Winter 2026
Match 5 (17 August 2026)

Red rag to a bull

Experience increases the ability to judge risk. When Ted Roosevelt was shot in 1912 as he sought to return to the presidency, he used his background in hunting, anatomy and the military to correctly determine that the bullet had not penetrated his lung as he was not coughing blood. He therefore delayed going to hospital so he could deliver his campaign speech, starting with the words: "Friends, I shall ask you to be as quiet as possible. I don't know whether you fully understand that I have just been shot; but it takes more than that to kill a Bull Moose." His doctors also made a risk assessment, deciding it was safest not to remove the bullet, so it remained lodged in his body for life.

At the bridge table, veteran risk assessors know to be bullish when bidding vulnerable games at IMPs scoring, given the huge potential gain. They may even know a thing or two about how to play the marginal games they reach. Board 7 of last night's OPL was a case in point:

BOARD 7

BD: 7	♠J8762 ♥JT42 ♦K9 ♣T7	**Dlr: S** **Vul: ALL**
♠A953 ♥K963 ♦42 ♣KJ8		♠KT4 ♥A8 ♦QJT875 ♣Q3
	♠Q ♥Q75 ♦A63 ♣A96542	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N T
N	1				5
S	1				11 12
E		3	1	2	1 12
W		3	1	2	1

Div 1 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 7

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2♦ by EW	+1	-110	3

3♦ by EW	+1	-130	1
2♦ by EW	+2	-130	1
2NT by EW	+2	-180	2
3NT by EW	=	-600	1

Div 2 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 7

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3♣ by NS	-1	-100	4
2♦ by EW	+2	-130	3
3NT by EW	+1	-630	1

Div 3 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 7

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2NT by EW	-1	100	1
2♦ by EW	+1	-110	1
2♦ by EW	+2	-130	1
2NT by EW	+2	-180	1
3♣ by NS	-2	-200	3
2NT by NS	-5	-500	1
	=	0	1

Div 4 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 7

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3♣ by NS	-1	-100	1
3♦ by EW	=	-110	1
2♦ by EW	+1	-110	2
3♦ by EW	+1	-130	2
2♦ by EW	+2	-130	1
2NT by EW	+2	-180	1
1NT by EW	+3	-180	1

Div 5 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 7

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3NT by EW	-2	200	1
2NT by EW	-1	100	1
2♥ by EW	-1	100	1
2♦ by EW	=	-90	1

3♦ by EW	=	-110	1
3♦ by EW	+1	-130	1
2♦ by EW	+2	-130	2
2NT by NS	-3	-300	1

At most tables, South opened 1C (despite the negative feature of the SQ being singleton) and North responded 1S (with 5 HCP plus shape), over which East overcalled 2D. The North-South bidding suggests game is unlikely for East-West, so pass by West is reasonable, but some West players ventured 2NT.

What now for East? Pass and 3D are two possibilities, but a few players including Bruce Neill – a more seasoned professional than almost any other player in the country – tried 3NT, with the hope of a haul of IMPs for the vulnerable game.

Ted Griffin (Bruce's partner) received the HJ lead. Hardened bridge warriors know how to maximise value of their honours, and Ted covered the jack with dummy's ace, which retained the HK in hand as a threat, ready to cover an enemy honour. North should have been equally parsimonious, leading a low heart: this would have gone to South's HQ and West's HK, and then dummy would have had the bare HA so the defenders could have played low on the next round of the suit and taken the contract down, whereas the HJ lead allowed Ted to take nine tricks, giving him +600 and 9.71 IMPs.

The other successful declarer in 3NT was Martin Brown in Division 2. He received a spade lead from North, and followed standard good play: play second hand low and capture South's spade honour; then establish the long diamonds. He was thereby able to take ten tricks, for +630 and 11 IMPs.

Elena Rochtchina in Division 1 declared 2NT on the dangerous C10 lead. South must duck this. After winning this trick, declarer leads diamonds and North wins the DK and continues clubs; the suit is established and can be enjoyed when South wins the DA. But when the C10 was led against Elena, she covered with dummy's CQ, and South succumbed to the natural instinctive play of taking that with the CA. Oops! South continued clubs but North had no club left to lead later, so the defenders could not make their long clubs and Elena finished with ten tricks for +180, outscoring those in a diamond partscore and giving her a small reward, +0.41 IMPs.

Comments or questions?
You can interact with Derrick about his analysis on the Bridge NSW Facebook page by commenting on the post for that week of OPL.

About Derrick Browne

Derrick Browne is the author of over 40 books and pamphlets on bridge. He is also owner of Trumps Bridge Centre in Mosman, Sydney, which offers training, duplicate games, bridge books and accessories, and holidays including Canberra 20-23 September and Leura 22-25 November.