

The Listening Post III: Spy vs Spy

By Neil Kimelman

In the last Instalment of this series, *The Listening Post II*, we looked at hands where ‘the dog that didn’t bark’, or taking inferences from something that did not happen. Another situation where listening is more important than taking up bidding room happens when both sides are using this tool.

Playing in the weekly IMP game at the Ambassador Club I pick up this lovely hand as South: ♠AK9765 ♥5 ♦Q ♣A8765. Both vul, East, one of Winnipeg’s top players, deals and opens 1♥. I see no reason not to make a normal 1♠ overcall. The bidding continues:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	1♠
2♥	3♠	4♣	

Partner’s call is preemptive. I pay attention to East’s 2nd bid. It may be a two suiter, or a cuebid trying for a heart slam. In either case, my club holding is a red flag, saying, ‘hmmm, I better listen because I don’t know what is going on.’

Practicing the Listening Post dictum I pass, to learn what I can about the hands of the other three players, instead of jumping to game, and then having to guess at the five level.

The bidding continues:

West	North	East	South
		1♥	1♠
2♥	3♠	4♣	Pass
4♥	Pass	6♥	?

Now what? It looks like East wanted to bid 6♥ all along, and only bid 4♣ as a ‘lead inhibitor bid’. I cannot risk defending 6♥ so I bid 6♠, which East doubles, ending the auction. The full deal:

Contract: 6♠x		♠	QJ10432		
Scoring:		♥	J3		
Dealer:		♦	86		
Vul:		♣	QJ2		
♠	8	N W E S		♠	-
♥	K106			♥	AQ98742
♦	J97432			♦	AK105
♣	K109			♣	43
Lead:		♠	AK9765		
		♥	5		
		♦	Q		
		♣	A8765		

6♥ is cold, and I am -500 instead of -680 or -1430, a tie for a top. Had I bid 4♠ I am positive the bidding would have gone:

West North East South

 1♥ 1♠

2♥ 3♠ 4♣ 4♠

Pass Pass 5♥ 5♠

Pass Pass 6♥ ?

Now I might have quit, earning a bottom score.

Hand 2

Playing matchpoints in 3rd seat with neither vul you pick up ♠AK865 ♥K9 ♦K8 ♣K853. E-W vul. My nice hand turns better when partner opens 2♠! I relax and bid 4♠ and the bidding continued:

West North East South
 2♠
 Pass 4♠ 5♦ Pass
 Pass ?

Not expecting the opponents to come at these colours, I guessed to double. This was full deal:

Contract: 5♦x		♠	AK865		
Scoring:		♥	K9		
Dealer:		♦	K8		
Vul:		♣	K853		
♠	J3	N W E S		♠	-
♥	Q8752			♥	AJ106
♦	A6			♦	QJ1075432
♣	9764			♣	Q
Lead:		♠	Q109742		
		♥	43		
		♦	9		
		♣	AJ102		

Minus -750 did not look good on our 60+% game.

Had I instead gone slowly and bid 2NT feature asking, LHO would have likely bid 3♦ or 4♦, and we may have avoided this bottom. One final lesson on this hand: East's bid will probably not be made all tables, so even if we had beaten 5♦ one, +200 would still have been close to a bottom. I should have bid 5♠, hoping it made.

