

True Bridge Humor

As published by Michael Lawrence and reported by Alan Truscott

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Bridge: A Comedy Of Errors

In any major event bridge experts, like their opposite numbers in the chess world, quite reasonably expect peace and quiet in which to operate. There have been occasions when players in the final of a national championship have found themselves a partition removed from a disco, but by and large the organizers manage quite well.

To give the players maximum protection from spectators and extraneous noise, each table in the late stages of a national knockout or the world team championship for the Bermuda Bowl is given a separate room. The only non-players permitted are a recorder, an occasional waiter, board-mover or tournament director, and perhaps a non-playing captain, a Vugraph announcer, a member of the Appeals Committee or a member of the press. In practice there are seldom more than six persons present.

At the start of the 1971 Bermuda Bowl in Taipei one room had just five persons: Mike Lawrence and Bob Goldman for the Aces, John Swanson and Dick Walsh for North America, and player-writer Albert Dormer of England acting as recorder. The peace and quiet they expected was not, however, forthcoming. A description of the proceedings has recently been reported in a booklet by Lawrence entitled "True Bridge Humor."

Swanson and Walsh arrive out of breath 15 minutes late, claiming they had been told the wrong time and the wrong floor. The telephone is supposed to be silent, but rings three times during the first auction, receiving increasingly irascible responses from Dormer. An uninvited waiter asks for orders and is told "orange juice."

Walsh takes 15 minutes to play a part-score and then opens the bidding out of turn, deceived by the markings on unfamiliar wallet boards. He is barred for a round. On the next deal Swanson tables a dummy with 14 cards. Everyone else has 13, and after some argument the director agrees to provide a substitute board. A beautiful Chinese girl arrives from nowhere and uses the telephone for a long conversation in Mandarin, without objection from the goggling players. The substitute board arrives at the same time as the orange juice, and the telephone rings yet again. Goldman reaches for it indignantly, clashing with the waiter and sending half the orange juice over Dormer and half over the remaining boards.

Later in the match the diagramed deal illustrated the weakness in the traditional American ambiguous-king lead. When South landed in four spades doubled, West led the diamond king and East did not know what to do. As the cards lie he should have ruffed and led a heart, insuring a second ruff to beat the contract. But it seemed to him likely that his partner held ace-king of diamonds and no quick entry, in which case it would be foolish to ruff.

Many modern experts avoid this problem by modifying their leads, playing either queen from king-queen, called Rusinow, or ace from ace-king. As it was East guessed wrong by discarding. South won and led the heart jack. West was able to win, cash the diamond queen and continue the suit, but South ruffed high in dummy and made his doubled game easily. In the replay West played five diamonds and went down one.

The records of the 1971 world championship do not include, unfortunately, any of the drama-packed initial boards. Presumably Dormer's notes of the proceedings were permanently obscured by orange juice.

		North		
		♠ KQ9		
		♥ KQ82		
		♦ J2		
		♣ A873		
West			East	
♠			♠ A754	
♥ A5			♥ 109643	
♦ KQ1096543			♦	
♣ J104			♣ K962	
		South		
		♠ J108632		
		♥ J7		
		♦ A87		
		♣ Q5		
South	West	North	East	
Pass	1 ♦	Double	1 ♥	
2 ♠	3 ♦	3 ♠	Pass	
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Double	
Pass	Pass	Pass		

West led the ♦ King.