



Bath Replays

15 *It never rains ...*

Another Board 13. Online on a wet day

On summer holiday at my son's house in Devon, with rainwater lapping at the door, I was getting severe withdrawal symptoms, so phoned my internet partner John Maggs for a game online, and he agreed to help. The opposition were two Life Masters, from Croatia and Arizona, whose complaints about the hot, sunny weather in those two places made an inauspicious start. It got steadily worse. They seemed to get all the good cards and played them as befits their ranking. When we did get the odd hand we played too aggressively to catch up and failed miserably - Bath Members will recognize this familiar scenario. Finally, we were dealt a decent hand.

We were playing Reverse Benji, so John opened 2♦ showing a 19-20 count or 8PT. Pass from East. We normally play a negative 2♥ for 0-6 points (game possible), a positive 2♠ for 7-9 (game demanded) and 3♣ for 10+ (slam potential). Somehow this didn't quite cater for partner having a massive 14 pts. So I decided to ignore our 'Step System' and jumped to 3S, hoping it would show not only my strength, but the fact that I also held a suit that could hold its own, even with limited support. John bid 4♦, whereupon East entered the fray with 4♥.

What to bid? 4♠ would be wimpish, 4NT not a lot of use, and double was dangerous, as 4♥ might make on a cross-ruff. I chose 5♥ to see if partner could help out in hearts. With two little hearts, he could always close me out with 5♠. Holding a singleton heart, he bid the diamond slam. I had to pass this in case partner's stop was K, to leave him as declarer for a safe lead. West, however, scuppered this cosy arrangement by bidding 6♥ - a clever sacrifice, as she knew 7♦ was a loser and probably 6♠ as well, as John had not supported my spades. I was very tempted to double, but in the end bid 6♠, intending to go down with flags flying. Surprisingly, I was not doubled by East, who turned out to hold five trumps and all the top hearts. Obviously she didn't want to expose her trump strength and who doubles a slam anyway? Getting it off is usually a 'Top', so they say.

At this stage, I should disclose just some of the EW cards (the rest of their cards are irrelevant).

♠ K
 ♥ 2
 ♦ AKJ9863
 ♣ J103

 ♠ AQJ953
 ♥ 1083
 ♦ 84
 ♣ AK

♠ 10
 ♥ 87642
 ♦ 102
 ♣ AKQ
 ♠ Q

I was expecting a heart lead, which if returned takes the slam off as I have to ruff with the ♠K, leaving East with the ♠8 as a cast iron trump trick. But luck was with me as West, playing her partner for a void in diamonds, led her 10♦. (I would have thought that had East wanted an unusual lead, she would have doubled to avoid the obvious.) Once the singleton Q♦ had dropped from East, the diamond suit was established for all my heart discards. I quickly unblocked the ♠K from dummy and could have legitimately claimed at that point, as the ♠10 dropped from West.

Unfortunately, this was the precise moment that my son chose to enter the room, and my concentration blipped. I sensed that 4 spades had gone on the first trick, but missed the vital ♠10! I returned to my hand via the clubs and played trumps. When West showed out to my AQJ, I realised with horror that East was still playing trumps and, as I thought, still held the master ♠10. Instead of playing the ♠9 and recovering my error, I played a diamond which was ruffed gleefully with the EIGHT of spades, followed by three heart tricks for three off. I sat and stared at the screen, devastated. It didn't help when my partner typed in *You had 13 tricks there*. Yes, I noticed that, partner. I made my apologies and farewells, then slunk off to a sleepless night listening to the rain pouring onto the roof.

*Jim Corbett,
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