

# SENIOR TALES: MATCHPOINTS

BY EZECHIELE

Ezechiele, sitting comfortably in his favorite armchair, was in a philosophical mood. He was wondering why none of his three sons wanted to learn bridge, a break from a family tradition begun by his grandfather. He had few hopes for his grandchildren as well: They had too much money in their pockets and too many possibilities for amusement.

These reveries were interrupted by Laura, a beloved grandchild, who broke unexpectedly into his den. She had just returned from a special program in Vienna. "I have great news for you, Grandpa," said his princess. "In Vienna, I learned to play bridge!" Ezechiele was so surprised that he was unable to utter a word. Later, during lunch, he announced to his wife Maria: "I haven't played at matchpoints for more than 40 years, but I will participate in a duplicate with Laura on Saturday evening. She deserves to have an experienced partner, even if I'm above all a rubber-bridge player."

The duplicate room was crowded and overheated. The inter-generational pair's first opponents were two young men, one thin and with a beard of several days' growth, the other portly and white-haired—he reminded Ezechiele of a great white shark. On the first deal, with both sides vulnerable, Laura opened one diamond in second position; her grandpa responded one notrump. After two passes, the shark doubled, and everyone passed. Despite declarer's skillful play, the contract was defeated one trick for what appeared to be a zero for the declaring side, because the shark's hand was:

♠ A Q 7 4   ♥ Q 5 4   ♦ Q 6 2   ♣ 8 7 3.

There was no time for further investigation, because the second deal appeared:

North dealer; North-South vulnerable

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

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
<i>Ezechiele</i>	—	<i>Laura</i>	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
3 ♦	Pass	4 ♦	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♣	Pass
6 ♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

West led the deuce of spades. The shark won with the king of spades and shifted to the queen of hearts. Now the contract seemed to be ironclad with a finesse against the queen of spades, but Grandpa decided that a lead from a queen, against a slam, was not too likely, and he was pretty sure of the location of the king of hearts.

So declarer cashed all his trumps but one, blanking the spade ace in dummy, then took three clubs ending in North. The shark was trump-squeezed, and his squirming (combined with the fourth-highest opening lead) provided strong clues to the count in the ending, so the slam was made, evening up the scores for the round.

After a long series of bland deals, a pair of aggressive-looking, middle-aged ladies sat down without even a nod. The first board of this round was reminiscent of the first deal of the session. Laura opened one diamond, Ezechiele bid one notrump, and after two passes the lady in reopening position, not vulnerable, entered the bidding with what seemed to Ezechiele an incredible two spades on:

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

This was duly doubled, but plus 100 for down one was a poor result for the opening side, which had eight easy tricks in notrump. "Everybody seems to have gone crazy!" thought the old man. He was considering how to explain to the princess that matchpoints was not bridge, but Laura was already looking a bit confused, so Grandpa simply smiled at her as they played the second deal of the round (positions switched for the reader's convenience):

South dealer; North-South vulnerable

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

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
	<i>Ezechiele</i>	<i>Laura</i>	
1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
1 NT	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♥	Pass	6 NT	(All Pass)

Ezechiele led the jack of hearts, taken by South's queen; Laura pitched a spade. Declarer unblocked the queen and jack of spades, then knocked out West's ace of diamonds. Looking like

a tigress, she won the heart return and had to decide whether to finesse against the king of clubs or to try to squeeze West between hearts and the king of clubs. After an anguished huddle, declarer came to the conclusion that if West had held six hearts to the jack-ten with an ace and a king on the side, he would have bid over one diamond. Therefore, she ran the queen of clubs, which was unsuccessful, because this was the full deal:

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

Ezechiele considered that this was a situation within Laura's comprehension, so he painstakingly demonstrated that a Vienna Coup followed by a simple squeeze would have been successful as the cards lay. The tigress in South gazed at him with hatred and, foaming with rage, shouted: "Director!" A tall, gray-haired gentleman, dressed with the blue blazer of the Bridge Federation, appeared in a flash. "That guy, not vulnerable, had six hearts to jack and ten, a king and an ace, and he didn't bid after I opened one diamond," South complained. "Don't you think that's a bit too odd?"

The director looked at the full deal, then at the old man, and answered: "Not at all!"

Ezechiele's mind was elsewhere, because he remembered with pleasure a quite similar deal played by his father, where an opponent's bid had provided a critical clue to the presence of king of clubs. That deal had occurred more than 50 years before, in Alba, the kingdom of truffles.

In some of the later deals, Ezechiele's no-frills approach produced a number of good scores. The last round brought to the table a man and a woman, apparently husband and wife, fiercely discussing the previous deal. When the lady malevolently hissed "Good evening," Ezechiele was reminded of a rattlesnake. For the third time during the session, Laura opened one diamond and Ezechiele responded one notrump. After two passes, the husband doubled, but this time the story had a happier ending: Ezechiele made an overtrick. The rattlesnake was still hissing when the last deal began (positions again switched):

North dealer

Neither side vulnerable

NORTH

♠ Q 4  
♥ A Q 5 4  
♦ Q 7 6  
♣ A 9 6 3

EAST

♠ 10 8 6 5 2  
♥ 8  
♦ 9 8 2  
♣ J 10 8 4

SOUTH

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

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
Laura	—	Ezechiele	—
—	—	1 ♣	Pass
1 ♦	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
5 NT	Pass	6 NT	(All Pass)

West led the jack of hearts to dummy's queen, East contributing the eight. Suspecting that hearts were not divided three-three, Laura turned her attention to the minor suits, starting with diamonds, where her holding was stronger. When the jack appeared under the three top honors, she had 11 tricks. A spade toward dummy's queen might have been a prudent play at this point, but Laura went directly for clubs, taking the king, queen and ace. West discarded a spade, and East followed with the jack. Made a bit nervous by her first slam in formal competition, Laura was flustered to be unsure whether the nine of clubs was a winner. "Even if it isn't," she decided, "no harm will be done by playing it."

The rattlesnake smugly took the trick with her ten and, perforce, returned a spade. Laura's first reaction was to play low, but something about Vienna—was it her University?—was it something Grandpa had said?—was turning around in her head. What else declarer might have been thinking never became clear, but in the end she played the ace of spades and the last diamond, making West, and eventually East, very unhappy.

When Ezechiele returned home, he entered the bedroom cautiously, trying not to awaken Maria. But she opened an eye and asked: "Did you win?"

"No," he replied, "but we made an honorable fifth, a very good result for a beginner and an old man."

"And what was the prize?"  
"They gave us a bleak envelope with some money inside." He began what would have been a long lecture on the dangers of distributing money, rather than cups or medals, in minor events,

but Maria was again asleep.

The next day's lunchtime found Ezechiele sitting at the big oval table that had belonged to his parents. Around this sat every member of his family, celebrating the princess' return from Vienna. In front of him, there was an inviting dish of handmade *tagliatelle* (in English, noodles); his elder son, Giuliano, was cautiously slicing thin chips of a precious truffle, coming from Alba and paid for its weight in gold.

"By the way, how did my daughter play yesterday evening?" asked Giuliano.

Ezechiele smiled broadly and, repeating what his father had said ages ago, replied: "Good enough! Some months' more experience and she will be able to join Grandpa for Sunday afternoon's rubber bridge, the best bridge in town!" Something shone in Ezechiele's eyes; it might have been a tear.

## EFFECTIVE GAME-PREEMPTS

BY JOHN HANCOCK, SILVER CITY, NM

Preempts are effective, and game-preempts are highly effective. Exactly when to open with four of a major is a matter of style, but whatever your style you will profit from using more such openings. I suggest bidding four of your suit with a "weak" such preempt, three notrump with a "strong" one. Why three notrump? Because "gambling" three-notrump openings are uncommon and ineffective, a natural four of a minor is useful as a preempt, an artificial four of a minor allows an opponent a safe double, and three notrump provides some critical extra room for investigation.

For discussion purposes, I will give specific requirements for "weak" and "strong" preempts that match what many partnerships use. If your style is different, make the appropriate modifications.

Open four of a major when the chance of slam seems negligible. One guideline is zero to two 2-1-points (ace

= 2, king = 1). Alternatively, a preempt qualifies as weak if it does not figure to make slam opposite four key cards (that is: four aces, or three aces and the king of the long suit). If a major-suit preempt is stronger than that, say three to five 2-1-points, open three notrump. With more 2-1-points, or a hand that can have a good slam opposite fewer than two aces, open with a one-bid.

### Responding to Four of a Major

Almost all the time, responder will pass a four-of-a-major opening. However, when responder visualizes a possible slam, he counts his key-card-2-1-points (KC21s: any ace or the king of partner's suit = 2, any other king or the queen of partner's suit = 1) and can bid four notrump with nine or more KC21s. Opener can sign off in five of his major; or ask for fit for his major with five clubs (responder, who cannot safely offer a positive response with a void in opener's suit, replies in steps: low