

HERMITAGE

Big deal

Boy draws rare perfect hand in bridge game

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A bridge player sorts cards at a tournament in Hermitage. A Sharon youth recently drew a perfect hand, the rarest of deals. The odds were 158.7 billion to one.

They say that nothing is perfect. But, when Joseph Faber picked up his cards while playing contract bridge and found four aces, four kings, four queens and a jack of spades, what else can you call it? Perfect.

“A dream hand,” said Kathryn Ekker, adviser of “Bridge Really Rocks,” the Hermitage summer recreation program that ended Thursday. Ms. Ekker, who was present when Joseph drew the hand, said she still has a hard time believing that it happened.

“My heart tells me it is a hoax,” she said. “I did see it with my own eyes. I have to believe it was true.” Joseph, 11, of Sharon, said it did not take him long to realize

what he had. “I love this hand,” he remembered thinking. Joseph pulled the hand July 29, the first deal of the day.

He was the dealer, which raises a red flag with any seasoned card player, but he insists it was on the up and up. “I shuffled it and then I put the cards on the table and mixed them up,” said the son of Sharonda and Brian Faber. Ms. Ekker recalled the mixing on the table, and that Joseph’s competitors cut the cards before the deal.

Ms. Ekker said she had never seen anything close to a perfect hand and the experienced players in her duplicate bridge club in Youngstown “all said they had never seen anything like it.” “The more I think about it, the more incredible it becomes,” she said. “I’m never gonna get it again, I know it,” Joseph conceded, although he expects to draw some pretty good ones. “If you play a lot, you’re going to get the better hands,” Joseph said.



Joseph Faber, 11, deals during a bridge tournament at the Hermitage Municipal Building. Joseph drew a rare perfect bridge hand a few weeks ago.

What are the odds of getting a perfect hand? Ms. Ekker said www.mathworld.wolfram.com set them at 158.7 billion to one. *Billion.*

Experienced bridge players have played their whole lives without seeing one. Compare those odds to

the chance of drawing a royal flush in poker on the first five cards: 649,740-1 or the odds of being struck by lightning, a mere 576,000-1. The odds of bowling a 300 game: 11,500-1. The odds of hitting a hole in one: 5,000-1. The odds of winning straight up on a single number in on-line roulette: 37-1. Heck, compared to the odds of getting a perfect hand, the Cleveland Browns are a shoe-in to win the Super Bowl at 85-1. (The Steelers are 20- 1.)

Joseph, who also likes to play likes baseball, golf, Xbox 5 and build Legos, started playing bridge last year during "Bridge Really Rocks," encouraged to give it a try by Case Avenue Elementary School teacher Dave Tomko. "He thought I would like the game, and I did," said Joseph, who has a 9-year-old sister, Kristen. "It keeps you away from video games," he said. "It helps you with math — I'm really good with math. It helps your memory and it helps you overcome challenges."

Joseph, who is entering sixth-grade, has discovered an online bridge site, and is reading books on the card game that Ms. Ekker gave him. Ms. Ekker touted the brain building aspects of bridge, many of which Joseph touched on, and added that it promotes socialization, logic and problem solving. "It's sort of a dying game, but it's a special game and it's good for their brains," said Ms. Ekker, who learned to play at age 12 from her mother, who tired of playing Monopoly. "I enjoy the challenge," Ms. Ekker said.

"There is never the same hand. Every hand is a challenge to convey to your partner what you have in your hand through the bidding aspect, and then playing your hand to try to make your bid."