

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [6]

Norway's Boye Brogeland is famous in bridge circles not just because he is a world class player, but also for a more important reason, namely that it was he who risked his livelihood, his reputation, and even his personal safety to expose the curse of collusive cheating at the top of the professional game. For years certain pairs had been whispered about, but Brogeland decided he had had enough – he went public, accusing the Israelis Fisher and Schwartz (former professional team-mates of his) of playing a crooked game. With the help of other top level players who carefully studied the available video evidence and helped break the illicit signalling methods that were employed, this pair, along with Fantoni/Nunes (Italians who were paid to represent Monaco) and two other pairs, one German and one Polish, were effectively drummed out of professional bridge.

The cheating allegations were of course fiercely resisted, and Brogeland came under enormous pressure, being accused of jealousy and worse. He also faced being sued for millions of dollars. But he stuck to his guns and was eventually vindicated. Those players are now banned. Bridge is by its nature vulnerable to cheats, but thanks in large part to Brogeland, top level bridge is now a lot cleaner than it was. It is an inspiring story.

His role in bringing cheats to justice has also served to focus attention on Brogeland the bridge player – and he is pretty good. The following hand served to decide an epic quarter-final match in the recent European Winter Games, held in Monaco. Brogeland's team, which included other world superstars Zia Mahmood and Geoff Meckstroth, went on to win the event. In the quarter-final they had a nerve-shredding tussle against another world class outfit comprised largely of Dutch professional players. The following hand – two boards from the end – decided the match.

Dealer South; N/S vul

	♠Q	
	♥QJ9	
	♦KQ82	
	♣A8765	
♠J1054		♠K863
♥3		♥1082
♦AJ1095		♦73
♣J42		♣KQ93
	♠A972	
	♥AK7654	
	♦64	
	♣10	

At the other table in the match N/S came to rest in Three No Trumps, which made in comfort. This was the Brogeland/Lindqvist auction.

Brog (S) Lind (N)

1H	2C
2H	3H
4C	4D
4N	5C
5D	6D
6H	

It's not easy to follow the bidding of many top pairs, such is their reliance on artificial methods, but this is easier than most. I think we can infer that 2C was itself game forcing, with hearts then agreed as the trump suit. There then followed an exchange of cue bids, followed by a Roman Key Card '5 Ace' enquiry. Following this, 5D presumably asked whether North held the Queen of trumps, and the 6D response would have confirmed that he did, along with the King of diamonds.

As you can see, Six Hearts is no picnic. If we view South as the 'master' hand, declarer has somehow to find a resting place for his three spade losers. Drawing trumps immediately is not an option.

Brogeland took a positive age to play the hand, watched on BBO by nearly 4,000 kibitzers, few of whom would have ventured to make a cup of tea, however tempted they may have been by some of Brogeland's trances. This was the order of play:

1. 2 of clubs led, taken by the Ace
2. small club, King from East, ruffed with the seven of hearts
3. small diamond, taken by West with the Ace
4. Jack of diamonds exit, taken with the King in dummy
5. Queen of diamonds, ruffed (disappointingly for Brogeland) with the eight of hearts and over-ruffed by declarer with the King
6. Ace of spades
7. a further spade, ruffed with the nine of hearts
8. a low club, ruffed with the four of hearts
9. low spade, ruffed with the Jack of hearts
10. low club, covered by East and ruffed (heart-stoppingly) with the 6 of hearts, Brogeland at this point having to play East - rather than West – for the heart 10
11. nine of spades, ruffed with the Queen of hearts
12. eight of diamonds, 2 of hearts from East (he only has trumps left), five of hearts from South
13. Ace of hearts (the only time declarer actually led trumps), felling East's 10 and West's 3

It took a while, as top level declarer play often does, but it was worth it as 26 IMPs hung on this one hand. Brogeland's team had made it through to the next round by the narrowest of margins.

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