

Board of the Week 26

By Dick Chapman

There is little or no educational value today, but read on, if you wish, for a discussion of three boards. It's slam week for this edition. In one recent session, EW held all the good cards, and three are making slam in double-dummy conditions. Can we bid them? Let's see.

You are West and deal yourself this nice 12 count:

♠KQ ♥A1085432 ♦5 ♣K107

Non-vulnerable, you open 1 heart. East 2 diamonds (game forcing), you 2 hearts, East 4 hearts. Your call?

The board was played 12 times. 11 pairs passed. I decided to go for it: 4NT, partner 5 hearts to show 2 key cards without the heart queen (in this partnership, we don't play a kickback 4 spades call as ace-asking). Partner quite likely has three trump (but it's not 100%), so I gamble to not worry about the queen. 6 hearts. Yes, it's going to require something extra from partner, but let's see the hands:

♠KQ		♠10642
♥A1085432	V: N	♥KJ7
♦5	D: W	♦A10932
♣K107		♣A

The opening lead was the diamond 7. If the hearts are 3-0, it's a 50% guess as to who has the queen. This time they were 2-1 so the slam rolls in. I unblocked the club ace, drew two trumps, ruffed a club, and conceded a spade.

Was 6 hearts wildly optimistic? I will leave it to the experts to answer that. I admit to having had some bad boards earlier in the match and to feeling a need for a big score. I don't know how much that influenced my decision; the big feature was my holding a singleton (yes, it was sort of wastage) and 7 trump in a fit with partner. The slam is hopeless if partner holds three small clubs. With AJx you have a two-way finesse for the club queen. All in all, the game forcing diamond call plus the heart fit pushed me into the slam try. Next time I won't be so lucky. The next board:

♠AJ2		♠K5
♥QJ4	V: EW	♥K9763
♦QJ10752	D: W	♦AK98
♣6		♣A7

Our partnership plays Flannery so I can't open 2 diamonds. I don't like opening 1 diamond in first seat with this suit holding and vulnerability, but some might open it. At our table it went around to East, then 1NT – 2NT (transfer to diamonds) – 3 hearts – 4 hearts, all pass. I disagree with East's 1NT call: I can stand one deviation from the "normal NT bidding rules" (the five card major) but not a second reason (the unbalanced hand). A more normal auction might be 1H – 2 clubs (three-card Drury) – 4C (first round control and a mild

slam try) – 4H (no interest in slam). So how does one get to slam? If one insists on 1NT opening, it might go 1NT – 2NT ("diamonds") – 3C ("I like diamonds") – 4D (a key card ask) – 4NT (2 without the queen) – 6D. I suppose the best way to get to the heart slam would be West opens:

1D – 1H – 2D – 3C – 3H – 4NT – 5C (1 or 4) – 6H

But again I will leave it to the experts. Or maybe it was a lucky shot by the one pair who bid it, out of 12. At any rate, 12 tricks roll in on the loss of a single trick, the trump ace.

Either one of these two slams could be "good bridge" or a "fix," depending on your methods and your risk tolerance. If they were "fixes" then the sad part of this story is that the same pair was NS in both cases. That's life in the fast lane, and there's nothing you can do about it when you get fixed. If the auctions were "good bridge" then the same philosophy applies: there is nothing NS can do about that either, so they write down their zeros and keep playing. Next time the can't-do-anything-about-it bad scores will happen to another pair and this NS will benefit accordingly.

The third board now:

♠J876		♠KQ54
♥AJ2	V: EW	♥3
♦Q84	D: E	♦AK1053
♣A106		♣K72

At my table, East opened 1D, South overcalled 1H, West negative double, East 2S, West 4S. I'm not sure I agree with 2 spades, but we reached the normal 4 spade game. 5 pairs were in 3NT making a couple of overtricks, 6 were in 4 spades making 6 (7.5 on a top of 11), and one bid the slam. To their credit, this pair was also the only pair to make it to slam on the second board. I asked them how they did it on this one. East's reasoning was this: if West can jump to 4 after I rebid 1 spade, and I have extras, it's worth a try. Missing a key card, I might have stopped, but this pair charged forward. The long diamond suit, the stiff heart ("dummy points" if you remember that West has the spade suit), and good trump...so go. No one else did, so this pair got a top losing only the spade ace.

In all three cases, one pair and only one bid the slam. Today the pair that bid slam on the second and third boards finished first, and our pair (bidding the first slam) finished second. Does this mean "bid all close slams?" It does not. The overall finish is due to multiple factors (especially errors by opponents). Just play the cards you have, and play well. I offer this suggestion:

At the club level, occasional brilliance is great, but you win by making fewer mistakes than the other pairs.

So was it right to bid those slams? I don't have a clue. But all three boards were interesting. See you next time.