

# A Question of Aces

By Mark Horton

In 1980 the Olympiad was held in Valkenburg, a small Dutch town close to Germany and Belgium. An expanded field made little difference to anything but the length of the event. The final matched the might of the USA with that of France. The French team included players who were to be at the forefront of the game for most of the next two decades: Paul Chemla, Christian Mari, Michel Perron, Michel Lebel, and Henri Svarc. The Americans were one of the final incarnations of Ira Corn's Aces: Hamman, Wolff, Soloway, Ira Rubin, Fred Hamilton, and Mike Passell. It was an all-out brawl and this sensational deal played a decisive role:

**Board 20**  
West Deals  
Both Vul

<p>♠ Q 9 5 3 2 ♥ J 8 5 4 ♦ Q 6 4 ♣ 7</p>	<p>♠ 10 ♥ K Q 9 ♦ A 10 9 8 3 2 ♣ K 9 8</p>	<p>♠ A K J 8 7 6 ♥ A 10 7 6 3 2 ♦ — ♣ 2</p>	<p>♠ 4 ♥ — ♦ K J 7 5 ♣ A Q J 10 6 5 4 3</p>
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N
W E
S

West	North	East	South
<i>Perron</i>	<i>Ruben</i>	<i>Lebel</i>	<i>Soloway</i>
Pass	1 ♦	1 ♠	2 ♣
4 ♠	Pass	5 ♣	6 ♣
Pass	Pass	6 ♠	Dbf
All pass			

This type of wild deal, with voids and long suits all around, can make an idiot of anyone. Facing an opening bid, Paul Soloway was confident his opponents could not make a slam and probably doubled with a fair amount of confidence. He led a diamond and declarer had to lose a heart and a club for -200.

Notice the standard IMP strategy of bidding one more when you're not quite sure who can make what. Yes, double dummy East-West can defeat six clubs.

But even if East had doubled six clubs and West had found the diamond lead for his partner to ruff, East would still have had to cash the right major-suit ace.

You could expect the replay to be exciting, too, and it was:

West	North	East	South
<i>Wolff</i>	<i>Mari</i>	<i>Hamman</i>	<i>Chemla</i>
Pass	1 ♦	2 ♦ <sup>1</sup>	2 ♥ <sup>2</sup>
4 ♠	4 NT	5 ♠	6 ♣
Pass	6 ♦	6 ♠	7 ♦
Pass	Pass	Dbf	All pass

1. Majors
2. At least a limit raise in diamonds

Bob Hamman, who was always going to bid six spades if necessary, attempted to lull his opponents into a false sense of security by taking the low road. When he found himself on lead against a grand slam he had to decide which ace to lead — a similar problem to the one the other East-West pair would have had against six clubs had they chosen to defend.

Chemla had cuebid two hearts and for the same money he could have bid two spades. Perhaps he was void in hearts. That was one possible clue. A second was Mari's use of Blackwood, suggesting that he held a singleton spade. If Chemla had a spade void then Wolff had six-card spade support — possible but unlikely.

For whatever reason, Hamman led the ace of hearts. Declarer was able to ruff and it was not difficult to pick up the trumps in light of the bidding. Between the two results, France were +2330, winning 19 IMPs on their way to collecting a world title.