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The Pairs

210 pairs competed in this year's congress and the standard of players attending was exceptionally high. Each qualifying section had at least 12 seeded pairs so it was very difficult to even qualify for the 2nd Consolation, let alone the Championship or Plate. The hands, during the week, were most interesting and had many points of learning.

"Gut feelings" play an important part when one is experienced enough to break the standard "rules" of the game. Unfortunately, Jessica and I were both put to the test too early in the event to find the best defence. In fact, both of the following were the first two boards of the tournament.

Dealer W : Both Vul

		<u>BIDDING</u>			
		<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	7	NB	NB	1S	NB
	Q42	1NT	2C	2H	NB
	Q62	NB[!]	NB		
	AQ9864				
A4		106532	[!] Would normally revert to 2S but had a "gut feeling" that the 4-3 fit was better.		
953		A1076			
8743		AK5			
K1052		J			
	KQJ98	Believing my good spade points were useless and that Jessica had made her bid primarily as a lead direct, I elected to quietly defend 2H rather than bid.			
	KJ8				
	J109				
	73				

I led the club 7 that Jessica won with the Queen. Her return of the diamond 2 was won by declarer with the Ace and I played the 9 in an attempt to encourage [Jessica and I play reverse signals, i.e. low to encourage]. Declarer played a low spade to dummy's Ace and the spade 4 return was ruffed by Jessica [she did not have a crystal ball to see I held the strong spade holding].

Jessica must now play the diamond Queen to create an entry to my hand but failing to view my 9 as encouraging played the standard return of the 6. Declarer won with the King and played one round of trumps with the Ace and led a spade that was ruffed with dummy's 9 and over-ruffed by Jessica with the Queen. We collect the diamond Queen trick but now Jessica is unable to get to my hand for me to draw dummy's last trump before declarer is able to ruff another

losing spade. The contract went down 1 trick but we should have defeated it by 3 tricks. This result would not have given us any more matchpoints as most E/W players were in 2S and 2SX for some embarrassing scores but that is not the point - we don't like to miss a golden opportunity to play a good defensive game. The point to be made is that when it is necessary, in defence, to find partner holding a certain card, one must play on this assumption. The lead of the Queen cannot cost if declarer holds the AKJ as the low card return gives a finessing opportunity. Pairs using natural signals i.e. high encouraging, defending 2H [a couple], had the chance of finding this elegant defence.

The next board was a lead problem. Playing against Acol opponents, what do you lead after this auction?

	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
K6	NB	1C (1)	NB	1D
J652	NB	2NT(2)	NB	3NT
64	NB			
108543	NB	NB	NB	

[1] As few as 2.

[2] Flat 17-18 HCP, may have majors.

The lead from a weak long suit when outside entries are poor is generally a bad choice of leads. The defending partnership can lose tempo if the led suit is continued. West had bid diamonds and when he failed to use Baron after the 2NT rebid, I suspected he held at least 5 diamonds and there was no way I was prepared to help declarer establish this suit at trick 1. The choice is now between leading from J652 [again, generally a poor lead] or K6 [the mind boggles].

I toyed with the spade King for some time as my "gut feeling" was to lead this card. However, as it was early in the event, I did not want to find egg on my face by leading into the jaws of declarer's AQ and most importantly, I had no wish to rock the partnership trust that Jessica and I have developed over the years. Against my better judgement I pulled out the heart 2. Oh! If I had only followed my "gut feeling" and put the spade King on the table [but could Jessica's old heart have stood the shock].

	QJ872		The heart lead ripped Jessica's hand
	97		to threads as declarer took 4 tricks
	A1072		in the suit - Jessica letting go 2
	Q2		spades in order to keep her
103		A954	diamonds. Declarer had no problem in
Q84		AK103	finding the correct club position
KJ983		Q5	and the 3rd club squeezed Jessica's
K76		AJ9	hand once more. Again she let go a
	K6		spade. Declarer, who had been
	J652		watching the spade discards with
	64		interest, elected to test the suit
	108543		by playing the Ace and to his
			absolute delight he had set up 3

spade tricks for one loss in the suit. Making 11 tricks with the loss of 1 spade and 1 diamond. It does not matter whether Jessica throws spades or diamonds if she elects to pitch diamonds, then declarer will go after this suit in lieu of spades. On the spade

King lead declarer is held to 9 tricks. I should have followed my own preaching "When in doubt, clout"!!

With a 52% result on the first round we are lying in 7th place N/S in a 15 table movement.

The 2nd Qualifying produced another set of interesting hands. We were having quite a comfortable round until we met this board. As west, you are on opening lead against 6C on this bidding sequence.

KQ8542	<u>North</u>	<u>South</u>	(1) 16+ HCP, ANY SHAPE
K2		1C (1)	(2) 4-7 HCP, 6-carded suit
J852	2H (2)	3C (3)	(3) 16+ HCP, 5-carded suit
6	4C (4)	4H (5)	(4) 6-7 pts, club support
	4NT(6)	5C (7)	(5) to play
	6C (8)	NB	(6) CRO Blackwood
			(7) 0-3 Aces
			(8) to play

If you found the spade King lead [no difficulty at all at Arana], you defeated the contract by taking 2 top spade tricks as partner held the AJ.

West led the diamond 2 [no don't ask me why anyone would chose this lead] and I won with the Ace, cashed the diamond King, throwing a spade from dummy and then led a low spade towards dummy's now singleton. East was given another opportunity to set the contract by returning a trump but selected a low heart.

Plan your play, as declarer, in this 6C contract [no we don't understand how we got there either, however, we did and I had to play it.

	96		There are insufficient entries to
	J109743		dummy to set up the heart suit but
	9		by using dummy's trumps separately,
	KQ73		you have 4 tricks, 5 trumps in your
KQ8542		AJ	hand, AK diamonds and Ace of hearts
K2		Q865	makes 12 tricks so if you chose the
J852		Q643	cross-ruff line you were correct. If
6		954	you start the cross-ruff without
	1073		first giving up the spade, you will
	A		be defeated.
	AK107		
	AJ1082		

On the low spade exit, East wins with the Jack and returns a low heart. You win and play a low spade and ruff in dummy - low heart and ruff in hand and west plays the King. You continue with a low diamond, ruffed in dummy and a low heart return. What trump do you insert? If you put in the 8 you ran a serious risk of an overruff with the undisclosed 9 and a trump return would make you 2 tricks off instead of 1.

Your correct play is the Jack. You ruff the last diamond in dummy and lead one of the last two hearts towards your now A8 of trumps.

When East plays low you put in the 8 and to your great surprise you tally up 12 tricks on an impossible slam contract.

When leading against slam contracts, it is recommended you find the aggressive lead. On this hand the spade King is aggressive - the heart King is aggressive - the trump is aggressive low from the Jack is not only passive it is a stupid lead.

The Gold Coast Congress uses a carbon Travelling Score Card and at the half-way point, the top copy is collected and scoring is started - an excellent idea that allows the huge number of results to be produced in a much quicker time.

A confused Richard Grenside (Chief Tournament Director) returned to our table as Jessica had kindly given E/W the slam score. As it was impossible, in his opinion, for any side to score a 920 on the board, he questioned Jessica as to whether she had inadvertently plucked a score from the air. On her reassurance that the 920 should have appeared in the N/S column he said "I won't ask you how you bid it, but I will give you my cheque book later on so that you can make something out of nothing".

A 59% round, in a very tough field, gave us a win for the session and 3rd overall saw us competing in the Plate Section [an even tougher field].

Final 1

The importance of planning one's play at trick 1 was high-lighted in this 6H slam hand by West.

	K1084		Jessica led the diamond 10 from North and declarer had called for a low diamond before I could focus. I won with the King and seeing nothing better to do, returned a passive diamond to dummy's Queen. The Ace was played and declarer discarded a spade from hand. With the speed of light, declarer called for a low heart from dummy, playing the Ace in hand followed by another heart lead to dummy's Queen.
	9		
	10973		
	J963		
J3		AQ752	
AK64		QJ105	
J2		AQ4	
AQ872		10	
	96		
	8732		
	K865		
	K54		

At this point, we could have all packed our bags and gone home because there was nothing that declarer could do to save the contract.

Declarer continued the hand as a cross-ruff but had to surrender the last 2 trump tricks to me. What a waste of an excellent slam. Declarer, who I knew had been playing for 20 years, had tackled the hand without preparation. I know it is difficult and boring to plan one's line of play at trick 1, but it is an essential exercise if one is going to get the most out of hands. All declarer needed to do was count. Spade Ace (1) AQ of diamonds (2), club Ace (1) trumps in dummy (4) trumps in hand (4). Does this not total 12 tricks??

Taking the diamond finesse at trick 1 is mandatory and on the passive diamond return, declarer cross-ruffs the hand and sails on to victory and +1430. A trump return, by me, at trick 2, will defeat the contract by 1 trick because ruffing power is depleted. I should have recognised the hand as a cross-ruff, but it was the last hand of the afternoon, and the only thing on my mind was thoughts of a glass of red wine and the delicious Thai chicken that Jessica had prepared.

Final 2

The hands, although the most interesting in many years, were also the most difficult to bid, play and defend. Board 19: Dealer S - E/W vul. was played against a once international player, Fay Landy [North].

	A9642		<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	void		1D(1)	2D(2)	2S(3)	NB
	8		2NT	5C	5D	NB
	AKJ10954		NB	6C	NB	NB
3		KQJ107	6D(4)	NB	NB	NB
K82		A94				
AKJ96		75432		(1) 11-15, could be as few as 2		
Q872		void		diamonds.		
	85			(2) At least 5-5 in black suits.		
	QJ107653			(3) Natural and forcing.		
	Q10			(4) Pairs strategy - when in doubt,		
	63			bid one more.		

Jessica wrapped up 12 tricks in a very quick time. There are many ways to bid a slam, this is just one of them.

Sitting South with E/W vul. what do you bid at [?]

	QJ72		<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>
	Q742		2C (1)	NB	NB (2)	2H
	974		2S (3)	NB	3S (4)	X (5)
	K8		NB	4H	?	

- (1) 11-15 HCP, at least 5 clubs and 4 of a major, or 6 clubs headed by 2 top honours.
- (2) Fewer than 10 points.
- (3) Showing at least 5 clubs and 4 spades.
- (4) 8/9/10 points in support of spades.
- (5) Optional for penalties or Take-out.

As far as I was concerned, the X was automatic. They were vulnerable, we were not - we had competed strongly, they had stolen our contract - we were going to pick up a big plus, wrong again!! Contract made 10 tricks with the loss of 2 spades and 1 diamond.

953		104	4S is a terrible contract on heart
AKJ103		9865	returns. Declarer loses control of
AK65		J83	the hand and any attempt to set up
A		10932	clubs is fruitless.

The Teams

110 teams front up for the most popular event of the week-long congress - the Swiss Teams. 14 board matches with a maximum gain of 30 VPs per round.

Match 1.

We had dramatic start by playing the top seeded team [Seres]. Tim Seres and Mary McMahon have ruled supreme over the Gold Coast Congress for most of my bridge life and it was extremely sad to witness the deterioration in Mary's game [she is now close to 80]. Against 3NT by Mary, I led 4th highest from my 6-carded suit headed by KQ. Dummy produced J10 doubleton and Mary inadvertently overtook the winning Jack with her Ace. I regained the lead at trick 2 and cashed my remaining 5 diamonds to defeat the makeable contract by 3 tricks vulnerable. Mary was understandably embarrassed by her carelessness and apologised to Tim. Without hesitation, he told Mary to forget it and said "I will tell our teams mates that Judy led the King pinning the J10 doubleton". My admiration for this gentleman of the game increases each time I am lucky enough to sit at his table. Here is a man who has almost perfected this very difficult game and careless mistakes naturally must frustrate him, but he never shows it. With many partnerships screaming and fighting because one could not find a difficult defence or a complex bid, it is refreshing to observe impeccable table manner. He also conveys by example that in order to gain success one must encourage partner not criticise.

It was a fairly uneventful match with small IMPS being passed backward and forward but we lost the match with this board contributing 12 IMPS when I failed to find the trump lead.

J109 Against their 4H contract, I chose the spade Jack
A105 [unbid major] as the opening lead and continued the
A1095 suit when I regained the lead with the heart Ace. At
J63 the other table, Pam received the trump lead and had
 no chance of making her contract. We lost the match
 19-11 VPs.

Match 2

We are still in the top half of the field and this match was played against another reasonably high seeded team. This was the most interesting hand from this set.

A102 After a 1NT [Precision 13-15] opening from me, Jessica
void bid 3D forcing and I returned to 3NT. 6C from Jessica
AJ1052 that I converted to 6D and she proceeded to take all
AK973 13 tricks. It is unsound practice to bid Grand Slams
 in teams unless you can count all 13 tricks in your
mind before you make your final bid. With distributional hands,
as above, the Queens that are vital key cards that cannot be
found from a Blackwood or Cue Bidding sequence. It is also very
likely that suits will divide badly. The other table failed to
bid the slam and we won the match 24-6 VPs.

Match 3

We all played a solid game to score another victory 17-13 VPs.

Match 4

We sat down with a team of ladies from Sydney and after this board I sensed we were on top of the match because they became very agitated after Jessica had bared her teeth.

Dealer S: E/W Vul

	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
	NB	1S	3C	4S
Q7	5C	5S	NB	NB
532	NB			
32				
QJ10987				
AJ853	K964			
97	QJ108			
AQ7	K10984			
A62	void			
	102			
	AK64			
	J65			
	K543			

After I had passed initially Jessica's weak-jump 3C bid suggested a sacrifice against the vulnerable game/slam. I will always co-operate so bid 5C over their game. 5S is 1 off when declarer takes the trump finesse into Jessica's hand - electing to play me for Qxx [quite a reasonable assumption in view of Jessica's

weak jump overcall]. Once regaining the lead, Jessica led a heart to my AK that I had indicated when she made the opening lead of the club Queen. The importance of using suit preference signals [Lavinthal - Lesson 7, page 7 of my book] is clearly obvious on this hand. At the other table, Jenny made all 13 tricks on a non-heart lead and playing for the drop in trumps. We tally up another 23-7 VP victory.

Match 5

We are now in 10th place and are to meet a very strong Townsville team. The pair at our table were playing a very complicated Relay Precision System with more frills than Madam Pompadour's Petticoat.

	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
KQ9842	3NT(1)	4S(2)	NB	NB
KQ7	5C	NB	NB	5S
854	6C	NB	NB	6S
J	X	NB	NB	NB
6				
void				
AQ1073				
AKQ10754				
	75			
	J108543			
	92			
	832			
AJ103				
A962				
KJ6				
96				

(1) Showing no more than 3 losers with a long solid suit.

(2) Not even a chaff bag tied around her neck would keep Jessica out of the bidding.

Not knowing who held what, I had a difficult decision to make. They were vulnerable, we were not. West was obviously void in one suit [most likely spades] and I did not like my diamond holding - both values could be finessed if dummy had two entries [or the suit could be ruffed high if dummy turned up with a void or singleton]. After weighing up all the pros and cons, I took the bit between the teeth and bid 6S

because I believed 6C was making - wrong again - dummy's hand could provide one entry only so 6C fails losing 1 spade and 1 diamond trick. Jenny and Pam were able to stay out using my control loser method but the loss of -100 at our table, was too expensive and they won the match 19-11 VPs. We slipped back to 14th place.

Match 6

Both tables failed to bid the vulnerable spade slam on this board.

	32		<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	J983		1S	NB	4S	NB
	Q1086		?			
	QJ4					
AJ1086		K9765	Although East's bid promises no			
AK6		54	more than the 5-carded spade			
AKJ7		42	support, West should make a slam			
10		A976	try by Cue Bidding the diamond Ace.			
	Q		If East does not hold the club Ace,			
	Q1072		West will return to 5S where the			
	953		contract will play and have a			
	K8532		reasonable chance of making.			

East's hand is a text book 4S bid. If East changes suit to 2C showing the 10+ point hand and then supports spades strongly, West will be tempted to bid 7S after finding out, through Blackwood, that East holds 1 Ace, 1 King [total of 7 points] and obviously, at least 1 Queen. We had another good win of 21-9 VPs so up we shot again.

Match 7

This match was against a strong team from Newcastle. We gained IMPs on 6 of the 14 boards - they gained on 5 so we ended up in a 15-15 VP draw.

Round 8

At this stage of the tournament all teams in the top quarter of the field were strong - we were in 11th place. This is the most interesting hand from the set played against a strong Sydney team.

Dealer S : E/W vul.

At our table, East played 3NT after this bidding sequence

	8		<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
	A8542		NB	1D	2NT(1)	X(2)
	KJ		NB	NB	3C	3NT
	J10952		NB	NB	NB	
A32		KQ94	(1) Showing 5-5 in two of the			
Q1093		J76	unbid suits.			
A85		Q64	(2) Penalty X showing points.			
Q87		A64				
	J10765					
	K					
	109732					
	K3					

I led the club King that was ducked by declarer. The club continuation was won by dummy's Queen and a low heart led from the table was won by my King. Having a premonition that declarer held the strong spades, I found the lead of the diamond to Jessica's King and she was able to knock out declarer's last club stopper while still clutching the heart Ace. We take the contract down 2 for +200. At the other table, Pam and Jenny had an uninterrupted sequence to 3NT with West as declarer. North found the club Jack lead and continued in exactly the same way to where South was in with the heart King. Their south elected to return a spade, not the diamond and Jenny was able to scramble home for +600. We won the match 24-6 VPs.

Jenny and Pam's team bridge has improved enormously since last year and the solidness of their game was obvious as we were holding our own against the best. Although we had many wins last year, they were against lower seeded teams and when we jumped up the field we were knocked down again when we played the top seeds. This year, all our matches were against tough solid teams. With Jenny and Pam as the reliable "anchor pair", now confident in playing against the aggressive bidders, Jessica and I were able to play our game with some flair.

Match 9

Our team was now in 7th place and we were about to have one of our hardest matches. The team consisted of 3 members from one family - Mother and 2 sons. There is a 3rd member of this remarkable family who was not present at the Gold Coast Congress - Barbara Travis (nee GILL) is one of Australia's finest women players. Peter Gill has partnered Ron Klinger on many occasions with much success. Mother Gill taught her children bridge from the age of 4. She is a fine player in her own right and a lady with high standards. Her strong influence has rubbed off on her children and even though we lost by 22-8 VPs, it was the most pleasant of all our matches.

Match 10

Down to 10th place again to meet another Sydney team and we draw the match 15-15 VPs. This board cost us 14 IMPS when the pair at our table found a 24 HCP vulnerable slam using a very complex bidding method. Jenny and Pam bid to 3NT but the contract fails to make due to bad distribution.

<p>Q95 J9532 98 K96</p>	<p>A A64 K754 J10743</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 10px auto;"></div> <p>J1082 void AJ1063 AQ85</p>	<p>K7643 KQ1087 Q2 2</p>	<p>Our South opponent was able to establish that the North hand held 12 HCP, at least 5 clubs, 2 Aces and a singleton spade by the time they had reached the 3NT level. The slam is now very easy to bid and play [declarer, South, had no trouble in getting the diamond position right]. They lost 1 club trick to Jessica's King.</p>
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After the 10th round, the 1st and 2nd placed teams withdraw from the event and play off for 1st and 2nd prize money. The rest of the field continues on for 2 more rounds to determine the winners in other categories - Women's : Mixed : Veterans : Country. At this point, we were the leading Women's team and although we failed in our next two matches, we were delighted that we had sustained a good position in the field for most of the time.

Our 11th Round we lost 22-8 VPs. Jenny and Pam experienced much table presence from the husband and wife combination. Persistent table chatter from the wife when Pam and Jenny were trying to bid was very off-putting [yes, they know they should have called the Director but they are too nice]. Incomplete information was given during a bidding sequence [I believe deliberately] and Jenny and Pam were "conned" out of a vulnerable game. This couple [whom I won't name] have been around since Adam was a boy and they are bad news at and away from the table. Their ethics are questionable, but one has to have solid proof before pointing the finger. I did visit their table, after the match, in regard to the board where Jenny and Pam had failed to bid game due to incomplete information. The wife bristled immediately [a sign of guilt] and I made my point without accusing. They were not unpleasant to Pam and Jenny, just overwhelming.

One cannot help but improve one's standard of bridge after playing at the Gold Coast. The bridge is generally tough but mostly pleasant. The 1.30 p.m. start in the pairs and the 1 p.m. start in the teams, gives the participants time to sleep in [Jessica], stroll around Surfers, swim or write up bridge hands [Judy]. The 8.15 start for the night session allows players to enjoy a relaxed meal in the various eating houses around Surfers.

Why not give serious consideration to attending next year - it is a great week. It is a nervous experience the first time, as Jenny and Pam will tell you, but this you will overcome. There are players of all different standards with many new faces each year who are attending their 1st Gold Coast Congress.

This was my 30th year and I can say that I have never been involved in a conflict at the table. I have experienced the odd unpleasant game against fighting partnerships, but I do not let their behaviour interfere with my enjoyment. The Gold Coast Congress is rated by players as the "best" on the Australian bridge calendar and full credit must go to the band of workers who are responsible for the smooth running of this most prestigious event.