

A BRILLIANT CALL

I learned to play bridge in 1946, while I was a student at Carnegie Tech (now Carnegie-Mellon). My first partner, and one of the most brilliant players I have ever met, was my classmate Joe Lux who, during World War II, had been stationed in Philadelphia, at that time the center of the bridge universe. Somehow he found time to learn the game while he was stationed there, and he began to rub shoulders with some of the game's greats, who in those days even played regularly in the local duplicate games.

Joe and I played in our first sectional tournament together in the winter of 1947. During the qualifying round, Joe was faced with the following problem:

AKQ86
AKQ107
A
73

Your partner (me) opens the auction with a pass out of turn, whereupon the bidding reverts to his LHO (your righty) with the penalty that your partner must pass at his first turn to bid. Right opens with a pass. Your call.

Joe passed, in rhythm! Not wanting to guess which major suit to bid game in, he trusted lefty to open the bidding even lacking the values. After all, lefty would reason, neither of his opponents had an opening bid and if he passed, the deal would be passed out:

AKQ86
AKQ107
A
73

109
543
KJ108
A654

J2
J986
Q53
KQJ9

7543
2
97642
1082

East opened one club which I passed, perforce. West raised to two clubs and Joe cue bid three clubs. after I bid three diamonds Joe cue bid again, four clubs. I found myself playing four spades, making five, with a yarborough! Had Joe guessed which major to bid, he might well have chosen hearts which actually makes four, a terrible match-point result. Joe's first-round pass, with no apparent thought, was truly the single most brilliant call I have ever seen at the bridge table. Joe never played much duplicate (although his wife Kay is a seasoned tournament player). In fact, Joe gave up duplicate completely when the ACBL established its no-smoking policy a few years ago, since he has always been a passionate smoker. Amazingly, he is still alive!