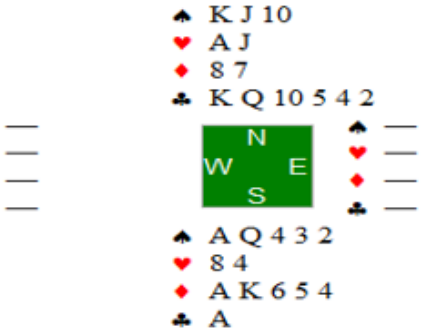
Hot Off the Presses: Gumby's 1st Bridge Book

--Bruce Schwaidelson (bruschwade@aol.com)



I am excited to announce that Gumby's very first bridge book, *Gumby's Guide to Flexible Declarer Play,* is now available online and in bookstores everywhere. Gumby, a prominent District 4 member, not only shares some wonderful advice, but many of the deals are ones you may have encountered, as they are often from the Common Game.

In an early chapter, Gumby discusses this intriguing Thursday afternoon Common Game board (E-W hands omitted):

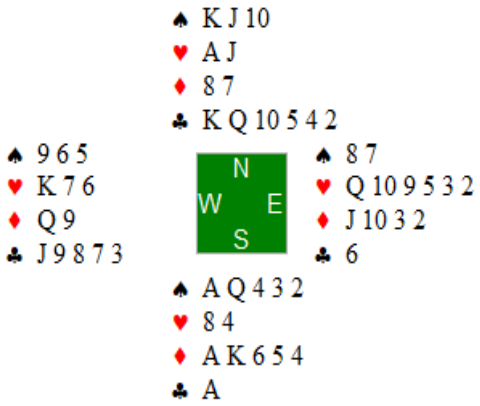


Gumby advises that it's all vulnerable at matchpoints and you are South declaring a 6♠ contract. He requests your plan to make at least twelve tricks after West leads a low trump and East follows. He also wonders if you would play the board the same way if you were in 7♠.

Unfortunately for Mrs. Gumby, she was one of the declarers in 6♠. Gumby describes his wife as a "uni-linear" bridge player - a term that he himself coined - and I don't think he meant it as a compliment. He laments that when she declares, she decides what she thinks is her best line and begins to play accordingly. It is only when something goes wrong that she considers what Plan B might look like. Sadly, it is too late to backtrack. Mrs. Gumby does not use what our author calls the *Gumby Flexible Approach.*

Mrs. Gumby's line for today's deal was solid and, in fact, she was sorry she hadn't bid the grand. She counted eleven top tricks and the club suit was extremely likely to yield two more. Her plan was to win the first trump in dummy and cash a second one there, hoping that spades were 3-2 – and they were. Next she would unblock the ♣A and play a trump to dummy, drawing the outstanding trump. She would then run the club suit, ruffing a club in her hand if necessary, then return to the board with the ♥A to claim thirteen tricks.

Easy as apple pie, you say. What could possibly go wrong? Take a look at the full deal:



Once Mrs. Gumby returned to dummy to pull the final trump, she was horrified to discover that when she cashed the ♣K, her RHO showed out, pitching a heart. All of a sudden she still had only eleven tricks. Looking for Plan B, she noticed that if diamonds were 3-3, she could still make her contract. She ducked a diamond and hoped for the best, but when the diamond suit broke 4-2 she was forced to concede down one. Her uni-linear approach had failed!

According to the author, that evening Mrs. Gumby asked her husband if he had been successful in his 6♠ slam. Gumby informed her that he and Pokey, his side-kick and favorite partner, had in fact bid the grand, adding: "After a trump lead, you should have no problem making thirteen tricks, dear, *if you would just follow the Gumby Flexible Approach."*

For the reader, Gumby gladly provides their uncontested auction after East passes:



Gumby		Pokey
1♠	2♣	
2♦	2♠	
3♣	3♥	
4♦	4NT	
5♣ (0 or 3)	5♦ (Q-ask)	
6♦ (♠Q,♦K)	7♠ All Pass	

Gumby informs us that once spades were agreed, the next three calls were control bids. After the 5♣ response to RKCB (0 or 3), the 5♦ bid was the Queen-ask, and 6♦ showed the ♠Q and the ♦K. Pokey's horse-sense told him that the club suit was a huge favorite to provide at least five tricks, so he bid the grand.

Gumby has words of praise for Pokey's grand slam decision plus words of wisdom to share with his wife (and his readers): "The best time to develop Plan A and your backup plan is *before* you play a single card from dummy. Ask yourself what could go wrong with Plan A and consider what precautionary measures you might take just in case." This was indeed the theme of Gumby's book: *to be a successful declarer, you must be as flexible as Gumby!*

Gumby agreed with his wife that the best line was to rely on the club suit for five likely tricks since both 6♠ and 7♠ would easily succeed if trumps were 3-2 (or 4-1) and clubs were no worse than 4-2. But the always flexible Gumby asks his readers: *What if clubs are 5-1? Do you have a bad-break insurance plan?*

Gumby admits that if both black suits broke badly, the grand would not succeed, but what if trumps behave and the clubs don't? At the table, Gumby made the key play at trick two: after winning the trump lead on board, he unblocked his stiff Ace of clubs. Why? He could go back to the board with a trump and then test clubs by ruffing a club high in his hand if West follows suit – his *no-cost* insurance policy. If both players follow, he would return to the dummy's ♠K to draw the final trump and claim. Gumby would be able to pitch his losing heart and three diamonds on the remaining four clubs. (Gumby added that even if spades are 4-1, the rest is easy.)

When his RHO pitched a heart on the second club trick, however, the Gumby insurance plan paid dividends. You can follow Gumby's actual line of play by clicking **here** and keep hitting the ***Next*** button. By preserving a high trump in dummy, he was able to cash the ♦A-K, both opponents following, and ruff a diamond. This enabled him to get rid of one of his diamond losers and gain an extra trick, while providing an entry to work on the club suit.

As Mrs. Gumby discovered earlier, the diamonds broke 4-2, but this was no longer a problem, since now Gumby needed only four club tricks, not five! He was able to ruff another club to establish the club suit. Next he drew the outstanding trump, pitching a heart from dummy, and the board was good, the ♥A having been preserved for the final entry to the good clubs. Nicely done, Gumby!

Gumby mentions that only an initial heart lead would have held him to 12 tricks as the cards lay. He also notes that had the E-W hands been reversed, his line of play would have still succeeded, since the hand with the singleton club did not have a third spade.

Gumby's Lesson: While many authors talk about the ***ABC****'s of Bridge* (***A****lways* ***B****e* ***C****ounting)*, Gumby's favorite acronym is ***ABF – A****lways* ***B****e* ***F****lexible!* Look for ways to test Plan A before totally committing to its execution. If you fail to do so, it may be too late for Plan B. Testing the club suit early in the play, *cost absolutely nothing* – but it paid off handsomely.



Eddie Murphy as Gumby

Book Review: Not only do I highly recommend this enjoyable paperback, but it would not be complete without the humorous foreword by SNL's long-time favorite, Eddie Murphy. Eddie is clearly excited about Gumby's approach to declarer play, as he discusses his own declarer capabilities: *"I'm Gumby, dammit! Of course I'm flexible!"*

Gumby's Guide to Flexible Declarer Play is an absolute must read. Don't miss out.

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