



News Letter 2006

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Tamsin and I will soon be back, exchanging the wintry darkness of Scotland for the warm summer of New Zealand. We look forward to seeing you all again and wish you all a happy holiday season and good New Year.



"I'm sorry, Kris, but I need a man I can believe in."

The queen of trumps

As declarer the most common card of the opponents that you have to worry about is the queen of trumps. Why? Because you will often have a choice about which opponent to finesse for it. For example, in the trump suit you might have A T x x in one hand and K J x x in the other. This sort of choice doesn't arise when you are lacking the Ace (you have to lose it willy-nilly) or the King (there will only be one opponent you can finesse for it).

Sometimes you just have to guess. But often there are some indicators that will help you and other experts. The English player Hal Sims used to boast that he never mis-guessed the position of the queen of trumps. Some of his friends once played a trick on him. They set up a deal in which they gave the queen of trumps to both opponents and asked him to declare the contract. After a few tricks he scratched his head in puzzlement.

"Both opponents seem to have it" he growled!

So how do you set about playing the right opponent for the missing queen? The biggest clue is in the bidding: the opponent who has bid (except for a pre-emptor) is more likely to hold the queen of trumps. If both opponents have bid the one who has bid more strongly (say, the opener rather than the responder) is more likely to have the queen of

From our Foreign Correspondent

Little bridge news this month but I have a true story of official idiocy. My sister-in-law Linda had to travel from Inverness to Glasgow with two of her friends recently. They arrived at the station in good time to catch their train. Linda was carrying her rail ticket and a seat reservation slip. Unfortunately her companions had only their rail ticket having mislaid their seat reservations. No big deal they thought since the train was not likely to be full. However on presenting their tickets at the station Linda's friends were told they could not board without a seat reservation. Prolonged remonstrations and evidence that they had valid tickets were all to no avail: the officials were adamant.

The only thing to be done, they were told, was to buy another ticket! Rail tickets are not cheap but, with much grumbling, this had to be done. They bought the tickets.

"What about a seat reservation?" they asked. The answer was given: "We do not do seat reservations here". (I am not kidding; this really happened). It turned out that, with a ticket bought at the station, they would be allowed to board the train even without a seat reservation. And what do you think? The train was empty and they had their pick of any seat they wanted!

Deception in a hopeless contract

I got this hand from the London Times Bridge Column and thought it was really neat.

♠ J 2 ♥ 3 2 ♦ 7 5 4 2 ♣ 9 8 7 6 5		
♠ K 6 4 ♥ A K Q T 9 8 7 4 ♦ void ♣ J 2		♠ A 9 8 7 5 3 ♥ J 5 ♦ J 8 ♣ Q T 3
♠ Q T ♥ 6 ♦ A K Q T 9 6 3 ♣ A K 4		

South is in 5♦ after getting the A♥ lead which is followed by the K♥. The contract seems hopeless since the opponent have two top spades still to win. Is there anything that can be done?

Well, you can ruff, draw trumps, play Ace and King and a third club and hope the opponents are rabbits and not switch to spades. But what do you think of declarer Thorvald Aagaard of Denmark's idea? He discarded the ♣4!! West, afraid to switch to a spade, then played a "safe" club. Aagaard was then able to win, draw trumps, and set up dummy's clubs for spade discards?

trumps; but this rule has to be tempered by common sense. For example, suppose your left-hand opponent has begun by leading the A, K, Q of some side suit: then be inclined to play RHO for the queen of trumps.

Besides the bidding, the early play can often provide slight clues. For example, if an opponent shows up with a long suit then it is more likely that your other opponent will have the queen of trumps. In the same way, *lacking all other clues*, you should play your LHO for the missing queen! The reason for this is that your LHO might have led a trump to start with, but almost certainly wouldn't if they held the queen.

All of the above are helpful clues. However, they are sometimes all overridden by more immediate tactical concerns. For example, if you suspect an impending ruff then you may well decide to play off the Ace and King of trumps. Another issue is that you may choose which opponent to finesse on the grounds of giving the lead to the opponent who, if they win the trick, can make the least damaging return.

Hal Sims claimed a 100% record of successful guessing. Be happy if you can achieve 60% to begin with, and then work on raising your percentage to Sims-like levels.

Minnie's new glasses

Minnie's new glasses had arrived. After months of pretence that her vision was 20-20 she had finally admitted that maybe there was a small amount of room for improvement. Actually, there were a number of surprises in the first week that she wore them. Her house seemed much dustier than usual. On the other hand her garden definitely perked up that week with a large number of new flowers, especially small ones; and the birds in her garden seemed both more numerous and more brightly coloured.

Sitting down for her first hand of that evening's bridge she was heartened to find that this time she seem to have been dealt a couple of Kings. So often her hands consisted of dreary Jacks - in fact in one recent game she recalled she had had a hand with 6 Jacks. Today however her first challenge was to make 6♥ as West on the lead of A♦.

♠ K 6 4
♥ A K Q T 9 8 7 4
♦ void
♣ J 2

♠ A 9 8 7 5 3
♥ J 5
♦ J 8
♣ Q T 3

(Notice that Minnie has been very lucky to escape a club lead! - Ed.)

Hmm. What should she do? She had read widely that week - in particular, that helpful article in the Taieri Bridge Newsletter about finding the queen of trumps. What had it said? She reviewed it in her head point by point (*see page 2 - Ed.*). But just a moment! She held the queen of trumps herself so that was one problem out of the way. Surely that silly author should have recommended that declarer first checks her own cards. Now what else? Oh yes! Think before playing to the first trick. Well, she had done that when she was spotting the queen of trumps so that was another success. Time to play to the first trick. Her partner Sinclair seemed to have set out the dummy cards suit by suit! Why couldn't he have done that last week? That made following suit a breeze. But, oh bother! She couldn't follow suit herself! What should she do? The solution came to her in an instant - no more than 15 seconds thought - ruff it of course. Looking across the table she detected a twitch in Sinclair's demeanour - naughty man, usually completely impassive, but he must surely be approving of the results of her diligent studies. The unexpected thought of mistletoe popped into her head.

Of course the fate of the contract depended on whether spades divided 2-2. They did and Minnie's Christmas holiday was off to a flying start.