

Board of the Week 70

By Dick Chapman

Some board are plain vanilla and some you could write about in several different ways. This one falls in the latter category. There is no instructional value so I won't give you half the cards and pose a question. I'll just narrate along. Well, I might ask a question along the way. Here we go:

Casual BBO Imp Pairs, all vulnerable:

♠AQJ97 ♥9 ♦A1052 ♣AK9			♠ ♥AJ643 ♦KJ98 ♣Q854	
West	North	East	South	
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass	
3♦	Pass	4♦	Pass	
4♠	Pass	6♦	All pass	

Per normal bridge practice, 3 diamonds was a game-forcing jump shift. East's 4 diamond call was intended as key-card asking in diamonds, but there is perhaps a better way to inquire. West was in on method, it seems, and bid the second step to show 3 key cards. Who has the trump queen? East doesn't know but blasted slam anyway.

Back to West for the play. The opening lead is the heart 2 won in dummy. If West guesses the trump queen, it's easier and there would be no Board of the Week, so let's say West leads a top diamond from dummy and loses a finesse to North's queen. There is still a trump outstanding. Here comes the heart king. What the hey? North led the 2 of hearts from the king against a slam? As Laurel would have said, "Well, here's another nice mess you've gotten me into, Ollie."

As we have often heard at the table, play the contract you are in, not the one you wish you were in. This is true for any contract but especially for any contract that you know the field will not be in, for any doubled contract, and for any slam. Put the cards where they need to make it.

You have to ruff this heart, of course. Now give the layout a look and figure out what

your best chance is. I am not saying experts will get it right, I'm merely asking you to imagine the most favorable layout to make.

With 8 spades lurking about, it is highly unlikely you can ruff out the king by leading low cards. You don't have enough trump in dummy. Anything else?

Your best (perhaps only) shot is a 4-4 division of the spade suit with North holding the king (a ruffing finesse position). Yes, this is unlikely, but I will give you that layout and ask you to play the board. In fact, let's show all the cards:

	♠K1062 ♥KQ102 ♦Q63 ♣J3	
♠AQJ97 ♥9 ♦A1052 ♣AK9		♠ ♥AJ643 ♦KJ98 ♣Q854
	♠8543 ♥875 ♦74 ♣10762	

Wow, look at the opening lead again. It worked, so I guess you can't argue. Anyway, let's play cards. Ruff the heart lead at trick 4, lead the spade ace (discard a heart), the spade queen (covered and ruffed), the club ace, the spade jack (discard a heart). Here is the layout at this point:

	♠10 ♥Q10 ♦6 ♣J	
♠97 ♥ ♦A ♣K9		♠ ♥J ♦J ♣Q85
	♠8 ♥8 ♦ ♣1076	

Now a spade from hand and ruff with the last diamond in dummy. Back to the club king,

draw the last trump with the ace (discard dummy's fourth heart) and lo! the fifth spade is good...discard the losing club in dummy. The final trick is the club queen.

What are the odds of a 4-4 spade split? According to one source, 32.7% *ab initio*. But only half of those will have the king in the correct place, so now we are down to a 16% slam. Ugh, not my sort of contract.

I said you could write about this hand in different ways. Did you notice East's BART-like hand? What in the world am I talking about? It's not a train in San Francisco. I don't play BART with any of my partners, but it's in one of the dusty corners of my toolkit. Opener 1 spade, responder 1 (forcing) NT, opener 2 clubs. Responder holds 5 or more hearts. With a strong hand, responder would have bid 2 hearts to start, game forcing. With a weak hand, responder bids 2 hearts over the 2 club rebid and the auction (usually) ends. But Goldilocks, you hold the middle hand (invitational values), and the convention comes into play: responder bids an artificial 2 diamonds. Opener can bid hearts or make other calls per the details of the agreement. The various possible hand types for both opener and responder can't be described here. Newer partnerships might be willing to limit the way BART is used until they get comfortable. Use it only for the invitational heart hand, that is. But there are other uses.

Of course, like any bridge convention, you have to give up something. What do you give up? The ability to make a natural (and weak) 2 diamond call after opener's 2 club rebid.

Interested in BART? Check out this source, which incidentally refers to its use in a Grand National Teams event by our friend and mentor Gordon Campbell and his partner Judy Gartaganis:

<https://www.acblunit390.org/Simon/bart.htm>

Larry Cohen is said to know something about bridge as well, so you can check out a source he prepared:

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/bart>

Meanwhile, I'll see you at the table at the club, where you will guess the diamond queen correctly and deprive me of a writing opportunity.

Oh, one more thing. If you are indeed fishing for the diamond queen and have no other information, do your thinking before you play a card to the opening lead. You are not thinking about the heart play, but the opponents don't know that. In fact, you always pause at trick 1 just to get your plan in place. You have a two-way finesse for the diamond queen. Ok, ready? Win the lead and plunk down the jack of diamonds. This is a "table-feel" case. With strong opponents, you won't get a flicker. But with some opponents, a South holding the queen will break tempo slightly, trying to decide whether to cover. If that happens, take the finesse. If South plays low smoothly, win the ace and finesse back toward the K9 in dummy. This won't always work, because good South defenders holding the queen will be thinking along with you and thus will be prepared to play low smoothly. And unethical South defenders holding 74 in the suit will break tempo as a way to intentionally luring you into thinking they have a reason for the hesitation (later, of course, they will claim they were deciding how to give trump suit preference with their carding).

See you at the table.