

CHAPTER 18

BRILLIANCY? BOLS!

This is our next presentation of some fine expert analysis, this time by a panel, as well as the unnamed writer who wrote it up. I did not hear any further comment, so presume the brilliancy award was not questioned. Let's see if our panel, and our readers, can be equally brilliant.

Here are the full hands and MY write up at the time (back in 1984).

Brilliances? Bols!

"The second hand comes from last year's Bols Brilliancy Awards. Australian Bridge readers were quick to pick flaws in most reported brilliances but managed to leave this one unscathed:

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

The bidding isn't given but presumably did NOT qualify for a brilliancy award. Wonder why, since 4S is stone cold, in fact FIVE makes, admittedly on a fortuitous lie of the cards. South landed in 3NT and West led the two of hearts. Declarer won on table and immediately led a low spade. The FIRST supposed brilliancy: East, according to the story, made the "excellent play of the jack of spades"! Now I ask you, does this require brilliance, or carelessness or stupidity to NOT play the jack when you can see dummy? Even my mother-in-law would have played the jack. (*Please note, this commentary was written when sexist, blonde, and in-law jokes were not actionable by hanging*). Then, East made the "Brilliant" switch to the king of diamonds, attempting to kill dummy, but declarer foiled his plan by ducking. Finally, the ultimate brilliancy by East – he switched to *clubs*! This, despite the fact that partner had led a HEART. Now as far as I can see, perhaps East had, by then, managed to do a bit of counting, or remembered the bidding or the 'rule of 11', as well as declarer's apparently blasé play, and finally realised he had only one more chance to get it right. That is not for me to judge, the 'expert' judges did that. Me, I maintain that the club switch BEFORE the king of diamonds is a standout, IF declarer can be trusted to be playing a REASONABLE game, and do Bols Brilliancy prizes get awarded for C Grade play at the local club? Mind you, the bidding was so atrocious that maybe East did NOT believe South's play was based on even a bit of common sense.

I would ask myself: If declarer was fragile in the heart suit, why give up a certain trick to a LOW card in spades at trick two? And if declarer had CLUB entries, would declarer not come to hand in THAT suit to lead spades UP to dummy twice? Therefore, declarer PROBABLY has somewhat TENUOUS clubs. Next, I would ask myself whether declarer could have the queen of diamonds, because then the king of diamonds switch could be a disaster couldn't it? With the queen-JACK of diamonds in declarer's hand, the king of diamonds switch just about gives declarer nine tricks without spades.

True, declarer may NOT have the diamond queen, because then he MIGHT have tried a diamond towards it for an extra entry to lead spades towards the ace, but no guarantee of that."

What I think is that most defenders who have read about the “Merrimac Coup” will try it if there is a chance of a brilliancy prize. You don’t get a prize for returning partner’s suit, do you? Nor returning another suit ‘through strength and round to weakness’. But for executing a coup, that’s different.

Now let us follow this one through. If you were one of the coup addicts who laid your king down in order to kill dummy, you would have got the FIVE from declarer, and the FOUR from partner. What would you have done NEXT on the actual hand that has been presented to you? If you play NORMAL signals, partner’s FOUR, in the light of declarer’s simple false card of the five, would appear to be encouraging, and you would continue diamonds. At least that is what those who switched to the king of diamonds have said anyway. If West DISCOURAGED in diamonds (how would you encourage OR discourage given West’s actual hand anyway?), East would switch to a HEART. Once more, that is what the panelists who got a ‘discouraging’ signal would do. So, no problems for declarer against OUR panel, only against the ‘genius’ who would switch to a CLUB. Sorry, folks, if YOU tried the diamond king but NOT a club switch to follow, then you would not have won the Bols Brilliancy in 1984. Nor would you have won my own award of the flying pig UNLESS you returned a CLUB at trick THREE. And for those of our panel who still insist that the king of diamonds does no HARM and allows East to switch to a club anyway, let me reproduce a hand that South COULD have had, and one that is MORE likely to be bid to the stupid 3NT contract. Let me now quote from a further passage of my comments back then:

“Just a SMALL difference, but a South hand that gives South’s play SOME justification, so try it NOW with the king of diamonds switch.

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

Look what happens NOW. East hops up with SJ, KD follows and declarer DUCKS, carefully UNBLOCKING the ten. Belatedly East switches to a club, the TEN being necessary and NOT a low one (though at trick THREE it doesn’t matter). However, declarer rises with the ace, cashes the king of hearts, still leaving the ace of hearts in his hand. Now, the jack of diamonds, and it matters not whether West covers or not; declarer next establishes the spade suit and comes to: four spades, two diamonds, two hearts and one club, even if the heart ace never makes a trick! Another likely set up for declarer’s clubs is AJ9x. In this case, after the king of diamonds is allowed to hold, and East switches to a club, declarer merely covers any club that East switches to and still races home, because West is end played in three suits or can give declarer an entry to hand with a heart! In my humble opinion, the only one of the four people at the table who deserved ANY kudos at all was WEST, for making the lead of a low heart from such a poor suit, because THAT led declarer into the WRONG line of play. Declarer COULD have made it on ANY defence, so certainly does not deserve a medal, and North, not to have bid 4S in the first place, certainly deserves no prize. East, as you may or may not agree, hardly deserves a prize for FIRST trying for a well known coup, and then belatedly switching, albeit to the correct suit rather than returning partner’s suit. Bols, I say, to such brilliancies!