

Richelieu Plays † Bridge †



Robert F. MacKinnon

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Finally the author wishes to express his thanks to the above mentioned editors and to Ray Lee for their patient and active support.



**The Rules
of
the Game**



The month of June 1616 was a busy one at the French Court, but not for Louis XIII himself. It had been expected that once he had returned to Paris after his marriage half a year previous, the King would begin to take on more of a role in the governing of the country. It was not happening. His mother, the Regent, kept him from the meetings of the Council, and Concini, her chief adviser, ignored him, sometimes adding rudeness to neglect. For his part, Louis pursued his quiet hobbies and neglected his child bride. Although they met formally twice a day surrounded by their attendants, warmth of feeling was not expressed during the rituals of these meetings. At this time the King, bound up in all the trappings of a kingship over which he had no control, had not the self-confidence needed to undertake a loving relationship. For Louis XIII, 'to love' always was to mean 'to dominate.'



Every morning Grand Almoner Richelieu waited upon the Queen and attempted to make her into a good Bridge player. He soon discovered that his pupil, although possessing intelligence sufficient for the fulfillment of her royal duties, was not a natural card player, but a task once taken up by Richelieu was a task never set down. A teacher of the young, like a doctor to the old, trades in excessive optimism. He decided to pursue a method of instruction in keeping with her rigid Spanish upbringing, that is, he drew up a list of rules to be followed faithfully.

Daily the list grew longer as in private sessions he partnered his pupil against two members of her Spanish household: her Lady-of-Honor, the Condesa de Las Torres, on whom old age had encrusted a patina of righteousness, and the sly Duque de Monteleone, Ambassador from Spain, to whom respectability was granted according to custom. Gradual progress was noted: honors started to be covered by honors, low cards began to appear at second-hand play, and so on.

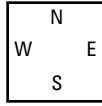
Two of Richelieu's rules pertaining to opening leads were: *don't lead from a worthless doubleton in an unbid suit*, and *never lead trumps*. The following deal proved instructive, although not in the way Richelieu would have hoped.

De Las Torres

♠ 10 9 8 6
 ♥ 10 2
 ♦ Q J 8 7
 ♣ A 7 4

Queen Anne

♠ K Q 7
 ♥ 9 8 7 6 3
 ♦ 10 5 2
 ♣ 9 3

**Richelieu**

♠ 5 4 3 2
 ♥ Q
 ♦ A K 6 3
 ♣ K J 6 5

Monteleone

♠ A J
 ♥ A K J 5 4
 ♦ 9 4
 ♣ Q 10 8 2

Queen Anne	De Las Torres	Richelieu	Monteleone
pass	pass	1♦	1♥
pass	pass	dbl	2♥
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

With neither side vulnerable Richelieu opened the bidding in the suit below his singleton and Monteleone overcalled in that suit. In the balancing position the Grand Almoner demonstrated for his pupil's benefit the function of the protective double. The ambassador rebid his values, not generally a wise practice, but he was familiar with the Queen's defensive abilities and rather fancied his chances.

In the final-pass position, Richelieu let his hot blood override his judgment. He was aware of the dangers of competing further with a 4441 shape but he felt that if his pupil were to advance, her mental clay would have to be fired in the furnace of competition where each card played was crucial to the outcome. To him will-power was the prerequisite to preeminence in any endeavor, and one did not cultivate will-power by coddling. Therefore, double!

The young Queen gave no thought to removing the double; she assumed that her partner must be well stocked in high cards and would be pleased when she showed up with much more defense than she had promised. Richelieu would hold four spades for his initial double, so she led the king in his promised suit with high expectation of praise from her hard taskmaster. The Duque was delighted by this gift; he took his ace and returned the ♠J to set up winners in dummy.

Anne was one of those timid souls who become flustered in times of crisis. Nothing appeared certain so she reverted to a 'safe' trump. This only aided the Spaniard as he could win Richelieu's ♥Q and enter dummy with a second trump to discard his two losing diamonds on the winning spades. The Queen took her ruff on the fourth spade, and returned yet another trump, allowing the Duque to draw the outstanding trumps in complete safety. Uncertain of the position of the cards after this faltering defense, Richelieu had come down to ♦AK6 ♣KJ, so Monteleone was able to manage ten tricks, having begun with a mere six.

Richelieu apologized profusely to the Queen, taking care also to compliment the Duque on his fine play and the Condesa on her fine pass on the first round that might otherwise have gone unnoticed, but inwardly he seethed. ‘What a different story if the Queen had led from her worthless doubleton in clubs!’ he thought. ‘The ♣K takes the first trick and a club is returned, Monteleone winning cheaply, but he is trapped.’

This is the position that Richelieu envisioned:

	Dummy				
	♠ 10 9 8				
	♥ —				
	♦ Q J 8				
	♣ A				
Queen Anne	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	Richelieu
N					
W E					
S					
♠ K Q		♠ 4 3			
♥ 9 8		♥ —			
♦ 10 5 2		♦ A K 3			
♣ —		♣ J 6			
	Monteleone				
	♠ J				
	♥ J 5				
	♦ 9 4				
	♣ Q 10				

Monteleone, having taken the second club and played on trumps, has returned to his hand with a spade to his ace. If he plays a club now, the Queen can ruff this and obtain a second club ruff, enough to set the contract, therefore declarer is forced to draw another round of trumps. If he plays to the ♣A thereafter, the Queen must refuse the ruff by discarding a diamond. Now in dummy, Monteleone must relinquish the lead, so the Queen’s hand may be entered with the ♠Q. She can draw the last trump, assuring two spades, two diamonds, a club and a heart trick for the defense. Now there was a worthy lesson in defense.

‘I do not wish to interpose my own views on what must be the superlative instruction of the Bishop,’ began the Duque preparatory to doing just that, ‘but if I may be so bold, this hand provides good instruction to Her Majesty on the rules that govern our actions at the bridge table.’

‘Quite so, Your Excellency,’ put in the Condesa, ‘I once overheard King Philip say to the Grand Inquisitor, *‘When holding five trumps I look no farther’*, and the Grand Inquisitor confirmed that view, adding he would do the same even with six.’

‘A good rule to be sure, but I had another in mind. Can you not guess it?’

‘I find it interesting that if the Queen, God forbid, were to break a rule and lead from her worthless doubleton in clubs...’ began Richelieu, about to expound on his superlative seven-card ending.

‘No, no,’ interrupted the grandee with an impatient wave of his hand, ‘I can always make my contract on any lead whatsoever provided I do not make the error of drawing more than one round of trumps before starting on spades. Of course, a lead of a low trump might tempt me into such an error, but, no, the rule I had in

mind was *always take out your partner's takeout double*, not so? Here a contract of 2♠ by West is down one after the inevitable trump lead from the Condesa, but that is better than putting too much faith in partner's doubles.'

As Queen Anne dutifully added Monteleone's rule to her notebook, Richelieu could do nothing but grit his teeth, smile, and await a chance for revenge. All these references to trump leads, an action that he had expressly forbidden, had brought on one of his fierce headaches.

MORE RULES

Young Queen Anne was confused by the contrary advice she was receiving concerning opening leads. Her Grand Almoner had told her never to lead trumps, her Lady-of-Honor had recalled that her famous grandfather had always led a trump holding five (or more), and her Major Domo had spoken of benefits to be obtained indirectly from a trump lead. To resolve her difficulty she asked the advice of her ancient governess, a dignified old crow who went by the title of the Duquesa de Villequieras.

'Let's see, your Spanish advisor said to lead a trump and your French advisor said not to, but both sides agreed that it didn't matter one iota. So the answer is easy! Follow the French rule, for you are the Queen of France. In that way the French can never criticize your action no matter how ludicrous the result, for in so doing they would be heaping criticism upon themselves.'

Not entirely satisfied with this sensible solution, the Queen approached the Princesse de Condé, a young woman of the French Court who had treated Anne kindly from their first meeting. This was her comment.

'On leading trumps the best advice I ever got came from my brother, the Duc de Montmorency, who told me, *lead trumps when nothing else is better*. I find that works for me.'

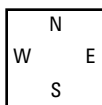
Although one may not disagree with this admonishment in principle, it is of doubtful practical value and may even lead to some confusion in the mind of a novice, as did another rule of the same kind laid down by the normally lucid Richelieu: *on defense, take all the tricks that are coming to you*. In many a battle ambiguity has led to disaster, as it did on this deal played on the very next day.

De Las Torres

♠ 9 8
 ♥ 10 9 4
 ♦ 7 4 3 2
 ♣ K 9 8 6

Queen Anne

♠ A K J 7
 ♥ 6 5 2
 ♦ K 10 9 6
 ♣ 7 3

**Richelieu**

♠ Q 5
 ♥ K Q 7 3
 ♦ J 8 5
 ♣ Q J 4 2

Monteleone

♠ 10 6 4 3 2
 ♥ A J 8
 ♦ A Q
 ♣ A 10 5

In third position, with both sides vulnerable, Monteleone saw his hand as a strong 1NT opening bid, so he made that bid, and was allowed to play there as Richelieu had resolved to give up on balancing doubles for a while. It was well the Spaniard made this bid, for if he had opened with a bid of 1♠, the result would have been a contract of 1NT for East-West, making eight tricks. On this basis one might think that Monteleone should have been held to five tricks in his own 1NT contract, but it doesn't always turn out that way.

Like many novices Anne liked to lay down an ace to have a look at the dummy before deciding how to conduct the defense. Fully aware of this propensity, Richelieu did not unblock his ♠Q under her lead of the ♠A. Seeing the ♠5 appear on his right, Monteleone wanted to make it appear safe to continue spades, so he played the ♠6. In fact, the best defense would be to follow Monteleone's suggestion and continue with a spade to Richelieu's queen, for then the Bishop could return a diamond through the ♦AQ. However, Anne was suspicious of Monteleone's card and she had a contrary nature in keeping with her Spanish upbringing. From what holding would Richelieu encourage with the ♠5? He would have to hold ♠Q5432, leaving Monteleone with ♠106, but Anne was not about to give the problem the benefit of the thorough analysis it deserved. Lazily she concluded that Monteleone must have had some motivation for his apparently deceptive ♠6, so she was not going to fall into the obvious trap of continuing spades and giving up a trick to declarer's ♠Q. She switched to a diamond.

Monteleone was happy to take his ♦Q and continue spades. Richelieu overtook Anne's ♠J and cleared the diamond suit. Monteleone exited with a spade to Anne's ♠7 and the Queen, following Richelieu's rule to the letter, stolidly began taking her diamond tricks to produce the following ending:

	Dummy										
	♠ —										
	♥ 10										
	♦ 7										
	♣ K 9 8 6										
Queen Anne	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		Richelieu
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ —		♠ —									
♥ 6 5 2		♥ K Q									
♦ 10		♦ —									
♣ 7 3		♣ Q J 4 2									
	Monteleone										
	♠ 10										
	♥ A J 8										
	♦ —										
	♣ A 5										

Oh no! thought Richelieu when he realized what was happening. On the last diamond, he parted with the ♣4 and Monteleone with the ♥8. Lead through strength, proudly recalled the Queen as she laid the ♣7 on the table, but it mattered not what she led. Monteleone could win with the ♣A or the ♥A in his hand and make his contract easily by squeezing Richelieu in clubs and hearts on the play of the ♠10.

‘May I ask how many points you held, Bishop?’ asked the Queen breezily. When Richelieu admitted to 11, Anne commented, ‘So did I. Isn’t it strange that we both held 11 points, but I took five tricks and you took only one? If you could have taken just half as many as I, we would have set the contract.’

‘You noticed that, did you, Your Majesty?’ replied Richelieu as pleasantly as possible. ‘Your Excellencies, I do believe my dear pupil is at last beginning to think like a true bridge player.’

THE ULTIMATE RULE

Richelieu had to admit to himself that his attempt to teach bridge by laying down rules was not working as well as he had hoped. Too late he was discovering that no sooner had his pupil absorbed a rule than a deal came along in which it failed miserably. A more religious man might think the Devil had had a hand in it. To a man of reason like Richelieu there were just two honorable alternatives:

1. follow the advice of Francis de Sales: retire from politics, return to his diocese, and serve the people; or
2. present prematurely to the Queen the ultimate rule that all rules are made to be broken.

He decided that with the next lesson he would embark on alternative #2 with alternative #1 remaining as a distinct possibility in the near future.

Anne was puzzled. It seemed that the more one learned the less one believed. Faithfully she reported the latest addition to her list to her old Spanish governess.

‘Nonsense,’ exclaimed the Duquesa de Villequieras, ‘rules are made to be followed not to be broken. Scratch that last one.’

‘But sometimes the rules fail,’ observed the Queen.

‘What do you expect?’ retorted the governess, a pure Castilian Aristotelian, ‘The rules are not at fault, it’s the world that’s imperfect.’

A year previous back in Spain this answer would have satisfied the Infanta, but by now she had been exposed to the influence of the emancipated ladies of the French Court. She approached for advice the Princesse de Conti, perhaps the most emancipated of that crowd, a novelist and the inventor of the beauty patch.

‘In order to gain peace of mind we ladies must forget most of what has been taught us at an early age,’ the Princesse affirmed. ‘Don’t take too seriously any rules that men lay down for us to follow, for in public men are always telling us to act in one way whereas in private they are hoping we do quite the opposite. You’ll see. This Bishop has kindly given you a *carte blanche*. Use it. Remain as charming as you are, but do as you please. Above all, never, never try to explain your actions, especially to a man.’

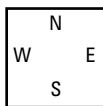
Richelieu came to the next practice session with renewed optimism. He was sure he would encounter a hand in which he could demonstrate the advantage of breaking one of his own rules. It was exciting to speculate which rule that might be. Perhaps, *never open the bidding on less than twelve points*? That was certainly was a live possibility. Or *never bid notrump with a singleton*? There were so many candidates, but the first rule to be broken was, surprisingly, *never underlead an ace*. With the opponents now 60 up, game seemed inevitable after the bidding given below.

Monteleone

♠ Q 3 2
♥ J 9
♦ A K 5 3
♣ K J 10 7

Richelieu

♠ K 10
♥ Q 10 4 2
♦ J 7 6
♣ A 8 6 5



Queen Anne

♠ 9 7 6
♥ A 7 6
♦ Q 9 8 4 2
♣ Q 9

De Las Torres

♠ A J 8 5 4
♥ K 8 5 3
♦ 10
♣ 4 3 2

Richelieu

pass
pass
pass

Monteleone

1♦
1NT
2♠

Queen Anne

pass
pass
all pass

De Las Torres

1♠
2♥

The unbid suit was clubs and the expectations were that dummy would hold

the opponents' power in that suit. Rather than play the ace to guard against a singleton honor in declarer's hand, Richelieu decided to underlead his ace. There was the danger that the Queen might misread the situation, but that danger would exist no matter what the lead.

Instead it was the Condesa who misread the situation. She never expected the Bishop to break one of his own rules, so she saw no reason to put up the ♣K losing to the ♣A now marked on her right. Hopefully, she put in the ♣10 and lost to Anne's ♣Q. As it happened, the Queen was also on the lookout for an opportunity to break one of Richelieu's rules. It would not be too much to say her mind was ablaze with anticipation. She saw that here was an opportunity of breaking not just one rule, *always return your partner's suit*, but simultaneously a second rule, *never underlead an ace*. Boldly she placed the ♥6 on the table, doing Richelieu one better.

Once again the Condesa saw no profit in what was in her estimation a losing play, so she ducked the heart to Richelieu's queen. A second heart put Anne on lead once more and this time she switched to her remaining club. Richelieu won and led a third round, ruffed by Anne, so that in the end the defense took two clubs, two hearts and two spade tricks, setting the contract and saving the rubber.

The Spaniards made no comment on the play, although the Duque's brow was furrowed and the Condesa's cheeks were seen to take on an unaccustomed blush. Monteleone grew somewhat uneasy after this display by a man he had always considered a firm ally of Spain. Was this simply a demonstration of skill at card play, or did it have greater significance? Was the Bishop entirely reliable?

Anne saw new possibilities arising on several fronts and could hardly wait to talk again with the Princesse de Conti. Richelieu was satisfied that at last his pupil was grasping the essence of Bridge. He appended the following comment to his own write-up of the hand: *The truth is always complicated, whereas lies can be made simple as one desires. It follows that the confused mind, seeking simplicity, can most easily be led on by untruths.*



Anne of Austria

Anne was engaged to Louis when both were twelve years old. On being told to send a personal message to her fiancé, Anne wrote saying that she could hardly wait to be his bride. Her governess objected to this passage, saying it was unbecoming a lady. 'Haven't you always taught me to tell the truth?' replied the defiant Infanta.