

Womens Euro Team Championships 2026

GOLD for England

by Derek Patterson

Team England had arrived in Riga for the European Championships, and I was lucky enough to be the non playing captain (NPC) of the women's team — a role that sounds glamorous until you realise it mostly involves fretting, paperwork, and trying not to lose anyone between the hotel and the venue. As the championships progressed, Charlotte Bedford & Lucy Norman, Fiona Brown & Helen Erichsen, Nevena Senior & Nicola Smith were sweeping all before them, extending their lead with every match. Opponents were waving white flags and announcing, 'Too good, too good!' The entire event was a breeze.

Funnily enough, it wasn't quite like that...

In reality, the first surprise had been the head-banging at the Opening Ceremony — to *The Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*, no less. Nothing says 'prestigious European sporting event' quite like a roomful of dignitaries nodding violently to a bit of Tchaikovsky. Then came the shop lifting scandal (just a little misunderstanding), swiftly followed by a 'best-of-luck' video message from Claudia Winkleman.

None of this was normal, but perhaps the most unusual aspect of our campaign was the cast of the squad itself, masterminded by Helen for the trials which included Lucy and Charlotte — and now both making their debuts at just 19 years of age. With the other four having won more medals between them than I've had hot dinners, we were blessed with an extraordinary blend of youth and experience — a combination that produced brilliant bridge, occasional chaos, and more entertainment than any captain could reasonably have expected.

DENMARK — LUCY & CHARLOTTE AND THE 5-2 MASTERSTROKE

We started very brightly: three wins on day one. Match four was against Denmark, a very talented team, and on the following deal Charlotte and Lucy

showed exactly why Helen had put her faith in them:

E/W Game. Dealer South

♠	Q J 7 6 5		
♥	7		
♦	A 6 5 4 2		
♣	K 9		
♠	10 4 2		♠ K 8 3
♥	Q J 9 8 3		♥ A 5
♦	J 3		♦ 9 7
♣	8 5 4		♣ A Q J 10 6 2
			♠ A 9
			♥ K 10 6 4 2
			♦ K Q 10 8
			♣ 7 3

West	North	East	South
Bilde	Bedford	Buus Thomsen	Norman
Pass	1♠	2♣	1♥
Pass	3♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	4♠	All Pass	3♠

Hoping East would find no entry to West's hand, the deliberate choice of the 5-2 spade fit — designed to avoid a lead through North's ♣Kx — paid off handsomely when trumps divided 3-3. A truly enterprising and brilliant effort!

In the other room the Danish team played in 3♦, producing a 7 IMP swing for England.

FRANCE — HELEN & FIONA'S STUNNING SLAM

In the next match, against France, we continued our winning ways, in no small part due to Helen Erichsen and Fiona Brown putting on their bidding boots for the following deal:

N/S Game. Dealer South

♠ J 7

♥ 10 8 4 3

♦ J 7 6

♣ K Q 6 5

♠ K 6 4 3

♥ A Q 9 2

♦ K Q 3 2

♣ 8

♠ A Q 10 9 5 2

♥ 7

♦ 4

♣ A J 10 7 4

♠ 8

♥ K J 6 5

♦ A 10 9 8 5

♣ 9 3 2

Thanks to a little ‘Zanussi (the appliance of science)’, Fiona’s transfer meant that she became declarer in 5♣. South cashed the ♥A, North following with the ♥2. Then came the ♦4 switch.

Fiona now faced a horrible guess: finesse – if it loses to ♦Kxx (♦4 is a singleton) she will suffer a ruff; or

rise with the ♦A. But what if North is void and ruffs?

North’s ♥2 was suit preference, but it was compatible with both ♦Kxx and with a void. There was no foolproof answer. This was a razor-edge decision with no safe option. What would you have done?

At the other table, declarer had the same problem at trick two, but with a crucial difference. West was declarer.

West <i>Erichsen</i>	North <i>Leleu</i>	East <i>Brown</i>	South <i>Kurek Beaulieu</i>
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Dble
6♠	All Pass		

West <i>Saccavini</i>	North <i>Senior</i>	East <i>Paoluzi</i>	South <i>Smith</i>
1♣	3♥	Pass	4♥
Dble	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♠	All Pass		

Fiona’s 2NT was forcing to game and agreed spades. Helen’s 3♣ was natural and slam-seeking. After a few further checks, Helen, recognising the immense power of her distributional hand, launched into 6♠ via RKCB.

With the ♦A sitting over the ♦KQ, three club ruffs were required before drawing trumps. Helen executed the plan with aplomb, helping to secure our fifth consecutive victory.

ROUND 11 v ITALY – A CARD-READING MASTERCLASS

In round 11, against Italy and still unbeaten, Fiona faced a genuinely difficult decision, playing in 5♣.

♠ K 9 5

♥ Q

♦ A Q 10

♣ A Q 9 7 3 2

♠ A

♥ 9 8

♦ J 9 8 7 3 2

♣ K J 8 5

West <i>Erichsen</i>	North <i>Pomares y de Morant</i>	East <i>Brown</i>	South <i>Golin</i>
1NT ¹	2♦ ²	Pass	Pass
4♣	4♥	3♣ ³	3♥
		5♣	All Pass

¹ Slightly off-centre, ² Multi-Landy (either hearts or spades), ³ transfer to diamonds

Nevena Senior led the ♥2 to Nicola Smith’s ace, and back came the ♦4. Again, the same guess. What would you have done this time?

The Italian declarer feared a singleton and rose with the ♦A. Disaster – Nevena ruffed, and 5♣ went down.

Should she have succeeded? In truth, there were clues here, too. The opening lead had been the ♥2 – known to be from a very long suit and, therefore, not a standard lead. It was a suit preference signal made before seeing dummy.

Why would Nevena signal for a diamond with ♦Kxx, without knowing the location of the ace? Much more likely that she was void. Nicola drew that inference. Declarer did not.

Fiona’s problem was harder. At her table, the suit preference signal came *after* dummy had become visible. The inference was far less clear. Very bravely, and after due consideration, Fiona decided to finesse.

North ruffed, but the contract survived because the diamond finesse could be repeated later, once trumps had been drawn. Eleven tricks rolled in.

A fabulous piece of card reading and 12 IMPs to England. The full deal is overleaf.

Continued

♠ Q 7 6 2
♥ K J 10 7 6 4 2
♦ —
♣ 10 6

♠ K 9 5
♥ Q
♦ A Q 10
♣ A Q 9 7 3 2

♠ A
♥ 9 8
♦ J 9 8 7 3 2
♣ K J 8 5

♠ J 10 8 4 3
♥ A 5 3
♦ K 6 5 4
♣ 4

♠ Q 7 5
♥ K 2
♦ J 9 8 7 6
♣ Q 10 5

♠ AK 9 6
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ Q 5 4
♣ A J

♠ J 10 8 3 2
♥ Q 9 8 5
♦ 10
♣ K 8 7

♠ 4
♥ J 6 3
♦ AK 3 2
♣ 9 6 4 3 2



THE WINNING STREAK AND THE (DUTCH) TEAM IN ORANGE

As the round robin progressed, our momentum was extraordinary. After five days, we had put together a remarkable run of 14 consecutive victories, and at one stage we were more than 20 VPs clear of second place. But match 15 brought our first setback – a narrow one IMP defeat to Finland. The Netherlands were racking up some sizeable wins, and by the time we faced them in round 18, our once comfortable lead had all but disappeared. A mixture of misfortune and excellent Dutch play handed us a second defeat, and we entered the final day of the championships trailing the new leaders.

THE FINAL DAY — TÜRKİYE, SPAIN, ISRAEL

The final day loomed like a three act thriller. Both the leading teams would be facing the same opponents – Türkiye, Spain and Israel – and every board now carried the weight of the entire championship. All we could do was score heavily and pray that fate, for once, might be wearing red and white. Türkiye, the reigning World Olympiad champions and entirely capable of derailing a title charge, posed a formidable challenge. We would face them first; the Dutch would have to confront them in the final round, with everything on the line.

**TÜRKİYE — NEVENA & NICOLA'S
CLINICAL DEFENCE**

On the next deal, Lucy and Charlotte bid to 4♠ and made it by playing the heart suit for three tricks. In the other room, the Turkish declarer played 4♥ by East – and things got interesting.

Nicola led a top diamond and switched to a spade. Declarer had several options when

considering how to play the trump suit. Perhaps fearful of spade ruffs, she decided to remove trumps as quickly as possible and played the ace and another heart, Nevena winning with the king. Superficially, it might have seemed that declarer's troubles were over, but a ruthlessly accurate defence exposed the cracks in the chosen line.

Nevena returned a diamond, which East had to ruff. At this point she had the singleton queen of hearts left. She could draw the jack, but if she did, she knew that losing to the spade queen would also cost her a second diamond trick. Accordingly, she left the last trump outstanding and led a spade. Nicola refused to ruff, declarer took the king and had nothing better than to continue spades. Nevena won with the queen and played another diamond, thereby promoting Nicola's ♥J for the setting trick.

A clinical defence — and a vital win against Türkiye. Meanwhile, the Dutch continued their splendid form against Spain.

PENULTIMATE ROUND: THE GAP NARROWS

As the penultimate round unfolded, the atmosphere in the England camp shifted from hopeful to electric. Our momentum was irresistible. We were bidding with immaculate judgment, declaring with accuracy, and defending for our lives.

News filtered through from the Netherlands-Israel match. A game swing here. A part score swing there. A slam swing – against them. Suddenly the leaderboard tightened like a violin string. The once comfortable Dutch margin had nearly evaporated. Maybe the future would not be orange after all.

FINAL ROUND – EVERYTHING ON THE LINE

We entered the final round knowing exactly what was required: a big win against Israel, and a little help from Türkiye. The team in orange were up against the reigning Olympiad champions – a brutal assignment under any circumstances, let alone with the title on the line.

My team walked into the arena for the last time with a steely determination and played the final match with an incredible level of accuracy, courage, and sheer competitive fire.

Board after board, they pushed. They fought. The VPs ticked upward. The deficit disappeared. We edged ahead. The Dutch were struggling. Türkiye were fighting hard.

I kept refreshing the running scores with the desperation of someone trying to buy tickets for their favourite band’s newly-announced world tour. We were in front, and the gap had started to widen.

AND THEN, FINALLY, IT HAPPENED.

The last board was scored. The final VP totals appeared. The Dutch had fallen. England had risen.

*** We had done it. European Champions! ***

A squad spanning generations — two teenagers making their debuts, a player victorious again more than half a century after her first European triumph, and three other legends of the game. A squad combining brilliance with determination, accuracy with audacity, and professionalism with the occasional shop-lifting misunderstanding. A squad that never stopped believing.

As the six of them celebrated — laughing, hugging, and perhaps wondering how on earth they’d put up with me all week – I realised that being a non playing captain *is* glamorous after all.

Because sometimes, you get to be part of something unforgettable. □

WOMENS RESULTS			
Gold	England	294.78	
Silver	Netherlands	287.75	
Bronze	Sweden	272.55	

YOUNG PAIR OF THE YEAR



Lucy Norman and Charlotte Bedford have been awarded the Young Pair of the Year Award for 2025-26.

Lucy and Charlotte have had an outstanding year with successes at domestic, home international and world championship level.

The pair were part of the team that won the European Women’s trials in February, and subsequently triumphed, winning the Womens Gold Medal in this year’s European Teams Championships. They went on to play in the U21 team the following week.

The two were also part of the gold medal-winning team in the U21 European Online Championships.

This is not the first win for either of them. The partnership is an enduring one. They first won the Young Pair of the Year award in 2022.

GREAT NORTHERN SWISS PAIRS

3-4 OCTOBER
HEADINGLEY
LEEDS

Run by Yorkshire Contract Bridge Association on behalf of the EBU