

Board of the Week 85

By Dick Chapman

Here's a board that put me on the spot. See if you can do better than I did. Club matchpoint pairs, all red, you dealt yourself this modest set of cards as South:

♠Q763 ♥J9 ♦KQ82 ♣1097

You pass and West opens 1 club. Partner 2 clubs, which is a Michaels cuebid showing both majors. East passes and you dutifully bid 2 spades. Partner three spades. Your call?

Partner knows you have something (otherwise East would have made a call) but it could be much less than your actual holdings. Yet partner is over there inviting game. Accept or not?

Sure, let's go for it. Four spades. You get the club king and here we are:

	♠AJ842 ♥AQ1094 ♦J ♣A4	
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣K		♠ ♥ ♦ ♣
	♠Q763 ♥J9 ♦KQ82 ♣1097	

Do you see the problem? I certainly saw it when dummy came down. I am missing two major kings and can't get to my hand to take finesses!

But hold on. Never give up. There are actually two ways to get to your hand. Study a little more and see if you spot these two ways. Hint: in both you have to lose a trick. Don't read further until you study the hand. In fact, I'll listen to Dolly a few minutes while you think about the two ways.

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Ready? See next column.

The two ways, and the two approaches to making 4 spades, are this:

1. Lead the ace of spades, then, if the king doesn't drop, try to split the spades 2-2. You can arrive in your hand later, with the spade queen, and finesse hearts.
2. Lead the queen of hearts. If the defenders don't take the king, you are going to make no matter what. Just lead a couple of spades and win all the needed tricks. But of course they will take the heart king. Now you have the heart jack as the entry to hand, and you take the spade finesse. If it works and spades are 2-2, you make.

So which is it going to be, Bridge Champion? Give up a heart and finesse spades, or give up a spade and finesse hearts? You have to make your choice immediately. Keep in mind you are going to lose two minor suit cards along the way. Time to think some more. Decide on a plan before you read further.

Well? What did you decide? See next page.

Here was my plan: I played ace and low spade, adding the small shot at dropping a stiff spade king to what I thought was a coin-toss of approaches. At trick 3, West won the spade king (I had preserved the queen as an entry, relying on 2-2 split). Eventually I got back to that spade queen and led the heart jack. Losing this to East's king, down 1. Sorry partner.

Here's the full hand:

	♠AJ842 ♥AQ1094 ♦J ♣A4	
♠K9 ♥72 ♦A1075 ♣KQJ63		♠105 ♥K853 ♦9643 ♣852
	♠Q763 ♥J9 ♦KQ82 ♣1097	

I would have prevailed had I gone the other way. I could have led the heart queen. West would grab the king and the defense will score two more tricks. Now I get back in and get to dummy with the heart jack. The spade king is onside and the contract makes (losing 1 heart, 1 diamond, and 1 club)

Was my decision just a bad guess? I don't know, because I'm not an expert. I get every finesse wrong, I guess every KJ combination wrong, and I never know where that queen lies. I also never complain about my card luck or skill.

Well, maybe sometimes I do.

Ok, always I do. We all do. It's in the DNA of bridge players.

I know this: 5 pairs bid and made 4 spades. I don't know their line of play. Three of them played it from the North side and may have received some help from defenders who can't see the layout. Only 2 pairs were in 4 down 1. So it was a nice solid 5% on the board for our side.

Making would be an additional 7 matchpoints. To make it sadder, we finished third and missed first by...7 matchpoints. Urp.

I always wonder why defenders like it when I declare. This hand may be part of the reason.

See you at the club. And don't laugh at me when I botch the next one.

Wait, there is a serious element to that last statement. When an opponent makes a terrible play (which we have all done, and often) and you get a good score, take great pains to keep your mouth shut. Enter the score, privately add a ☺ if you want, wish the opponents good luck, and change the subject. Be kind, in other words. I know how much I appreciated our opponents on this week's board. They knew they

were getting a good score, but they didn't rub it in. When I was groaning about getting it wrong, they were not pointing out the obvious (that the play could have gone the other way). In other words, try to be a good winner.