

# Board of the Week 51

By Dick Chapman

Many of the recent Boards of the Week have illustrated errors that a certain writer has made. They are written in sort of “misplay these hands with me” style.

Today is a switch to a good play. A statement attributed to Satchel Paige is “If you can do it, it ain’t bragging”. I hope you don’t think this is bragging, but it was a pretty cool play.

	♠J ♥83 ♦KJ10875 ♣AQ92		
♠103 ♥A7652 ♦A43 ♣J108	IMPS V: NS D: N	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	
	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		
North	East	South	West
Pass	3♠	Pass	Pass
4NT (!)	Pass	5♣	All pass

BBO casual pairs play, so there is no telling what will happen. North passed (why?) then forced to the five level (why?) Ok, here we are. With these colors, I gave some thought to saving at 5 spades but...the doubler might have a spade, partner might have the ace, and I have two other aces. I decided to defend and led the spade 10. Partner queen, declarer ace. Decide now how you are going to beat this contract. Where is your third trick going to come from?

I don’t have any music for you today, so just think. In fact, we all should remember our friend Robert Downie’s oft-made comment “I don’t have a problem, I just need to think a moment.” He usually said this when in third seat at trick 1, but opening leaders should also stop. There is both an ethical and strategic reason for this: if you stop and think on every hand, you don’t unethically telegraph unauthorized information to partner, and you don’t give a “tell” to declarer when you have a problem and when you don’t.

Ok, do you have a plan to beat 5 clubs? Read on for my play. Declarer drew trump in three rounds, then led a low heart from dummy. Partner 4, Declarer queen, and you win the ace. You had better be ready. If you think now, it’s too late, as you will give away the layout.

I led the 3 of diamonds. Declarer tanks and I know we are beating this. Sure enough, Declarer plays the 5 from hand and partner plays the queen, which wins.

Back comes a diamond and we beat the contract. The full hand:

	♠ J ♥ 83 ♦ KJ10875 ♣ AQ92	
♠ 103 ♥ A7652 ♦ A43 ♣ J108	IMPS V: NS D: N	♠ KQ98652 ♥ J4 ♦ Q6 ♣ 43
	♠ A74 ♥ KQ109 ♦ 92 ♣ K765	

By being ready, I was able to play my low diamond in tempo. Not too fast, not too slow...just like the first several tricks, in tempo. Declarer has to guess: did I lead low from the queen, or low from the ace? Hmm, what would you do as declarer? Who leads low from an ace?

The answer: defenders who see no other way to beat a contract. Partner can’t have the heart king because Declarer was attacking that suit. The only hope is the diamond queen in partner’s hand. If it’s not there, it’s not there. If I lead the ace then a low diamond I give away the hand.

Another thought: would the defense be the same in matchpoints, where overtricks are more critical than at IMPs? Answer: yes. Even if declarer has a stiff queen and you give up an overtrick, it’s still the right play. The reason is you aren’t trying to beat the field here. The field isn’t going to be in 5 clubs! If the contract makes, with or without an overtrick, it’s going to be a very poor score for your side. Later, I checked the traveler: 16 pairs played the board, and only 2 were in 5 clubs (both down 1, with the other pair playing it from the North side, leading diamonds and guessing the suit wrong). Several pairs beat 3 spades by one trick, and 2 pairs found the magically making 3NT.

Our IMP score wasn’t that great because there was no big swing on the board: only 4.87. In matchpoints it would have been second-top.

Did you find the right play? I’m not advocating underleading aces, but it works when the facts are right. They were certainly right on this board.

One more consideration. Declarer should perhaps put the diamond ace in the West hand on the basis that East is very close to an opening 1 spade if holding KQ-seventh of spades and a side ace. It’s not 100%, as this would still be only 9 hcp (the heart jack and diamond queen have not appeared at the decision point), but it’s something to consider. Isn’t bridge a wonderful mind exercise? See you at the table.

A related story is on the next page.

I credit David C. for making me the victim of a play like this about 15 years ago. I still remember it because just a few days later I used the same play to good effect in a sectional Swiss. I made a neutral lead at trick 1 then scored the trump ace at trick 2. I smoothly underled a side suit ace to Judy's queen at trick 3. She led the suit back to my ace, and I led the suit a third time for a ruff. Down 1 was a big swing for our team, as the game was making when our teammates were declaring at the other table. The layout was something like this (spots approximated):

	♦K983	
♠A		♠53
♦A52		♦Q6
	♦J1074	

Spades were trump, diamonds the side suit. I had one trick with the ace, so needed 3 more. Underleading the ace was the only hope to beat the contract. From declarer's point of view, I was underleading the queen and East has the ace. Oops, that wasn't the case. If I had played the ace then low, declarer will win the king, draw trump, and make an overtrick. A bridge tip: when you are defending, 9 tricks by declarer is better than 11.

See you at the table.