



Around the world with 52 cards

Travels and adventures of a bridge pro

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“O Canada” are the first words of the national anthem that dwellers in the shade of the maple-leafed flag know by heart.

“Ohhhh Canada!!!” is my instinctive reaction whenever my mind goes back to the splendid month I spent in that gorgeous country occasioned by the 2002 World Championship in Montreal.

After spending a few days in Toronto, where we enjoyed the excellent company of my great friend and “Coach of all Coaches” Eric “EOK” Kokish and his wife, Beverly, we drove all the way to Montreal. After a few hours of leisurely drive we noticed a swift transition in the language of the road signs from English to French: We had crossed into Quebec.

Finally we reached Montreal, the Paris of North America, “la Ville aux cent clochers,” and the “Reine Elizabeth” hotel, where we would stay for the fortnight of the championship.

The weather was trying to make us feel at home and the 90F degree heat bounced aggressively off the

street, so we skipped walking and a short cab-ride later we were in the older part of the city.

Sitting at an outdoor café in one of the quaint cobble-stoned squares of Old Montréal is as close as you’ll get to France on this side of the Atlantic. You’ll hear mellifluous French spoken over the clip-clop of horse-drawn carriages, and see charming 17th-century grey-stone buildings tucked alongside towering church spires. France is in the air, but one of the things that makes modern Montreal so dynamic is the amazing mix of cultures: Large numbers of Anglophones and immigrant groups contribute their vibrant heritage to neighborhoods like Chinatown, Little Italy, and

the Plateau Mont-Royal. Our diets were blown to the wind when faced with irresistible temptations such as Schwarz’s succulent smoked-meat sandwiches, Moische’s juicy char-



broiled steaks or Mr. Ma’s deliciously crispy duck with orange sauce. The final

blow came when, walking down Boulevard St-Laurent, we came across a small quaint French restaurant where I was faced with the ultimate gastronomic temptation: goose liver with chocolate sauce. . . Ohhhhh Canada!!!

As night fell, the temperature dropped, but Montreal heated up. It is after dark that the city's continental swagger really sets it apart. The main thoroughfare, Rue Saint Catherine, comes alive with students and throngs of fun-seekers. While on Rue Crescent, the heart of the city's nightlife, the atmosphere resembles the hectic bustle of Miami's South Beach, but everyone is polite and smiling. People flood into the

road, flitting in and out of Winnie's Bar or the Newtown Club, seemingly without a care in the world.

One evening we were wandering in one of the lively streets bordering Rue Crescent together with a happy bunch of Canadian players, when one of them suddenly stopped outside a club. When reading English at McGill in the late eighties, she said, she used to go there almost every night. We went in, ordered a drink, got the tour of the place by our knowledgeable friend, hung around a bit and, just as we were leaving, I noticed one of the waiters pointing at our friend and saying to the barman: "I told you she'd be back." That really made her day.

With such an exciting backdrop, the bridge for once took second place, especially since an unlucky draw coupled with an obscure seeding process meant that our team faced an uphill struggle to qualify from the Teams round-robin to the knock-out phase and eventually floundered in sixth place with only the top four getting through.

The first event was, however, the Mixed Pairs, which I played with Polish champion Jacek Pszczola. Once I got past his unpronounceable surname by using his well-known nickname of "Pepsicola" or "Pepsi" for short, I found him to be not just a great player but also a delightful person and a true gentleman at the table, a rare mix nowadays.

Jacek has had a great deal of success over the last decade, from the World Open Pairs Championship in 1998, in partnership with Michael Kwiecien, to his recent win last May in the lucrative Cavendish pairs, playing with Sam Lev.

He is a "natural" player, with superior table presence, qualities that often allow him to divine positions and make contracts where the large majority of experts would fail.

Here is one of the hands that helped him on the way to his first world title in 1998.



North dealer North
 N-S vul ♠ K Q 7
 ♥ A Q J
 ♦ K 8 6 2
 ♣ A 7 5

South
 ♠ A J 10 6 4 3
 ♥ 5
 ♦ 7 3
 ♣ K 10 9 2

West	North	East	South
Quantin	Kwiecien	Abecassis	Pszczola
—	1 ♣	pass	1 ♠
pass	2 NT	pass	3 ♠
pass	4 ♣	pass	4 ♠
pass	6 ♠	(all pass)	

West led the ♦A followed by a low diamond.

I bet that when dummy came down Jacek was not too thrilled with his prospects!

At least the lead cleared up the diamond position, but that's only the first hurdle and there's plenty yet to do. There seems to be another inescapable loser in clubs and even a successful view in hearts brings the total count to 11. Is the contract doomed unless the ♣Q-J is doubleton?

How would you play it?

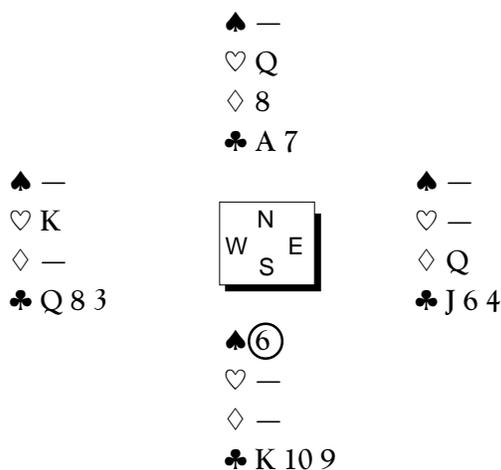
This was the full deal:

North
 ♠ K Q 7
 ♥ A Q J
 ♦ K 8 6 2
 ♣ A 7 5

West
 ♠ 9 2
 ♥ K 8 7 4 2
 ♦ A 9 5
 ♣ Q 8 3

East
 ♠ 8 5
 ♥ 10 9 6 3
 ♦ Q J 10 4
 ♣ J 6 4

South (Pszczola)
 ♠ A J 10 6 4 3
 ♥ 5
 ♦ 7 3
 ♣ K 10 9 2



After losing the first trick to the ♦A, Pszczola took the second one with the king, cashed the ♠K, returned to hand with the ♠J and led a heart to the jack. When that held, he cashed the ♥A, ruffed a diamond, and cashed two more spades, reaching this position:

The last trump placed both defenders in a tight bind, from which there was no escape: a classic double squeeze. Eventually both opponents discarded a club, so Jacek took the last three tricks in clubs for a huge score. Note that there is no guess in hearts. Declarer had to play West for the ♥K, so he could score two heart tricks and keep a heart threat in dummy.

Had West also held the ♦Q (and a club honor), he would have been the victim of that "rara avis" of plays: the guard squeeze.