

OXFORDSHIRE V WORCESTERSHIRE

19th February 2017 at Oxford Bridge Club

A big result for the county and a welcome return to form. Our A team won by 54 IMPs (14-6 VPs), the B by 237 (20-0) and the C by 82 (15-5) though this last result still awaits the outcome of an appeal which could reduce the margin of victory.

The wrong sets of boards were put out after tea in one match, which screwed the stats for the B and C teams. The figures below reflect cross-IMP scores across all three teams, after unscrambling, but I haven't shown the Butlers, which remain scrambled (they were pretty much the same as the cross-IMPs anyway). Congratulations to David Flower and David Stead on a monster card in the C match and also to Michiel Cottaar and Peter Litchfield for another mighty big one in the B.

Flower/Stead (C)	+78.9
Cottaar/Litchfield (B)	+51.4
Cooper/A Wilson (A)	+38.2
Noble/Robinson (B)	+37.8
Claridge/Williams (B)	+22.9
Geary/Patterson (A)	+22.5
Nettleton/C Wilson (B)	+12.1
Lonsdale/Wilkes (C)	+07.6
Sheehy/Whitehouse (A)	+0.5
Lintotts (C)	-14.1
Lawton-Smith/Slater (C)	-21.5
Middleton/Smith (A)	-32.7

There were almost too many boards of interest for what must be a briefer-than-usual report (I'm hospital-bound at the week-end) but I'll do the best I can to refer to the most interesting....

Board 1: love all, dealer N

	AJ7	
	Q9874	
	J107	
	75	
KQ1084		None
J6		AK10532
43		982
Q632		AK104
	98532	
	None	
	AKQ65	
	J98	

Some purists might object to South deciding to show a two-suiter with such poor spades, particularly when it involves partner having to bid at the three-level, but there you are. After my 1H opening South bid 3C to show spades and diamonds and I took the wind out of partner's sails by persisting with 4H over North's 3S. Whether she would have doubled 3S for pens, had I passed, is her secret, but she would certainly have had a piece of 4S, which North wisely omitted to bid. I'm not proud of the 4H bid, of course, but only the lousy 5-0 trump break defeated it. At the Noble/Robinson table, Steve managed to pass 3S and Michael duly doubled this but the double wasn't clear-cut for pens in an unfamiliar partnership so Steve ran to 4H, suffering the same fate. The board only becomes meaningful if North over-stretches, as happened once in the B match and twice in the C (an overall

2-1 score in favour of Worcs). Cooper/Wilson got away with suicide (not as bad as murder) in the A match when they did find 4S over 4H but oppos came to the rescue with 5H(!) , which cost them 300.

Board 2: NS game, dealer E

North KJ42 Q9 AK5 10942 South A103 K1054 J63 QJ7

At my table North opened a weak NT after three passes and oppo settled in 2NT after Stayman by South and 2S by North. Put off the spade lead by this helpful development, I led a diamond from 10XXX and we had to make two diamonds, two clubs and a heart for -120. But the bold 3NT succeeded three times (all by Oxon declarers). 3NT also went down 3 times (twice by Oxon declarers, which gives an idea of relative pushiness.

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

West 9852 None Q10984 Q843 East A104 AK74 AK72 A5

What do you bid when North opens in hearts (either 1H or a weak 2H)? I doubled 1H despite the lack of a fourth spade (what else?), South raised to 2H and partner was there with 2S. 3NT seemed an obvious punt now and I was able to take 9 top tricks after a heart lead. 5D needs routine care but is equally OK (though Brian Geary relates a series of mishaps in the play to go 1 down). David Flower tells me that he defended 4S with the NS cards, in which declarer came down to an end position where he claimed three obvious remaining tricks for his contract; when it was pointed out that he needed four not three, he conceded 1 down. David later realised that cashing his two remaining diamond tricks would have squeezed LHO and brought the contract home! That's the kind of thing that can happen for you on a really good day.

Board 4: game all, dealer W

	J10876	
	10	
	A10742	
	QJ	
K2		Q94
A5		KQ873
KJ96		Q85
108763		94
	A53	
	J9642	
	3	
	AK52	

A sensible auction probably starts 1H-1S-2S. It probably ends there too (though as Nick Smith points out, passing 1S may be superior to the raise). However, some pairs had trouble finding a playable spot. My own oppo bid 1H-1S-2C-P (not a huge success!) However, there were worse results than the 200 declarer lost. Nick Smith chanced a double with the West cards after 1H-1S-2S and Emily had to play 3D*, losing 800. Lawton-Smith/Slater got 400 with the NS cards but in the absence of a scorecard or explanation I assumed at first that they got away with an improbable 3NT, making 4 spades, 4 clubs and a diamond after a non-diamond lead – but that would be 600, so it must have been 4 down by EW, undoubled in something or other.

Board 7: game all, dealers

South 84 A64 8753 AK97 North A9 KJ1032 AKQ2 62

This looks simple enough if South opens (and for many of us, an AK and an Ace is sufficient encouragement). It might go 1C-1H-2H-4H, for instance. Half the field managed to reach 4H. However, I should mention that West has QXX of spades and QJ108543 of clubs, so EW can get in

the way, particularly if South fails to open the bidding. The danger from their point of view is locating the spade fit and then overreaching: Middleton/Smith did well to lose only 500 but there were two -800s, one taken by Cottaar/Litchfield and the other against Lintotts. There were two other out-of-the-way results, one against me when South and West both passed and oppo then bid P-1H (1S)-2D- (2S)-3D and that was that. A bit pathetic. Christopher Whitehouse can't remember his auction clearly but EW reached the doomed 4S over 4H and he misjudged to push on to 5H, going 1 down when he misguessed trumps. Ouch!

Board 8: love all, dealer W

West K3 8 KQ9753 K1093 East J10984 KJ5 J108 AQ

It looks like a routine 3NT (we bid 1D-1S-2D-3NT against silent oppo). NS have a 5-4 heart fit but mercifully, North holds AQ to 5, so HJ holds at trick 2 and with diamonds behaving, there's now no problem. Geary/Patterson missed game when David rebid 2NT only and they settled for 3S. Lonsdale/Wilkes made 130 in diamonds whilst two NS pairs got away with modest minuses, Sheehy/Whitehouse losing 200 and Flower/Stead 150.

Board 14: love all, dealer E

South Q1032 AQ104 K952 3 North A4 5 8764 K76542

I for one played with fire here, overcalling 2C for the majors after East opened a weak NT. But West simply bid 2H – which he was evidently confident of being natural and NF – and played there for 140. Had he tried a double (he held 876 KJ763 AJ10 98 who knows what might have happened? At Michiel Cottaar's table NS tried 3C and got doubled for 1100!

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

	None	
	94	
	KQ1098642	
	KQ3	
AJ954		KQ1032
K8762		J1053
J7		A
4		1087
	876	
	AQ	
	53	
	AJ9652	

One of the more dramatic deals of the day. I opened 1C, West overcalled 3C for the majors, Sandra shot 5D and East settled in 5S. It was too much to expect Sandra to bid 6C opposite a potentially short 1C opening but that would have been magic, seeing 6C is cold. Even 6D by North will make on a spade lead (which looks pretty normal). Some NS pairs did indeed achieve dramatic results: bearing in mind that 5S is cold for 450 to EW (or 650 when doubled). Middleton/Smith lost 300 with the N/S cards, and four of our N/S pairs managed 600 or 620 in 5 of a minor. The only big losers were Lintotts, who conceded -950 as EW.

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

West K984 A 5 KJ95432 East 5 K4 AQJ8764 Q76

Our oppo bid un-impeded 1C-1D-2C-5C. Sandra held 6 hearts to 10987 and a 7-count and opted not to compete on the first round with a weak 2H (very reasonably in my opinion, but I held QJXX of those in a 10-count and could have made life awkward, as it happens). The ruffing finesse in diamonds works, so 5C is easy – but not everyone got there, only half the field in fact.

Cottaar/Litchfield got there and beyond: unfortunately, oppo were unkind enough to cash two Aces against 6C.

Board 17: love all, dealer N

West 109543 AK6 A A1064 East AKJ6 73 Q8532 32

One of life's more comfortable 4S contracts, one would think. I'm still trying to recall how declarer put this on the floor at my table. Christopher Whitehouse, the other recipient of Worcs generosity is equally hazy about events: sometimes you just chalk up +50, smile sweetly at oppos and move on.

Board 18: NS game, dealer E

	9542	
	98	
	10632	
	A42	
AQJ1087		3
6		AQJ1052
4		Q985
QJ875		106
	K6	
	K743	
	AKJ7	
	K93	

This was a fine board for the county as three of our pairs brought home 4S (doubled twice, to boot!) These worthies were Middleton/Smith (undoubled), Geary/Patterson and Lonsdale/Wilkes. The only narrative I have is from Brian Geary: after a multi 2D from his partner and a natural 2NT overcall, he essayed a NF 3S, only to hear David preferring his hearts; knowing he needed to make something of the club suit Brian persisted with 4S, to discover that he had stumbled into a makeable spot. Many overcalled 2NT with the South hand. I for one got to play there and was reasonably content to get out for -50. Mike Robinson had other ideas in the same contract, however; like me, he won SQ opening lead with the K, cashed a top diamond and led a club to the A, following with a successful finesse of DJ (good news but also bad). He now went for broke by cashing CK, eliminating East's black cards altogether, and exited with a low heart to the 8 and 10. He won the return and end-played East again with another heart. Contract made: how neat is that? Of course, he knew that if West's presumed singleton heart was the 10 or higher, he was going 4 down!

Board 19: EW game, dealer S

	QJ73	
	KQ108	
	K	
	A976	
K652		984
7632		4
Q986		A7532
K		J1085
	A10	
	AJ95	
	J104	
	Q432	

Everyone's 4H contract but the outcome was mostly decided at trick 1 when East led CJ. With a variety of alternative leads possible, it seems unlikely that he's led from such a dangerous holding as

KJ10 (X) so instinct is rewarded when West is obliged to waste CK on the Jack. The play is still tricky but declarer will usually survive. Sandra did, as did everyone in the A match, all but two in the B (Noble/Robinson were the unlucky ones) and all but one in the C (John Slater's oppo). If CJ is covered by the Q at trick 1, it's difficult to see the contract ever succeeding.

Board 20: game all, dealer W

West J1076 QJ1042 J85 K East AQ5 A7 K1042 A852

3NT is the obvious spot but CQ lead (from QJ1074) soon puts paid to that. There were only two successful declarers, both from Oxon – Cottaar/Litchfield (who else?) and Lonsdale/Wilkes. At my table Sandra pulled the wrong card at trick two, covering HQ with HK from KXX, which led to 9 tricks after a successful spade finesse, but mercifully our oppos had settled for 2NT. It's moments like that define your day sometimes.

Board 22: EW game, dealer E

South KJ7 AK97 K93 J104 North 10986 1054 2 97652

I opened the South hand with a 14-16 NT and played there, 3 down for -150. LHO held a 15-count including A10764 in diamonds, which was good enough for an opening lead – and for a penalty double, do you think? A rescue from that to 2C* would have cost at least 300 but the only penalty obtained in the entire field was Flower/Stead's 500, which they haven't even bothered to comment on in their notes. Best of all were the two 630s gained in the B match by Nettleton/Wilson and Cottaar/Litchfield. The county avoided all significant minus scores on this one.

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

West KJ96 J1072 53 Q62 East Q2 Q83 KJ86 AKJ8

North opened 1S and I doubled, for want of anything better to do. Partner bid 1NT and, on enquiry, I asserted that this wouldn't be on any scattered 6-8 HCPs with a spade stop. So I raised to 2NT to prove the point. Partner tried to sign off in 3H but 3NT was now the only resting place in town. Just to prove that we aren't the only peerless bidders in the team, Noble/Robinson enjoyed an identical sequence and an identical result, +600. Cooper/Wilson got 600 too but I don't suppose their auction held a candle to ours.

Board 26: game all, dealer E

South 42 A9 KQ95 AJ543 North A85 K107 AJ832 Q2

Everyone's 3NT except at Nettleton/Wilson's table, where I'm guessing it started 1C-1D-3D and grew in splendour from there, East being unable to find a spade lead from J107 to defeat 6D. Definitely our day in the B...

Board 29: game all, dealer N

	KQ943	
	Q43	
	98	
	963	
J765		A2
J76		AK102
K763		J52
A2		KQ74
	108	
	985	
	AQ104	
	J1085	

Strong Club systems were devised initially with the simple intent of bidding game with 9 points opposite 16, a regular problem with natural systems. Natural systems still have occasional problems today, despite the invention of the odd gadget. Sandra and I proved the point here. Playing a 15-17 NT I would have opened one, but, playing 14-16 and 5-card majors, I opened a normal 1C. Over a 1S from partner I preferred a reverse into 2H to a 2NT rebid, seeing my values lay in the two suits. Sandra should have bid a common-sense 3NT now, in my opinion, having 9 balanced points opposite my 16+ and a diamond stop. Her preferred choice of 2NT was dangerous in that I had no reason to treat it as anything but a weak sign-off with a diamond stop. Anyway, there we were. A spade lead round to the Jack (!) paved the way for +180. Not that 3NT is a cake-walk from either hand on a more testing lead. Alan Wilson, for instance, got 10S lead from South. Needing at least one diamond trick, and not wishing to hang around, Alan took his SA and led a diamond towards the King. South took his Ace and continued with a second spade. 1 down! Apart from his table and mine, 600 or more was the norm.

Board 30: love all, dealer E

	KJ9764	
	84	
	None	
	KQJ92	
Q		A103
A9752		Q103
J10843		AK976
84		106
	852	
	KJ6	
	Q52	
	A753	

I opened 1D, raised pre-emptively to 3D by Sandra. North was there with 3S, raised to 4S by South. Sandra attempted to save in 5D, which would have cost 300 or so, but North persisted with 5S which I doubled for a sweaty +100 when I found I was blessed with a second trump trick. 4S is an easy make, of course, given a good guess in hearts, and two Oxon pairs were allowed to play there (both in the C) whilst Sheehy/Whitehouse had got locked into hearts with the EW cards and decided to let 4S go. Middleton/Smith's 4S was rather randomly doubled by East, persuading declarer to play him for HA rather than HQ, yielding a slightly unlucky -100 rather than +590. [It was not our day – Ed]

Board 32: EW game, dealer W

	1043	
	A104	
	Q95	
	AJ109	
AKJ9		7652
9		52
AJ8		K7643
Q7532		K6
	Q8	
	KQJ8763	
	102	
	84	

Sandra opened 1C, I responded 1D and South backed in with 3H. Encouraged by her diamond holding, Sandra risked 3S and I went to 4S over 4H. This was all set for 620 but South persevered

with 5H and we had to be content with 500. This was an OK result as there were very few 620s on the score-sheet.

I think that's all, folks. Thanks to our diarists, Alan Wilson, Chris Cooper, Brian Geary, David Patterson, Michael Robinson, Steve Noble, David Flower, Nick Smith and Christopher Whitehouse. They told many good stories I haven't found space for.

JOHN WILLIAMS

23/02/17