An old saying has a bridge version that runs: "A twitch in time saves nine contracts." A tiny twitch in the bidding can help the eventual declarer detect a bad break, even when the opponents have been silent.

The diagramed example features, in the South seat, a player with a firm place in bridge history. Two decades ago, Dave Cliffe of Basking Ridge, N.J., pioneered the development of relay bidding, a concept that has spread around the world and appears in various disguises in all world championships. Nowadays, with a slight orthographic revision, he favors "the Kli ff Kue-bid by Dave Kli ff."

But that is theory, and the diagramed deal, played at the Essex Bridge Center in Livingston, N.J., is entirely practical. South’s decision to open one club rather than the orthodox one diamond made him the declarer in four hearts, and he noted that the West player, Rudy Oppenheimer of West Orange, N.J., had twitched slightly over one heart and again when four hearts came around to him.

A spade was led, and when dummy played low, East erred by putting up the ace and returning the suit. The declarer won with the queen, finessed the diamond queen successfully, and cashed the diamond ace followed by the spade king. He then ruffed a spade, cashed two club winners and ruffed a club to reach this ending:

Remembering the twitches, Cliffe led the diamond from dummy. Oppenheimer had to ruff his partner’s winner and lead from the heart king. He has now sworn to give up twitching.