

54. High anxiety

By Ron Klinger

After 12 boards in the 36-board final of the Alt Invitational, held in April and organized by bid72, bridge 24 and netbridgeonline, together with BBO (Bridge Base Online), **De Botton** (Janet de Botton, Thomas Charlsen, Jason Hackett, Thor Erik Hoftaniska, Alexander Hydes, Artur Malinowski) led **Street** (Paul Street, Kamel Fergani, Nicolas L'Ecuyer, Ron Pachtman, Fred Pollack, Piotr Zatorski) by 28 Imps to 12.

East dealer : Nil vulnerable

North
♠ AK6
♥ KQ10
♦ A82
♣ AK63

South
♠ QJ975
♥ A
♦ KJ73
♣ J98

Would you rather be in 7♠, 7NT or 6♠ / 6NT? How would you play 7♠ on a heart lead or 7NT on a spade lead?

Barring a 5-0 spade break, with West holding all five, about a 2% chance, there are 12 tricks on top in 6♠ or 6NT. Even with West holding five spades, you have 11 tricks on top with chances for the 12th in diamonds and clubs. With 12 tricks almost certain, you have good chances in 7NT. You would win the lead in hand, cross to ♠A, cash ♠K, return to the ♥A, cash two more spades, discarding the ♦2 and the ♣3 from dummy, cross to the ♣A and cash the ♣K in case the ♣Q is singleton or doubleton. If the ♣Q has not dropped, continue with the ♥K, discarding the ♦3 or ♦7, and the ♥Q, pitching the ♠J. Finally play the ♦A and if you have not found anything better at this point, finesse the ♦J. You make if the ♣Q comes down in two rounds or if the ♦Q is onside or if there is a squeeze against West holding ♣Q-x-x-x and the ♦Q-x or longer and you pick the ending.

You have an extra chance in 7♠, which makes it the better grand slam. Win the heart lead, draw trumps (they are 3-2), via ♠A, ♠K, ♠Q, cross to the ♣A, cash the ♣K (home if the ♣Q has dropped), the ♥K, pitching a diamond and the ♥Q, discarding the ♣J, and ruff a club (home if clubs are 3-3). Finally played ♦A and finesse the ♦J. You make if the ♣Q falls or if clubs are 3-3 or if the ♦Q is singleton or the ♦Q is onside. None of it worked on the actual deal:

	North	
	♠ AK6	
	♥ KQ10	
	♦ A82	
	♣ AK63	
West		East
♠ 42		♠ 1083
♥ J7632		♥ 9854
♦ Q1054		♦ 96
♣ 72		♣ Q1054
	South	
	♠ QJ975	
	♥ A	
	♦ KJ73	
	♣ J98	

DE BOTTON was one off, -50, in 7♠. **STREET** was one down, -50, in 7NT, no swing.

North dealer : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	?

What would you do as South with:

♠ KJ84
♥ --
♦ Q7
♣ QJ107543

Suppose you have chosen 4♣ as South. West bids 4♥, Pass : Pass : back to you. What now?

Some would open 5♣, particularly because of the vulnerability. There are two reasons why you might prefer to open lower with, say, 4♣. You are certainly worth 4♣ in terms of playing strength, having six losers and hence seven playing tricks. The downside of 5♣ is that it leaves the opponents little option other than to double you. If you open 4♣, they might misguess their best spot. Over 5♣, they are very unlikely to go exploring for a contract at the 5-level. The other poor feature is the 4-card spade suit. That could work well in defence.

In the final both Souths chose 4♣.

North dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 1095	
	♥ Q542	
	♦ K1043	
	♣ 92	
West		East
♠ A3		♠ Q762
♥ AKJ763		♥ 1098
♦ AJ95		♦ 862
♣ 6		♣ AK8
	South	
	♠ KJ84	
	♥ --	
	♦ Q7	
	♣ QJ107543	

With **DE BOTTON** North-South, it went Pass : Pass : 4♣ : 4♥, all pass. North led the ♣9. West took the ♣A and ♣K, discarding the ♠3. Then came the ♦2: seven – nine – ten. North switched to the ♠5, taken by the ♠A. West cashed the ♥A, followed by the ♦A and a third diamond. West was able to ruff the fourth diamond in dummy. He lost a heart and two diamonds, but had ten tricks, +620.

STREET North-South:

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	4♣
4♥	Pass	Pass	4♠
Dble	5♣	Dble	All Pass

A pre-emptive bidder is expected not to bid twice (unless partner makes a forcing bid). If you do so, you can accept the accolades when you are right and all the blame when you are wrong.

West led the ♥A. South ruffed and played the ♣Q. East won with the ♣K and returned a heart. South ruffed and played the ♣4 to the ♣9 and ♣A. East returned a third heart. South discarded the ♠4. West won and could play a fourth heart: queen – ♣8 – ♣J. The ♦7 went to the ♦K, followed by the ♠5: two – jack – ace. South still had a diamond and a spade to lose, four light, –800 and 5 Imps to **DE BOTTON**. South would have been one trick (and 8 Imps) better off (and a hero) by discarding a spade at trick 3 when East returned a heart. **DE BOTTON** won Session 2 by 24-18 and led by 52-29 with one session to go.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. With South the dealer, neither side vulnerable, and with the opponents passing throughout, how would you and partner bid these cards:

North

♠ 8

♥ AJ98

♦ A6

♣ KQ8763

South

♠ A9643

♥ KQ1063

♦ 102

♣ A

2. With South the dealer, only East-West vulnerable, and with the opponents passing throughout, how would you and partner bid these cards:

North

♠ AJ87

♥ 1076

♦ A962

♣ A6

South

♠ K93

♥ Q

♦ KQ1053

♣ KJ95

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

I have reached the age where 'happy hour' is a nap.