

The Rocky Road to Templeogue

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Twelve stars from Europe battling it out against 12 stars from the United States. Every match a point. No prize money at stake, only honor, pride and a prestigious trophy.

You may be thinking Ryder Cup and you might be right. But this is a bridge column, not a golf column. So you should be thinking **Buffett Cup**.

Based on the same ideas as the Ryder Cup, the inaugural Buffett Cup took place in September this year during the days leading up to the golfing event at the same destination, Dublin in Ireland. Daniela and I were honored and very proud to be a member of the European team, and like everyone else on both teams we were determined to give our best. Our Irish hosts had done everything in their power (if not even more) to create the best possible conditions and give all the stars their due shine. A group of volunteers had worked hard for months to renovate Templeogue, the home of the Irish Bridge Association, where the event was to be staged. The result was no less than breathtaking. Never have I seen a place more suited and prepared with such attention to detail to stage a bridge event. Nothing had been left to chance, and everything was done very professionally throughout. For the occasion the organizers had even set up two trailers in the backyard, one for each team, to use as their home base, compare scores, relax between matches, get refreshments and so on.

Only the respective team members were allowed in there, nobody else. And to top it off there were even set up flower boxes with pretty and colourful flowers on the roofs of the trailers. Did I say attention to detail? A bit inconveniently, however, both teams stayed at a hotel at the other end of town for the duration of the event. And a daily tee-time of 10 a.m. seemed to bode ill regarding the sleep department and time spent in rush-hour traffic. No problem for the Irish organizers. As though it was the smallest problem in the world, they had arranged for a police escort for the bus transporting us all to the playing site. Every morning, five policemen on motorbikes accompanied our bus and blazed a trail through Dublin rush-hour traffic, waving all the cars to the roadside and making everybody wonder who the important people inside that bus were.

The **form of scoring** was novel for bridge. We would be playing first pairs, then teams and finally an individual competition. The captains of the two teams (**Paul Hackett for Europe and Donna Compton for the U.S.**) decided which of their pairs would play together as teams.

Every European pair, team and player was matched with an American counterpart in the respective events. Counterparts would never meet one another at the table. Rather they would always sit in the same direction at a different table trying to outscore their respective counterparts on as many boards as possible. Scoring was simple point-aboard. The pair, team or player winning most boards in a match would score a certain number of “championship points” for their “team” (Europe or U.S.) in the overall standings, with the number of championship points at stake depending on the form of competition (pairs, teams or individual). Okay, it was designed to be rather simple, but turned out to be rather complicated. Next time this will certainly be changed. After the pairs competition the score was level. After the teams competition, Europe had taken the lead, we were up by 9. Everybody was looking forward to the individual competition with anticipation. The consensus was that the Americans would have an edge because of greater familiarity with the methods they were using. The European players generally play vastly different systems and methods and might have more problems being on the same wavelength. At least that was what the Americans were hoping for. And they were proven right, in the end the Americans prevailed by 23 championship points. But there were no real losers. In terms of publicity and the promotion of bridge, the inaugural Buffett Cup was a huge success. And we were all happy to have contributed to it in various ways, no doubt some of us by keeping the

spectators entertained and amused with strange looking plays, convincing them they could have done much better themselves at home in their local club.

Here is some of the action.

I picked up this hand as South:

♠K Q 9 8 4 ♥A 10 9 2 ♦K 2 ♣8 5

We had reached the individual phase, and after four rounds, Europe's lead had shrunk to 1. In the fifth round, I was playing with **Geir Helgemo** against **Jill Levin and Bob Hamman**. How would you have bid my hand? Nobody was vulnerable.

West North East South

1♦ 1♠ Pass 1NT

2♣ 2♥ Pass 3♥ Pass ?

Should I pass or go on to 4♥? Unfamiliarity with my partner's style played a big role here. I didn't quite know how much to expect from him for his raise to 3♥. It looked to me like we were likely to lose three tricks in the minors. Hamman's bidding seemed to indicate an adverse major-suit

split, which would be bound to complicate the play of the hand, even if we had all the high cards in the majors. So I talked myself into passing. Jill Levin led the ♣2, and Geir put down his beautiful

dummy, a bit too beautiful to make me feel happy about my pessimistic decision.

This is what I saw:

♠ A 10

♥ K Q 6 4

♦ J 9 6

♣ Q 7 4 3

♠ K Q 9 8 4

♥ A 10 9 2

♦ K 2

♣ 8 5

I played low from dummy awaiting further developments. Hamman won the ♣K, cashed the ♦A and continued with a low diamond to my king, Jill Levin showing a doubleton. How should I go about the play of this hand? The form of scoring had played a not unimportant role in various choices of action throughout the entire event so far, and this deal was no exception. Making 3♥ didn't seem to pose any great problems. If the table we were comparing with had reached 4♥, overtricks wouldn't matter at all. But if they also had stopped in the heart partial, my line of play and the resulting number of tricks would be decisive. Taking this into consideration, it had to be right to go for the maximum number of tricks. The only question that remained was how.

The play to the first tricks indicated that Hamman held a 6-4 distribution in the minors, leaving him with only three cards in the majors. If hearts broke 5-0, it would be impossible to win 10 tricks. With a void in spades, Hamman probably would have played a higher diamond at trick three to ask for a spade ruff. So I discarded those two possibilities from my thoughts. Why had Jill led a club from her three-card suit instead of a diamond from her doubleton? Most likely she was looking at a four-card trump holding with a possible trump trick and had decided to play for a forcing game rather than a ruff with what might turn out to be a natural trump trick.

So far, so good. If my assumptions were right, Hamman had a doubleton spade and a singleton heart, making it odds on that both major-suit jacks would be on my left. If Jill's trump holding also included all the intermediates, *i.e.* J 8 7 5 or J 8 7 3, the timing of the play would be very delicate. In order to make 10 tricks I would have to take a first-round finesse against the jack in either one of the majors. (If Hamman held the singleton ♥8 or ♥7, there would be other successful but more involved lines.) It seemed right and clearly it would be more exciting, so at trick four I played a spade to the 10. Hamman won the jack – of course!

The full deal:

Dlr: East	♠ A 10	
Vul: None	♥ K Q 6 4	
	♦ J 9 6	
	♣ Q 7 4 3	
♠ 6 5 3 2		♠ J 7
♥ J 8 5 3		♥ 7
♦ 5 4		♦ A Q 10 8 7 3
♣ J 6 2		♣ A K 10 9
	♠ K Q 9 8 4	
	♥ A 10 9 2	
	♦ K 2	
	♣ 8 5	

Because of the implications of the choice of opening lead, the assumption of four hearts to the jack on my left is more conclusive than four to the jack in spades. So I should have started by running the ♥10 at trick four instead. Then it would no longer have been necessary to finesse in spades. By just playing spades from the top before continuing to draw trumps, I would have been able to both handle the doubleton jack on my right and four to the jack on my left, ruffing the fourth round of spades in dummy if necessary.

As it was, Hamman could have beaten even 3♥ now by cashing his high club and then continuing with a diamond. But as the opening club lead could have been from four to the jack, he immediately continued with the ♦Q. I desperately wanted to avoid the embarrassment of going down in 3♥ at this point. Clearly, I had to discard my club loser now on the diamond. I ruffed the next diamond with the ♥2 in my hand, which would be imperative in case Jill's heart holding was J 8 7 5 or J 8 7 3. Jill did well not overruffing but discarding a club instead, but it didn't matter. I could take the marked finesse against her trump jack and then just keep playing spades, finishing with nine tricks. "Well done," Hamman said, nodding appreciatively. Somehow losing the board didn't hurt quite as much any more.

What a great event this was!