

Around the world with 52 cards

by Migry Zur Campanile

When I heard that the venue for the 1997 European Championships would be the Italian town of Montecatini Terme, I was quite intrigued. I had never been to an old-fashioned, elegant Spa resort like Bath in England, Baden Baden in Germany or indeed Montecatini in Italy, and I started wondering what it was going to be like trying to mix bridge and the health treatments of the Spa. On a more personal note, I had just entered one of my non-smoking spells and I knew that it would inevitably lead to a very "tense" time. I was painfully aware of the fact that one of the acknowledged dangers of a prolonged competition is the amount of stress a player can build up and I was afraid that piling on top of it the stress from having stopped smoking would likely make me into a Migrynstein before the end of the event. So the prospect of being able to relieve such pressures and in a medically controlled environment of all places was a very welcome one.

Located less than an hour drive from Florence, Montecatini's long and illustrious history as a health center goes back a few hundred years and is based around the restorative properties of the local spring. In the summer its population grows from around 25,000 to 150,000 as visitors arrive from all over the world to experience its

mineral benefits. Various spa houses accommodate the eight different types of water that flow from the nearby hills, each one with trusted medicinal properties for the treatment of specific complaints such as liver trouble, gall bladder issues and so on.



The furious pace of the Championships barely left me the time to experience first hand the "miraculous" properties of the water. Whenever I left the playing area I would find myself discussing hands with my friends

happily smoking away in the adjoining corridors. The temptation to ask for a cigarette was overwhelming, so I decided to create an alternative for myself and started experimenting with rolling grass into cigarette papers and smoking them. Yes, you read right, grass as in the grass of your garden, not the other type related to marijuana and such. My idea was that smoking anything would be better than nothing, sort of a conscious placebo effect. Of course, they tasted disgusting but still I persisted for a few days, trying different mixes of grass and carefully selecting strands of various types taken from different areas of the nearby park. Their strange smell together with the "homemade" look elicited a lot of interest from my fellow players; some would hesitantly take me aside and warn to be more careful, some others would praise my "free

spirit” and devil-may-care attitude. All of them, however, would marvel at my “chutzpah” in smoking the “special” cigarettes in public. Was I not afraid of being caught? To be honest part of me was actually looking forward to having a testy Carabinieri, having to suffer through a few puffs of my horrible cigs in order to decide what to make of them!

Despite my nicotine deprivation woes, the bridge went quite well and we ended up fighting for the podium, finishing a creditable third, only one VP behind the French ladies.

Here is a hand from our match versus Denmark in the 13th round of the Championships.

Try it yourself first. You reach 6♥ without the opponents bidding.

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

West leads the ♣9. Suppose you play low from dummy. Would you?

East plays the ♣K and you ruff.

You draw three rounds of trump, West discarding a club on the third round.

Next you lead the ♠K. West takes the ace and exits with a spade.

How do you continue?

Here is the full deal:

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

Migry	West	Ruti Levit	North	East
South	pass	2♦	pass	pass
2♣	pass	3 NT (1)	pass	pass
3♥	pass	4♦ (3)	pass	pass
4♣ (2)	pass	5♥	pass	pass
4♠ (4)	pass	(all pass)		
6♥	(all pass)			

- (1) I have a king.
- (2) Which one?
- (3) The ♦K
- (4) cuebid

Again, West led the ♣9 and I played small from dummy. East put up the ♣K, which I ruffed.

After drawing trumps in three rounds, it looks like the only legitimate chance apart from finding West with an extremely unlikely original club holding of J-9 doubleton, was to devise some sort of squeeze involving the minor suits.

The first thing I had to decide was to check the timing of the squeeze, to see if it could work on both players and, if not,

on which player it would have the better chance of success. I knew that East held the remaining top club, so it was time to check what was happening in spades and, if possible, turn the ♠J into an additional entry to improve my communications.

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

I led the ♠K and, after some thought, West took her ace and exited with another spade. Decision time: Which opponent was holding the diamond guard? If it was East, then I would have to cash the remaining spades and run all my trumps, leaving in dummy the ♦K-x and ♣Q and in hand the ♦A-x-x. If it was West who held the diamond guard, I would have to take the spade in dummy, play the ♣Q to force out the ♣A and thus transfer the club threat to West. Then I cash the last spade and run my trumps, leaving a similar end position but with the ♣10 in dummy this time. Which way to go? Was it a complete guess?

Well, the only tiny clue I had was that East had one more heart than West, and thus she was a little less likely to hold the diamond guard. It was an extremely thin inference but it was better than nothing. So I proceeded to set up the squeeze vs. West. I took the spade return in dummy and followed the plan I outlined earlier, reaching the following position with my last trump to be played:

♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ —
♦ K 9 8	♦ Q 3
♣ 10	♣ 7 5
♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ —
♦ J 10 5	♦ Q 3
♣ J	♣ 7 5
♠ —	♠ —
♥ 3	♥ —
♦ A 7 6	♦ Q 3
♣ —	♣ 7 5

other table the Danes succeeded in unearthing their diamond fit, so they had a lot less trouble in the play. It was a swift one down in six diamonds after the spade lead for a sizeable 14-imp swing, which helped us to a 19-11 victory.

Editor's Note: Migry's decision on this hand was in tune with the Vacant Spaces discussion in the articles on the preceding pages. There was one more space in the West hand for the third diamond. The odds were 11 to 10 that West had more diamonds than East. Interestingly, West had to duck the ♠K and ♠Q to defeat the slam!

On the last trump, West has no escape and the twelfth trick came rolling in. At the