BRIDGE BY THE LAKE

By Ken Masson

The Annual Valentine's Sectional Bridge Tournament in Ajijic was once again a big success this February. Many thanks are due to the organizing committee headed by Norinne and Dick Nelson who made sure that everyone had a good time by providing a pleasant playing area with complimentary snacks throughout the course of the event provided by members of the Lake Chapala Duplicate Bridge Club.

While most bridge enthusiasts enjoy the competition and added masterpoints available at tournaments, many club players fear the "computer hands" which are the norm in the pairs games. There is a deep-seated suspicion that somehow the computer conspires to produce devilishly complicated hand layouts that only experts have a chance of figuring out and the less experienced participants become mere cannon fodder. This, despite the fact that countless

studies have shown that in the long run computer-generated deals more closely approximate statistical probability than those produced by humans.

As a case in point, the illustrated deal was played by the team of Elsie Johnson, John Fraser, herself and myself in the Swiss Teams on the last day of the tournament and these hands were people dealt! In this event one partnership of a team sits East-West at one table, while their teammates sit North-South at the other. A given number of hands are played at each table and afterwards a comparison is made to see which team has the best result.

At our table, herself was sitting West and opened the bidding 1 diamond. North bid 2 diamonds, the Michaels Convention, showing both major suits (there is no denying that is what she held, even if a little thin in high card points!). I couldn't be sure which side owned the contract but I thought I would mix things up a bit by raising partner to 5 diamonds. This did not slow down South who chimed in with 5 hearts only to see herself bid 6 diamonds and North raise *her* partner to 6 hearts! At this point I felt proceedings were getting out of control so I decided to end the madness by doubling the contract. Herself duly led the diamond ace and North, to our consternation, placed all her cards on the table in two neat columns instead of the normal four. Declarer wasted no time in trumping the opening lead in dummy and playing a spade towards her hand. I won the spade king and with a sinking feeling played another diamond, ruffed again in the dummy.

In quick order, declarer proceeded to ruff two spades in her hand setting up winners in the dummy, draw trumps and claim her contract – 6 hearts doubled made for a score of 1210! Herself and I desperately tried to think of some way of explaining this debacle to our team mates when they returned to our table to compare scores but lo and behold when they did come back it was with the news that they had duplicated the result at their table!

Unfortunately, we lost that match but at least it wasn't due to this aberration of a hand that couldn't even be blamed on a computer!

Questions or comments: email: masson.ken@gmail.com

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