

Board of the Week 14

By Dick Chapman

Thanks to Darrell Berry for sharing this hand with me.

You may get this hand once every 10 years. If you play a lot of bridge in those 10 years, I hasten to add:

♠AKQJ1054 ♥AKQ ♦AK ♣5

Sacremént bon! I certainly have never seen this, and I've been playing for a bit longer than 10 years. 50 years more than 10, in fact. Today it's a 0-500 NLM Sectional, matchpoint pairs, vulnerable vs. not, second seat. Pass to you, what's your call?

Plan A: 6 spades which is laydown unless spades break 6-0 (~1% probability). But what's the rush?

Plan B: 2 clubs, forcing. Say your partner bids 2 diamonds, which you play as game forcing. 2 spades, your partner bids 3 clubs. Now what? You are exactly where you don't want to be. 4 clubs is minorwood for clubs. But maybe you don't play minorwood. 4NT is Roman Key Card for clubs. Do you see the problem?

The problem is you don't want to know key cards in clubs. The king of clubs is of absolutely no importance to you. It's equal to the 2 of clubs, don't you agree?

You need the ace and only the ace of clubs.

What is Plan C?

Plan C is an opening bid of 4NT. Yes, there may be esoteric partnership agreements that assign a meaning to this call, but come on, we're club players who don't have a 200-page partnership agreement. What else could 4NT be other than "regular" Blackwood? Nothing else, that's what. It says "I want aces and nothing else. Not key cards.

Remember that, if possible, you avoid having two bids mean the same thing. So 2C-2D-2S-3S-4NT would certainly be Roman Key Card for spades, with similar sequences for other suits. If that's the case, then 4NT shouldn't be Roman Key Card for anything. Just aces.

Partner bids 5 clubs, "I have no aces." Call 6 spades and lay it down absent that strange trump break mentioned above. But lo! Partner bids 5 diamonds, "I have one ace." Are you happy now? Yes you are. Reach into the box and detonate the H-Bomb: 7NT. Opening lead comes down and this is what you see:

♠AKQJ1054		♠
♥AKQ	D: S	♥9842
♦AK	V: EW	♦962
♣5		♣AJ9754

Partner is void in spades but you bid it right. It either makes or it doesn't. If you go down at 7NT on a bad spade split, don't even think about regretting your call. It was right, regardless of the result.

Today you get a normal 4-2 break. If you are in 6 spades, win the lead, play one top trump, everyone follows, claim 12 tricks (no one is going to discard the club winner, so don't play it out). Claim by saying, "drawing trump first, give club at the end." Don't claim without making a statement about the trump! Your partner will not be amused if you just put your cards on the table. Any claim should be accompanied by an explanation. Perhaps it is better to get all the trump in, then claim.

If in no 7NT with the ace of clubs in dummy, play one top spade, everyone follows, and lay the cards on the table, all winners.

Here's the full deal:

	♠72 ♥J103 ♦J8754 ♣K32	
♠AKQJ1054 ♥AKQ ♦AK ♣5		♠ ♥9842 ♦962 ♣AJ9754
	♠9863 ♥765 ♦Q103 ♣Q108	

And here's the traveler (scores are factored):

Contract	Frequency	Result	MP's
4♠	2	710	0.58
3NT	1	720	2.21
6♠	6	1460	6
6NT	3	1470	10.88

I don't have the auctions, but one wonders how you get to 6NT. If West knows about the club ace, then it's 7NT. If West does not know about that card, 6NT is suicidal. 6 spades is the call without all the aces.

Notice that 7NT doesn't gain much over the 6NT bidders, but it's a big matchpoint jump from the 6 spade bidders. When you can safely take an average to a top by counting aces, I recommend you do exactly that.

Whether playing \$0.001 or \$1.00 a point, rubber bridge players should call 7 spades, not 7NT. Why? 150 bonus for the honors, that's why. Every point is cash.

See you at the table. And let me have this hand when it is dealt, if you don't mind. I've never had one like this in all my years in the game.