

The Most Famous Hand in the History of Bridge?

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Several months ago we reviewed Mark Horton's *The Hands of Time (The Most Exciting Bridge Deals Ever Played!)*, published by Master Point Press of Toronto, featuring some of the most fascinating hands from 75 years of bridge. This may be one of the best known hands in the history of world championships. It hails from 1975 when the Italians played the Americans in the finals and were leading by just 12 international match points going into the last five hands.

East/West vulnerable
East dealer

Garozzo
♠ QJ8
♥ AJ965
♦ K82
♣ AQ

Kantar
♠ 7652
♥ K432
♦ J53
♣ K10

Eisenberg
♠ 43
♥ Q1087
♦ Q1064
♣ 754

Belladonna
♠ AK109
♥ —
♦ A97
♣ J98632

The great Italian player Giorgio Belladonna was sitting *South*, and Benito Garozzo, *North*. On a less than ideal and lengthy auction, Belladonna ended up in seven clubs, not a good contract. Belladonna was astonished (nauseated) when he saw dummy's club holding. One of the top American players and bridge authors of all-time, Eddie Kantar, was sitting *West*. In one of his many books, he relates the story in a chapter called "The Short Life of the King of Clubs."

As Kantar explains it, he knew the match was close, and before dummy came down, he was optimistic. Here he sat, with the king of clubs safely (he thought) tucked behind the original club bidder. He was going to be a world champion!

And then dummy hit Belladonna of course, played the hand the only way he could, hoping for king-doubleton on his left. He won the opening lead, led a club to the queen and held his breath as Kantar's partner, Billy Eisenberg, played low. The ace brought down the king and brought home the contract.

Notes Horton, when the king dropped, Belladonna, a devout Catholic, made the sign of the cross and smiled.

At the other table, the Americans with the *North-South* hands, played six notrump, making. The Italians won the world championship. Down one in seven clubs would have cost 17 international match points and the championship.

When the Americans compared scores and discovered they had lost thanks to this sickening hand, team member Bob Hamman (currently the second ranked player in the world) quipped, "This calls for a human sacrifice." [*Editor's addendum: then he chucked the king of clubs off the balcony!*]

So what do you think? Just bad luck? Certainly even if declarer had seven clubs to the jack, he wasn't going to play for a singleton king offside, so what if, with nothing to lose, Kantar had played the king on the first round of the suit? If Belladonna thought it was a singleton he could have played for a specific lie of the cards to try to pick up the four clubs to the 10 that *East* supposedly started with, a line of play that would fail on the actual lie of the cards.

Many years ago, this writer asked Belladonna that very question. What if Kantar had played the king first. Replied Belladonna, "The Americans would have been world champions."

There's always the chance to make your own luck.