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Bridge column by Tanna Hirsch

29th April 2011

Dealer : West Vul : Both	NORTH ♠ Q 10 9 6 ♥ K Q J 3 ♦ A 5 ♣ A 5 4	
WEST ♠ 4 3 ♥ 6 5 ♦ K Q J 9 8 7 3 2 ♣ K		EAST ♠ 8 2 ♥ 10 9 8 7 ♦ 10 ♣ Q J 10 9 7 3
	SOUTH ♠ A K J 7 5 ♥ A 4 2 ♦ 6 4 ♣ 8 6 2	

South	West	North	East
-	4 Diamond	X	Pass
5 Spade	Pass	6 Spade	All Pass

Opening lead: ♦ K

Pre-empts are double-edged swords. Although they can make life miserable for the opponents, they may propel them into a terrible contract, then blueprint the way for them to succeed. Consider this 'impossible' slam.

West's four-level barrage left North-South groping for the best contract. South's decision to jump to five spades, inviting partner to bid slam with first- or second-round control of opener's suit, was as good an evaluation of the hand as any, but there was no way to be sure that the hand was going to make exactly 12 tricks instead of 11 or 13.

West led the king of diamonds. Other than hoping for an opponent's error, there was only one way to tackle the hand: West had to be endplayed, and for that to be possible West had to have started with a singleton club!

Declarer won the opening lead with dummy's ace of diamonds, drew trumps in two rounds and cashed out the hearts, discarding a club from hand. The time had come to cash the ace of clubs, exit with a diamond and hope for a minor miracle.

All was well. Down to nothing but diamonds, West was forced to concede a ruff-sluff. That permitted declarer to get rid of the club loser from one hand while ruffing in the other.

What if West had started with a doubleton club? The pre-empt would have reaped a rich reward by inciting North-South to bid an unmakable slam instead of settling for a sure vulnerable game.

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