

Around the world with 52 cards

Travels and adventures of a bridge pro

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My French got better and better this summer; I almost learnt how to make sense of their restaurant menus! After the fortnight in Menton for the European Open Championships with its grueling playing conditions, I felt I definitely had to give the French bridge organizers a chance to redeem themselves; so when a good American friend, now living in Paris (and not related to Gershwin!), invited me to La Baule to play with him in their 53rd International Bridge festival, I was very happy to accept.

La Baule is a well developed holiday town on the southern coast of Brittany with a gorgeous wide beach of golden sand which stretches as far as the eye can see, aptly gaining the appellation of the best beach in Europe. Besides having lots of attractions in its own merit, with open air markets full of gastronomic temptations, La Baule functions as a great base from which to explore the real Brittany with the majestic cliffs and the spellbinding sunsets of its Cote Sauvage: the days are brisk and sunny and at night,

the dinner tables are loaded with freshly-caught fish.



Is it any wonder that the toughest part of the day was to extract myself from this kaleidoscope of smells and colors to return to the green covered tables of the Palais du Sport, where the tournament was hosted?

Right. The tournament. Well, for a start the participation of several French, Belgian, Polish and Israeli experts meant that the qualification of international was truly deserved, but the playing atmosphere was much more pleasant than some other tournaments I have played in. The tournament included all the usual varieties of competitions: ladies', men's, imps, mixed, teams, but some of the sessions were rather long, stretching sometimes to 30 boards. The prizes were very generous and were extended to the top fifth of the field (which was often very large with over 220 pairs attending, for instance, the Open Pairs). Here are a couple of interesting hands:

South West North East
 pass 4 ♠ double pass
 5 ♥ (all pass)

After this short but explosive round of bidding, West (your partner) leads the ♦9 and this is what you see in dummy:

South dealer	North	
E-W vul	♠ A 7 6 2	
Imps	♥ A 10 9 5 4	
	♦ K 2	
	♣ Q J	
		East (you)
		♠ 3
		♥ Q
		♦ A Q 10 7 6 5
		♣ 10 9 8 7 3

♦ 9	<table border="0"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										

Declarer plays low so you take the ♦Q and start getting those hyperactive brain cells going. What do you play next? (Answer on next page.)

The next hand is taken from the Open Pairs (matchpoints) and shows how a sharp declarer can often take advantage of a minor defensive slip (upper right column):

	♠ A 10 8	
	♥ 8	
	♦ —	
	♣ —	
♠ Q J 4		♠ 7 5 2
♥ A		♥ —
♦ —		♦ —
♣ —		♣ 10

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	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K 9 6 3										
	♥ —										
	♦ —										
	♣ —										

South declarer	North	
None vul	♠ A 10 8	
	♥ K 8 3	
	♦ 9 8 7	
	♣ A J 7 2	
		East
West		♠ 7 5 2
♠ Q J 4		♥ J 4 2
♥ A Q 9 6 5		♦ J 10 5
♦ 6 4 2		♣ 10 9 6 4
♣ Q 3		
	South	
	♠ K 9 6 3	
	♥ 10 7	
	♦ A K Q 3	
	♣ K 8 5	

After a quick, unopposed auction to 3NT, West leads the ♥6 to his partner's ♥J and ducks the heart return to keep the communications open in order to be able to clear the suit if either he or his partner takes the lead. This looks like an unsound decision given that declarer has at least 27 points, and with West holding 11 and the ♥J already played, there is very little chance of East ever gaining the lead.*

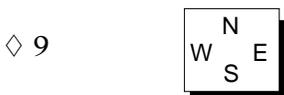
This paves the way to a nice endplay. I cash the diamonds (throwing a club, not planning to finesse) and take three club tricks when the queen appears, to reach the following layout (diagram on the left).

At this point the ♥8 from dummy puts West in a difficult bind. He opted to exit with a small spade, playing East for the ♠9, and this allowed me to claim 11 tricks for an 80% score on the board. On a high level, the correct exit card is the ♠Q. West has come down to one heart winner and three spades, so he must be guarding spades (with the Q-J-x or Q-x-x). If he leads the queen, I might get it wrong.

*One advantage to ducking is to prevent declarer from taking a risk-free finesse into the East hand.

Answer to first problem:

South dealer	North	
E-W vul	♠ A 7 6 2	
Imps	♥ A 10 9 5 4	
	♦ K 2	
	♣ Q J	
		East
		♠ 3
		♥ Q
		♦ A Q 10 7 6 5
		♣ 10 9 8 7 3



South	West	North	East
pass	4 ♠	double	pass
5 ♥	(all pass)		

Opening lead: ♦9

What did you play after winning trick one with the queen?

The question is how to defeat 5♥. We can see two diamond tricks and since partner cannot possibly overruff dummy or be credited with a spade or a trump trick, he

must have a club honor. Now if we cash the ♦A and play back a club, declarer will simply pull trumps and pitch a losing club from dummy on the ♦J. If we play back a club, declarer can let West win the trick and if he has led from a singleton, we will have no way to cash our diamond before it is pitched in dummy on the winning club in hand. So it all comes down to whether partner has led a singleton or a doubleton.

Given the bidding, his likely shape should consist of at least seven spades, probably two hearts since South failed to open a weak two and three or four cards in the minors. It is unlikely, however, that partner would open 4♠ with a 7-2-2-2 shape, and, therefore, we should credit him with 7+-2-2/3-1 or 7+-2-1-2/3. We can deduce that in all likelihood the ♦9 is indeed a singleton and the only return to defeat the contract is a low diamond for partner to ruff, thus not setting up any minors-suit winners for declarer on which to pitch losers in dummy. Here is the complete hand:



The author at the market in *la bau*

	North	
	♠ A 7 6 2	
	♥ A 10 9 5 4	
	♦ K 2	
	♣ Q J	
West		East
♠ K Q 10 9 8 5 4		♠ 3
♥ 8 2		♥ Q
♦ 9		♦ A Q 10 7 6 5
♣ K 5 4		♣ 10 9 8 7 3
	South	
	♠ J	
	♥ K J 7 6 3	
	♦ J 8 4 3	
	♣ A 6 2	