



The Sunday Night QUESTION



THIS WEEK, I HAVE AN APPOINTMENT WITH CLOTHILDE, ONE OF THE TWO BEST GIRLS THAT I TRAIN. I IMPATIENTLY LOOK FORWARD TO THE DEBRIEFING OF THEIR FIRST WEEKEND OF THE WOMEN'S NATIONAL DIVISION. HER AND HER PARTNER ALICE HAVE JUST BEEN INVITED TO JOIN THE TEAM AND ARE THEREFORE PLAYING THIS COMPETITION FOR THE FIRST TIME TOGETHER.

A "ring" tells me that I have a message from Clothilde arriving on my favorite social network.

She tells me: "It went like a dream! We are in the lead and our partners congratulated us. And yet, the weekend got off to a bad start."

I reply: "That's normal, even if one should avoid these small mistakes at the start of the tournament and be immediately focused. There is a bit of pressure when you are invited to join a team in the strongest competition of your category. But tell me about that bad hand at the start."

She replies: "I made a questionable opening which led to a bad contract. I opened 1NT with ♠32 ♥AKJ ♦KJ8762 ♣K3".

Me: "That's completely normal, Clothilde. I have already explained to you that this kind of opening bid is automatic and you must not question it every time it goes wrong. If you don't open with 1NT, you'll have a thorny problem with your rebid. If you open 1♦ and settle for 2♦ on the next round, you will not be doing justice to your hand's potential with the sixth Diamond and 15 HCP. On the other hand, if you jump to 3♦, your partner could be disappointed when he discovers the quality of your Diamonds."

She retorts: "Yes, but we ended up playing 3 No-trump with two small Spades opposite the Jack doubleton. Alice had an obvious reply of 3NT to 1NT."

Me: "Yes, I admit that is not great. But with one Diamond less and one more Club you would not have hesitated for a second to open 1NT and yet your hand would have been worse than here where you have a sixth Diamond. So, did they take the first five or six Spades?"

Clothilde: "No, the Spades blocked but I still went down. They also had the Ace of Clubs and the Heart finesse didn't work. "Show me both hands and tell me the start of the play, please."

♠ J4		
♥ 752		
♦ AQ3		
♣ QJ1074		
	N	
	W	E
		S
♠ 65		
♥ AKJ		
♦ KJ8762		
♣ K3		

"Here are the two hands. West led the ten of Spades and East overtook with the Queen before cashing Ace-King. I could already see myself going down when East started to think and then switched to the Heart ten."

"Oh, really? And you didn't win?"

Clothilde: "Well no! Why do you seem surprised? I told you, the Queen of Hearts is offside."

Me: "Yes. But East is the one who holds the Ace of Clubs, right?"

Her: "Yes, how do you know that?"

"Well, you know, you play the National Women's Division. You play against the best ladies in France. If West had the Ace of Clubs, East would have switched to a Club, not a Heart. You played as if they had misdefended and given

you the contract when they had seven tricks to cash from the top."

Her: "Ah yes, I was stupid, I told myself that if I played a Club it was certain that I'd lose the lead whereas in Hearts I had a 50% chance of not losing it."

Me: "It's funny but a priori the odds are equal. When you finesse in Hearts, you play that East has the Queen. When you play Clubs, you play that East has the Ace of Clubs. It's the same thing. Except that you know with near certainty that West does not have the Ace of Clubs."

"Yes, especially as you're right: in that situation, signaling is not very complicated for them."

"Yes. Clothilde, what is the rule?"

"You've repeated it over and over again! Whenever we know that the partner will not be able to continue the suit we are playing, we must give preference."

"Yes, so West must have played her highest Spade every time, right?"

Her: "Yes. West played the nine and then the eight since she had 1098732 to ask for Hearts. If she had held the Ace of Clubs, she would have played the two and then the three of Spades."

Me: "There you go. In such basic signaling situations, you can trust good players not to make mistakes."

Clothilde: "Thank you, Wilou! See ya!"

	♠ J4	
	♥ 752	
	♦ AQ3	
	♣ QJ1074	
♠ 1098732	N	♠ AKQ
♥ Q43	W	♥ 10986
♦ 95		♦ 104
♣ 65		♣ A982
		S
	♠ 65	
	♥ AKJ	
	♦ KJ8762	
	♣ K3	