Better Bridge

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Bridge is not poker. The banter and bluffing that have grown up around the poker table are taboo to the serious bridge player.

The bridge ethic is more attractive. It outlaws, for example, deliberate hesitations which are intended to mislead. Accordingly, most hesitations (and there are many) are inadvertent rather than deliberate.

Gratuitous information given away by an obvious pause is frequently costly to the partnership. However, redress to the nonoffending side is not automatic. He who would take advantage of the information does so at his own risk. One who incurs a poor result as a reward for unusual action will keep the result. At the same time the offender may be penalized.

The auction:

South, declarer at six spades was able to make good use of one such balk to bring home 12 tricks. At his first opportunity to call, East hesitated perceptibly before passing. East's assortment of scattered honors appears enticing but hardly warrants action between two bidders in a forcing sequence. Ignoring East's problem North-South reached the small slam with an aggressive auction.

The play:
West chose a heart lead — East didn't have to bid to suggest it after all — to declarer's delight. East won the ace and returned a low heart to South's king. Trumps were drawn in three leads.

Now declarer took stock. To make the slam it was necessary to eliminate the potential diamond loser. Several options were available. First, the club queen might fall in two leads establishing dummy's jack for a discard. With only five clubs in the North-South hands this was unlikely. Alternatively, a diamond finesse might succeed or the queen drop doubleton.

At this point declarer recalled East's anguish during the auction. Perhaps East actually held all the missing high cards. If so, could he withstand the pressure of a squeeze?

The ace of diamonds was cashed. Nothing. The ace and king of clubs did not produce the queen. South ran trumps to reach this ending:

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