

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SEA END – APRIL 2016

The start of the Formula 1 season always for me brings back memories of Australia and playing bridge in the QBA Gold Coast Congress. I suppose that the start of the quest to win the driver's world championship crown in a campaign of many races over many continents ending in Camelot with the Holy Grail is always memorable. Indeed that is what SWMBO (who is also a petrol head) tells the pussy-cats and she of course is always right. I merely dream of yesteryear and watching cricket at the Gabba as well as recalling the odd remarkable bridge hand.

Freakish distributional hands always generate the interest of the bridge playing public and back in 1996 when I was leading an EBU team to the Gold Coast, I was playing in a Pre-Congress event with one of the organising committee. My lady partner with both sides vulnerable opened 1 Heart, playing 5 card majors, and my RHO overcalled 2NT showing both minors. Somewhat surprisingly my hand was Spades A10xxx Hearts KQJxxxxx Diamonds Void Clubs Void.

Now they don't teach you what to bid with 8 card support and anything could work, and probably just bidding 6 Hearts is the middle of the road option, but I was always one to take the unorthodox, although trying to be scientific, approach and so I tried 5 Clubs, which I hoped would be read as a very strong cuebid with Heart support. LHO joined in the party with 6 Clubs and both partner and RHO passed. This was quite a favourable development, since not only had my 5 Club bid been shown to be a cuebid but also my partner had not doubled to discourage me from bidding on. Accordingly I decided to make the "master bid" (ie a bid that no ordinary mortal would contemplate, let alone make) of 6 Diamonds, showing (clearly as I thought) a first round diamond control and committing us to 6 hearts at least and asking partner to bid the grand slam, if she thought appropriate.

LHO passed and my partner thought and thought and thought. As the minutes passed, I became more and more worried that she would pass and my "scientific" bidding sequence would be exposed to the general ridicule of all. However she didn't pass but emerged with 7 Hearts, holding Spades KQ9x Hearts A10xxx Diamonds Kxx Clubs x. Thus we had reached the top spot and partner remarked on the fact that in our sequence I had managed to bid each of my two voids but had refrained from actually supporting her suit!!

However this is not what makes the hand so memorable for me. A few years later the EBU invited a Queensland team to our Summer meeting in Brighton and my said lady partner was one of the group who accepted the invitation and as part of their trip, SWMBO and I held an informal reception for them at our home. She showed me an article in an Australian bridge magazine which had featured the hand in a bidding challenge, and had in fact won us a prize for the best bid hand for the year. She handed me my share of the prize which was a couple of small cuddly koala bear toys (which still adorn one of our bedrooms). However what pleased me the most was a statement in the article by the editor that her 7 Heart bid was only valid if playing with an expert who could be trusted to bid correctly! It was one of the only times in my life that not only have I been referred to as an expert but also my bidding has been called trustworthy in print.

Bye for now,

Geoffrey Wolfarth, Hove