

AN HONORS EBOOK FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

# THE ABBOT'S SENIOR MOMENT

DAVID BIRD

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Once again, I am happy to thank my great friend and fellow writer, Tim Bourke of Australia. The world's finest constructor of bridge deals, he gave me many of the most unusual and imaginative deals in this book.

DB

# 1

## BROTHER LUCIUS'S WASTED EFFORT



The Abbot was in an excellent mood. He and Xavier had won the monastery pairs a week ago, and he had spent the past seven days talking to all and sundry about the best of his high-scoring boards. He had also been busy on the internet. He was particularly proud of a tricky diamond slam that he had made, overcoming a 4-1 trump break. He had shared a two-page analysis of his excellent line with all 59 bridge players in his Contacts list. Not a detail omitted - how they must have enjoyed it!

‘Evening, Abbot,’ said Brother Cameron, sitting well back in his seat.

The Abbot cast a weary eye over the incorrigible novice. ‘Do you not think your bridge might improve if you adopted a more upright position?’ he enquired. ‘I’m surprised you can see the dummy from that angle.’

The novice slumped even further back into the chair as he sorted through his cards. ‘I like to be comfortable,’ he replied. ‘There’s nothing wrong with my eyesight.’

This was the deal before them:

**Dlr: South**      ♠ 8 7 5 2  
**Vul: Both**      ♥ 4 2  
                       ♦ A 8 4  
                       ♣ A 9 6 5

♠ 10 6 3 ♥ A Q 9 8 7 5 ♦ K 7 5 ♣ 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;">           N            W     E            S         </div>	♠ 9 4 ♥ J 10 3 ♦ 9 6 3 2 ♣ K J 10 7	
---	---	--	--

♠ A K Q J  
 ♥ K 6  
 ♦ Q J 10  
 ♣ Q 8 3 2

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
<i>The Abbot</i>	<i>Brother Damien</i>	<i>Brother Xavier</i>	<i>Brother Cameron</i>
–	–	–	1♣
2♥	Dble	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

The Abbot led the ♣4 and down went the dummy. Brother Cameron had no difficulty in reading the lead as a singleton. Why would anyone lead from an honor into a suit bid by the declarer? ‘Play the ace,’ he said.

‘Can you speak up a bit?’ demanded the Abbot. ‘They say that the power of hearing fades, the older you get. Were you able to hear declarer thanking partner for the dummy, Xavier?’

‘Thank you, partner,’ said Brother Cameron. ‘Play a trump.’

After drawing trumps in three rounds, the young declarer led the queen of diamonds. The Abbot played low and covered the jack of diamonds on the next trick. Brother Cameron won with dummy’s ace and returned to his hand with the ♦10. These cards were still to be played:

	♠ 8	
	♥ 4 2	
	♦ –	
	♣ 9 6 5	
♠ –	N	♠ –
♥ A Q 9 8 7 5	W E	♥ J 10
♦ –	S	♦ 9
♣ –		♣ K J 10
	♠ J	
	♥ K 6	
	♦ –	
	♣ Q 5 3	

When the ♥6 appeared on the table, the Abbot covered with the 7 and Brother Xavier overtook with the 10. He had no good continuation. A heart to the Abbot's ace would force him to concede a ruff-and-discard. Declarer would ruff in the dummy, discarding a club from his hand, and then lead towards the queen of clubs.

When Brother Xavier played the king and jack of clubs instead, Brother Cameron won with the queen and exited with the king of hearts. The Abbot won and declarer was able to ditch his remaining club loser on the ensuing ruff-and-discard. The game was made.

'That won't be good for us, partner,' observed Brother Xavier. 'Perhaps it's harder for him to read the position if you don't lead the singleton club. He did bid clubs.'

The Abbot sat back in his chair with a resigned expression. When the Great Reaper eventually knocked on his cell door, he had high expectations of being offered a warm reception into Heaven. Anyone who had lived less virtuously and found himself assigned to the other place... well, they would doubtless have to partner Brother Xavier for all eternity. Every single bid or opening lead would be criticized.

A round or two later, the Abbot arrived at the table of Brother Hubert and Brother Richard. The Abbot took his seat, noting that Brother Richard was in the South seat, as always. His card play was several times better than that of his hapless partner. Somewhat mysteriously, he nearly always ended as declarer when playing against the Abbot. Perhaps he thought that the South seat offered some statistical benefit in that respect.

'The boards have been excellent this evening,' declared Brother Richard. 'I've rarely had so many interesting contracts come my way.'

The Abbot could summon little interest in this announcement. Did the

man never consider that his partner might like to play an occasional contract?

The Abbot could not suppress a sigh when Brother Richard opened 1NT on the first board of the round:

<b>Dlr: South</b>	♠ 10 6 3										
<b>Vul: Both</b>	♥ A Q 5										
	♦ 10 8 5 4										
	♣ A 6 2										
♠ K Q J 9	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px;"> <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> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ 7 5 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 10 8 3 2		♥ 9 6 4									
♦ J 3		♦ K Q 6									
♣ J 4 3		♣ 10 9 8 5									
	♠ A 8 4										
	♥ K J 7										
	♦ A 9 7 2										
	♣ K Q 7										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
The	Brother	Brother	Brother
Abbot	Hubert	Xavier	Richard
—	—	—	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

The Abbot led the king of spades against 3NT. This won the trick and he persisted with spades, declarer winning the third round. Eight top tricks were on view, and the diamond suit offered the only possible hope of a ninth trick. Brother Richard nodded to himself. Yes, the suit would have to break 3-2; he would also have to lose two rounds to the safe East hand. Another small possibility was that West would hold a singleton honor in the suit.

After a heart to the queen, Brother Richard called for a low diamond. The 6 appeared on his right and he won with the ace. Much to his relief, a second round of diamonds went to East's king. He won the club return with the king and played a third diamond to East's queen, setting up a winner in the suit. Back came another club and declarer was rewarded with a fine +600.

'It's no good if I put in one of my honors,' Brother Xavier explained. 'Declarer ducks, wins my switch and returns to dummy to lead another diamond.'

'Obviously,' muttered the Abbot.

Brother Richard leaned forward. 'It just shows what a load of rubbish the Rule of Seven is,' he observed. 'I had six spades between my hand and the dummy. Subtract that from seven and the Rule says that I should hold up my ace for only one round. Absurd! I lose three spades and two diamonds if I play



that way.'

'Obviously,' muttered the Abbot again, beckoning for the next board to be put into position.

'A much simpler and better rule is to hold up an ace for two rounds,' continued Brother Richard. 'Not that many bridge teachers seem to realize it.'

The Abbot's mood was improved a few rounds later by the arrival of the monastery's weakest pair, Brother Aelred and Brother Michael. 'Are you two having a good session?' he enquired. There was no harm in asking the question. Miracles did sometimes happen.

'We've played quite well, actually,' Brother Michael replied. 'If it wasn't for some unlucky boards, we'd be above average.'

Brother Aelred consulted his scorecard. 'Yes, I mark those with a large U,' he said. 'It's scarcely believable, but we've had four Us so far and one VU.'

The Abbot had every intention of adding to these numbers as he sorted his cards for the next board:

<b>Dlr: South</b>	♠ K Q 8 7 4										
<b>Vul: N/S</b>	♥ 7 3 2										
	♦ A 6										
	♣ 8 6 5										
♠ 9 6 5		♠ A J 10 2									
♥ -		♥ Q 10 8									
♦ K Q 10 8 7 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <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> </div>		N		W		E		S		♦ J 5 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♣ J 9 4 3		♣ Q 10 2									
	♠ 3										
	♥ A K J 9 6 5 4										
	♦ 9 2										
	♣ A K 7										

<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>
<i>The Abbot</i>	<i>Brother Michael</i>	<i>Brother Xavier</i>	<i>Brother Aelred</i>
-	-	-	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

The Abbot led the king of diamonds, won with dummy's ace. 'Low trump, please,' said Brother Aelred. He played the ace from his hand and groaned audibly when West showed out. No-one could fault his play of a trump to the ace. It was yet another unlucky board.

When a spade was played to the king, Brother Xavier won with the ace and returned a diamond. Brother Aelred had to lose a trick in each suit and was one down. He scrawled 100 into the minus column of his scorecard and added an outsized ‘U’.

‘It’s well below average,’ Brother Michael announced, surveying the score sheet.

‘Actually, finessing the jack of hearts on the first round is a sort of safety play,’ observed Brother Xavier. ‘If it loses to the queen, dummy’s seven of trumps becomes an entry. You can discard your club loser on a spade honor.’

‘Yes, but it’s a questionable play at match points,’ added the Abbot. ‘Unless, of course, some Wests think it clever to make a weak jump overcall in diamonds. Finessing the jack is probably right, then.’

This discussion was way over Brother Aelred’s head. ‘Eight ever, nine never,’ he muttered to himself. ‘Still, that Rule doesn’t help much when you have ten cards in a suit.’

The session was nearly at an end when the Abbot faced the monastery’s top pair, Brother Lucius and Brother Paulo.

<b>Dlr: South</b>	♠ A 2										
<b>Vul: None</b>	♥ A Q 2										
	♦ 7 5 4 3										
	♣ Q J 7 2										
♠ K Q 10 9 6	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px;"> <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> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ 7 5 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ K 10 9 7		♥ J 4 3									
♦ J 9		♦ Q 8 6 2									
♣ 4 3		♣ 9 8 6									
	♠ J 8 4										
	♥ 8 6 5										
	♦ A K 10										
	♣ A K 10 5										
<b>WEST</b>	<b>NORTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>								
<i>The</i>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>Brother</i>	<i>Brother</i>								
<i>Abbot</i>	<i>Paulo</i>	<i>Xavier</i>	<i>Lucius</i>								
–	–	–	1NT								
Pass	3NT	All Pass									

Brother Lucius won the king of spades lead with dummy’s ace, retaining a partial stopper in his hand. Brother Xavier would have unblocked the spade jack if he held it. His ♠3 was a count signal, showing an odd number of cards.

Declarer had eight top tricks on view. It was unattractive to play a heart to the queen, because the finesse would be into the danger hand. If East won with

the king, he could return a spade through the jack. Brother Lucius saw that he had more than one chance in the diamond suit. East might hold the queen and jack, or the suit might break 3-3. 'Low diamond, please,' he said.

The ♦10 lost to the jack. At trick three the Abbot switched to the ♥10, hoping to put declarer to an early decision there, before he knew how the diamonds were breaking. Brother Lucius had no intention of giving up his second chance, a 3-3 diamond break. 'Ace of hearts, please, partner.'

The Abbot sucked in his right cheek. That's exactly what he had hoped for. What a difference there was between a world-class defender and the average performer!

Two top diamonds revealed a 4-2 break, but Brother Lucius had realized that the third of his chances (in hearts) was still alive. He led towards dummy's queen and claimed nine tricks when the Abbot produced the king.

'A lot of 400s on the sheet,' said Brother Paulo, reaching for his pen.

Brother Lucius chuckled to himself. 'I might have saved myself some trouble by finessing the queen of hearts at the start,' he replied. 'I expect several of our Brothers did exactly that!'

## NOT IN HEAVEN YET

For forty-three years, David Bird's tales of the bridge-crazy monks of St Titus have appeared in magazines around the world. They have been translated into several languages.

In this fourteenth collection of stories in book form, the pompous and self-important Abbot wonders for the first time if old age is starting to affect his play.

The Mother Superior of St Hilda's Convent forms a contentious partnership with the Abbot on her visit to the monastery. The St Titus monks play a Crockford's Cup match in East London, against a team captained by Angie Brooker, proprietor of the Shoreditch Escort Agency. Hoping to enjoy some excellent cuisine, the Abbot agrees to teach the game to the wealthy order of St Geofric's. A mixed pairs at St Hilda's has the monks partnering a nun or a novice. Brother Jasper rises from his deathbed to request one last game of bridge — with a surprising outcome.

Regular followers of David Bird's work will know what to expect in these tales — a first-rate mixture of amazing bridge, entertaining characters and sparkling dialog.



**DAVID BIRD** (Southampton, UK) is the world's most prolific bridge writer, with 154 bridge books to his name. Known for the clarity of his writing and explanations, he has won the American Bridge Teachers Association 'Book of the Year' award a record nine times. He is married, to Thelma, and has two children and two grandchildren.