

CAUTIOUS BIDDER [19]

Are you finding time to watch the European Championships, currently taking place in Ostend? If not, you're missing a treat. The 'Open' is close to being the toughest event in the bridge calendar – tougher even than the Bermuda Bowl because at least half the field is truly world class. Wales is fielding a team (including Mike Pownall of the Cardiff club who was drafted in as a late replacement), and whilst they may not be doing particularly well, any assessment of their performance must take into account the ferocious standard.

When watching on BBO I am drawn to the few players I know personally, and of course to those I particularly admire. I especially enjoy watching England's David Bakhshi. Bakhshi is friendly and approachable in person (not something that can be said of all top players), but at the table he is a cold-eyed assassin. Watch him at work on this hand, played against the Dutch World Champions. Bakhshi and his partner, Artur Malinowski, sat North/South. (Malinowski is now British, but before that he was Norwegian, and before that, Polish. For the past decade he has made his living as a bridge professional in London.)

Board 6 Dealer East; East/West vul

	♠Q75	
	♥105	
	♦54	
	♣AQJ963	
♠10832		♠KJ64
♥QJ76		♥A43
♦J1096		♦873
♣10		♣854
	♠A9	
	♥K982	
	♦AKQ2	
	♣K72	

I'll give the bidding, although since Bakhshi/Malinowski employ a variant of the Polish Club system you may find it fairly impenetrable.

<u>S</u>	<u>N</u>
1C*	2H**
2S**	3C
4C**	4H**
4S**	6C

**incorporating a variety of hands*

***goodness knows*

I can tell you that Six Clubs was natural. So I assume was Three Clubs. I could try to guess the rest, but there's not much point. All that matters is that Malinowski had put his partner in a hugely ambitious contract (one that, strictly speaking, it was not possible for him to make). As further context, England, through a combination of bad luck and some questionable decisions, had contrived to lose 34 IMPs in the first four boards of the match. They were facing a horrible defeat, with the losing margin set to be amplified by this board. At the time they languished in 11th place in the Championships, with only eight teams to qualify for the Bermuda Bowl. It is hard to imagine greater pressure.

It looks as if Declarer, even with the Ace of hearts onside, must lose a spade and a heart. And yet Bakhshi managed to make Six Clubs. This is how he did it.

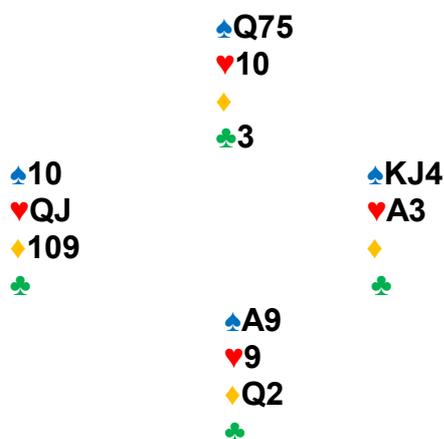
East led the Jack of diamonds, and Bakhshi thought – for several minutes. And then he played, surprisingly quickly.

Trick one was taken with the Ace of diamonds.

At trick two, a club to dummy, won with the Queen.

Then, at trick three, a heart from dummy!!! This would not have been expected by Driver, sitting East, but he had no time to think; after all, declarer might have had a guess in the suit – so he played low smoothly. But as you can see, Declarer had no guess – he had no option other than to play for the Ace of hearts to be onside.

East's duck of the heart gave declarer a chance, but he was still a trick short. Bakhshi proceeded to cash four more club tricks; then a second diamond. This was the five card ending, with the lead in declarer's hand.



Bakhshi now played the Queen of diamonds, discarding the 10 of hearts from dummy.....and what was East to do? If he retained his three spades, protecting his holding in that suit, he would have to come down to his singleton Ace of hearts. Bakhshi in that case would have thrown him in with a heart and he would have had to lead away from his spade honours. In practice Driver discarded a spade, coming down to King/Jack doubleton, so Bakhshi played Ace and another spade to claim his contract.

Seeing all four hands, I could not see how Bakhshi was going to make this contract - until he did. The commentator on BBO was in the same boat. I suppose that's one way to distinguish the masters of the game from we lesser mortals. They can find a way home in contracts that we can't see how to make even when we have sight of all four hands. That heart play at trick three, made without hesitation, was something else.

It's possible, had West elected to keep spades rather than hearts, that Bakhshi would have had to guess the spade end position. I'm sure he would have got it right. After all, Deep Finesse sees all four hands, and it tells us that this contract can't be made. But Bakhshi made it, against world class defenders.

Catch it whilst you can. There are still a couple of days to go.

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