

# HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 31 Page 1

There has long been a debate in the bridge world about whether more swings are won by bidding well or by playing well. My thinking is that better play is more important than better bidding at matchpoints and it's a tossup at IMPs. Here's a deal from the GNOT qualifying Swiss that comes down heavily on the play better side. I'll show you the bidding and play at the other table first.

South picked up, in 2<sup>nd</sup> seat, ♠A854 ♥10943 ♦8 ♣AK102

Our East, Dick Katz, opened 1♠ as dealer. South and West passed, and North reopened with 2♣, showing hearts and a minor. South made the good bid of 3♠, showing a good hand. North bid 4♦ and South bid 4♥, showing that his cue bid was based on a heart fit and that he had a very good hand for his previous bidding. North bid RKC, South showed 2 keys and no Queen, and North ended the auction by bidding 6♥.

West, Bob Zimmermann, led the ♠7 and declarer saw:

North: ♠9 ♥AKQ82 ♦A10973 ♣76

South: ♠A854 ♥10943 ♦8 ♣AK102

Trick one continued with the ♠9, 10, and Ace. South now embarked on a campaign of ruffing his black suit losers in dummy. He cashed one club, crossed to the ♦A, played a club to hand, and ruffed a spade. Now came diamond ruff, spade ruff (West pitched a club), diamond ruff with the ♥9. The full end position, with South to lead, was:

North: ♠-- ♥AKQ ♦109 ♣--

West: ♠-- ♥J75 ♦Q ♣Q      East: ♠KQJ ♥6 ♦-- ♣J

South: ♠8 ♥104 ♦-- ♣102

South needed 4 tricks. We can all see that the winning line from here was a heart to dummy and a diamond ruff, leaving dummy with two more heart winners. But South had another plan. Remember, he couldn't see all the cards, and so far East had shown up with only 4 HCP to justify his opening bid, although the play to trick one strongly suggested that East held the ♠KQJ. Even so, that gets him to 10 points only.

So East found a play that only required that East hold the ♥J. Do you see what he did? He ruffed a club in dummy and when East followed with the Jack, that marked him with an original holding of ♠KQJ1063 ♥? ♦KJ5 ♣J84. So declarer led a diamond, planning to pitch a spade if East ruffed with the ♥J, or ruff with the ♥10 if East discarded. But East ruffed with the ♥6 and declarer bitterly regretted having wasted the ♥9 on the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of diamonds. If he still had the ♥9 in hand, he could pitch his spade on this trick as planned and in this 3-card ending, with East on lead:

North: ♠-- ♥AK ♦10 ♣--

West: ♠-- ♥J75 ♦-- ♣--      East: ♠KQJ ♥♦-- ♣

South: ♠-- ♥109 ♦-- ♣10

## HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 31 Page 2

South would just ruff East's spade return in hand. If West overruffs, dummy does also and now declarer can ruff dummy's last diamond high, leaving the ♥A in dummy for trick 13. This is called a smother play, and is one of the rarest of all endings in bridge.

Instead, in the actual ending, South had no winning option. Repeating the actual ending again,

North: ♠-- ♥AK ♦109 ♣--

West: ♠-- ♥J75 ♦-- ♣Q      East: ♠KQJ ♥6 ♦-- ♣

South: ♠-- ♥104 ♦-- ♣10

After East ruffs the ♦9, if South overruffs, West also overruffs and leads a club to force dummy to ruff. West can't be stopped from making another trick. So Bob and Dick brought back +50 on this board.

Meanwhile, at my table, after 1♠ on my right, pass, pass, 2♠ by Phil, my RHO passed and I made the horrific underbid of 4♥. But after the spade lead, I found the right plan.

North: ♠9 ♥AKQ82 ♦A10973 ♣76

South: ♠A854 ♥10943 ♦8 ♣AK102

I won the spade in hand, crossed to the ♦A, and continued diamond ruff, spade ruff, diamond ruff to reach this ending.

North: ♠-- ♥AKQ8 ♦109 ♣76

West: ♠-- ♥J75 ♦Q ♣Q953      East: ♠KQJ3 ♥6 ♦-- ♣J84

South: ♠85 ♥109 ♦-- ♣AK102

When I led a spade in this ending, West couldn't afford to pitch his diamond since I could ruff low, draw trumps, and claim. And ruffing was obviously wrong, so he pitched a club. But now I just ruffed a diamond in hand, led a trump to dummy, drew trumps, and claimed 13 tricks. So we scored +510, and won 11 IMPs that were deserved for card play but not deserved for my bad bidding.