

Elizabeth Yoo and I paired up to play in the South West Pacific Teams Championship in this year's Summer Festival of Bridge. Although we haven't played a lot together, we are starting to understand one another's style and we managed to get to most of our games and to defeat the opponent's contracts when they had stretched too far – two key factors of success in teams bridge. Partnership trust was tested somewhat when I picked up the following hand at the start of the final day:

♠ KQT98
♥ Q5
♦ QT96
♣ AQ

A 5422 fifteen count. Conventional wisdom would be open One Spade, but I prefer One No Trump with a hand like this. This is the kind of hand we will either play in Spades or in No Trumps and either way, if the opponents lead a heart, club or diamond, it will be beneficial to have the lead come around to this hand rather than have a lead through those holdings and have us have to commit a card at trick one.

My Left Hand Opponent passed and to my surprise Elizabeth bid Four No Trumps. This is known as a quantitative raise and essentially means "I have a flat hand too and we can definitely make Three No Trumps easily and quite possibly Slam. Pass if you have a minimum and bid Six No Trumps if you have a maximum".

Our range is fifteen to seventeen, meaning that I am definitely at the low end and should pass but I've always been an optimist in the bidding. I like my Spade Suit and figure there's an excellent chance the defence will give me a trick on the opening lead. Accordingly, I bid Six No Trumps which ended the auction. LHO considered his options for a while and then led the Diamond Two. Elizabeth put down the following dummy:

	♠ J4
Contract 6NT	♥ AK6
Opening Lead D2	♦ K54
	♣ KJ942

♠ KQT98
♥ Q5
♦ QT96
♣ AQ

Oh dear.

Only one of us has our bid. I am indeed looking at two wonderful, balanced(ish) hands but the fact we are missing two aces in Six No Trumps is something of a disappointment! This is going to be an awkward post mortem...

I played the Four from Dummy; Right Hand Opponent inserted the Jack and I won that with the Queen. Okay, well one bit of good news is that the Aces were not both in the same hand. That opened the door to a swindle and I immediately led the Diamond Six up towards Dummy's King-Five. LHO considered this for quite some time and then made the mistake of playing low, letting my King win the second trick.

I could now switch to Spades, playing the Jack from Dummy which RHO took with the Ace as the rest of my suit was now established as winners. As the first two rounds of diamonds had exhausted his holding in that suit, all he could do was put me back in hand where I could cash out my twelve tricks and breathe a sigh of relief. Awkward post mortem averted! (In my experience, partners are always much happier to forgive one's bidding errors when they lead to a good score)

There's more to this hand than the cautionary tale of not abandoning one's system just because you "like your hand". Even if the situation looks hopeless, it is always possible you will be saved by defensive error. My Left Hand Opponent should have got this right (ducking the second diamond wasn't going to gain their side anything). Nonetheless, if you put someone to a test early in the hand before they know what is going on they are far more likely to make an error. Defence is regarded as the hardest part of the game and even good players will go wrong from time to time. If you find yourself in desperate need of luck, it's often correct to make the key play at trick two or three before the opponents have had time to discard or otherwise signal to one another.