

HAND OF THE MONTH FOR NEWER PLAYERS

December, 2015

This month we continue with the theme of counting the opponents distribution. In his book *The Art of Card Reading at Bridge*, Fred Karpin tells a dramatic counting story from the annals of bridge.

In 1957, before the widespread adoption of International Match Point (IMP) scoring, in the Masters Team-of-Four championship, a world class player named Pedro Cabral and his partner were part of a team that faced the highly favored team of Alvin Roth, Tobias Stone, John Crawford and Sidney Silodor, all top players of that era. Going in to the final deal of the match, Cabral's team trailed by 2,160 points; only a dramatic swing could save the day.

In pursuit of the necessary swing, Cabral carefully counted out the opponent's distribution in a grand slam contract, and then intentionally made the anti-percentage play; the result was precisely what his team needed.

	NORTH	
	S K73	
WEST	H AJ10	EAST
S 96	D AK103	S 542
H Q95	C AK2	H 7432
D 9874		D J2
C 654	SOUTH	C 9873
	S AQJ108	
Dealer: South	H K86	
Vulnerable: NS	D 65	
Opening lead: Club 6	C QJ10	

The bidding:

South	West	North	East
1 spade	pass	2 diamonds	pass
2 spades	pass	4 notrump	pass
5 diamonds	pass	5 notrump	pass
6 diamonds	pass	7 spades	all pass

In those days, a one spade opening only promised four, hence the two spade rebid with just five. Ace asking was done via standard Blackwood.

Assuming normal breaks, it can readily be seen that making the grand slam depended on successfully locating the queen of hearts.

The opening club lead was won in the dummy, followed by A, K and Q of trumps, West showing out on the third round; then diamond ace and king, diamond ruff in hand, East discarding a club; next ace and queen of clubs, everyone following.

At this point, Cabral could count that East had started with three spades, two diamonds, and four clubs, and thus – by simple math – four hearts. Since West had started with three hearts, odds were four to three East held the queen.

However, Cabral also reasoned that Alvin Roth, the very talented declarer for the other team, would undoubtedly also be in seven spades, and that he would no doubt count out the hand the same way and then finesse East for the queen. Knowing his side desperately needed a huge swing, Cabral knowingly took the anti-percentage play of finessing West.

When this worked, the total swing was 2,310 (counting his 100 honors, as was done in those days), and Cabral's team won the match by the narrowest of margins.

This one hand played an important role in the wider adoption of IMPs scoring in the US to reduce the potential for one board to swing an entire match.

MORAL: Counting opponent's distribution is essential, both as declarer and as defender. After doing your counting, however, sometimes you just gotta do what you gotta do.