

23. A Fond Memory

♠ A 4 3 ♥ A ♦ A K 5 4 2 ♣ A 9 6 5

The previous Team Trials deal was a heartbreaker for sure, but this one falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. It was from earlier in the match and might be classified as comic relief. It is surely one I will never forget. I suspect my opponents haven't forgotten it either. At favorable vulnerability, I held the above West cards. On my right was Lew Stansby and on my left was Chip Martel, world champions both. Sitting opposite me was one of the most aggressive preemptors of all time, my good friend Marty Bergen.

The Auction

Marty was the dealer and at these colors he hardly ever passed. Sure enough he opened 2♦, which for us showed a preempt, but not in diamonds. We played two-under transfer preempts: 2♦ showed spades, 2♠ showed clubs and 2NT showed diamonds (2♥ was natural since we had to use 2♣ for strong hands.) We played these two-unders to allow Marty even more latitude in preempting. If partner was at all interested, he could bid the next step to ask. Opposite the typical minimum, we were able to stop as low as possible. I have since concluded that this is a poor method, as it makes it too easy for the opponents to get in.

Anyway, here I was with this super hand opposite a weak two-bid in spades. Opposite a normal weak two, I could think about a grand slam. Maybe partner would have ♠KQJ10xx and the ♦Q, for example. Opposite Marty, as I liked to put it, I hoped nobody would double us in 2♠!

Well, that's an exaggeration of course, but still, I wasn't really thinking of slam. You see, Marty's favorable vulnerability preempts were a sight to behold. Any five-card suit and any thirteen cards qualified. He could have had:

♠ 10 x x x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x x

— really!

So instead of insisting on game (or looking for slam), I decided to ask more about his hand by bidding 2♥. (At least I didn't just bid 2♠, which would have been a sign-off.)

With the opponents silent, Marty gave his usual answer: 2♣, 'Partner, I have a minimum'. So what else is new? Marty always seemed to have a minimum. I passed. That is not a misprint. I passed! I swear to it, I was there. You haven't lived until you've seen one of Marty's favorable-vulnerability weak twos. Maybe this was taking it too far, but we were not vulnerable, and if we missed a decent game, so be it.

Meanwhile, my opponents might balance — and balance they did! Chip Martel's 3♥ bid was passed back around to me. What do you think I did?

Yes, I doubled. I didn't think our side could make a game, but I also didn't think Martel could take nine tricks. With any luck, I could cash my five top tricks and maybe one from Marty as well for a juicy 500.

Much to my surprise (and delight), Lew Stansby ran to 4♣. Now we were really getting somewhere. This one I felt confident about beating. Christmas had arrived. I was on lead against 4♣ doubled and vulnerable.

Cohen	Martel	Bergen	Stansby
		2♦*	pass
2♥*	pass	2♠*	pass
pass!	3♥	pass	pass
dbl	pass	pass	4♣
dbl	all pass		



Marty Bergen and Larry Cohen

The Play

♠ A 4 3 ♥ A ♦ A K 5 4 2 ♣ A 9 6 5

So which of my four aces should I lead? I've waited many years as an author to present this as a choice.



There is no 100% correct answer, but why not lead from the diamond combination and look at dummy?

Martel

♠ Q 6 5
 ♥ K Q J 9 4 3
 ♦ J 8 3
 ♣ J

Cohen

♠ A 4 3
 ♥ A
 ♦ A K 5 4 2
 ♣ A 9 6 5



Dummy is beautiful (to me, anyway). I suppose I could be really greedy and wish there were no ♣J on the table, but still, this looks juicy! Partner drops the ♦Q and declarer plays the ♦7. What does that mean?

On defense, signaling with an honor shows the one below it. In general, you never play high-low to signal a doubleton with Qx. Here, though, with the ♦J in dummy, partner might be starting a high-low. He knows you won't play him for the jack. You play the ♦K and partner follows with the ♦6 declarer playing the ♦9. Sure enough, his ♦Q wasn't a singleton.

Now what do you play?

- a) ♠A
- b) ♥A
- c) a low diamond
- d) ♣A



You are going to give partner a diamond ruff, yes. However, you do want a heart ruff when he gets in, so you play your ♥A first. You also should cash your ♠A before giving partner the diamond ruff. Why? Declarer ran from 3♥ doubled, so maybe he has a singleton in hearts. When your partner plays a heart for you to ruff, you don't want declarer to throw away a spade loser.

Having cashed the major-suit aces, which diamond do you play and why?



You should play the ♦2. When giving a ruff, you signal suit-preference. You want partner to return the lowest side suit, hearts. Partner ruffs with the ♣7 and duly returns a heart. Declarer ruffs with the king. And you?



You follow the general principle of trump promotion. When declarer ruffs high, if you overruff, there is no gain. By discarding, you set up an extra trump trick. This is now the position:

	Martel										
	♠ Q 6										
	♥ K Q J 9										
	♦ —										
Cohen	♣ J	Bergen									
♠ 3		♠ J 10 8 7									
♥ —		♥ 8 7 5									
♦ 5 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>	N		E	W				S		♦ —
N		E									
W											
	S										
♣ A 9 6 5		♣ —									
	Stansby										
	♠ K										
	♥ —										
	♦ —										
	♣ Q 10 8 4 3 2										

You have taken the first five tricks, and partner's heart play has promoted a second trump trick for your side. You now have two natural trump tricks for down four for +1100.

The Result

NS Vul.

	Martel										
	♠ Q 6 5										
	♥ K Q J 9 4 3										
	♦ J 8 3										
	♣ J	Bergen									
Cohen		♠ J 10 8 7 2									
♠ A 4 3		♥ 8 7 6 5 2									
♥ A		♦ Q 6									
♦ A K 5 4 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td></td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>	N		E	W				S		♣ 7
N		E									
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	S										
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	Stansby										
	♠ K 9										
	♥ 10										
	♦ 10 9 7										
	♣ K Q 10 8 4 3 2										

Marty's weak two was quite ugly. However, it could have been worse! The ♦Q and ♠J10 were nice cards. I had misjudged. In fact, 4♠ is a pretty good contract, and given the good breaks, it would have made. However, +1100 was certainly better than +420. Also it made our opponents think twice before balancing for the rest of the match.



Lew Stansby

What happened at the other table? For some reason, East started out with a pass. How can anyone bid like that? This time it was South who preempted, a fairly normal 3♣. Personally, I think 3NT is the correct overcall on my hand, but West chose a rather tame (lame?) 3♦. Everyone passed and East-West made their unambitious contract for +110. They were only one zero short of the +1100 achieved at the other table.

One thing I'll never forget about this deal is the way the late, great, Alfred Sheinwold described it in his syndicated bridge column. He wrote:

When Bergen bid only 2♠ (meaning 'My hand isn't weak — it's decrepit!'), Cohen passed casually, as though he had only a mediocre hand. The opponents naturally dashed into the auction, with Cohen after them, chopping their heads off.

I can make all the fun I want and have all the fond memories I want, but let the record show that even though we won this battle, we lost the war.