

## REFLECTIONS FROM THE SEA END – MAY 2016

Spring has arrived with its usual mix of weather just in time for the cricket season. An arctic storm descends like some lion from the north to stop play on the green fields of Britannia and then bathes them in soft sunlight while the white frost melts away. This time of year always reminds me of battles on the green baize and in particular of the Schapiro Spring Foursomes where in days of yore your author achieved some measure of success.

One hand stands out in my memory namely my 1% grand slam in the 2007 final that my partner, Gary, and I bid and made to force the match into extra time. It was widely reported in print at the time and the pros and cons of the bidding sequence were debated at some length. However all the expert commentary was way off track and I think that a truthful explanation of the sequence would be instructive and would show what really top players think about.

I held: S Jxx H AKx D AJxx C AQx and Gary held: S AK109xx H Jxx D Q C xxx

Gary dealt and opened 2D being a “multi” which showed either a weak 2 bid in either major or a balanced 20-22hcp. With both opponents silent, I responded 2NT which was a conventional enquiry bid asking Gary which type of hand he held. So far so good and everything was in accordance with our agreements.

Gary now bid 4D. This bid was not in the scheme of replies which we had previously discussed and I cringed at the thought that we were about to have a bidding misunderstanding, especially since we were on vugraph and bridge players all over the world would be watching. We had agreed what all the responses between 3C through to 3NT meant so I had to think it out from first principles. Well clearly he had a good hand in context of a “multi” so his weak 2 (if he had one) must be really chunky and his suit must be of good quality. Further he might be holding a 20-21 hcp hand which, since he had NOT bid the systemic bid of 3NT (which would have normally showed it) he would have a hand which had an unusual shape like 3-2-6-2 and which he was treating as balanced as well as having all the remaining honour cards.

Accordingly we were very close to a slam, probably in one of the majors, and I needed to find out exactly what type of hand he held. Therefore, I wanted him to pick the slam and so made what I thought was the normal “expert” bid of 5NT which in many situations means “pick a slam” and thus I was surprised, but not unduly concerned, when he bid 7 S!

Gary’s thoughts about the auction were not the same. He had bid 4D showing as he thought was a maximum weak 2 in spades with mild slam interest (3D showing only a moderate weak 2 hand in spades). 5NT he took as the normal grand slam force in spades which was his “known” suit and because he held two of the top 3 spade honours he dutifully bid the grand.

Sitting as dummy I was not too concerned when on a low diamond lead (best) he won in hand with the queen (ie a finesse) and after a little consideration played out the AK of trumps and found they were breaking evenly. However when Gary then solemnly announced that the contract still needed “a bit” I went beetroot red and realised we had had a bidding mix-up and had landed in the mire. However Gary safely negotiated the remainder of the play via a squeeze and the contract made and thus we emerged smelling of roses.

There is no real moral to this story except as yet another example of the maxim fortune favours the bold, but the pussycats always purr contentedly when I tell them the story again and again and again.....

See you next month.

Geoffrey Wolfarth, Hove.