



How **not** to play Bridge – by Nigel Mortimer

No 001

Through my years of playing Bridge I have witnessed many surprising things, some good play occasionally, but much more often, really dreadful play, almost too appalling sometimes to believe. It's not because these players are not intelligent, I've seen some very clever people make the most absurd errors.

Take this hand played recently by some friends Sam & Joan, Colin & Andy.

East was dealer & the bidding proceeded as follows:

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| East (Colin) | South (Joan) | West (Andy) | North (Sam) |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|

| | | | |
|----|------|----|------|
| 1♦ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
|----|------|----|------|

East then thought for a minute and prefaced their bid with the words, "I don't know, this is probably wrong" they then bid

| | |
|----|------|
| 3♦ | Pass |
|----|------|

West now thought long and hard, fiddling with the bidding box, looking at the cards again, then turning the bidding box 90 degrees left and then back again before finally....

| | |
|-----|------|
| 3NT | Pass |
|-----|------|

When it came back to East they immediately and without thought placed the 4♦ card on the table. West sighed loudly and passed quickly.

4♦ was the final contract and a low club was led by South. When dummy went down, West had

♠ A K J 8 5
♥ 10 7 4
♦ J
♣ A K J 9

North was heard to mutter "Dear God" under their breath.

11 tricks were made for +150 which was even more surprising than the bidding as East turned up with.

♠ 10
♥ A Q
♦ A K Q 10 4 3 2
♣ Q 8 3

When the score was entered all other pairs had been in 3NT, 6NT or 6D all making 13 tricks. There was a 5-0 trump break to be fair, but the ♠Q falls on the second round so there are an easy 16 tricks (of which you can take any 13).

What went wrong? Well the list is a long one!

- a) Should East open 2♣? Difficult, probably if the diamonds were hearts or spades, Playing Benji it would be ok, but in standard Acoll many would open this 1♦.
- b) The 3♦ rebid by East is now the only possible rebid, but it is an underbid in reality.
- c) West should count 16+ pts for partners 3d rebid & added to the 17 pts in their own hand a slam certainly looks possible even with a singleton diamond. 4NT would reveal the 2 aces and 6NT is then quite easy.
- d) Even after 3NT – 4♦, West must surely realise East has 7 solid (semi solid) diamonds and something outside & again 4NT would reveal the slam.
- e) Could they find the grand slam. At club level this would be difficult, as to get to the grand slam cue bids would really be required, after 3♦, 4♣ is a good start, followed by 4h from East. Even then the grand slam is made by the club fit and solid diamonds, there are precious few systems that would reveal this and so 6NT is probably the best final contract.
- f) How come only 11 tricks were made? Even now I find it difficult to believe, Declarer won the club lead in hand and played the ♦J which revealed the 5-0 break. They then played off the clubs (throwing a spade) and allowing South to ruff.
- g) A diamond return by South, meant East had no way to discard the ♥Q or get to dummy so the last trick was lost to the ♥K.

This might seem contrived, but I promise you it's not, declarer showed considerable skill to keep themselves to just 11 tricks!

There are several other issues relating to the bidding, where the director could have been called at least 3 times, but NS weren't ever going to complain!

Bridge principle – Always count both your and your partners points as a combined total, 25 combined points means you should be in a game of some sort. 30+ points combined is sufficient to consider a slam and with 33-34 combined points slam is a real prospect.

Nigel