

Board of the Week 36

By Dick Chapman

Sorry for the length of this article, but there was lots to say about an interesting board I played with Kathy G. as partner. I'll let you play along with me, if you will. You are sitting South; East deals, you are vulnerable and they are not. Matchpoints. You hold these cards:

♠4 ♥Q6 ♦KQJ97 ♣J10942

West comes in with a call of 1 diamond in third seat favorable. Could be a bad 11, could be an unbalanced 20. Partner doubles, East passes. Back to you now. What is your call?

(Music playing. We are getting tired of the Jeopardy theme, so perhaps a Chopin nocturne this time.)

It's not easy, is it? Pass? 3 clubs? 1NT? 2NT? I suppose my call is unorthodox, but I blasted 3NT (I hope partner has a diamond and the AK of hearts!). Wild, but what I thought I could make.

Yikes, Partner isn't happy to stop here. She calls 4 clubs. You may or may not have discussed this, but it's certainly not natural. It's either "aces" or "RKC for clubs." You guess the latter and show zero key cards by bidding 4 hearts. Maybe you get lucky and will play this at 5 clubs, or maybe 4NT. Nope, you hear 6NT from partner and you are regretting your 3NT call.

As Bobby Wolff once said, if you bid them up, you have to play them up. Here you are on the lead of the diamond 10:

	♠AQ109 ♥AJ54 ♦A4 ♣AQ6	
♠ ♥ ♦10 ♣	V: NS D: E	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣
	♠4 ♥Q6 ♦KQJ97 ♣J10942	

Here's a novel idea: think before you play to Trick 1.

First, count the points. 21 in dummy ("Thank you, partner") and 9 in your hand. Aha, the crafty West opened with 10 or fewer hcp and a diamond suit headed by the 10. This is not a psyche, I hasten to add. Anything goes in third seat with favorable colors!

You know that every card is in the West. But you have some serious transportation issues. Think some more and consider the best line of play to make the contract.

By the way, it's a general principle that when you are in a contract that others aren't going to be bidding, you

don't worry about overtricks. In fact, in most club level games, any slam making is going to be most of the matchpoints. Continue your thinking.

(tra la la)

I won the lead in dummy, played the queen of clubs, taken by West (as expected). Here comes a spade. You do not suspect a psyche, so you put the spade king in West and play the queen. It holds and you cash out: 2 spades, 1 heart, 5 diamonds, and 4 clubs.

Here's the full hand:

	♠AQ109 ♥AJ54 ♦A4 ♣AQ6	
♠KJ65 ♥K932 ♦1063 ♣K8	V: NS D: E	♠8732 ♥1087 ♦852 ♣753
	♠4 ♥Q6 ♦KQJ97 ♣J10942	

West was kind enough to praise Kathy for her call. That's what we should all do: when the opponents get it right, we should acknowledge as much. I remember how Allan S. did that to me one time when I was a newer player ("that was nice defense there") and how much the praise from an expert made me want to keep coming back to the table. Thanks, Allan.

As you can see from the diagram, the club king was going to drop in two tricks, so double dummy play is play off all five diamonds then take the club finesse, drop the king at trick 7, win all the other clubs in hand, then a major finesse to win 3 major/10 minor tricks.

Should I play West to have 2 clubs? West later suggested yes. Remember I gave up a club early, but I can do that later just as easily. Win the opening lead in dummy and 2 more diamonds. East follows to all three tricks, so West has only 3 of that suit. Next question: what hand opens 1 diamond with only 3 of the suit? A 4=4=3=2 hand, that's what. Yes, West broke system by opening 1 diamond when the EW methods are "may be short" for 1 club openings, but that's irrelevant: I can discover the two-club holding easily enough.

This was the second board of the set. We played the first board in normal time, so I had plenty of time to think about this one. As an aside, this is a good reason to not discuss an early board until all boards are completed: you never know when you will need some time on a later board of a set. Because I had time, I spent a minute or more before I played a card to trick 1. My courteous opponents didn't say a word about my taking extra time to think.

In preparation for this article, I at first thought that if West has 3 clubs, the contract couldn't be made, so one might as well play for the drop and make an overtrick. But a double-dummy analysis I used says 6NT can be made even when West holds 3 clubs. Perhaps there is a squeeze when South runs all the diamonds, but I don't see it clearly even when all the cards are in sight.

As described above, I could/should have played the diamonds first to get a read on the West hand. I didn't see that line of play, but was happy enough to make 12 tricks. The traveler was kind to our pair, with 10.5 matchpoints on a top of 12.

Four pairs made 13 tricks, so I guess they played it better than I did. But only one bid 6NT making 7 and one other besides us were in 6NT making 6.

Another interesting part of this board is what to do if West passes and North opens 2NT. I suspect this is what happened at most tables. Some play 3 spades as a relay to 3NT, with the next call by responder being a key-card ask in a minor (4 clubs for clubs, 4 diamonds for diamonds). But I can't do that without more strength or 6 diamonds. One optional extension of this method is after 2NT-3S-3NT, 4H by responder shows 5-5 or better in the minors with heart shortness, and 4S shows 5-5 or better in the minors with spade shortness, both of which are obvious slam tries. My hand would qualify for a 4 spade call.

Any of these methods would get us to 6NT. But our agreement did not include the 4H/4S calls to show a splinter in the major. So with this partnership, I might have tried a quantitative 4NT and just live with the result. Experts might have other methods.

A special thank you to David C. for his assistance in preparing this article. And thanks to David and Bill J. for your courteous treatment at the table.

See you at the club.