

The Value of Small Cards

By Gabriel Chagas

Gabriel Chagas is the diminutive super-star of Brazilian bridge. He is a financier and investment consultant in Rio. He is one of just eight players in the world to have won the triple crown of World Olympiad Teams (1976), World Pairs (1990) and Bermuda Bowl (1989). He is the top-ranked South American player, having won the South American teams twenty times in twenty-four attempts in the period 1967–93. He has also won the Sunday Times twice, in 1979 and 1992, and the Cap Gemini Pairs in 1993.

For the defenders, the small cards have great significance. As leads and signals they will often show length, or attitude, or a desire for some other suit. And the declarer will attempt to decode them in the light of other information he has available.

The defenders must give more attention to the small cards. To illustrate this, put yourself in the East seat – you are defending six hearts:

Board 23
 South Deals
 Both Vul

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

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | |
| W | | E |
| | S | |

| West | North | East | South |
|------|-------------------|----------|-------|
| | | | 1 ♥ |
| Pass | 2 NT ¹ | 3 ♠ | 4 ♦ |
| Pass | 4 ♠ | Dbl | 5 ♥ |
| Pass | 6 ♥ | All pass | |

1. 4-card support

Your partner leads the spade ten, and dummy's jack is played. You win with the queen and return the king. South follows suit and wins with dummy's ace, obviously relieved that your partner has a second spade.

Five rounds of trumps now force a lot of discards. You give up two spades and the jack and ten of clubs, and your partner, after following to three rounds, discards two clubs. Dummy parts with a club, and South cashes the ace, queen and king of diamonds, putting the lead in dummy in this end position:

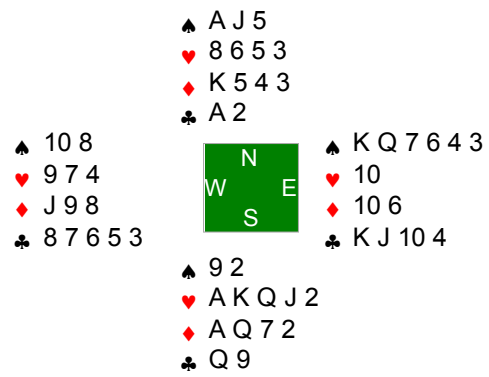
| | | | |
|---|---|---|-----|
| ♠ | 5 | ♠ | 7 |
| ♥ | — | ♥ | — |
| ♦ | 5 | ♦ | — |
| ♣ | A | ♣ | K 4 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | N | |
| W | | E |
| | S | |

The club ace is cashed and South plays the queen. He follows with the diamond five, and you remember that your partner followed three times. You give up the spade seven, but unfortunately declarer produces the deuce of diamonds and scores the last trick with the spade five. You quickly blame the bad light for your slight misplay. The complete deal was:

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In real life, would you be paying the required attention to the diamond pips?