

At the deep end

By Rikard Greenberg House cat



The large hall was carefully laid out: the seemingly endless arrays of playing tables with their immaculate green tops neatly arranged in the middle, while to the side the players could avail themselves of all sorts of light refreshments with free running milk distributors and tuna tasting generously provided by the organization. This was the day I had been dreading: the National Feline Pairs Championship Final was about to start and myself and Prissy were still trying to decipher the seating card we were given. Eventually a kind soul took pity on us and led us by hand to the table where we were supposed to start. The background noise from hundreds of competitors chatting away was deafening but suddenly an imperious voice soared over it and announced that play could begin.

We held our own in the first couple of rounds but in the third one we got a terrible score because our opponents opted for 3NT instead of a game in a major and gathered the same ten tricks.

After that we hit a streak of tops, so much so that I even began marking our results to see if we had a chance to finish in the top places. "You must be faring well, if you are so keen to assess your scores." I turned around and I saw Sly Sylvester standing behind me and then taking a seat at our table.

I introduced him to Prissy and then after some friendly banter he wished us good luck and we all got down to business.

The first hand was an average but in the second I picked up:

South Dealer, E/W Vul

♠ AKJ2
♥ KQ10876
♦ -
♣ AK5

Nice hand but I still opted to open 1♥ and

not 2♣ as some might do.

When Prissy supported me with 2♥, I thought of the many alternatives available to me: I could envisage many hands where 7♥ could be made but it was quite difficult to find a way to elicit the right information from Prissy within the very basic system we were playing. So I tried 4NT hoping for the magic 5♥ reply which would solve all my problems but when she replied that she had only one ace I could not take the chance and I simply bid 6♥.

Here is a recap of the bidding:

West	North	East	South
	Prissy	Sly	Myself
			1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♦	Pass	6♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

The lead was the ♦10 and this is what I could see:

♠ 1096
♥ J95
♦ AQ2
♣ J964

W N E
S

♠ AKJ2
♥ KQ10876
♦ -
♣ AK5

I played the ♦Q, ruffed East's ♦K and continued with the ♥K. Sly took the ♥A and sent back another diamond. As I was not yet sure how to best use the pitch on the ♦A, I decided to ruff the diamond return and delay the decision until I knew more about the hand. I took out the remaining trumps playing small to the ♥9 and when they split I saw a way to best combine my chances by trying first to drop a doubleton ♣Q and then, if that did not work, to go for the spade finesse, using

the last trump as entry.

So I quickly rattled out the ♣A and the ♣K and when Sly dropped the ♣Q on the second round, I finessed the ♣9 and I opened my hand, claiming 12 tricks by pitching a spade on the ♣J and the other on the ♦A.

Well, that's what I thought anyway. "Not so fast, dear chap" said Sly with a friendly smile and showed me the ♣10 in his hand!!

He got me again!

This was the full hand:

♠ 1096
♥ J95
♦ AQ2
♣ J964

♠ 753
♥ 32
♦ 109876
♣ 873

W N E
S

♠ AKJ2
♥ KQ10876
♦ -
♣ AK5

♠ Q84
♥ A4
♦ KJ543
♣ Q102

The wily champion seeing that my plan was destined to succeed, because of the friendly position of the ♠Q, decided to give me a losing option by throwing his ♣Q under my ♣K, hoping that I would fall for it and finesse the "marked" ♣10.

I could not bring myself not to admire his foresight and I congratulated him for his brilliant play. That proved to be the right thing to do because before leaving at the end of the tournament he came to Prissy and said: "Stick tight to this one, he is not only a good player but he is also a gentleman and a very good sport".

I unashamedly blushed and clutching my card with its precious 55% score in one paw and holding my beautiful Prissy with the other, I proceeded with my chin held high towards the car park where Hana was waiting for us.