entry to the high clubs. If only East had been taught to win his tricks when they were presented to him, I would still have been okay, but Julius Linde had other ideas. He found the brilliant counter of ducking the queen of clubs and my goose was cooked. On the next club from dummy, Matthias Schüller was able to put his little trump to great use, preventing me from establishing the suit, because there was only one entry left in dummy. I had to concede two heart tricks in the end for a really embarrassing one down.

Where did I go wrong? I failed to see that I had to unblock the ace of clubs immediately at Trick 2. Then, when the 3-0 trump split came to light at the next trick, I would be able to overtake the spade queen and win the trick in dummy to take an immediate ruffing finesse in clubs, discarding a heart from hand. Even if East forced one of dummy's trump entries now by playing a diamond after winning the king of clubs, I would be able to use dummy's clubs as a way of removing one of West's trumps. If West ruffed in, I could overruff and re-enter dummy, simultaneously drawing the last trump, and claim twelve tricks.

Anyway, very nice defense, guys! This pair is still quite young and in their junior shoes, but they played very enterprising pressure bridge for the whole match. Germany has never really excelled internationally in open competition, so it was refreshing to see there is some hope for the future.

Despite all this and thanks to the more successful efforts of our teammates, Guido Hopfenheit and Sebastian Reim, our team survived the first stage of the trials.

The last deal was a very painful experience. How can one avoid this kind of mistake and become more aware of kill points? It will never be possible to eliminate mistakes completely, but here is a good rule: whenever you are happy with your contract and things look easy, stop to ask yourself this question: "What can go wrong?" When you have found the answer to this question and know how to counter possible obstacles, proceed to the next trick. If you couldn't find anything that could go wrong, go on playing and pray that you were right.

Thankfully the game of bridge is not always cruel. Very often a player is not punished for failing to recognize a kill point or not analyzing it correctly because of the fortunate lie of the cards. Because of this, many mistakes go unnoticed by players and spectators alike. Sometimes they get discovered in the post-mortem analysis, though. I remember waking up in the middle of the night after playing this deal with the horrified realization that I had totally screwed up the play. Take a look at this deal from the fourth IOC Grand Prix that sensationally took place in Salt Lake City just one week before the start of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games.

Dealer North. N-S Vul.

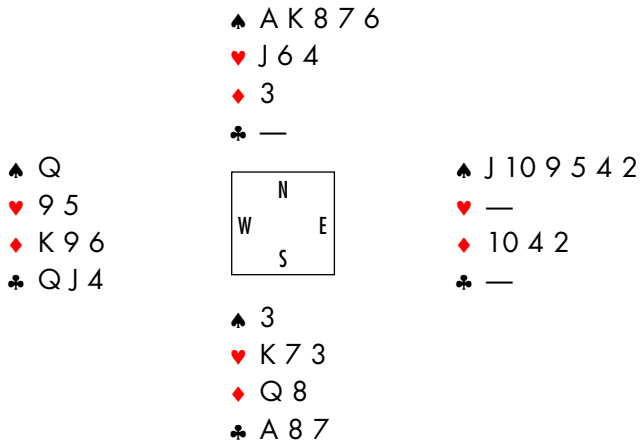
	♠ A K 8 7 6 ♥ J 10 6 4 ♦ A 3 ♣ K 6	
♠ Q ♥ A 9 5 ♦ K J 9 6 ♣ Q J 10 9 4	N W E S	♠ J 10 9 5 4 2 ♥ Q 8 ♦ 10 7 4 2 ♣ 2
	♠ 3 ♥ K 7 3 2 ♦ Q 8 5 ♣ A 8 7 5 3	

West	North	East	South
Simons	*Sabine*	*Pasman*	*Elke*
	1♠	pass	1NT
2♣	2♥	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

Dany was unable to go to Salt Lake City because she was seven months pregnant, so I paired up with Elke Weber to represent Germany in this prestigious event. Elke was fantastic. It was her first time on the German National team. Even though she must have had lots of butterflies in her stomach, she never said no to anything, not even to playing on VuGraph against the Dutch champions, Anneke Simons and Jet Pasman.

Four hearts is not a great contract, but it is one of those that seem to be difficult to avoid. Pasman quite naturally led her singleton in partner's suit and I captured Simons' nine with my king. I then started trying to form a plan. Quite frankly, I had absolutely no clue as to how I was supposed to take ten tricks on this deal, but the game had to continue. It seemed like a good idea to get the opponents' trumps out of the way before the ruffing started. I have seen people start with the ten from this kind of combination in the heart suit with great success, so I decided to give it a try. Indeed, it was much harder for Pasman to cover the ten than the jack with her doubleton queen. After all, I could theoretically have played the ten from a holding of ♥A109x, in which case covering might result in me not losing a trump trick at all if I finessed against her partner's jack on the way back. Actually, this is sort of an illusion: a player is very unlikely to play the ten from such a combination without also looking at the eight either in his hand or in dummy, because it risks unnecessarily losing an extra trick in the suit when it breaks badly. Remember that the next time you are confronted with the problem.

Looking at the eight herself, East should no doubt have worked out to cover my ten, but she played low, leaving her partner to wonder whether she should win with her ace or not. West did finally win with her ace and continued with the ten of clubs, no doubt suit preference for diamonds. East ruffed with the queen of hearts and obligingly continued with a diamond. With the position of the king of diamonds quite clear, playing the queen from dummy was unlikely to gain anything, so instead I inserted the eight, which was covered by West's jack and my ace. The position was now:

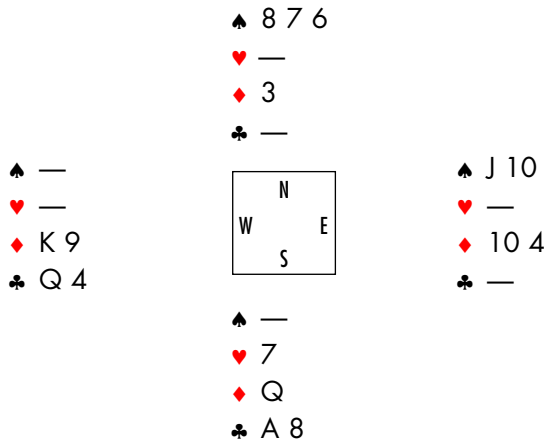


It was clear that West held the last two trumps and I was convinced that she also had the king of diamonds. From the play so far, it seemed unlikely that spades would split 4-3, so I would not be able to establish an extra winner by ruffing the suit. However, an expensive ten of clubs had been wasted in the opponents' ruffing maneuver and my plan now was to endplay West for the tenth trick. This would require stripping West of her exit cards in spades and I would need to guess exactly how many spades she had. So next I cashed the ace of spades. When the queen fell from West, I decided to take it at face value based on the principle of restricted choice: she might have played another spade if she had one, but was forced to play the queen since it was her only spade.

Crossing my fingers that I was right, I drew the last two outstanding trumps, ending in dummy, and continued with the seven of clubs. Simons was forced to cover this, but instead of ruffing I simply discarded my losing diamond. This was an unexpected trick for my opponent, but it was also the last one. Now West was truly endplayed. She could either play a club into my tenace or exit with a diamond, establishing my queen for the tenth trick. This was nice and felt good. Succeeding to perform a play like that always does, especially when playing on VuGraph. I was later told that the VuGraph commentators with all hands on view actually had not spotted the winning line until American world champion Peter Weichsel pointed it out from the audience. That was, of course, very flattering and I was a happy camper.

That is, until I woke up in the middle of the night with cold sweat on my forehead. I had missed the kill point! There was no need at all to guess how many spades West had; the deal was laydown under the assumption that West had the king of diamonds. I had misplayed the deal, because I would have gone down had West held another spade. Go back to the point

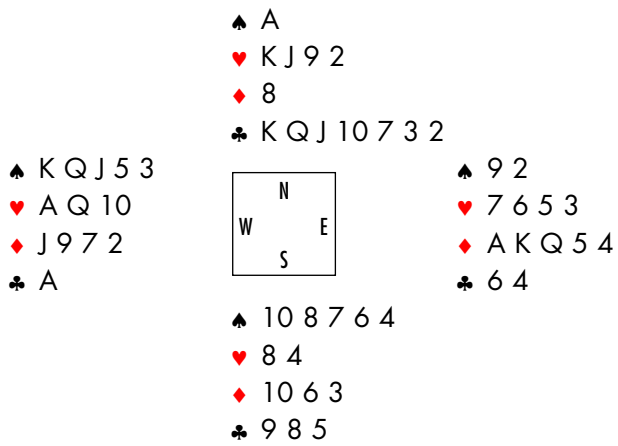
where I played the seven of clubs from dummy, which West had to cover. The right play now is actually, instead of doing something brilliant, to simply ruff this trick. The king of spades comes next, throwing a diamond from dummy, and West will either follow or discard a diamond depending on how many spades she started with. Now a spade is ruffed in dummy and this time West will be squeezed!



If she discards a club, my clubs are good and if she discards her low diamond, she will be put in with the king of diamonds to lead into my club tenace. That was a bad night. Do you also dream about bridge?

Has all this been too depressing? Too many mistakes, too many blunders? I believe it is a good philosophy in life to try to finish on a positive note. Please take a seat and watch a woman who knows a kill point when she sees one.

Dealer North. E-W Vul.



West	North	East	South
Andrea	*Modlin*	*Pony*	*Mansell*
	1♣	1♦	pass
1♠	3♣	pass	pass
dbl	pass	3♥	pass
5♦	all pass		

Andrea Reim (née Rauscheid) and Pony Nehmert have long been one of the mainstays of the German women's team and have contributed extensively to its many successes. During the 2000 Bridge Olympiad in Maastricht, they played some of their best bridge ever, as witnessed by this deal, which occurred in our round-robin match against South Africa, never an easy opponent.

The five diamond contract reached by Pony and Andrea looked eminently reasonable and eleven tricks seemed to be a cinch after the club opening lead. Remember the advice I gave you earlier in this chapter (or did I give it to myself?). When things look easy, ask yourself, "What can go wrong?" Pony did just that, coming up with a very satisfactory answer. If either heart honor were onside or if spades broke no worse than 4-2, there would be no problems at all. So just in case worse came to worst Pony spotted a little extra chance.

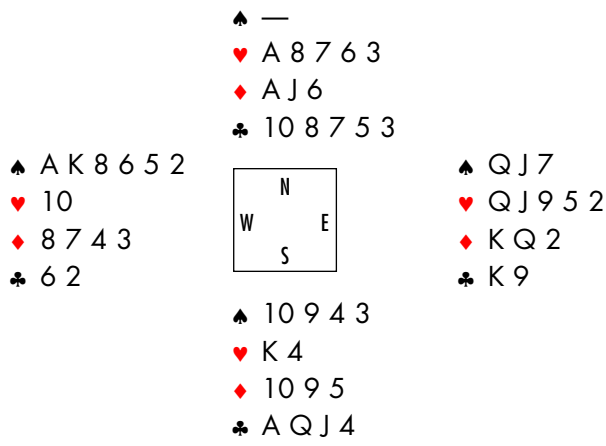
After drawing only two rounds of trumps, she ruffed her club loser in dummy and, being quite sure about the location of most missing high cards from the bidding, continued with the king of spades. Spades did indeed break very unfavorably for declarer, but this is where Pony's foresight paid off. When North won her singleton ace, she was actually endplayed. She could either hand Pony a heart trick on a silver platter by playing into the ♥AQ10 or she could give her a ruff and sluff by continuing with a club. Modlin chose the latter and Pony duly chalked up eleven tricks. If Pony had immediately drawn all the opponents' outstanding trumps, there would have been no endplay and yet another kill point missed. Thanks Pony, for helping me finishing this chapter on a positive note!

–9–

The Pit and the Pendulum

It was now halfway through the set and things were going reasonably well for us. However, we were still 35 IMPs behind, and there had been no landslides that could give us any realistic hope of turning the match around at the last minute. Would time run out on us despite our determination?

Board 9. *Dealer North. E-W Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
	pass	1♥	pass
2♠[1]	all pass		

1. Weak jump response.

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
	1♥	pass	1♠
2♠	2NT[1]	4♠	dbl
all pass			

1. Minimum opening with 5+ hearts and at least four cards in a minor.

Andrea's weak jump response allowed our teammates to stop safely in two spades. Although the spade game might produce ten tricks on a very lucky day, on the actual layout nine tricks were the limit. Eight tricks were all Andrea needed and that was what she made, recording +110 for Germany. Nobody else managed to stay so low.

The auction at our table was completely different. Veronique's two spade overcall was, as far as I can judge, totally out of character for the usually very conservative French style. Catherine took it at full value when she jumped to game. Who can blame her? She was looking at the most high card points at the table and everybody else had been bidding but her!

My 2NT call was completely artificial, indicating at least four cards in a minor, more likely five, together with five cards in hearts and a minimum opening. We need to have such bids, because in our canapé system, we also open one heart with, for example, four hearts and a six-card minor. We want to be able to show that later in a competitive auction. If Daniela had known my second suit was clubs, she would surely have been reluctant to double 4♠, getting us to five clubs instead, a contract that cannot be beaten on the lie of the cards. What ensued after her actual decision was even better since it also had a psychological effect.

Holding two aces, I was quite happy to see the double, but what exactly was going on? Daniela knew I had a minimum opening and minimum in our style is quite a bit less than in most people's vocabulary. Was she doubling on the power of her trumps? That seemed unlikely; surely the French in their comfortable position wouldn't challenge fate by climbing to the four-level with a fragile trump suit when the bidding had already indicated bad breaks. They knew better. I concluded that the reason for Daniela's double had to be shortness in hearts, so I started our defense with the ace of hearts. The appearance of dummy and the play to the first trick did nothing to change my mind and I continued with another heart, fully expecting Daniela to ruff it.

At first sight, it looks as if declarer might bring home her contract by playing low from dummy, having established a parking place for her club losers. A closer look reveals that she will run out of trumps before being able to enjoy the necessary two diamond tricks. No matter how she twists and turns, we will prevail in the end and beat the contract by a trick. The misery for France now was that Veronique took her eye off the ball. She mistimed the play, neither playing low from dummy on my heart continuation nor trying to establish the diamond suit by playing towards her honors in dummy. She finished two down, for 500 points and 12 IMPs to Germany. The score was France 216 Germany 193, and we had suddenly moved much closer.

Time seemed almost to stand still for a few seconds. There was shocked silence. It was crystal clear to everybody at the table that this was a disastrous result for France. Yes, we had had a few small positive boards before, but nothing earthshaking, nothing that could possibly have made any serious in-roads into the French lead. This was different. Not only was it a decisive gain for us, but more importantly, our opponents were showing nerves. Forebodings of a victory going down the drain lay in the air. We clearly had the momentum.

Momentum is one of those terms sports announcers love to use. A team that has momentum is on a roll, has luck on its side, simply cannot do any wrong and may appear unstoppable. Those who have been there before know there is the other side to the coin. Momentum can also be very much a negative force: everything starts going wrong and the opponents seem to score with every single move.

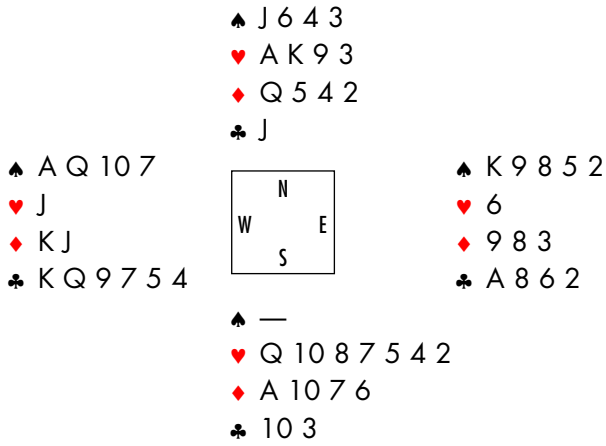
Momentum is always triggered by a precipitating event that for one reason or another changes the performer's cognition and behavior, eventually leading to a change in performance — which can go either way, mind you. In bridge, a typical triggering event could be an extremely inspired line of declarer play that would be difficult to spot even looking at all four hands or a very serious and embarrassing blunder that can only be explained by having been momentarily brain-dead. It could also be a disastrous bidding misunderstanding, ending in a ridiculous doubled contract. One of the most dramatic examples of such a case, which gives me the creeps to this day when I am reminded of it, dates back to the semifinal of the 1989 Venice Cup in Perth, Australia.

Back in those days, the number of European teams qualifying for the Venice Cup was restricted to two. Having sensationally won the European Championships in Turku, Finland that same year, surprising everybody and most of all ourselves, we had earned an automatic bye to the semifinals.

There we met the other European team, the Netherlands, who had had to go through one week of round-robin play to get that far. We were very eager to prove that our victory in the European Championships had not been a fluke.

For a long time, it looked like we were going to succeed in our quest. Going into the last sixteen-board segment, we were leading our rivals by 16 IMPs and the set started well for us. On the very first board Daniela and I stopped accurately at the five-level, since we were missing a cashing ace-king in a side suit. There would have been twelve tricks without the right lead, so the deal was potentially dangerous, except for the fact that opening leader held the missing ace-king combination and had no problem knowing what to lead. Indeed our counterparts at the other table sailed into the doomed slam, giving us another 11 IMPs. The Dutch pair at our table almost seemed to shrug their shoulders in resignation: "Oh well, this doesn't look like our day. Let's get it over with." And then it happened.

Dealer North. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Van der Pas	*Sabine*	*Schippers*	*Dany*
	pass	pass	3♥[1]
dbl	4♣	dbl	all pass

1. Either a preempt in hearts or a solid club suit.

Back then Daniela and I were employing a gadget where a three heart or three spade opening was a two-way bid: it was either a natural preempt or promised a solid suit in the corresponding minor. You see, if you open a gambling 3NT with a solid minor without side values and 3NT is where

you belong, you will very often play it from the wrong side — the opening lead will come through partner's hoped-for stoppers. Our solution was very smart, wasn't it?

To tell you the truth, this is not the way I felt by the time this deal was finished. Our agreement was that over the three heart opening, a four club bid by partner would be pass or correct. With the solid club suit, opener would pass, and with the heart preempt, opener would correct to four hearts. However, inexplicably and inexcusably, we had neglected to discuss how we would act should the opponents interfere with as vicious a bid as a double. Without an agreement, I felt I should bid the same as without the double and I wasn't too concerned about bidding four clubs. Looking at my hand, it surely looked like Daniela had the solid club suit. Daniela, on the other hand, felt that if I wanted to find out what she had, I could simply pass the double, so four clubs had to be natural. I wish I could tell you there was a happy ending to this story, but there wasn't. Four clubs doubled in our 1-2 fit was the final contract; when the defense didn't lead trumps, I escaped for a mere down six, for -1400 points and 15 IMPs to the Netherlands.

What happened next was frightening. The Dutch, who until then had had an air of resignation about them, all of a sudden sat straight up in their chairs. "What is this nonsense? Of course we can win this match! This is not a hopeless case at all!" This was what their expressions seemed to say and from that very moment they didn't touch a single wrong card or make a single wrong bid. For the remainder of the match, I felt totally helpless; it seemed like everything was predestined. I will never forget that eerie feeling — even writing about it now gives me the shivers. Needless to say, the Dutch emerged the glorious winners of the match.

The ensuing hot or cold streak that often follows such a dramatic event sometimes seems inevitable. Is this some kind of predestination? Is there simply no escape from fate? Of course not!

Empirical studies of basketball and tennis matches have shown that the performers perceive momentum to a much greater degree than spectators. It is very much an emotional phenomenon; it is something that is in our heads, something that we create ourselves. In reality, every board is a new opportunity to change your luck. Forget the last board; it's over, and no matter how much you dwell on it, you will not change the result. What's done is done and cannot be undone. The only board that matters is the one you are playing right now. You can excel at it with the same probability as at any other board, no matter what has happened before. There is no

correlation between events unless you create it yourself; everything else is a cock-and-bull story. Just be confident. Believe in yourself. You can do it!

You aren't convinced? Then I recommend Bob Hamman's book *At the Table*. There is hardly a page where he doesn't emphasize the importance of focusing solely on one board and one board only — the one you are playing at that moment. Who wouldn't listen to his advice? Nobody has won more often than he has. Maybe playing one deal at a time is the secret of his success? It doesn't take long to see that he is a master of this difficult discipline, as he so aptly demonstrated at the recent Bermuda Bowl in Monte Carlo.

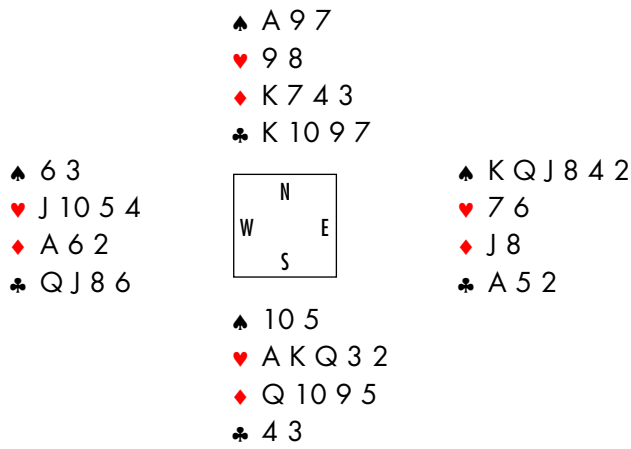
If there were Academy Awards for bridge championships, the final of the 2003 Bermuda Bowl between Italy and USA would be a cinch to snatch the award for best drama. The story of the dramatic conclusion to this match has, without a doubt, appeared in every single bridge publication on earth. But this is not the story I want to tell you. The story I want to tell you is the story of a man who kept his cool.

At the end of a grueling fortnight of non-stop bridge, going into the last sixteen-board segment of the fight for the most desired crown in bridge, the United States were leading Italy by 28 IMPs. Some of the most famous partnerships in modern bridge were involved in this match. In the Closed Room, the Italian pairing of Bocchi-Duboin were battling it out against Meckstroth-Rodwell from the United States. In the Open Room, with hundreds of spectators and commentators watching spellbound on the VuGraph screen, Hamman-Soloway were fighting against Lauria-Versace.

The going soon got very tough for the Americans. They bid a terrible slam, which was destined to go down and duly did so. Then they missed a laydown slam, where twelve tricks could be claimed after the opening lead. Then they doubled four spades (off four cashing top tricks), and let it through with an overtrick when Versace took an inspired backward finesse for the missing queen in a side suit.

Beyond doubt, it was clear to everybody involved that the Italians had very likely overtaken the lead by then. Try to put yourself in Hamman's place. A world championship is near at hand and seven boards later it looks like it is going to slip through your fingers. What are you thinking? How you should have bid differently to avoid that horrible slam? Why on earth you did not reach that baby slam with your system? Whether you should have led something different to make sure of beating their doubled game? Or why your fool of a partner did this and didn't do that? Hello! Anybody home? You are defending three diamonds!

Dealer South. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Hamman	*Lauria*	*Soloway*	*Versace*
			1♥
pass	1NT	2♠	pass
pass	dbl	pass	3♦
all pass			

Versace ducked the opening spade lead and won the continuation with dummy's ace. It was clear to everybody watching that he would make his contract if he could guess the layout of the trump suit, whereas he was likely to go down if he didn't. At Trick 3, Versace played a diamond to the queen.

I am convinced that 99.9% of the players in Hamman's shoes would have grabbed their ace and played back some random card. Let's get this silly little contract over with. It's bigger things we need now. Let's get out and compare scores; let's find out whether we've hung on to our lead. Not Hamman. He ducked the diamond as though he didn't have a care in the world, because defending this plain three diamond contract had his full and undivided attention.

Imagine what would have happened if he had won his ace. Declarer would have been bound to drop the diamond jack offside. He would have known from the bidding and the play that if Hamman had the jack, he would always be able to beat the contract by putting his partner in with a club and finally overruffing dummy when a spade was continued.

By ducking, however, Hamman had planted the conviction in declarer's mind that the ace of diamonds was with Soloway, and declarer played

the rest of the deal accordingly. I won't describe it in great detail, because declarer's play is not the point I am trying to make. It would have been a very nicely played deal, except for the fact that Soloway didn't have the ace of diamonds. So in the end the contract drifted one off to give the Americans a 4-IMP swing. It was one of the finest examples of a player keeping his calm to concentrate solely on the task at hand that I have ever witnessed and it has my full admiration.

Thinking about the last deal while playing the next one is a cardinal mistake, as is not finishing the match. Do you recognize this scenario? Things have gone splendidly: your side has done everything right and the opponents couldn't catch a ball. Even lagging a few IMPs at the beginning of the set, you must surely have pulled the match off with your performance. You can't wait to race outside to compare scores with your teammates. Oops, what was that? Did your concentration slip? Did you really let them make that ridiculous game on the last deal? Now you really can't wait to compare scores and your worst fears come true. Your teammates had a very bad set and your digression on the very last board has cost you the match. Zia calls this phenomenon the last-board syndrome. I am convinced that succumbing to it has cost many good bridge players important victories.

Every single board is equally important, including the last one. You may feel you have absolutely no chance to win the match, because things have gone so badly for you. Drop it. You can never know for sure what happened at the other table. It is your duty to do the best you can until the very last card has hit the table. I actually have a theory that a large number of bridge matches are decided on the last two boards. Of course, a long match is not decided by just one or two boards alone; they all matter. However, those last two boards are the very last opportunity to make a difference between victory and defeat. They deserve your undivided attention, regardless of what has happened so far in the match. It ain't over till it's over. How can someone with a name like Yogi Berra possibly be wrong about that?

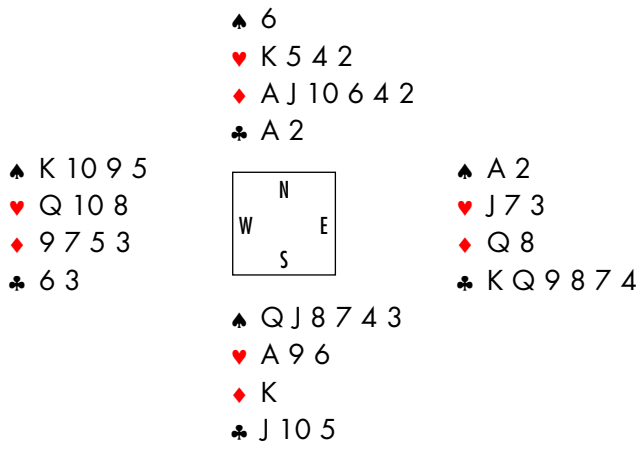
Yet this is all easier said than done, because we are not machines; we are human beings with emotions and feelings, a desire to laugh or to cry, to be happy or sad as the situation requires. Blocking all this out of your mind to let cold reason govern your thoughts is extremely difficult. And indeed, who wants to be a robot? So I was proud of myself for keeping my wits together in an awkward situation in our round-robin match against the USA II team at the 2003 Venice Cup in Monte Carlo.

The top eight out of eighteen competing teams in the Venice Cup round robin would qualify for the quarterfinal stage. That seemed like an

accomplishable task, but our team had run into a cold streak and we were struggling, having basically tied every match so far. It was important not to lose further ground against the powerful American squad.

Unfortunately, our cold streak continued. Our opponents bid a lousy slam that came home on a very lucky (for them) lie of the cards. Then we bid two aggressive but reasonable slams on minimal values that were unlikely to be reached at the other table. One that was otherwise makeable went down when the opponents were able to get a ruff on opening lead. The other one was difficult to declare and went down on an unsuccessful line of play. That was three big swings against us and even though we had a few small pick-ups, it was clear that we were in the gutter by the time the penultimate board hit the table.

Dealer South. N-S Vul



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Wittes	*Sabine*	*Cohen*	*Dany*
			1♠
pass	2♣[1]	dbl	2♦[2]
pass	2NT[3]	pass	3♠[4]
pass	3NT	all pass	

1. Artificial game forcing relay.
2. Artificial, basically any hand type except a canapé or a 5-5 with a minor.
3. Showing a diamond suit that needed support (a 3♦ bid instead would have promised a solid suit).
4. Showing a one suited hand with spades.

Daniela and I open the bidding very lightly, so I might have taken the view with the North hand to start an invitational sequence only. Still, I think it would have been a big decision with the vulnerable game bonus at stake. Once I had committed our side to game, we sailed into the inevitable 3NT; at least it was a contract that had some play.

Sasha Cohen kicked off with the king of clubs and I was assessing my chances. I knew we were in terrible shape IMP-wise and I was determined to give this deal my best effort. This was the next-to-last deal of the match; there would only be one more chance left after this one. I would not give up before I had thought the deal through very carefully. Think, Sabine, think, you have to make this contract!

It became clear to me very soon that the seemingly 'normal' line of play would fail if the defenders were on their toes. It seemed like the odds-on chance of winning this contract was playing for a 3-3 diamond break. Win the opening club lead, cash the ace of diamonds and continue with the jack to drive out the opponents' queen. If all goes well you can hope to score two hearts, five diamonds and two clubs. But what happens if the defense, after winning with the queen of diamonds, switches to a heart instead of continuing its club attack?

You will have two choices: you can either win the heart switch in dummy and wave goodbye to your second hoped-for club trick or you can win it in hand, preserving your dummy entry for later. In that case, you have to run your diamond tricks now and will have no good discard from dummy on your last diamond. You are down to:

♠ Q J 8 ♥ A ♦ — ♣ J 10

Dummy is squeezed and your goose is cooked!

Even though all this was quite clear to me, the all-important question became: "How likely was the opposition to find that killing heart switch?" I simply couldn't come up with any good logical arguments one way or the other. So I listened to my instincts and those instincts said: "These two girls have not dropped a single IMP so far. They will find the correct defense blindfolded." This may not sound very rational to you, but there comes a point in every woman's life when she has to make a decision no matter what. Now was my time. The deal had to finish at some point — it couldn't continue forever.

Accordingly, I played for the only realistic chance to make the contract legitimately, the doubleton queen of diamonds. On the way to unblocking the diamonds, I ducked a heart so as maybe to save an extra undertrick on

a 3-3 heart break if my hopes in the diamond suit did not materialize. When the defense didn't cash out, but instead established their club suit, I ended up with eleven tricks, gaining 13 IMPs for Germany on the finishing line.

It wasn't solving this problem successfully that I found extremely satisfying, but the fact that I did it under what I perceived to be extremely pressuring and adverse circumstances. Luck seemed to be against us and we were playing this match on VuGraph, with hundreds of spectators watching on-site and online worldwide. That knowledge didn't exactly make it easier.

Is there a recipe for how to deal with negative momentum and seemingly never-ending strokes of bad luck? Maybe. The main ingredients are focus, will power and confidence.

- Think positive. You can do it.
- Everybody makes his own fortune and every new deal is a new opportunity.
- Forget about the past. The only moment that matters is here and now.
- Don't panic. Stay in your seat with both your body and your brain until the very end.
- Never give up. It ain't over till it's over.

-10-

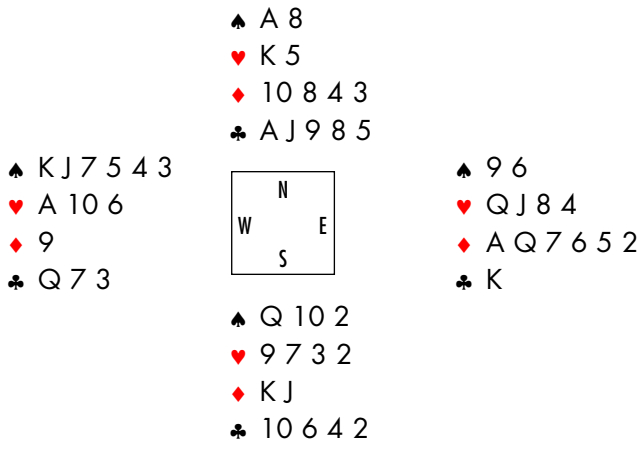
Murders in the Rue Morgue

The best chess-player in Christendom may be little more than the best player of chess; but proficiency in whist implies capacity for success in all these more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind.

Edgar Allan Poe

We had just struck a serious blow and there were still seven boards to play. Time enough to decide the match in our favor. We needed to keep the momentum going and were hoping for some highly competitive deals. Surely after the shocking experience on the last deal the French would be anxious to play straight down the middle and give us as few chances to score as they could. We, on the other hand, would try everything possible to force difficult competitive decisions on them. I could sense the nervousness at the table and a lurking fear of making a wrong decision.

Board 10. *Dealer East. Both Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
		1♦	pass
1♠	pass	2♦	pass
2♠	all pass		

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
		1♦	pass
1♠	2♣	2♦	3♣
3♠	all pass		

The next deal was not exactly what we were hoping for. Pony and Andrea bid undisturbed to two spades and Andrea managed to take ten tricks after the opening lead of the king of hearts.

As I like to get into the auction quickly, before the opponents have a chance to exchange more information, I came in over one spade with a two club overcall that was not chosen at any of the other tables. I felt pretty safe in the knowledge that our opponents would be very reluctant to chance any doubtful penalty doubles at the present state of the match. They might even be reluctant to compete, wanting to avoid any risks at all, thus letting us quietly declare when the deal in reality belonged to them.

This didn't materialize here, but we did manage to push our opponents one level higher. On the ace of clubs lead there was a slight chance to beat three spades by a trick if declarer could be persuaded to misguess the play in the trump suit. Veronique dashed our hopes there by playing a spade to the jack in the end position, after having ruffed her club loser in dummy, to score up her partial. That meant +140 for France, but still 1 overtrick IMP for Germany. We were 22 behind with six deals left.

Will computers eventually be better bridge players than humans? Are they already? Bridge is a game of millions of possibilities and combinations. Considering computers' mind-boggling speed in calculating a number of choices that has so many zeros that I don't even know the word for it, they seem to be predestined to excel at bridge. And yes, in certain areas they already do. Yet there is one element they will never be able to master: I am talking about a discipline reserved for the human race, the psychological war.

Bridge is not only about making the right technical bid or play after having taken all the facts into account and having calculated the probabilities of the various possible outcomes. Far from that! Sneaky, illogical-seeming plays that dazzle your opponents can at times be much more effective. How often have you caught yourself thinking: "I cannot believe he played this way. That made no sense at all!" And yet it was you who ended up on the short end of the stick and your opponent prevailed, leaving you more than slightly annoyed, which didn't exactly improve your performance on the next deal.

Bridge is not only about playing your best yourself, but also about exploiting your opponents' weaknesses and inducing them to make mistakes. Computers will never be able to conjure up smoke screens to create an illusion in their opponents' minds that will cause them to make the losing decision. What am I talking about? Take a look at this masterpiece by the great Pakistani magician, Zia Mahmood.

Dealer North. Both Vul.

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

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Mari	*Chagas*	*Omar*	*Zia*
	pass	1NT	pass
2♦[1]	pass	3♥	pass
3♠[2]	pass	4♣[3]	dbl
redbl[4]	pass	4♦[5]	pass
4NT[6]	pass	5♥[7]	pass
6♥	all pass		

1. Transfer to hearts.
2. Cuebid.
3. Cuebid.
4. Control.
5. Cuebid.
6. Blackwood.
7. 2 aces.

We are at the 1997 Macallan Invitational Pairs in London, one of the two prestigious and glamorous invitational top-sixteen pairs events of the eighties and nineties. Sadly, they have both vanished from the scene now. Every single top player in the world was eager to play in those events, hoping to come home one day and find an envelope with the invitation in his or her letterbox.

The crowd-puller every year in London was the celebrated movie star Omar Sharif lending some of his glory to the bridge scene. He always played his role immaculately, smiling for even the most foolish female attempts to have a picture taken with him. Now in his 70s, Omar is still going strong, recently having won the César award (French equivalent for the American Oscar) as Best Actor for his role as a Turkish shop keeper in *Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran*. After accepting his award, he allegedly joked: "It must be awful for my fellow nominees to think they're even worse actors than I am." No doubt over the years many of his opponents at the bridge table had to go through the awful realization that they were in fact worse bridge players than Omar. On the above deal, however, it was Omar who fell victim to a ruse by Zia Mahmood.

Having partnered Omar in this event in previous years, Zia had in 1997 paired up with Brazilian star Gabriel Chagas, another legend of the bridge world. You would need the fingers of both hands to count the languages Gabriel speaks fluently. He doesn't only speak them, he also sings in them! Maybe in his next life he will be an opera star.

Did you notice anything strange or abnormal in the above auction? Why did Zia double Omar's four club cuebid on three small clubs? Zia was simply listening very carefully to the bidding and could see the writing on the wall. His opponents were on their way to slam and, considering the three spade cuebid on his left, it looked to him like all the cards were well placed for his opponents. So why not try to throw a little bit of sand into the machinery with a fake double? Maybe it would stop them from

bidding slam; maybe it would paint a wrong picture in declarer's mind about the location of the high cards. What bad could come of it? His partner wouldn't even be on opening lead. The double of four clubs was a typical Zia effort and what ensued must have lived up to even his wildest dreams.

Omar and his partner, French champion Christian Mari, could not be stopped from bidding the heart slam, but there was still the small matter of collecting twelve tricks. Looking at all four hands, they seem to be there for the taking, but Omar wasn't allowed to look at all four hands. He had only listened to the bidding. Could he use Zia's double of four clubs to his advantage?

He won the trump lead and drew trumps in three rounds. Did he need the spade ace onside or was there an extra chance? Yes, there was! If diamonds broke favorably, he would be able to throw one of the two small spades in his hand on the fourth diamond. Then he would be able to ruff one of his spade losers in his hand and throw the other one on an established club winner. Whereas the location of the spade ace was unclear, the location of the club king appeared quite certain; surely it would be in the doubler's hand. Unfortunately for Omar, he couldn't test the location of the spade ace before the club maneuver, because if it was offside, the defense could take out the necessary entry to his hand before the extra club winner was established. Accordingly, Omar took the ruffing finesse in clubs before it was too late, only to see it lose to Chagas' king with disbelieving eyes; one down meant losing 15 IMPs instead of winning 9 IMPs and a victory for Zia's artfulness.

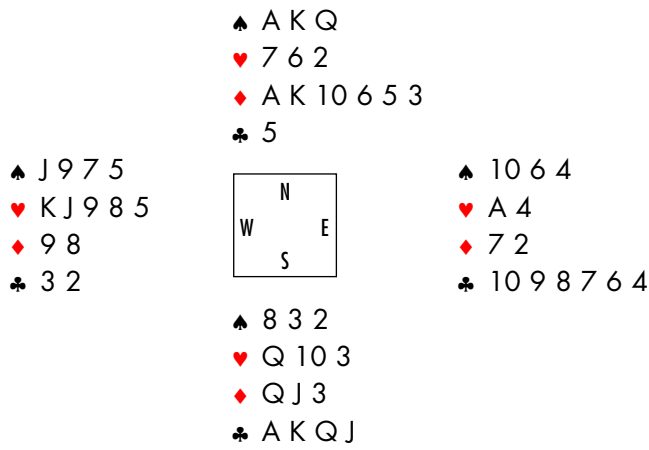
You think Omar should have worked this out? After all, would Zia honestly double a cuebid in a situation where his partner would not possibly be on lead, unnecessarily giving declarer more information about the deal? Wasn't this likely to be a foul trick? Maybe; but, you see, next time Zia plays against Omar or, for that matter, anybody who has heard about this deal, he may just double a cuebid with a useful holding in the suit. What will declarer think then? "I know this guy. This is a fake double!" and he'll consequently go wrong again.

The human mind is incalculable; the only chance you have to emerge victorious from these mind games is to be a better psychologist than your opponent. This is why a computer will never be a better bridge player than a human being, at least not in my mind. But, you might argue, the computer will simply consistently go with the probabilities, not letting itself be led astray by attempts to create an illusion, thus making the winning move more often than not. My answer: who wants to win playing like a machine?

Seriously, it is so much more satisfying to look right through your opponents' ploys and much more stimulating for the ego. It might even drive you on to new heights of performance you never knew you could reach. Winning also has to be fun! For me at least.

End of story? Not yet! There is probably never an end to any story in which Zia is involved. In the very next round, Zia and Chagas met American-turned-Scotsman-turned-American Michael Rosenberg, who is arguably the game's most brilliant analyst. He was partnering Texan millionaire Seymon Deutsch, who in 1988 played on the team that won the United States' first ever and so far only Open Team Olympiad title in Venice, Italy. Against Zia and Chagas nine years later, this is what happened:

Dealer West. Both Vul.



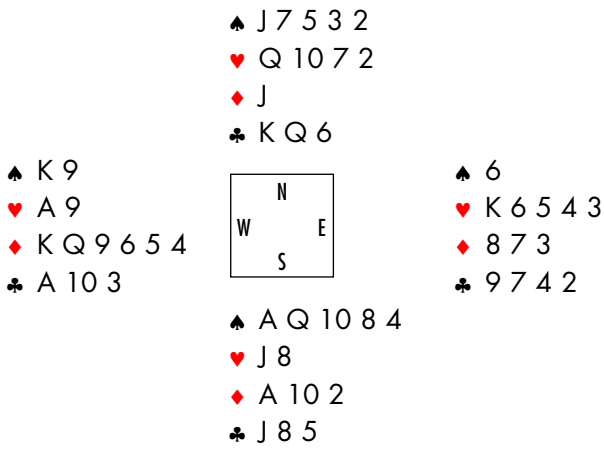
West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Zia	*Deutsch*	*Chagas*	*Rosenberg*
pass	1♦	pass	2NT
pass	3♦	pass	3♥
dbl	pass	pass	3NT
pass	4NT	pass	6♦
all pass			

When Michael bid 3♥, showing some values in that suit, Zia looked at his heart holding with enamored eyes, thinking: "I would really like Chaggi to lead a heart if they end up in a diamond contract." So, like any sane man would do, he doubled three hearts. Undeterred, Michael and Seymon proceeded to sail into the diamond slam and now the spotlight was on Chagas.

"Aha!" he thinks. "There is my mad partner in action again. Doubling a cuebid when it's most unclear I will be on lead. I have seen this before. Better to try to find a trick in a different suit." And he leads… a spade. Seymon quickly claimed thirteen tricks and, before anybody could ask any embarrassing questions, put his cards back into the board. The readers of the Daily Bulletin the next day were delighted. Clearly Zia's general approach to the game backfired on this particular occasion. Yet never knowing what he is up to makes him the extremely dangerous opponent he is and his approach results in far more successes than failures. It also produces much more publicity than any computer could ever dream of.

Catching your opponent off guard and outwitting him can have especially beneficial effects in a team match, where one plays a large number of boards against the same opponents. Your own ego will get a boost while your opponent's ego will have suffered a little crack. You are likely to have gained table dominance; establishing dominance at the table early in a match is worth bushels of IMPs! It will add some extra spice to this special cocktail and make the situation even more delicate should the adversaries in such a battle be of the opposite sex.

Dealer West. Both Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
He-Fin	*Nippgen*	*She-Fin*	*Sabine*
1NT	pass	2♦*	pass
2♥	pass	pass	2♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

Mixed tournaments are a fertile battleground for such skirmishes between the sexes. The above deal dates back to the 1996 European Mixed Teams Championships in Monte Carlo. I was playing with my good German friend, Georg Nippgen, a member of the German team that shockingly (for the rest of the field) and surprisingly (not for themselves) took home the Rosenblum Cup for Germany at the 1990 World Championships in Geneva.

The current rules at international bridge tournaments stipulate that women always have to sit in the South or East seat and men accordingly in the North and West seat. Probably nobody has ever given much thought to it, but to me that is a scandalous and discriminating rule with the underlying insinuation that men and women play on a different level, in this case clearly meaning women are inferior to men. Even though, as stated in an earlier chapter, I subscribe to that point of view on an average basis when it comes to bridge, there is hardly anything I despise more than generalizations, especially when they form the basis for a rule.

My husband, Jens, who is a vice president of both the World Bridge Federation and the European Bridge League, was laughing at me when I mentioned this point of view to him. When interrogated, he could give no plausible reason for the rule and quickly tried to change the subject, to no avail of course.

Anyway, sitting in my predestined South seat in Monte Carlo, a fact that quickly unmasked me as a woman to anyone who might have been in doubt, I was at the wheel in 4♠ against a pair from Finland after a very revealing bidding sequence. Unfortunately, I can't remember our opponents' names, so I am dubbing them 'He-Fin' and 'She-Fin'. He-Fin led the king of diamonds and I took stock. I had two heart losers and one club loser off the top, so on the surface the king of spades needed to be in the pocket for the contract to succeed. But that was simply impossible. Clearly He-Fin would have led a heart honor with both of them; therefore, She-Fin had to have one of those. It follows that having opened a strong notrump, He-Fin had to have the rest of the high cards.

Seeing no reason to indulge in any futile efforts, i.e. taking a finesse that was bound to fail, I instead played a low spade out of my hand at Trick 2. This was not a legitimate chance, but if I managed to trap my opponent here it would be worth so much more than winning a contract by taking a simple finesse. When the low spade hit the table, He-Fin eyed me suspiciously from the corner of his eye. Had I really raised to game on a queen high suit and not much else outside? This was a European Championship; surely I had to be good enough to know how to take a finesse. Was I also

good enough to work out not to take a finesse? A woman? 'No way' he seemed finally to decide and played low from his doubleton king, only to have the indignity of contributing it under my ace on the next round of the suit. There was an almost inaudible contemptuous sniff from the East seat and He-Fin's virility level immediately seemed to drop by several degrees. I am not privy to knowing what this pair's relationship was, but I am quite confident they didn't have any sex together for the remainder of the week.

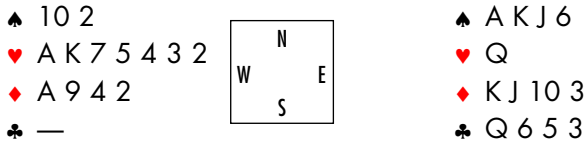
The message should be clear by now. Human beings are not machines, thus the decision of which bid, which opening lead or which line of play to choose is not always reached by pure, cold logic and calculations alone. Very often a twitch, a blink of the eye, a raised eyebrow, a nanosecond break in tempo, a certain movement of the hand, a slightly unusual tone of voice, a special way to phrase a question or answer, the mere fact that a question is posed, a seemingly meaningless, casually dropped remark often plays a much more important role for a player with his antennae tuned.

The important thing to remember is that as human beings we are all different from one another. Any action, movement, remark that mean one thing from one person may mean something totally different from another person and something different yet from a third person. Was the action a reflex or was it deliberate? If it was a reflex, the question to ask yourself is: what caused this reflex? If it was a deliberate action, the question becomes: what are this guy's motives?

One of the best-known characters created by Victor Mollo in his *Bridge in the Menagerie* series is the Rueful Rabbit. The Rueful Rabbit is a very weak player, but he has extremely good instincts. At the bridge table his strategy consists of noting what an opponent quite obviously wants him to do, and then doing the exact opposite. What is good for them must be bad for me and vice versa. This approach is far from stupid and works surprisingly well in real-life bridge as well.

Time to look at another bridge deal.

Dealer North. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany		*Sabine*	
	pass	1♦[1]	pass
1♥[2]	pass	2♠[3]	pass
3♣[4]	pass	3NT	pass
4♣[5]	pass	5NT[6]	pass
7♦[7]	pass	pass	dbl
all pass			

1. 10-15 HCP 2+ diamonds, usually no four-card major unless top-level strength.
2. Natural or relay with at least invitational values.
3. Natural, but promising longer diamonds.
4. Either fourth suit forcing or game-forcing with long clubs.
5. Who knows?
6. Choice of slams in case partner really had clubs.
7. If you think we can make a small slam, then a grand slam must be laydown with my hand.

In our quest to represent Germany in international Open competition, our team had reached the semifinal stage of the German trials. The final winner would have the right to represent Germany at the 2004 European Championships in Malmö. We were leading by a small margin after the first segment when this exciting deal cropped up in the second segment.

The bidding quickly developed into a nightmare for Daniela and me. The one hand type we do not want to hold in our strong club canapé system is a strong 4-4-4-1, for the simple reason that we cannot show it. I rejected a 16+ one club opening with the East hand because it would automatically propel us into game opposite any 8+ HCP, which did not seem particularly desirable to me at the time. Instead I opted for a one diamond opening planning to reverse into spades, thus showing a maximum non-one club opener with, of course, longer diamonds, but still pretty close, I felt, to what I had.

Daniela's three club continuation unveiled another flaw in our system. It was far from clear whether this was fourth suit forcing or just a natural bid showing a game-forcing hand with long clubs; there would have been no other way to show this hand type. Fourth suit forcing seemed more likely considering my singleton heart, so I tried to conclude the auction with

3NT. Daniela had higher ambitions — slam looked promising with her hand. The trouble was that she couldn't bid four diamonds, as this would have set diamonds as trumps and asked for keycards at the same time, which didn't seem like such a good idea with a void in clubs.

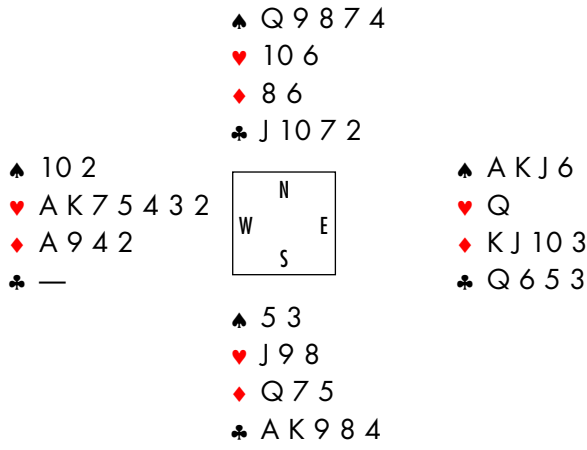
The system bid for such a situation is four clubs, which also sets diamonds as trumps and asks partner to start a cuebidding sequence, only in this particular instance it still wasn't clear whether Daniela had clubs or not. I tried to solve this seemingly insoluble problem by jumping to 5NT, giving Daniela a choice of slams and hoping she would get the message. Daniela in turn had heard enough and jumped to seven diamonds, probably having a slightly different picture of my hand.

Daniela wasn't the only one who had heard enough; so had South and he doubled the final contract and led the ace of clubs. Daniela started putting down her dummy and South remarked: "I hope my ace stands up." He seemed shell-shocked when the club void became apparent in dummy. I had two things to do now: pray for a miracle and try to locate the diamond queen.

Do you remember the deal in Chapter 4 from the 1989 European Championships in Turku, where Daniela so brilliantly analyzed a defender's resignation and finessed her partner for the missing trump queen in a nine-card fit to bring home her slam? Was this all déjà-vu? Was South disheartened by the sight of the club void in dummy and had he lost all hope of beating the contract? Which defender would you play for the vital queen?

The situation is similar, but the opponents are different. My left-hand opponent is a seasoned competitor who has been there many times before and knows all the tricks of the trade. He would never, ever let his emotions give away the winning line of play to declarer — quite the contrary.

I ruffed the opening lead, played a trump to my king, cashed the queen of hearts and ran the jack of diamonds through South. My prayers had been heard and the whole deal proved to be:



I quickly claimed thirteen tricks and chalked up +2330, giving full meaning to the expression "You have to know your customers".

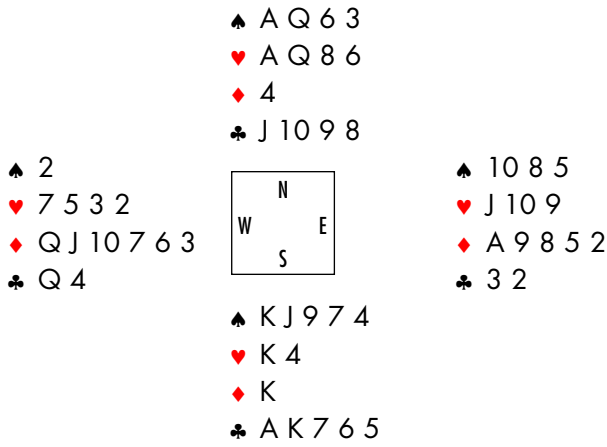
Sadly, at the time I write this, we have already played the final of the German Open team qualification, which we lost. But both Daniela and I agree: we will be back!

-11-

What the Tortoise Said to Achilles

Back in Paris, our opponents seemed relieved that one more deal had passed without anything monumental having happened. With only six more deals to go, it was, no doubt, still too many for their taste. The new board that hit the table clearly had all the makings of a swing board. Would the bridge gods smile on us?

Board 11. *Dealer South. Neither Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
			1♣
2♦	dbl	4♦	4♠
pass	4NT[1]	pass	5♥[2]
pass	6♣	all pass	

1. RKCB for spades.
2. 2 key cards without the queen.

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
			1♣
pass	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♠[1]	pass	3♣[2]
pass	3♥[3]	pass	3NT[4]
pass	4♦[5]	pass	4♥[6]
pass	4NT[7]	pass	5♥[8]
pass	6♠	all pass	

1. 11+ HCP, 3+ spades.
2. Club ace or king.
3. Heart ace or king.
4. Serious slam-try, denies extra spade length.
5. Shortness in diamonds.
6. Last train slam-try.
7. RKCB.
8. 2 key cards without the trump queen.

In the Closed Room, the French reached what turned out to be the inferior of the two available slams. Playing in spades, declarer can test the opposing distribution of both major suits before making a decision on how to play the club suit; with clubs as trumps, there was no such luxury against best defense. On any lead but a diamond, the normal and obvious plan for declarer would be to cash two rounds of clubs and, should the queen not drop, continue with three rounds of hearts, intending to shake the diamond loser, inevitably leading to all thirteen tricks. However, Andrea did extremely well not to lead her singleton spade against the club slam, sticking to her partnership's long suit (diamonds) instead, and declarer was under the gun.

Have you ever read English superstar Andrew Robson's Bols Bridge Tip? If an opponent makes a preemptive bid and then leads his own suit, he tends to have a singleton trump. (Preemptors tend to have singletons, and he would probably have led any side-suit singleton.) Sadly for Germany, Sylvie Willard has not read Robson's Tip — or maybe she just knows better! She confidently banged down the ace and king of clubs after winning Pony's heart switch and allowed herself a relieved smile when the queen obligingly appeared on her left. I am 99% sure that in her shoes I would have misguessed the position. Will you tell me your secret, Sylvie? How did you get this right?

Meanwhile at our table, the French defensive methods were not tuned to create a competitive problem for Daniela and me. Restrained by her system, Veronique took no action whatsoever with a hand that most people would consider a prototype for as obstructive and nasty an intervention as possible over a strong club opening. In the French methods a one diamond overcall would have shown both majors, a jump to two diamonds would have promised sound values and a preemptive three diamond bid would have promised a seven-card suit. Veronique's solution to this dilemma was a logical pass, giving us all the time and space in the world to reach our best slam and for a change we even knew what we were doing.

Against six spades, Veronique also led the queen of diamonds, which Catherine won with the ace to switch to an honest three of clubs. Daniela drew trumps and, having noticed Veronique's spade singleton and believing Catherine's play in the club suit, she proceeded to guess the clubs correctly. She dropped the queen for +980 and 2 IMPs to Germany; only a small swing, but better than nothing! The totals were now France 216, Germany 196; what had been a 47-IMP deficit was now down to a mere 20.

More often than you might think, winning inferences at the bridge table boil down to simple steps of logic. Probably you aren't even aware of making them at the time. Daniela, probably without knowing it, used elementary logic to arrive at the winning conclusion on the above deal.

To establish what she was thinking, let's start out with a basic principle. If two premises are true, then the conclusion is necessarily also true. This form of argument is called *modus ponens*.

- If A then B
- A

= Therefore B

A little rain might help to illustrate the point.

- If it is raining, then the streets will be wet.
- It is raining.

= Therefore the streets will be wet.

(This is what was hammered into our heads during my first year of math at university. To this day I am hoping that one morning it will be pouring with rain and the streets will still be dry!)

On the previous deal, Daniela used a closely related argument form known as *modus tollens*. If one of two premises is not true, then the other cannot be true.

- If A then B
- B
= Therefore not A

Again the rain might help to understand.

- If it is raining, then the streets will be wet.
- The streets are not wet.
= Therefore it cannot be raining.

So how did the rain help Daniela?

- If an opponent has two singletons, she will make some noise in the bidding.
- The opponent makes no noise in the bidding.
= Therefore she cannot have two singletons.

You don't call these forms *modus ponens* and *modus tollens*, but a 'conclusion' and a 'negative inference' instead? Me too, but for one thing this is a book and for another thing, I like to be hip and cool; there is absolutely nothing hip and cool about the phrases 'conclusion' and 'negative inference'. But it doesn't really matter what we call them as long as they help us to solve difficult bridge problems.

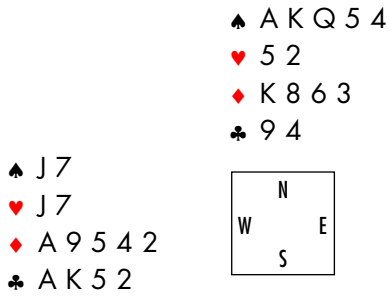
Let's get some practice with a deal from a preliminary round of the 2004 Danish Cup Championship. Sitting North, you hold:

♠ A K Q 5 4 ♥ 5 2 ♦ K 8 6 3 ♣ 9 4

The bidding goes:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	1♠	pass	1NT
pass	2♦	2♥	2♠
3♥	all pass		

Your partner starts with the four of hearts and the dummy comes down:



Declarer wins the first trick cheaply in dummy and continues with a club to the queen in his hand. Then come two more rounds of clubs with the ace and king from dummy. You are happy you can put your little trump to good use on the third round of clubs and prevent declarer from discarding a loser. Declarer counters by overruffing and continues with a small spade to dummy's jack, partner contributing the eight of spades. How do you plan your defense?

Time to ask yourself some questions. Why did declarer start by cashing his club tricks? Because he wanted to discard a loser. Could he not draw trumps first? There can be only one reason why declarer postponed drawing trumps: our side can gain the lead and has at that point enough tricks to cash to beat the contract. Therefore two things should be clear: 1) declarer is missing the ace of hearts and 2) declarer cannot possibly be looking at a diamond loser, since a discard of that loser could always wait until after trumps had been drawn. Ergo the only other four losers declarer can conceivably be looking at must be spades.

Was this *modus tollens*? Yes, indeed!

- If declarer had only four top losers, then he would draw trumps before going for his discard.
- Declarer does not draw trumps before going for his discard.

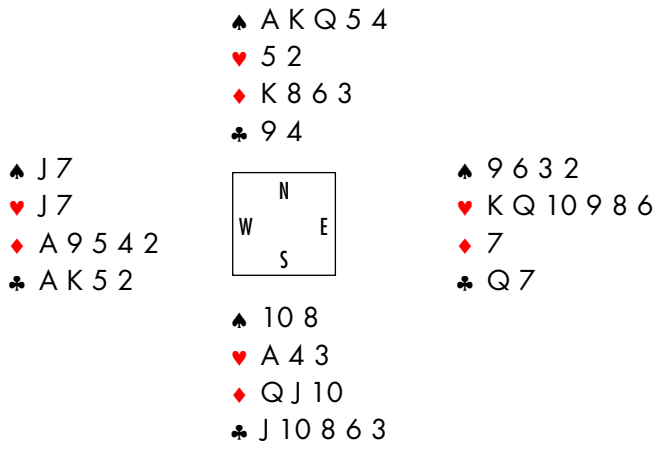
= Therefore he must have more than four top losers.

The all-important thing is to make sure that your premises are correct. If they are false, then your conclusion will be unsound. Reconstructing declarer's hand should be an easy task now; it has to look something like

♠ x x x x ♥ K Q 10 x x x ♦ x ♣ Q x

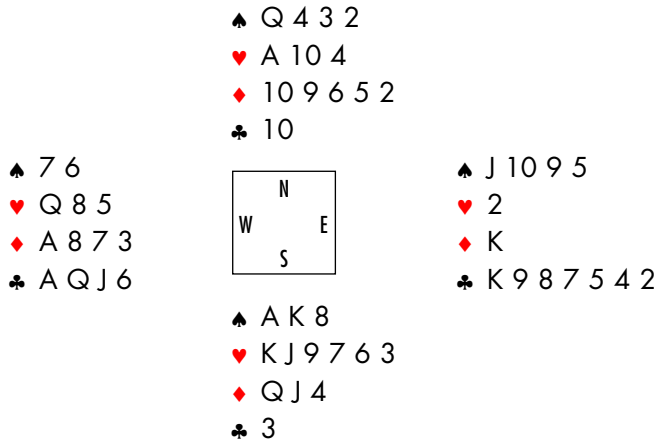
Can you see a chance to beat the contract? Declarer has apparently progressed to Plan B. Instead of discarding one of his spade losers on a high club, he is now trying to ruff it in dummy. The proven antidote for that is

removing dummy's trumps. Unfortunately, by now you have run out of trumps; the only one who can hurt declarer in that respect is your partner, but he is not on lead! Is there any way partner can gain the lead? There is only one conceivable chance: partner must have the spade ten! And indeed the full deal was:



Being the generous person that you are, you let partner win the second round of spades with the precious ten and partner, of course, hurries to remove dummy's last trump, consequently beating the contract by a trick. Having analyzed this deal so brilliantly, you should not forget to congratulate partner on an equally brilliant opening lead. Try to beat the contract on any other lead! Are you ready to look at another example of this intriguing method of reasoning?

Dealer East. N-S Vul.



West	North	East	South
Herbst	*Jansma*	*Barr*	*Sabine*
		pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	3♥[1]
all pass			

1. Invitational with 6+ hearts and exactly three spades.

The summer of 2003 saw the birth of a new and exciting international bridge event for bridge enthusiasts all over the world — the first ever Open European Championships, staged in Menton, France. 'Open' in this context meant that all nationalities worldwide could participate in any combination they liked, so all tournaments in the event were not only open, but also transnational. There was no way I could pass up on such an opportunity, so for the Mixed Pairs I joined forces with one of the leading Dutch players, Jan Jansma, a true matchpoint magician.

Having qualified directly for the semifinal of this event by staying in the Mixed Teams event until a late stage, we were contesting our very first round against the Israeli combination of Roni Barr and Ilan Herbst. Already the second deal out of the box offered me a chance to try out a newly learned gadget.

Probably dissuaded by her side four-card spade suit, Roni Barr opted not to start skirmishes with a preemptive club bid in first seat. This had the advantage of not giving anything away about the distributional nature of her hand should our side win the bidding contest. However, when she also refused to enter the bidding on the second round, her side had no more chances to enter the auction to declare a club contract that would deliver at least ten tricks, maybe more on a misdefense. My three heart rebid in the auction promised invitational values with six or more hearts and exactly three-card support for partner's spade suit. Maybe a bit too much with the actual hand, but just so pretty! How could I possibly resist? Well, I couldn't. But partner had absolutely nothing to add, so three hearts became the final contract.

Ilan Herbst on opening lead decided to go with a passive seven of spades and I was looking at a relatively safe nine tricks as declarer, assuming hearts broke no worse than 3-1. With hearts 4-0 and a misguess from me, there would be the danger of a diamond ruff. However, this being pairs where every extra trick can be worth bushels of matchpoints, I was much more focused on trying to make an overtrick than on avoiding going down. Indeed, an overtrick definitely seemed within reach. All I had to do was not lose a trump trick to the queen. But how to go about playing trumps?

Let's see whether the rain can be of any help analyzing the opening lead. The opponents' choice of opening lead methods was third and fifth. East contributed the nine of spades at Trick 1, so the seven clearly had to be either a doubleton or a singleton; nobody would lead the seven from J107. But why would West, a renowned international top player, having listened carefully to the bidding, lead a spade on this auction? He knew I had at most four minor-suit cards and, from his point of view, there had to be a considerable danger I could discard one of my minor-suit losers on dummy's fourth spade after drawing trumps. Wouldn't it have been much more normal and obvious on the auction for him to try either to cash whatever minor suit tricks their side had on opening lead or to develop tricks in the minors, hoping his partner could stop spades once? It was still early in the day; he didn't look tired and he didn't seem to have a hangover, so there had to be a logical explanation for his choice of lead from shortness in spades. The longer I thought about it, the clearer it became to me that there had to be exactly two reasons: he saw no need to establish any minor-suit tricks on opening lead because he held both aces, and much more importantly, he wasn't concerned about me being able to draw trumps because he was looking at the guarded queen of trumps.

- If West were worried declarer could draw trumps and discard a minor-suit loser on dummy's spade suit, he would lead a minor suit.
- West leads a spade.

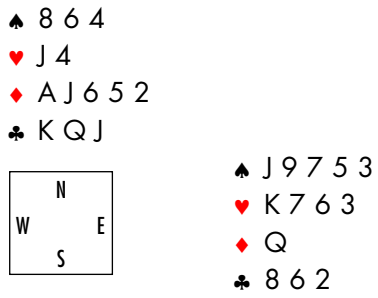
= Therefore West must have a reason to assume declarer cannot draw trumps before making any discards.

The only plausible reason West could possibly have was the guarded queen of trumps. Once I had thought about it, I just knew this had to be right. So there was no hesitating in finessing West for the queen of hearts to rake in ten tricks and a very satisfying matchpoint score.

After the play of this deal had concluded, my partner looked through the opening in the screen and whispered: "Did you glance at his hand?" "No," I answered. "I just noticed the streets weren't wet."

A less traditional way to use this kind of logic presented itself some time ago when I was corresponding with the incomparable Zia Mahmood about participation in an invitational tournament in Denmark. Always ready to throw a tricky problem into the ring, he managed to sneak this problem into one of his emails:

Dealer North. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	1NT[1]	pass	3♣[2]
pass	3♦	pass	6♣
all pass			

1. 12-14 HCP.
2. Natural and forcing.

Declarer plays low from dummy on the lead of the five of hearts and you put in the king, which holds the trick. Now what?

Whenever you receive a bridge problem from Zia you know you need to be on your toes. You may have all sorts of questions like: "What are our leads?" or "Who is my partner?" or "Who is declarer?" But since Zia doesn't supply you with this information, you can rest assured you won't need it to solve the problem. What could possibly be the catch here? Maybe one has to break up a squeeze? Let's say declarer's hand is something like:

♠ A Q ♥ A 9 2 ♦ 8 ♣ A 10 9 7 5 4 3

Now, if you return anything but a diamond, declarer can simply ruff his heart loser in dummy and then run his trumps. Your partner will automatically be squeezed between his king of spades and his diamond holding. Only a diamond continuation from you at Trick 2 will break up the squeeze, as it disrupts declarer's communications. Yes, that must be it, a diamond at Trick 2 has to be right here. But wait a minute! I forgot to tell you something. Zia's problems never have a technical solution. Mostly they have to do with trying to figure out what is going on in people's mind and interpreting people's actions. How does that help here?

- Zia's problems never have a technical solution.
- Breaking up a squeeze is a technical solution.

= Therefore it cannot be the right solution.

You had better put on your thinking cap again. Indeed, once you think about it, no declarer in his right mind, looking at the above hand, would play for a spade-diamond squeeze. The natural and indicated line would be to take the spade finesse after having tried to establish an extra diamond trick if given the time. So trying to break up the squeeze cannot be the right defensive plan here; declarer would never guess to play for it anyway. Your mind is clear now; there has to be a different solution. The more you think about it, the more obvious it becomes: partner has underled the ace of hearts! So you'd better continue a heart at Trick 2, before declarer's heart loser disappears on the diamonds. Well done! You survived one of Zia's problems without embarrassing yourself! I never found out what declarer's real hand was, but I suppose it could have been something like:

♠ A K ♥ Q 8 ♦ K 4 ♣ A 10 9 7 5 4 3

The foundations of the kind of logic described in this chapter are undermined in an amusing dialogue by Lewis Carroll, 'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles'. In the dialogue, the tortoise challenges Achilles to use logic to make him accept the following argument:

- Things that are equal to the same thing are equal to each other.
- The two sides of this triangle are things that are equal to the same thing.

= Therefore: The two sides of this triangle are equal to each other.

Achilles is very sure of his case, since the conclusion follows necessarily from the two premises under the laws of logic. Nevertheless, the clever tortoise leads him into an infinite regression by granting him more and more additional premises, still simply refusing to accept the final conclusion. In the end, a frustrated Achilles has to give up; he cannot convince the turtle.

My head is spinning trying to figure out what's wrong here. It's a good thing we don't have to compete against turtles at the bridge table. Or do we?

-12-

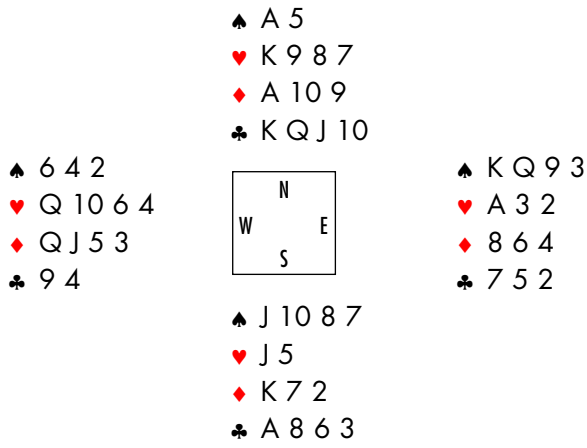
In the Nick of Time

The French could not possibly be totally unconcerned about the last deal. It was easy to see how rigorous diamond preemption could create problems for the strong North-South hands in more than one way. For one thing, slam might be missed altogether. Then if slam were reached, might declarer not play the hand with long diamonds for shortness in clubs and try for the finesse instead of dropping the queen? We had no way of knowing what had happened in the other room, but the thought must have been nagging in our opponents' minds that there was a considerable risk it was bad for France and good for Germany.

Letting your thoughts go astray like that can be directly detrimental to your game, because you will not be 100% focused on the new deal before your nose. It should be avoided at all costs — there is nothing you can do about what has happened anyway. Every championship player knows that, but we are all only human. Knowledge is one thing; getting yourself to act accordingly is another and much more difficult task. Shall we say impossible?

Still, the implications of the last deal were all too obvious without having to reflect too much about it. For Daniela and me, the thought of a possible German pickup was stimulating and we were eager to achieve another good result on the next board.

Board 12. *Dealer West. N-S Vul.*



Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
pass	1♣[1]	pass	1♠
pass	1NT[2]	pass	3NT[3]
all pass			

1. 16+ HCP.
2. Relay.
3. 8-10 HCP with four cards in spades.

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
pass	1NT	pass	2♣[1]
pass	2♥	pass	3NT
all pass			

1. Stayman.

In the Open Room, Catherine had a tough problem on opening lead. Nothing looked particularly appealing. Her best suit had been bid on her left and not much was known about declarer's hand. I rated to have a balanced hand, but I could easily have bid the way I had with a long minor; I was less likely to have a long heart suit. Thus a minor-suit lead risked going right up into my long suit. Could it be right to lead a heart from ace third?

"No," Catherine decided. Reluctantly, she played the three of spades, probably more for lack of an outstanding lead than for any other reason.

What card to play now from dummy at Trick 1? I had absolutely no idea of the technical merits of either playing low, finessing against the nine, or going up with an honor. Either you know these things or you don't. Mulling over it for ten minutes doesn't help; there is no light bulb that will all of a sudden switch on in your brain.

I played low from dummy, curious to see how it would work out. When Veronique showed an odd number with the deuce, I knew the opponents wouldn't be able to develop more than two spade winners for their side. As I already had eight tricks on top by now, I only needed one trick from the heart suit without giving up three. It seemed sensible to play West for at least one heart honor — the ace, the queen or the ten — so at Trick 2, I ran the jack of hearts from the table, covered by the queen, king and ace. Catherine continued with a low spade to establish her side's two tricks in that suit, but I could simply drive out the ten of hearts for nine easy tricks and +600 for Germany.

In the Closed Room, Pony, on opening lead, also knew there would be a four-card spade suit coming down in dummy on her left. In addition, she also knew of declarer's four-card heart suit. On the principle of exclusion, a minor-suit lead seemed like a good idea. As Pony values quality, she went with her better minor leading the diamond six, second or fourth best.

Bénédicte played low from dummy and won Andrea's jack with her ace, keeping a finessing position in the suit. She continued with a club to dummy's ace, on which Andrea contributed the nine, a Smith signal to show her enthusiasm about the diamond lead. Declarer followed with the jack of hearts, covered all the way by the queen, king and ace. Sensing that her lead had struck gold, Pony continued with another diamond. At that point, declarer could have made sure of her contract by rising with the king in dummy, which clearly was the indicated play. Since the jack had appeared on her right at Trick 1, the six of diamonds lead could no longer have been from a five-card suit, so there was no danger of losing three diamond tricks by going up with the king.

Instead, she took her eye off the ball, playing low from dummy, and Germany was in with a chance. Would Andrea work out the winning defense on lead with the queen of diamonds? Andrea quickly counted her side's tricks. She knew she could set up another diamond trick by continuing the suit and would get in with the ten of hearts to cash it, but that would only give them four tricks, not enough. Was it possible her partner's spade holding was good enough to give them two extra tricks together with two

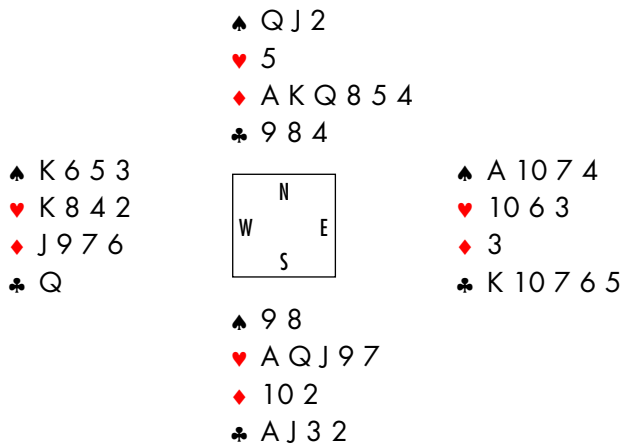
hearts and one diamond trick if she switched to spades in time? Out came the four of spades and down went the contract. Well done, Andrea! Their +100, together with our +600, gave Germany 12 IMPs and we had closed within breathing distance; only 8 IMPs separated us now.

'Count your tricks' is basically the first thing every bridge beginner is taught when introduced to declarer play. It turns out this is not only a neat idea for declarer; the defenders can also profit highly from this little ruse. So, as a defender about to continue a suit your partnership has resolved will make declarer's life miserable, stop to contemplate whether this move will give your side enough tricks to beat the contract. If it will not, consider switching to a different suit.

The European Champions' Cup is a relatively new addition to the international bridge calendar. Since 2002, the European Bridge League every year invites the top finishing countries at the European Championships to send their National Cup champions to this prestigious event. It is no surprise that it regularly brings together Europe's finest. The third edition of this event was staged in 2004 in Barcelona with twelve participating teams.

English star Andy Robson, starting for the All-England Bridge Club, was brilliant on this deal from a match against my own team, the Karlsruher Bridge Sport Club.

Dealer West. Both Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Elinescu	*Robson*	*Wladow*	*Bakshi*
pass	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	3NT	all pass	

Entscho Wladow started with fourth best of the only unbid suit, spades. Michael Elinescu won his king and continued with the three of spades giving honest count, and Andy's queen was allowed to hold the trick.

I am totally convinced that 99% of the declarers of this world would proceed by trying to cash their six diamond tricks only to — oops, there aren't six diamond tricks after all — find out the contract cannot be made any longer. Not so Andy. He hasn't won as often as he has by simply relying on 3-2 breaks; on the contrary, he is very well aware of the dangers that seemingly tame and simple deals may hold.

Before playing to Trick 3, he stopped to think whether he could take any precautionary measures to guard against a potential bad diamond break and give him some extra chances to make his contract. Unless his opponents were a pair of smart rascals who had both lied about their spade length, he could be reasonably sure that spades were breaking 4-4. On that assumption, there was nothing to be lost and everything to be gained by taking a heart finesse against the king before broaching diamonds.

If it won, he would be able to duck a diamond, guarding against a 4-1 diamond break; one spade, one club, two hearts and five diamond tricks would still be enough for his contract. If the finesse lost, there would be the extra chance of the ten of hearts coming down in three rounds just in case diamonds weren't breaking to give him one spade, one club, three diamonds and four heart tricks. Brilliantly easy, isn't it? For Andy it was.

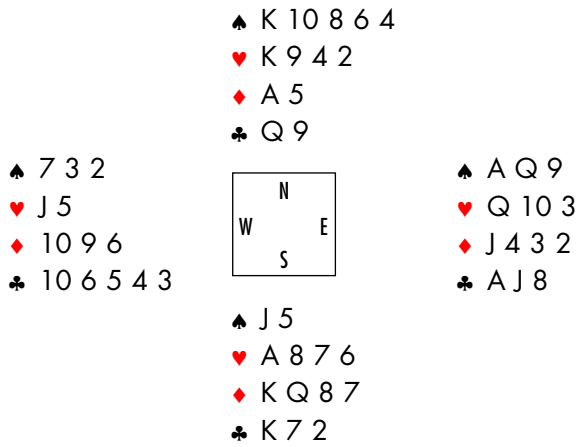
Despite his brilliancy, I feel the defenders could have given him a serious headache had they counted their tricks before embarking on the spade suit. Both defenders could see that the spade suit alone couldn't provide enough tricks to beat the contract and they needed to find an extra trick before declarer had scraped together his nine tricks. Combine this need for an extra trick with a little bit of wishful thinking and you will find that a club switch was in order before declarer was given the lead with a spade. Maybe this is a bit easier to see from the East seat, but it would have worked from the West seat as well. Yes, I do know Andy could still have prevailed by clairvoyantly divining the diamond situation and finessing both against the jack and the nine on his right. But please, this is not Hollywood.

Consider this strategy as a defender: if you can see that the suit you have designated to be declarer's downfall is in reality breaking favorably for declarer, contemplate switching to a different suit. If no switch seems appealing or opportune, at least try and lie about your suit length.

Another good moment for switching to a new suit is when you can see that the hand with the long winners in the suit you have established has no

entry to cash those winners. Pony demonstrated this to perfection when we were on our way to winning our first Venice Cup in Beijing in 1995.

Dealer East. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Willard*	*Pony*	*Cronier*
		1NT	dbl
2♣[1]	3♣	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

1. One-suiter in clubs or two other suits

After the first segment of our semifinal match we were leading the French by 11 IMPs. Then things definitely started to blow our way. We had already outscored our opponents 25-0 over the first five boards when the above deal hit the table.

Pony started with a weak notrump and when Bénédicte Cronier piped up with a value-showing double, our warriors were in the soup. Andrea bid the only thing she had that even vaguely resembled a suit, determined to brave the bloodbath that was in store for her. Luckily for Germany, Sylvie Willard pursued the strategy of finding a major-suit fit for her side instead of trying to punish the opponents. Who should have bid hearts, North or South? Somehow the implications of this particular bidding sequence hadn't been discussed in great depth by our opponents, because the 4-4 heart fit never came to light. Instead, 3NT was reached from the wrong side of the table —

the side where it risked being beaten by perfect defense, as our heroes were about to prove. They hadn't escaped the hammer to be friendly and give away presents; they were going to take advantage of their opponents' slip.

Since nobody seemed to want to double clubs for penalty, Andrea could see no reason not to lead her fourth-best club against 3NT. Knowing from the opening bid that the club ace was on her right, declarer played the nine from dummy and ducked East's jack. Pony also cashed the ace of clubs, but then paused for reflection. Two tricks were in the bank and the ace-queen of spades looked like another two tricks. A club continuation would set up partner's suit, but she would need a yellow cab to reach Andrea's hand. There couldn't possibly be an entry. Could Andrea have anything at all to give them a chance for a fifth trick?

Only 14 HCP were missing. The best Pony could hope for in partner's hand was a jack. If it was the jack of spades, declarer would have to lose three spade tricks and would go down unless she could manage eight tricks from the red suits; there was nothing the defense could do about that anyway. What if Andrea had the jack of hearts? Then it was mandatory to switch to a heart now before declarer could set up the spade suit. That had to be it! Triumphantly Pony banged down a little heart and when the jack appeared from Andrea, she knew they had beaten the contract. Amazing what gratifying results one can achieve once in a while by using those little gray cells!

The French had lost a big opportunity. They had ended up going down in 3NT, when best defense would have beaten two clubs doubled by three tricks for 800 points, more than compensating for the game bonus. So is this deal an argument for or against the weak notrump? You tell me. I don't know the answer!

Are you wondering what happened at the other table?

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
		1♦	pass
pass	dbl	pass	2NT
pass	3♠	pass	4♥
pass	4♠	all pass	

This seemed to be the deal of imperfect partnership discussions. At the time I assumed that Daniela would always bid a four-card major over the

takeout double, if she had one. Accordingly, her four heart bid had to be a cuebid in support of spades, just in case I had a good hand. Looking at it today I wonder what I was thinking about. I would bid exactly the same way Daniela did.

Anyway, even though it is usually a better idea to play in your 4-4 fit, game in our 5-2 spade fit wasn't hopeless. Actually, this deal is fascinating both in a four heart and a four spade contract. There are so many details and variations that I don't even know where to begin. Let's start by taking a look at what happened at the table and then analyze the deal step by step.

Catherine d'Ovidio led the three of diamonds, third and fifth. I won with the ace in my hand and continued with a low trump towards dummy. Catherine went in with the queen and persevered with another diamond. I won with the king in dummy and played the jack of spades to Catherine's ace and she followed with yet another diamond. This time I ruffed in my hand, drew the last two outstanding trumps in one round and now played the card there was no response to, the nine of clubs.

If Catherine went up with the ace, I would have two parking places for my two heart losers, the king of clubs and the queen of diamonds. So she ducked, but now I could win with the king, discard my club loser on the queen of diamonds and simply give up a heart, claiming ten tricks when hearts broke 3-2. This was a classic Morton's Fork Coup: damned if you do, damned if you don't.

How many errors were made on declarer play and defense do you think? Or call them unfortunate views, if you prefer. As I said, let's take it step by step:

Trick 1: diamond three, seven, nine, ace.

Defenders: Actually, the only lead that beats the contract legitimately is a heart, but I don't see how anyone could work out to lead a heart on our auction. A diamond looks totally normal and would no doubt be the majority choice among experts and non-experts alike. Why a heart lead beats the contract will become clear from further analysis and I will get back to it.

Declarer: Winning with the ace of diamonds in hand was flawless, but any sane person would do the same.

Trick 2: spade four, queen, five, two.

Declarer: This was an unfortunate view. There was only one card at this point that would guarantee the contract against any defense, the nine of clubs. Why? I will get back to that later.

Defenders: Either ducking the spade or winning with the queen would have worked at this point. Catherine's decision to win with the queen looked totally normal.

Trick 3: diamond two, king, six, five.

Defenders: This was perfect defense; only a low diamond now could beat the contract, cutting communication between declarer's hand and dummy.

Declarer: Hard to criticize. Playing low from dummy would have led to certain defeat.

Trick 4: spade jack, three, six, ace.

Declarer: There was no winning play at this point, continuing trumps was a good shot and totally normal.

Defenders: Either winning with the ace or ducking would have worked; once again Catherine's choice seemed normal.

Trick 5: diamond four, eight, ten, spade eight.

Defenders: Wrong move! Catherine should have continued her good communication-cutting work by switching to a heart now. However, this was by no means obvious. She couldn't be sure of declarer's distribution or the location of the jack of hearts.

Declarer: Ruffing the diamond in hand and preserving the high diamond in dummy was necessary to prepare the dilemma East would face a little while later.

Trick 6: spade king, nine, heart six, spade seven.

Declarer: Nothing wrong with that.

Defenders: Just following suit.

Trick 7: club nine, eight, king, three.

Declarer: Finally, the winning card. As described above it left the defense without resource. Everything was plain sailing from then on.

Defenders: There was no longer a winning move.

What would/could have happened:

- if at Trick 5 Catherine had switched to a heart?
  I could have won the heart in my hand, drawn trumps and played the by now well-known nine of clubs out of my hand. However, going up with the ace of clubs would then have defeated the contract, because Catherine could have continued with another heart, taking out dummy's last entry before I had disentangled my club winners.

- if at Trick 2, I had played the nine of clubs from hand?
  This would have been a partial Morton's Fork Coup with a squeeze threat. Why partial? The definition of a Morton's Fork Coup is a maneuver by which declarer presents a defender with a choice of taking a trick cheaply or ducking to preserve an honor combination, either decision costing the defense a trick. If the defender wins the trick, he sets up an extra high card in the suit for declarer, while if he ducks, his winner disappears because declarer has a discard possibility.

It's true. If Catherine had won with her ace, I would have been able to discard my two heart losers on a club and a diamond. But what if she had ducked? Discarding the club loser on the high diamond now would lead to defeat. East would have three entries, two in trumps and one in hearts, to force me in clubs and diamonds, shortening my trumps so that I would not be able to enjoy my established heart winner.

There would have been a different solution leading to success, however. I could simply have given up a trump to Catherine. If she had now tried to start shortening my trumps by playing clubs, there would have been a red-suit squeeze against her in the endgame. If she had tried to break up the squeeze by continuing with a red suit, I could have discarded my club loser on the high diamond. There would no longer be enough entries for her to shorten me in time.

- if at Trick 1 Catherine had led a heart?
  You can see it all now, can't you? A heart lead and continuation when in with a trump establishes a heart trick for the defense before declarer can execute a red-suit squeeze. Don't tell me you knew it all along!

Phew, what a long analysis! I promise I won't do it again, at least not in this book. And I promise I won't bore you by analyzing what the winning line of play would be in the more normal four heart contract. I can assure you it is by no means an obvious line and in practice it is probably easier to make four spades than four hearts.

I think it's fair to say the above deal was very lucky for Germany in more ways than one. At one table the weak notrump at unfavorable vulnerability was destined to get cruelly slaughtered. However, against the odds, our teammates not only escaped the knife, but they achieved a plus score to boot when their opponents reached a good contract from the wrong side of the table.

At the other table, Daniela and I, not being on the same wavelength in a competitive situation we had never discussed, reached a four spade contract that in practice turned out to be an easier make than the "theoretically" correct four heart contract. That is lucky, isn't it?

To me, luck is an integral part of the game of bridge. It is what keeps many of us coming back to the bridge table again and again. Bridge is not just a game of mathematical figures and cold logic and reason, where the brightest minds are bound to win. The luck factor gives everyone a chance once in a while. It makes the game appealing for all of us, giving even the least talented kitchen table player a chance to outbid or outplay the best experts on any given deal. In short, luck adds a lot of charm to the game and makes it 'human'.

Unfortunately, there seem to be groups among the administrators of our game who would rather not have luck be a part of the game. For a period

in the nineties, for example, appeals committees worldwide would assign automatic procedural penalties to players who forgot their system, even though there was no damage to the opposing side at all. "You must not forget your system and if you do, you shall be punished no matter what," seemed to be the underlying tone. In my view that was a most regrettable development.

Of course there should always be redress for the non-offending side if an opponent's forgetfulness results in damage to the non-offenders. But why punish somebody for something that most of the time will give him a bad result anyway? Forgetting one's system usually does that. Once in a while, it doesn't and it causes absolutely no damage at all. Why then look for an artificial punishment? It reminds me of a schoolteacher saying to his student: "You have answered the question correctly, but it was just a coincidence. In reality, you have not learned your lesson properly. Therefore I will deduct some points."

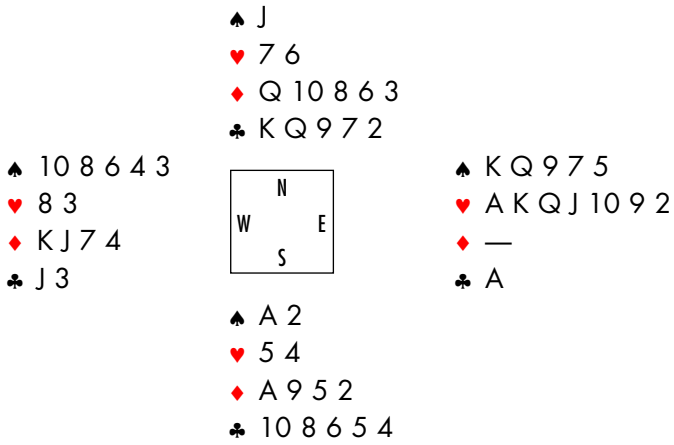
Luckily, this point of view was shared by others in the bridge world. In 1999, at the instigation of the WBF, a group of experts met during a WBF meeting in Lausanne (the Lausanne Group) to set down the Code of Practice for Appeals Committees that they hoped would be followed worldwide. Regarding procedural penalties, the Code suggests the following:

> A procedural penalty may only be applied where there is a violation of the laws or of a regulation made under the laws. If an appeal committee awards a procedural penalty it should specify what law or regulation has been violated.
>
> In particular the WBF wishes to stress that a player who forgets his convention, misbids or misuses it, is not subject to automatic penalty. It is envisaged that a procedural penalty will only be applied in aggravated circumstances, as for example misuse several times repeated. Score adjustment is the way to redress damage.

I heartily approve.

Daniela and I got incredibly lucky on a deal that occurred during the round-robin stage of the 1995 Venice Cup in Beijing.

Dealer West. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany		*Sabine*	
pass	pass	4NT[1]	pass
5♦[2]	pass	6♥	all pass

1. *Thinking* I was asking for specific aces.
2. *Knowing* that 4NT showed a two-suiter in the minors according to the system.

"Not bad" were my thoughts upon picking up the East hand. "How about a round of rubber bridge?" Clearly with the ace of spades on the board the grand slam in hearts should have excellent play; without it, there would surely be some play at least for the small slam. If I bid deceptively enough, the opponents might even lead a spade, solving all potential problems in that suit. Asking for specific aces seemed like an excellent idea. Convinced I had found a practical and promising solution for how to bid this hand, I started with 4NT. Daniela would answer five clubs with no aces; otherwise she would bid the suit in which she had an ace, with 5NT showing the ace of clubs. With two aces, she would think of something intelligent to do — a brilliant convention!

Unfortunately we were not actually playing that convention. According to our system agreements and our convention card, a 4NT opening showed a very distributional hand with both minors. I had forgotten that agreement, but Daniela hadn't — she never does. She correctly removed 4NT to her better minor. When I then jumped to six hearts (thinking Daniela was

showing me the ace of diamonds), it became obvious that something had gone wrong; clearly I didn't have both minors. So Daniela shrugged her shoulders and passed.

As we do at every major championship, we were playing with screens, a diagonal partition of the table that prevents partners from looking at one another and from exchanging illegal information, deliberate or not. Every player only sees one of his opponents, with South and West sharing one side of the screen and North and East the other.

Daniela properly alerted my 4NT opening to her screenmate and explained that it showed both minors. No doubt South was very well aware that something was wrong when I later jumped to six hearts; looking at two aces in defense, she wasn't exactly unhappy. She started with the ace of spades to see what was going on. The jack of spades appeared from her partner and I dropped the king. Should she now try and give partner a ruff or should she try and cash her other ace? She didn't really give it much thought and in a matter of seconds the ace of diamonds appeared on the table. Just as quickly as she had played it, I claimed the rest of the tricks and my contract. At the other table, Pony and Andrea beat the same contract with the spade ruff for a useful 13-IMP gain for Germany.

In an article entitled 'Luck isn't always what it's cracked up to be', which appeared a few days later in the Championships' *Daily Bulletin,* the American Richard Colker complained that Daniela and I were the only pair in six hearts that was allowed to make it. According to him, it was likely that the confusion created by my forgetting the system led to South misdefending the deal.

Well, I disagree. First of all, I think we got extremely lucky reaching a relatively normal and playable contract despite my forgetfulness. Second, I do not think South's dilemma on defense was created by the resulting confusion, but rather by my active bidding decision not to disclose anything about the nature of my hand.

Mr. Colker felt that as an act of Active Ethics I should have informed my left-hand opponent about my bidding intentions, ensuring she had all the proper information. The concept of Active Ethics comes originally from the United States, where its development started back in 1986. Its objective is to "instill in all players the concept that vigorous efforts should be made to provide equity in the game of bridge. Every player should take extra effort to make certain that the opponents have in no manner been harmed through incomplete or misleading information as to the meaning of

conventional calls and treatments. An aggressive approach along these lines on the part of each and every individual will ensure that the game of bridge remains a game that everyone can enjoy."

It is a very nice concept and I can only encourage everybody to consistently apply its basics. Still, I feel that one should use not only Active Ethics, but also one's head.

Let me put you into the South seat on the above deal and confront you with a defensive problem. You hold:

♠ A 2 ♥ 5 4 ♦ A 9 5 2 ♣ 10 8 6 5 4

Your right-hand opponent's 4NT opening was explained as showing both minors and your left-hand opponent's five diamond bid as simple preference. Now your right-hand opponent jumps to six hearts ending the auction. You cannot be sure exactly what has happened, but you know something has gone wrong. You lead the ace of spades and see the following dummy:

♠ 10 8 6 4 3 ♥ 8 3 ♦ K J 7 4 ♣ J 3

Now your right-hand opponent turns to you and says: "I am terribly sorry, but something is wrong here. I meant my 4NT opening as asking for specific aces and assumed five diamonds was showing the ace of diamonds." Would you now try to give your partner a spade ruff at Trick 2 or would you try to cash your ace of diamonds?

Personally, I feel I should have been put in jail if I had said anything resembling the above to my opponent at the table. Nobody in the world would have considered my action ethical. Quite the contrary. How could a defender not try to cash the ace of diamonds after such an explanation? It is my clear conviction that not saying anything was by far the more ethical decision in this situation, giving South a much better chance to find the winning defense.

Principles are good, but using one's head is better.

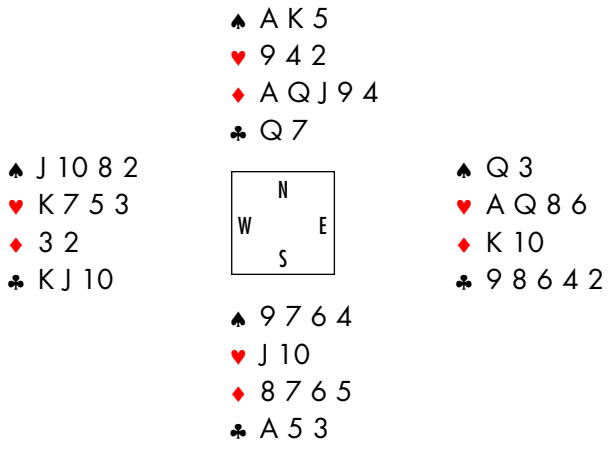
-13-

The Power of Vertigo

In Paris, our moods continued in the same vein. 3NT on the last deal was in reality always makeable and one would expect it to be made under most circumstances. Still, a foreboding of a French accident was hovering in the air, fueled by apprehension on the one side and hope on the other side. The expression on the players' faces could leave no doubt as to who was rooting for what.

There was no way to find out what had happened on the last deal at the other table yet. Even under the best imaginable circumstances, we couldn't possibly have picked up enough points in the set to be ahead of the French at this point. All we could hope for was to be in striking distance and we had to battle on, hoping for more chances in the few remaining deals.

Board 13. *Dealer North. Both Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
	1NT	all pass	

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
	1♣[1]	pass	1♦[2]
pass	1NT[3]	all pass	

1. 16+ HCP.
2. 0-7 HCP.
3. 17/18 HCP balanced.

The final contract was the same at all four tables in play in the final of the Paris World Championships. None of the defenders found the heart switch when on lead again with the king of diamonds after a normal club lead and continuation, which would have held declarer to seven tricks, resulting in +120 across the room. The score in our match stayed at France 216, Germany 208.

The bidding in the Closed Room looks unexceptional and is a hot favorite to be duplicated at a million tables across the world. It is difficult for East-West to enter the bidding on very limited high-card strength and really not so much distribution. I do know a few nutcases, though, who would consider it standard to take action with the East hand over a strong notrump opening. Yet, considering that the hand in reality belongs to East-West, maybe they are not so nuts after all.

East-West can take eight tricks with hearts as trumps and an inspired declarer might even emerge with nine, unless East plays the contract, in which case a clever South can foil declarer's brilliancy by leading a low club. This little clue should point you in the direction of the award-worthy line. With a bit of precise timing, one can eliminate spades and diamonds, draw trumps on the way and finally play a club towards the king. North-South are helpless. Try it out some time on a rainy day when you are bored — it is quite entertaining!

Interestingly, both Terje Aa for Norway and I felt that the North hand, with the nice five-card diamond suit, was just a tad too good for a 14-16

notrump and opened with a strong club instead. If East-West at those two tables had had the methods and/or the willingness to enter the bidding over the strong club, they would likely have won a small swing for their side.

One deal proves nothing. Still, a not-irrelevant question for all tournament players is, when and how should we interfere over a strong club? My personal answer is: whenever you dare and with any excuse at all. After all, one of the main objectives of overcalling a strong club is to make it as difficult as possible for the opponents to exchange meaningful information at a low level. Strong club system players are in principle one step behind natural players in these situations. Yes, they have already promised a certain strength, but they haven't shown any suit yet with their one club opening. So, if you can manage to find a fit quickly and jack up the bidding, opener may have to bid his long suit for the first time at the three- or four-level. It goes without saying that finding 4-4 fits becomes especially challenging for strong club players in such scenarios.

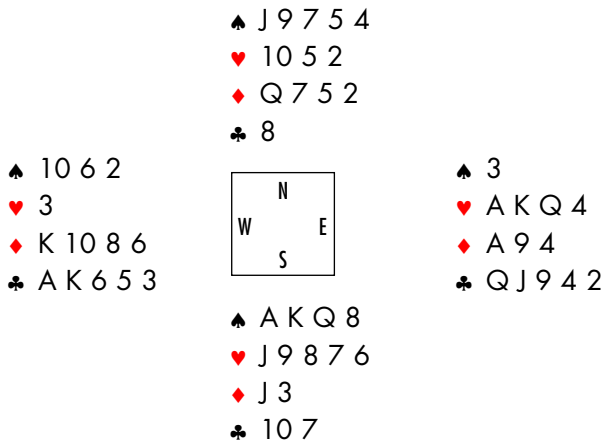
With this in mind and with a partiality for confusing the issue, a lot of tournament players over strong one club openings favor a defensive structure that incorporates ambiguous overcalls. Daniela and I, for example, have been playing the following method for years, which applies both over the one club opening and the negative one diamond response:

dbl	either both majors or both minors (4+4+)
1♦	natural overcall
1♥	natural overcall
1♠	natural overcall
1NT	one-suiter in clubs or two-suiter with diamonds and hearts
2♣	one-suiter in diamonds or two-suiter with hearts and spades
2♦	one-suiter in hearts or two-suiter with spades and clubs
2♥	one-suiter in spades or two-suiter with clubs and diamonds
2♠	two-suiter with either spades and diamonds or hearts and clubs

I don't remember where we acquired this convention or whether it actually has a name. Doing some reading up on the subject, I recently discovered that in principle it is based on an idea from Australia, the Myxomatosis Two Bids: every two-level opening shows either the suit above or two suits above that. Indeed, if you take another look at the structure above, that's exactly what every

bid starting with 1NT shows, except the last one, two spades, which shows one of the two-suiters with non-touching suits. The idea behind this convention is to make it difficult for the strong club pair to both play for penalty and sort out their fits. However, the longer Daniela and I have used this convention, the less I have come to like it. The reason is aptly illustrated by this deal from our quarterfinal match against Austria at the 2000 Venice Cup in Bermuda.

Dealer East. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Weigkricht	*Sabine*	*Fischer*	*Dany*
		1♣	dbl[1]
1NT[2]	2♦[3]	pass	2♥
3♣	pass	4♠[4]	pass
5♦[5]	pass	6♣	all pass

1. Both majors or both minors.
2. 4 controls (A=2, K=1).
3. Pass or correct.
4. Splinter.
5. Cuebid.

When your opponents play a strong club system, especially in combination with control responses, you want to bid defensively up to the limit as quickly as possible. Daniela and I did not manage this feat on the above deal, the main culprit being, in my opinion, our defensive methods.

Daniela's double over the one club opening showed either both majors or both minors and could show as little as 4-4 in length. The standard approach for the partner of the overcaller in these kinds of ambiguous methods is to bid up to the level of your fit. If Daniela had both majors, I knew I could afford to bid up to three spades, secure in the knowledge of at least a nine-card fit and protected by the Law of Total Tricks. What if she had both minors? We might only have an eight-card fit and the singleton club would not exactly be an asset. Jamming it to three diamonds just seemed a bit rich to me. Thus it happened that we only made a couple of miserable noises on a deal that theoretically had dealt us the opportunity to make life much more difficult for our opponents.

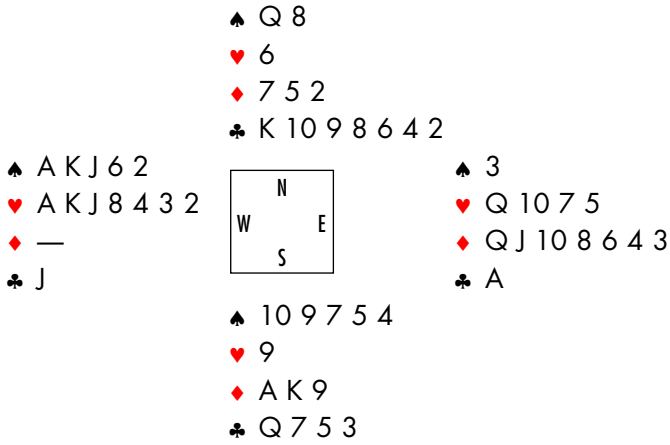
I still insist that my own cowardliness comes only second on the list of who or what was to blame for making it easy for our opponents to bid the slam. We gave them all the room in the world to find their club fit at the three-level, splinter their shortness and show their controls. Never has slam bidding been easier!

Suppose we had been playing a different method and I had known for sure that Daniela was showing both majors, making it easy for me to preempt to three spades. What would have happened then? Nobody knows. For sure, our opponents, Doris Fischer and Terri Weigkricht, a world-class pair well known for bidding a slam too many rather than a slam too few, would have been on much less firm ground and would have had a great deal of guesswork to do.

It is a law of nature that the more often one is put under pressure to guess, the more often one will guess wrong. Bearing this in mind makes it clear to me that bidding up to the limit is the name of the game. Put as much pressure as possible on your opponents as often as you can. I am not claiming busybody bidding and high-level preemption are a cure-all against strong club systems, but with everything else being equal, that approach will make life more difficult for even the best of experts. It forces them to guess more often, and prevents them from conducting a controlled auction that completely explores high-card points, distribution and controls. Please don't feel disappointed, though, if your opponents once in a while also guess right or 'get lucky'. Everybody is entitled to that!

France's best, Michel Perron and Paul Chemla, demonstrated effective pressure bidding in an all-time classic in the finals of the 1997 Bermuda Bowl in Hammamet against the formidable American pairing of Bob Hamman and Bobby Wolff.

Dealer East. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Hamman	*Perron*	*Wolff*	*Chemla*
			pass
1♣[1]	3♣	3♦	5♣
pass	pass	5♦	pass
5♥	pass	6♥	all pass

1. Precision.

The two Frenchmen quickly and effectively elevated the bidding to the five-level before Hamman had a chance to show even one of his suits. Hamman solved this problem with a forcing pass and his delayed five heart bid indicated a second place to play. It is easy to see how a quite obvious-looking six-club cuebid by Wolff would have enabled Hamman to bid the laydown grand slam. For certain tactical reasons, however, Wolff contented himself with a raise to six hearts. Effective preemption had forced him to make a high-level decision as to which road to choose, the scientific or the psychological-tactical one, and he chose the wrong one. It happens to even the best once in a while.

In order to achieve maximum efficiency, I consider it imperative to play a defensive system against strong club openings that does not use ambiguous bids. Ambiguity can and will too often prevent the partnership from preempting to the limit when it is advantageous for them to do so. By the same token, I feel one should play a system that allows the partnership to show both one-suited and two-suited hands, because this greatly enhances chances of finding a fit. A fit is nice if you want to preempt aggressively unless you don't mind getting a nosebleed occasionally. Whether one

wants to define a two-suiter as starting with at least 4-4 distribution is a matter of personal taste and just how aggressive you want to be.

It is often suggested that one should only bid directly over a strong club opening with weak defensive hands. Constructive hands should pass first and act later. Proponents of this method claim that it increases your chances to conduct a constructive sequence and explore chances of a possible game despite the opposing club opening. Personally I dislike this method, mainly because it gives the strong club pair a whole free round of undisturbed bidding and enables them to exchange meaningful and valuable information at a low level. Admittedly the deal may still 'belong' to us despite an opposing strong 1♣ opening. But what law forbids us to investigate game, when we act directly? So I have difficulties of seeing the big advantages of the 'pass first with good hands' method. I am more a believer in "He who strikes first strikes twice".

While searching for a method that meets all these requirements, I ran across the Truscott Defense. It was devised by the late Alan Truscott, one of the world's foremost bridge writers, whose bridge column in the *New York Times* was followed by bridge enthusiasts all over the world. The Truscott Defense is used over a strong one club opening and also over a negative one diamond response according to the following principles:

- Any jump bid is natural.
- Any non-jump bid shows a two-suiter with the suit bid and the next higher touching suit (clubs and spades count as touching in that respect).
- Double shows the suit doubled and the non-touching suit.
- 1NT shows the remaining two non-touching suits.

It may be easier to visualize the concept using a chart:

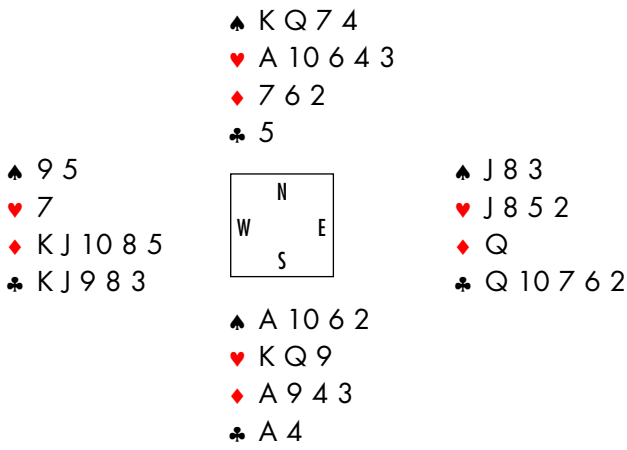
Bid	**Over 1♣**	**Over 1♣-(pass)-1♦**
Double	Clubs and Hearts	Diamonds and Spades
1♦	Diamonds and Hearts	N.A.
1♥	Hearts and Spades	Hearts and Spades
1♠	Spades and Clubs	Spades and Clubs
1NT	Diamonds and Spades	Clubs and Hearts
2♣	Clubs and Diamonds	Clubs and Diamonds
2♦	Diamonds	Diamonds and Hearts
2♥	Hearts	Hearts
2♠	Spades	Spades
3♣	Clubs	Clubs

I really like this and I am going to suggest to Daniela that we try this method out. What do you say, Dany?

Having promoted the idea of active (some may say hyperactive) bidding against strong club openings throughout the chapter, I won't conceal the fact that there are two sides of the coin. No doubt you have already spotted it yourself. The big danger of the happy-go-lucky bidding approach is that it risks giving an astute declarer extra clues as to how to play the deal successfully.

Anders Wirgren from Sweden, a man with an amazingly gifted memory, showed me a deal from the Swedish Club Teams Championships from some twenty years ago that is spot on.

Dealer South. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Olofsson	*Lindkvist*	*Bäckström*	*Fallenius*
			1♣[1]
3♣[2]	3♦[3]	5♣	pass
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

1. Precision.
2. Both minors.
3. Both majors.

We are back in the year where Björn Fallenius and Magnus Lindkvist played their first season as a partnership. It seems to me that the above deal was a herald of their many national and international successes to come.

I cannot tell you whether the final six spade bid was the result of a good deal of scientific reasoning or just a sign of exuberant youth. Whatever ardor there may have been in his bidding, Björn followed it up with careful and considerate play that was based on the near certainty that West would hold at least 5-5 distribution for his three club bid.

He won the opening club lead with his ace and cashed the king of hearts to guard against a singleton jack. Next followed the king and queen of spades, everybody following. If Björn's assumption of a 5-5 minor-suit holding was correct, West couldn't hold any more major suit cards now. Ergo he played a small heart to the nine next to finesse against East's jack and bingo! One more round of trumps and he could claim twelve tricks. It would have been difficult to perform this neat little feat if East-West had remained silent in the bidding.

If you are eager to read more about the nasty things that can befall intruders over strong club openings, I can recommend a 'must read' for all bridge lovers: Pietro Forquet's *Bridge with the Blue Team*. Start with page 111 for a true piece of magic. And if you believe in magic, you may be best off following J.R.R. Tolkien's advice in *The Fellowship of the Ring*: "Do not meddle in the affairs of wizards, for they are subtle and quick to anger." Just bear in mind that not every declarer is a wizard. Most are just mere mortals bound to guess wrong every now and then.

On certain types of hands, strong club players rarely welcome intervention. Holding a very strong two-suiter never thrills me, for example, especially at unfavorable vulnerability. Usually I will not be the only one with a tempting distribution and I just know that by the time the bidding comes back around to me after my one club opening it will have reached vertiginous heights. Again and again I will be forced to guess whether to double the opponents or bid one of my suits at a level that may be way overboard already. Even if it's right to bid, how do I pick the right suit?

I can't help but think there has to be a remedy. Meckstroth-Rodwell, Hamman-Soloway, Berkowitz-Cohen, these are all household-name pairings known for playing a strong club system. Do they really let themselves suffer the indignity of not having at least a slight edge in these high-level battles? Of course not. They have a secret weapon, and it is called Pass-double Inversion.

The general idea is to reverse the classic meaning of pass and double in forcing pass situations to create more possibilities to describe one's hand. Playing the classic way of forcing pass, a double says, "Careful! I don't think we should be bidding on. Let's play for a penalty." A pass, on the other hand, is encouraging, saying in principle: "Partner I am not sure

what's right here. If you want to double them, that's fine with me. If you'd rather bid on, that's fine with me, too." Passing initially and then pulling partner's double typically shows a hand that is too good to bid in the direct seat and carries some slam interest.

In Pass-double Inversion, as the name indicates, the meanings of pass and double have been reversed. A pass asks partner to double, unless holding a very distributional hand that would have pulled a penalty double. Then one can either pass the double for penalty or continue bidding, thus describing certain clearly defined hand types. A direct double is either for takeout or has a specific conventional meaning, depending on whether partner has already shown a suit and whether the opponents have preempted below or above the level of our game. There are small variations to the basic concept, with each expert pair having added its own personal flavor.

Back in the mid-nineties, David Berkowitz and Larry Cohen graciously relinquished their version of Pass-double Inversion to Daniela and me, and we have enjoyed playing it since. It applies to both opener and responder when the enemies interfere with three spades or higher, but there is only one Pass-double Inversion per auction according to the following principles:

Responder has not bid a suit

Double	Takeout. Partner is supposed to bid his longest suit; he can also scramble with 4NT.
Any suit	One-suited hand.
pass	Asks partner to double. Over the double, one can then pass for penalties or bid a suit, which (since we would have bid directly on a one-suited hand) implies another place to play.

Responder has bid a suit

There is a difference now between one's possible actions depending on whether the opponents have bid to the level just below game in the suit responder has shown, or whether they have bid to or past the level of our game.

They bid to the level just below our game

Double	Shows a better raise than raising partner's suit directly.
New suit	Shows a one-suited hand.
4NT	Roman Keycard Blackwood for responder's suit
Cuebid	Exclusion Roman Keycard Blackwood for responder's suit.

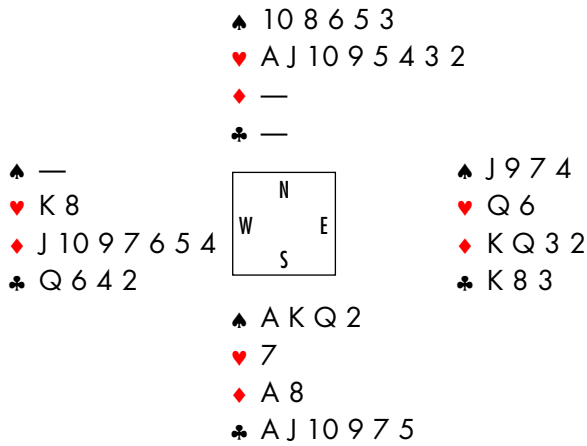
pass	Asks partner to double. Over the double, one can bid a new suit or raise partner's suit, thus showing another place to play. A cue-bid of the opponents' suit would be a slam try with a void.

They bid to or past the level of our game

Double	Flexible raise. Partner, I have some support for your suit. If you want to bid on, that's fine. If you want to penalize them, that's fine, too.
New suit	One-suited hand.
pass	Asks for double. Continuations are as above except for the delayed raise, which is now a slam try.

The first major championship in which our newly learned gadget came into operation was the Venice Cup in Beijing 1995. I distinctly remember that both Daniela and I were feeling quite apprehensive about whether we could correctly remember some of the more involved sequences. Therefore getting it right on a tricky deal in our semifinal match against France was not only a smashing success, but also a big relief.

Dealer South. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*Saul*	*Dany*
			1♣[1]
3♦	3♥	5♦	pass[2]
pass	5♥[3]	pass	6♣[4]
pass	6♠	all pass	

1. 16+ HCP.
2. As described previously, asking me to double. Daniela was planning to follow up with 6♣ thus showing another place to play.
3. I was not going to double with that hand!
4. As planned.

Wild things are bound to happen on highly distributional deals and this one was no exception. At the eight tables in play in the 1995 Beijing Bermuda Bowl and Venice Cup semifinals, a total of seven different contracts were reached. The only legitimately making slam from the North seat is six spades. The other playable slam, six hearts, can be beaten with an opening spade lead, which West can ruff; not that it would be an obvious lead under most circumstances.

For us, the deal was a true test of our newly acquired methods, and our memory! I knew Daniela's pass over five diamonds was asking me to double, so no problem with that. I also knew I was allowed to deviate with a very distributional hand. Certainly nobody could argue with the North hand being highly distributional, so I had no qualms about bidding five hearts either. So far, I felt totally content that I had bid according to the script. Now the tray came back with six clubs from Daniela. What was that supposed to be?

I mentally flipped through the pages of our notes. If I remembered it correctly, the delayed six club bid should promise another place to play. The way the bidding had developed, that place could only be spades. Did I remember everything correctly? Had Daniela remembered it? After all, this was our very first time with this sequence. There was nothing to do but show courage. I bid six spades, awaiting the hammer blow and prepared to duck. But there was no hammer, which brightened my hopes considerably. I really meant it when I said, "Thank you very much!" when Daniela put down her dummy.

Six spades posed absolutely no problems in the play. In fact seven spades would have been quite a nice contract, but was doomed by the foul trump split. So how could this be bad? It wasn't. When Andrea and Pony in the other room convinced their opponents to double them in five diamonds, their minus 500 went superbly with our plus 1430, for a 14 IMP gain to Germany.

Maybe you don't think occasional good results justify the strain seemingly complicated conventions put on one's memory. You feel it is simply too involved and demanding and prefer a more stress-free approach. Then consider this quote by English historian Thomas Fuller: "Memory depends very much on the perspicuity, regularity, and order of our thoughts. Many complain of the want of memory, when the defect is in the judgment; and others, by grasping at all, retain nothing."

-14-

Chances Are

Three boards were left, and although we didn't know it, the score was France 216, Germany 208. The wind had definitely been blowing our way so far in this set, but there was no denying that despite a few windfalls it hadn't been a tornado. To have any realistic hope of snatching the title from the French at the finish line, we would soon need a hurricane. At least category 2 on the Saffir-Simpson scale would be my guesstimate. Come on, Aeolus, we need some serious blowing.

Board 14. *Dealer East. Neither Vul.*

	♠ A 10 ♥ K 9 7 2 ♦ A K 8 ♣ J 10 6 3	
♠ K J 3 ♥ 10 8 3 ♦ J 10 5 3 ♣ A 8 5	N W E S	♠ 7 4 2 ♥ Q J 5 4 ♦ 7 6 2 ♣ K Q 4
	♠ Q 9 8 6 5 ♥ A 6 ♦ Q 9 4 ♣ 9 7 2	

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
		pass	pass
pass	1NT	pass	2♥[1]
pass	2♠	all pass	

1. Transfer to spades.

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
		pass	pass
pass	1NT	pass	2♦[1]
pass	2♠[2]	all pass	

1. Either transfer to hearts with at least invitational values or sign-off in spades or any three-suiter forcing to game
2. If you have hearts I want to be in game.

To my disappointment, the new deal did not exactly take my breath away. Surely the same contract of two spades would be reached in the other room as well, and there didn't seem to be anything to the play at all. The heart queen lead did not pose any particular threat unless either opponent had a singleton heart. There were three club losers and it was just a question of how to play the trump suit to best advantage for a potential overtrick.

Oddly enough, I had just read an article about this particular suit combination and had been a bit surprised by it. It turns out that mathematically, the best play for four tricks with this combination is actually a bit counter-intuitive. Would you know it? You have to start by leading the queen of spades from dummy, running it if West doesn't cover. This way you will get four tricks out of this combination in roughly 40% of all possible distributions, more than by any other line of play. Amazing, isn't it?

Yet I rejected this line at the table, because playing this way, the missing seven of spades posed an undeniable threat of losing an extra spade trick. Not only could the suit break very badly, but there was the risk of a trump promotion if West held ♠J7xx and a doubleton honor in clubs. East, after winning the king of spades, could cleverly switch to a low club and the fourth round of clubs would promote a third trump trick for the defense out of nowhere.

Safety first, so the obvious thing seemed to be to cash the ace of spades and then run the ten on the next round. Nothing and nobody could prevent me from taking three spade tricks that way. The other three declarers' thoughts must have followed along the same lines, because they all played the spade suit exactly the way I did.

Yet something was bugging me when I started writing up this deal. Was it really correct to play the trump suit that way or was there a snappier alternative? A play that would be as foolproof for three tricks as my chosen line,

but would offer better chances for four tricks? One more trick, one more IMP, which could have been the difference between victory and defeat.

Spending hours developing and studying probability tables does not exactly belong among those leisure activities that get my heart beating faster. There are a number of good books on how to play suit combinations on the market. Many suit combinations can be found in the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*. Then, of course, there is J.M. Roudinesco's famous *Dictionary of Suit Combinations*, which gives the best mathematical play for a wealth of different suit combinations depending on how many tricks one wants to take.

However, I really wanted something a bit more flexible, so I went on the hunt for a computer program that would tell me exactly what I wanted to know. You can find a couple of card-combination analysis tools on the Internet, which will accurately calculate the probability of every single distribution possible for any card combination you are interested in. You can even define certain parameters like number of known cards or a range of high card points, which can all alter the percentages. However, you still have to work out yourself which line of play works for which combination and then add up the percentages and compare — quite a lengthy process.

Then I found *SuitPlay*. *SuitPlay* is a computer program that does all this work for you and provides the optimal line of play for any suit combination. Excited about this newfound toy, I let it analyze my little problem and it produced the output on the next page. The probability table gives the probabilities for every single possible distribution of the missing cards, with the last column showing how many tricks declarer will take in every case when choosing line A or B.

The summary below shows that line A will produce four tricks in a bit more than 40% of the cases and three tricks in about 90% thus giving declarer an expected average number of tricks of 3.304. The probability of making four tricks with line B is only about 36%, but in return, line B guarantees three tricks 100% of the time, resulting in an expected average of 3.3634 tricks.

Tricks Line	4	3	Max
A	40.3727%	90.0311%	3.3040
B	36.3354%	100.0000%	3.3634

West	East	prob.	A	B
—	KJ7xxx	0.75%	2	3
x	KJ7xx	3.63%	2	3
xx	KJ7x	4.84%	3	3
xxx	KJ7	1.78%	3	3
7	KJxxx	1.21%	3	3
7x	KJxx	4.84%	3	3
7xx	KJx	5.33%	3	3
7xxx	KJ	1.61%	4	4
J	K7xxx	1.21%	3	4
Jx	K7xx	4.84%	4	4
Jxx	K7x	5.33%	3	4
Jxxx	K7	1.61%	3	3
J7	Kxxx	1.61%	4	4
J7x	Kxx	5.33%	3	4
J7xx	Kx	4.84%	3	3
J7xxx	K	1.21%	2	3
K	J7xxx	1.21%	3	4
Kx	J7xx	4.84%	4	4
Kxx	J7x	5.33%	4	3
Kxxx	J7	1.61%	4	3
K7	Jxxx	1.61%	4	4
K7x	Jxx	5.33%	4	3
K7xx	Jx	4.84%	4	3
K7xxx	J	1.21%	3	3
KJ	7xxx	1.61%	4	4
KJx	7xx	5.33%	4	4
KJxx	7x	4.84%	3	3
KJxxx	7	1.21%	3	3
KJ7	xxx	1.78%	4	4
KJ7x	xx	4.84%	3	3
KJ7xx	x	3.63%	2	3
KJ7xxx	—	0.75%	2	3

Now it only remains to uncover what constitutes lines A and B, and the program lets you do just that. It turns out that line A, not unexpectedly, means starting with the queen from dummy and running it if next hand plays low.

However, I am not really interested in the line that offers the best chance for four tricks. What I want is the best line for four tricks, provided that it guarantees three tricks, and that is line B. When I had reached that point with the program, I was eager to find out what line B was. Have you worked it out already? Line B means leading low from dummy and inserting the ten from your hand if next hand follows low. That was a bit unexpected. I was curious, of course, to know how much worse the line all four declarers in Paris had chosen was than line B. Checking the probability table for all the relevant cases and adding up the percentages quickly revealed that 'our' line had only a 32.3% chance for four tricks. So it was roughly four percentage points worse than the winner of the contest, line B.

There is still a bit more to this. The program analyzes every suit combination in isolation. To look at it in the context of the full deal may introduce variations that change the probabilities. In the deal we are considering, the defense may have the chance to engineer a trump promotion for the jack of spades if West has a doubleton club honor and jack third in trumps or even jack doubleton in trumps. In that case, it will be difficult for declarer to guess the position. Looking at it mathematically, the probability of a doubleton club honor with West is roughly 17% and the probability of jack third or doubleton in trumps with West about 14%. That would seem to shear almost 2.4% off the edge of the superior line B. However, consider that this also assumes perfect defense by East-West. East on lead with the king of spades has to switch to a low club from a four-card club holding headed by two honors, and not all opponents play perfectly all the time. Also, wouldn't East have led a club from ♣AKxx or ♣KQxx? So you see, this probability business is quite tricky. It's nice to have a program like *SuitPlay* on hand to assist a great deal.

Jeroen Warmerdam from the Netherlands developed the program. You can find information about it on his website www.suitplay.com. If you write to him at the email address he provides there, he will happily send you a copy. When I contacted him, he helpfully and graciously offered to do some calculations for me, if I needed it. I did! Thank you, Jeroen!

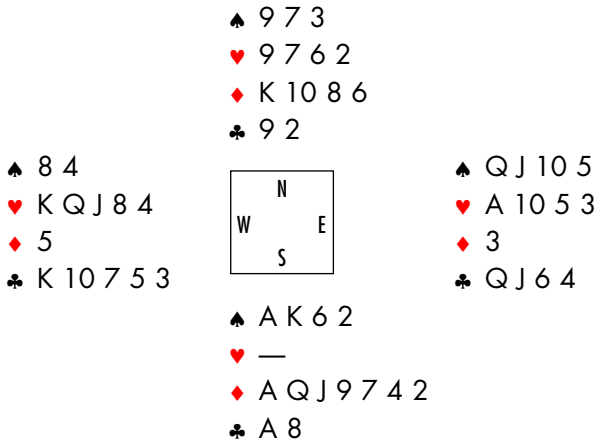
SuitPlay has even more gadgets. It not only lets you analyze the best play for the maximum number of tricks, but also the best play for IMP-scoring and the best play for matchpoints. I can see you frowning already. "Why should a suit combination be played differently at matchpoints than at IMPs?" It is quite surprising. "Do you know that you have to play small to the ten with AQ10xxxx opposite xx in a suit playing matchpoints?" Jeroen asked me in one of his emails. Come on, Jeroen. This is child's play.

You can find this combination in every textbook and even my 10-year old son knows that the correct technical play with this particular holding is low to the queen!

Not so at matchpoints! Due to the form of scoring, what one really wants is not to take as many tricks as possible on any given deal, but rather more tricks than the rest of the field as often as possible. The number of tricks more is irrelevant. This is where low to the ten is superior; it produces more tricks than low to the queen in 23% of all possible cases. Low to the queen, on the other hand, produces more tricks than low to the ten in just 20% of all possible cases. A quick glance at the suit's probability table proves this irrefutably, even to the most unbelieving eyes. I am still shell-shocked.

Yes, it would be convenient to have a little computer on hand when deciding how to handle a particular suit combination at the table, but having come this far in the book, you know by now that pure mathematics is far from everything in bridge. Let's try to make use of some human strengths instead and throw some psychology, sixth sense and table feel into the cocktail. Can that achieve anything?

Dealer West. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	Kaplan		*Helgemo*
2♥	pass	4♥	6♦
all pass			

This highly publicized deal was played at the 1997 American Spring Nationals in Dallas, Texas. Norwegian superstar Geir Helgemo was playing

with the unforgettable bridge legend Edgar Kaplan, who in his lifetime had a great impact on many areas in bridge and is greatly missed.

For once the bidding is self-explanatory. Refreshing, isn't it? Helgemo wasn't fussing around and bid what he thought he could make. As he is accustomed to making quite a bit more than lesser mortals, he also tends to bid a bit more. He cleared the first hurdle when West, not surprisingly, failed to find the killing club lead, preferring instead the safety of the suit the partnership had bid and raised. Who would not?

Our hero ruffed the king of hearts lead and quickly removed the two outstanding trumps in one round. Now the only problem was how to wring three tricks out of the mediocre spade suit. As though it were the most natural and obvious thing in the world, Helgemo continued with a low spade out of his hand and inserted the seven from dummy when West played low. East grabbed the trick with his jack and shot back the five of spades, but Helgemo was not to be led astray. Unerringly, he played low from his hand and claimed the remainder of the tricks when West couldn't beat dummy's nine. It wouldn't have helped East to continue with a heart or club instead; there were entries enough in dummy to run the nine of spades through him and finesse against both his remaining honors. No doubt this had been Helgemo's wicked plan all along.

Having digested the deal, I consulted *SuitPlay* as to the prescribed method of playing this suit combination. The winner was: starting with the nine from dummy at Trick 1. If East doesn't cover, let it run. If East covers and the eight drops from West, finesse East for the remaining two honors. This line of play wins three tricks whenever West has the singleton eight or the suit breaks 3-3, offering a 36.7% chance of success.

What about Helgemo's line then? Was he just lucky or is there more to it? What layout was he actually playing for? Let's assume he was playing for West to hold either the eight doubleton or any honor-eight doubleton combination. So if West had played an honor on his low spade, he would next have run the nine of spades from dummy. If West had played the eight, he would have covered with the nine, cashed one high spade honor and then, when an honor had dropped from West, finessed East for the last honor. Playing this way would also automatically result in three tricks when East could win the first spade trick with the eight from a three-card holding. There would then be nothing left to play for but the 3-3 break. Under these assumptions, Helgemo's line had a 25.8% chance of producing three tricks, almost 11% worse than the optimal line for the combination. Note, however, that a clever West could give

declarer a serious problem by inserting the eight from eight doubleton. Wouldn't declarer almost be bound to go wrong?

Put yourself in the West seat and imagine what your reaction would be with the various holdings when declarer plays a low spade out of his hand. Don't you think that with any honor-eight doubleton combination, you would hesitate just slightly while wondering which card to play and finally play one or the other? But what about a three-card holding including two honors and the eight, i.e. ♠QJ8, ♠Q108 or ♠J108? Isn't it quite natural to immediately win the trick with one of your honors without giving it too much thought? Assuming Helgemo could pick up these small radio signals at the table, and I assure you he can, then he would also end up with three spade tricks when West had any three-card holding with two honors including the eight or all three honors, i.e. ♠QJ10. Helgemo chances of success would improve to almost 33%, getting closer to the recommended line.

While we are at it, how would you react with a three-card holding headed by just one honor including the eight, i.e. Q8x, J8x or 108x? Aren't you likely to contemplate the matter for a few seconds before deciding that it probably cannot hurt to play low? If Helgemo could also draw the right inference in these situations, then his line all of a sudden would improve to 43.6%, almost 10% more than the line preferred by the computer.

The line Helgemo chose does not guarantee 43.6%, but it was a more flexible line, a line that offers the possibility for psychological judgment later in the play. For sure, it was a much more sensational line! The computer line is a rigid one, with no chance for adjustment when following your nose later in the play. Which line is for you? I guess it all boils down to how good a judge of human nature you are.

Although there is no certainty defenders will react the way I outlined above, it is a behavioral pattern I conceive possible, while very much depending on who your opponents are. You may have a different perception of human behavior in this kind of situation. Knowing your opponents is a big advantage. Use your psychological instincts to become a better bridge player!

Did you notice that clever falsecarding by the opponents could foil declarer's plan in one of the discussed scenarios? Suppose East holds ♠Q8x, ♠J8x or ♠108x and doesn't win the seven of spades cheaply with the eight, but with his honor card instead. If West had managed to play low quickly, without thinking with his two honors, declarer would be bound to go wrong, running the nine at the next trick. Any defenders managing that feat would deserve a brilliancy prize in my view!

Falsecarding is an intriguing subject that appeals to many people's natures. Who doesn't like to outsmart one's opponents in any game?

Creating an illusion and a losing option where in reality none exists and having your opponent fall for it is an extremely satisfying experience.

Let's consider a very common and standard situation where every full-blooded bridge player is just dying to falsecard whenever the opportunity arises.

In dummy you have

AK86

and in your hand you have

Q1053

You need to take four tricks with this suit. You will always have four tricks if the suit breaks 3-2. If East holds jack fourth, you can also win four tricks, because you will cash the ace and the king, see West show out and then know to finesse against the jack in the next round. You can also win four tricks if East holds the singleton nine, because when it drops under one of dummy's honors you can next cash the queen and, when East shows out, finesse against West's jack on the next round. Here's a real classic for all falsecard aficionados: with J9xx, they just love to float the nine under the honor declarer plays from dummy. What should poor declarer play next? Cash the second honor from dummy or cash the queen?

It's time to talk about protection. So, as declarer you play small to dummy's ace and East contributes the nine. Now what? I hope I already have you frowning. One shouldn't start this combination by playing low towards dummy, but by cashing an honor from dummy first! Why? Consider what East's dilemma will be. He is dying to play the nine from J9xx, but what if partner has the singleton ten? That would give declarer Q7xx and all of a sudden a finesse against the jack, where originally no possibility for a finesse existed. Only a very daring East who is dying to make the headlines will play the nine in this situation, and it's amazing how often 'daring' converts into 'foolish' when an action doesn't work out. However, if declarer starts playing the combination by leading low towards one of dummy's honors, East will already have seen whether his partner had the singleton ten and will be free to play the nine from J9xx.

Now a little variation. In dummy you have

AK106

and in your hand you have

Q853

This time you play the ace from dummy and — stop! The situation is different now. This time the ten is visible in dummy and it is West who could potentially fool you by falsecarding with the nine from J9xx. Therefore, this time you should start the combination by playing low towards dummy. West, with J974, might be worried about a possible singleton queen in his partner's hand, in which case playing the nine could cost a trick. Even if he is not worried about that, he will most likely hesitate at least slightly, because he will be unsure as to whether playing the nine could cost a trick. A little hitch is enough for an attentive declarer to know how to continue the suit on the second round.

There are more variations on this combination, but here is a general rule of thumb: Always make the defender who could falsecard with the nine from J9xx play first, before he has a chance to see his partner's card.

SuitPlay, by the way, starts the last combination by cashing the ace. Here is something you can teach your program, Jeroen!

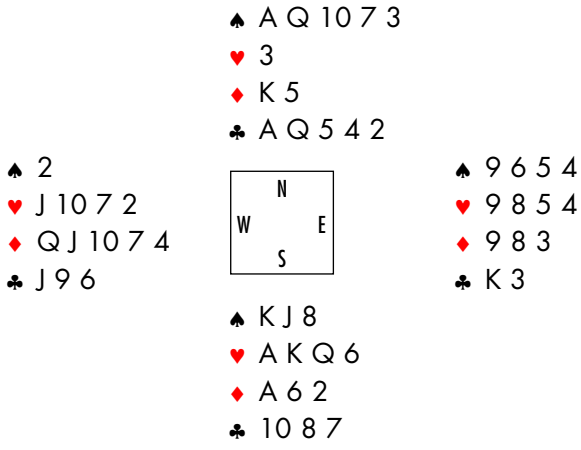
As long as we are not allowed to bring our little computers to the bridge table, none of us will be able to memorize the correct technical play for all possible suit combinations. It helps to have some basic knowledge of probability calculation. I know studying mathematical figures and tables is not everybody's cup of tea, but if you want to improve your game, you also have to work a little; nothing comes from nothing! So let me recommend an excellent book on the subject that keeps mathematics totally down to earth and that I personally have benefited a great deal from: *Bridge Odds for Practical Players* by Hugh Kelsey and Michael Glauert. Dive right into it and you will love me forever because I told you about this little secret treasure.

Still it's a blessing that not every bridge deal requires detailed knowledge of probabilities. Such knowledge wouldn't be sufficient anyway, because it is mandatory to look at every combination in the context of the whole deal. Sometimes you can even hide the fact that you haven't done your homework by taking that approach, because sometimes percentages don't matter. Wouldn't it be annoying to go to bed knowing that your line of play would have worked in 99% of all possible cases, but unfortunately the particular deal you were playing fell into the remaining 1% category? No sweet dreams tonight!

In 2004, the bridge circuit moved to Scandinavia with the European Team Championships taking place in Malmö, Sweden. For once I didn't have to make any travel arrangements; all I had to do was cross the bridge from Copenhagen to Malmö. Unfortunately, others didn't view Malmö as

that attractive and participation in the women's competition was disappointingly low, continuing a long ongoing trend. I have to make a mental note to remind EBL authorities for the umpteenth time that they have to give women's bridge more focus and attention if they want to boost participation. Considering my statements in Chapter 8 regarding the differences between male and female bridge players, there may be some justification in giving the open competition top priority. No hard feelings there, but please let's not complain about the consequences. Who wants to blame the women for preferring to stay home and play with the children?

Dealer West. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
	Sabine		*Dany*
pass	1♠	pass	2♣[1]
pass	2♥[2]	pass	2♠[3]
pass	2NT[4]	pass	3♣[5]
pass	3♠[6]	pass	6♠
all pass			

1. Artificial game force.
2. 4+ spades and five clubs.
3. Relay.
4. Maximum hand for not opening a strong club.
5. Relay.
6. Five spades and five clubs.

Despite our artificial methods, Daniela and I had no trouble bidding to the good spade slam in our match against Croatia at the Championships. Mercifully nobody had forgotten the system. After East's three of diamonds opening lead, I quickly realized that the fate of the contract would hinge on not losing two club tricks. How the heck should I go about playing the clubs? I had absolutely no clue. It seemed to me there were three possibilities:

Play low to the queen and if it loses, cash the ace next, hoping the jack will drop.

Start with the ten from dummy, planning to take a double finesse. If the ten gets covered by the jack, queen and king, run the eight next.

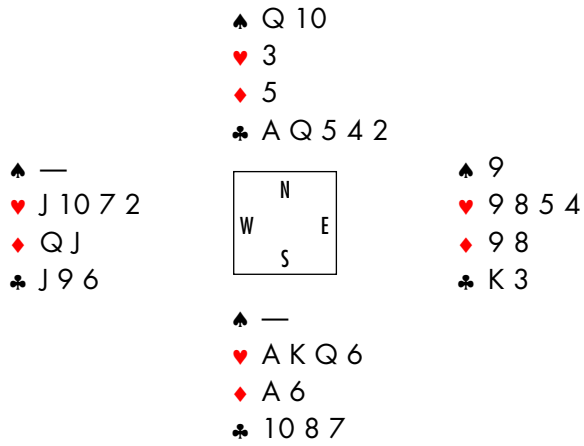
Cash the ace first and then play low from dummy. If, at that point, an honor has appeared, all worries are over; if no honor has appeared, guess whether to play the queen or duck.

I didn't have the faintest idea what the percentages of any of these three lines were and had to rely on my gut feeling. Line 1 seemed pedestrian and boring and all in all not very promising. Line 2 looked interesting and also a bit fancy and I sort of liked it. Nevertheless, there was a nagging inner voice that warned me, "This cannot possibly be the best percentage play." If that was true, how would I explain to my teammates I went down in a laydown slam when West held the doubleton jack without the nine? Finally, line 3 seemed to have the aura of good technique. A lot of good things could happen on the way and one could leave one's decision open till the very end. But boy, how I would hate to misguess!

So which line was it to be? I still had no clue, so I decided to go about my business drawing trumps. Maybe somebody would turn on a light bulb in my head in the meantime. I played low from dummy on the opening diamond lead and won West's ten with my king. Next I pulled three rounds of trumps, during which West turned up with a singleton and quickly discarded two diamonds on the second and third rounds. Now that was interesting and something began to dawn on me.

The opponents' opening-lead method was third and fifth, so East had led from either a three- or five-card suit. West's two quick and easy discards pointed to the former. The pace of the discards also led me to believe that West would not hold another five-card suit, so her distribution had to be either 1-4-5-3 or 1-3-5-4. If she had four clubs, cashing the ace of clubs would guarantee the contract, as I could go back to dummy and play towards the queen after having drawn the last trump. Then I recalled that East had made her opening lead very fast. Wouldn't she have thought for a while if she had a singleton club? Not with the singleton king, of course, but I could

always fall back on that later. Somehow I was more intrigued by the possibilities if West's four-card suit was hearts. The position by now had become:



If all my assumptions were correct, it couldn't possibly be wrong to draw the last trump, discarding a club from dummy. The club discard feels a bit awkward because it robs you of some possibilities in the suit itself, but the suit per se was not an issue any longer, as you are about to see.

What could West discard? If she discarded a club, it would remove my guess of how to play the club suit. If she discarded another diamond, I could ruff out the heart suit discarding clubs on the high hearts. I could then play ace and another diamond, discarding my last small club and throwing East in to lead into my club tenace. Finally, if West discarded a heart, I could do the whole thing the other way around, ruffing out the diamond suit and endplaying East with the fourth round of hearts.

West contemplated the matter for a while and finally discarded the jack of diamonds on my fourth trump. This convinced me that she held a four-card heart suit, because with a three-card suit I felt sure she would have preferred to discard a heart. Most players almost mechanically try to keep a suit the same length as dummy for as long as possible. So I went through with my plan of ruffing out the heart suit, noticing with relief that West followed on the fourth round. Finally, I threw East in with the last diamond. She now had to lead into my ace-queen combination in clubs for twelve very sweet tricks.

Of course, having successes like that doesn't exactly make one an avid student of probabilities. If it hadn't been for my new hero, Jeroen, I wouldn't have known the correct technical play in the club suit to this day. What does he say is the solution? You have to cash the ace first. If an honor drops, all worries are

over. If not, go to dummy and play towards your queen. If East has played the nine under your ace, you have to guess whether to play the queen or duck when West follows low; both chances are equal. If East has played the three or six under your ace, you have to put up the queen when West follows with the nine. That gives you a total chance of success of 69.22%. Oh well.

If you have had enough of all these probability figures, you will be relieved to read that I promise not to give you any more of them for the remainder of the chapter. All I have left for you is one easy question. How do you play the following combination?

In dummy you have

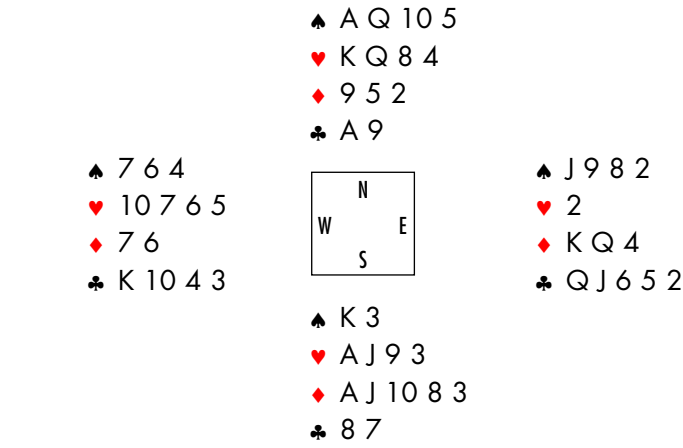
AJ93

and in your hand you have

KQ84

I guess I had better give you the whole hand before you start thinking this is a misprint or that I have gone completely crazy.

Dealer West. N-S Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Långström	*Sabine*	*Andersson*	*Dany*
pass	1♥	pass	2♦[1]
pass	2NT[2]	pass	3♦[3]
pass	3♠[4]	pass	4♦[5]
pass	4♠[6]	pass	4NT[7]
pass	5♦[8]	pass	6♥
all pass			

1. Heart raise with at least invitational values.
2. Not minimum and showing spade values, usually a suit.
3. Diamond ace or king.
4. Cuebid.
5. Guaranteeing the diamond ace and denying a club control.
6. Guaranteeing the spade ace and promising a club control.
7. RKCB.
8. 0 or 3 keycards.

This deal occurred at the same tournament a few days later against the eventual winners of the Championships, Sweden. Daniela and I conducted yet another scientific auction to a nice-looking slam. Pia Andersson wasn't long in finding the troublesome lead of the queen of clubs.

The club lead was annoying, because I couldn't afford to pull all the trumps before discarding dummy's club loser on a high spade and playing for a favorable diamond position. If I did, the defense could simply tug me into dummy by making me ruff a black suit, after a diamond to the jack had lost to an honor. I would not be able to get back to my hand to finesse in diamonds again and would have to concede defeat with honor third in diamonds onside.

All I could afford was two rounds of trumps before diving into the remaining required activities. Something else was bothering me a bit, that nine of hearts in dummy. There was a danger that trumps were 4-1and in that case that innocent-looking nine of hearts would be a communication blocker after the defense had won its diamond trick and made me ruff a black suit in dummy. I wouldn't be able to get back to my hand to draw the opponents' last trump. Better to get rid of it. So, under the king of hearts I unblocked the nine from dummy and continued with a low trump to dummy's ace. When East showed out on the second round of trumps, that unblocking move was already beginning to look like a good idea.

Now I had to pray to the card gods for everything else to be right. First I had to get rid of that club loser in dummy; three rounds of spades with the club pitch stood up and things were beginning to brighten up. Next was the diamond suit. I played a low diamond out of my hand and East, at the speed of lightning, went in with the queen. Was it from ♦KQx or from ♦Qxx? If the latter, I would have to win this trick and continue with another diamond. If the former were the case, I would have to duck this trick.

Now, Pia Andersson is known as the fastest woman player around, but

I felt that even she would have needed at least a fraction of a second to work out the brilliant play of the queen from ♦Qxx. I decided to duck this trick. Pia, of course, continued with a club, which I could ruff in dummy. Now it was payoff time for the unblock of the nine of hearts. I could ruff this trick with dummy's jack and return to hand by finessing against West's ten. The rest was routine: draw the last trump and finesse against East's remaining diamond honor. Never has making twelve tricks been easier.

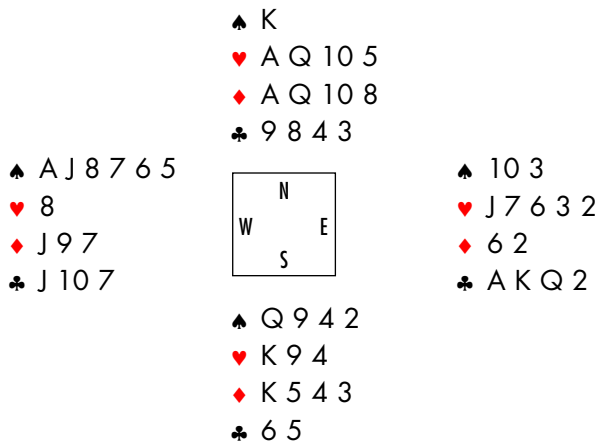
"Times go by turns, and chances change by course, from foul to fair, from better hap to worse." Robert Southwell (1561–1595), British poet.

-15-

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious

Back in Paris, Aeolus definitely hadn't done his job. I have never had much faith in the ancient Greek gods anyway. Better to rely on a different brand of magic. "Wind's in the East, there's a mist coming in, like something is brewing, 'bout to begin," says chimneysweep Bert in the musical *Mary Poppins*.

Board 15. *Dealer South. N-S Vul.*



Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
			pass
2♠	dbl	pass	3♦
all pass			

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
			pass
2♠	dbl	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

Something was indeed brewing. In the Closed Room, the French reached the best spot for North-South when Sylvie Willard did not deem her hand good enough to show extra values over her partner's takeout double of Andrea's weak two spade opening. In the classic French style, bidding a suit directly at the three-level over the takeout double is the weakest move possible. In contrast, bidding 2NT would be a constructive and forward-going move, the direct opposite of Lebensohl, a very popular convention in many other parts of the world. After the lead of the singleton eight of hearts, Willard quickly wrapped up ten tricks for +130, the best result genuinely available. Whether it would gain or lose IMPs for France would be decided at the other table.

Daniela felt protected by her first-round pass, which basically denied as many as 11 HCP. She also felt we needed a big swing to have any chance at all of overcoming the French. Doing the same thing as your counterpart is likely to do is not the way to create a big swing. For all these reasons, Daniela went for the more aggressive action of the direct three diamond bid, which in our style promises some values. I wasn't exactly thrilled about bidding on with the North hand, knowing that Daniela was marked with a maximum of 10 HCP and game would be marginal at best. Despite that, my thoughts were running on the same track as Daniela's, believing that we needed a big swing. So bid on I did and there we were, in a game that would be makeable against any lead but a club honor.

I imagine time stood still in the VuGraph theater, the audience holding its collective breath as Veronique Bessis selected her opening lead. We can only speculate what was going on in her mind. There wasn't only the issue of what lead would generally be best on a hand like this. There was also the question of whether the same contract had been reached in the other room. What was the score in the match likely to be? Was she supposed to do something speculative or the normal thing?

Finally she decided to go with the seeming-safety of her long suit and the fourth-best seven of spades hit the table. All of a sudden we were within reach of stealing the match from the French at the finish line. Would Daniela, having played an outstanding set, be able to land the *coup de grace* on this deal?

She made it look easy. After the king of spades held in dummy, she cashed the three top honors in diamonds, East discarding a telltale heart. The discard of the idle fifth has been a recurring theme in this book and there will be more on it later in this chapter. It is almost a law of nature: most defenders like to keep a suit the same length as dummy as long as

possible. Here the heart discard told Daniela that East was likely to hold at least five cards in the suit. At this point she really should have cashed a heart honor from dummy to guard against a singleton jack. But when you are hot you are hot and there were no singleton jacks lurking about.

Daniela simply cashed the last diamond, eliciting a club from East and a spade from West. Then, like it was a matter of course, she followed up with a heart to the nine. West was known to hold six spades and three diamonds and thus had only four unknown cards. Add East's easy heart discard and you will agree that Daniela's play was odds-on. The odds were with us, giving us +600 and 10 IMPs to take the lead by 2: it was France 216, Germany 218.

We were told later that the VuGraph audience exploded when Daniela took the first-round heart finesse against the jack. What a culmination of suspense!

The very next day the Championships *Daily Bulletin* paid homage to Daniela's tremendous efforts in this set with a little poem Mark Horton borrowed from the world of American baseball:

Dany at the Bat

The outlook wasn't brilliant for the German six that day,
The score stood minus forty-six, with but sixteen boards to play

And then when Andrea failed at first, and Barbara did the same,
A pall-like silence fell upon the patrons of the game.
A straggling few got up to go immured in deep distress.
The rest clung to that hope which springs eternal in the human breast.
They thought, "if only Dany could but get a whack at that.
We'd put up even money now, with Dany at the bat."

So upon that stricken multitude, grim melancholy sat;
for there seemed but little chance of Dany getting to the bat.
But Pony let drive a single, to the wonderment of all.
And Sabine, the much desired, tore the cover off the ball.
And when the dust had lifted,
and men saw what had occurred,
there was Sabine safe at second and Pony a-hugging third.
Then from five hundred throats and more there rose a lusty yell;
it rumbled through the VuGraph, it rattled in the dell;

It pounded through on the mountain and recoiled upon the flat;
for Dany, mighty Dany, was advancing to the bat.
There was ease in Dany's manner as she stepped into her place,
there was pride in Dany's bearing and a smile lit her face.
And when, responding to the cheers, she lightly doffed her hat,
no stranger in the crowd could doubt t'was Dany at the bat.

A thousand eyes were on her as she rubbed her hands with dirt.
A thousand hands applauded when she wiped them on her shirt.
Then, while the writhing pitcher ground the ball into her hip,
defiance flashed in Dany's eye, a smile curled her lip.
And now the leather-covered sphere came hurtling through the air,
and Dany stood a-watching it in haughty grandeur there.
Close by the sturdy batsman the ball unheeded sped —
"That ain't my style," said Dany.
"Strike one!" the Director said.

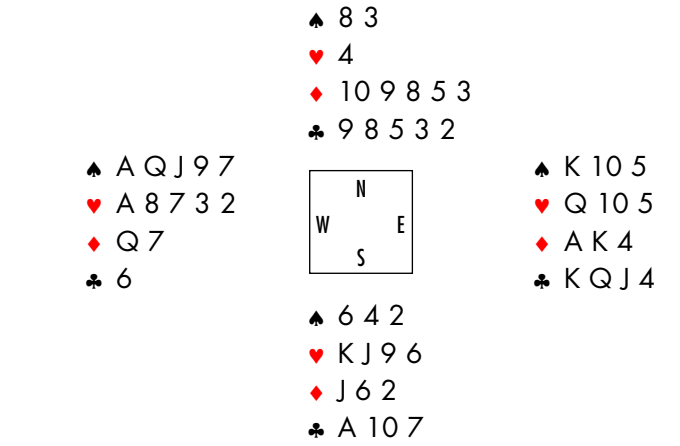
From the benches, black with people, there went up a muffled roar,
like the beating of the storm waves on a stern and distant shore.
"Kill him! Kill the Director!" shouted someone on the stand,
and it's likely they'd have killed him had not Dany raised her hand.
With a smile of Christian charity, great Dany's visage shone,
she stilled the rising tumult, she bade the game go on.
She signaled to the pitcher, and once more the dun sphere flew,
but Dany still ignored it, and the Director said, "Strike two!"

"Fraud!" cried the maddened hundreds, and echo answered "Fraud!"
But one scornful look from Dany and the audience was awed.
They saw her face grow stern and cold, they saw her muscles strain,
and they knew that Dany wouldn't let that ball go by again.
And now the pitcher holds the ball, and now she lets it go,
and now the air is shattered by the force of Dany's blow.
Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright.
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light.
And, somewhere men are laughing, and little children shout,
and there is lots of joy in Germany –
mighty Dany has pulled it out.

I must admit that rereading this poem after some years now and reliving the whole scenario brings tears to my eyes. It was a very poignant experience for all of us.

Immediately my thoughts wander further back to another one of Daniela's outstanding efforts in the 1996 Marlboro China Cup in Beijing, China. We couldn't wait to go back there one year after we had won our very first Venice Cup title at the same location.

Dealer East. E-W Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany		*Sabine*	
		1♣[1]	pass
1♠	pass	1NT[2]	pass
2♥	pass	3♠[3]	pass
3NT[4]	pass	4♣[5]	pass
4♥[6]	pass	4NT[7]	pass
5♠[8]	pass	6♠	all pass

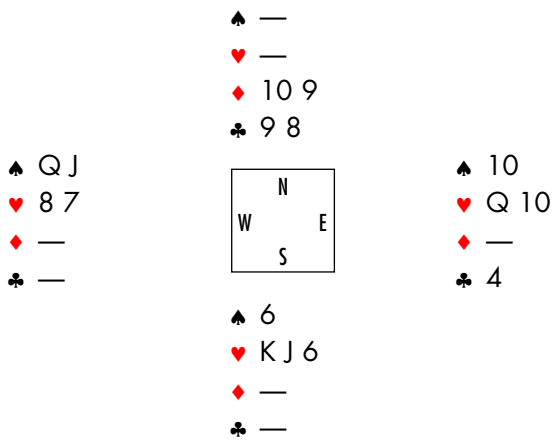
1. 16+ HCP.
2. Relay.
3. Setting trumps.
4. Serious 3NT (better than a cuebid).
5. Cuebid.
6. Cuebid.
7. RKCB.
8. 2 keycards and the spade queen.

Daniela and I both felt we were looking at a decent hand and full value for our bidding. Yet slam is nothing to write home about on the combined hands, even though it definitely would have some play if the ace of clubs were with North, especially if North were so kind to lead it, in which case the slam would be cold.

North quickly dashed these hopes by leading her singleton heart. Considering the auction, the lead had singleton written all over it and Daniela immediately realized that in this case playing North for the ace of clubs wouldn't really help her against perfect defense. Yes, if North took the ace on the first round of the suit towards dummy, all worries would be over — Daniela would be able to discard all her heart losers on three clubs and one diamond in dummy — but if North ducked the ace, then Daniela would be left with two heart losers. Also, people with aces don't usually lead singletons against slams, so it seemed advisable to look for a different idea. Was there any hope at all?

Daniela came up with an ingenious plan. She played low from dummy on the opening lead and South's nine drove out her ace. Step one of Daniela's plan was to dispose of her club loser on dummy's third diamond. Next followed the club king, which South covered with the ace, ruffed away by Daniela. So far so good, but there still were two heart tricks to lose with the king-jack sitting over the queen-ten. Not necessarily so, as Daniela was about to demonstrate!

She carefully took just two rounds of trumps, ending in dummy, and then discarded two of her heart losers on dummy's two high clubs. The position had become:

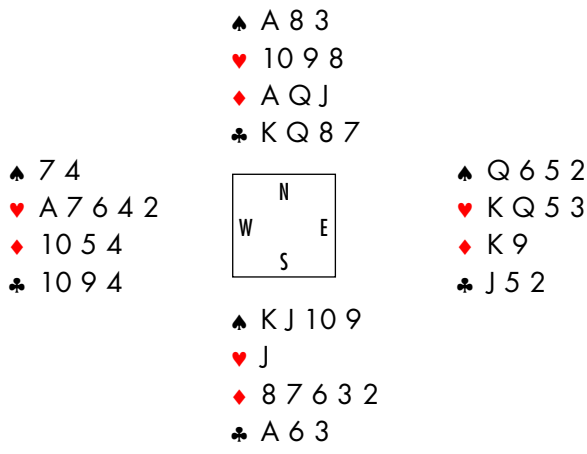


At this point Daniela ordered the losing club from dummy. South had been following the play carefully and she knew that club was a loser. Why bother wasting a trump when the club wasn't high? Not suspecting any harm, she discarded her small heart. Now Daniela's vision began to take shape. When, instead of ruffing her loser, she discarded one of her two remaining hearts on it, look what happened. Yes, North could win this trick, but now she was endplayed. Whichever card she played, Daniela would ruff in dummy and discard her last heart loser from hand. She resignedly shrugged her shoulders and conceded twelve tricks.

If South had been awake enough to ruff dummy's last club with her useless trump, Daniela would have had no counter, but that takes absolutely nothing away from her farsighted vision of the possibilities of this deal.

In case you are beginning to get the impression that Daniela's brilliancies are limited to declarer play, let me convince you otherwise. Actually, Daniela loves defending. Let's go back even further and take a look at a little defensive gem from the 1993 Venice Cup in Santiago, Chile, where we had reached the final for the very first time.

Dealer South. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Sabine	*Sanborn*	*Dany*	*McCallum*
			2♦*
pass	2NT*	pass	3♠
pass	4♦	pass	*5♣*
all pass			

You may not agree with Karen McCallum's choice of opening the South hand with a weak two in diamonds, but if your partnership's agreement is to open *any* unbalanced hand when not vulnerable, you are somewhat drained of alternatives.

After the artificial 2NT inquiry every bid was basically natural with Kerri Sanborn expecting 4-0-5-4 distribution in partner's hand. This explains her pass over five clubs rather than removing to five diamonds. Thus it happened that our opponents reached a contract that was clearly inferior to the best game of five diamonds, but which would be unbeatable on the actual lie of the cards.

Unbeatable, however, is a non-existent word in Daniela's vocabulary. If a contract cannot be beaten legitimately, the defenders' mission has to be to create a losing option for declarer. There is one thing working to their advantage: very often only the defenders know whether a suit is breaking favorably or not for declarer and whether a finesse is onside or not.

My opening spade lead on the above deal did nothing to hamper declarer's task in five clubs. Even though the diamond finesse was offside, eleven tricks would be easy, as trumps were breaking 3-3. When Daniela refused to put up the queen of spades, Karen McCallum won the lead cheaply in her hand with the nine. Then she quickly analyzed that she would have to get the diamond suit going before drawing trumps, partly for a lack of entries to her hand and partly to prevent us from cashing several heart tricks should the diamond finesse be offside.

Therefore at Trick 2 declarer continued with a diamond to dummy's queen, which Daniela smoothly ducked. Now declarer would really have liked to immobilize our trumps, but there was no way for her to know that trumps were breaking 3-3. She realized that with the diamond king onside, she could also make five clubs on a 4-2 trump split, as long as she refrained from drawing three rounds of trumps before running the diamond suit. This would prevent us from cashing more than one heart trick after having ruffed in on the run of the diamonds.

Accordingly, declarer pulled just two rounds of trumps with the king and the ace before repeating the diamond finesse. Now Daniela's trap snapped shut. She won with her king, played a heart over to my ace and received a diamond ruff on the way back. Contract down one. Mission accomplished!

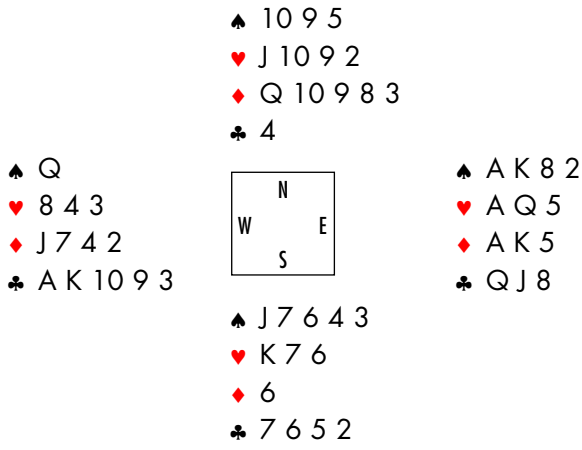
The Case of the Easy Discard occurs more often for defenders than you might think. Laziness and repression of tedious thoughts are part of human nature — "Maybe the problem will go away and I won't have to think about

it" — but this approach is usually nothing more than wishful thinking. Most of the time, problems only grow bigger if you avoid thinking about them.

The classic situation in a bridge context occurs when declarer is about to run a long suit and the defenders have to find some discards. They would be well advised to take the time to stop and plan ahead as soon as they realize they may have a problem. Yet most defenders make the unproblematic discards first and then start agonizing, so the whole world knows now they have a problem.

Declarer can often use this human weakness to his advantage, relying on defenders' first and early discards to be the easy and obvious ones. One of my favorite examples comes from the 1998 Macallan Invitational Pairs Tournament in London. This competition was especially memorable for followers of the women's game, because two women pairs finished in the top three: Nicola Smith and Pat Davies from England and Daniela and myself. Battle was fierce when the four of us met on VuGraph.

Dealer East. Neither Vul.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany	*Smith*	*Sabine*	*Davies*
		1♣[1]	pass
2♥[2]	pass	2♠[3]	pass
3♦[4]	pass	4NT[5]	pass
6♣	pass	6NT	all pass

1. 16+ HCP.
2. 8+ HCP, 5-4 in the minors.
3. Relay.
4. 8-10 HCP, singleton spade.
5. Quantitative.

Maybe I should have passed Daniela's 6♣ bid, but as it turned out, the club slam was more likely to go down than not. In the event, all the declarers who bid it failed when they naturally planned to simply ruff the fourth round of diamonds. Unfortunately a nasty opponent already ruffed the second round of diamonds, sinking that plan, and there was no way to recover.

I was by no means unhappy with playing the slam in notrump. South led her fourth-best spade and two different obvious lines became immediately apparent. There were eleven tricks on top and the twelfth could either come from a successful heart finesse or a third diamond trick. The heart finesse had a 50% chance, so clearly playing on diamonds had to be better.

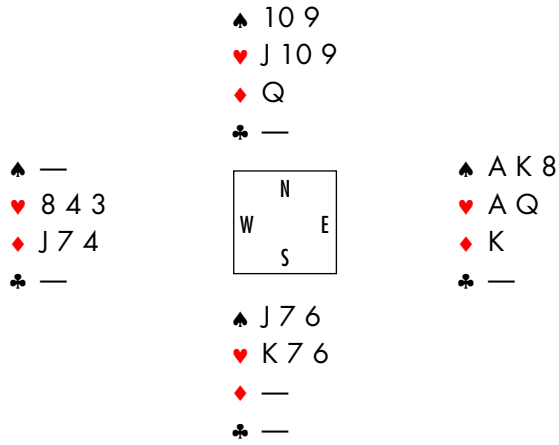
The best way to play the diamonds for three tricks is to cash the ace and king and then play a third round towards the jack. This will produce three tricks if the queen drops singleton or doubleton, if the suit breaks 3-3 or if the queen is in front of the jack — about 77%. Much better than a straight finesse in hearts.

I would have liked to combine my chances in the two red suits, though. The trouble with playing on diamonds in the prescribed way is that I wouldn't be able to take the heart finesse any longer once North turned up with four diamonds to the queen; I would be down one already. At the same time, if I cashed just one high diamond instead and then led a low one towards the jack, I wouldn't know what to do if North won the jack with the queen and came back a heart. I would have to make an instant decision whether to play for diamonds 3-3 or the heart king onside. That wasn't very satisfying either.

I would also have preferred to delay my decision until I had run the long club suit in dummy. Unfortunately South's spade lead had removed dummy's only entry outside the club suit, so that was not an option. Still, sometimes one can get some enlightening information by just taking two rounds of a suit. So for lack of anything more intelligent to do, I cashed the queen and jack of clubs, keeping communications with dummy open. North discarded a small diamond on the second round of the suit. Aha!

Clearly the hot favorite line of playing on diamonds was now out. Nicola Smith's painless and easy diamond discard made it obvious that she had to have at least five of those little beggars, which would make it impossible for me to score three diamond tricks. Convinced I hadn't been fooled, I contented myself with cashing just one top diamond and then finished off the clubs.

Now it was South's turn to come to my rescue by discarding her 'useless' little spade on the last club. The position by now had become:



I was convinced that South had discarded the 'idle fifth', so I knew I could come to hand with the king of diamonds and throw her in with the fourth round of spades. She would have to lead into my heart tenace whether she had the king or not. Actually, in a way, both North and South had been squeezed on the run of the clubs and there was nothing they could have done to prevent me from taking twelve tricks as long as I could read the end position. But would I have read the situation correctly if Pat Davies had discarded a heart on the fifth club?

Making 6NT vulnerable gave us a huge score at IMPs across the field, but it wasn't enough to overtake Nicola and Pat; they finished second in the event and we third. Not bad for women.

The last and final example of the 'easy' discard leading declarer to the right track occurred at the 2004 Team Bridge Olympiad in Istanbul, Turkey in our round-robin match against Greece.

Dealer West. Both Vul.

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

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Kanellopoulo	*Sabine*	*Ekonomou*	*Dany*
pass	1♥	pass	2♣[1]
pass	2♦[2]	pass	2♥[3]
pass	3♦[4]	pass	3♥[5]
pass	3NT[6]	pass	4NT[7]
pass	5♦[8]	pass	6♥
all pass			

1. Artificial Game Force.
2. If you really want to know what I have, you have to ask me again, partner.
3. Ok, I really want to know. So, what have you got, please?
4. One-suiter in hearts.
5. Not bad. How do you feel about slam?
6. My hand could be worse, but I have no shortness.
7. In that case, let's check whether we have enough keycards.
8. I have 0 or 3 keycards. Is that enough?

Daniela and I produced yet another of our famous bidding sequences under the cover of science. Mercifully, the opponents didn't interfere at all, else we would really have been in the soup, not knowing what was going on at all. This way at least we had a rough idea that slam should have some kind of play on the above deal. Or rather Daniela did, because I was just

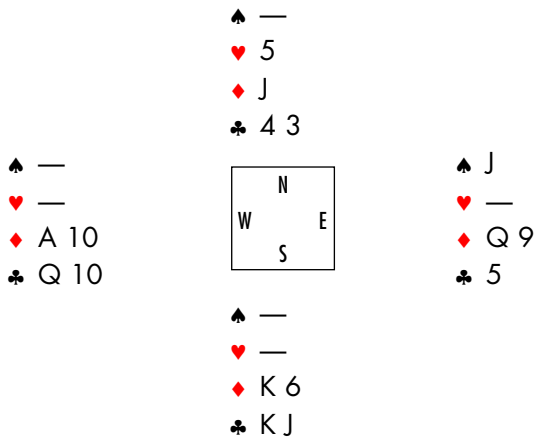
answering her polite questions and had no responsibility for the final level and strain. Okay, so I did claim I had a decent opening bid, but isn't every hand containing three keycards decent?

Our opponents were clearly unimpressed with all the scientific gibberish. My screenmate's questions about the bidding seemed to stem more from politeness than from real interest. With a knowing nod, she selected the three of spades as her opening lead, playing third and fifth leads.

A quick glance at dummy and a first tally revealed eleven tricks on top (God forbid trumps break 5-0) and several possibilities for a twelfth trick. The ace of diamonds or the queen of clubs could be onside. I could even test both possibilities after discarding a diamond from hand on the third spade from dummy. Ideally, I would want to wait with that until trumps were drawn, just in case a mean opponent ruffed the third spade away. Unfortunately, my entries were a bit tangled and I couldn't afford to overtake the second round of trumps in hand unless trumps broke 3-2 or the ten came up. How could I possibly know? I couldn't, and a 4-1 trump break definitely seemed a bigger danger than a 6-2 or 7-1 spade break.

Then again, who knew? Maybe the ten of hearts would make an early appearance, allowing me to draw trumps before cashing all the spades. In any case, it seemed a good idea to start some detective work. On the second round of hearts West discarded a small club. This discard had bad news written all over it. In order to combine all my options, not only would I now be forced to cash all my spade winners before pulling trumps, thus risking a ruff, but the club discard also bore all the signs of being from length — the by-now-famous idle fifth (or sixth or seventh). This meant the queen of clubs was now a hot favorite to be over the jack.

This didn't bode well, but all was not yet lost. Things brightened up a bit when none of my spade winners got ruffed, allowing me to discard a diamond from hand in peace. Entering my hand with the ace of clubs, I, for the time being, had nothing better to do than to finish drawing trumps, dispatching one of dummy's useless little diamonds. West happily discarded another club and a diamond. It seemed a good idea to play just one more round of trumps; once in a while illuminating clues appear on the run of the trumps. East discarded the ten of spades and West another small diamond. I had now reached this position:



I could still go for the combination play: play a diamond towards the king and if the ace was offside take the club finesse. This was roughly a 75% chance, apart from the fact that I was totally convinced by now that the queen of clubs was offside. Thus in reality I would just be playing for the 50% chance of the ace of diamonds being onside.

As the astute student of squeezes and endplays has already noticed, the contract can also be made in this ending with both keycards offside. On the very last round of trumps, I can spare my last small diamond from dummy and West's goose will be cooked. She can either blank the queen of clubs or the ace of diamonds, only to be thrown in with it to lead into dummy's club tenace.

So in reality it all boiled down to who had the ace of diamonds? Were there any clues at all as to its whereabouts? Might East have led a diamond looking at the ace? Maybe, maybe not. One thing was certain — going for the strip squeeze and endplay was a far sexier play than taking a straight finesse or two. Somehow there didn't seem to be any more worthwhile criteria to judge by.

I dropped the combination idea and cashed my last trump, discarding the small diamond from dummy. West did well to quickly blank her queen of clubs on the last trump, but my mind was set and nothing could dissuade me from dropping it now.

As the same contract failed in the other room, the easy discard of the idle fifth had presented us with 17 IMPs.

If there is any moral to be found in this, it has to be some advice for the defenders. When declarer is about to run a long suit, don't rush to make the easy discards first, but plan ahead instead. When you have a rough idea of what discards you are going to make, start with the difficult ones and make the easy ones last.

-16-

The Hour of Lead

There was dead silence around the table. One could have heard a pin drop to the ground. Nobody said a word. It was clear as crystal that the last board had been a devastating blow to France and a triumph for Germany. Everybody was aware of it and there was no reason to dwell on it. There was one more deal to play. Would it change the outcome or was victory already decided? I couldn't help but feel it was within our grasp.

Board 16. *Dealer West. E-W Vul.*

	♠ 6 4 2 ♥ 9 5 4 3 ♦ 10 8 7 ♣ 6 3 2	
♠ A 7 3 ♥ K Q J 2 ♦ J 5 4 ♣ K J 8	N W E S	♠ Q 10 5 ♥ 10 8 ♦ A Q 9 6 3 ♣ 10 5 4
	♠ K J 9 8 ♥ A 7 6 ♦ K 2 ♣ A Q 9 7	

Closed Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Andrea	*Cronier*	*Pony*	*Willard*
1NT[1]	pass	2♠[2]	pass
3♣[3]	pass	3NT	all pass

1. 14-16 HCP.
2. Either weak with a long minor or a balanced invitation or any 4441 game forcing.
3. Accepting the balanced invitation.

Open Room

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Bessis	*Sabine*	*D'Ovidio*	*Dany*
1NT	pass	3NT	all pass

In the Closed Room, Pony judged her tens and good five-card suit worth a balanced invitation opposite Andrea's 14-16 notrump. Andrea, sensing a chance to win some important IMPs, wasn't long accepting the invitation, bidding a thin vulnerable game.

The only lead to beat this game is a spade, giving the defense a chance to develop two spade tricks to go with their two aces and a diamond trick. When Bénédicte Cronier went with her longest suit instead and led a heart, 3NT could not be beaten any longer and nine tricks rolled home for +600 to Germany, an excellent result.

At our table, with the 1NT opening slightly stronger, the auction was even brisker, reaching 3NT in a hurry. I was faced with the same opening lead problem as Bénédicte in the other room. What a pile of junk to lead from! Were there any clues, any smart rules, anything at all to guide me in the right direction?

Lead fourth best from your longest and strongest against notrump was what I learned in my early bridge years. Later I discovered that with a weak hand without any entries it is often a good idea to try to find partner's suit on opening lead. So, which of my three-card suits was it to be?

Considering that I couldn't contribute anything at all, Daniela needed to hold a pretty good hand for us to have a chance to beat 3NT. With a decent major, Daniela would have had the option to double 3NT, asking me to lead my shortest major. Did that mean I should gamble one of my three-card minors?

This line of thinking had some appeal for me. However, very often when people just raise 1NT to 3NT, they hold a long minor suit themselves. There seemed to be a considerable risk that whichever minor I led, it would be the opponents' suit and I abandoned the idea.

Back to which major to lead. Logic says that partner is more likely to be longer in your shorter suit. Yet it seemed to me (assuming Daniela didn't have a five-card major) that we would have a better chance getting enough tricks if her four-card major was hearts, because I could contribute four cards there myself. If Daniela held four spades, the opponents' spades might be distributed 4-2 and a spade lead might even be advantageous for them. Oh dear, what to do?

Finally there was the matter of the state of the match. Was it possible we had taken the lead with that huge result on the last deal? If yes, I should try to do the same thing as my counterpart at the other table. If not, I should try to create a swing by doing something different. There was no reason to assume the contract in the other room wouldn't be the same. Something deep inside me told me that we had done it, that we were actually in front at that point. I felt fairly confident that Bénédicte at the other table would select a heart as her opening lead, playing straight down the middle. This settled the matter and out came a heart. Hardly a success, when Veronique Bessis quickly wrapped up nine tricks for +600 to France. What a relief it was to find out that Pony and Andrea had also bid and made the wafer-thin game!

The match was over. Nobody spoke a word. It was evident that the outcome of the match had to be close. We all rose from the table, and the French raced off first, eager to compare scores and find out whether they had held on to their lead. Daniela seemed to be in a trance and totally exhausted. I smiled at her and said: "You played fantastic, Dany. I think we may have done it." She looked at me as if I had lost my mind.

As we walked outside together, there was an almost eerie silence and the hallway was almost deserted. There was just one figure standing outside the door, Lorenzo Lauria from Italy, his face very grave. When we walked by behind the French, he tilted his right thumb up. That could only mean one thing. I smiled.

We turned the corner and all hell broke loose. A huge crowd was waiting for us, cheering and congratulating us. We had outscored our opponents 51-2 in the last set, winning the match by 2 IMPs!

What a disappointment it must have been for our opponents, to have come so close only to lose on the final stretch in front of a home crowd. But they were there immediately, together with their families, all of them congratulating, embracing and kissing us. It is hard to imagine better sportsmanship. Thank you for a match well fought!

The opening lead is generally acknowledged to be one of the more difficult disciplines in bridge. There is no dummy in view yet; one has only one's own hand and the bidding to work with, and sometimes the bidding is not very revealing at all. Some wicked opponents deliberately bid to conceal their distribution as much as possible or, even worse, make bids designed to mislead their opponents.

Finding the best opening lead is so difficult that one of Sweden's all-time greats, Jan Wohlin, who is famous for his instructive literary work on bridge, gave this piece of advice in the foreword of a book on opening

leads: "Don't ever lead!" I'll answer Jan Wohlin with a Chinese proverb: "If someone doesn't lead, no one will follow."

Following universally endorsed rules when deciding on an opening lead is a good starting point. Listening to the bidding is an improvement. Using your head definitely improves the quality of your opening lead. Add to that a grain of good luck and your opening leads will become smashing contract breakers. Humility is an important quality for every successful bridge player to have and should not to be underestimated. If the bridge gods are against you, you cannot succeed, no matter how clever you are.

May I invite you to look over my shoulder and try your luck with some opening lead problems? And don't look at the answers before you have made up your mind!

1. The first problem comes from the German trials for the 2004 European Championships in Malmö, Sweden in the Open competition. Our semifinal match against a strong team had reached a critical point when I had to find an opening lead against the enemy's slam.

As North you hold

♠ 7 6 5 3 ♥ — ♦ Q J 10 8 6 5 ♣ K 9 7

The bidding has gone:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Rohowsky	*Sabine*	*Bussek*	*Dany*
		1♠	pass
2♥[1]	pass	4♥[2]	pass
4NT[3]	pass	5♦[4]	pass
6♥	all pass		

1. Game-forcing.
2. Weaker than 3♥.
3. RKCB.
4. 0 or 3 keycards.

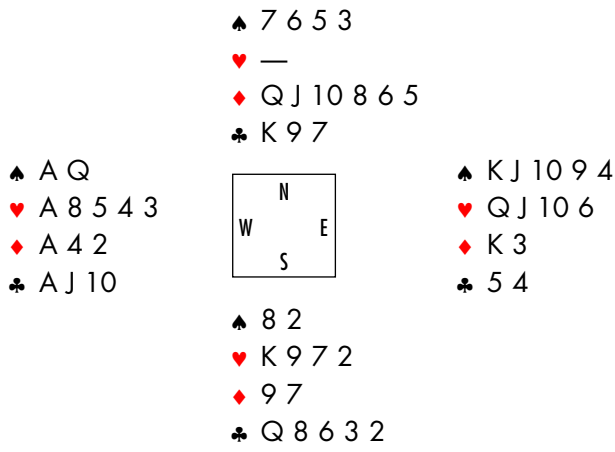
My void in hearts gave me some hopes that trumps would be breaking badly and Daniela could win a trump trick for our side. However, we still would need another trick. My spade holding looked extremely gloomy —

surely any slow losers declarer had would quickly disappear on dummy's spade suit. There could be no doubt I had to develop a trick on opening lead for our side and hope we could get in with time to cash it. What offered the best chances, a diamond or a club?

The diamond honor sequence looked enticing and inviting, clearly a safe lead that would give nothing away. Was it the best chance to establish a trick for us, though? In my mind there were two factors that spoke against it. I was looking at 6 HCP. Giving Daniela a heart trick probably meant another 2 or 3 HCP for us. It was unlikely we could have much more, so hoping for the club queen in Daniela's hand seemed more realistic than the diamond king. Secondly, my diamond suit was very long. Even if Daniela had the diamond king, there had to be a considerable risk that one of the opponents had a singleton diamond, meaning there would be no diamond trick for us after all.

All of this seemed very conclusive to me. A club lead had to give us a better chance to beat the slam. So I played a low club, but not without trepidation. If you make a lead like that, you had better be right. There won't be a whole lot of sympathy for your decision if you are wrong.

Dealer North. Both Vul.



I was lucky, and the bridge gods were with me. Daniela's trump holding was just good enough to prevent declarer from drawing trumps. Just in time, her doubleton spade stopped declarer from pitching his club loser on dummy's spades. On any other lead, declarer could have just given up a trump and claimed twelve tricks. Not only did this deal give us 13 IMPs when our teammates stopped safely in game, but it was also a momentum

breaker. Everything went our way from then on and we won the match easily.

2. In problem 2, we are back in Paris, for who wouldn't like to return to that city of cities? To reach the knockout stages of the 2001 Championships, we had to finish the round-robin stage among the top eight teams of eighteen. Going into the last match of that phase against Austria, we were lying comfortably, but not completely safe. We needed no heroics, but had to avoid a very big loss to be sure of qualifying. Playing straight down the middle was the name of the game. But that shouldn't prevent one from putting one's thinking cap on!

As North you hold:

♠ A K Q 4 3 ♥ J 5 2 ♦ Q J ♣ A 5 3

The bidding:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Smederevac	*Sabine*	*Redermeier*	*Dany*
1♥	1♠	dbl	pass
2♣[1]	pass	3♣	3♦
3♥	pass	4♥	all pass

1. Possible canapé, i.e. clubs may be longer than hearts.

If you were as quick as I was to lead an 'obvious' spade honor from the AKQ combination on this problem, let me invite you to retrace how both you and I should have been thinking. The first step must be to analyze the bidding. As you will quickly see, simply asking the right questions will point us in the right direction.

How many hearts and clubs did West and East show in the bidding?

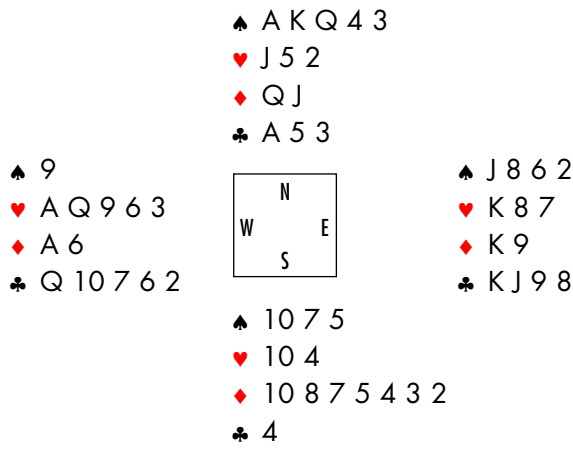
West's two club rebid could have been a canapé with four hearts and five clubs. When she bid three hearts over Daniela's three diamond intervention, she confirmed five cards in the major; clubs could be four or five. East clearly held exactly three cards in hearts for the delayed raise and at least four cards in clubs, possibly more. Thus East-West were marked with an eight-card fit in hearts and at least an eight-card fit in clubs, more likely longer.

Why did Daniela pass over the negative double, only to introduce a new suit a level higher one round later?

Daniela was marked with a very weak hand. She passed over the negative double to avoid pretending she had any values and indicating a lead she didn't want. To be able to come in on the three-level later, she needed a very long suit and probably also at least a secondary fit for my suit. For sure, she had to have at least nine cards in spades and diamonds together, more likely ten. She was also marked with a doubleton heart. So if she did have ten cards in spades and diamonds, she would only hold a singleton club.

Putting all these clues together makes one possible lead a standout: the ace of clubs! Leading a spade honor is a losing play.

Dealer West. Neither Vul.



As you can see, having led the king of spades, my switch to the ace of clubs at Trick 2 came too late. I could still give Daniela a ruff, but I had wasted my only entry to give Daniela another ruff on opening lead. We could no longer beat the game. Luckily, though, we played well enough on the remaining deals to win the match easily and were allowed to move on to the knockout stage.

Mercifully, God has given us human beings the ability to learn from our mistakes. Our subsequent quarterfinal match against the United States immediately gave me the opportunity to redeem myself, almost as if some higher power wanted to check whether I had learned my lesson. Go ahead and read opening lead problem number three. Déjà vu?

3. Moving to the East seat, you hold:

♠ Q 6 ♥ Q J 9 7 ♦ A K J 2 ♣ A 9 7

The bidding:

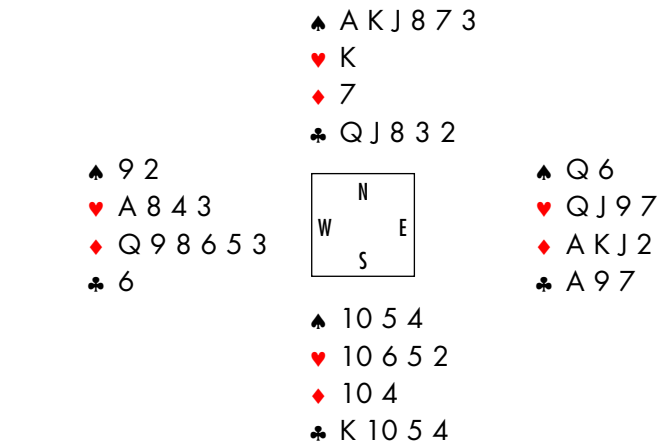
West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Dany	*McCallum*	*Sabine*	*Sanborn*
		1♣*	pass
1♦*	dbl[1]	pass	1♥
2♦	2♠	3♦	3♠
4♥	4♠	pass[2]	pass
5♦	pass	pass	5♠
dbl	all pass		

1. The black suits or the red suits.
2. Forcing.

Once again, Daniela's bidding was very informative. She had shown a relatively weak hand with five diamonds and four hearts. By bidding on to five diamonds over four spades after I had made a forcing pass, she was indicating some extra distribution, namely a sixth diamond. Thus she had to have either a singleton spade or a singleton club.

The opponents' bidding confirmed this conclusion. Kerri Sanborn's bidding on to the five-level could only be based on a very good fit for both her partner's suits. Doesn't thinking this way make leading the ace of clubs child's play?

Dealer East. E-W Vul.



The ace of clubs lead was a thundering success. I was able to give Daniela an immediate ruff, regain the lead with a diamond and deal her another ruff.

We still had the ace of hearts to come and set the contract three tricks for 500 points to Germany. Once again, the more standard looking diamond lead would have robbed my hand of the vital entry to give Daniela the second ruff. Five spades would, at best, have drifted off two tricks. I sent a grateful thought to the bridge gods that had made me see the error of my ways only one day earlier.

In the other room, Pony and Andrea somewhat surprisingly let their opponents play four hearts. Declarer, not gifted with second sight, did not guess the trump position and went down one for another 100 points to Germany, translating into 12 IMPs.

Once you get used to this kind of opening lead, you can almost get addicted to it. You should look out for it when the opponents have declared a double fit in the bidding and you hold ace third in their side suit. Not to mention ace fourth, which would make leading the ace almost automatic.

By now you have probably sensed that also problem number four is related to the same subject.

4. This deal occurred at the bridge festival in Deauville in 2004. The festival takes place every summer during the second half of July, starting on Bastille Day, and gives bridge lovers a wonderful opportunity to combine a holiday with their passion for bridge. There is only one session of bridge every afternoon, lasting four hours. This offers plenty of time for summer activities before the game and a sumptuous dinner afterwards.

As a special treat in 2004, the organizers had invited eight international pairs to entertain a VuGraph audience with some sparkling play late in the evenings after dinner. I had the pleasure of being part of this group, together with Kirsten Steen Møller from Denmark, who had been a member of the Danish women's team that took home the gold at the 1989 Olympiad in Venice.

Kirsten and I have played together quite successfully on several occasions, both nationally in Denmark and internationally. I know she doesn't mind the occasional flight of fancy, so I had no qualms giving my imagination full rein against the Belgian pairing of Coenraets and Engel.

Staying in the East seat you hold:

♠ A 5 4 ♥ 5 2 ♦ A 10 7 4 ♣ 10 8 6 3

The bidding:

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Møller	*Engel*	*Sabine*	*Coenraets*
		pass	pass
pass	1♠	pass	2♣[1]
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

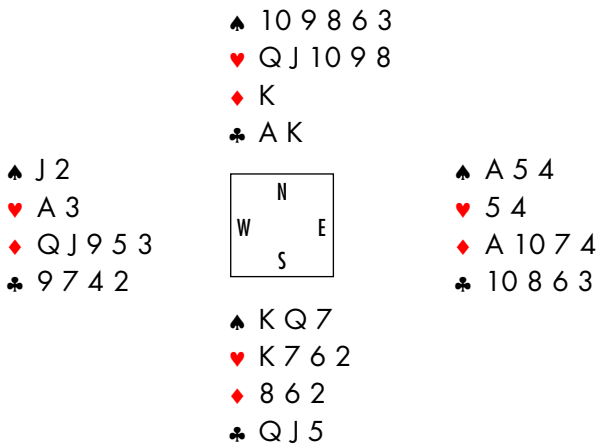
1. Drury, promising three-card spade-support and better values than a raise to two spades.

Once again the opponents reached game. I had two aces that looked like two tricks for us, but nothing more. Was it possible Kirsten could contribute another two tricks to beat the contract? It was certainly possible, but it seemed to me there were better chances.

We are back on familiar ground. The opponents have shown a double fit in the bidding and opening leader has ace third in his side suit. Nevertheless, leading the ace of spades didn't strike me as necessarily correct here. Clearly Kirsten couldn't have a singleton spade, because with a nine-card fit our opponents would have just bid the game in spades instead of hearts. By the same token she was marked with a doubleton spade, because the two club Drury response to one spade had promised three-card support.

So there was an easy way to beat the contract when partner didn't have two tricks but only one, namely either a fast trump trick or the spade king. Simply lead a low spade!

Dealer East. E-W Vul



Lucky again! Kirsten had the heart ace and we scored our three aces plus a spade ruff to beat four hearts by one trick. Leading the spade ace and continuing the suit would have worked as well, because I would have had an entry with the diamond ace to deal Kirsten the spade ruff. Leading the diamond ace would also have worked, as long as I had followed it up with a low spade, which would have been a cinch on the bidding. Who says leading an unsupported ace or underleading an ace against suit contracts is a no-no? Just listen to the bidding!

Afterword

Sadly, not only is this book coming to an end now, but also my 11-year long marriage with Jens. Like all couples, we had to face and tackle the problems of everyday life once the first phase of infatuation had passed. Some are better at it than others. I think if we are honest, both Jens and I will agree that we were horrendous in that respect and never managed to build that base that keeps a couple together till death do them part.

When we finally realized that things had gone wrong, we tried to make an effort. But it was too little too late. Despite all our mistakes and errors, however, we still managed to produce the two most wonderful children anyone could imagine. Both Jens and I are aware of our responsibility towards these two children, who have done absolutely nothing wrong, and they will maintain a bond between Jens and me for the rest of our lives. Jens, I wish you all imaginable happiness with your new family. And I just know one day I will be happy again, too.

Bridge undeniably has played a very important role in my life so far. I took up the game at the age of twelve, when I became fascinated by Agatha Christie's *Cards at the Table*, where the incomparable Hercule Poirot solves a crime mystery by making the right deductions from several suspects' abilities as bridge players. Daniela and I started playing together in 1986 and our career took off for real at the European Championships in Turku, Finland, 1989.

At that time, our victory was a big surprise for everybody, a clear underdog win. But as in all other sports, the possibility of underdog wins is one of the more charming aspects of bridge. Daniela and I were still quite young at that time and basically unknown. The years to come would be incredible. Everywhere we went we would be received with open arms. We would go to places we might never have gone without bridge. We would have experiences and adventures we might never have had without bridge. We would meet people, make friends and marry husbands we might never have met without bridge.

The point of the matter is, you don't have to be a champion to experience the same things. Every local club player, every home rubber-bridge player, can experience the same thrills. Bridge is a bond that unites us all over the world. Wherever we go, we will find people whose company we enjoy, whom we can laugh with, become friends with. When we sit down at the bridge table, we won't care about race, religion, or political opinion; we won't care about age. We all compete under the same conditions.

Things have taken a dramatic turn in my life now. Of all my various considerations, the children have top priority, more so than ever. I will focus on providing them a home and an environment where they feel safe and loved. Depending on how well I succeed there and how some more secondary issues like earning a living develop, bridge may well have to play a secondary role for me, at least for a while. I don't know how it will turn out yet, but one way or another, bridge will always be a part of me.

I love this game.

GENERAL INTEREST

"Sabine has proved herself equal to the best men"

– Zia Mahmood

In the November 2001 Venice Cup final, Germany trailed France by 47 IMPs starting the last set. In this book, world champion Sabine Auken tells the thrilling inside story of their comeback world title win, every bid and every card. She also uses each of the sixteen deals from that final session as a starting point for discussion, and distills from each of them general principles and advice that will help anyone looking to improve their own game. Among the topics covered here are the rationale for her own system agreements (the pros and cons of mini-notrump openings, multi-purpose two-bids, the merits of forcing club systems, etc.) and carding methods, as well as team chemistry, table presence and even dressing for success!

SABINE AUKEN lives in Denmark but still represents her native Germany in world competition. The world's #1-ranked woman player, she has won three world titles and been a medalist in nine other world events. This is her first book in more than ten years.

MARK HORTON is editor of BRIDGE magazine in the UK, and a well-known international player and journalist.

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