

Omar Sharif Bridge Circus

By Mark Horton

The Omar Sharif Bridge Circus was a fascinating phenomenon born in the late 1960s. Sharif collected some of the world's best players, including members of the Blue Team, and traveled around the world playing bridge exhibition matches against local teams. The Lancia sports car company put up four cars as prizes for any team who could beat them (they paid out once, to a bunch of upstart New Yorkers who included a couple of promising youngsters named Matt Granovetter and Alan Sontag). Then the format changed: the Sharif squad would play matches against the new world bridge powerhouse, the Dallas Aces (Hamman, Jacoby, Wolff, Goldman, Eisenberg and Lawrence).

Here is a deal from one of their four exhibition matches in Winnipeg, Manitoba, in 1970:

West Deals N-S Vul	♠ 7 6 5 4 ♥ A 8 3 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ K Q 5	♠ 8 3 ♥ 9 2 ♦ 9 ♣ A J 10 9 7 4 3 2				
♠ K J 9 2 ♥ Q J 10 6 ♦ 8 5 4 ♣ 8 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ A Q 10 ♥ K 7 5 4 ♦ A K Q 10 7 6 ♣ —	
N						
W E						
S						
West <i>Eisenberg</i> Pass Pass All pass	North <i>Garozzo</i> Pass 5 ♠	East <i>Goldman</i> 4 ♣ Pass	South <i>Belladonna</i> 5 ♣ 6 ♦			

On the opening lead of the eight of clubs Giorgio Belladonna played the club king, covered by the ace and ruffed. Now Giorgio pondered the problem. The Closed Room was small but had been provided with a side table for water and coffee. Giorgio stood up, went over to that table and lit a cigarette. He walked back and forth with his head in his hand, puffing furiously.

He finally went back to the table and played the ace of diamonds and a diamond to the jack. He cashed the queen of clubs, discarding the ten of spades. He ruffed the last club high and began running trumps. During his walkabout, he had concluded that the spade king must be offside. When he found an eight-card club suit on his right, he was also convinced that the hearts were not breaking. He arrived at this position:

	♠ 7 6 5 4 ♥ A 8 3 ♦ — ♣ —	♠ 8 3 ♥ 9 2 ♦ — ♣ J 10 9				
♠ K J 9 ♥ Q J 10 6 ♦ — ♣ —	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ A Q ♥ K 7 5 4 ♦ 10 ♣ —	
N						
W E						
S						

When Giorgio led his last diamond, Billy Eisenberg was in trouble. If he threw a heart, Giorgio would play ace, king and another heart to endplay Billy and force a spade lead into the A-Q whilst setting up the

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heart seven. If Billy discarded his spade nine, Giorgio would simply discard the heart three and then play the ace and queen of spades to set up the spade seven and six for the eleventh and twelfth tricks.

Jacoby-Wolff also arrived in six diamonds, but it was over very quickly. Jacoby ruffed the club lead and after playing the diamond ace and a diamond to the jack he led a spade to the ten and jack. Eventually he lost two hearts in the end position for two down.

To this day, Billy Eisenberg says that this was the greatest hand ever played against him. How clearly Giorgio saw this game of ours.