

At Jim Solomon's Club Championship Game, Fremont, CA

By Stephen Castellino, Fremont, CA
Email: bcde@comcast.net

Our usual Friday evening game is at the Livermore club but Friday was wet and cold so Colette and I stayed home by a warm fire with a bottle of our favorite pinot. And to-day we are here at Jim Solomon's Saturday game in Fremont. It's the Club Championship game, no less.

Game time is 12:30 pm at the Merrill Gardens site in Fremont. Jim has been trying to get us to play at his Saturday game, so he's pleased to see us. To-day's game is a 5 table Howell movement, 3 boards a round, 9 rounds in total.

We start against Jim and Pat Leary. On the first board they get to a tenuous 3NT but Colette and I are not on the same page on defense, and we allow it to make! 12.5% to us. This is not a good start and I'm not happy. I note the board for a later partnership discussion.

I'm still smarting from our poor result on board one as I sort my hand on board two. Looking at S975, HAK64, DAK52, CA3 I open 1D as dealer, and after two passes RHO balances with 1S. I don't want to double and I don't want to pass. Then it strikes me – 2D! I await the rest of the bidding with some anticipation and am surprised that it goes all pass. At least I'm not doubled.

Both vul; Dealer South

Colette

S:Q862

H:Q32

D:983

C:964

LHO

S:VOID

H:JT87

D:QT764

C:KQ85

RHO

S:AKJT43

H:95

D:J

C:JT72

Stephen

S:975

H:AK64

D:AK52

C:A3

LHO leads the heart jack (promising a higher honor) and as I study dummy I can see why Jim and Pat have not contested the auction further. I win the heart lead in hand and cash the diamond ace. RHO's jack is telling and, especially in conjunction with the non-spade lead, gives me a clue to the distribution. I enter dummy with the heart queen and continue with the club four; RHO follows with the club two, making it easy for me to duck this trick to LHO's five. LHO plays back a third heart, RHO discarding a spade, and I'm in control. I win in hand, cash my club ace, ruff my fourth heart, and ruff a club. My diamond king is my eighth trick for a clear top and 100% of the matchpoints. Other EW pairs are in 2S or 3C making.

Most players will pillory me for the 2D bid, but I think it's a practical, even creative, bid in a

difficult situation. And it worked !

On the third board, the Learys take the push to 5H, down 1 and another 100% to us. We are 71% for the round and I head off to round two feeling pretty good. Maybe Colette and I will be Club Champions to-day ☺

Round 2 is against Verlan Gabrielson and Terri Kiyota. Verlan's cherubic countenance disguises a fiercely competitive bridge mind. He and Terri take us to the cleaners allowing us 12.5% for the round and our cumulative score plummets to 42%. Verlan is making a habit of taking me to the cleaners; I'm going to have to do something about that.

Round 3 is against Dave and Joyce Denyven and they are solid, scoring average plus against us on boards one and two, and board 3 is worse when Colette misguesses the clubs. We are 29% for the round and our cumulative score deteriorates further to 38%. This is disquieting.

My sense of disquiet gets worse in the next round against Rajan Jeyakumar and Venkat Sivasankaran. First, they defend accurately against our 4S for 37.5% to us. Then they jockey us out of 1NT. Plus 50 defending against 2S does not compensate for 1NT making our way. Finally, Colette takes the wrong view in hearts to go down one in 4S.

Our score for the round is 21%. And we move for the fifth round with a cumulative score of 33%. We are still headed in the wrong direction. This has to change!

Round 5 is against JT Wang and Amy Wu. Board 25 is a routine game – 50%. Board 26 (rotated) is my favorite for the afternoon:

Both vul; Dealer South

Colette

S:AT432
H:K973
D:8
C:863

Amy

S:K965
H:T5
D:T942
C:KJ9

JT

S:J7
H:Q86
D:J653
C:T742

Stephen

S:Q8
H:AJ42
D:AKQ7
C:AQ7

I open 2C and rebid 2NT. Colette uses STAYMAN and I'm in 4H in short order. The lead is the fourth best diamond two. I cash three rounds of diamonds pitching clubs from dummy and ruff a diamond, both opponents following suit. At trick five I play club ace and ruff a club followed by the spade two from the board and my spade queen loses to Amy's king.

The position is now as follows:

Colette
S:AT43
H:K9
D:none
C:none

Amy
S:965
H:T5
D:none
C:K

JT
S:J
H:Q86
D:none
C:T7

Stephen
S:8
H:AJ42
D:none
C:Q

Amy makes the best defensive continuation of the heart five offering me the proverbial losing option. I spurn the free finesse, winning the heart king on the board followed by spade ace, spade ruff, club ruff. The spade four, at trick 12, from the board pickles JT's heart queen. There are other ways to make six, but I am very pleased with my trump coup.

Board 27 is a routine 4S our way making five, but one pair stops in 3S and a second pair cannot make the overtrick. Our 54% for the round is the first time since round one that we have an above average round and our cumulative score rises to 38%. Much better.

Round 6 is against Bill Cubley and Prakash Karamchandani. This round is dead average and our cumulative score inches up to 40%. At least we are headed in the right direction.

Round 7 is against Marty Holtz and Chrystal Newell, and we continue our good results. First, they bid to an impossible 3NT which we beat two for 100%. Then we are able to disrupt their auction and they play in an inferior 2D making for 62.5% to us. Finally, an average 3NT; but our score for the round is 71% and our cumulative score improves to 44%.

By now I know there is no Club Championship for me to-day, but I would like to finish above average.

Round 8 is against Joanne Baumgardner and Carole Ackerman. They are the only Flight C pair in the room. As expected we have a good round. We score 75% for the round and our cumulative score continues its rise - now 48%.

The final Round 9 is against Bo Xiao and Yanong Han, easily the strongest pair in the room. On board one I am in 3NT. The defense is not routine, and I have chances but the defense is not to be denied – one down for 38%. On Board 2, we are in 2NT and Colette makes 5 – 50%. On Board 3, they are in 4H. Colette defends accurately to deny the overtrick. Our score for the round is a creditable 58%.

We finish with 49.07%. Not the result we were hoping for but after the early rounds we have scored above average. And I did get to play a trump coup 😊