

Board of the Week 3

By Dick Chapman

I'm reminded of the excellent series David C. ran several years ago, which he called Slam of the Month. Maybe I'll get around to some non-slam hands, but the first three have been slam auctions.

You hold the South cards.

D: W	♠Q87 ♥104
V: N	♦K3 ♣AKQ1065

West passes and partner opens 1 heart. You 2 clubs, partner 3 hearts. Ok, let's go for the slam. 4NT by you, partner 5 diamonds (0 or 3 key cards). You bid 6 hearts and it goes spade ace, ruff, down 1. What happened?

The answer is quite simple. You could have bid 6NT. Yes, you have only ♠Q87 and partner might have no spade guard. But partner's points are somewhere. If you are missing the spade ace, it's partner's job to hold the king, right? Here's the full deal:

	♠K94 ♥AKQJ95 ♦AQ95 ♣	
♠AJ10532 ♥862 ♦1086 ♣8	D: W V: N	♠6 ♥73 ♦J742 ♣J97432
	♠Q87 ♥104 ♦K3 ♣AKQ1065	

Why didn't partner respond to 4NT with 6 clubs (odd number of key cards with a club void)? Because the void in partner's suit isn't useful! 5 diamonds is the right call.

South should be concerned about the long club suit. It is entirely possible someone could ruff a club, and there is a missing key card for a second defensive trick. The long suit says "no trump." Partner's long suit says "no trump." The only deterrent is that missing spade honor. Does partner have it or not?

At the tables, only one pair in the small field found 6NT for a cold top.

Next question: Much depends on partnership style, but doesn't 2 spades seem to be the opening call for West? If that call is made, both North and South should be leery of a spade ruff and it might be easier to get to 6NT (especially North, who has the

protected king, if it's possible for North to be the declarer).

Let's assume it goes 6 hearts by South but the cards are changed. Switch the ♣8 and ♦5:

	♠K94 ♥AKQJ95 ♦AQ9 ♣8	
♠AJ10532 ♥862 ♦10865 ♣	D: W V: N	♠6 ♥73 ♦J742 ♣J97432
	♠Q87 ♥104 ♦K3 ♣AKQ1065	

Now West can double 6 hearts, assuming the defenders use Lightner doubles to request an unusual lead. East should lead a club (dummy's first bid suit that isn't trump) to get a ruff and West cashes the Ace of spades for the set. But, in Spy vs. Spy fashion (remember Mad Magazine?), either North or South might smell a rat with that double and can run to 6NT (where, as the main article suggests, you could have or should have been all along). South knows a key card is missing so it might be South's move to escape from the probable ruff by running. Given the possibility of NS running to a making contract, should West double for the unusual lead? Probably, because NS might not know to or be able to run. West has to make this decision in the dark, but doubling seems the best way to gain the set.

Lightner doubles almost never come up, but when they do, it's a deadly strike by the defense. If you use this method, you should take care to not double unless you really want the unusual lead. But, as our mentor Peggy used to say, "You don't need to double slams [unless you are using Lightner]. If you are right and are beating the slam on power, you have your top board without the double; and if you are wrong, you get a zero."

In the hand actually played (as reported above) West had a singleton club rather than a void, and the defense was a spade followed by a ruff. But with the spade king in North, it's a laydown for 6NT: 1 spade, 5 hearts, 3 diamond, 3 clubs. Wait! It's not really a laydown, is it? What if East leads a diamond? Now you must duck to the Q9 in dummy (rising with the queen), back to the diamond king, run 3 clubs to find the bad news, then a spade before the hearts and hope the ace of spades is in West (who can't lead a club). The same 12 tricks but it's not as easy as you want it to be.

All of these possibilities in one hand, which is why we keep coming back to play the game.