

# An Early Lesson in Humility

By Eric Kokish



I started to play seriously in 1967, at the Summer North American Championships in Montreal, my home town. I had less than 100 master points so I could not play in the Life Master Pairs, the Spingold, or the Master Mixed Teams. However, my very good friend George Mittelman and I made good results in the secondary events, one day scoring over 70% in two separate one-session side games. Okay, so it wasn't the big time, but we were only 20 years old and very eager, and I still remember running to the major events to kibitz the great players of the day, hoping some of their wisdom would touch us. Although I confess that today I don't run quite as much, my interest in seeking the truth about the game still keeps me coming back for more.

Four years later, most of my friends and I believed we had become very good players and we had all had some success at the national and North American level. At the 1971 Can-Am Regional, I was playing with my great and good friend Joey Silver, who had started to help me a couple of years earlier, to play set matches for real money(!) against his unsuspecting rubber bridge friends.

The Can-Am was our most important local tournament and as there were far fewer events at each tournament in those days, winning one of them was still a special achievement. Joey and I were playing in the Open Pairs and doing quite well at the table but less well away from it, because we were following a slow pair and never seemed to have more than ten minutes per round to play two deals.

As luck would have it, on one of these "short" rounds the first hand took most

of the available time, and when we started the second hand there were only a couple of minutes left to play.

These were the cards:

♠ QJ1098		♠ A742
♥ AK3		♥ Q
♦ 4		♦ K1098732
♣ AKQ10		♣ J
♠ 5		♠ K63
♥ 10864		♥ J9752
♦ J6		♦ AQ5
♣ 986542		♣ 73

West	North	East	South
	Silver		Kokish
		3♦	Pass
Pass	Db1	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♠	Pass	5♦
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♣	Pass	6♠
Pass	6NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

We bid quickly but with notable efficiency to 6NT, a particularly promising contract at Matchpoints and one that seems destined to succeed when we look at all the cards. However, in my haste to catch up I took the lead of the ♦J with the queen and played on spades without cashing either a high club or a high heart in dummy, either of which would have produced a positive result.

(Let us not mention the absence of a plan to counter the possibility of being tucked in dummy on the third or fourth round of



spades). East took the third spade and played a second diamond, which I won with the ace, discarding dummy's ♥3, staking the fate of the deal on the club suit. As East was marked with 11 cards in spades and diamonds, West was an enormous favourite to hold the ♣J, so I stifled a giggle at my carelessness and confidently led a club to the ten and jack, at which point I could not prevent myself from laughing rather more loudly.

East thought it was pretty funny too and demonstrated his joy at being given an unexpected entry by loudly thumbing each of his five remaining high diamonds onto the table as the Director hovered over us. As you may already have foreseen, my greatest moment in bridge was not yet complete. As East led his last diamond, we were down to a three-card ending:

♠ Q			
♥ A			
♦ -			
♣ A			
♠ -		♠ 7	♥ Q
♥ 10	W	N	E
♦ -			♦ 2
♣ 92	S		♣ -
♠ -			
♥ J9			
♦ -			
♣ 7			

I knew that East held another spade, but was his remaining card a heart or a club?

Perhaps trying to justify my club play to an extent only a masochist could appreciate, I decided to play East for a second club and so discarded the ♥A from dummy.

East's delight in showing me the queen of hearts came as no surprise.

And so it came to pass that the young and (I confess) somewhat arrogant Eric Kokish, aspiring to be one of Canada's greatest players, finished minus 600 in a slam that was cold . . . umm . . . without a finesse . . .

It occurred to me that I might have a future in the game when I was able to report the deal to the Daily Bulletin (perhaps only moments ahead of the thundering hordes, it's true) with a smile on my face, despite the gaping wound in my heart.

We did not win the 1971 Can-Am Open Pairs. Although I can't confirm with confidence that this incident convinced me not to take myself so seriously, it certainly contributed mightily. Years later, my Australian mate Bobby Richman pointed out that "we're all little error machines" with an unlimited capacity to make them, batteries not included. Appreciating that makes it so much easier to deal with our inadequacies.

I still look forward to the next major tournament because there's sure to be something new and interesting that I haven't experienced before – places to go, people to see – something special worth keeping. Knowing that there will be

high moments more than makes up for the inevitable disappointments.



Eric 1978

**Eric Kokish went on to become one of the best bridge players in the world, winning many international events and leading Canada to a close second place in the 1995 Bermuda Bowl in Beijing. He is one of the most respected analysts and theoreticians of the game and has built a great reputation as a coach: amongst others he has trained in the past the Israeli, the Dutch and the Indonesian national teams and has been coaching for quite a few years the world-beating Nickell team (Hamman-Soloway, Meckstroth-Rodwell and Nickell-Freeman).**

**We are delighted that he accepted to collaborate with us and that he has expressed his availability to answer questions from readers through his e-mail: [eric\\_kokish@bridge.co.il](mailto:eric_kokish@bridge.co.il)**

## מועדון ובית ספר לברידיג' אביבים

### קורס לשחקני תחרויות - משחק היד וההגנה: ♣

בקורס זה תוכלו להנות מתכנון משחק היד וההגנה ברמה גבוהה. קורס זה הינו גולת הכותרת לכל שחקני הברידיג', כולו חוויה והתרגשות. בקורס תקנה לעצמך את הכישורים המתאימים להנות ממשחקים תחרותיים. הקורס מועבר ע"י רב אמן זהב אפרים בריפמן.

20:30–23:30

ערב

9.9.03

שלישי

### קורס לשחקני תחרויות מתקדמים ♦

הקורס מועבר ע"י אמן בינלאומי מוטי גלברד. (נחשב לקורס היוקרתי ביותר בארץ)

17:00–20:00

אחה"צ

10.9.03

רביעי

רח' טאגור 38 טל: 03-6417469/70

# Eric's World

By Eric Kokish



In this column Canada's peripathetic Bridge ambassador joins us for a monthly visit, sharing his insights and Bridge experiences and offering solutions to vexing problems. He will also answer questions by our readers.

The bottom line is that Bridge has been very good to me. The game has given me the chance to meet some wonderful people, to visit exotic, intriguing countries, to acquire some important vocabulary (how to order lunch) in many different languages, and to try my hand at virtually every aspect of this fascinating pastime. Bridge has provided me with frequent opportunities to show grace in defeat while tantalizing me with the dream of displaying grace in victory at the highest levels. It has taught me that there is always something to learn and that behind every ugly moment there lies something of great beauty.

I have been addicted to the game since my early teens: it has often been frustrating, sometimes amusing, always full of surprises and perhaps it's that uncertainty about what lies ahead that keeps me coming back for more.

This column is dedicated to those of you who share at least a part of this love affair. Your secret is safe with me. I will be happy to answer your questions on bridge and the most interesting ones will be published here in your bridge magazine. You may send them (in English please, as my last serious effort in Hebrew was at my Bar-Mitzvah, and no, I am not telling you how long ago that was) to: [eric.kokish@bridge.co.il](mailto:eric.kokish@bridge.co.il).

This month's deal is from my archives, a nugget from the Canadian National Teams Championship in the late 1990s. North

was Roy Hughes, South Irving Litvack, both terrific players who have remained largely unsung on the international scene through no fault of their own.

North-South vulnerable; East deals

♠ AJ864 ♥ K96 ♦ 973 ♣ A3	♠ K972 ♥ AJ72 ♦ Q1065 ♣ 10	♠ Q103 ♥ 10 ♦ KJ42 ♣ 86542	
	♠ 5 ♥ Q8543 ♦ A8 ♣ KQJ97		

West	North	East	South
	Hughes		Litvack
		Pass	1♥
1♠	2♠*	Dbl	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	
* = raise to at least 3♥			

Opening Lead: ♦3

With 4♠ doubled likely to cost 500 points and little chance to jockey North/South to the five-level, it will be much better bridge in the long run to defend 4♥ with the East/West cards. Particularly when West finds the best lead of the ♦3, as he did at the table.

Declarer called for dummy's ♦Q, covered by the king and ace. He led the ♣7 towards dummy's blank ten and, without missing a beat, West went in with the ace to continue with the ♦9, which held. West cashed the ♠A before declarer

could establish the ♦6 (leading the ten to smother the seven) and reverted to diamonds, declarer covering the seven. Declarer ruffed and led a trump to the jack, and soon lost a trump to West for one down.

Moments later, South was kicking himself. "I should have made it. Instead of playing a trump to the jack, say that I play ♣K and another high club. West discards a spade, but I ruff my winner in dummy, play ♠K, spade ruff, East following. By now I know that West has five spades, two clubs, and (apparently) three diamonds, which leaves him with three trumps. I intend to play him for the ♥K in any case, but now I can see that the best play is to lead the queen from my hand, winning against singleton nine or ten in East. If West covers, I win, ruff myself in with a spade, and finesse against the other 'minor' trump honour."

Perhaps spotting the easy-to-overlook winning line so soon after missing it should earn a consolation prize. In practice, however, it only manages to deflect the player's focus in a non-productive way: when the cards are put back in the box, the deal is history.

If there is something of special value to be learned from this deal, let me suggest to you that it is not the fancy handling of the trump suit that would have enabled declarer to make his game.

Please consider this: no matter how skilled and experienced you may be, you have only so much energy to expend at the table. If you use some of it to pick apart a deal that you won't be able to replay, you might find that you could have used that energy to master a fresh deal later on.

# Eric's World

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Dealer South; Neither side vulnerable

	♠ AJ	
	♥ Q10	
	♦ Q986	
	♣ K9632	
♠ K109762		♠ 53
♥ A84		♥ J652
♦ 10		♦ J754
♣ A108		♣ J54
	♠ Q84	
	♥ K973	
	♦ AK32	
	♣ Q7	

The first European Open Bridge Championships, recently held last June in Menton, was a competition I was very much looking forward to: I had not visited the Cote d'Azur since 1976, when both the Bermuda Bowl and World Teams Olympiad had been held in Monte Carlo, but my memories of the charm and beauty of this spectacular part of the world were all positive. Moreover my choice of partners would turn out to be quite inspired as I would be playing with two of the world's best female players who also happened to be great company: the French champion Benedicte Cronier, in the Mixed Teams, and your very own editor Migry Zur Campanile as part of the Barel team (Michael Barel/Ranny Schneider, Uri Gilboa/Yacov Vax).

Luckily (or perhaps not), when I played with Migry I could play my system of choice: weak no-trump, five-card majors, and 2/1 game forcing. We played very well in the two qualifying stages to reach the knockout phase, then won our first match against a solid Dutch team. This was the most interesting deal in the round of 32:

South declares 3NT after West overcalls in spades, suggesting a six-card suit. West leads the ♠10 and declarer can see that he'll need some luck, inspiration or both to come to nine tricks before West can get his spades going. One possibility is to play for three heart tricks, to go with two spades and four diamonds. That will require playing West for jack-third or jack and one, regardless of the location of the ♥A, or perhaps playing West for ace-fourth: he would have to duck a heart lead towards the queen, then declarer could cross to a diamond to lead the ♣7. West could not play the ace without giving declarer at least two club tricks, and if the ♣K won, declarer could revert to hearts. In any case, declarer's plan would be affected not only by his assessment of the most likely layouts but also by the size of his data bank and his ability to scan it for similar positions.

In the match between strong teams from the Netherlands and Poland, the declarers adopted different lines. Bauke Muller, declaring from the South side, allowed dummy's ♠J to hold, crossed to the ♦A, and led a heart. Apolinary Kowalski accurately went in with the ace to clear spades, and when the ♥J did not come down under the queen and king, Muller had to go one down. That looks unlucky to me, although West was likely to be shorter in hearts than his partner after overcalling in spades.

At the other table, Marek Szymanowski played 3NT from the North side on the lead of the ♠5, four, nine, jack. He crossed to the ♦A and called for the ♣7. On the lie of the cards West could not go in with the ace lest he give declarer four club tricks, and although Maarten Schollaardt didn't know that Szymanowski had a five-card club suit, he did the right thing by following low. That simply delayed the inevitable, however. Szymanowski won the ♣K and led the ♥Q. West won the ♥A and cleared spades, but declarer passed the ♥10, cashed the ♦Q, finessed against the ♦J, and took two spades, two hearts, four diamonds and a club for his contract. Had West taken the ♣A on the first round, declarer would have made an overtrick. Although Szymanowski was successful while Muller was not, the winning line adopted by the Polish declarer required not only the successful handling of the heart suit but also a three-three division of the outstanding clubs; else West could rise with the ♣A and clear spades before declarer could play on hearts with profit (two clubs, two spades, four diamonds... but no hearts).

Strictly speaking, this deal was probably worth the fifteen minutes Muller gave it before committing to a line of play, but those who believe that such extensive deliberation can't be tolerated will see it differently. My position is much less rigid. I believe that if everyone does his best to keep the game moving there will be more than enough straightforward deals to cater to the occasional special combination that requires more effort.

# Eric's World

By Eric Kokish



As we all know, bridge players love to argue about the game. A real deal is not necessarily required to get them going; theoretical points and hypothetical combinations will stir up the pot just as readily. The better the players, the more rational the discussion should be, but even among experts capable of submerging their egos, the search for the truth will not always be successful. Indeed, there may be more than one truth. Some of the most heated discussions involve contracts that could have been defeated with a different line of defense, particularly when the winning approach is not clearly indicated by the available evidence.

Take this deal, for example . . .  
All NV North Dealer  
You sit East and you hold:

♠ AQJ832  
♥ 643  
♦ K6  
♣ 32

North opens 1♦, you overcall 1♠ and South closes the bidding with 4♥.

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♠	4♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Partner leads the ♠K and here is the dummy.

♠ 1076	
♥ 5	
♦ AQJ109	
♣ AK84	
W	N
S	E
	♠ AQJ832
	♥ 643
	♦ K6
	♣ 32

What do you think are your possible defensive options?

In my view there are two sensible ways for East to conduct the defense.

The more obvious approach: East overtakes the ♠K (a possible singleton) to continue with more rounds of spades, hoping to promote a trump winner or two for West, perhaps with the ♦K still to come. If declarer discards a diamond on the third spade, East intends to play a fourth spade.

The alternative plan: East tries to discourage a spades and encourage a diamond switch. East aspires to take two spades and one diamond and hopes West can contribute a trump trick. Even if declarer spurns the diamond finesse and attempts to discard a diamond on the third round of clubs (as here), East, holding only two clubs, will foil this plan by trumping in to kill the useful discard. Declarer will take six hearts, the ♦A, and two clubs, for one down.

Here is the complete hand:

♠ 1076			
♥ 5			
♦ AQJ109			
♣ AK84			
♠ K5			♠ AQJ832
♥ K7			♥ 643
♦ 8732			♦ K6
♣ J10965			♣ 32
	♠ 94		
	♥ AQJ10982		
	♦ 54		
	♣ Q7		

Only the second line of defense works on this rather specific layout, but failing to cash spades could be fatal on a variety of combinations (picture declarer with 2-

7-3-1 shape, for example; declarer wins the diamond switch and discards a spade on the ♠K before attacking trumps). Overtaking the ♠K will usually succeed when West holds only one spade, and will not cost whenever declarer cannot avoid the diamond finesse. If West has two spades, it is unlikely that the defense will be able to develop two trump tricks; East's three small trumps don't leave much room for a useful holding in West.

Which card should East play at trick one to attract a diamond switch?

Some would say that it should be enough for East simply to discourage a spade continuation (the deuce for standard players). Others believe that three-way signals are best when signaller has shown a long (define minimum length carefully) suit. They would play the queen or jack (high) to request a diamond switch, the deuce (low) to suggest a club switch, and the eight (a middle card) to encourage (not here; East can overtake). If East had a club ruff coming, the suit-preference approach would handle it smoothly where the standard approach might leave some doubt.

It may well be that in the next hand you play the approach that you discounted here will work and viceversa: it does not mean that either of them is in principle better or worse, it simply means that in this wonderful game of ours there is no such thing as a safe bet.



# Eric's World

By Eric Kokish



## SOMETIMES IN JANUARY AFTER A TWO-NOTRUMP OPENING

How do you continue after your side opens a strong balanced hand with 2NT, showing, say, 20-22 HCP? A simple scheme of responses might look like this:

3♣: Stayman, asking for a four-card or longer major

3♦: Jacoby transfer, showing at least five hearts

3♥: Jacoby transfer, showing at least five spades

3♠: "Minor-suit Stayman," at least five-four in the minors

4♣: Ace-asking (Gerber)

Many pairs that play Jacoby transfers, also play 4♦ and 4♥ as transfers. Responder uses these "Texas" transfers, which show at least six cards in the suit above the named suit, when he wants to play game in his long suit. He will bid again only rarely, with certain specific types of slam tries. Accordingly, a three-level transfer and self-raise to game implies mild interest in slam.

**How would you bid with each of the following hands over a 2NT opening?**

a) ♠KJ964, ♥Q2, ♦J53, ♣1072

b) ♠KQ107542, ♥5, ♦KQJ2, ♣8

c) ♠54, ♥85, ♦KQ108, ♣AJ1054

d) ♠2, ♥J1087642, ♦Q1092, ♣6

e) ♠Q1054, ♥K10, ♦J10432, ♣42

**Solutions at the end of the article.**

As we have been discussing how to bid after a 2NT opening, it seems appropriate for me to present you with a deal that was played in...of all things ...2NT.

2NT? But the glamour contracts are

games and slams, and most often that's where you'll find the most interesting play, defence and noteworthy bidding. Hey, glamour isn't everything. Try this deal as an exercise with open cards. I think you'll like it.

Would you rather declare or defend the 2NT contract reached at our featured table?

North-South vulnerable; West dealer

	♠ AK95		
	♥ Q10		
	♦ J87		
	♣ Q1086		
♠ 876		♠ QJ32	
♥ 652		♥ AJ93	
♦ KQ542		♦ 96	
♣ KJ		♣ 954	
	♠ 104		
	♥ K874		
	♦ A103		
	♣ A732		

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♥
2♦	Pass	Pass	2NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Opening Lead: ♠8

Although North-South would have done best to punish West for his frisky overcall with a productive penalty double, that was not obvious, and so we've been provided with a rare glimpse of 2NT, the movie.

West, unimpressed with his own bid, found the good lead of the ♠8, which gave nothing away and made a good start on building spade winners for the defence. Declarer ducked the first spade to East's jack, then ducked the switch to the ♦9. West won the queen and reverted to spades. The defence seems to be proceeding swimmingly so far. Are you with the defenders, then?

Declarer won the ♠A, led dummy's ♠8 to

the ace, and led a second club to West's king, playing dummy's ten under it. West continued spades, but declarer won the ♠K, came to the ♦A to remove East's exit card in that suit, led a low club to dummy's queen, and tucked East in with his spade winner. Although the defence had been very stingy so far, East was forced to break hearts. He played ace and another, but declarer won the queen, led dummy's ♣6 to his own seven, and cashed the ♥K, his eighth winner.

What if West switches to a heart when he wins the ♠K? Declarer plays the ten and takes East's jack with the king to return a heart to the queen and ace. East's best play is the ♣9, threatening declarer's communications, but this time South unblocks the ♣7, wins the ♣Q, comes to the ♦A, and plays the ♥8, discarding a diamond from dummy. East wins the ♥9 and must either lead a spade into dummy's king-nine or a heart to declarer's seven, with a club entry to dummy to reach the ♠K.

**The solutions to the bidding problems:**

a) 3♥, transfer to spades, then bid 3NT to offer partner a choice between 3NT and 4♠. With two spades, he will pass 3NT; with four, he'll bid 4♠; with three, he'll use his judgement.

b) 4♣, the Gerber convention, asking for aces. If partner surprises you by showing only two (4♣ response) you can pass, but if he shows three (4NT response) you'll bid 6♠, and if he shows all four (4♦ response shows none or all four) you can bid 7NT. An easy one.

c) 3♠, showing both minors, interest in a contract other than 3NT. If partner bids 3NT (no fit or an unsuitable hand for slam), you will choose between pass and a raise to 4NT. If he shows a four-card minor, a "natural" 4NT continuation will describe your hand well. He may pass or move toward slam.

d) 4♦, Texas transfer to 4♥ (if you play them), then pass. If you do not employ Texas, transfer to 3♥, then a self-raise to 4♥. Playing Texas the second sequence would show interest in slam and would therefore be an overbid.

e) 3♣, Stayman. Over 3♦ (no four-card major) or 3♥ (four hearts), bid 3NT. In the second case partner might hold four spades; if he does he will convert 3NT to 4♥ (or bid four of a minor to show an exceptional hand for spades) and you'll reach a good contract.