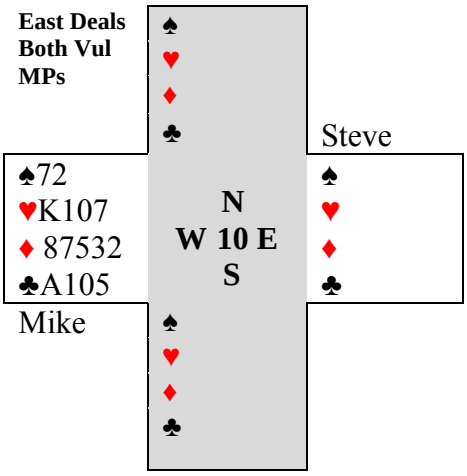
Learning Points – Defending a Slam in a Wild Hand **August 16, 2011**

By Steve Moese. *Edited by Mike Purcell* *Defense* Level: Basic / Intermediate



East	South	West	North
Pass	1♥	Pass	2♣[1]
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥[2]
Pass	2♠[3]	Pass	3♠[3]
Pass	4N	Pass	5♣[4]
Pass	5♥	Pass	6♥[5]

West leads ?????

1= Natural 2/1 Game Force
2= Optimistic based on tricks
3= Control Bid
4= 1 or 4 Key Cards
5= I have extras…

Tuesday Night Club Game, August 16, 2011, Mr. Mike Lipp, Director. Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 563-2210. Mike Purcell is my partner.

Defending a small slam can be tricky. Against a sound opponents holding an Ace and an off-side trump King makes for optimism. Beware! Traps abound.

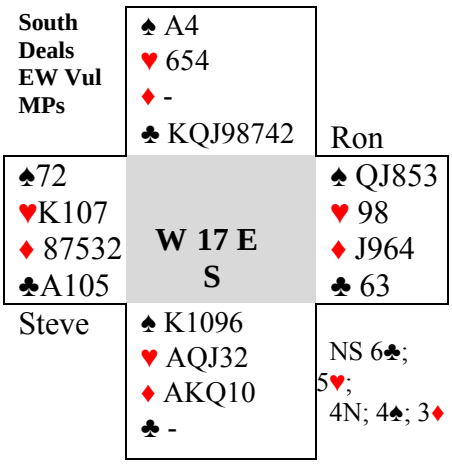
The Bidding

Our opponents 2/1 Game Force auction is natural and descriptive. Finding a fit and forcing to game at the 2 level allows for control bidding to explore slam at a low level. RKB suggested North held either the ♥K or the ♠A. North's control bid suggests the latter. South was conservative but North compensated and bid a touchy slam. As you already know, the result hangs on your choice of lead.

The Play

A small slam often benefits from an attacking lead. A trump would cut declarer's ability to cross ruff, even if away from the trump King. Notice if you believe South holds the ♥A this lead gives little away and might gain. A ♦ would lead into declarer's 2nd suit and would give away a tempo – we'd be helping declarer develop extra side-suit tricks. No a ♦ won't do. A ♣ lead is into North's suit, and might be risky if declarer is void. Leading the ♣A will work only when South is not void, and when that's the case, South will always lead ♣s on their own. Likewise leading a small ♣ risks when declarer has a singleton and partner cannot win the trick. That leaves ♠s. The opponents appear to have the 1st and 2nd round controlled. Perhaps this is a passive lead, risking only an unintended finesse of partner's ♠Q where declarer to hold the KJ.
A major suit lead gives up much less than leading either minor suit. Holding an offside trump K and the Ace of Dummy's suit should yield 2 tricks if we chose a passive approach. I like the ♥7, backing judgment that South must have the ♥A for the bidding. You might prefer the ♠7. Either lead will set the contract!

If you chose to lead a ♦, declarer might get home if partner fails to find the trump promotion. Ruffing in dummy then ruffing 3 clubs (ruffing ♦s back to the dummy each time – a triple Grand Coup) in hand will drop the ♣A on this layout. HOWEVER – East can ruff the 3rd ♣ with the trump 9, promoting partner's trump 10! [*Failing the trump promotion, the ♥A and ♥Q puts West in, with a ♠, ♦ or ♥ to lead back. If W chooses a ♠, simply win in hand and draw the last trump, using the ♠A to get to dummy's good clubs. If W chooses a small ♦, duck to your hand and draw trumps going to the dummy via the ♠A. A ♥ simply draws trump for the same ending*]. If you lead a small ♣, Declarer will win in dummy and pitch a small ♠ from hand. However the same trump promotion looms as above. Leading the ♣A presents declarer with the contract immediately.



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	Scores		MPs	
Contract	NS	EW	NS	EW
6 NT S	1440		8	0
6 ♥ S	1430		6	2
6 ♥ S	1430		6	2
6 ♥ S	1430		6	2
6 ♣ S	1370		4	4
5 ♥ S	650		3	5
6 ♥ S		100	1	7
6 ♥ S		100	1	7
6 ♥ S		100	1	7

Post Mortem

Accurate opening leads are difficult enough. To finding the killing lead try visualizing the opponents' hands. Assess the risks and advantages for each suit based on what you know in the auction and what you believe declarer must hold to give defense a chance. Some declarers cleverly mislead defense visualization. Kudos to those who succeed!

The inference that NS have unbalanced hands is strong. North rates to hold only 3 ♥s. With longer trumps people trot out splinters (or Jacoby 2NT with a balanced hand). Leading a trump into declarer's presumed holding has a lot to recommend it. Eliminating the extra ruff might make all the difference.

See the Bridge World August 2011 Vol 82 No. 11 "*The Queen of Trumps*" by Mark Kinzer, New Berlin, WI for an exposition of this trump lead theme in the rarefied case where you lead away from the trump Queen!!!.

Checking the results table 5 pairs bid and made slam, 1 made an overtrick in the ♥ game, and 3 pairs went down in the ♥ slam. Only 1 pair played in the lay down slam in ♣s, probably due to the famed disease *Matchpoint Blindness* (greed?) where playing a major suit not a minor suit is simply how we do things…

Sometimes thinking is better…

Learning Points

1. Take the 1st 90 seconds on defense to assess opponents' shapes and the value of leading each of the 4 suits. You might find your first impressions are riskier than you believed.

2. When you do choose a suit, choose the card based on what you intend to accomplish or communicate, and not on the table of leads from the back of your convention card.

3. Consider holding on to Aces when leading against small slams, especially if the Ace is in a suit you believe opponents are counting on for tricks. If you hold an Ace and a singleton, do not lead the singleton. Unless the opponents are terribly foolish, partner cannot hold the Ace of your singleton suit and you will be giving up a tempo!

Keywords: Opening Leads against small slams, defensive visualization, Choose suit before card.

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