

# The Local University Comes to the Slow Lane

by  
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In addition to the Rose Parade at our place, Pasadena is famous for housing an outstanding scientific institution. The Bridge Builders from Caltech sent over a student squad to do battle with my troops. Sharing the vugraph responsibilities with me was their coach, Professor Carl Sage, the World's Leading Authority. I expected us to lose by billions and billions of IMPs, but the experience would be instructive. We knew they would be scientific bidders. On the first board, the Engineers ran into some tough luck.

*N/S Vul.*

**West**

♠ A5  
♥ Q72  
♦ 10954  
♣ 10953

**North**

1♦  
2♣  
2NT  
3♠  
5♦

**South**

1♠  
2♥  
3♦  
4NT  
6♠

Andrew was on lead after this delicate exploration. As I predicted, he found the killing lead with no difficulty. Andrew's rule for leads strikes again. Good thing he had the ♦4 and the ♣3 to resolve his dilemma. The board was pushed, unfortunately, because young Michael for the Builders made the aggressive, winning heart lead against the six diamond contract declared by North.

♠ A5	♠ 107	♠ 643
♥ Q72	♥ 83	♥ K10965
♦ 10954	♦ KQ872	♦ 6
♣ 10953	♣ AKQ8	♣ 7642
	♠ KQJ982	
	♥ AJ4	
	♦ AJ3	
	♣ J	

The second board was another

exciting one. A slight difference in bidding led to a large difference in the difficulty of play.

*Love All.*

♠ 42	♠ Q87
♥ Q7	♥ K1032
♦ Q102	♦ J963
♣ AJ10983	♣ 65
♠ AKJ63	
♥ J65	
♦ 74	
♣ K72	

At both tables, West judged his hand too strong for a nonvulnerable pre-empt. After the routine start of 1♦ by North and 1♠ by South, Engineer Jeff bid 3♣. Rick didn't know what to bid over that, so he passed. He passed again when Marcia tried 3NT, and nine tricks rolled in when the spade finesse succeeded.

Andrew was less bold, so he tried only 2♣. Now North could unsheathe a support double and game in spades was reached. Andrew was certainly in doubt when he faced his opening lead problem. He couldn't underlead an ace, and he had no other suit from which to lead fourth best. Therefore he selected a trump. When the ten held in dummy, Engineer Sam faced a difficult play problem.

A second trump was played to hand, confirming the break. Then came the crucial manoeuvre. Three rounds of diamonds were played, declarer ruffing in hand. Then a club toward the queen, which West had to duck. The fourth diamond was ruffed, and then the ♣K was played. West had no winning choice. He tried a third club. When East over-ruffed dummy's ten, she had only hearts left, and made a valiant try, exiting with the king, but declarer had a complete count and ran the ♥9 to the queen

that had been marked by the bidding.

I opined to the audience that the hand could not have been made without the diamond ruffs. 1 IMP seemed a small reward for Sam's farsighted sequence of plays.

The line I would have tried, running the eight of hearts at trick two with the hope of establishing a discard for the third club, could be countered by West's returning a diamond after winning the heart queen. For the heart tactic to work, a second round of trumps must be played with the lead remaining in dummy and without the entries having been compromised. North needed better spade spots.

We came back with a typical slow-lane triumph. In first seat at favourable vulnerability, Andrew held:

♠ A93  
♥ 8  
♦ 94  
♣ QJ107632

He decided this collection was too good for a pre-empt, so passed. His LHO opened 2♠, Ann bid 3♥ and RHO bid 4♠. Consistent with his view that he had a good hand, Andrew tried 5♣. RHO looked at Andrew with a mixture of pity and contempt as he doubled. The opening lead problem, with a weak-two bidder holding a solid

♠ KQ8652  
♥ 975  
♦ A10  
♣ 95

did not seem a difficult one; why speculate with anything but the spade king? The diagram reveals how much better a minor would have been:

♠ —	♠ J1074
♥ AKQ642	♥ J103
♦ J8632	♦ KQ75
♣ 84	♣ AK
♠ KQ8652	♠ A93
♥ 975	♥ 8
♦ A10	♦ 94
♣ 95	♣ QJ107632

The next hand featured contentious bidding at both tables, then settled into a declarer contest be-

reen Sam and Rick. Sam used a slide rule to determine the best play, thereby losing the board.

/S Vul.

♠ 87  
 ♥ A954  
 ♦ 93  
 ♣ AK953  
 ♠ KQ94      ♠ A106532  
 ♥ 106      ♥ 7  
 ♦ 10764      ♦ AQ82  
 ♣ Q107      ♣ 62  
 ♠ J  
 ♥ KQJ832  
 ♦ KJ5  
 ♣ J84

West	North	East	South
—	1♠	2♥	—
4(i)	4♠	Pass	—
5♥	All Pass	—	—

(i) Pre-emptive

rather than settling for a plus score of an uncertain magnitude, both North players allowed themselves to be pushed to the five level. The first few tricks were replicated. The spade king was overtaken so that East could try the ace and a second diamond. Declarer drew trumps, ruffing the diamond along the way, and had to bring home the club suit. Sam knew that playing for the queen to drop was much more likely to succeed than the double finesse. Rick, as always loved the finesse, though, with its linguistic connotation of elegance. Here was a chance to take two, so he did.

Upon hearing of semantic references I had made while commenting on vugraph, Rick protested. He claimed he had decided to play West for the club queen, since each defender needed one queen to justify the bidding. And that assumption changed the math underlying the play for the drop. "But how", I asked, masking my amazement at the depth of this reasoning, "did you know which green West had?"

Rick explained that East must have the diamond queen since he had ruffed the ace.

Otherwise, that tricky Engineer could have tried to fool me by underleading in diamonds. Opponents are always trying to fool me. I guess he should have underled anyway."

The pendulum swung again on the next board, when an overcall propelled us to a thin game:

N/S Vul.

♠ 98  
 ♥ 5  
 ♦ AKQ762  
 ♣ AQ53  
 ♠ Q763      ♠ AJ2  
 ♥ AJ82      ♥ Q10963  
 ♦ 53      ♦ 108  
 ♣ 1087      ♣ K94  
 ♠ K1054  
 ♥ K74  
 ♦ J94  
 ♣ J62

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	1♥	1♠
2♥	3♣	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	3NT
All Pass	—	—	—

The contract reached by my squad was not hopeless, but was pretty ambitious for a pair with 23 HCP. Engineer Jeff, as my co-commentator put it, uh, sagely passed 3♦ after a similar start. The heart lead gave up one trick, and I predicted Rick would go one down.

"No", Carl offered, "surely the best percentage play is the club finesse. South has to take it early, so he'll go down two"

"You don't understand", I chided. "Rick loves finesses to be sure, but he will be afraid to go down many. Marcia would feel bad after her overbid, so Rick will cash out his six diamond tricks."

And so he did. Michael had to make four discards. Things were getting interesting. I predicted Rick would get the ending wrong if Michael blanked the club king early. However, Michael threw only one club, instead releasing all of his spades. Rick couldn't get the ending wrong. I noticed the Professor was beaming.

"Yes, I taught them to play for legitimate holdings rather than for mistakes by their opponents. Jeff couldn't be sure that South's spade card was the king rather than the queen. So he defended properly."

I was impressed with this didactic strategy, especially useful against my team. It was disappointing to hear Jeff muttering something about using the opponents' opening lead strategies, but I couldn't catch the whole sentence.

Going into the last board, the Builders were ahead by a surprisingly small margin of 12 IMPs. It looked like there was some potential when the cards were displayed. What would your bidding plan be opposite a strong no trump with:

♠ KQ9874  
 ♥ A73  
 ♦ 10843  
 ♣ —

The opening promised 15-17 for the youngsters, while my team needs an extra point (16-18). Ann simply bid 4♠. This caused an anxious moment, because the team conventionally plays transfers at the two and four levels. Andrew looked puzzled but eventually passed.

Michael was more aggressive, as one would expect. He transferred with 2♥, which was doubled. Partner accepted this transfer, so Michael tried for big things in 3♦. The Professor nodded at this call. I asked if Zia had recently given a lecture on the fake cue bid.

"No," he replied, "with a two-suiter we try to bid both suits."

The 3♦ bid was raised to 4♦, and Michael seemed to have had enough when he signed off at 4♠. Partner tried 5♦. Now Michael regrouped. Obviously partner had to have great diamonds to move out of four spades. He cuebid 5♥ and then 6♣ over 5♠. Ever so slowly came the 7♦ call, which Michael passed gleefully. Professor Sage was shaking his head, but I couldn't understand why, since the dummy certainly justified Michael's bidding:

♠ AJ5  
 ♥ K852  
 ♦ AKQ6  
 ♣ 84

The grand slam was a magnificent contract.

"I don't care if it was a 68.75% contract young man. Did you think they would bid it? Did you think we were down in the match? Your bidding was accurate, but your assessment of the context was not."

Michael looked abashed. He knew the IMP odds on a grand presume the opponents have reached a small slam. With the diamond jack refusing to drop, 4♠ yielded eleven tricks and 7♦ twelve. We had won.