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Bridge

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One of the most popular figures in the world of bridge, Jean Besse, died Saturday in his native Switzerland at age 80. Beneath a placid exterior, he concealed a razor-sharp mind that he applied to mathematics and computing as well as bridge.

He was a newspaper columnist and a theorist as well as a player of the highest class. A quarter-century ago, he won the Sunday Times Pairs in England, an event to which Europe's best were invited, and he represented Switzerland in 27 international championships. In 1964, he was a member of a four-man team that seemed headed for the semifinal stage of the world team championship when fatigue took its toll.

At the 1982 world championships in Biarritz, France, Besse won the Bols Brilliancy Prize for his defense on the diagrammed deal. He sat East, defending three no-trump after South had opened one diamond. One might expect the opening bid to be one no-trump, with the same result, but it can be assumed that North-South were using a weak no-trump.

- The diagrammed deal was not archived by The New York Times -

West led the club five and South had to guess. If he played low from dummy he would have made his game since he would have scored two club tricks. But that would have been wrong if East held the nine. In practice, South played dummy's ten, hoping the jack was on his left, and regretted it when East produced that card.

South did the best he could at this point by permitting the jack to win. As the cards lie, this hold-up would succeed against routine defense: South will be able to lead a diamond from dummy and establish that suit without giving West a chance to cash two club winners.

But when Besse returned his remaining club, West took the ace and played the four. This was a suit preference signal, suggesting a possible entry in diamonds, and Besse rose to the occasion. He discarded his diamond ace. This play, known as the Emperor's Coup, insured the defeat of the contract. The diamonds could not now be established without permitting West to cash two more club winners.