

# Mountnessing Bridge Club

“Points” do not necessarily point accurately!

Hand played on August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009 George Curtis Swiss Teams  
 Board number 48  
 Dealer West  
 Vulnerability EW Vul  
 Submitted by Alaric Cundy

<p>North</p> <p>♠ 982          ♥ 2          ♦ AKJ852          ♣ 873</p>	<p>West</p> <p>♠ -          ♥ QT964          ♦ Q64          ♣ AKJ96</p>	<p>East</p> <p>♠ QT65          ♥ AK753          ♦ 3          ♣ QT4</p>	<p>Bidding:</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 25%;">North</th> <th style="width: 25%;">East</th> <th style="width: 25%;">South</th> <th style="width: 25%;">West</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>No</td> <td>4♦</td> <td>4♠</td> <td>1♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5♠</td> <td>5NT</td> <td>No</td> <td>4NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>End</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>6♥</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	North	East	South	West	No	4♦	4♠	1♥	5♠	5NT	No	4NT	End			6♥
North	East	South	West																
No	4♦	4♠	1♥																
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End			6♥																
<p>South</p> <p>♠ AKJ743          ♥ J8          ♦ T97          ♣ 52</p>																			

I am technically a Bridge teacher, and though I am not active in that area at the moment, that still qualifies me to receive a copy of the regular newsletter – *The Ruffian* – that the EBU sends out to all registered ‘Bridge for All’ students. I generally read the articles contained therein – not, I hasten to add, expecting to learn anything, but more a question of keeping an eye on what the students are being told, and also to look out for good teaching tips.

And so it was that a few hours before this hand cropped up at the table I found myself reading an interesting article by Sandra Landy about the origins of and logic behind the ‘Milton High Card Point System’ that even the most experienced of players use as the basis of hand evaluation. Sandra concluded her article with the comment that this method of hand evaluation only held good for balanced hands played in No Trump contracts, because trumps give additional opportunities to win tricks. If Sandra is in need of an example to prove that point, she needs to look no further than this hand, which cropped up in the George Curtis Swiss Teams event in 2009.

On the surface the West hand holds ‘only’ 12 HCPs and East ‘only’ 11 – a combined total of 23, which is not even enough for game if one slavishly follows the advice that ‘you need a combined 25 HCPs to make a game’. Just to emphasise this point, neither of the two

unsupported queens carry any weight, so the effective 'Points' total is 19 – barely enough for a one-level contract!

West opened 1♥, and East bid 4♦, a 'Splinter' bid that showed good support for hearts, game-going values, together with a singleton or void in diamonds. South tried to get in the way with a bid of 4♠. The textbooks tell you that you shouldn't use ace-asking conventions on a hand that includes a void, but here South's bid led West to suppose that any key cards held by East were unlikely to include what would be a useless Ace of Spades. 4NT was 'Roman Key Card Blackwood', with hearts as the presumed trump suit. North did her best to be obstructive by bidding 5♠. East / West were playing the 'D1P2 / R1P2' method of counteracting interference in an Ace-asking sequence. A double of 5♠ would show the 'first step' response – i.e., it would be equivalent to an uncontested response of 5♣, which would have shown 0 or 3 key cards, pass would be equivalent to the second step – which would have been 5♦, showing 1 or 4 key cards, whereas the bid actually made – 5NT – shows the next step up, which is equivalent to a response of 5♥ in an uncontested auction, showing 2 key cards without the Queen of trumps. That was enough for West to bid 6♥. When the defence started by attempting to cash spade tricks and it turned out that the trumps split 2-1, Dummy's solitary diamond loser vanished on Declarer's long clubs and 13 tricks were amassed.

So how did East / West manage to reach this lay-down 23-HCP slam so confidently? Well, firstly, for reasons already mentioned, the opponent's interference helped West to judge the hand, but beyond that, the 'losing trick count' method of evaluation was much more useful here with such a good trump fit. The West hand may only have 12 HCPs, but it is in fact classifiable as a 5-loser hand when the good trump fit is found. West's Splinter bid shows a hand that is worth an opening bid, which equates to a 7-loser hand. Seven losers opposite five losers equals 12 losers, which equates to 12 winners – i.e., slam zone. The knowledge of the diamond shortage, plus the helpful information about the opponent's spade holdings, was enough to clinch it.