

Board of the Week 19

By Dick Chapman

We have all missed slams that, upon review, we should have bid. It's frustrating, and we work hard to bid our making slams, but we still miss them. When I teach newer players, I make two general statements:

1. You don't win at the club level by making brilliant plays; you win by reducing errors.
2. If you can't stand errors, bridge is not your game!

There are many other boards that make 12 or 13 tricks, yet without x-ray vision the slam can't be bid. In a recent casual BBO game, my partner and I missed slam on three consecutive boards yet gained imps.

Check these three hands. First was Board 8 of a 14 board set:

♠AK87 ♥863 ♦Q972 ♣96		Imps D: W V: N	♠QJ652 ♥ ♦K5 ♣AKQ1084	
West	North	East	South	
Pass	Pass	1♠	Pass	
2♠	Pass	4♥*	Pass	
4♠	All pass			

East could/should have opened 1 club then reverse into spades. Our partnership uses 3 hearts after 1 spade – 2 spades to be a short suit game try, and if that had occurred, West should bid 4 spades because there is no wastage. But East elected to splinter 4 hearts, hoping West would understand that to be a void (otherwise 3 hearts, then after 3 spades by west, 4 spades would show a singleton). But this had never been discussed in terms of opener's splinter. Do you agree with West's signoff in spades after the splinter? Yes, there is no heart wastage, but look at the diamond losers.

The opening lead was the ace of hearts. Spades were 2-2 and clubs were 3-2, so it came in for 13 tricks as West's diamond losers disappeared on clubs while East's were ruffed in dummy. One pair got to 6 spades making 7 in an unscientific auction, one pair was in 5 doubled (!) making 6, one pair got the top when NS sacrificed 7 hearts for -1100 (it would have been a good sacrifice if EW were vulnerable). Our side was -0.73 imps for making 510.

Now Board 9:

♠K1043 ♥AK6 ♦KJ7 ♣964		Imps D: N V: EW	♠AJ762 ♥Q52 ♦A8 ♣A75	
West	North	East	South	
	Pass	1NT	Pass	
3NT	All pass			

East elected to open 1NT rather than 1 spade because of the problematic rebid. What happens when Responder calls 1NT? Those who never open 1NT with a 5 card major would call 2 clubs, and their partnership knows that the rebid might be a three-card suit. Good enough. West elected 3NT rather than Stayman because of the 4333 shape and stoppers in three suits. Luck #1, the lead was the heart 7 rather than a club. Declarer won in dummy and led the spade king, dropping the queen from South (Luck #2). To avoid a self-squeeze (I just made that term up, but we see it all the time), Declarer went to hand in spades then switched to a low diamond up to the KJ7. Luck #3 found the diamond queen onside. Now the board comes in for 12 tricks: 5 spades, 3 hearts, 3 diamond, and 1 club.

Make the opening lead a club. Now how do you play? Spades first, but don't take the diamond finesse. Take your 11 tricks and pay off to the lucky declarers who risked the entire contract to make an overtrick.

Should we find the spade slam? West has 14 so it might add to 31. Even with the spade fit, West doesn't like the club suit which, with the broken diamond suit, suggests there might be 2 or more losers. 690 was +0.33 imps for our side, and only one pair of 16 bid and made 6 spades. But this is BBO bridge, not a strong field. I would love to see a field of experts with this board.

And now Board 10 for the trifecta:

♠874 ♥532 ♦A ♣AQJ983		Imps D: E V: B	♠A5 ♥A86 ♦KQ1085 ♣K74	
West	North	East	South	
		1NT	Pass	
3NT	All pass			

Our pair uses 4 suit transfers, so 2 spades by responder would be a transfer to clubs. We play "one under" as super-accept, so East could bid 2NT to say "I have honor-third in clubs or better" and maybe West would venture a slam try in clubs with the call of 4 clubs. West has 6 losers, and imagining East being able to cover 5 of them is difficult. At the table and holding 11 hcp, West decided to close it out at 3NT. We don't use Puppet Stayman over 1NT so 3NT runs the risk of missing a 5-3 major fit. I suppose if we are going to open 1NT with a 5 card major (see previous board), we should use Puppet, but we don't. By the way, I saw the term "5-card Stayman" the other day, and that makes more sense than the artificial term Puppet Stayman."

The opening lead was the spade 3. Diamonds broke 4-3 but the jack was on the short side, so Declarer claimed: 1 spade, 1 heart, 5 diamonds, and 6 clubs. Our 720 was +1.27 imps as one pair didn't get to game and several pairs made 690; no pair bid slam here.

See you at the club.