

One of the best things about bridge tournaments is that one can have fun with the deals even when winning doesn't happen. During the Pasadena Regional, I was forced to emphasize that idea to myself again (and again . . .)

In one of the Knockouts, I held: ♠3, ♥Q7, ♦10642, ♣K109875. With no one vulnerable, partner (Mitch Dunitz) opened 1♦ and RHO bid 2♦, showing the majors. What should be my plan? The winning action was to defend 4♠ doubled. Would you have been able to stand that? I could, because my initial response was 4♣, showing clubs and a diamond fit (at least four). When LHO bid the inevitable 4♠ and Mitch doubled, I was able to pass with only slight misgivings, and we collected +300. Mitch's pattern was 4-3-5-1, and bidding on would have led to a minus for us.

Battles against old rivals heighten the pleasure. In the Swiss, John Swanson was on my left. After I, holding ♠AQJ7, ♥54, ♦8643, ♣J85, passed, partner (Lance Kerr) opened 2♣. RHO then bid 1♦, generating some hilarity. Rather than evoke some egregious penalty, he corrected to 2♦. I passed, showing a positive response, and Lance bid 2♥. I tried my spades and the next bid I saw was 5NT. I duly bid the grand, expecting to claim. After John's lead of the ♥2, I saw the error of my expectation:

North

♠K84
♥AKQ9
♦A7
♣AKQ4

South

♠AQJ7
♥54
♦8643
♣J85

How would you play 7♠? I stared at the dummy for a while, looking for a 13th trick. Nothing better than the double heart finesse came into view, so I called for the ♥9. John's normal poker face cracked for a moment when the 9 held. Spades were not unfriendly and whenever I encountered John during the rest of the event, I couldn't help but laugh. (Ed. Note: *You would have had a laugh if the ♥9 had been in your hand rather than in dummy — JOHN.*)

That terrible grand was not the most excellent adventure of my Bridge Week. In the finals of one of the other Knockouts, I was playing with Sidney Brownstein against Mark Itabashi and Jim Looby when I picked up a pile of seeming trash: ♠64, ♥108763, ♦K542, ♣75. I don't suppose this hand will appear in Marshall's column, but I'll set it up like one of his problems.

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Mark and Jim vulnerable:

Mark	Me	Jim	Sid
2♦	Pass	3♣	Dbl.
5♣	?		

The opening bid was a weak-two, and 3♣ was forcing. Sidney's double was for takeout. What should I do?

No sane person will find the bid I came up with. I doubled. Unfortunately, Jim claimed two overtricks, \$1150! But wait—teammates brought back +2140, so we won 14 IMPs on the board. Here's the whole deal:

North		East	
♠7		♠64	
♥J52		♥108763	
♦AQJ93		♦K542	
♣J1084		♣75	
West		South	
♠QJ982		♠AK1053	
♥AKQ94		♥void	
♦1076		♦8	
♣void		♣AKQ9632	

I had read about this bid—the striped-tail ape double, so named because you run like the beast when redoubled—many years ago, but have never seen it in real life. I felt like I was 25 again. Was Jim going to bid on if I had passed? Look at his hand! The double probably stunned him. It's easy to say Jim should have redoubled, but he thought we might escape to hearts—as indeed we would have. After revealing this deal, I don't expect to be allowed to get away with the maneuver again for many years, but it was too funny to suppress. And Looby can laugh about it too, because he won the match and the event.