Board of the Week 7

By Dick Chapman

Today I will congratulate my partner for getting me to a making slam and my opponent for crafty play, and admit to some narrow thinking on my own part.

Sitting West, I find myself in 6 clubs on this auction:

10632QJ4AKQ876		D: W V: N		AAI✓ACACACAC	3
West	North		East		South
1.	2♦		Χ		Pass
2*	Pass		3♠		Pass
4 🚓	Pass		6*		All pass

North's lead was the diamond 10. I thought "surely she has the king." Then I thought, "well, maybe she doesn't, and if she doesn't, I have an end play."

Give South the diamond king. This makes the preempting player holding the 10xxxxx of diamonds. Not likely, but...maybe. I can win trick 1 with the ace, draw trump, and lead my diamond queen. South must win and will be out of diamonds and clubs, thus must give me a free finesse into dummy's majors.

So without giving this another thought (I did give it a second thought, but not the third and fourth thought I should have given), I called for the diamond ace. All followed to the second club so my plan is still active. Draw the last trump and put down the queen of diamonds.

What the...?!? North wins the king and leads the 10 of hearts. I stop playing bridge and start kicking myself. But that's not very productive; one should kick oneself after the game, and <u>learn from mistakes</u>, rather than when one is trying to salvage a cold slam that has gone wrong.

Now I "know" I'm going down 1. It's a "certainty" that South holds the heart king. But it doesn't matter. I'm either going down or I'm not, so I call for the heart queen and it holds. 6 clubs making. Here's the full deal:

	♦3 ▼K1097 ◆K109765 ♣102	
▲106 ▼32 ◆QJ4 ♣AKQ876	D: W V: N	AAKJ95 ▼AQ86 ◆A3 ♣94
	♦ Q8742 ♥ J54 ♦ 82 ♣ J53	

North's leads were tops of inside sequences, both perfectly reasonable. Notice that had these leads not been made, declarer would take the same finesses, both of which are making. I could have or should have made all 13 tricks since the cards were favorably placed.

Making the club slam was good for 6.5 matchpoints on a 10 top, and making 13 tricks would be 7 matchpoints. Bidding/making 6NT would tie two other pairs, so 8 matchpoints. Both of those pairs bid it from the West side, but I don't know the auction.

I complimented North on her opening lead and she replied that it was out of desperation rather than any particular craftiness. Her demurral notwithstanding, it fooled me.

Next question: <u>should</u> it have fooled me? Remember my thinking: she probably has the king but if she doesn't, I have the strip and end play on South. What I failed to do is come up with Plan B, which is: what do I do if North has that king?

The fact is that I didn't ever get to that question. I determined a course of action for Plan A, it was perfect, and I never once made a plan for the more likely scenario (10 from K109xxx). In fact, I didn't even visualize that pattern.

But we are not done. Only now, after the match is over, do I get to the step that Aunt Millie taught me in 1962: Count the points. EW has 30, so 10 are floating around. The non-vulnerable jump overcall might be 6-7 of these. So it's highly probable that both kings are onside. Conclusion: duck the opening lead to my hand. If South has the king, all of the other points are going to be in North. So ducking is almost foolproof to bring in the slam, and stands very likely to bring in all 13 tricks.

Final question. Should I get us to 6NT? After partner's negative double, should I bid 2NT rather than 2 clubs? Three diamonds asking for a stopper (but 3 diamonds sounds like "pick a major")? Bid 3NT over 3 spades to show a diamond stop? Should East get us to 6NT? I'll leave it to the experts to answer these questions, as everyone knows my aspirations of experthood are fading fast. My spell checker says experthood is not a word, but I don't care.

Next time I get this board I'm counting the points and visualizing the North hand.

See you at the club.