

Board of the Week 64

By Dick Chapman

Sometimes it's important we follow the "rules" of bridge. But on other occasions, we break the "rules" (at our own peril). As an example, we might lie about count when it doesn't matter, we might underlead an ace in a suit contract when we see the king on our left and partner might have the queen, etc.

One of the "rules" is "skip diamonds on the way up the line." Another is "don't ask for key cards holding a void." In this week's board you will see I broke both rules, to good advantage.

Imps scoring, neither vulnerable. North deals and passes. East, your partner, opens 1 club. You hold

♠ — ♥AQ104 ♦AQ982 ♣K1085

The reflexive action is to bid 1 heart. But look at the hand. It's quite strong in any of three suits. If you bid 1 heart and opener bids 1 spade or 1NT, your second bid is going to undervalue your hand. This partnership doesn't have an XYZ game-forcing bid of 2 diamonds available, so set that aside. You know you are going to game, but what's the rush? I bid 1 diamond, breaking the first "rule."

North comes in with 1 spade and partner bids 2 diamonds. Visualize what partner knows about your hand: you have 4 and probably more than 4 diamonds, you probably do not have 4 or more hearts, and you have 6 points at the bottom with no upper limit.

Now pull out the 2 heart card. This isn't technically a reverse (you are not the opener) but it sends a strong message to partner that you have extras. And you do. Two hearts is 100% forcing, of course.

Next you hear four hearts from partner. It is undiscussed whether 2 hearts is game forcing, so let's assume it is not and thus 4 hearts by East is not weaker than 3 hearts. Now what? Pass meekly?

No! This is imps where you bid all your close games and small slams (it's more important

when vulnerable, but still, bidding aggressively pays off). Do you use Roman Key Card with a void? This breaks the second "rule." But I did it. We don't play kickback but I have the trump queen and two key cards so don't need that tool (partner won't/can't bid 5 spades). After my 4NT partner comes back 5 hearts to show 2 key cards without the heart queen.

Do you blast to slam? Yes you do. You have a 4-4 fit and ruffing power. You need extras from partner, but his 4 heart call shows extras. Bid it and hope to make it. You get a top spade and see this layout.

♠		♠98
♥AQ104		♥KJ63
♦AQ982		♦K65
♣K1085		♣AQJ6

All you need is the cards to behave. They may very well not behave based on North's spade call. But today you get lucky and it all works out:

	♠AKQ103	
	♥98	
	♦J3	
	♣7432	
♠		♠98
♥AQ104		♥KJ63
♦AQ982		♦K65
♣K1085		♣AQJ6
	♠J76542	
	♥752	
	♦1074	
	♣8	

I ruffed the spade, drew two rounds of trump to ensure I didn't have a problem there, then ruffed another spade. Over to dummy to draw the final trump. Now diamonds, with the club king to get back to the long diamonds if they break 4-1. When both red suits broke normally, I had 2 spade ruffs, 4 natural hearts, 5 diamonds, and 4 clubs. That's 15 tricks, so I should have bid 9 hearts.

Was this luck? Perhaps. If the red suits broke poorly, it would have been much more difficult. But I still think my calls were correct given the cards I held and the auction I heard.

The board was played 16 times with only two pairs bidding slam. Three pairs stopped in 5 hearts, the rest in 4 or defending spades.

See you at the table.