

Board of the Week 5

By Dick Chapman

On December 1 there were two 8-spade hands held by West:

Board 17	
West	East
♠AKQJ10985 ♥KQ75 ♦3 ♣	♠3 ♥AJ10 ♦1052 ♣AKQJ76
Makes 6S	

Board 30	
West	East
♠KQJ98743 ♥98 ♦Q9 ♣8	♠A3 ♥K ♦AJ64 ♣J109743
Makes 4S	

This reminded me of a recent inquiry from a player who asked if the club were still playing deals from The Common Game. The player expressed a concern that the boards were rigged in some way, and when I asked what the motive would be, the player suggested “to make them more difficult.” Let’s talk about this.

The Common Game is a volunteer project started by former ACBL President Jay Whipple. The goal was to have the same boards played around the world so as to give players a chance to compare their results with others. Jay also recruited experts to provide their comments on several of the more interesting boards in each afternoon session.

The Common Game uses Bridge Composer, the same dealing software our club uses, with the addition of random-generating software called Big Deal and a computer that can handle 96-bit code (required so that each possible bridge hand has an equal probability of being generated). The Common Game deals are actually more random than what our local software could produce and far more random than hand-shuffling. But readers should know that “random” doesn’t mean “uninteresting” or “easy.” It merely means that any given set of 13 cards is equally as likely to appear as any other set of 13. Yes, some hands in bridge are freakish. In addition to the two 8-spade hands on December 1, we West players got two minor suit 8-baggers on November 10 (next column):

Board 3	
West	East
♠K10 ♥ ♦AKQJ10976 ♣AQ4	♠J763 ♥AKJ3 ♦842 ♣97
Makes 6D from West side, 5D from East	

Board 14	
West	East
♠7 ♥9 ♦Q106 ♣AQ1096532	♠AK6532 ♥6 ♦K5432 ♣J
Makes 4C EW and 4H NS	

Is this a con job to make life difficult for people who tend to sit West? Of course not. It’s just bridge.

I got three Yarboroughs in one week a couple of months ago, and the odds against one Yarborough are 1828:1. Were the cards rigged to make me moan about bad cards? NO. I might not get another Yarborough for 2 years, or I might get one the next time I pick up 13 cards. It’s just mathematics, and numbers don’t have friends or enemies. And I wasn’t playing The Common Game hands on two of those three occasions.

Last story: I once played in a sectional knockout teams event (hand-shuffled cards), and put down a 7-5-1-0 dummy. About that time a director walked by. He leaned over and whispered, “don’t you just hate these computer deals?” Everyone got a good laugh.

So why The Common Game? Back to Jay’s project. If you play in our games and ACBL knows your e-mail address, you get two e-mails after each session. One is from ACBL, relaying your finishing position and any masterpoints won, and directing you to the results on ACBL Live for Clubs. The second will be from The Common Game, and this one will contain a link to your personal results as compared to the world-wide field. When you click on the link, you also get the expert analyses. Do yourself a favor and read the analyses. They provide very interesting insight into bidding and play of the boards.

And no, no, no. No one sits up at night in a basement laboratory, cackling over the difficult hands that are being sent out for play. Bridge is hard enough without needing someone to spend hours rigging hands. Just play the cards you have, and enjoy the game. Remember two things: first, if all hands were dull, we wouldn’t play the game; and second, if you do get a hard hand, everyone sitting in your seat around the room is going to have the same hard hand.

See you at the club. Often, I hope.