

Board of the Week 67

By Dick Chapman

I write a lot about my errors, but this time I got one right. It seemed routine at the time. In fact, it was online matchpoint pairs at our club, and I commented to the table "Another average board." Later the traveler showed 95% our way. Why? Let's take a look.

I'm West declaring 4 spades on this layout:

♠AKQ10987	♠J
♥A4	♥J8532
♦J	♦983
♣KJ4	♣A863

1S-1NT and South stuck 2 diamonds into the auction. I slightly underbid the hand at 4 spades and got the diamond ace and then the 4. Ruff this, and the game is in the bag, right? You can make it in your sleep: 7 spades, 1 heart, and 2 clubs. On to the next board.

Wait! This is matchpoints, and you want every trick. Can you make 11 tricks? How about 12? Let's see.

The source of possible additional tricks is...clubs. How do you play the club suit?

While you study I will listen to the Letter Scene from Le Nozze di Figaro. The Countess is my next wife, Renee Fleming*, and the mezzo singing Susanna is Cecelia Bartoli. It's not good video quality, but it's Mozart. Enjoy here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLtgZewjwgA>

Are you back? How did you play the clubs? You have two for sure. If the queen is in South you can get three. And if, in addition, the suit is breaking 3-3 or you get an inferior defense, you can have four...IF, IF, IF you play it right. If you have four club winners, your heart loser evaporates.

Over to the next column for a discussion.

*By the way, Judy says if I can get the goddess Renee as my next wife, go for it.

First, go to the spade jack and advance the club 3. Put up the jack. Lo! It holds, and now you have a third club. Draw trump and run all the spades in case someone incorrectly discards a club. In my case no one did that, so at the end I played the club king and finally over to the ace to discover 3-3 clubs. The hand:

	♠32 ♥Q1097 ♦75 ♣1072	
♠AKQ10987 ♥A4 ♦J ♣KJ4		♠J ♥J8532 ♦983 ♣A863
	♠654 ♥K6 ♦KQ1062 ♣Q95	

As I reported, it seemed routine. But the field was making only 11 tricks. Let's go over some of the plays.

A couple of declarers gave up a heart almost immediately, one trying to set up a fifth heart for a discard. Others led trump from the top then over to the ace of clubs and back to the jack, losing a diamond and a heart, 11 tricks. Two went to the spade jack then led the ace of clubs and then a club to the jack. This wastes an entry and gives up on the chance of a 4-3 fit. You have to finesse BEFORE the ace of clubs.

There were a few other lines of play, but no one played it the way I describe. I didn't get a cold top because one other pair got a heart lead from North, gave up a heart to North, then got a free finesse when North led a club and South put up the queen...so the wasted entry was returned when defenders didn't cash their diamond trick. A tie with us for the 95% board.

This discussion is not to brag, but to point out the need to stop before you play a card to trick 1. Look over the cards and ask whether you can improve on an otherwise good situation. You are not desperate here as you are always going to make. But if going for an overtrick isn't particularly risky, do it. Here you have to notice that there are two entries to dummy (spade jack and club ace) and that you must not cash that club ace when you are over there. You must use the club ace later in case the suit divides 3-3.

How often does a side suit divide 3-3? With no other information, about 36% of the time. The club queen has to be in South, which is another factor. But it's not a zero possibility, and you should play to make more tricks if they are there.

Read the next Board of the Week for my zero in the same match.