

CHAPTER 22

MORE EGG ON MY FACE

Let's now move on to something much more trickier. As though it weren't enough to fail, even in theory, in a contract that has an extra trick presented to you at trick one, I next failed to spot the fact that another contract was stone cold and on ANY lead. At least so I am told, though I have yet to receive final proof that this is indeed the case.

This was the problem as I presented it to the panel.

You are on lead after the following bidding:

S	W	N	E
1H	2S	3D	NB
4C	NB	4S	NB
6C	NB	NB	DBL
NB	NB	NB	

You hold:

♠ 10 9 8 7 5 2

♥

♦ K Q 6

♣ Q 5 4 3

Firstly, I asked whether the panel seriously thought partner's double was Lightner. Most of them didn't think so, nor did they care anyway as they thought this was going down for sure.

If it was Lightner, it meant a diamond void for sure, so the slam was doomed to failure whatever the case unless the lead was absolutely atrocious and there WAS some way to make. So, the king of diamonds seemed 100% clear cut and so it proved, a unanimous vote from the panel.

They did, however, have trouble constructing possible hands for the bidding and partner's double to make sense. No wonder they had trouble, because the final bid from South was actually meant to be SIX HEARTS!

I very quickly corrected the mistake and asked the panel whether this made any difference.

They were not swayed to making any other lead, but were, naturally enough, more convinced that partner had, foolishly or otherwise, got carried away and doubled because partner had HEART tricks. And therefore the king of diamonds was even more of an obvious lead.

Well, that is exactly what happened at the time the hand was played, and these were the hands and what happened when they were played:

The Countess came from her Intercity match and showed me the following hand, just the West hand to start, and asked what I would bid given the sequence 1H, 2S jump overcall, 3D from partner. I suggested checking for aces first then bidding 6H. Lynley was delighted to tell me that 6H would not have been a success, because South had all the outstanding trumps! Well, to cut a long story short, I like a challenge and suggested that if you were to know that South had all the hearts, like if South had foolishly DOUBLED, 6H could still be made.

BOARD 24 DLR W NIL VUL TEAMS

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

Here is how I envisaged the play proceeding: the king of diamonds lead, won by the ace and an immediate diamond ruff, a club to the ace and another diamond ruff. Ace, king of spades and now a club finesse to the jack, then king of clubs discarding the losing spade, at which stage this would be the position:

Board 24 DLR W NIL VUL TEAMS

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

“Quite a simple five card ending, really,” I smugly suggested. Now, when a club or diamond is led from dummy, South can ruff with any card at all, I overruff, and lead a heart to the nine, and must make the last three tricks. South can either beat the nine and be end played or follow low and still be end played. But of course the wonderful trump coup only works because North has no heart to lead. No other lead makes a difference as I can do the same thing. Of course the play requires a specific sequence of plays, but there is no other choice once you’ve been doubled by a stupid South.”

“Mmm, I still think it would be too risky not to take at least ONE round of trumps. Can’t you work an end play after that?”

“No, the nine needs to be kept until much later, I’m afraid. This sort of trump coup is one in a million.”

“Well, I made six and I was only in four, and I wasn’t doubled of course. And I DID cash the ace after the jack of spades lead. Unfortunately, the whole play was a bit of a blur and I haven’t a clue what the sequence was.”

I insisted someone must have done something silly along the way, but the problem was so interesting that I sent it out to the panel. I even told them after they had sent in their answers, what a wonderful little trump coup I had found, but that there WAS a lead to defeat the 6H contract. That was a CLUB, which seemingly allows declarer to make four club tricks yet, because it uses up a vital entry prematurely, at trick one, foils the trump coup.

Very soon, my good friend Phil Anderer came back to tell me that his wonderful little computer programme told him that there are ANY number of ways to make 6H, including cashing the ace first! AND on any lead. Well, all I can say is, as I wipe more egg off my face, to hell with computer programmes that take all the fun out of being a smart ass. I'm still willing to play against ANY computer for ANY stakes, maybe there is a human out there who would like to join me? And maybe that human might be the one featuring in the next problem. He certainly came up with a master bid that NO computer would have been able to outdo. Let me now relate THAT story.

He who shall remain anonymous sought me out the other night at the club and presented me with a hand.

This was it:

♠ A
♥ A K Q 9 3 2
♦ A
♣ A K Q 10 2

“Great hand, huh? Your partner opens 2S, weak. You bid 2NT which is an inquiry and partner bids 3D, showing a maximum. What do you bid now?”

“You tell me,” I replied, “I would have bid it differently. 3H is forcing. I guess I bid 3H and if partner rebids 3S I follow up with 4C. Probably I will later ask for aces and then kings and then bid 7C. No use trying anything any more scientific, if partner has something in one of my suits, a grand should make, if not, we're out of luck. And if partner has a real maximum and a good spade suit, partner will bid 4S over my 3H and I'll then bid 7S.”

“What about bidding 7NT? That's what I did,” Mr. Anon said, quite nonchalantly, and expectantly looking at me for approval. I gawked and couldn't contain myself.

“That is the biggest lunacy I have ever heard,” I couldn't contain myself, “You WERE, I take it, non compos mentis at the time, for whatever reason? Did it ever occur to you that there is probably NO entry to partner's hand and that you would need to make all 13 tricks on your own? My God, I don't believe it. Did you really? And I suppose this was in the final of the International trials?”

“Well, yes, it was, and, well, we did win. And partner of course had what I required. Who wants to mess round with anything else other than 7NT when you have THAT hand?” He then handed me a slip of paper with both hands on it. Partner had KQJxxx in spades and the jack of hearts and jack of clubs!!!

I was about to lay into our champ (still thinking that should be spelled with a u), when the move was called. Moving on, I still couldn't believe it. The Neanderthal had struck again!

Once more, I sought the views of the panel, setting THEM the problem, but in a slightly different format.

Here is the poser, as I put it:

“At TEAMS, and NIL VUL, partner opens 2S (Weak) and Mr X bids 2NT which is an inquiry. Partner replies 3D (maximum, and presumably a diamond feature or something like that, but does it really matter?). Mr. X now bids 7NT. Who do you think Mr. X was. Was it:

- a) George Bush
- b) Saddam Hussein
- c) Groucho Marx
- d) Albert Einstein
- e) Giorgio Belladonna
- f) The Village Idiot

I now find that the 3D in fact showed a MINIMUM with a reasonable spade suit, so the fact that our hero bid 7NT astonishes me even more, but let's hear the panel on it.

Apart from two panelists who had decided that only a true genius could bid 7NT, therefore it was a toss up between d) and e) (and for those of you who are too young to remember who these guys were, Albert was my well known Great Uncle, Count Einstein and Giorgio perhaps the most famous of all bridge players and part of the famous Italian Blue team of the 50s), the votes were heavily in favour of f), a) and b). Poor Groucho, the funny man with the funny quips, didn't figure. I'd have thought that being a comedian would have been a prerequisite for making such a gross bid, but there you are.

Let me give you some quotes from the panel, without divulging their true identity in case George W, Saddam, or our own anonymous newly crowned 'champ', want to argue with them personally. Panels must be protected from such danger.

Lemsip: "Cunning to have George Bush twice on the list" (it took me a while to work out whether I'd messed up again). Then, our panelist continued. "If it made, it must have been Belladonna. If it's good enough for him, good enough for me, I'll bid 7NT and hope he's got the right jack." He DID have the right jack, but it was SINGLETON and the suit was led. No, just joking, Lemsip.

Willy Riskett: "Certainly f). I hope that wasn't YOU, was it?" After that insult, he went on to say: "Ironically, I am not interested in whether he has max HCP, I'm only interested in K+Q of spades, therefore why ask questions you're not interested in the answers to. I'd have used RKCB. I would bid 7S if I knew he had SJ as well, but as I can't determine this I would bid 6S unless I was behind in a match against superior opponents." Well, we all know that Willy is NEVER behind in any teams match against superior opponents! That is just not possible. He went on to say: "Now tell me the village idiot has SJ as well and also CJ and HJ and is cold for 25 tricks. Please don't tell me that this is your brilliant bid of the month. Never mind. There are vacancies at Rita Angus Homes."

OK I'll tell you that the FIRST part is correct. As for the second part, who is Rita Angus?

Morton Fawkes: "Please note that all the available options are deceased...or soon will be! As should be that insane bidder of 7NT!!" Mmm, is Morton vehemently stating that 7NT has its flaws?

Marty Readmylips: "All my money is on George Bush. He has overwhelming strength at his disposal, but has acted stupidly and hastily." Marty also had a very sensible solution to offer as to how the hand SHOULD be bid. "Can't see a way of telling if partner's spades are good enough for 7S, and can't find out if he has one or more of the rounded (for the uninitiated, clubs and hearts) jacks. So, I would have bid 3H forcing (either 2S-3H if that is forcing, or 2S-2NT-3D-3H), then follow with 7C." Presumably, partner is meant to bid 7S with KQJ10xx in spades and no support for either round suit?

Marty's regular partner, Pete Knewall, and Al Lanzy had pretty much the same comments as Marty. They also were playing in the same event.

Al's partner, Tony Slokar bid exactly that way. They ended up in 7C. You guys will need to have a better system than THAT, won't you? Throwing away 2 i.m.p.s for being in a minor suit slam! Oh dear dear and tut tut!

Al Lanzy also commented further: "As I recall the hands, the hand I held as the opener of the weak 2S, was something like:

S. KQJxxx
H. J
D. Jxxx
C. Jx

I think the jump to 7NT is ridiculous, it only comes off because the hand opposite has the jack of clubs! The jack of hearts is an unlikely bonus card that also lets 7NT make."

Actually, only ONE of the jacks is needed for 7NT as long as the jack is not SINGLETON, because if it is singleton, a lead in that suit kills the entry to the spade suit. But given NO jacks other than the jack of spades, 7NT is, as you say, RIDICULOUS, unless there is a deep entry to a club or heart card. Glad you agree. But I would still like to know what partner is meant to do with

- S. KQJxxx
- H. x
- D. Qxxx
- C. xx

According to Al, with that hand, 7C has the best chances of success of any grand slam. I can't say that I agree, but then I'm not one who can calculate such delicate odds, either in my head or using my computer.

Sergeant Simba: "No way of telling what will make or what cards partner has that are of any use. The village idiot would bid 7NT. Not Albert, who is alleged to have said: "Only two things are infinite – the universe and human stupidity, and I am not too sure about the universe." My partners never have anything when THEY open a weak two. I would just shut my eyes and bid 6H, which will make when either hearts or clubs behave."

Thanks for those pearls of wisdom, Sarj! But surely just in case this is the one time when partner does have the 'goods', there is a better way if you have an intelligent partner (despite Albert's assertions). I would suggest that the way to bid to the BEST slam is to bid 3H (forcing, either immediately or via 2NT, however you play it) to start with. If partner has KQJ10xx in spades, partner will bid 4S (SURELY?) and you can bid 7S. If partner bids 3S you follow with 4C. If partner now bids 4S, you bid 4NT (RKCB) and whatever partner shows, you follow with 5NT. Now if you do the sensible thing and ask for kings with 5NT as a Grand Slam try, you are GUARANTEEING that you have all the aces (with RKCB that should be all the five key cards) between you, then your intelligent partner will have no difficulty in bidding 7NT on the actual hand he held, and will bid 7S with KQJ10xx in spades and little or nothing else. At least this will have a reasonable chance.

Of course, if I had opened a weak 2S and we had bid to 7S in this very scientific way, I would have held:

- S. K Q J 9 x x
- H. J x
- D. Q x x
- C. x x

Which in my world is an OPENING BID anyway. In 7S, I would have got a heart lead and then would have to decide whether, after unblocking the ace of trumps, to come back to hand with the jack of hearts or by ruffing the third club, and if the latter, whether to ruff the club high or low. Whatever I decided I can guarantee would have been WRONG. The second heart would have been ruffed, or I'd have uppercut myself with a third club, or ruffed high and found clubs are 3-3 and spades 4-2 with four to the ten in one hand. MORE egg on my face for sure. That is why I am sitting here writing this while our anonymous hero who had the brilliance, daring, stupidity, whatever, in bidding 7NT is busily practicing how to inflict more damage on his more subtle and no doubt unsuspecting opponents. The bridge world is waiting!