

theguardian

The mother of all catastrophes

The deal that set two new world records

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The Guardian, Thursday 27 October 2011

The Netherlands ladies team overcame a large deficit against the US and progressed to the semi-finals of the World Championships. But whether the Dutch win or lose that match, whether they take the gold medal in front of their home supporters or not, the most famous deal of the tournament was a moment they will want to forget, but will never be allowed to do so.

East-West vulnerable, dealer South.

	N	
	♠Q1098643	
	♥9	
W	♦Q75	E
♠AK	♣73	♠J2
♥763		♥AK10842
♦K9862	S	♦A103
♣1095	♠75	♣64
	♥QJ5	
	♦J4	
	♣AKQJ82	

There was no hint of impending disaster when the Dutch held the East-West cards in their match against Morocco. North-South sacrificed in four spades over East-West's four hearts – that contract was destined to fail, so East-West and the spectators were happy with plus 500 when four spades doubled went three down. At the other table, though, the auction was truly surreal.

West	North	East	South
			1NT ⁽¹⁾
Pass	2♥ ⁽²⁾	Dble ⁽³⁾	Pass
Pass	Rdbl ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	3♣ ⁽⁵⁾
Pass	3♥ ⁽²⁾	Dble ⁽⁶⁾	Pass
Pass	Rdbl ⁽⁴⁾	Pass	3NT ⁽⁵⁾
Pass	4♥ ⁽²⁾	Dble ⁽⁶⁾	Pass
Pass	Rdbl ⁽⁷⁾	Pass	Pass ⁽⁵⁾
Pass			

(1) A "strong" no trump in the modern fashion (2) I have spades (3) I have hearts (4) I want you to play the hand – please bid spades (5) Shan't (6) I still have hearts (7) For the last time – will you please bid spades?

This deal set at least two new world records. The penalty from four hearts redoubled

was 3400 when the contract went six down, the largest recorded in world championship play. Moreover, North in effect made six consecutive calls that were transfers to spades, something no one has ever seen in any [bridge](#) tournament, whether a world championship or not. The swing to Morocco was 21 IMPs, which must have been a bit of a disappointment to the Dutch East-West. As I write, the England ladies team is making progress against Indonesia in the semi-final – you can follow their fortunes at [worldbridge.org](#) or [www.ebu.co.uk](#).

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