

Board of the Week 20

By Dick Chapman

This week's board was played in a three table game where all three pairs got to 4 hearts but only one found the right play to make the contract. Try it yourself before reading too far in the narrative.

	♠A7 ♥A87653 ♦Q10 ♣1094	
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	V: NS D: E	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣
	♠K109 ♥KQ9 ♦642 ♣AKJ6	

You open 1NT and soon find yourself in 4 hearts. For discussion purposes, West leads the diamond ace and over to East's diamond king. East leads the club 3. You postpone the club finesse because (a) West might have a stiff queen and (b) you have a spade entry to dummy to finesse later.

King of hearts, 2, 3, void. Oh, no! You now have a heart loser, as West still holds the J104 of trump. You can't afford a club loser.

Take it from here, and remember, no peeking at the answer. In fact, I'll make this a two-page problem.

(Now playing the Jeopardy tune, ♪ ♪ tra la ♪ ♪)

Ready? Remember, there's little purpose in reading bridge stuff if you don't give the material some thought. If you have done that, check your results on page 2.

Ok, you are here with your play decision. Did you elect to lose your trump, go to dummy with the spade, and take a finesse in clubs? That's what I did. Guess what? It's not the winning play. Dropping the club queen is also a possibility, but that's wrong too.

You don't need a finesse or a drop. It's almost a certainty that West is out of diamonds. West wouldn't lead Ace and low in any other case. Try this: queen of hearts, ace of hearts, ace of spades, king of spades, ruff a spade. Now you are in this position with the lead in dummy:

	♠ ♥87 ♦ ♣1094	
♠(?) ♥J ♦ ♣???(?)	V: NS D: E	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣
	♠ ♥ ♦6 ♣AKJ6	

Now lead the 8 of hearts. If West has another spade, you have to ruff and hope to play the clubs right. But if West started with 3 spades (thus 3=4=2=4) you sit back for your free club finesse. It's easy, isn't it? Why don't I see this line of play in real time? After the deal I remarked to partner that I missed an end-play. Partner was kind enough not to say "it's a bit too late to replay the board in your mind" as she put minus 1 into the BridgeMate terminal.

The secret to winning bridge is think the entire hand through before taking action. After the heart loser jumped to life I should have asked "is there any way to avoid a finesse?" But I didn't...I just put all my eggs in one basket. As you can see from the layout, the strip-and-end-play works regardless of who has the club queen:

	♠A7 ♥A87653 ♦Q10 ♣1094	
♠862 ♥J1042 ♦A9 ♣Q875	V: NS D: E	♠QJ543 ♥ ♦LK8753 ♣32
	♠K109 ♥KQ9 ♦642 ♣AKJ6	

Bob Stepp was the player who found the correct line and got a top for his effort. Well done, Bob.

BONUS BOARD OF THE WEEK

In that same game this hand came up:

	V: NS D: N	
	♠K2 ♥KQ85 ♦AQ1072 ♣A10	

As South, you ethically keep a straight face (and don't fall out of your chair) when North opens 1 heart. 2NT by you, 4 hearts by North (no shortness, 11-14 hcp). You go into your toy box for 4NT, Roman Key Card, and eventually bid 6 hearts, easy.

Now change the facts. Partner rebids 3NT and you have an agreement that this is 15-16 with no shortness. Now 4NT and North bids 5 hearts (2 key cards, no queen of trump). What next? 5NT is king-ask. North bids 6 clubs to show that king. Your call?

There are 6 or 7 points lurking around, so in theory the king of diamonds could be offside. The grand is almost a certainty, but there is a safe way to go forward and still stop if you need to.

Try this: six diamonds. **This is not telling...it's asking.** If partner has the king of diamonds, she bids 7 hearts. If she doesn't, she bids 6 hearts. The cards:

	♠A7 ♥A109764 ♦KJ ♣KJ6	
♠J109864 ♥32 ♦543 ♣85	V: NS D: N	♠Q53 ♥J ♦986 ♣Q97432
	♠K2 ♥KQ85 ♦AQ1072 ♣A10	

In this small game, no one bid the grand.

Thanks to David Cockcroft for helping me with the recommended auction. Standard expert is that after a specific king ask, 6 of a suit lower than trump asks partner to bid the grand slam with the king of that suit, otherwise stop at the small slam.

Did I say partner should bid 7 hearts? Wait a second, the auction is not over. In a pairs game, you would call 7NT, wouldn't you? Of course you would. In fact, you have the first 15 tricks so this time you can make 9NT. See you at the table.