

MOUNTNESSING BRIDGE CLUB

Meets every Thursday at 7.25 for 7.30
at Mountnessing Village Hall, Roman Road, Mountnessing, Essex, England, CM15 0UG

“Points” do not necessarily point accurately!

Hand played on 02/08/2009 George Curtis Swiss Teams
Board number 48
Dealer West
Vulnerability East / West
Submitted by Alaric Cundy

	North ♠ 982 ♥ 2 ♦ AKJ852 ♣ 873					
West ♠ - ♥ QT964 ♦ Q64 ♣ AKJ96		East ♠ QT65 ♥ AK753 ♦ 3 ♣QT4				
The Bidding						
	South ♠ AKJ743 ♥ J8 ♦ T97 ♣ 52		North No 5♣ end	East 4D♦ 5NT	South 4♠ No	West 1♥ 4NT 6♥

It was by chance that a few hours before this hand cropped up at the table I found myself reading an interesting article by Sandra Landy about the origins of and logic behind the ‘Milton High Card Point System’ that even the most experienced of players use as the basis of hand evaluation. Sandra concluded her article with the comment that this method of hand evaluation only held good for balanced hands played in No Trump contracts, because trumps give additional opportunities to win tricks.

If Sandra is in need of an example to prove that point, she needs to look no further than this hand, which cropped up in the George Curtis Swiss Teams event in 2009. On the surface the West hand holds ‘only’ 12 HCPs and East ‘only’ 11 – the combined total of 23 is not even enough for game if one slavishly follows the advice that ‘you need a combined 25 HCPs to make a game’. Just to emphasise this point, neither of the two unsupported queens carry any weight, so the effective ‘Points’ total is 19 – barely enough for a one-level contract!

West opened 1♥, and East bid 4♦, a ‘Splinter’ bid that showed good support for hearts, game-going values, together with a singleton or void in diamonds. South tried to get in the way with a bid of 4♠. The textbooks tell you that you shouldn’t use ace-asking conventions on a hand that includes a void, but here South’s bid led West to suppose that any key cards held by East were unlikely to include what would be a useless Ace of Spades. 4NT

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was 'Roman Key Card Blackwood', with hearts as the presumed trump suit. North did her best to be obstructive by bidding 5♠. East / West were playing the 'D1P2 / R1P2' method of counteracting interference in an Ace-asking sequence. A double of 5♠ would show the 'first step' response – i.e., it would be equivalent to an uncontested response of 5♣, which would have shown 0 or 3 key cards, pass would be equivalent to the second step – which would have been 5♦, showing 1 or 4 key cards, whereas the bid actually made – 5NT – shows the next step up, which is equivalent to a response of 5♥ in an uncontested auction, showing 2 key cards without the Queen of trumps. That was enough for West to bid 6♥. When the defence started by attempting to cash spade tricks and it turned out that the trumps split 2-1, Dummy's solitary diamond loser vanished on Declarer's long clubs and 13 tricks were amassed.

So how did East / West manage to reach this lay-down 23-HCP slam so confidently? Well, firstly, for reasons already mentioned, the opponent's interference helped West to judge the hand, but beyond that, the 'losing trick count' method of evaluation was much more useful on this hand. The West hand may only have 12 HCPs, but it is in fact classifiable as a *5-loser hand* when the good trump fit is found. West's Splinter bid shows a hand that is worth an opening bid, which equates to a 7-loser hand. Seven losers opposite five losers equals 12 losers, which equates to 12 winners – i.e., slam zone. The knowledge of the diamond shortage, plus the helpful information about the opponent's spade holdings, was enough to clinch it.