

	<b>N</b>	<b>North</b>	
	♠	QJ8	
	♥	AJ965	
	♦	K82	
	♣	AQ	
<b>W</b>	<b>West</b>		<b>E</b>
	♠	7652	♠ 43
	♥	K432	♥ Q1087
	♦	J53	♦ Q1064
	♣	K10	♣ 754
	<b>S</b>	<b>South</b>	
	♠	AK109	
	♥	—	
	♦	A97	
	♣	J98632	

The world championship in **Bermuda** two weeks ago was my second. I had played in **Rio de Janeiro** in 1969, when we finished third, the first time in history the **U.S.** had not been first or second. That's the story of my life.

But after six days of preliminaries in **Bermuda**, we were close to victory. We had managed to defeat the French in the semifinals, and in the finals had built a surprising halftime lead of 73 International Match Points against the perennial champions, the Italians. That is like leading the **Pittsburgh Steelers** 21-0. With only 48 hands left to be played, in segments of 16 each, spirits were soaring. We had a good team, and even though the Italians were capable of playing superb bridge, it would be quite difficult for us to blow this one if we didn't go completely to pot. Could it be? Was I really going to be a world champion?

I had been playing bridge regularly since I learned the game from my best friend's father at the age of 12-30 years ago. Seldom does a day pass that I don't either teach a bridge class, write a bridge column or a bridge article, read about the game, think about the game, dream about the game, bid hands with my partner, deal out hands, or simply play. Was I—that good-for-nothing cardplayer, gambler, bum—finally going to make my worried relatives proud?

So we played 16 hands and dropped 27 of our precious 73-IMP lead, but we went to bed with 46 IMPs still tucked under our pillows. That's a lot. Then 16 more boards the following afternoon and 22 more IMPs disappeared, leaving us 24 IMPs ahead with 16 hands remaining. The Italians had started to play extremely well, better than at any other time during the tournament. Luck, which had been ours, switched sides. Nobody on our team could do anything right.

As I sat down for the last 16 boards I began to reflect upon my errors earlier in the match. I had managed to go down in a vulnerable four spades that I should have made. That blew 17 IMPs. On another hand I thought my partner, **Billy Eisenberg**, had raised my opening one-club bid to two clubs over an adverse one-diamond overcall, so I had cleverly leaped to five clubs to shut out the opponents' spade fit.

They doubled and set me three tricks when it turned out my right-hand opponent and not Billy had bid the two clubs. Not only that, but Billy had six spades, so they had no makeable game.

Our other pair, in the meantime, holding the adverse cards, wound up playing three no trump, down three. And finally there was my brilliant underlead of the ace-king of hearts over to Billy's queen to get a club ruff. Only Billy didn't have the queen, he had the nine. Expletives resounded.

Our opponents for those last 16 boards on vu-graph (where everyone can witness your atrocities) were those giants of the game, **Benito Garozzo** and **Giorgio Belladonna**. This was probably the first time they had ever been down this much going into the last few boards and it didn't amuse them.

Even though Billy and I (especially Billy) were now doing rather well, we felt they had the edge on us—but not 24 IMPs worth. And then it happened: Board 92 (see page 54), a hand that looked as if it might change my life.

After Billy passed, Belladonna opened two clubs, which in the Italians' super-precision system showed a long club suit, fewer than 17 high-card points and possibly an outside four-card suit. Garozzo responded two diamonds, a relay, asking for more information, and Belladonna duly bid two spades to show his four-card suit. Garozzo now tried a natural bid of three hearts and Belladonna retreated to three no trump.

Garozzo was far from through; in fact, he was just beginning. He showed his club support by bidding four clubs and Belladonna cue-bid four diamonds, showing either first- or second-round diamond control.

Garozzo made a waiting bid of four no trump (Blackwood is for peasants) and Belladonna confirmed first-round diamond control by bidding five diamonds. Garozzo tried another cue bid of five hearts. Billy, who had seen some of my opening leads, doubled to help me out, and Belladonna seized the opportunity to show first-round heart control by redoubling.

Garozzo bid five spades, a bid whose meaning is not 100% clear to me, and Belladonna bid five no trump, another mystery. Whatever it meant, Garozzo leaped to seven clubs. Everyone passed in exhaustion.

Seven clubs! I could hardly believe my ears. Here I was defending a vulnerable grand slam with the king-10 of trumps tucked away safely in back of the original club bidder. God is not an Italian after all. They were certain to go down one. I was going to be a world champion. What a day. I could hardly wait to get home to tell everybody. I would hold court...I would....

I led a heart and then I saw it in the dummy...the ace-queen doubleton of clubs! Could this really be happening to me? Why me? Why couldn't the ace of trumps be where it should have been? Why couldn't they have dealt Billy the king of clubs? Or why couldn't I have been dealt just one more little club? Just one...a very little one. Why, why?

Wait. Maybe I did have one. I searched frantically through my spades. The whole scene reminded me of a story I tell my classes. A little old lady, Alice, is playing with a pro, Morris, and she shows out on the second round of hearts, even though Morris knows from the bidding she must have another heart somewhere.

"No hearts, Alice?" he asks. "No hearts, Morris," she replies. "Look in with your diamonds, Alice." "Morris, I have no hearts in with my diamonds." "One more time, please, Alice." "No hearts, Morris." On the last trick Alice rather sheepishly produces a heart. Morris repeats, "I told you to look in with your diamonds." "I'm sorry, Morris, it was in with my clubs."

All right, Morris, I'll look through my hearts and my diamonds, I said to myself. (Later at the "victory banquet" I admitted to my teammates that I had searched despairingly through my hand for just one tiny little club, admitting that I would have killed myself if I actually had one and didn't know it. "You wouldn't have had to," said another of the **U.S.** players, **Bob Hamman**.)

Meanwhile, upon first viewing dummy, Belladonna thought the big problem was his. He knew he needed to find me with precisely the doubleton king of clubs or possibly the singleton king, in which case an unlikely trump coup was at least feasible. Roughly a 13% chance. He could see the world championship flying out the window. But I knew better; I could see myself flying home with the runner-up trophy.

He ruffed my low heart lead and led a club to the queen, shaking his head. Next he cashed the ace of clubs, and when my king dropped two huge sighs filled the room. One from Belladonna, the other from Billy. We both knew it was all over after that, and so it was.

The last few hands were relatively flat (no swings), and **Italy** went on to defeat us by 26 IMPs. Had the grand slam been defeated we would have won the match by 3 IMPs. In the closed room, our other pair, **Hamman** and **Bob Wolff**, had bid to six no trump, played by North, making seven with a club lead. Admittedly six clubs is the best contract, but six no trump is a far better contract than seven clubs, particularly after North had bid hearts initially, thus inhibiting that most damaging lead.

As soon as the last hand was finished, we were told that **Italy** had won. The door to the room burst open and a hundred thousand Italians surged in to hug and congratulate the winners.

Billy and I trudged back to our team's rest and recovery room to compare scores and suffer with Hamman-Wolff and **Paul Soloway** and **John Swanson**, our other teammates, who must have watched the last 16 boards in horror.

After the comparison there was a long silence. Finally it was broken by **Hamman**. "This calls for a human sacrifice," he said. I flipped the king of clubs out the terrace window.

The great Belladonna, declarer, trumped the heart lead, and led a trump to the ten and queen. At that point, his face lit up, he looked to the heavens, called for the ace of trumps, and

At the victory banquet, he was asked, "What would have happened had West played the club king on the first round of trumps?" He answered, "the Americans would be World Champions today!" Why? See below

BRIDGE

## A King, a Shock, a World Title

By PHILLIP ALDER  
Published: September 18, 2006

In Saturday's column, the two declarers had to play a heart suit of Q-9-5 opposite A-J-8-4-2 for no losers. When they led the five off the board, the next player put up the king. The Irish declarer decided that this was a singleton. So he won with his ace and played a heart to the nine, picking up 10-7-6-3 on his left. But the French declarer was confident that if his right-hand opponent had started with the doubleton king-ten of hearts, he would have "falsecarded" by playing the king. And knowing that doubleton king-ten was more likely than singleton king, he played a heart to dummy's queen and went down.

NORTH		
	♠ Q J 8	
	♥ A J 9 6 5	
	♦ K 8 2	
	♣ A Q	
WEST		EAST(D)
♠ 6 5 2		♠ 7 4 3
♥ K 4 3 2		♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ J 6 5 4 3		♦ Q 10
♣ K		♣ 10 7 5 4
SOUTH		
	♠ A K 10 9	
	♥ —	
	♦ A 9 7	
	♣ J 9 8 6 3 2	

Both sides were vulnerable. The bidding:

East	South	West	North
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	3 N.T.	Pass	4 ♣
Pass	4 ♦	Pass	4 N.T.
Pass	5 ♦	Pass	5 ♥
DbL.	Redbl.	Pass	5 ♠
DbL.	5 N.T.	Pass	7 ♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass

That deal recalled another one: No. 92 from the 96-board final of the 1975 Bermuda Bowl world team championship between Italy and the United States. When this deal was played, Italy enjoyed a lead of 196 international match points to 183.

The given auction was produced by the Italians Benito Garozzo (North) and Giorgio Belladonna. The two-club opening bid was natural but limited to 15 high-card points. Two diamonds was an artificial inquiry, with two spades, three hearts and three no-trump being natural. Four clubs showed support for the six-card suit and slam interest. Then the auction went off the rails. When North jumped to seven clubs, he thought that his partner had at least six clubs to the king.

West led his lowest heart, and declarer was horrified when he saw the dummy. He ruffed the heart in hand and played a trump, West's king appearing. If this was a true card, South had to arrange a trump coup, which required that at Trick 12 the lead be on the board, with South having the jack-nine of clubs hovering over East's ten-seven. But with the given distribution,

if at Trick 3 South cashed dummy's club queen just to check that West had not played the king from king-doubleton, the contract would be impossible to make, because East would ruff the fourth round of spades.

To make the contract, declarer discards a diamond on the heart ace at Trick 3, ruffs a heart in his hand, takes his two top diamonds ending on the board and ruffs another heart to bring about this end position:

NORTH		
♠ Q J 8		
♥ J		
♦ 8		
♣ Q		
WEST		EAST(D)
♠ 6 5 2		♠ 7 4 3
♥ —		♥ —
♦ J 6 5		♦ —
♣ —		♣ 10 7 5
SOUTH		
♠ A K 10 9		
♥ —		
♦ —		
♣ J 9		

Now declarer takes three spade tricks ending in his hand and ruffs the last spade on the board with the club queen, East being forced to underruff. Then the lead of either red card effects the trump coup.

What a brilliant — if lucky — way to make a grand slam and win a world title. But now I must be honest. West actually had this hand: S 7-6-5-2; H K-4-3-2; D J-5-3; C K-10.

Then, if declarer follows the stated line of play, he goes down because East ruffs the third round of spades.

What really happened at the table? Sitting West was Eddie Kantar, a two-time Bermuda Bowl champion who is one of the greatest players of all time. He thought that the club ace was going to be on his right, in the declarer's hand. When he saw the ace-queen appear on the table, he was shocked. Still in shock, Kantar played his club ten, not the king, when Belladonna led a low trump at Trick 2. Declarer called for dummy's queen and cashed the ace. When the king dropped, Belladonna sat back in his chair with a big sigh of relief.

At the other table, Bobby Wolff (North) and Bob Hamman reached six no-trump by North. Arturo Franco (East) led a low club, and Wolff won an overtrick.

Plus 2,140 and minus 1,460 gave Italy 12 imps. But if seven clubs had failed, the United States would have gained 17 imps — a difference of 29 imps. And the final result was Italy 215, United States 189 — a difference of only 26 imps.

Belladonna, who died in 1995, was an extremely likable, personable man. At the final banquet he was shown a layout similar to this one and was asked what he would have done if Kantar had played the club king at Trick 2. Belladonna replied that he would still be at the table, thinking.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/18/crosswords/bridge/18card.html>