

OXFORDSHIRE V LEICESTERSHIRE

11th September 2016

A mixed bag for our opening game of the season. The A team fielded a make-do-and-mend side with only one regular county pairing (and this was their A team debut) so could be reasonably happy with a draw against a strong Leics team (-4 IMPs = 10-10 VPs). The B team was a settled outfit and did very well to win convincingly (+85 IMPs = 15-5 VPs). The C team lost narrowly (-30 IMPs = 8-12 VPs)

Performance by pairs was follows:

	<i>Cross-IMPs</i>	<i>Butler IMPs</i>
Sandra Nicholson/Krys Kazmierczak (EW C)	+39	+33
Gillian Lonsdale/Nigel Wilkes (EW B)	+37	+40
Andrew and Dinah Lintott (NS B)	+32	+28
John Briggs/John Deech (NS C)	+20	+26
Robert Procter/Nick Smith (EW A)	+15	+11
John Williams/Chris Wilson (EW A)	+11	+08
Tim Dickinson/Lorna Swadling (NS B)	+02	+02
Christopher Whitehouse/Mary-Ann Sheehy (NS A)	-07	-04
Liza Furnival/Rob Dixon (NS C)	-06	-05
Alan Wilson/Chris Cooper (NS A)	-11	-18
John Slater/Helen Lawton-Smith (EW B)	-17	-28
Simon Harrison/Hugo Huggett (EW C)	-55	-65

Board 1: love all, dealer N

	AK7	
	AK10652	
	Q	
	J52	
2		Q63
73		Q
J876432		AK105
986		KQ1073
	J109854	
	J984	
	9	
	A4	

When North opens 1H, East has to decide between a T.O double lacking a fourth spade and 2C lacking a sixth club. At my table Chris chose 2C (nothing wrong with that) and when South raised to 4H I had to decide whether 5D was justified at equal vulnerability. Simple overcalls are in essence single-suited, if only in the sense that they're less likely to be two-suited, and partner could well hold a singleton diamond and an easy defence to 4H, so pass seems fair enough. At another table in the A Rob Procter chose the T.O double, which makes 5D over 4H a pretty straightforward option. The double could have turned out badly on a different lay-out but – hey, why not praise enterprise when it works? 5D is an obvious 1 off for a mere -100 if they double but can produce a magic result if they bid on – as did Rob and Nick's oppo (unlucky for them that spades are 3-1 offside). NS made game 8 times in all whilst Birks/Furnival did the best they could with +100 against 5D* and Cooper/Wilson got 200 extra (where on earth did that come from?). Slater/Lawton-Smith were the other big winners with +50 from 5H.

Board 2: NS game, dealer E

West K7 Q8 KQ2 K107652 A9 East 982 AKJ109 1075 A9

We bid 1H-2C-2H-3D-3S-3NT. I was West, with a choice between the manufactured 3D and the eyes-shut 4H at my second turn. Chris could have rebid 2D to deny a sixth heart and promise 3+ diamonds, but with such strong hearts and weak diamonds his actual choice looks best, as does the 3S ask. Should I accept 3NT with the required spade stop or bid 4H anyway? I can't see a strong argument either way. However, I got a spade lead from J10 to five, North held DA to go with it and I could only run five hearts and the top clubs (just in case) before surrendering. Oppo didn't seem to be unduly embarrassed in keeping the right cards. By contrast, 4H is easy-peasy for 11 tricks as the clubs are set up for no loser. I've thought hard about this one but still fail to spot an obvious flaw in our auction. The extraordinary thing about the results is that only three pairs in the entire field played in 4H and everyone else in 3NT – and it made with overtricks 5 times (a mere two pairs on either side suffering -50)! Please direct me to the nearest religious retreat.

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

South Q A7653 104 A10942 North AK985 Q109 A8 KJ8

If South opens the bidding either at the 1 level or via a two-suited gadget, then 6H beckons and has to cope with a top diamond lead. It's easy enough to ditch the diamond loser but declarer then has to guess clubs as well as trumps (the latter straightforward but the former less so). No one got it right so slam always failed – perhaps deservedly so. Big winners on the board were Rob/Nick with -150 when oppo played 3C+2 after a misunderstanding, Krys/Sandra and Simon/Hugo with +50 against 6H, big losers were Alan/Chris and the Lintotts with -50 in the same. But there were other less than satisfying results, notably when Tim/Lorna and Rob/Liza missed game with the NS cards. A possible auction which springs to mind is P-1S-2H-2NT-3C-3D-3H-4H (the key bid being the opening pass!) Of course, you are entitled to disagree!

Board 5: NS game, dealer N

North AQ4 942 K6 Q8653 South K65 AJ86 J972 K2

I'll let Andrew L recall how the West was won on this one: "I opened 1D (which might have only 2), and we had bid to 2NT when West suddenly came out of the woods and bid 3D (holding 98 Q53 AQ10854 A7). Dinah was so surprised that she failed to pass smoothly and, feeling that she had to do something, bid 3NT. S9 lead was won in dummy, club to K and A, second spade also won in dummy, H9 covered by 10, J and Q. At this point West felt that he had to do something with his diamonds and bizarrely chose the 5, won by the 6 in dummy. I finessed H8 successfully and played towards DK. West had to win this but unwisely cashed his Q as well, giving me three spade tricks, three hearts, two diamonds and a club for +600". My own scorecard indicates that Chris and I defended 2NT, down 1. The only contract actually made by NS, apart from Andrew's, was +120 against John/Helen.

Board 6: EW game, dealer E

	109	
	K863	
	653	
	QJ103	
AKJ62		3
9		AQJ102
J872		Q94
K65		A842
	Q8754	
	754	
	AK10	
	97	

We bid 1H-(1S)-P-(P)-Dbl (end). It's a close call as to whether to defend or go for the NT game at this vulnerability. As it happens, the game looks safe and it was made 5 times in all, three by Oxon pairs. Four EW pairs went down, however, three of them Oxon. So the trick for those who opted to defend was to register at least 500. The only pair to manage that was Alan and Chris's oppo. Rob/Nick and Chris/me managed only 300, which felt inadequate. It's all very fiddly but a good score seems to depend firstly on East overtaking the opening lead with H10. A trump switch is then OK, as is HA followed by a McKenny H2. The diamond trick will come naturally in the fullness of time.

Board 8: love all, dealer W

West J K10654 AQ4 A964 East K103 Q2 J852 KQ102

We bid unopposed 1H-2C-3C (forcing)- 3NT. The opening lead was S8 which ran to J, Q and K. Chris played a diamond to the Q followed by A and another, after which 9 tricks were easy. It was something of a surprise to find a healthy swing in but it was one of only two Oxon gains, compared with three the other way. There were four part-scores recorded around the room and three Oxon pairs went minus. Rob and Nick bid 1H-2D-3C-4C-4D-4H-4S-5C, doomed when the defence started with HA and a heart ruff, spade to the Ace and another heart, forcing Nick to ruff high: that led to a misguess in trumps for down two.

Board 11: love all, dealer S

	K2	
	QJ7543	
	74	
	K65	
Q975		A3
9		A86
AK965		QJ1032
J87		A93
	J10864	
	K102	
	8	
	Q1042	

Not my finest hour. I passed as West when I might have opened 1D and when North opened 2H Chris tried 2NT which I raised to 3NT. There was no sensible play for this after a small heart lead so Chris wound up cashing 8 tricks and conceding the rest, despite some heavy breathing. Nick Smith did better when he opened 1D, leading to a superior game in 5D after North competed in hearts.. This is a doddle double dummy (Ace and a small spade from both hands after drawing trumps) but Nick found a way home despite missing all the easier winning options. He drew trumps whilst eliminating hearts and then played SA followed by a spade to Queen and King. North's forced exit of C5 went to South's Queen: having split his top spade holding, he had to return a club as a spade would establish the 9. It only remained for Nick to play him for CK by playing small from dummy and that was that. As he says, nice!... Tim Dickinson's oppo found the more successful line of SA followed by another to the 9 but, sadly for him, the contract was 6D and there was a club loser to follow.

Board 14: love all, dealer E

	AQ1065	
	763	
	AJ85	
	A	
None		KJ84
KQJ952		A4
9		10742
1098764		QJ5
	9732	
	108	
	KQ63	
	K32	

One of the more exciting offerings of the day. At my table Chris passed the East hand so I opened the West one 4H (as who wouldn't?) North bravely tried 4S. Two rounds of hearts stood up, after which we had two fortuitous trump tricks for 1 down. It's worth noting that 4H can be beaten double-dummy (cash CA, underlead DA, and take CK and a club ruff). No one managed that: in fact the two most noteworthy scores were both against Oxon, first when Christopher Whitehouse decided to let 4H go and then failed to find the right switch after CA, then when Tim Dickinson defended 5C* after West had opened 3H and pushed on to 5C over 4S – SA was ruffed and a losing diamond discarded on SK. Ouch! Nick Smith was also in 5C but the defence played Ace and another diamond, so one down.

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

South KJ6 85 A9432 764 North A82 AKQ107632 Q 3

With 9 playing tricks opposite an Ace and a King you need accurate methods to diagnose that 6H depends on a winning spade finesse. Still, as this is 50/50 anyway, you might expect one or two adventurous souls to take the high road. There was only one: well done Christopher and Mary-Ann for judging that the spade finesse was destined to win...

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

North A1052 QJ98 A2 J92 South K874 A105 J87 K106

Our oppo bid 1NT-2C-2S-4S, leaving nothing unsaid. They couldn't avoid a trump loser but HK and CAQ were all favourably placed for them, so we had to concede 420. Fortunately Christopher and Mary-Ann, Tim and Lorna, Liza and Rob were made of equally stern stuff (Tim even made an overtrick!) whilst the only other Oxon pair to concede game was Hugo and Simon, who succumbed to 3NT (fortunately for declarer, West had a six-card diamond suit and no side entry, so one diamond duck was enough, if needed).

Board 20: game all, dealer W

	AJ109	
	8754	
	None	
	Q10532	
Q654		K732
QJ2		None
Q1062		J9854
84		AK97
	8	
	AK10963	
	AK73	
	J6	

Fun and games here at several tables. NS have an easy 10 tricks in 4H, even after a club lead (declarer has only to ruff the third round with a low trump – ruffing high is the only losing option). However, at my table the bidding started with 1D-(1H) and I doubled to show 4 spades. North raised to 4H and Chris competed with 4S (!) – I can sort of see why but as I was a passed hand, this was bold to say the least. South came to our aid by going on to 5H ahead of partner. I led a club and the sight of dummy caused gasps around the table. The resulting +100 must come into the category of the world’s least deserved killings. We were not alone in casting our boat adrift, however: the Lintotts got an 800 as NS and Dickinson/Swadling took 1100! Neither were our oppos the only ones to descend from hero to zero: Nigel and Gillian also got +100 from 5H, whilst Liza and Rob lost the same. Elsewhere, there were 7 games in hearts to NS. (Boring but sound....)

Board 21: NS game, dealer N

	8643	
	83	
	K6	
	J8643	
AJ7		952
A		Q109752
10832		54
KQ972		A10
	KQ10	
	KJ64	
	AQJ97	
	5	

What on earth is South supposed to do when East opens a weak 2H? Well, at two tables I know of, both in the A match, the answer was 2NT. Resisting the temptation to unblock HA, I led CQ (we play Ace or Queen for attitude, King for count). The sight of dummy was a little disquieting to say the least, but partner’s C10 was a hugely welcome surprise. I could continue with a low club to unblock the suit, knowing that a helpful spade was likely to come back. I could just exit safely in diamonds thereafter, ensuring 1 down. These actions were replicated at Nick Smith’s table – including CQ lead, but Rob was sufficiently bemused to overtake with the Ace and the contract limped home. There were no big scores on this one, except the 300 lost by the Johns (Briggs and Deech). However, the 2NT against Rob and Nick was the only making contract.

Board 22: EW game, dealer E

	AK82	
	AKJ42	
	K2	
	74	
Q75		J1064
Q85		763
AQ4		1076
Q1083		965
	93	
	109	
	J9853	
	AKJ2	

Some will prefer to skip this one, i.e. anyone who opened the West hand a weak 1NT after two passes, thereby gaining access to that bourne from which no traveller returns. I’ll quote some NS scores which will give pleasure: Christopher and Mary-Ann registered 1100 in the A, Tim and Lorna 800 in the B, whilst in the C both the Johns and Liza/Rob also got 1100. However, two of our pairs in

the B (names with-held as an act of fellowship) lost 1400 whilst in the C, one went for all of 1700. Of the remaining scores three were making games to NS but the A team had large bonuses when both Rob/Nick and Chris/me conceded mere part-scores. Mine was after I opened a worldly-wise 1C as West, despite having weak NT on the card: this was doubled by North after which South removed to 1NT and North rebid 2H; clearly this showed a hand too good to overcall initially but South had a brainblock and passed. The result was 200 to them for 11 tricks. Nick says he conceded 460 for 3NT+2 but must have lost his scorecard or his marbles, or both, because the official scoresheet confirms 230 only. (In fact, Jim Mason passed the unpassable 2H after a similar auction – *Ed*) Immensely lucky, but we'll take it. Chris Cooper blew his chances of a penalty by opening his 9-count as a 10-12 1NT in the South seat, so had to be satisfied with 460.

Board 24: love all, dealer W

	QJ87	
	654	
	AJ972	
	Q	
9532		None
KJ98		3
53		KQ10864
432		AK10876
	AK1064	
	AQ1072	
	None	
	J95	

After Chris opened 1D third in hand, South doubled and North bashed 4S. Chris competed with 5C which I would have passed (he could easily hold 5 diamonds and 6 clubs on this bidding) but South pushed on to 5S. The contract proved unmanageable and drifted 2 off for 100 to the good guys. 5C wouldn't have played well, of course, but that's how the game goes sometimes. Not a single contract made around the room, though most scores were either 50 or a 100, one way or the other. The exceptions were a magnificent 1100 gained by Chris and Alan in the A, which more than made up for the 500 Nick/Rob lost in 5C*. The 1100 resulted from a crazy decision by EW to play at the 6-level, compounded when West gave false preference to 6D. As Chris remarks, Alan's double "would have been felt, if not heard, in Oxford".

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

North Q8 J5 K6 J8643 South J7 AKQ87643 8 J2

No one managed to settle in a part-score with the South hand, so 4 black-suit winners were quickly cashed around the room. Nuff said.

Board 26: game all, dealer E

South KQ753 73 Q9876 K North None AKQJ964 432 842

Holding huge heart suits caused only grief for NS on two successive boards (4H was down 2 at my table), though one Leics declarer got 620 somehow: I guess the defenders were sufficiently discombobulated by trying SA at trick 1 to fail to find their three rounds of diamonds when in with CA at trick 2 (I can't see another plausible explanation).

Board 27: love all dealer S

West A965 J1082 A8 832 East K4 76 K63 AKJ976

I passed as West, North opened 1S, Chris overcalled 2C, I raised to 3C and there matters rested: a spade was led to the A, North coughed up CQ at trick 2 and that was a quick +150. My partner is the most equable of souls, except perhaps when he isn't (which isn't often). He was dismissive of my 3C

raise, arguing that I was worth a UCB 2S. I'm bound to say he's right (but only just?). It was pointed out that even my J10 of hearts were critical cards, as indeed they were. The only good news from my point of view is that the only 3NTs bid and made were by Oxon pairs, so well done to Chris and Alan, Nick and Rob and Gillian and Nigel. I feel better now, confession being good for the soul.

Board 28: NS game, dealer W

West 8 105 AQ632 AKJ43 East A1096 A943 104 Q65

We bid 1D-(1S)-DbI-(2S)-3C-(P)-3NT, so no holding back this time. Chris's pips were critical and he squeaked home for +400. Actually game was made half of the time around the room. It's not bound to make, of course, because both diamonds are wrong. Chris Cooper comments that when he led partner's suit with SQ, Alan correctly discouraged, but he continued anyway, allowing declarer to set up S10 for his 9th trick. As far as I can see, no one in game actually went down, the only "poor" scores resulting from not being in it.

Board 30: love all, dealer E

South 1097 AKJ4 7 AKJ53 North AJ82 103 AKQ92 62

A routine 3NT with overtricks for most of the field but Oxon suffered disasters at two tables, one in the A and one in the C. The first occurred when South opened 1C 2nd in hand and Nick Smith, holding 6 97652 J8653 98, tried 2NT to show the reds. Being non-vul opposite a passed partner, it seemed a good idea at the time but there was nowhere even halfway good to go when the doubling started. As he says, only -1100 in 3D* was a minor triumph as the cards lay. The C team disaster leaked the full -1700.

There was nothing else earth-shattering to report, as two part=score hands saw small gains to Oxon on the final two boards.

I'm afraid that your captain and I managed to miss the agreed handing-over of scorecards during the week following the match, so I've written this without benefit of seeing them. Apologies are therefore due for any resulting inaccuracies. Waiting for the postman would only further prolong the agony. Thanks to Nick Smith, Alan Wilson, Chris Cooper, Andrew Lintott, Christopher Whitehouse and Tim Dickinson for comments offered.

JOHN WILLIAMS

21/09/16