

Von Impski Files Ch25

Chapter 25: All Roads Lead to Rome

The Old Victorians are a somewhat different breed of bridge player, and Morton Fawkes is one of their foremost experts. I was fortunate to be invited to take part in one of their special teams events, as were some of the better known outsiders, Bruce Lemming, Ben Bacon, Ant Slocar and Al Lansem. I was an honorary member of the Victorians for the event, and had renewed an old partnership with Murphy Juggernaut. At post match discussions, Morton was most agitated, having been taken for a ride by one of the visiting rabbits.

“You probably remember the big 4441 hand. Given that the bidding went 2C on your right, 2H on your left, 4NT on your right, 5D (one ace) on your left, 6NT from your right, what would you lead from

♠ Q J 3

♥ J 9 8 4

♦ 8

♣ Q 7 5 4 2

“ My fourth highest club. I have been taught by my superiors to always lead fourth highest of my longest and strongest.” I rather facetiously answered, since that is what I had actually led.

“That gives a trick away on the go as you know. Anyway, I chose the spade queen, very reasonable wouldn’t you say?”

“Yes, of course. I don’t really think it matters what you lead except a low spade, a diamond, or the queen of clubs, all pretty stupid leads. On any sensible lead the contract of 6NT is doomed to failure isn’t it?”

At this stage two voices piped up in unison. “I made 6NT”. The voices belonged to Al Lansem and Bruce Lemming.

“Well, so did that rabbit we were playing against. Not only was the bidding atrocious but he took the strangest line. Let me tell you what happened,” Morton continued.

BOARD 3 DEALER SOUTH EW VUL

North

♠ 10 9 6

♥ A K 5 2

♦ 10 6 2

♣ J 6 3

West

♠ Q J 3

♥ J 9 8 4

♦ 8

♣ Q 7 5 4 2

East

♠ 7 5 2

♥ 10 7 6 3

♦ K 7 5 4 3

♣ 9

South

♠ A K 8 4

♥ Q

♦ A Q J 9

♣ A K 10 8

“As I said, I led the queen of spades. Declarer won, cashed the queen of hearts, and laid down the ten of clubs. Well, I have a theory that if declarer wants you to take a trick, don’t, so I ducked. Clearly declarer was going to try and manufacture an entry to dummy for the hearts, which were cut off from him. If he wanted to, and was prepared to, he could overtake with the jack. And, of course, he didn’t, so there was no club entry. But what happened next didn’t please me one little bit. Declarer next tried a spade towards dummy, forcing an entry that way. I had to win this, and led a third spade, which seemed to be the least of all evils. But declarer discarded the eight of clubs and unblocked the jack of diamonds from hand on the top hearts, and then led the ten of diamonds. He was able to repeat the diamond finesse after the ten held, and twelve tricks were in the bag. All I had to do was to win my queen of clubs, like declarer had wanted me to do, and exit a club. That would have given declarer an eleventh trick but never a twelfth”

"Well, you should have led a club like I said you should. Then declarer would have had the entry taken out before unblocking the heart whether or not declarer won the jack at trick one or ran the lead to the ten. Besides, you SHOULD have won the club, and returned a third. No chance on a club lead." I had forgotten that I had led a club against Al Lansem.

"Not so," it was Al Lansem's turn. "I made on a low club lead from West. You all know that West was the Count himself, and yes he DID lead a club. Our bidding was somewhat more sophisticated but I still ended up in 6NT, admittedly not the best contract but we didn't come here to miss the slams. When the Count led the four of clubs, I played LOW from dummy, hoping that EAST would produce the queen since it wasn't like the Count to make such a bad lead. But East of course did not have the queen, and produced the nine. It was time for some quick thinking, so I won the ACE, cashed the queen of hearts, and next led the ten of clubs. Much the same situation as in your case, Morton, but given that any reputable declarer would surely have won with the ten at trick ONE, the Count smelled a rat. It seemed clear to him that I was desperate and did not have the king of clubs, didn't it? Therefore Murphy must have started with K9 in clubs and, being the good player that HE is, slotted the nine at trick one."

Still looking at me meaningfully, Al continued. "Consequently, going up with the queen would be a disaster for the Count as Murphy's king would swallow the queen and provide the needed entry. So, the Count played low, just like a top player WOULD. But thanks to the fact that I had learnt the 'rule of eleven' I was confident that he had the queen. I overtook in dummy, and cashed the top hearts, on which I discarded one spade and the JACK of diamonds. I then followed with the ten of diamonds, then a further diamond finesse. That of course produced only three diamond tricks to go with three clubs and three hearts and two spades, but the poor Count was now squirming something terrible, weren't you Ray? You had to relinquish a heart and a club. I then played off three rounds of spades and threw the Count in."

Al was relishing the story. He turned to the admiring audience and finished with a flourish: "He had to lead a club from his Q7 to my K8! Cute, eh?"

I couldn't help but be defensive. "Yes, you played it brilliantly, but the fact remains that I COULD have defeated you, just like Morton could have defeated that rabbit declarer. There is nothing to beat a fourth highest lead, it always seems to defeat the contract if there is any way to do so."

"Not so," it was Bruce Lemming's turn. "I too got the lead of fourth highest of longest and strongest. But our bidding wasn't quite as gross as those who responded 2H to a 2C opening with only a four card suit. I was North and when Ben opened 2C, I bid 2NT. I became declarer in 6NT and East of course led HER fourth highest of HER best suit, diamonds. I had to be a bit careful, like win the first trick with the jack in dummy rather than lazily play the nine, but that was all there was to it."

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 3 DEALER SOUTH EW VUL

North

♠ 10 9 6

♥ A K 5 2

♦ 10 6 2

♣ J 6 3

West

♠ Q J 3

♥ J 9 8 4

♦ 8

♣ Q 7 5 4 2

East

♠ 7 5 2

♥ 10 7 6 3

♦ K 7 5 4 3

♣ 9

South

♠ A K 8 4

♥ Q

♦ A Q J 9

♣ A K 10 8

I won the jack, cashed the queen of hearts, and laid down the ten of clubs, intending to overtake with the jack. But West zapped up with the queen (remember that dummy had AK108 of clubs on view) and exited with another. I won in hand and cashed my hearts and then was able to lead the ten of diamonds and repeat the dose when East ducked. The slam was too easy for words with the book lead of fourth highest. Of course it WAS a terrible lead against a 6NT slam, but some of these Victorians like dear old Dora Dingleby, who was fortunately East, are pretty set in their ways. She had an easy way to defeat me. A spade lead would, I'm sure, have given me no chance. At least I don't think I could have made, but maybe the contract is cold even so. Too much for me to try and work THAT out. But it somehow seems to me that an unmakeable contract was made in every case we know of. I guess all roads do lead to Rome."

