♪ ♪The Unusual No Trump is Loved by Everyone ♪ ♪

--Bruce Schwaidelson (bruschwade@aol.com)

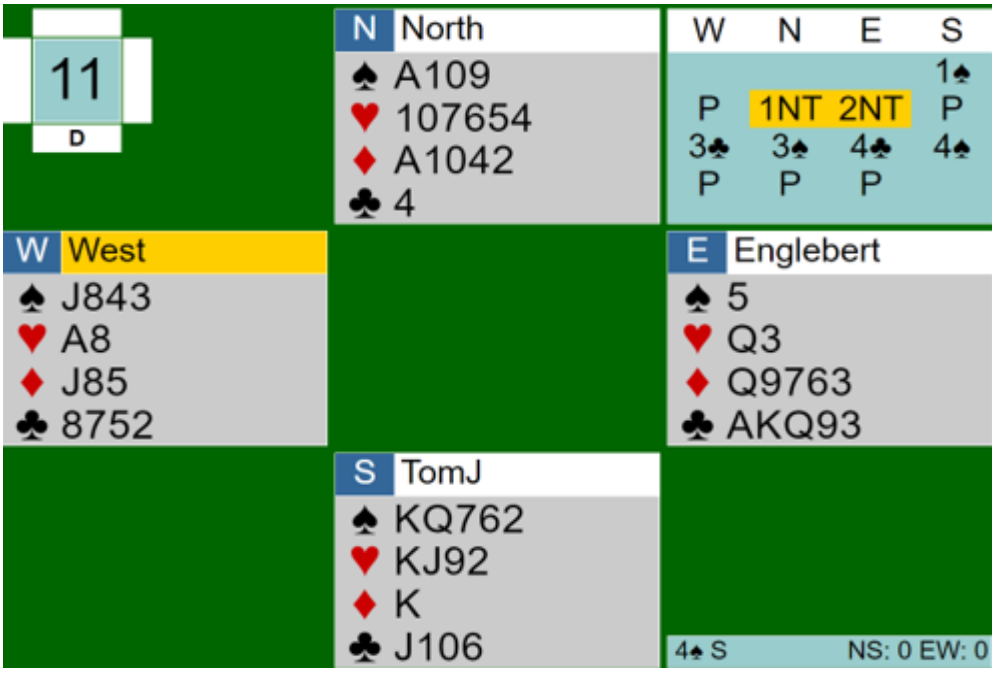
Growing up in New York, I rarely got to see my Uncle Dave who lived in far off Flint, Michigan. In 1982, however, when I was perhaps an intermediate player and he was a life master several times over, I got up the nerve to ask if he would play with me at the upcoming Niagara Falls Nationals. Much to my surprise he jumped at the chance. We lived, ate, talked, and played bridge together for five wonderful days. Today's deal brought back many fond memories...

At the Nationals, I discovered Uncle Dave was a fascinating storyteller but I was never really sure when his tales were totally true, somewhat embellished, or completely fabricated. He attempted to convince me that several years before Tom Jones became an acclaimed performer, Uncle Dave had lunch with him in Detroit and tried to interest Tom in some songs he had written. Since almost everyone played bridge back then, he thought a couple of bridge tunes would help jumpstart Tom's singing career. (Really?)

According to my uncle, Tom loved the melodies but not so much the lyrics, agreeing to purchase two of Uncle Dave's creations for thirty bucks total (!) with the stipulation that if he ever used them, my uncle would get no royalties and zero credit for writing the songs – they would be 100% owned by Tom to do with them as he saw fit. This may not *happen every day, no matter what you say*, but Tom supposedly took my uncle's favorite tune *The Unusual No Trump Is Loved by Everyone* and made quite a few lyric changes. When he released *It's Not Unusual (To Be Loved by Anyone),* both Tom and the song became smashing successes. My uncle did not.

At the tournament, Uncle Dave advised me that while just about everyone plays the UNT convention, *it should definitely not be loved!* He counseled that when you have the minors and they have the majors, you will usually get outbid. Yes, you might find a nice save at favorable vulnerability, but more often than not, you will push the opponents into a makeable game they would not have bid on their own, and to make matters worse, a good declarer - who knows that the UNT bidder has at most three cards in the other suits - will play the deal a trick or two better than if his opponents had simply remained silent. Uncle Dave's sage advice: *if you have to open your mouth, it may be better to overcall in the suit you want partner to lead.*

My uncle would have loved this deal from an online club game (below):



Notice that North upgraded his Aces and decided his nice shape and excellent spot cards, including three tens, were worth promoting his hand to a limit raise. He therefore responded 1NT (forcing), planning to follow it with 3♠. Englebert, sitting East and playing against his longtime rival and nemesis TomJ (South), trotted out an Unusual 2NT overcall, a bid that Uncle Dave would not have recommended. His suggestion would have been to bid 2♣ as a lead director. West had already passed so it was unlikely that Englebert's side would win the auction with his less than stellar hand, nor did he want a diamond lead.

West might have jammed the auction with a 4♣ bid but instead went low with 3♣, which promised nothing and could even be made on a 2-bagger. That did not deter Englebert, however. After North completed the description of his hand with 3♠, Englebert's next bid was 4♣! This left TomJ with a tough decision: he was prepared to pass his partner's 3♠ call, but not loving his hand for defense, he decided to take the push to the 4-level, buying the contract.

West led a club to Englebert's queen, and he unwisely switched to his doubleton ♥Q. TomJ covered with the king, West took his ace and returned a heart hoping his partner would ruff or at least win the trick with his ♥J. When East followed low, however, his hand was an open book. His shape was surely 1=2=5=5 and South knew exactly what to do. You can follow his fine play here by continuing to click the "Next" button.

TomJ cashed the ♠K to make sure East's singleton wasn't the jack, and that was followed by a finesse of the ♠10. The rest was easy. He cashed the ♠A and came back to the ♦K in order to draw the outstanding trump. The long heart and the ♦A in dummy took care of the South's club losers, thus making an overtrick. Played "double dummy," eleven tricks can always be made against best defense, but, as Uncle Dave would have predicted, the bidding pushed NS into a nice game they would not have bid voluntarily. Plus 450 was a cold top at our club and 94% in the Common Game.

At most tables the auction began 1♠ (P) 2♠ (3♣) leading to a part-score contract in either clubs or spades. Thus, bidding 4♠ and making exactly ten tricks would still have been a top in the club game, 84% in the Common Game. (Would you have bid North's hand as a limit raise? What do you think of the rest of the auction?)

Speaking of questions, *forgive me Delilah* for asking, but can you guess the other tune my uncle professed to have peddled to Tom Jones? Uncle Dave divulged that some time ago in a Swiss match he made a Lightner slam double clearly requesting a club lead (he was void), but his favorite partner Dee led the ♦A and continued diamonds. This defense enabled the opposing declarer to make his doubled 6♠ contract, thereby inspiring the classic lyrics to my uncle's ballad *Dee! Lightner?,* including the chorus:

> *My my, **why** lead diamonds?*
> *Why, why, **why** lead diamonds?*

and the dramatic ending:

> *Forgive me Dee, Lightner will **not** be my call anymore!*

Sadly, two years after our rendezvous, Uncle Dave had a heart attack while playing bridge and died. Niagara Falls was the only chance we had to play together. It was an unforgettable experience.

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Disclaimer: The original version of this fictional piece was published in the *North Penn Bridge Bulletin* in January 2022. My Uncle Dave & I did play in Niagara Falls in 1982 and this deal did come from a North Penn club game played on BBO. The rest, well, you decide.