

A Hand to Talk About

This month's hand is very different than those of previous months. Previously I chose hands that I had played, and most of them presented interesting theoretical discussions. This month's hand was not played by me, but is a hand that needed to be written up someplace, because of the unique and bizarre result that occurred. It was played by and sent to me by Rahn Smith (the book seller and a professional player in Florida tournaments). He played it in the A/X Swiss at the Orlando Regional on April 30, 2005.

Two quality teams were playing. One team had two sponsors: Marshall Hall and Diana Holt, and three professional players: Mike Cappelletti Jr., John Moschella, and Ed Schulte. The successful team on this hand was Rahn Smith, Sharon Meng, and Kathy and Jack Longman.

When the teams finished the match, they quickly went down the scores to see who won. When the losing team checked their scores, one player announced his result, and another player would announce how many imps they either won or lost on the hand. On this hand, one player announced -1700 and the other player announced lose 22 imps. At that point the team just added up their imps to see if they won or lost the match. It wasn't until about 5 minutes later that they discovered what the contracts were at both tables, and they then broke up laughing.

Rahn Smith was dealt the following hand, Not vulnerable vs. Vulnerable:

♠AJ93 ♥Q865 ♦109654 ♣---

His partner opened the bidding with 2Hearts, and his RHO overcalled 2Spades. He decided that he would not be willing to let the opponents play in a game contract, and decided to apply maximum pressure, and preempted 5 Hearts. The auction continued:

West	North (MikeCap.JR)	East (Rahn Smith)	South(JohnMoschella)
2♥	2♠	5♥	5NT*
Pass	6♠	Double	Pass*
Pass	Pass		

* The South player thought for over a minute before each call. This was the entire hand:

	North	North-South Vulnerable
	♠Q10875	
	♥---	
	♦QJ2	
West	♣Q9763	East
♠K642		♠AJ93
♥A109876		♥Q543
♦---		♦109654
♣J54	South	♣---
	♠--	
	♥KJ2	
	♦AK873	
	♣AK1082	

Rahn Smith's 5♥ preempt put the opponents into unfamiliar territory. Even though both opponents were bridge pros, they had a misunderstanding regarding the meaning of 5NT, and they arrived at revoltingly bad contract. The defense dropped one trick, but still scored 1700 points.

South clearly had a major problem. He obviously intended 5NT as some form of unusual NT, or pick-a-slam. But North obviously felt that it was some sort of grand slam try in spades, so he rebid 6 Spades to reject the grand slam try. South felt that North had selected spades as the only suit that he can play in, and therefore passed at his final bid.

I see this as a nightmarish problem for North-South. North has enough offensive power to overcall, but is too weak to show his distribution using the Leaping Michaels convention (where a jump to 4 clubs shows a black 2-suiter with game-forcing values). I agree with the 2Spades overcall with the North hand. After East's preempt, I would have no problem with some partners -- in some partnerships I play responsive doubles through 7 Hearts, so I would just make a responsive double. North would bid 6Clubs, which is the best contract on this hand. If South does not play responsive doubles at this level, then he has to choose between making a double and 5NT, and he better hope that his partner will interpret his 5NT bid as intended. I certainly sympathize with North's 6Spade rebid. It is normal on to assume that the 5NT bid is a grand slam try in spades -- one does not expect to be playing 5NT as pick-a-slam when the partnership has only shown one suit. I think this hand beautifully supports the need to play responsive doubles at high levels. If a responsive double was not available for South, then I think

he would have been better placed to double 5 Hearts, and hope that his partner might analyze what his hand looked like.

Now, let's see what the bidding was at the other table:

West (A Sponsor)	North	East (Ed Schulte)	South
Pass	Pass	1 ♠	2NT
4 ♠	5 ♣	Pass	6 ♣
Pass	Pass	6 ♥	Double
6 ♠	Double	All Pass	

Again the contract was 6 Spades doubled, and it went down six for a loss of 1400.

In other words, both North and West played in 6 spades doubled down six on the same board! I have never seen that before.

I like East's opening 1 Spade bid. Experts routinely open very light in 3rd seat with good 4-card majors. These bids are both good lead-directors, throw the opponents into defensive auctions, and mildly preempt the bidding. North-South bid very well to their 6Club slam. East made a great bid of 6 Hearts, and West incorrectly returned to spades. 6 Hearts is a reasonable sacrifice against the 6 Club contract, and has a good chance of making. With 6-card heart support, West should have passed the 6 Heart bid.

This hand is a fascinating example of how even bridge professionals make embarrassing mistakes.