

MY
FAVORITE 52

LARRY COHEN

*Adapted from the
original software
by Linda Lee*



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This is an unusual book, since it started out as an interactive software package, and only some years later became the book you are now holding. The original software is still available for purchase if you prefer that version.

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Of course, I also have to thank Fred Gitelman for designing the software upon which the original version of this book was presented.

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FOREWORD

I've known Larry Cohen throughout his thirty-plus years in the tournament bridge world. By combining his talents as player and writer to select his favorite 52 deals, he has come up with a compilation that will be a treat to bridge aficionados everywhere.

In my partnership with Bob Hamman in the 1980s we often found ourselves face-to-face with Larry and Marty Bergen. It was no surprise to me that several deals from that era have found their way into his favorite 52. They brought back memories for me and made me wonder how many other 'lost gems' were never written about. So many deals in this book have never been published before — it is like an unearthing of recent bridge history.

Many of the exhibits are spectacular. It increases one's fascination with the great game of bridge to see how these amazing deals were actually solved at the table by real humans in real time. I enjoyed the way these deals were presented — I had a chance to try to find the right bid or play for myself, and then read the story of what actually happened at the table.

I have always admired and respected Larry's great contributions to the game, and it was a treat for me to see his all-time favorite deals. I know that readers will share my joy.

Bobby Wolff
Las Vegas, NV
March 2009

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Introduction

Welcome to *My Favorite 52*. I've been collecting these deals for more than thirty years!

I played all 52 of these deals. (Actually, there are 60 deals because Deal 8 has seven bonus deals called 8A-8G and you will also find there's a phantom Deal 53 when you get to the end of the book.) Sometimes I am the hero, but at times I am the goat. In those cases, you can try to avoid the error I made at the table. I was tempted to call this *My Greatest Hits...and Near Misses* — but I couldn't resist the alliteration in *My Favorite 52*. Anyway, how bad can it be to use the number 52, in a book about bridge?

These deals are presented interactively. In fact, they are also available as software — you can play through them on your computer. They were first released in the software version, but I know that most bridge players like books — they prefer to read their bridge in a book as opposed to sitting in front of a computer. Accordingly, I've been persuaded to let the material be released in print format too.

The deals in this collection border on the sensational. They aren't your everyday instructional deals where declarer has to make an ordinary safety play. There are many positions that I trust will be new to even the most veteran readers. Still, I believe that with the warning bells sounded, even the hardest of these problems are actually solvable by advanced-level players.

Each deal is presented in four parts. The first part is the story of the deal itself: where it took place, who was involved and sometimes why it was special. The second part is the bidding. You will follow the auction as we bid one of the hands together. At various times I will give you an opportunity to make your own choice about the right action. From time to time, you will see this symbol:



When it appears, take a moment to think about the situation and try to decide what you would do. In the third part you take the seat of one of the players (be warned, it will usually be the hot seat) and follow the play, making decisions — some critical, some challenging and some less so. You will usually not know which! Again, the clock symbol tells you when to stop and think. Finally you will see the whole deal and learn the result of the deal when it was originally played.

Some of the deals are easy, some are medium, and some are difficult — just like in real life. My hope is that there's plenty to learn from each of them — and I know you'll have fun doing it!

Larry Cohen
Boca Raton, FL
March, 2009



SWEET BEGINNINGS

1. Once in a Lifetime

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

Do not adjust your glasses. This hand was actually dealt to me! It was during the 1980 Vanderbilt in Fresno, California, in the Round of 16.

The boards were dealt by us, actual human beings. According to the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, if you play a million deals, you can expect to hold this exact pattern three times. To put that in perspective, imagine that you play twenty-four deals a day, three days a week: that's seventy-two deals a week, 3,744 a year. Even if you played eighty years at that rate it would still be against the odds ever to hold this exact distribution.

Here I was, at the age of twenty, already using up my lifetime expectancy of holding such a hand.

The Auction

I was dealer, with both sides vulnerable. What is the correct opening bid? If you know the right answer, it will be all downhill from here. The bidding problems only get easier.



Most people opt for 4♠, 2♣ or 1♠. If I had to pick one of those, it would be 1♠. The hand is much too good for a preemptive 4♠, and you don't have enough aces and kings to open 2♣.

However, there is a better and more accurate call available: 5♣. If you don't believe me, you can again consult the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*. Look up 'Five of a Major Opening' and you will see the following definition:

FIVE OF A MAJOR OPENING: *Shows a hand missing both top honors in the trump suit, but no outside losers. Partner is invited to raise to small slam with one of the missing key cards, to grand slam with both. Probably the rarest bid in bridge.*

I can't recall from whom, where, when or why (probably a misspent youth), but I was aware of this 'rarest bid in bridge'. So I reached into the bidding box and pulled out the 5♠ bid and placed it on the table. This drew a few amused looks from the other players. Even in the Vanderbilt, there is room for levity. Left Hand Opponent passed, and my partner, Ron Gerard, started to think.

With a slight smirk (and more amused glances from the table), he reached into his bidding box and produced a 7♠ bid!

I hoped he had interpreted 5♠ the way I had meant it. If he was raising based on the ♣A and ♠A (as opposed to the top spades), this wasn't going to work too well. Everybody passed, and I anxiously awaited the dummy. At least I knew we weren't off the ♠A (no double!).

The Play

Both Vul.

♠ A K
 ♥ K 9 8 4 3
 ♦ 5 2
 ♣ Q 9 4 3

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

West	North	East	South
pass	7♠	all pass	5♠

The final contract is 7♠ by South. Perfect! He had the hoped-for ♠AK. You win the trump lead in dummy, as everybody follows. Will there be anything to the play of this hand?

What should you play to Trick 2?



It would be wrong to draw the last trump. If diamonds split 3-3, you will always make 7♠. If they split 5-1 (or 6-0), you will never make your contract. The only relevant diamond split is 4-2. It also happens to be the most statistically likely division. So you should start the diamonds, planning to ruff one in dummy. Everyone follows to two rounds.

♠ A
 ♥ K 9 8 4 3
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q 9 4 3

 ♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4
 ♥ —
 ♦ Q 8 6
 ♣ —

What if somebody had ruffed this second round of diamonds? As already mentioned, if diamonds were 5-1 or worse, you never could make this contract so don't worry about it. What now?



Let's not screw up the good work: ruff a small diamond in dummy. Playing the ♦Q would subject you to a ruff if an opponent had started with two diamonds and two trumps. Diamonds were 3-3 all along. You ruff something high in your hand and claim your contract.

The Result

Both Vul.

	Gerard										
	♠ A K										
	♥ K 9 8 4 3										
	♦ 5 2										
	♣ Q 9 4 3										
♠ 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 7 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 10 7 6 2		♥ A J 5									
♦ J 10 4		♦ 9 7 3									
♣ 10 7 6 2		♣ A K J 8 5									
	Cohen										
	♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4 2										
	♥ —										
	♦ A K Q 8 6										
	♣ —										

Notice how disciplined East was. He had two aces (and a king), yet trusted the North-South bidding enough to restrain from doubling the grand slam. Also notice West's proper opening lead. Expecting declarer to have a solid hand outside of trumps, the only 'extra' trick could come from ruffing a small card (from declarer's side suit) in dummy.

At the other table, the South player was unaware of the possible 5♠ opening bid. He started with 2♣ and reached only 6♣, receiving a club lead. Playing IMPs, what is the correct line of play in only a small slam (try to take twelve tricks)?

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

After ruffing the first club, should you?

- a) Draw trumps
- b) Play the ♦A and ♦K
- c) Other



Needing only twelve tricks, declarer can always make his six-level contract if diamonds are 4-2 or 3-3. At IMPs, you don't worry about overtricks. In six, you can try to find a way to protect against a 5-1 diamond break. There is an easy way to do so: after cashing a top diamond, continue with a *low* diamond from hand. This is a safety play to guarantee the contract.

If the suit splits 3-3 or 4-2, you've given away a potential overtrick, but you can win any return and draw trump and claim. The advantage comes if the suit splits 5-1. Even if somebody shows out on this trick, you can win any return (even a trump won't hurt you) and ruff your other low diamond in dummy to make twelve tricks. If instead, you laid down another high diamond and an opponent ruffed, you'd be in big trouble. On a trump return, you'd have only one trump left in dummy, but two losing low diamonds in hand. Down you'd go.

Anyway, the diamonds behaved well enough for either 6♣ or 7♣ to make, and our team won 13 IMPs for bidding the grand slam. Take one last good look at the South distribution. You probably will never get to hold such a hand in your lifetime.

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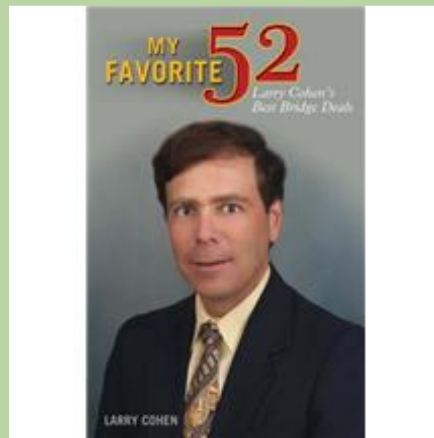
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