

A New Meaning to Restricted Choice

Or

What was North Smoking?!

By Neil Kimelman

Note: This article was inspired by three deals, at a not-too-recent Thursday at Lorraine's bridge club. The hands and North (me) dropping their bidding box actually happened. The rest is artistic license.

It is the last round of a local club game and I am ready to get going. It seems that many pairs have been slow all day, and as expected, you have to wait to sit against the last opponents. Worse, the bidding and hands have been uninteresting. I didn't realize that was about to change.

My name is Jim, and I am sitting East, playing with my favourite partner Kim. We quickly fill the vacated E-W seats as North is passing the boards, and is talking very quickly to his partner. He greets us very warmly, as you are his best friend, and somehow does not miss a beat explaining something to his partner.

You have never seen North before, and you quickly find out his name is Mike, apparently is a very good player, visiting from Topeka, Kansas. He is one of those people that is instantly likeable, in an ego-filled, charming sort of way.

Your thoughts of what to have for dinner are abruptly interrupted, as North accidentally dumps his bidding box on the floor. He quickly picks up a bunch of cards and says, "I will get the rest after the round is over. Nobody else seems to notice, but North is missing bids from 2♣ to 5NT! Who am I to say anything that would be construed as rude or none of my business, so on to Board 19, E-W vul. I pick up as East ♠A76 ♥6 ♦K1098753 ♣64 and am in 4th seat. Wondering if I will get a chance to bid my diamonds, I quickly find out the answer:

South West North East

1♣ Pass 6♥! All pass

Wow! I see no reason not to lead the ♠A. This dummy appears:

♠K94

♥ -

♦AQ64

♣KJ10976.

Trick one went: A,4,Q,2. My partner and I are playing upside count and attitude. Now what? Maybe my partner is void in diamonds. I thus shift to the ♦10, and am quickly chalking up -980. Here is the full deal:

Contract: 3♠		♠	2		
Scoring:		♥	AKQJ109432		
Dealer:		♦	-		
Vul:		♣	Q83		
♠	QJ10853	N W E S		♠	A76
♥	872			♥	6
♦	J2			♦	K1098753
♣	A2			♣	64
Lead: 6♠		♠	K94		
		♥	-		
		♦	AQ64		
		♣	KJ10975		

Declarer finessed the ♦Q, and cashed the ♠K and ♦A, throwing all three of his clubs away!

I recognize that this bottom is a chance to ask these experts how I should know to switch to a club. South explained that this an important issue to discuss with your partner. Here is what South told me what their partnership did, and it became a:

Lessons Learned

A low card is encouraging and a high card is discouraging. If discouraging, to help partner find which suit to switch to, a lower discouraging card suggests switching to the lowest suit, whereas a higher or highest card suggests the higher ranking suit.

So on this deal, West should play the ♠8. This cannot ask for a diamond, as this would give declarer ♠QJ102, and the 6♥ bid makes no sense. As we leave this board North chimes in one more time, "5NT was probably a better bid than 6♥, but I didn't seem to have one in my bidding box."

We go on to Bd 20. Both vul, West deals, and I hold ♠4 ♥A8632 ♦ KQ10932 ♣7. It goes pass, 1♣ to me. What should I bid? I don't know. I bid 2♦, weak. It goes 2♠, Pass, to North. I am curious if North is going to pick up the rest of his bidding cards, and I found out, no. North bids 6♣! This, not surprisingly, ended the auction.

So the full auction:

South West North East (me)

Pass 1♣ 2♦

2♠ Pass 6♣! All Pass

Now I get to lead. I don't know, but this is matchpoints so I better cash my ace. -1390!
The full deal:

Contract: 6♣		♠	J5		
Scoring:		♥	-		
Dealer:		♦	AJ6		
Vul:		♣	AKQ109652		
♠	K983	N W E S		♠	4
♥	J1074			♥	A8632
♦	8754			♦	KQ10932
♣	4			♣	6
Lead: ♥A		♠	AQ10762		
		♥	KQ95		
		♦	-		
		♣	J83		

Board 21

We go on to Bd 21. N-S vul, North deals, and I hold ♠Q9732 ♥AJ954 ♦3 ♣K10. The bidding:

South West North East

1♦ 2♦

4♣¹ Pass 6♦! All pass

1. Splinter.

Yes, we played three boards and North bid only with bidding cards for the 1, 6, and 7 level!! Why am I on lead, again!?! For the 3rd time in a row I lead an ace against a slam. The full deal:

Contract: 6♦		♠	K4		
Scoring:		♥	7		
Dealer:		♦	QJ972		
Vul:		♣	AQ765		
♠	65	N W E S		♠	Q9732
♥	Q1062			♥	AJ954
♦	K8			♦	3
♣	J9432			♣	K10
Lead: ♥A		♠	AJ108		
		♥	K83		
		♦	A10654		
		♣	8		

Partner eventually scores their ♦K and we beat 6♦ one. Whew!! Notice if I do not lead my ace declarer can discard their heart on a spade, making. So what I have learned this round:

1. The most important lesson was on Board 19, and how to signal encouragement and discouragement.
2. The 2nd thing I learned was why waste time bidding at the 2-5 level, and just cut to the chase.
3. I learned that leading against slams is a bit of crap shoot. The best you can do is listen to the bidding and do your best.

4. I learned that I wanted to smoke what north smoked, and we went out for a drink after the game, and I soaked in some knowledge from a more experienced player. This is one of the best ways to improve your bridge game!! Try it! Most experts are more than happy to take some time and answer your questions.