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Flight A Swiss: A Loser's Perspective

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We began, as always, with high hopes. Gerry Bare and I had new teammates, John Swanson and Ron Garber. They've won some events before. I expected both pairs to be pleased with their choice. One round later, our optimism was muted.

One of the nice things about living in a small town like Los Angeles is that you get to know the players. Our first round opponents were variously friends, partners, and teammates. So why did they beat up on us 51-3? Two of the deals will give you the flavor. Let's look at the first disaster from Gerry's (East) perspective:

E-W vulnerable, IMPs

♠AKJ754	West	North	East	South
♥---	<u>Weiss</u>	<u>Levinson</u>	<u>Bare</u>	<u>Walsh</u>
♦8652			2♠	4♥
♣1065	5♣	6♥	?	

Should Gerry double, bid 7♣, or pass? He chose the down-the-middle approach of passing; he has an ace, the hearts aren't splitting . . . seems pretty reasonable to me.

<u>North</u>		Just a routine hand with four voids. After the deal was played, I still didn't know if Gerry had taken a winning action. If he saved, the opponents might have made a grand slam. 7♦ is cold without a heart lead and an unlikely spade lead is required to defeat 7♥. Yes, I could hope for a pickup.	
♠Q109632		Unfortunately, things came up a little differently at the other table.	
♥1086			
♦KQ43			
♣---			
<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>		
♠8	♠AKJ754		
♥9754	♥---		
♦---	♦8652		
♣AKQJ9842	♣1065		

	<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
	♠---	<u>Sides</u>	<u>Swanson</u>	<u>Lolli</u>	<u>Garber</u>
	♥AKQJ32	5♣	Pass	6♣	1♥
	♦AJ1097	7♣	Pass	Pass	6♦
	♣73	All Pass			

Swanson thought his pass of 7♣ invited a grand slam. Garber thought his double requested an unusual lead. But if Swanson had been on the same wave length he wouldn't have led a spade, he would have bid 7♦ knowing that his partner was void in spades. That wouldn't have ended the auction, though. Lolli would double for a heart lead. Would one of our teammates then have cleverly removed to 7♥? And would Sides then find a spade lead?

We'll never know. We do know that Swanson led the diamond king against 7♣ and thirteen tricks were easy. Our team lost 22 on this board, the largest IMP swing in my career. Why, it makes our next hand seem trivial by comparison. Try this one from my chair:

Both vulnerable, IMPs

♠AKJ10754	West	North	East	South
♥Q86	<u>Weiss</u>	<u>Levinson</u>	<u>Bare</u>	<u>Walsh</u>
♦---	1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
♣A107	2♣	Pass	3♣*	Pass
	4♦**	Dbl.	4♥	Pass
	7♣	Pass	Pass	7♦
	?			

* = Game forcing, good suit.

** = Splinter

our smooth auction to the obviously lay-down grand slam, that darn Rhoda came to life with her 7♦ call. What should I do? Of course I could double, since I knew they wouldn't make it; but that seemed like a certain large loss. If we beat it four or five, we would collect 1100 or 1400 against our entitlement of 2140. I could pass to show first round control of diamonds and leave the decision to partner, but might not that show the ace? Since the number and quality of partner's spades was unknown - would he really be able to bid 7♣ with two small or a singleton queen? - I decided to look at things in a positive way and tried 7♣ myself. At least that call has an up-side. The opponents would lose two IMPs for their enterprise.

North

♠Q983
♥103
♦AQJ752

West

♠AKJ10754
♥Q86
♦—
♣A107

East

♠—
♥AK75
♦86
♣KQJ9864

South

♠62
♥J942
♦K10943
♣52

♠KJ106
♥102
♦J5
♣A9865

♠A75
♥KQ3
♦A73
♣KQ73

West
Bare

Pass
Pass

As you can see, my choice didn't work out too well. These hands with voids are killing us. We lost thirteen IMPs. That unlucky number suggests the injustice of team games. Why did we "only" lose thirteen? Because Tim and Bill only got to game! Sure, Rhoda deserved her gain, but did Stosh deserve to win on this board? Where is the style point adjudicator?

We held fewer voids and played somewhat better in the succeeding matches. As a result we were vying for the event on the last round; until I made a defensive play against the winners that took us out of contention. Test yourself as declarer:

	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
		<u>Weiss</u>	
			1♣
	1♠	Pass	2NT
	3NT	All pass	

The opening lead is the diamond four. You try the jack, but East covers with the king. You let that win. East returns the ten of diamonds, which you also duck, followed by the eight. West contributes the 6 and 9 to these tricks. When you play off five rounds of clubs, East follows once, then plays four hearts in ascending order. West pitches two hearts, also in ascending order. (Alas, no one has thrown the heart ace.)

Now what? If West has the heart ace, you need to guess spades. If East has that card, you can simply knock it out and claim. You have to guess that to do and I hope you would have the decency to guess wrongly.

But I didn't give my opponent the opportunity to demonstrate such flair. I gave him an easy ride; and the contract was made without a care, just as it was across the aisle. What was my error? Look at the entire deal:

North
 ♠KJ106
 ♥102
 ♦J5
 ♣A9865

West
 Q83
 A64
 Q964
 J104

East
 ♠942
 ♥J9875
 ♦K1082
 ♣2

South
 ♠A75
 ♥KQ3
 ♦A73
 ♣KQ73

I ploddingly returned the diamond deuce at trick two, and declarer knew the suit was splitting. It was easy for him to follow the winning line. When that powerful dummy appeared, I should have realized that desperate measures were in order.

Addendum from a teammate:

Returning the diamond ten would have given declarer a losing option but the gain is nebulous. There was a much more certain gain available at both tables on this deal:

North
 ♠KQJ
 ♥A1064
 ♦J63
 ♣Q107

West
 732
 KQ107
 KJ8652

East
 ♠A1073
 ♥QJ95
 ♦A84
 ♣93

South
 ♠986542
 ♥K8
 ♦962
 ♣A4

The diamond king was led, followed by the seven. The contract is clearly hopeless - or is it? Nels won the ace and shifted to the club nine, ducked to the king. Mike Schreiber can now cash the diamond queen and lead his hat. But the diamond deuce did not appear on the first two rounds. Perhaps partner has a singleton club and a ruff is available. The club continuation was won by the ace, a heart led to dummy, and a club led. East ruffs, but so what? Discard the losing diamond. Only I over-ruffed. East could thus win the first trump trick, lead a diamond to partner, and score the spade ten with the lead of either minor suit. I can claim that it was necessary to overruff in case West held a singleton heart and a doubleton spade ten, but that is much less likely than the actual layout.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
Schreiber	Garber	Erikson	Swanson
	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
All pass			

A halved board? No, at the other table the defense was identical except that East ruffed the third round of clubs with the trump ten. Declarer found it inconvenient to overruff. Five IMPs lost rather than five gained, enough to have