

May 2009

Victor Goldberg

IN 1947, a young man used to spend time in a snooker club in the Gorbals. Curious about four elderly Jewish gentlemen who sat every evening playing cards, he began to watch them between games of snooker. When one of the gentlemen failed to appear one evening, the other bridge players asked him to make up the four. So quickly did his talent blossom that the next year he won the Scottish Cup. The young man was Victor Goldberg, who died last month aged 86. Victor's achievements in bridge were phenomenal. He won the Gold Cup four times and the Scottish Cup a record 15 times. In a Camrose career stretching from 1956 until 2004 he had more victories representing Scotland (32) than anyone else. With Willie Coyle and Victor Silverstone in 1969 he was in the first British team at a European Championship to include Scots. In 1980, he won the prestigious Sunday Times International Pairs with Barnet Shenkin. His skills did not diminish with age. As recently as last year he played in the Scottish international trials; not only that but he and Derek Diamond also won convincingly. I had the privilege of captaining Victor in the Scottish team at the 2002 European Championships in Salsomaggiore. At the end of two weeks of gruelling play in an Italian heatwave he was the freshest player in the team, still playing bridge of the highest quality. His greatest partnership was perhaps with Sam Leckie, who tells of one hand from the Amsterdam World Pairs Olympiad in 1966. He held AQ542 7 A9 A10832, opened 1C and heard Victor respond 1S. Later, asking for Aces with 4NT, he was surprised to get a 5S response, showing 3 Aces. Since this was clearly impossible, Sam understandably assumed the heat had got to his partner and so he signed off in 6S. As soon as dummy went down, Victor emitted a guttural sound and threw his hand on the table in disgust. An error in duplicating the boards had resulted in him holding exactly the same hand as his partner. As one of the defenders noted at the time, you would think that with six Aces they might have reached a grand slam.

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