

# CHAPTER 21

## EGG ON MY FACE

Nothing is ever what it seems. I had been living under the illusion that I had a reasonable knowledge of the game and knew most of the right answers most of the time. How wrong can one be.

Let me tell you from the beginning, but I will need the assistance of our panel of better players. At least then I can show you that the 'egg on face' is not entirely limited to yours truly. The following problems were presented to me, either from first hand experience at the table, or from anecdotal material relayed to me by some of my learned colleagues.

This one was from first hand experience.

Playing in a match point game, I, as dealer, with neither side vulnerable, picked up

♠ A Q 7  
♥ K Q 10 7 6 2  
♦ A  
♣ J 7 3

I opened 1H and partner responded 2C. My right hand opponent came in with 2D, and the way people bid in the so called "A Grade" these days, RHO could have had anything at all. However given that partner had a 10+ count and clubs, there were lots of possibilities here. I considered rebidding 3H, but felt I needed a BETTER heart suit. I considered just rebidding 2H since, having opened the bidding, I did not HAVE to bid over the 2D overcall. That made a lot of sense since I would still show SOME extra values and my heart suit was probably then not overstated. I also considered raising partner to 3C, which in my view would ALSO show extra values and club support, but THIS club support did not seem good enough. To bid 2NT, which would have shown 15-16 HCP, would have been rather gross with a singleton diamond. There seemed to be no perfect answer, until I thought of 2S! This, being a reverse, would, in the given sequence, surely be forcing to game and leave ALL options open, including a possible 6C or 6H slam. YESSS! I thought to myself as I bid 2S. Pass from LHO, 3S from partner! That was NOT what I expected, and it presented me with another problem. To bid 4C, or 4H? I decided to end matters with a bid of 4H but that did not end the problem at all. Partner, despite having only three spades, and knowing we were in a 4-3 spade fit, felt the 4S contract would play much better than 4H. He even wondered whether my 4H bid wasn't some sort of cue bid. But in any case, he held:

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

and reverted to 4S. Well, what was I to do? I could do no more than hope that partner did have four spades and that it was the best spot anyway. Well, it certainly WOULD have been the best spot, and may even have been the best spot had partner held two top clubs and had opponents allowed me to cross ruff the spades for the last six tricks after I had taken four side suit winners. But worse was to come, LHO led a trump, and when good old pard put his spades on the table, the three turned out to be the three of CLUBS. Pard, very apologetically, pointed to his new spectacles, and explained that while he knew we were in a 4-3, he would certainly not have chosen to play in a 4-2! I struggled gamely, but even I could not manage to make 4S on the 3-2 fit and a trump lead! Despite the fact that NOBODY was making game our way, nobody else had gone down four either! At least I was able to make partner, and his Optometrist, feel much better by pretending that I, too, had somehow got one of my clubs in with the spades and it was certainly time for me to invest in a new pair of specs as well.

Interestingly enough, most of the panel did not even consider a 2H bid, which I had, nor a 3C bid which was another option I had considered. Most were in favour of a jump to 3H, though a couple were not too enthusiastic about the idea (including one 'yuk' in the 'why' column). One or two rather aggressive souls

opted for 3D, another option that I had not considered, but at least as they said, that will force to game and leave most options open. But would it not encourage partner to bid a slam on an unsuitable hand? I guess not, in an intelligent partnership.

And then, there was another one I had not considered, DOUBLE. Funnily enough, I would dismiss DOUBLE because I only have four spades, but then, if I can REVERSE in a three card suit, surely I can imply it with a takeout double?

I was beginning to think I would get no support for my intentional faux pas of the 2S reverse, but then help arrived, in the form of my friend “Mr. Logic” from the USA. 2S! Unfortunately, he did not give any reasons why, but then of course, it’s the OBVIOUS bid isn’t it? No need for a reason!

Now, for the ‘anecdotal’ problems. The first one was brought to me by my better half, the Countess Lynley, from one of her ‘Intercity’ competitions. This was one of the more interesting problems that she had encountered:

You are West, South deals at Nil Vul and TEAMS.

South passes, you open 1C, North jumps to 2D and partner bids 2H, which you play as forcing i.e. a ‘free bid’. South passes. North’s jump is explained as a ‘weak jump overcall’ within the terms of the ‘rule of 2 and 3’. What would you bid, holding:

♠ Q 9 5 4  
♥ A  
♦ 5  
♣ A K Q 9 8 3 2

To some of our panel, this was not a problem: 2S. Interestingly, these panelists also did not offer a reason for bidding 2S, I guess all 2S bids are non alertable and non explainable! Now let me give you some opinions from the club rebidders.

“3C. Show where my length and strength is.” That’s all very well, but does partner have to keep bidding over this?

“4C. Must be forcing in any rational auction, and I am bidding where I am. Can see no virtue in introducing such feeble spades as it will require AKxx in the suit before spades is a superior contract to clubs, in which case partner will bid them anyway.”

“5C. That is what I would have bid as my OPENING bid if I had held these cards, unlike the wimpy problem setter!”

Well, let me tell you that the wimpy problem setter suddenly found some muscle, and in fact now bid 3D. Partner, despite having a good heart suit, did as she was told and bid 3NT.

The ‘problem setter’ wasn’t the only one to bid 3D.

“3D. A diamond stopper in partner’s hand and 3NT looks a playable spot. Otherwise, we’re looking at 5C. This is the best way to find out.”

Well, let me tell you that 5C AND 4H were both excellent contracts, but a very unexpected problem presented itself in both those contracts. With nine TOP tricks the way the cards lay, 3NT was never in danger on ANY lead, but the club and heart contracts both foundered on a diamond lead. Let me show you all the hands:

## BOARD 11 DLR S NIL VUL TEAMS

♠ K J 6  
♥ Q 4  
♦ K 10 9 8 7 4  
♣ J 7

♠ Q 9 5 4  
♥ A  
♦ 5  
♣ A K Q 9 8 3 2

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

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

OK, OK, maybe East should have DOUBLED instead of bidding 2H, but one can forgive East for bidding 2H on that, despite only an 8 count, and that really doesn't alter West's problem.

If West were to bid 2S, what else should East do OTHER than bid 3H? If West were to bid 3C, what would East do? Bid 3NT? Hardly? And after East bids 3H, you tell ME how West can now look for a diamond stop in East's hand. And if West bids 4C or 5C, I'm afraid that doesn't get you to 3NT either. Yes, yes, yes, 5C is VERY unlucky because of the singleton ace of hearts and no entry to the East hand, and 5H is unlucky because of the same lack of a quick entry to draw trumps, despite the queen of hearts dropping doubleton. Maybe our expert who has that wonderful computer programme that tells declarer how to make impossible contracts will be able to tell us whether it IS possible to make 4H on a diamond lead. I'm certain that you can't make 5C on proper defence, but 4H doesn't seem that clear cut, on the surface anyway.

Now we have a problem that was presented to me by Al Grunt, another of our well know bridge buffs. This is the problem HE sent me:

### The Bidding:

S	W	N	E
1D	NB	1H	NB
2NT	NB	4NT	NB
5C	NB	6NT	

The 2NT rebid is 18-19, 4NT is Key Card Blackwood, and 5C shows 0 or 3 key cards, king of HEARTS being the fifth key card.

The lead is the EIGHT OF SPADES and dummy and declarer are as follows.

### Dummy:

♠ A 7  
♥ A J 9 4  
♦ Q 7 4  
♣ K 9 7 3

### Declarer:

♠ K J 6 3  
♥ K 7  
♦ A K 10 3  
♣ A 10 6

Al said: "The lead has given you an extra trick, so how do you play it after that?"

Well, I had a very quick and clever answer for him. "I would expect that the lead from West is the top of the spade suit, and presuming West is not a novice, that means West has not wanted to open up any of the other suits. Hence, I would diagnose from the lead that West has something like:

♠ 8 x  
♥ Q 10 x x  
♦ J x x x  
♣ Q J x

Or

♠ 8 x  
♥ Q x x  
♦ J x x x  
♣ Q J x x

Therefore, just in case I need some sort of squeeze at the END, I would win the ace of spades at trick one. The finesse is obviously working and can wait. I come to hand and lead a club to the nine if West follows low. What happens?"

"East wins the queen and returns a spade."

Oh well, I guess I have to take the finesse now and that won't help the squeeze chances later, but there are other chances anyway."

"Afraid not, Count," Al replied, "you won't need the squeeze any more, since you will have the last nine tricks anyway, after losing to West's queen."

WELL, that certainly floored me. I couldn't believe that West had led from Q 10 8 and I wanted to know what else West had to make such a ridiculous lead. I still refused to believe that any 'expert' defender would lead a spade from the holding that he gave me, so I sent out the problem to our panel. The answers weren't exactly reassuring and certainly did not atone for the egg on my face, but better egg on face in theory rather than in practice. Here is what our panel chose to lead and why. Let me show you all four hands so you can appreciate why a spade lead is not so stupid, even though I would certainly NOT have chosen one myself.

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

You can see that if West leads a diamond, and there were some panelists who led one thinking it was the 'safest' lead, there are four diamond tricks for declarer and after negotiating clubs for three tricks, there is a 'show up squeeze' on West.

Declarer can hardly go wrong at the end. Either West's queen of spades drops or the queen of hearts pops up when declarer plays king of hearts and another.

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

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

A club lead allows declarer to take four club tricks and work towards a similar end situation, but after four club tricks declarer can afford to try a heart finesse to see what happens, and that works so again no problems.

Some of the panel led the JACK of clubs, trying to be tricky, and yes, it might make declarer wonder if West in fact IS trying a tricky jack from QJxx, but it still gives up four club tricks if declarer guesses correctly.

On a HEART lead, and I must say I would have chosen that suit myself, declarer can take a first round finesse in safety and then play on clubs. But if West throws a heart on the fourth club, there is still room for declarer to get things wrong and take the losing spade finesse, though a good declarer will more than likely make.

And for the benefit of those who decided that a heart WAS the right suit to lead, look at what happens if West chooses the 'tricky' EIGHT: Dummy covers with the nine, and declarer suddenly has FOUR heart tricks! This does not happen if West leads the THREE if declarer tries the nine or jack, as declarer is bound to do, but it still happens if declarer plays the FOUR from dummy!

The ONLY heart lead that does NOT give away four heart tricks on the lead is the QUEEN. How come none of our 'expert' panel managed to find THAT? Says he with tongue in cheek and still egg on face!

As for the spade leaders, and there were one or two, it really matters not WHICH spade you lead, as long as you DON'T lead the queen. It's right to lead the queen of HEARTS, but not the queen of SPADES! If you lead the ten or eight, at least your queen stands to make the setting trick, IF you have a mug declarer like the Count Von Impski!

***To be continued in next chapter (Chapter 22) of the Von Impski Files***