

It's an unfortunate time to laud the world's highest ranked bridge player. He was convicted of tax evasion yesterday! In today's story, he's minimising losers instead.

**THE 1997 "LE BRIDGEUR" AWARD FOR THE HAND OF THE YEAR**

**Geir Helgemo (NOR)**

Journalist: Edgar Kaplan (USA)

The Bridge World June 1997 page 20. IBPA: Bull 387, page 15, April. From the Hague Bulletin report by the IBPA Editor entitled the Three-way Finesse.

**Here is Kaplan's write-up:**

My team had a rather short run in the Vanderbilt, but there was a consolation prize at the finish: With a somewhat different team, Norman Kay and I won the concluding Open Swiss Teams. Our teammates were Bart Bramley, Brian Glubok. Geir Helgemo and Waiter Schafer.

Helgemo is the young Norwegian who has been producing superb results for the last five years. The reason for this became clear when I played a match with him and he produced a brilliant dummy-play on this deal, which hinged on another eight-spot: When an opposing weak two-bid is raised to game, the fourth player holding a good hand must guess well. Helgemo took a reasonable shot at 6♦.

Dir West     ♠ 9 7 3  
 Game All    ♥ 9 7 6 2  
                  ♦ K 10 8 6  
                  ♣ 9 2

♠ 8 4                    ♠ Q J 10 5  
 ♥ K Q J 8 4            ♥ A 10 5 3  
 ♦ 5                        ♦ 3  
 ♣ K 10 7 5 3           ♣ Q J 6 4

♠ A K 6 2  
 ♥ -  
 ♦ A Q J 9 7 4 2  
 ♣ A 8

West	North	East	South
	Kaplan		Helgemo
2♥	Pass	4♥	6♦!
All Pass			

He ruffed the opening heart lead, happy to have escaped a club lead. The ♦A removed the missing trumps, and it was now necessary to score three spade tricks. The only obvious chance was a three-three split, but Helgemo saw another possibility. He led a spade to the seven, a rare finesse against an eight on the first round.

East made a tricky play by winning with the jack and returning the five. Helgemo guessed what was happening: He played low from his hand, won with dummy's nine, and threw dummy's club loser on the fourth round of spades to make a slam that failed in the replay.

There were two psychological clues to this remarkable winning play. East's spade return was slightly suspicious, since he could obviously have led a heart. And if West had been able to win the third trick he might have done so, or at least hitched fractionally.

None of the experts who were shown South's problem found the solution, and all were in awe of Helgemo's effort. If East had returned an obvious heart at the fourth trick, South could still have succeeded by ruffing, crossing to dummy, and leading the ♠9.

There are more pedestrian brilliancies in this vein available for the rest of us.

Let's start with the most common:

Dummy  
 Q65

West	East
J	K43

You  
 AT9872

If East is marked with length in this suit and marked with strength on the hand, why not "squash" West's jack by leading the queen from dummy, avoiding a loser altogether?

Another common scenario:

Dummy  
 J95

West	East
T4	KQ3

You  
 A8762

It's hard to avoid two losers with this combination but, if West has a doubleton which includes the 10, it's doable. Start low towards dummy's 9. East wins with the king or queen. Next time, run the jack, squashing West's 10. Voila, one loser only!

Note that you can do just as well when West holds QT, or KT:

	Dummy	
	J95	
West		East
QT		K43
	You	
	A8762	

Again, start low towards the dummy and West is cooked (as long as you pick the layout!). If West hops with the queen, dummy plays low and you're in the same position as last time. If West plays the 10, cover with the jack, losing to East's king. Next round, lay down the ace to consume West's queen. One loser only!

If you're thinking ahead, you might have noticed that West would do well to insert the ten on the first round *even when holding Tx!* This provides declarer with a chance to lose two tricks, playing the West hand for QT, instead of Tx.

Sometimes, the defenders can do the squashing. Most commonly:

	Dummy	
	J	
You		East
QT987		??
	Declarer	
	??	

The right card to lead here is the queen, plugging the hole in your sequence.

Sometimes the short honour is hidden and some imagination is required:

W	N	E	S
	3D	3NT	

All pass

	Dummy	
	♠A6532	
You	♥J76	East
♠KJT97	♦void	♠?
♥Q943	♣J9864	♥?
♦AK		♦?
♣32	South	♣?
	♠?	
	♥?	
	♦?	
	♣?	

You start with the ♦K and partner discourages violently with the ♦10 (low enc).

It seems right to switch to a spade, but which one? Routine argues for the jack, but here you know the queen is short. It simply can't hurt to lead the king instead. If declarer has a singleton queen, you might find yourself in the bulletin!

And lastly, a defensive technique that is rarely needed but all too sad if it's needed but not found:

	Dummy	
	Q85	
You		East
KJ92		A76
	Declarer	
	T43	

You find yourself on lead midway through the hand, needing 4 tricks from this suit. The winning choice is the jack. This does not *immediately* "squash" the ten, but it does well enough. You have, in a way, incorporated declarer's 10 into your own collection, by retaining a card higher, and a card lower, than it.