

Board of the Week 84

By Dick Chapman

David C. used to write a column he called "Slam of the Week", published in our monthly newsletter. This could have been one of his columns. I thought it was pretty standard, but it's BBO and we were one of only three pairs to find the grand holding 37 hcp. Imps, none vulnerable, East deals:

♠AJ1042	♠KQ7
♥A8	♥KQJ6
♦AKJ53	♦4
♣6	♣AKQ84

West	East
1♠	1♣
3♦*	2♥
4NT	3♠
5NT	5♠
7NT	6♣
	Pass

After my reverse, West's 3 diamond call was game forcing (in our system, only 2NT, a lebensohl-ish relay to 3 clubs, is non-GF). 3 spades is a checkback, in case responder has 5 of the suit. She did, and 17 points to go along. She checked for key cards and specific kings and bid the grand.

However, there is a slightly better call than 7NT. Realizing that East could have a king less than the actual holding (visualize ♥QJ106), perhaps West should bid 6 hearts. What is this? It's not natural, as spades is the agreed suit. We have discussed in these articles: after a check for specific kings, a bid of a higher suit (lower than trump) says "bid the grand slam if you have the king of this suit, otherwise stop at 6 of our suit." Since I do have the king of hearts, I would have bid 7 spades, and West could then safely convert to 7NT.

I consulted with David, and he suggested that I as East also have a slightly better way of handling the auction. Once West demonstrates all the key cards and makes a grand slam try, I can take matters into my own hand and just bid 7 spades. My heart and club honors are solid, so West doesn't need anything else. After 7 spades by East, West can and will convert to 7NT.

We got a diamond lead from North, so the best contract is 9NT. On that lead, we have the first 15 tricks: 5 spades, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds, and 3 clubs. Only any other lead we only make 14 tricks, so 8NT. I couldn't find that bidding card on the screen.

The traveler is in the next column. If you want a few laughs check out some auctions on BBO. Example is this one...

West	East
	2NT
3♥	3NT
4NT	5♥
Pass	

...making 5 on a 4-2 fit in hearts and pulling down a nice tidy -9.13 imps for their efforts. You really have to work hard to bid that poorly. I know, because some of my auctions at the club fare about as well. I have had far too many -300 scores on botched auctions. But here the East hand opened 2NT with a singleton diamond (instead of reversing) and then missed the transfer to spades, then they didn't get to slam on 37 points. That's not bridge. It's not even Go Fish or Slapjack.

Here's the traveler:

Result	Score	Imps
7NW=	1520	10.6
7NW=	1520	10.6
7♠W=	1510	10.27
6NW+1	1020	1.73
6NE+1	1020	1.73
6NE+1	1020	1.73
6♠W+1	1010	1.6
6♠E+1	1010	1.6
6♠W+1	1010	1.6
6♦W=	920	-0.67
3NE+4	520	-8.2
4♠W+3	510	-8.4
4♠W+3	510	-8.4
4♠W+3	510	-8.4
5♥W=	450	-9.13

The one other pair that got to 7NT had an auction identical to ours, except after 5♠ East blasted 7NT without checking for kings. As mentioned, there are better ways, but a pair should get there regardless of methods.

I have actually heard it said at our club "I never bid the grand slam" or "I don't bid the grand slam in a team game." Rather conclusive statements, those. It is certainly true that we don't take big or even moderate risks to bid the grand when the small slam is virtually assured. But "risk" is a funny word. It's often hard to measure, but occasionally (as in this week's board) it can be fairly easy. I will never forget our team being beaten in the finals of a knockout in DeGray when I considered but then didn't bid the grand on the final board of the set while the other team did bid it. It was a long ride home. Sorry, Art, I incorrectly assessed the risk. I'm as conservative as the next person about this matter, but when the facts say bid it...bid it.

See the next page for a bonus board.

For a laugh, read this bonus story:

Weekly BBO Robot 8 board tournament, matchpoints, NS vulnerable, you hold these nice cards as South

♠A6 ♥AK1074 ♦AK6 ♣J103

East deals and calls 2 spades. With 19 you double, West 3 spades, pass, pass. What now? You could shoot 4 hearts but there is a better call. Let's double and see what happens. This is a value double...do something intelligent, partner. Partner bids 4 diamonds. Now what?

I elected to bid 4 hearts, just in case partner has 3 or wants to bid 5 diamonds or something. Lo! Robot Partner calls 6 diamonds, all pass. Gulp. You have to play this, and for some reason you got a very, very favorable lead from East: the club 7. Looks like a singleton, but who knows since this is BBO Robot play. You get this:

	♠75 ♥53 ♦107532 ♣AQ98	
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		♠ ♥ ♦ ♣7
	♠A6 ♥AK1074 ♦AK6 ♣J103	

Well, you did promise values, but six diamonds??? You aren't going to make it, but it's free bridge so give it a shot. Remember your hand is dummy and North is Declarer. You have a free finesse here, and your 10 drives out the king. Already you are wondering why West didn't just duck smoothly. Doesn't matter, take the trick and the club suit is now good. Now AK of diamonds and guess what? East has the QJ tight! Wow, with this luck we should be in a casino making 10 straight passes at the dice table.

Draw the final trump with the 10. It's going to get better but you don't know that yet. AK of hearts, then ruff a heart and the hearts are 3-3. Back to the ace of spades. Notice the trip back to the good hearts would not have been possible if those stupid robots had led their suit to start. Now you score 1 spade, 4 hearts, 5 diamonds, and 4 clubs, for 14 total tricks. Somewhere along the line you discarded a winner, but you get the idea. Maybe it was a club discard and you only scored 3 club tricks. A cold top (15 pairs) for your 1390 score.

The full layout is shown in the next column:

	♠75 ♥53 ♦107532 ♣AQ98	
♠Q94 ♥862 ♦984 ♣K654		♠KJ10832 ♥QJ9 ♦QJ ♣72
	♠A6 ♥AK1074 ♦AK6 ♣J103	

Double dummy it makes 7 diamonds. Do you see how? Let's say they lead a spade. With x-ray vision you win and lead 2 top diamonds. Now 4 clubs (discarding the losing spade). Ruff a spade with the diamond 6, then 2 hearts and ruff a heart. Now, finally, the 10 of diamonds to pull in West's final trump. The closed hand (North) is good. The only loser was the spade in North, and this got ruffed before you drew the third trump.

So is 7 diamonds the par score? No. According to my double dummy tool, it also makes 7 hearts or 7NT. I haven't spent any time on these two contracts.

BBO Robot play is terrible. But it's just 8 boards once a week in this event. There is another 12 board daily game where, for some reason, the field is tougher and/or the robots play a little stronger. In that event there are 2500 in one huge field. As a non-expert, I generally score in the mid 50's up to low 60's. Any time I get over 60 I will be in the top 100 of the field, good enough.

N.B. Whatever you do on BBO, realize it's not "bridge." The robots are unreliable (six diamonds?) and they won't say hello to you when you sit down. They also don't bring a cake when it's your birthday. Instead, come to the beautiful Curtis Finch Bridge House. There you can silently thank all the donors who made it possible and who continue to make it possible with ongoing financial support. And you can play in the best card room I have ever seen with the best friends you could ever want.

Want to improve your game? Keep playing, of course, but take advantage of the good curriculum provided by The Bridge House. Read. Frankly admit your errors. Ask questions, and it doesn't have to be top experts you approach...ask your peers as well. And keep playing. I said that already, but I'm saying it again.

See you at the club. And don't forget Carolyn S's command: be nice.f