

The Matron's clever bid



David Bird

THE Headmaster looked closely at the young German master, Stefan Götel, who had just arrived at the table. He was an intelligent man, no-one could deny it. How could such a person tolerate an awful partner like the Matron?

'Interesting hands we are playing tonight, Headmaster,' observed Stefan Götel. 'A most enjoyable session, I must say.'

The Headmaster made no reply. An enjoyable session, partnering the Matron? Was the man a masochist?

The players drew their cards for this board:

E/W Game. Dealer North.

♠ 4 3 ♥ A K Q 9 4 2 ♦ Q J 10 3 ♣ 8	♠ 9 6 ♥ J 8 6 ♦ A 7 ♣ A K 9 7 4 2		♠ 10 8 5 ♥ 10 7 5 3 ♦ 8 4 ♣ Q J 10 6
	♠ A K Q J 7 2 ♥ Void ♦ K 9 6 5 2 ♣ 5 3		

West	North	East	South
Headmaster	The Matron	Reverend Benson	Stefan Götel
	1♣	Pass	1♠
2♥	Pass	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♠	Pass	6♠
All Pass			

The Headmaster led the ace of hearts and the Matron laid out her dummy somewhat apologetically. 'I was a bit worried, raising the spades with only two trumps,' she said. 'I wanted to bid 3NT, with my good clubs, but it seemed too risky on three hearts to the jack.'

Stefan Götel liked the look of what he saw in the dummy. 'You bid it excellently, partner!' he exclaimed.

The German master ruffed the heart lead, drew trumps in three rounds and led a low club towards the dummy. The Matron's immaculately clean fingers moved towards the ace of clubs. 'No, no, play a low one,' said Götel.

The Reverend Benson won the first round of clubs with the ten and returned a diamond, aiming to dislodge the entry to dummy. Stefan Götel rose with the king of diamonds and crossed to the ace of clubs, West showing out. 'Ah, the club division is 4-1,' he exclaimed. 'It is a good job, as you say here in England, that I made the safety play!'

Götel cashed the king of clubs, throwing a diamond, and ruffed a club to establish the suit. He then returned to dummy with the ace of diamonds and discarded his remaining diamond losers on the good clubs. Twelve tricks were before him.

The Matron beamed at her partner. 'My unusual bid worked out very well,' she declared. 'I don't expect anyone else will raise the spades on two low cards.'

The Reverend Benson was less pleased at the turn of events. 'Not the best of opening leads, Headmaster,' he said. 'If you start with your singleton club, declarer can't afford to duck. I would win and give you a club ruff.'

The Matron looked at the Headmaster

with some concern. 'You had a side-suit singleton?' she queried. 'I always lead a singleton against a slam. If partner has the ace, he can give you a ruff.' She paused to enter a large 980 into the plus-column of her score-card. 'Madge Warner recommended it only last week, in her column in *Children's Healthcare Weekly*.'

'A diamond lead would beat it, too,' persisted the Reverend Benson. 'If Stefan wins with the king, draws trumps and ducks a club, I can knock out the ace of diamonds before the clubs are established.'

The Matron retrieved the Headmaster's cards from the table, wondering what he had held in diamonds. 'Ah, the queen-jack-ten!' she exclaimed. 'That's what Madge Warner calls a sequence of honours – she recommends that as a good lead, too.'

The Headmaster had heard enough. 'You didn't just happen to notice my holding in the heart suit, did you?' he asked heavily. 'I had the ace-king-queen of hearts. Does the great Madge Warner not recognise that as a lead of some promise?'

In an instant, all traces of concern vanished from the Matron's face. 'You need blame yourself no longer, Headmaster,' she declared, patting him on the back of the hand. 'Ace-king-queen is the most perfect lead there is. Well defended, indeed!' □



PLAYING WITH THE STARS

WIMBLEDON Bridge Club held its annual charity event on 23 November 2008. The highlight of the day was the auction to play with one of sixteen bridge celebrities in the club's *Play with the Stars* evening on 26 February 2009. Raffle tickets were also sold, the top prize being the chance to play with Andrew Robson in the February event. This year the club chose to support the following charities: Great Ormond Street, Breast Cancer Hope, St Raphael's Hospice and The Village of Hope.

Almost eighteen tables turned out to support the charities on 23rd November. A very successful auction, conducted by EBU Director Martin Lee, helped the club to collect almost £7,200 in total. This figure will be further increased by the table money collected on the night when the stars turn out in February. The following celebs will be in action: Brian Senior, Ian Pagan, Espen Erichsen, Nevena Senior, Sally Brock, Colin Simpson, Bob Rowlands, Peter Lee, Nick Sandqvist, Janet De Botton, Daffyd Jones, Ed Scerri, Rob Cliffe, David Burn, Ben Green and Zia Mahmood.