

Brian's Brighton – Part One

My journey to Brighton actually began on the morning of Sunday, July 20th. I drove to East Grinstead in Sussex for an EBU one-day Swiss Teams event. Having stayed in Hove on Sunday night, the next morning, at a disgustedly early hour, I took a taxi to the local bus station, took a bus to Gatwick, and then flew to Las Vegas. There I played with my wife, Nevena, for six days, for four of which we were being paid by an American sponsor partnering David Gold. You may find it strange that Nevena and I travelled separately to Vegas, but there was a logical reason - after the tournament she was flying to Sofia via London, I was flying to Hong Kong for another tournament, and that meant continuing to fly West. I was writing Daily Bulletins in Hong Kong and, after that I had three days holiday in Bangkok before flying to Heathrow on Thursday August 7th - just in time for the start of Brighton the following day.

So, my first article for these Brighton bulletins is a collection of four of the best boards from our Las Vegas experience.

I couldn't find a way to make my contract on this deal from the second final session of the Mixed BAM but the play had a cute ending.

Board 27. Dealer South. None Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
Brian Senior		Nevena Senior	
—	—	—	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

Some might have bid over 1♠ with the North cards but our North passed in tempo and, when we reached 3NT, led the three of hearts, attitude, to the ten and king, rather than risk leading into a possible ♣KQ10 holding.

I led a diamond at trick two and, when North pitched an encouraging club, could see that making the contract was very unlikely. I won the ace, unblocked the spade and, even though the ace was almost certainly offside, led a club to the queen. North won her ace and continued with a second heart, ducked to South's jack. Back came the ten of clubs. I won the king and exited with my last club. Can you see what is going to happen?

North cashed the clubs and I came down to king-jack of spades and one card in each red suit, dummy to ♥A9 ♦QJ. North was forced to lead into the spade tenace and on two rounds of spades away went dummy's diamonds. South was squeezed, the low diamond in hand being a threat against him. The contract was still one down, of course, but that was enough to win the board for the good guys.

It does not help the defence for North not to cash the last club. If she leads a spade a trick earlier, there is no squeeze, true, but declarer can set up a diamond for his eighth trick and the result is unchanged.

This deal shows how dangerous it can be to double a world champion. At the other table 3NT was not doubled and neither was it made, despite declarer being a well-known US pro-player. After a heart lead, declarer simply played for split diamond honours and was down one.

Board 2. Dealer East. N/S Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
	Brian Senior		Nevena Senior
—	—	1♥	Pass
1♠	Dble	2♣	2NT
Pass	3NT	Dble	All Pass

We reached this thin game on the auction above, East doubling the final contract as, after all, his partner had responded to his opening bid.

West led the eight of hearts to the queen and Nevena won the ace and played a diamond to the jack and king. Back came the ten of hearts. She won the jack and cashed all four spades, discarding a diamond from the dummy. East had discarded two clubs on the second and third rounds of spades, but what could he do on the last spade? He had been triple squeezed and was forced to throw one of his heart winners, after which declarer could knock out the second diamond honour and, with only two hearts left to cash, East could no longer defeat the contract; +750 and 13 IMPs to the good guys.

Declarer at the other table could have cashed the four spades for nothing - even if this set up a spade winner for the defence, this could not be the fifth defensive trick, while cashing the suit might put pressure on a defender. Also, consider that, if the top diamonds really were split, East would have ducked the opening lead, forcing declarer to use up one of his heart stoppers. Now, West could have won the first diamond and cleared the hearts while East still had a diamond entry. On the actual defence, declarer could have ducked the first heart and won the second with the jack, exhausting West of the suit.

This next deal featured a nice falsecard from an opponent, tempting declarer into a losing line of play.

Board 15. Dealer South. N/S Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
	Brian Senior		Nevena Senior
—	—	—	1♦
2♣	Dble	Pass	3♣
Dble	Pass	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♥	Pass	5♣
Pass	5♦	Pass	5♥
Pass	5♠	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♠	All Pass	

In our methods, the 1♦ opening would always deliver at least four cards in the suit and, when Nevena later showed four spades, she would also have at least five diamonds (except in the impossible case where she was 1-4-4-4). My Four Club bid was, at least notionally, showing a club control - I wanted to make a couple of encouraging bids without having to go past game on my limited hand and to cuebid 4♥ immediately over 3♠ would have cramped the auction somewhat. Nevena drove to slam now, even making a grand slam try in case my diamond control was the king - though she strongly suspected this would not be the case.

West led a top club, ruffed, and declarer played ace of diamonds and ruffed one, seeing the king appear on her left. A heart to the jack and king, put her back in hand to ruff another diamond as West pitched a club. With the diamond established, it was time to set about the trump suit but, when cashed dummy's ace, West dropped the ten.

Of course, had the contract been 7♠, there would have been only one possible line of play - play for trumps to be three-two, so draw them and cash the red winners. In 6♠, however, there was an alternative which would succeed when spades were four-one but not, alas, when they were three-two. Was West 1-4-2-6, as suggested by the fall of the spade ten, or was she 2-4-2-5 or 2-3-2-6?

Nevena cashed the ace of hearts then led the third heart to her queen and attempted to cash the queen of diamonds. Had that survived, she could have continued by ruffing a winning diamond with dummy's jack and would have had two more trump winners in hand to bring the total up to twelve. When West turned up with the eight of spades with which to ruff the diamond winner, there was no longer any way to come to twelve tricks as declarer would have to shorten her trumps to get back to the remaining diamond winner. Down one and a huge swing away as the opposition played for trumps to be three-two at the other table.

And finally, a bit of fun. What is the weakest hand you have ever opened?

This deal came up during the second session of the Mixed BAM qualifying .

Board 2. Dealer East. N/S Vul.

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

Late in the session we moved to a table where South was bemoaning the fact that his previous opponent, young Dutch star Tim Verbeek, had just opened 2♦ against him, third in hand on the West cards. It was difficult for me to give him too much sympathy as I had made exactly the same opening bid myself.

At my table, North doubled, Nevena raised to 3♦, and South bid 3NT. After much soul-searching, North raised to 6NT. The play was a thing of rare beauty. There is a double dummy line to make 12 tricks after a diamond

lead, but declarer didn't get close. He won, crossed to hand with a heart and took the club finesse. That lost and Nevena returned a diamond. Declarer came back to hand and finessed the ten of spades, losing to the jack, and back came a club. He made the mistake of cashing the third club before taking the queen of diamonds and didn't even look at Nevena's card so didn't know that his ten was now a winner. A second losing spade finesse resulted in down three as Nevena had the thirteenth club to cash. Obviously, this result won us the board.

This may be the weakest hand I have ever opened - if not, it must be mighty close, but it is not the weakest suit with which I have opened a weak two bid. That honour falls to a hand I held many years ago in a tournament on Sicily. In those days, the Italian Bridge Federation, in its infinite wisdom, had a rule that, in a pairs event, any one-level opening bid, even in third seat, had to conform to the Rule of 18 (HCP plus the number of cards in your two longest suits added together equals 18 or more). So you could open 1♠ on a small doubleton as a psyche, but only with something like opening values, and could neither psyche nor make a lead-directing light opening with a weaker hand.

So, again at favourable vulnerability, I picked up, ♠Jxxx ♥xxx ♦xx ♣Qxxx. After two passes, I opened with a natural weak 2♦! The next hand overcalled 3♣ and that ended the auction. It turned out that he had overcalled on a 2-2-4-5 19-count and they were cold for 6♦ and 6NT. When the first thing dummy put down was ♦KQJ10xx, up went an Italian arm with a scream for the director. Over came top WBF director, Antonio Riccardi. He listened to my opponent, looked at the deal, looked at me, who he knew well, and I explained that I couldn't open at the one level but the prohibition didn't extend to the two level. He told the opponents that there was nothing he could do, it was just a perfectly legal psyche, and walked away from the table, shaking his head and smiling to himself.