

Pip power

Susanna Gross

Never overlook the power of the pips. That's been my mantra this week, having read the analysis of a hand defended by Gunnar Hallberg and Andrew McIntosh during last week's prestigious Lederer tournament (which they went on to win). Pips is a slang term used to describe cards smaller than the Jack — also known as 'spot cards'. Awareness of these cards is one of the things that sets apart experts from average players, who tend to focus exclusively on honour cards. Experts know that little cards can pack a punch too, or, at least pave the way by helping to promote their seniors. That's exactly what happened here:

Love all

Dealer North

<p>♠ J 6 ♥ 8 6 ♦ A K 8 6 4 2 ♣ A K 7</p>		<p>♠ 5 3 ♥ Q 5 4 ♦ J 10 9 5 ♣ 10 5 3 2</p>										
<p>♠ K 8 7 4 ♥ A K 10 9 7 3 ♦ Q 3 ♣ 6</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ A Q 10 9 2 ♥ J 2 ♦ 7 ♣ Q J 9 8 4</p>	
	N											
W		E										
	S											

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1NT	pass	2♥
Dble	pass	pass	3♣
Pass	3♦	pass	3♠
Pass	4♠	All pass	

North opened an off-centre 1NT; South's bid of 2♥ was a transfer to spades; North's pass of West's double showed two spades; they went on to reach the excellent 4♠ contract.

Hallberg (West) led the king and ace of hearts, discovering his partner had three cards in the suit. Most of us would probably switch to our singleton club at this point. Not Gunnar. He reasoned that as East (McIntosh) was unlikely to have any useful high cards, the only hope was that he held 9x (or better) in trumps. The plan, then, was to lead another heart: declarer, presented with a useless ruff-and-discard, would ruff in dummy, then take the losing finesse in trumps. Gunnar would now play a fourth heart which his partner would ruff with the ♠9, forcing declarer to over-ruff and thus promoting Gunnar's ♠8. In fact, what happened was that declarer, unsure whether East held two or three hearts, ruffed the third heart with the ♠J. Next he played the ♠6 to the ♠Q; Gunnar won, played another heart and his partner's play of the lowly ♠5 forced out declarer's ♠9 — so Gunnar made his ♠8 after all to defeat the game.