

The Lady Milne Trophy 2017

(A Captain's Tale)

The Lady Milne Trophy is the Bridge Home Internationals for Ladies Teams. The weekend of 21st to 23rd April saw it being held at the Ramada Plaza Hotel in Wrexham. Played over one weekend with teams from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A sixth team from the home federation, is also eligible to take part so this year, Wales being the home nation, they were able to field a WBU team as well.

I had been asked to captain the Wales ladies and an eventful weekend saw England victorious, but only just. They lost their last match heavily to my team with Scotland defeating a good Northern Ireland team and closing in fast.

Match One – Wales vs WBU

One of the first matches on Friday night is always between the two home nation teams. This year every match was shown on BBO with people from all over the world able to watch the play at every table. Play usually starts at board 1 of 16 in the Open room with board 15 and 16 being the first played in the Closed room. This lets some early scores be compared when a couple of boards have been played.

Board 16 was just your usual 28 hcp hand.

Dir: West
Vul: E/W

♠ J 9 8 7 6 5
♥ 9 8 6 5
♦ 2
♣ 10 8

Optimum
NS -1440

♠ K 4 3
♥ K 4 3
♦ 9 8 6 3
♣ 9 5 4

NORTH
WEST 16 EAST
SOUTH

♠ A Q 10
♥ A J
♦ A K Q
♣ A K J 7 6

♠ 2
♥ Q 10 7 2
♦ J 10 7 5 4
♣ Q 3 2

	♠	♥	♦	♣	N
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	4	2	3	6
W	6	4	2	3	6

In the Open room the WBU team bid this to the correct 6NT and had no difficulty making 12 tricks. However in the Closed room, Gilly Clench for the WBU opened the North hand with a weak (one hcp!) multi two diamonds. The auction then took a strange turn...

Open Room				Closed Room			
West	North	East	South	West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass	2♦ ^①	Dbl ^②	Pass ^③
2♥	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass ^④	3NT	Pass
4♣	Pass	4NT	Pass	Pass	Pass		
6NT	Pass	Pass	Pass				

- ① Multi 2♦
- ② Do something.
- ③ Showing diamonds
- ④ Ah well

Yes, you have read the **Closed room** auction correctly. This was played and 12 tricks were made. It resulted in a 13 imp loss for Wales. However, Captain Jones went to see the Directors and the board was adjusted back to the last contract of two diamonds doubled.

Just for your information :

LAW 22 – END OF AUCTION

The Auction ends when:

- A. *one or more players having bid, there are three consecutive passes in rotation subsequent to the last bid. The last bid becomes the contract*

According to *Deep Finesse*, this was only due to make 3 tricks and the result became -1100. Still an 8 imp loss.

A vulnerable 32 point slam (13 imps) not being bid by Wales and two vulnerable 3NT games being made by the WBU but not by Wales (24 imps) went nicely towards the WBU winning the 16 board set by 70-37. Although Wales won the second set 25-21 there were few opportunities to gain and the WBU had bragging rights.

Final VP score: Wales 5.61 – WBU 14.39 (62 - 91 imps)

Match Two – Northern Ireland vs Wales

Saturday morning saw Wales take on Northern Ireland. There were swings either way leading to a 40-28 imp lead in the first set for the Irish. This was helped by the monstrous hand below.

The diagram shows a bridge hand with the following details:

- Contract:** Optimum NS 980
- Declarer:** South, **Vulnerability:** None
- North's Hand:** ♠ A K 6 5 4 3, ♥ J 2, ♦ 9, ♣ K 8 4 2
- South's Hand:** ♠ Q 7, ♥ A 10 9 7 6 4 3, ♦ 8 3, ♣ Q 6
- Bidding:** West bid 11, South bid 11.
- Trick Tally:**

	♠	♦	♥	♣	N
N	-	6	-	6	-
S	-	6	-	6	-
E	-	-	2	-	-
W	-	-	2	-	-
- Bottom Hand:**
 - ♠ 9 8 2, ♥ - -, ♦ A K Q J 10 7 6 4, ♣ J 7
 - Trick tally: 11 (top), 8 (left), 10 (right), 11 (bottom)

Open Room				Closed Room			
West	North	East	South	West	North	East	South
			1♦				1♦
2♥	Dbl	4♥	5♦	3♥	3♠	4♥	5♦
Pass	Pass	5♥	6♦	Pass	Pass	Pass	
Pass	Pass	Pass					

With Wales-East West in the Open room, Val Kennewell made a weak jump overcall which was raised to the four level by Margaret Lane. The Irish declarer took the push to five and Margaret unfortunately committed one of the bridge cardinal sins (of which we have all been guilty of in the past) - bidding your hand twice. The vulnerability should have swayed her to let the Irish play at the five level. She had fair (although useless) defensive values after her partner had made a weak call.

Declarer ruffed the Ace of hearts lead, remembered to unblock the spade suit and all thirteen tricks came in for +940.

In the Closed room the Irish West decided her hand was worth a weak three call. This was again raised to four after Diane Kurbalija bid three spades. Should Jill Reitz bid four spades? Maybe but with the eight card suit and no guaranteed route back to her hand she chose five diamonds. This was passed and Jill played safe for 11 tricks against a 3-1 spade break by running the 8♠. A gain of 11 imps for Northern Ireland.

However, set two saw Wales come back and win 47-30 for an overall 5 imp win. We were helped by Diane Kurbalija and Jill Reitz bidding two very thin vulnerable games (one with 20 hcp only) both being let through on Irish mis-defence.

Final VP score: Wales 11.07 – Northern Ireland 8.93 (75 - 70 imps)

Match Three – Wales vs Scotland

Saturday evening saw Wales take on the Scottish ladies. A very tight first set of sixteen boards saw Wales edge it 25-11 imps. Only one double digit swing saw Wales gain 10 imps when Scotland bid a thirty point 6NT and went off while Wales played nicely in game.

The second set was very different and 99 imps changed hands with Scotland winning 52-47. Wales hung on (just) for the match win helped by the following hand:

The diagram shows a bridge hand with the following details:

- Contract:** 2NT
- Declarer:** East
- Vulnerability:** E/W
- Hand:**
 - North: ♠ Q, ♥ Q 10 9 8 6 3, ♦ K J, ♣ 10 9 8 7
 - South: ♠ A 9 7 5, ♥ 2, ♦ 10 8 5 4, ♣ A K 6 2
- Bidding:**
 - West: 1♠, 2NT
 - East: 1♠, 2NT
 - South: 3NT, 4NT, 5♥, 6♣
- Score Table:**

	N	S	E	W
N	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-
E	3	3	3	7
W	3	3	3	7

Open Room				Closed Room			
West	North	East	South	West	North	East	South
		1♠	Pass			1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass	4NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♣	Pass	6♣	Pass	7♠	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass		

This was well bid by the Welsh pair of Ceri and Maggie Pierce to the cold seven spades. Maggie used a splinter bid after Ceri had opened one spade. Even though the spade queen was missing, Ceri thought the grand slam a good bet with 10 trumps.

Scotland used a Jacoby 2NT response but only reached the small slam when they found the spade queen was missing. 13 imps to Wales.

Final VP score: Wales 11.86 – Scotland 8.14 (72 - 63 imps)

Match Four – Ireland vs Wales

Prior to the start of the match, Ireland had been lying in last place but decided to pick on us to suddenly start playing well. A fairly tight first sixteen boards saw just one large swing when Maggie Pierce decided to double a non-vulnerable game in spades for + 100 while Ireland bid on to a making vulnerable five diamonds. An 11 imp loss for Wales.

There was a very peculiar Board 5. The direction sticker on the board had somehow been rotated so that North was South and South was North etc. This led to South (incorrectly for the board) opening the bidding with one club. Wales eventually found a good sacrifice of five hearts doubled against a making five clubs.

At the table where the board was played with the correct sticker on, North was able to open a weak bid and South became declarer in the normal five clubs. West however was not able to intervene in the bidding.

The Irish Captain complained and the board ended up being scrapped and a directorial ruling was required. The score after the *fifteen* board set (before the adjustment) was 18-3 imps to Ireland.

The second set saw 98 imps of swing on the sixteen boards! Fifteen of these came in the direction of Wales via board 20 when a double, vulnerable game swing occurred.

Open Room				Closed Room			
West	North	East	South	West	North	East	South
1♥	2♣	4♥	Pass	1♥	2♣	3♥	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass		Pass	Dbl	Pass	5♣
				Pass	Pass	Pass	

Val and Margaret bid the East-West cards in the Closed room to a quick four hearts making +650. In the Open room, the Irish East only bid three hearts. This went back around the table to Ceri Pierce in the North seat who decided her hand worth a take out double. Maggie Pierce jumped to the club game and the pressure was on to try to beat it. East had an easy top diamond lead and switched to hearts. West won and the pressure point came. She played the Ace of diamonds instead of the Ace of hearts. Ooops. Game over...

Wales won the second set 55-44 imps and the match score was now Wales 58 Ireland 60.

Back to the scrapped board. An adjustment of +3 imps **to both sides** was awarded this meant the score was now :

Wales 61 - Ireland 60 **and also** Wales 58 - Ireland 63. A rare, **WIN-WIN** match.

Final VP score: Wales 10.22 – Ireland 11.07 (61 – 60 imps)

Match Five – Wales vs England

The top few scores as the final matches began were :

1 st	England	62.43 VP
2 nd	Northern Ireland	45.28 VP
3 rd	Scotland	42.84 VP
4 th	Wales	38.05 VP

With Wales due to play England (who had won every match so far and only needed 2.86 VP to guarantee winning the event), either Scotland or Northern Ireland needed a 20-0 'blitz' of the other to have any hope of winning.

So, could Wales do either of them a favour and 'blitz' England 20-0 on St George's Day?

Wales had **crushed** England 49-5 imps in the first 16 boards – currently 16.90-3.10 in VPs!

England played in the wrong game two off.

Wales were in the correct game 11 imps

England were in a part score.

Wales were in the cold game. 10 imps

England were in a three spades part score.

Wales were in the game and it was let through. 10 imps

England were in 3NT -3 when 1NT was the limit.

They also played in 2 spades -1 in the other room. 9 imps

England were losing it...

What would happen in the last 16 boards?

Taken from the final set against England where Wales were leading by 49-5 imps after the first sixteen boards the hand below shows the kind of thoughts that went through my mind while watching each hand over the weekend on BBO. This healthy 44 imp lead could easily disappear and nine of the final sixteen boards had been played with England, making a comeback (leading 27-21) in this set.

The diagram shows a bridge hand with the following details:

- Contract:** 26 (North-South)
- Declarer:** East
- Vulnerability:** All
- Optimum Score:** NS 1370
- North's Hand:** ♠ A J 10 6 3, ♥ A K, ♦ 3, ♣ Q J 10 8 3
- South's Hand:** ♠ 8 7 5, ♥ 7, ♦ A K 7 4, ♣ A K 9 4 2
- West's Hand:** ♠ 9 2, ♥ J 10 2, ♦ Q J 10 9 8 6 2, ♣ 7
- East's Hand:** ♠ K Q 4, ♥ Q 9 8 6 5 4 3, ♦ 5, ♣ 6 5
- Score Table:**

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	6	-	-	5	4
S	6	-	-	5	4
E	-	-	1	-	-
W	-	-	1	-	-
- Bidding Box:** Contains numbers 4, 7, 14, 15.

On this hand Val Kennewell and Margaret Lane were North-South for Wales against Heather Bakhshi and Claire Robinson, East-West for England. As you can see, six clubs is a lovely, unbeatable contract but this board alone could result in a 16 imp swing out if all went wrong which could give England a lead of 43-21 with six boards to go. Watching on BBO these were my thoughts and emotions as the bidding progressed :

Open Room			
West	North	East	South
<i>Robinson</i>	<i>Kennewell</i>	<i>Bakhshi</i>	<i>Lane</i>
		2♥	Dbl ^①
Pass	3♥ ^②	Pass	4♣ ^③
Pass	4♠ ^④	Pass	5♦ ^⑤
Pass	5♥ ^⑥	Pass	6♣ ^⑦
Pass	Pass	Pass	

- ① “Oh no! Where are we going to end up?”
- ② “Phew. At least that sets a game force.”
- ③ “Yes! We may be on our way to the slam.”
- ④ “Oh No!. This could be passed... We may miss the slam.”
- ⑤ After about two or three minutes... “Yes! We are on our way again. But wait, what if Val thinks this agrees spades? What if she thinks Ace and King of hearts are good enough for six no-trumps with her good hand? Both of these contracts are one off! Argh!!! I need a drink!”
- ⑥ After another two minutes... “Yes!. We going to make it to the excellent slam. But wait... Why is Margaret thinking... Oh no, is she going to convert to six spades? Don’t do it! It’s not pairs!!!”
- ⑦ “Phew! Thank goodness!”

During this one sequence I now knew how the saying “I was having kittens...” came about.

No effort in the play but what would happen in the other room?

Closed Room			
West	North	East	South
<i>M. Pierce</i>	<i>Draper</i>	<i>C. Pierce</i>	<i>Smith</i>
		2♦	Pass
2♥	2♠	Pass	4♥
Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	5♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

After a multi two diamond opening by Ceri Pierce, two very experienced England internationals had FOUR calls EACH but both failed to bid their five card club suit and the excellent slam was missed. Anyone for a 'Leaping Michaels' four clubs bid showing 5/5+ spades and clubs with the North hand?

A 12 imp gain for Wales.

During the remaining six boards yet another 23 imps of swing took place with Wales just edging it. The final result was a convincing win for Wales and the 'Dragon' had defeated 'Engerlund' on St George's Day.

I did not have to play a single hand but was exhausted after watching boards like this all weekend.

Believe me, it is much easier to play than be a captain.

Scotland tried their best and ended up beating Northern Ireland 18.37 – 1.63 but it was not enough...

Final VP score: Wales 17.69 – England 2.31 (97 - 45 imps)

The final table of results :

	Team	England	Scotland	Wales	N. Ireland	WBU	Ireland	Adjustment	Total	Average
1st	England		12.60 (64 - 51)	2.31 (45 - 97)	18.05 (124 - 68)	20.00 (173 - 42)	13.78 (85 - 65)	-2.00	64.74	12.95
2nd	Scotland	7.40 (51 - 64)		8.14 (63 - 72)	18.37 (114 - 54)	15.63 (77 - 44)	11.67 (84 - 76)		61.21	12.24
3rd	Wales	17.69 (97 - 45)	11.86 (72 - 63)		11.07 (75 - 70)	4.90 (62 - 91)	10.22 (61-60)		55.74	11.15
4th	N. Ireland	1.95 (68 - 124)	1.63 (54 - 114)	8.93 (70 - 75)		16.35 (78 - 39)	18.05 (102 - 46)		46.91	9.38
5th	WBU	0.00 (42 - 173)	4.37 (44 - 77)	15.10 (91 - 62)	3.65 (39 - 78)		13.94 (88 - 67)		37.06	7.41
6th	Ireland	6.22 (65 - 85)	8.33 (76 - 84)	11.07 (60 - 58)	1.95 (46 - 102)	6.06 (67 - 88)		-1.00	32.63	6.53

Teams	Players
England	Fiona Brown, Helen Erichsen, Heather Bakhshi, Claire Robinson, Catherine Draper, Nicola Smith (NPC: David Burn)
Scotland	Sam Punch, Paula Leslie, Anne Symons, Helen Kane, Liz McGowan, Fiona McQuaker (NPC: Alan Goodman)
Wales	Diane Kurbalija, Jill Reitz, Ceri Pierce, Maggie Pierce, Val Kennewell, Margaret Lane (NPC: Barry Lloyd Jones)
N. Ireland	Heather Hill, Clare Watson, Diane Greenwood, Helen Cole, Helen Hall, Rosarie Heatherington (NPC: Sandie Millership)
WBU	Helen Davies, Diana Jones, Liz Atkinson, Gilly Clench, Sheila Shea, Beth Wennell (NPC: John Salisbury)
Ireland	Joan Kenny, Teresa Rigney, Jeannie Fitzgerald, Emer Joyce, Jill Kulchicky, Petra O'Neill (NPC: Gay Keaveney)

Team Wales



Left to Right:
Diane Kurbalija, Barry Jones (npc) Jill Reitz, Val Kennewell, Maggie Pierce, Ceri Pierce, Margaret Lane

Congratulations to the winners England.

Here England npc David Burn (right) is being presented with the trophy by the new WBU CEO Alan Stephenson.



Many thanks to all the players, captains, directors, officials and vu-graph operators who made the event successful, but of course, most of all to my wonderful team who played so well.

Perhaps I should have tried different tactics against the WBU on Friday night and we may have won all five matches.

We only needed a 29 imp win on the Friday evening instead of a 29 imp loss and we would have won the event on a split tie having beaten England in the head to head match.

Note to self :

*Lucky red underpants (worn on Friday night) do not work at bridge events
Do not wear them again when captain of a team or playing.*