

Board of the Week 6

By Dick Chapman

Generally, there is little educational value in freak hands, but today I have a striking bit of information for readers. Did you know that 3 plus 1 equals 4? Yes, it's true! Read on for an embarrassing story, where the one embarrassed is your friendly non-expert commentator.

In Board of the Week 4 I described something that has never happened in my 60 years of playing: a 7NT redoubled contract. Today I have another new experience. I'll put it in question form: when was the last time you opened a 9-hcp hand at the one level then asked for key cards on your third call? Check out this hand:

D: W	♠Q107643
V: N	♥AK1073
	♦9
	♣7

I dealt and upgraded this hand to bid 1 spade. Partner 2NT, a game forcing spade raise. Wow! My 9-point hand grew up in a flash. 4 hearts by me (bidding at the four level shows a second five card suit, thus implies 3 or fewer cards in the other two suits). Partner tried to sign off at 4 spades, but 4NT by me, 5 diamonds (0 or 3 key cards) by partner, 5 spades by me, all pass. What? Five spades? Why not six spades?

The answer is simple: I said to myself "I am missing two key cards." That's right, I didn't count the ace in my own hand. That ace is the "1" in the high-level mathematical formula (3 + 1) I mentioned in the opening paragraph of this article.

LHO led the diamond king; I ruffed the second diamond and claimed:

	♠5	
	♥985	
	♦KQ10532	
	♣964	
♠Q107643	D: W	♠AK92
♥AK1073	V: N	♥QJ6
♦9		♦J82
♣7		♣AQ5
	♠J8	
	♥42	
	♦A64	
	♣KJ10832	

What was the overall problem? It was this: I allowed my evil opponent, adrenaline, to interfere with the auction. Of course I do everything I can to not display excitement at the table (too much of a "tell" to opponents, unethical with respect to partner). And that was the case with this board. But internally I was on fire. I just couldn't slow my racing mind down

enough to think through the situation. And that is the lesson of the day.

When you get a freak hand, calm down! Sort through the options and do the two things our mentor Allan Siebert always hammers: visualize and count. This time I did visualize (opening then making a slam try with a 9-hcp hand). But I certainly didn't count.

Partner later wondered if she should have corrected to 6 on the basis that she held three key cards rather than zero. In most auctions that's a logical step. But here's my (non-expert) thinking: she knew that I knew she had three key cards and stopped at 5 anyway, so it is proper to accept my judgment. How did she know that I knew she had three? Well, when was the last time you saw a Jacoby 2NT call with zero key cards? In my view, her pass of 5 was correct. Little did she know that her partner can't count to 4. She did have a nice 17-hcp hand and the huge trump fit, but I still think her pass is acceptable. I always look for ways to blame partner for my mistakes ☺ but I can't do it here.

For the record, the board was played 3 times in game, and no one got to slam. I don't know the exact auction at the other tables other than South bid 3 clubs over 2NT at one of them and that EW pair stopped in 4; the other EW stopped in 5 as we did.

If West and North pass (perhaps NS are using Flannery so North can't open 2 diamonds) and East opens 1NT, West could Texas to spades, but much better is 2 clubs. East 2 spades, then what? 4 spades by West seems a bit timid. If the partnership plays 3 hearts as a slam try in spades*, try that. East is at the top with very good spades, so cooperates with a 4 club cuebid. When East shows interest, West can RKC and maybe EW can get to slam in this fashion. If West opens 1 spade, as I did, it should be easier to get to slam.

Message 1 for the day: stop, breathe, visualize, and count. Message 2 for the day: 3 + 1 = 4, not 3.

See you at the table.

- * Some experts use 3 of the other major after Stayman as confirming the suit and a slam try:
- 1NT-2C-2S-3H is a slam try in spades
 - 1NT-2C-2H-3S is a slam try in hearts.