

OXFORDSHIRE V NOTTS

9th October 2016 at Oxford Bridge Club

I lost my wallet during the afternoon and am most grateful to the cleaning staff at the club who found it the next morning and kept it safe for me, all contents intact. This wasn't the only thing to slip through my fingers on a bad day for the A team, who lost by 70 IMPs (6-14 VPs), spoiling excellent outings by the other teams, the B winning by 96 (16-4) and the C by 77 (15-5). As I was the main contributor to the A team's poor performance it's fitting that I should be landed with this report as an act of penance. I can actually play the game but, as I get older, seem to suffer from inexplicable lapses of concentration on bad days, making errors that my Granny, who taught me numerous card games as a child, would never commit. They're not instructive, though many of the other hands were of interest.

Firstly the stats:	<i>Cross-IMPs</i>	<i>Butlers</i>
Lintotts (NS B)	+196	+34
Furnival/Birks (NS C)	+162	+23
Litchfield/Cottaar (EW C)	+153	+23
Geary/Patterson (EW B)	+102	+21
Lonsdale/Jones (EW C)	+57	+11
Cooper/Jones (NS A)	+82	+08
Dickinson/Swadling (EW B)	+49	+04
Sheehy/Whitehouse (NS B)	+40	+04
Smith/Wilson (EW a)	+14	+02
Nicholson/Kazmierczak (NS C)	-39	-09
Nettleton/Covill (EW A)	-58	-17
Williams/Wilson (NS A)	-124	-26

Board 1: love all, dealer N

West 9754 KQJ2 A54 Q4 East AKQ8 A108 Q962 AK

I can't ever recall a board flat across all 12 tables before. Here the only difference was the contract but the universal score was 50 to NS. Extraordinary because 6S is certainly makeable with good guessing. In 6NT after (say) a heart lead, if all the winners outside diamonds are cashed, South can judge to keep the thirteenth heart and KJ of diamonds. In 6S he might judge to let the heart go, retaining KJ7 of diamonds. Now declarer can play a diamond to the 9, won by the Jack, but South is end-played to lead away from King of diamonds. The result is the same if North's first diamond is the 10 because this goes to the Queen and King and South is end-played as before. If the long heart is retained, declarer has a choice of winning options. When there are ample points in the two hands there's something to be said for opting for no-trumps, to guard against bad breaks, but only three declarers did that (against me, East played a diamond to Queen and King early and had no chance of redemption later). One pair played 7S-1, suggesting that diamonds were played successfully, but obviously the level was a bummer. Another pair played 6H, against which the 5-1 trump break was decisive. So the remaining 7 pairs had a chance for glory in 6S and were left feeling a little rueful, perhaps.

Board 4: game all, dealer W

West AQ A982 109 K10984 East J32 KJ7543 K7 AJ

The room was in 4H+1 (though Cooper/Jones lost 800 saving against it in 4S* - not a catastrophe) but two pairs (both Oxon) got to 6H. It was horrible to get DA lead setting up the King, only to find that opening leader knew what he was doing because he held Q106 of trumps. Still, it seems to me that slam isn't great: OK, you wouldn't normally expect a trump loser but how would you feel on a spade lead at trick 1? (actually SK is the only key card that's actually onside). Against that, on a good

day you could even survive a spade lead with the King wrong, by winning the Ace and guessing clubs to discard both diamonds. So perhaps I'm being a bit of a Jeremiah.

Board 6: EW game, dealer E

South AQ865 43 K93 A32 North KJ107 A5 AJ5 KQJ4

We started 1S-2NT-3S: perhaps my 3S was a tad conservative but at least I knew to catch up when partner followed up with 4C. We continued 4D-4H-5C-6S. The play was untroubling so after drawing trumps and ditching the heart loser I had the luxury of a free finesse in diamonds for the overtrick – and lo and behold, it worked... End of story, one would think, except that two Notts declarers decided the hand merited a Grand! The unlucky losers for Oxon were Smith/Wilson in the A and Geary/Patterson in the B.

Board 8: love all, dealer W

North AJ10982 A10 AQ6 74 South Q7653 Q2 J53 K106

We've all been in worse 4S than this but although trumps are 1-1, AQJ of clubs are over the King and King of diamonds is over the Queen. Bad luck. From the defenders' point of view, the key is never to play hearts, giving declarer the chance to guess the suit correctly. They certainly managed that against Chris. But 4S crept through four times in all, for a 2-2 draw.

[Editor's note: surely the balance of power is with declarer, not the defence, as long as trumps are guessed correctly? If South is declarer in 4S (as at our table), the contract can be made on any lead, even a diamond. If North plays it, E needs to find a club lead to put the defence ahead but it will still require accurate defence thereafter.]

Board 10: game all, dealer E

South 5 QJ1092 AQ8 Q843 North A963 AK8 64 K975

If either North or South held Jack of clubs in place of a small one, we'd all be hoping to be in 6C (preferably by South) and wondering how to get there. As the cards actually are, the trick is to stay out of any slam at all. The auction 1H-1S-2C-2D-2NT-4H springs to mind. However, it wasn't all plain sailing with the NS cards. Jones/Lonsdale languished out of game whilst Covill/Nettleton played the wrong one (3NT-1). Two Oxon pairs took their club fit seriously to play 6C, Dickinson/Swadling going down 1 and Geary/Patterson down 3: the problem the latter pair faced was in the sequence starting 1H-(1S)-2C-(2S)-3C-(P)-3S. This last bid ostensibly asked for a spade stop but opener wasn't sure whether it forced to 3NT or 5C and decided that 4C would therefore not show extra strength. Unfortunately it was taken to be a stronger effort than 5C, resulting in the poor slam.

Board 13: game all, dealer N

West Q96 KJ52 AQ873 7 East AK105 Q1063 KJ2 Q6

My first instance of snow blindness. North opened a weak NT which partner doubled for penalties. South ran to 2C promising five cards. With ample points for game I quickly succumbed to the temptation to punish the weak NT by doubling, knowing full well that this was penalties. On another day partner might have held four good clubs and 4-3-2-4 shape, leading to a satisfactory score, but the day was anything but good when oppo turned out to have a 5-5 club fit, meaning that we could take only 200. A Notts pair took the same view as I did against Smith/Wilson, with the same result but it must be said that the odds favour bidding 3C rather than double, after which partner can raise to 4C to invite either major. 4H was bid and made in comfort at seven tables, whilst Birks/Furnival were offered a get-out-jail-free card when they opted for 3NT, making 10 tricks. We enjoyed additional bonuses when both Dickinson/Swadling and Lonsdale/Jones were allowed to defend 2D+3. I imagine that these latter instances of generosity arose after East had failed to double 1NT (a very reasonable view with a broken 15-count): still, you can't help wondering how game was missed; even after (1NT) – P – (P) it's difficult to construct an auction (we know one because Tim Dickinson

says he opened 1NT, passed to West who bid a Capaletti 2C showing a single-suiter; how East was then content with 2D is something of a mystery).

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

West K3 J96 K643 AQJ5 East A8762 K2 A9 K864

It wasn't long before I was picking the ball out of the back of the net again. In 3NT on a diamond lead, I could see 8 top tricks and a ninth obtainable via a spade break or a favourable position in hearts. Reluctant to risk the contract on the heart position I ducked the opening lead, won the return and played a spade, seeing the Queen fall from South. I've since consulted Grannie via a medium and she has offered the view that whilst South could indeed have been fooling with QJ10 in the suit, it's more likely that he isn't, making it imperative to abandon that line and chance the hearts (which finds the Ace onside). The trouble with leaving the hearts as a last resort is, as I soon discovered, that the oppo have setting tricks available by the time they won the Ace. Truly pathetic! I wasn't alone, as 3NT failed four times, all by Oxon declarers. I'm not required to name the other three.

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

North K84 AQ104 J85 982 South Q652 K86 K42 AK10

Another 3NT teaser, this time for NS. The computer says it makes, but only the computer knows that Queen and Jack of clubs are onside. Unless declarer shares the knowledge or is gifted a trick on the opening lead, he has to do everything himself and it's not easy. I led a heart from 4 small, which gave nothing, and declarer innocently played on spades, where I held AJ103, eventually going one down. Well done to Covill/Nettleton and Geary/Patterson, who made 3NT, and hard luck to Sheehy/Whitehouse who conceded it. All the other scores were 50 to EW apart from Birks/Furnival, who lost a mysterious 300 in 2H undoubled by East.

Board 17: love all, dealer N

	106	
	AJ10	
	AK1043	
	983	
AKQ7		J52
9843		Q6
J2		Q98
742		AKQJ10
	9843	
	K752	
	765	
	65	

I've chosen to show the whole hand because it yielded such a plethora of results either way. There were high-spots, as when a Notts North opened 1NT against Smith/Wilson, doubled by East and leading to an auction so convoluted that it can't be recalled in full with certainty, but ending in 2H doubled for 300 to EW (Nick wonders whether it was possible to do even better as the play went). Litchfield/Cottaar were allowed to defend 1NT* and took it three off (and they no doubt regretted not taking the first nine tricks!) Both Covill/Nettleton and Dickinson/Swadling brought in 3NT as EW, which clearly needs help from the defence. The low spots occurred when EW were twice allowed to make 4S, once by Geary/Patterson and once against me. It's possible to understand letting 3NT through but 4S takes some believing. North starts with two top diamonds, discovering that partner holds three small: it's now clear that any trump trick(s) available will become apparent later but, apart from that, the only chance is to cash Ace and King of hearts. I was unlucky to hold precisely

765 of diamonds, so when D5 showed an odd number my next card, the 7, wasn't as obvious a suit-preference signal as I would have liked, but Chris is still beating himself up for not switching to hearts after it. I should add that West had bid the suit (!) which made the switch more difficult, psychologically. Other results were 2H -1 by South, 2H-2 by South, 1NT undoubled -2 by North and 3C+1 by East. Welcome to Fairyland!

Board 18: NS game, dealer E

South AK AK Q987 K10642 North J9653 53 A1053 J9

I was in the inevitable 3NT as South after East opened an avowedly super-weak 2H. After a heart lead I managed to drop the bare diamond King from East but that was of no avail with both club honours wrong, so I was 2 down. Lintotts and Kazmierczak/Nicholson both made it somehow, and Lonsdale/Jones conceded it. Perhaps the opening lead was a small diamond but, even then, it all seems a bit unlikely.

Board 19: EW game, dealer S

South K1062 J984 Q54 104 North A8 AKQ103 KJ1092 3

What do you bid as North when partner passes and West opens 3C in front of you? Chris became suddenly aware of a gap in our system. Double was dangerous in case I leapt to 4S but was 4C "pick a major" or "two places to play"? (We've now agreed the latter, for good or ill.) Deciding that neither double nor 4C could be risked in view of the possible unwelcome response in spades, he opted for 3H, which I passed serenely. This just shows (again) how uncertainty can trap you into something daft: clearly, the practical shot when in doubt has to be 4H. Then again, perhaps the shock of board 17 was still in the back of the mind.

[Editor's note: this is not "daft". The 3H is reasonable and the Pass is fine when you are looking at so few potential tricks. It happens to be a miracle fit – the pre-empt did its job.]

Board 20: game all, dealer W

	QJ52	
	62	
	108	
	KQJ107	
K8		97
943		KQJ1085
AQJ653		4
92		8543
	A10643	
	A7	
	K972	
	A6	

It's one thing to get into 4S, quite another to make it after West has shown diamonds and East hearts, and West has led a heart to the 10. You simply can't afford to let East in to lead a diamond through, so it's essential to win trick 1 and play three rounds of clubs ditching a heart as West ruffs. Now even diamond Ace and a ruff can't hurt you because the trump King falls under the Ace. Is it imperative to play off Ace of trumps first, i.e. before tackling clubs? Not here, but there's one theoretical position where it would be, which is when West holds KXX of trumps and East a singleton. I was lucky enough to make 4S without taking this precaution, as were up to four other declarers (perhaps some wearing a safety belt at the time). But 6 declarers failed to make game (whilst Geary/Patterson's oppo stopped in a safe 3S).

Board 21: NS game, dealer N

North Q642 63 A1062 Q64 South AK93 AQ1098 7 532

When you open 1H third in hand and partner responds 1S, do you bid a quiet 2S or a forward-going 3S, relying on fitting cards opposite? Smith/Wilson's oppo were content with 2S and played there for a comfortable plus whilst I, along with several others, favoured the pushier effort and suffered a sad fate: partner had to go down with three clubs losers and both hearts offside (though one could be ruffed out). He was doubled to boot for -200, but without a double he'd have probably gone two down anyway. Apart from Nick Smith's table, all contracts yielded 100, 200 or 300 to EW.

Board 22: EW game, dealer E

South KQJ82 K6 K952 AJ North 7 AQ98542 A3 953

It takes a club lead to beat 6H so I reckon Birks/Furnival can count themselves unlucky to be the only pair to be in it and then find themselves going one down (mind you, Litchfield/Cottaar's oppo were in 6S, which is scarcely unlucky to go down – apart from being in the wrong demonination the spade slam finds West on lead holding KQ10X of clubs). I suppose the problem with 6H is how you get there: it's possible to cue-bid in such a way as to telegraph the club lead. Even so, hard luck!

Board 23: game all, dealer S

South AQ753 A43 AJ 1043 North J106 K1086 KQ10653 None

What should South re-bid after opening 1S and hearing a 2D response from partner? Well, assuming he plays the 2D as either GF or 10+ , a 2NT rebid as 15-19 and a 3NT rebid as 15-17 with no further interest in the majors, the obvious answer is 2NT, in case partner can show 3-card spade support. So why didn't I do this? God alone knows and he sent Grannie to tell me "you have system, use it!" On another day partner would have had some clubs and I'd have got away with it, but not today. It was a minor blessing that the adverse clubs were 5-5 only. I was one of only three pairs to lose the hand by bashing 3NT. 6D would have been a better shot (albeit beaten by a 4-1 spade break). Cooper/Jones and Geary/Patterson's oppo were the only other pairs to fall into the trap.

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

North J4 AQJ98 82 K1072 South KQ72 75 KJ1097 A9

Another tight 3NT which went wrong more often than not. After a club lead you need to play on hearts (OK, the finesse is wrong) and then on spades. As it happens, playing on diamonds, which involves losing the lead twice here, means that East can establish his final club trick whilst he still has Ace of spades. I don't think this is so easy to discern. Only Lonsdale/Jones for Oxon and two Notts declarers got home.

Board 26: game all, dealer E

	AK10765	
	10	
	10985	
	A2	
983		Q
AQ76		KJ82
62		AQJ7
10854		KQ97
	J42	
	9543	
	K43	
	J63	

This is tricky for both sides. The computer says EW can make 4H and NS 3S, so perhaps the par result is +100 to EW for 4S*-1, which was the score achieved by Smith/Wilson. However, 4H is no

picnic as the cards lie, and as I for one found after a top spade lead and a switch to Ace and another club. It looks plain sailing at first but the 4-1 trick break is an irritant. I abandoned trumps after two rounds and took a losing diamond finesse, but a switch back to spades forced dummy and left me stranded there to eventually concede either a trump trick or a long diamond. It's still not clear to me what the double-dummy line should be to succeed, and my brain hurts. Perhaps Lintotts could tell us, or Birks/Furnival, both of whom made it, as did the oppo of Covill/Nettleton. Kaz/Nicholson conceded 790 defending 4S*, which sadly involved a revoke. Cooper/Jones got into a corporate bidding muddle and ended in 4C as EW, which at least had the merit of making.

Board 28: NS game, dealer W

West Q732 KJ84 A2 J32 East AKJ1204 A1053 6 AK10

We bid unopposed to 6S, though I can't remember the sequence exactly. Chris guessed hearts correctly after drawing trumps in four rounds (North held QX) and then dropped CQ to make all 13 tricks. Simples! But elsewhere three pairs missed slam (two of them from Notts fortunately) and Kaz/Nicholson had the misfortune to mis-guess both hearts and clubs and go one down in slam.

Board 29: game all, dealer N

West 94 K87 A10 KQ9642 East AJ1082 A5 6 A10853

I certainly remember the bidding on this one. Chris opened 1S, I responded 2C and he splintered with 4D. Cue-bids of 4H and 4S followed, after which I shot 6C. Nothing to the play, obviously. However, less than half the field bid slam. Chris's splinter was obviously the key bid chez moi. Nick Smith got in the way as North with a weak jump 3D after 1S-2C, a telling effort though East could still have tested the water with 4D, I feel. Cooper/Jones played 3NT and avoided a diamond lead, so spades could be established fortuitously for 12 tricks.

Board 30: love all, dealer E

West K103 1097543 10 KQ2 East A92 KQJ62 642 86

Chris and I passed throughout and ended defending 5D by North, which had three inescapable losers. Ed Jones opened the East hand 1H and was rewarded by a raise to game. This has 4 inescapable losers except that one of them escaped for +420. All aboard the skylark! Lintotts managed the same feat.

This just about ends the recordable proceedings. Having revealed my various shortcomings I should be feeling a bit better – but I don't. Anyway, thanks to all contributors to these notes and apologies for taking so long to complete the report. These things lose a bit when they're further away from the moment.

The short trip to Staffs comes next...

JOHN WILLIAMS

20/10/16