

## WHEN DIAMONDS ARE A GIRL'S BEST FRIEND

The annual Gents vs Ladies match for the Sheila Becarevic Cup was held on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2015 between two teams of 7 pairs. Each board was played 6 times and the ladies won by a fairly comfortable 14 IMP. Two key swings occurred on boards 4 and 5, where female bidding judgement trounced its male equivalent. On board 5, for example, all 3 ladies pairs reached the good 6♦ contract on the hand below.

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

The slam makes easily on any lead except a club, as the losing club vanishes on a heart winner, and also makes if North has the club Ace and leads it. There is still a chance if North leads (say) the club Queen – declarer doesn't play the King, and hopes that the Ace can be ruffed out for a 3rd spade discard.

If West opens a strong 2♦, the only problem might be keeping East calm but 6♦ should be easy to reach. 1♦ is perhaps more standard (it is hardly going to get passed out) when East can sensibly bid 3NT at teams (poor intermediates but a diamond fit) and West might bid 6♦ straight away or work Blackwood in somehow, although raising 3NT to 4NT might be taken as quantitative. Symptomatic of the male malaise was where East bid a rather cautious 2NT over 1♦ and West bid a lazy 5♦. Picking diamonds instead of NT is reasonable (there could be 4 or 5 quick club losers and the ♠A off 3NT) but 4♦ would have been far more sensible; East would co-operate with a 4♣ cue-bid and West could bid 6♦. As all 3 male pairs missed the slam, however, a significant swing to the fair sex would still have occurred.

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Hand 4 featured an awkward decision for East at Game all. He held ♠A83 ♥4 ♦Q9742 ♣KJ104 and heard his partner open 1♦, which could be a 3 card suit playing 5 card majors. He bid a natural 3♦ as a limit raise, heard LHO bid 3♠ and partner raised to 5♦. Two passes followed and LHO now bid 5♥. Partner passed and RHO corrected to 5♠ so now a huge decision looms – do you pass, double or bid 6♦, obviously the last as a relatively cheap sacrifice rather than expecting to make it?

Clearly the hand doing all the bidding has 11 or even 12 cards in the majors but why didn't partner double 5♥ with a decent holding, as he surely must have a few – RHO has after all reverted to her partner's first suit. Perhaps West passed in the hope that they would play in 5♥ rather than revert to spades, but surely he must have some defence or he might have taken the save himself. Anyway, East realised that he couldn't sit there too long or he'd put ethical pressure on West so he doubled. Sure enough, his swinging of the axe resulted in severe injuries to his own foot when the full hand was:

♠ 4	♠ J 9 6	♠ A 8 3
♥ Q 8	♥ K 7 5 3	♥ 9
♦ A J 10 8 5	♦ K 6 3	♦ Q 9 7 4 2
♣ A Q 8 7 3	♣ 9 5 2	♣ K J 10 4
	♠ K Q 10 7 5 2	
	♥ A J 9 6 5 4 2	
	♦ None	
	♣ 6	

Wrong again! Dummy was a hideous surprise to the defence and declarer had no problem racking up +850, although at least West didn't lead the ♦A when declarer makes an overtrick. The hand can be beaten if West leads a heart, East takes the spade ace and plays a club over to get a heart ruff. Oddly enough this didn't happen.

West could perhaps have bid clubs on the way to 5♦, but East might have taken it as a slam try and bashed the slam, going one off unless South pushed on. East might also have taken the save in 6♦ as insurance but really expected to go plus.

To be fair, the double didn't make matters much worse than a pass, and losing 200 wouldn't have helped that much; an EW pair for the ladies were allowed to play in 5♦ which makes easily, while other scores were a random mix of cautious diamond part scores with overtricks and high-level contracts going off. Still, the ladies' judgement shown on these two hands was enough to confirm them as worthy winners. To rub it in, IMP scoring is a better test of bridge skill than pairs which can be rather a lottery.