The Crocodile Coup

By Brian Gunnell

Bridge has a number of exotic “coups” and we’ll look at some of them, starting with the aptly named Crocodile Coup.

Board 5
North Deals
None Vul

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

We’ll spare you the auction and just say that American many-time world champion Bob Hamman found himself in a poor six diamond contract after East had overcalled spades. You are sitting West, try playing this out looking at just the N-W hands.

You lead the spade three, dummy plays the king, East the ace and declarer ruffs. Then a diamond to dummy’s king, a diamond to declarer’s jack, and the ace of diamonds. Partner follows with the seven, ten and queen. With trumps drawn, Declarer now plays ace, king and queen of hearts, East playing the four, six, ten.

Of course, while all this going on, you are busy counting the distribution, because that’s what successful defenders do. Declarer ruffed the first spade so East is known to have started with six spades. Hearts? East played the four and then the six, and “low-high” shows an odd number, in this case three. Diamonds? East started with three of those also. That leaves just one club with East, he started life with 6-3-3-1 distribution.

Next, declarer leads a low club from his hand and you must avoid the temptation to win this cheaply with the nine! If you do, East will be forced to overtake with the Jack, and will have to lead a spade (that’s all he has left), allowing declarer’s club losers to go away on dummy’s spades. Instead, you alertly squander the club king, swallowing partner’s jack, and you return the ten. Now declarer never reaches dummy’s spades, and eventually loses another club. Nice defense! When this deal was played in the 2006 World Championships, West was caught napping and missed that Crocodile Coup.