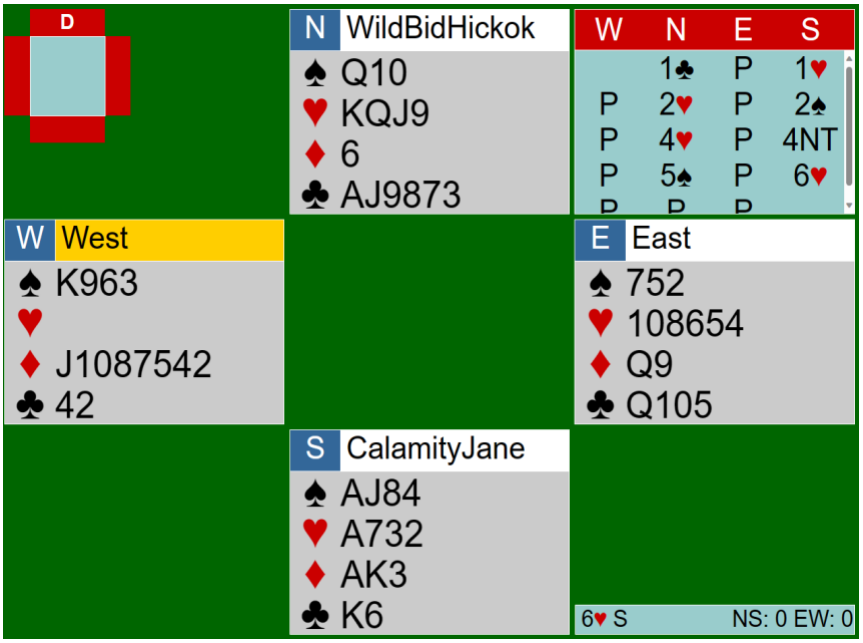
"Oh, That 5-0 Heart Break…"

--Bruce Schwaidelson (bruschwade@aol.com)

A couple of years ago, two of our newest District 4 members, Calamity Jane and Wild Bill Hickok, rode into town with guns a-blazin' (in their SUV, not on horseback), having just relocated from Deadwood, SD, to Lumberville, Bucks County, PA. Calamity has always been known to be a pretty straight shooter, even as a bridge player, but ***"Wild Bid"***, as she had so apply renamed him, likes to pre-empt foolishly or overbid whenever he gets the chance.

This past fall, in keeping with their "woodsy" theme, the couple spent several weeks enjoying Dollywood and other fun places in Tennessee. Fortunately, they returned home just in time to experience this very interesting slam deal played at the North Penn club:



West led the ♦J against the 6♥ contract, and when Wild Bid's excellent dummy appeared, Calamity wondered why in the heck they didn't bid the grand. Surely if hearts and clubs both broke 3-2, thirteen tricks would be a cakewalk, and if they didn't behave, there were still several possible ways to collect all of the tricks. When did Wild Bid become so conservative, she thought. He had a six-loser hand, six nice clubs and a stiff diamond. Why not a least splinter with 4♦, rather than merely jump to 4♥?

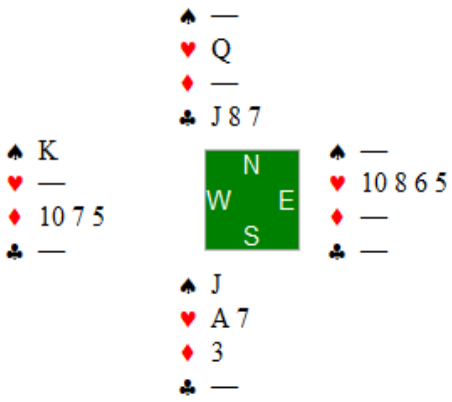
After she won the opening lead with her ♦A and led a trump to dummy's King, she was of course horrified that the red card her LHO played was a diamond. Suddenly she was wondering why she didn't bid 6NT. The dreadful 5-0 heart break put her 6♥ contract in serious jeopardy.

Not one to raise the surrender flag, Calamity stopped to think. She had begun calling herself "Zen Jane," having recently become a serious student of yoga and tai chi to help cope with her partner's crazy bidding style. She remembered that while the two of them were enjoying their Tennessee jaunt, they stopped in Memphis to tour Elvis's former home. In fact, they stayed right across from Graceland *down at the end of Lonely Street at Heartbreak Hotel.* How appropriate for this deal, she thought, but could it possibly give her some inspiration? (Yes, Virginia, there is a Heartbreak Hotel in Memphis down at the end of Lonely Street.)

Zen Jane began to follow three mindfulness techniques for better bridge: (1) don't panic, (2) breathe in deeply, and (3) calmly focus on your mission. And of course one other: *don't forget to exhale!* Her goal was to make her contract without taking a finesse, since she knew a losing finesse would surely spell doom. She starting counting sure tricks: one spade, two diamonds, two or perhaps three clubs if the Queen dropped. She would therefore need six or seven trump tricks, including the one already played, a pretty tall order. (You can follow the play by clicking **here** and continuing to click the **NEXT** button.)

Jane played the ♣K-A and everyone followed, but alas the Queen did not appear. That meant she would likely need seven trump tricks. As she had already pulled one round of trumps, she would need to score the rest of her trumps individually by cross-ruffing, knowing that East's heart holding might make that difficult.

Jane next led the ♠Q, but when it wasn't covered she went up with her Ace. The ♦K allowed her to pitch dummy's losing spade as East followed with the ♦Q. Fearing East held a doubleton diamond, she imagined that he was 3-5-2-3 or 4-5-2-2. Thus, she correctly decided to ruff a spade, rather than a diamond, with the ♥9 and then played a club to ruff out East's Queen. Jane ruffed another spade in Dummy with a high trump as East followed. She had managed to win the first nine tricks, but East was still holding four trumps. Here was the position with Dummy to lead and Jane hoping to win three of the last four tricks:



Strangely enough Jane began to think about her visit to Dollywood's Stampede, where Dolly Parton herself surprised the crowd by singing her brand new hit called "Heart Break," which begins:

> Oh, that 5-0 heart break makes my heart ache,
> If only I could love you *en passant…*

Up until that very moment Jane had no idea what those lyrics meant – but suddenly it hit her! She knew *en passant* was a French phrase that became chess-speak for an odd yet legal way to capture a pawn. She recalled that the world of bridge had adopted the term for a rather clever technique that could somehow enable her to win an unexpected trump trick "in passing."

Jane began humming Dolly's tune as she called a club from Dummy, ruffed by East with the ♥8 and overruffed by Jane's Ace. The crossruff continued with her ♦3 ruffed by dummy's ♥J, while poor old East had to *underruff*.

Finally, it was time for… no, not the *coup de grâce,* but rather the *coup en passant!* Another club was played from the table and East was at the crossroads: he could play his ♥10, Jane pitching her final spade to establish the ♥7 as her twelfth winner, or he could ruff with the ♥6 to be overruffed by Jane in order to claim her contract. Beautifully done, Zen Jane!

Postmortem: *Wild Bid went wild!* He recollected reading in the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge* that the *coup en passant* was "the lead of a plain suit card that would promote a low trump behind a higher trump," indeed a term borrowed from chess. He was surprised, however, that his partner would be able to accomplish such an astute line of play, thereby scoring up a small slam that went down at the other tables. He also wondered to whom Zen Jane should be giving most of the credit -- her Yogi or her Dolly?

As for Jane, she actually felt sorry for the pair that bid the grand and went down two.

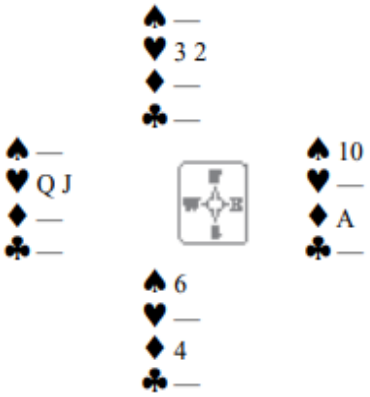
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣

The original version of this article appeared in the *North Penn Bridge Bulletin* in October 2023.

Official Encyclopedia of Bridge (7th Edition):

COUP EN PASSANT. The lead of a plain suit card to promote a low trump behind a higher trump. The term is taken from chess.

In the following position, spades are trump. The lead is in the North hand.



Declarer (South) holds no more winning cards, but when a heart is led from the North hand, South makes a trick with the ♠6. If East discards, South ruffs the heart. If East ruffs with his master trump, the ♠6 wins the final trick. In the above example, if East held ♠10-5, South would score the ♠6 en passant in a similar manner, overruffing if East ruffed low, and discarding if East ruffed high. Related: Elopement.