

Around the world with 52 cards

By Migry Zur Campanile



Albuquerque

Thinking back over the recent excitement from Yokohama and its nerve-racking NEC Cup final, screened in real time for all to watch thanks to that wonder of wonders which is the online vugraph, it is difficult to reconcile ourselves with a time where the only detailed information from major events came from brief newspaper articles and tournament bulletins. The latter were stock-piled by the participants and became bridgistic gold dust for the majority of information starved players waiting for them back home.

Not many know that the first tentative steps of our game on the information superhighway were made in 1994, when the World Teams and Pairs Championships were held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and for the first time ever the tournament bulletins were posted on a yet sparsely populated internet.

Founded by the Spanish in 1706, Albuquerque has quite a few interesting spots, most of them conveniently located along Central Avenue, the famous Route 66: the Old Town is the old Spanish part of the city, and well worth a look. Its center is the Old Town Plaza and the San Felipe de Neri church, which look just the way you would imagine an old Spanish town center to look – complete with endless arrays of souvenir shops.

The championships took place at the end of summer from September 17 to October 1. Those who are familiar with the weather in New Mexico will know that summer in Albuquerque means one thing: Heat. OK, there are probably a few other things going on too, bridge being one of them, but the major activity for residents and visitors alike seemed to be finding ways to avoid the oppressive heat.

During the fortnight of my stay it was often explained to me that mid-September should usually see a progressive cooling

of the average summer temperatures, which are steadily in the high 30s.

Unfortunately nobody had bothered to tell the Great Shuffler in the Sky that he had forgotten the heating on for too long! To make things worse the effects of the heat are sharply intensified by the fact that Albuquerque is almost a mile above sea level: the air is thinner, and so the sun is more intense. On the plus side the heat is a dry heat, similar to what we have in Eilat, and more bearable than its humid counterpart.

Anyway, shuttling from air-conditioned motel in an air-conditioned car to the air-conditioned playing venue was not so bad. It certainly gave us a chance to concentrate on our bridge without outside distractions. The tournament was one of missed opportunities: we managed to surprise ourselves by getting to the quarter-finals of the Mc Connell four-handed (myself, Ruti Levit, Daniela Birman and Roni Barr), only to lose a tight match to a strong USA team which would eventually win the competition. In the Ladies Pairs myself and Ruti finished sixth after leading at the half-way.

Here is an instructive hand from the Mc Connell quarter finals where for one of the defenders the ace of trumps got too hot to handle!

West Dealer – N/S Vul

♠ 73
♥ Q932
♦ AQ5
♣ 10986

N
W E
S

♠ AJ
♥ K1074
♦ K1096
♣ AQ5

West	North	East	South
	<i>Migry</i>		<i>Ruti</i>
2♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	3♥*	Pass	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

* Natural, 8-10

Lead: ♠4

After a normal sounding auction I was left to tackle a 4♥ contract which essentially seemed to depend on guessing the ♥J and, failing that, on a super-friendly club layout.

I could see no benefit in ducking and several potential dangers (like a club switch and an ensuing ruff if the ♥A is with East),

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have saved the ship. So Babbitt and his fellow officer bid on, trying to take advantage of the high cards in their possession.

The lead was the ♥4 and Talat tried to deceive declarer about the position of the remaining high cards, by winning with the ♥A and returning the ♥5. Babbitt did not fall for it and put up the ♥Q. When that held he could count nine tricks, since the diamond finesse was bound to work. His tenth trick could come from a double finesse in diamonds or much more likely, if either of the black suits split 3-3, since unfortunately it was not possible to combine both chances for lack of entries. Babbitt continued by cashing his three top spades, finding that East had started with four of them. Then he moved on to dummy and cashed two top clubs, reaching this position.

♠ 7			
♥ -			
♦ 8765			
♣ A			
♠ -		♠ J	
♥ J9		♥ K8	
♦ 94		♦ KJ3	
♣ J10		♣ -	
♠ -			
♥ 10			
♦ AQ10			
♣ 94			

Still unwilling to try the double finesse, Babbitt continued with his original plan and cashed the third club. Talat discarded the ♥8 and declarer had now only one chance left to make his contract: he played a diamond to the ♦10 and exited with the ♥10 to Talat's bare ♥K. The Turk

was now forced to return a diamond into declarer's ♦AQ. This spectacular ending saved the ship and secured for the skilled American officer the nickname of "Four NoTrump" Babbitt!



Talat Pasha

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so I took my ♠A and played a heart to my ♥Q. Surprisingly...it held. This may be easier than I expected, I thought, as I continued with a heart to the ♥10, small from East, ♥J from West! I was not a happy bunny now and soon had to make another guess: West played back the ♠Q, overtaken by East with the ♠K and the ♣3 hit the table.

Coming from a competent player the club switch could be from anything, including KJx. However West had already come up with seven points and was known to be rather a free-spirit where light openings are concerned, so I assessed the chance of her holding the ♣K and not opening 1♠ at green vs red as remote. Should I then put all my declarer eggs in the club double-finesse basket or was there a more appealing alternative?

What would you do?

West so far had shown six spades and three hearts and by taking the "safe" club finesse I could probably find out more about her minors. So I played the ♣Q which held and then the ♠A, on which West played the ♣J. It looked like she started with a 6-3-2-2 shape and that is just what the doctor ordered for a speedy recovery of my 4♥ contract!

Can you guess what happened next?

One of the most treasured bits of advice that I give to my pupils is: "Do not play the Ace of Trumps unnecessarily early, as then you will have relinquish control of the hand". As always, however, all rules have their exceptions and this hand proves how holding on to the ace too long can be equally fatal. This is the position we have reached:

		♠ -	
		♥ 93	
		♦ AQ5	
		♣ 109	
♠ 10865		♠ 9	
♥ A		♥ -	
♦ 42		♦ J873	
♣ -		♣ K7	
		♠ -	
		♥ K4	
		♦ K1096	
		♣ 5	

After I cashed two rounds of diamonds and exited with a heart, West had no choice but to give me a ruff-and-sluff which took care of the club loser.

Here is the complete hand:

		♠ 73	
		♥ Q932	
		♦ AQ5	
		♣ 10986	
♠ Q108652		♠ K94	
♥ AJ6		♥ 85	
♦ 42		♦ J873	
♣ J4		♣ K732	
		♠ AJ	
		♥ K1074	
		♦ K1096	
		♣ AQ5	

Naturally a sharper defender could have insured my defeat my cashing first the ♥A and then playing the ♠Q, but such a play is far from automatic at single dummy and certainly not as obvious as one needs to have the power to break a rule so deeply ingrained.