

HAND OF THE MONTH FOR NEWER PLAYERS

July, 2015

For this month only, I hope I can be forgiven for departing from my basic commitment to presenting hands of the month with educational value, and to instead indulge in a bit of nostalgia. Many members of District 3, and in fact many people from all around the bridge world, will remember Paul and Florence Silver; for years they were a fixture at the Rockland Bridge Center, as well as at virtually all sectional, regional and national tournament.

Freakish hands can be limited in educational value since they involve distributions that occur only very rarely, but they can make for memorable bridge moments. Some years ago, my wife Glenda and I were playing with the Silvers in a team game when a freak hand provided us with a huge swing at a time when we much needed it.

	NORTH	
	S 642	
WEST	H KJ9532	EAST
S AQ105	D K973	S 83
H Q876	C Void	H Void
D 8		D J6
C AK62	SOUTH	C QJ10987543
	S KJ97	
	H A104	
NS Vulnerable	D AQ10542	
Dealer: South	C Void	

At one table, Glenda and I were East-West, and the bidding proceeded gradually:

South	West	North	East
1 diamond	double	1 heart	2 clubs!
2 diamonds	3 clubs	3 hearts	4 clubs
4 hearts	pass	pass	5 clubs
5 hearts	double	pass	6 clubs
double	all pass		

With the spade finesse working, six clubs doubled made easily, with only the loss of a diamond trick, though as dummy I recall some anxious moments wondering why Glenda was making no move to draw trumps.

At the other table, with Paul and Florence North-South, the bidding was more dramatic, and the final contract different:

South	West	North	East
1 diamond	double	1 heart	5 clubs!
pass	pass	5 diamonds	6 clubs
6 diamonds	double	all pass	

Perfect defense could set six diamonds by four tricks (do you see how?); however, West's opening lead was the club ace, and Paul, given an unusual "ruff and sluff" opportunity at trick one, proceeded to make the doubled slam. He discarded a spade from dummy, ruffed in his hand, and drew trumps; because West's original takeout double suggested heart length, Paul started the heart suit by playing the ace first, and when East showed out, it was easy to bring in the whole suit, discarding three spades and conceding a spade at the end.

In the post mortem we realized that had Paul ruffed in dummy at trick one and discarded a spade from his hand, he could have made an overtrick; still, making the doubled slam was good enough.

Six clubs, doubled and making by EW at one table, six diamonds doubled and vulnerable, making by NS at the other, for a total swing of 21 IMPs – International Match Points, the form of scoring used in team games – the biggest single board swing any of us could remember, and a great boost not only to the team's morale, but also to our standing for the day.

In reflecting later, we could find no general lessons to be drawn. Here the East that chose to proceed slowly with a nine card suit, running the slight risk of being passed out below game, came out on top. Next time ...?

MORAL: I don't know what to recommend you do with your nine card suits. Luckily for those of us who teach, they don't come along very often.