

NORWAY'S BRIDGE SUPERSTAR AT WORK

In the 1998 Marlboro China Cup, Geir Helgemo of Norway, partnered Paul Hackett (with the Hackett twins at the other table), representing the World Stars. They finished 3 VPs behind the French world champions, with the USA and China in their wake. Geir was the only declarer to make 4 ♠ on this deal.

| | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|--|
| | ♠ Q 9 3 | | |
| | ♥ Q J 8 7 2 | | |
| | ♦ 4 | | |
| | ♣ A J 4 2 | | |
| ♠ 1 0 8 7 | | ♠ A 5 2 | |
| ♥ A K 1 0 9 5 3 | | ♥ 4 | |
| ♦ K Q 5 3 | | ♦ J 1 0 7 2 | |
| ♣ - | | ♣ K Q 1 0 7 5 3 | |
| | ♠ A K J 6 4 | | |
| | ♥ 6 | | |
| | ♦ A 9 8 6 | | |
| | ♣ 9 8 6 | | |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|---------|--------|---------|
| Levy | Hackett | Chemla | Helgemo |
| - | - | - | 1 ♠ |
| 2 ♥ | 3 ♥ | 4 ♣ | 4 ♠ |

Alain Levy cashed one top heart, then switched to a trump. Geir's target now was to score five trump tricks in hand, two ruffs in the dummy, two minor-suit aces, and one heart trick. Careful timing was required. How would you have played the contract?

Geir won the trump switch in dummy, crossed to the ace of diamonds, and ruffed a diamond. He then returned to his hand with a heart ruff and ruffed a second diamond. A heart ruff to hand was followed by two more rounds of trumps, leaving no more trumps in play. These cards remained:

| | | | |
|-----------|---------|-----------|--|
| | ♠ - | | |
| | ♥ Q J | | |
| | ♦ - | | |
| | ♣ A J | | |
| ♠ - | | ♠ - | |
| ♥ K 1 0 9 | | ♥ - | |
| ♦ K | | ♦ J | |
| ♣ - | | ♣ K Q 1 0 | |
| | ♠ - | | |
| | ♥ - | | |
| | ♦ 9 | | |
| | ♣ 9 8 6 | | |

The bidding, and the play so far, had given Geir an accurate count on the hand. He now exited with a diamond. If East won the trick, he would have to return a high club to the ace. West would then be thrown in with a heart and would have to concede a heart trick to dummy at Trick 13. It was West who won the diamond trick, in fact, but the outcome was just the same. He had to surrender a heart trick to dummy and the game was made.

The alternative play at the end – club to the ace and a heart exit – would have succeeded as the cards lay. It would have failed if East held the diamond king (or if West had unblocked the diamond king earlier).

NORWAY'S BRIDGE SUPERSTAR AT WORK

Geir had to read the cards accurately on the next deal, from the 1999 Reisinger. (This is scored by a point-a-board. A difference of 10 aggregate or more wins the board for your team.)

| | | | |
|---------------|-------------|---------------|---------|
| | ♠ A 9 6 5 2 | | |
| | ♥ Q 4 | | |
| | ♦ J 5 3 | | |
| | ♣ 1 0 6 2 | | |
| ♠ 1 0 4 | | ♠ Q 7 3 | |
| ♥ K 1 0 6 5 2 | | ♥ 9 3 | |
| ♦ 8 4 | | ♦ Q 1 0 9 7 6 | |
| ♣ A 7 5 3 | | ♣ J 9 8 | |
| | ♠ K J 8 | | |
| | ♥ A J 8 7 | | |
| | ♦ A K 2 | | |
| | ♣ K Q 4 | | |
| West | North | East | South |
| | Forrester | | Helgemo |
| pass | 3 ♥ | pass | 2NT |
| pass | 3 NT | All pass | 3 ♠ |

North's transfer sequence offered a choice of games but there was little to be gained by playing in spades. West led ♥ 2 (third and fifth leads) and Geir rose with dummy's queen, winning the trick. A spade to the jack won the next trick.

Geir's next move might surprise you. He led the queen of clubs from his hands. West allowed this card to hold, no doubt hoping that his partner would win with the king and play a heart through. Geir now reverted to spades, playing four more rounds of the suit. The ace and king of diamonds were played next, leaving this end position

| | | | |
|---------|---------|-------|--|
| | ♠ - | | |
| | ♥ 4 | | |
| | ♦ J | | |
| | ♣ 1 0 6 | | |
| ♠ - | | ♠ - | |
| ♥ K 1 0 | | ♥ 3 | |
| ♦ - | | ♦ Q | |
| ♣ A 7 | | ♣ J 9 | |
| | ♠ - | | |
| | ♥ A J | | |
| | ♦ - | | |
| | ♣ Q 4 | | |

Ace and another heart threw West on lead and he had to surrender an eleventh trick to South's queen of clubs. This was a winning board against the ten tricks made in 3NT at the other table.

How did Geir read the cards so well? West's third-and-fifth ♥ 2 lead had given him a count on the heart suit. As for the ace of clubs, it was almost certain to be with West. If East held the card he could not afford to duck the king in case declarer then scored two tricks with his KQx.

It may seem that West could have done better by taking his ace of clubs at the first opportunity and returning a club to the 9 and queen. Declarer can strip East's major-suit cards, however, and endplay him with a club to the jack. East will have to lead away from ♦Q and again declarer has eleven tricks.

Extracted from Bridge with Imagination By David Bird and Geir Helgemo. Published by Finesse Bridge Publications