

GCBA NEWSLETTER

Season 2020-21

July/Aug 2021

GCBA RESULTS

Series 8 of the GCBA Swiss Teams is nearing a conclusion. At the moment Paul Denning's team leads, with Ben Ritacca in second place. However, all that can change as the last few results are still to come in. Series 9 of the 9-high Swiss Pairs was won by Tony and Ros Reeves, with Lynn Edwards and Cath Jack finishing a close second – well done.

Summer Teams Winners:

June 21st : Val Constable, Andrew Kambites, Paul Denning, Graham Cornell.

July 5th : Dan McIntosh, B.J.O'Brien, Patrick Shields, Filip Kurbalija

July 19th : Rob Lawy, Jim Grant, Harry Anoyrkatis, Stefan Lindfors.

MCOL

Gloucestershire had a successful season, with their teams winning Division One and finishing third in Divisions Two and Three. As a result of their performance in the last two years, the County was invited to play in a National event for the winners of each regional inter-counties league. Gloucestershire were very successful in this event, winning both the first and third divisions. Congratulations to all involved.

Division 1: Dan McIntosh, Paul Denning, Joe Angseesing, Andrew Kambites, Richard Butland, Rob Stevens, Richard Chamberlain, Garry Watson

Division 3: John Councer, Mark Rogers, Peter Waggett, Ben Ritacca, Roger Schofield, Tony Letts, Jim Simons, Val Constable.

JUDGEMENT

This hand from the recent National Inter-County League Final caught my eye. You hold:

♠A543 ♥A5 ♦4 ♣AKJT52

The bidding starts with 1♠ on your left and partner overcalls with 2♦. How do you proceed after a pass on your right?

Many players looked no further than 3NT and this turned out to have ten top tricks. Some however, saw that with the right cards opposite, a club slam would be playable. They bid a forcing 3♣, to learn more from partner first. Partner held:

♠T8 ♥93 ♦AK7653 ♣Q98.

Those that now bid 3♦ to show a minimum failed to appreciate the value of their cards. Prime club support (the spot cards are likely to provide additional entries if required) and a good diamond suit must be a great holding for partner so even though the point count is low for a 2 level overcall, I am in favour of a raise to 4♣ with this hand. Partner will know that you hold no features in the majors else you would have bid one and so you have given an excellent picture of your hand. Where clubs were supported, partner invoked RCKB and was able to bid the club slam. 6♣ is an excellent contract and yet in a high quality field, a slam was bid at only one table out of twenty-eight. Later in the same event you pick up:

♠T5 ♥8652 ♦A53 ♣9842

The bidding proceeds 1♠ (at least five) on your right, pass from you, 2NT on your left (game forcing with four+ spades). Partner comes in with 3♣ and the opener rebids 4♠ showing a minimum hand. Opponents are vulnerable and you are not. Do you save or not? When opponents are in a game forcing situation through

strength, one should expect that partners intervention is a suggestion to save, and a typical hand for that action might be something like

♠9 ♥A3 ♦653 ♣KQT7653.

Facing a hand such as this you have no defence to 4♠ and 5♣ costs 500. If partner's club suit includes the Ace, you have at most 3 defensive tricks and the save will probably only cost 300. And the opponents may also misjudge and push on to 5♠, making the sacrifice look even more attractive. The sacrifice was bid at 7 tables but turned out disastrously when partner turned up with

♠J8 ♥A943 ♦76 ♣AKJ65

Clubs divided 2-2 so you have 4 tricks in defence. Worse still was that partner assumed their game was making and (very reasonably) took a club finesse and ended up -1100. Partner just wanted to get you off to the right lead, but this was misinterpreted. Team-mates were unsympathetic but the moral of the story, as always, is to agree in advance on your style of bids in these situations.

LAST MONTH'S PLAY PROBLEM

You were asked how, with lots of entries and having already discard the Deuce, to make 2 tricks from this if you know that West holds 4 cards in the suit:

A64
???? ??
J98(2)

One chance is that East holds KQ doubleton, but it is much more likely that East holds a doubleton ten. Start with a low card to the 8 in dummy, losing say to a top honour. On the next round, you lead the Knave from South and run it if not covered, hopefully pinning the ten with East. This play is termed an intra-finesse.

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IMPROVER'S CORNER

Suppose you need 4 tricks from a suit of 432 opposite AJT65 assuming available outside entries? I am sure that everyone is familiar with this situation – you take two finesses and this produces 4 tricks 62% of the time. You can extend this principle to 432 opposite AQT65, where again two finesses is the winning line. Your chance of success is over 65% but only if your first play is to finesse the Queen and not the ten – do you see why?

The play of the Queen gains when right hand opponent holds the singleton Knave whereas playing to the ten does not gain if RHO holds a singleton King. (Note that if you needed 5 tricks from this combination then your first play should be to finesse the ten (13% success rate).

So how do you play 432 opposite AQT65 for 5 tricks? The addition of a ninth card to the total holding now changes the odds considerably. The best play for 5 tricks is to not bother with any first-round finesse but to initially lay down the Ace. Then play towards the QT on the next round. This gives an overall chance of success of nearly 83%. If you needed 6 tricks from this holding then a first round Queen finesse is best.

Now it is unrealistic to expect to be able to work out these best percentage plays at the table. One way of improving your game is to know the best play in these situations by doing a little work away from the table. There are only a handful of combinations that are relevant for practical play purposes and you don't need any mathematical prowess to work out the odds. I use an excellent

little program called 'suitplay' to do all the hard work for me. You can download a free copy of the program at this address:

<http://www.suitplay.com/d5lb7/index.htm>

RAISING 1M

I am often asked if it is right to raise partner's 4-card major suit opening bid to the 2-level when holding only 3 trumps. The answer is definitely yes. Suppose your hand is in the 6-9 point range. If you don't raise to 2M then your alternative bid is 1NT. Yes you might end up playing in an occasional 4-3 fit, and when it happens, playing in a trump suit might even be better than playing in NT.

The opening bidder generally has 5 cards in their major unless they are too strong to open a weak NT. When they have 17+ points, they will bid on, so it is really only those hands in the 15-16 range which may play in the 4-3 fit. Clearly, opener must be cognisant of the fact that responder may only have 3 trumps when making a simple raise, and hence should not jump directly to 4M when holding a powerful hand, but should go via 2NT with 17-18 or 3NT with 19 points.

5NT?

I play the sequence 1NT-5NT to ask partner to bid 6NT with a minimum and 7NT with a maximum and yes – it has never occurred at my table in my 50 years of playing!

I also play that 5NT after 4NT (RCKB) promises possession of all the key cards and asks for outside Kings. Responder will bid a King held and with 2 such Kings, will bid the suit in which a King is not held. This use of 5NT helps you in bidding grand slams and has occurred maybe

a handful of times in recent years.

The old fashioned use of 5NT as a "grand slam force" has been made virtually obsolete by the use of RCKB which allows you to identify the trump honours at a lower level.

However, in more recent times, there has been a growing trend amongst better players to use a jump to 5NT to invite partner to 'pick a small slam' (while 5NT retains its usual meaning after Blackwood and 1NT-5NT).

When they do you use 5NT and then how does partner respond? Here are some examples from Monty Bergen's 'Slam Bidding Made Easier'.

♠ AT8	1♦	1♥	♠ KQ75
♥ K2	3♦	5NT	♥ AQJ7
♦ KQJ9752	6♦		♦ T
♣ 6			♣ A965

6♦ shows a self-sufficient suit.

♠ A4	1NT	2♣	♠ K953
♥ KQ3	2♦	5NT	♥ A85
♦ K642	6♣		♦ A5
♣ QJT8			♣ AK72

The 6♣ bid shows the lowest 4 card suit. If the 5NT bidder did not have 4 card support, he could bid 6♦ with 4 cards or 6NT without diamonds.

♠ AQJ9	1♣	1♦	♠ KT4
♥ AKJ	2♠	3♦	♥ Q85
♦ 6	3NT	5NT	♦ AJ8653
♣ KJ842	6♠		♣ A

The 6♠ bid shows a very good 4 card suit. The failure to bid 6♦ shows no diamond tolerance. The earlier 3NT bid implied 5/4 in the black suits and since partner did not support spades, this bid must show a willingness to play in a 4-3 fit.

Remember that to use this convention, you should be confident of making a small slam, but also that if you are considering a grand slam, you should choose another route.