

GLOUCESTERSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE

Cheltenham BC: 15th Jan 2017

A disappointing day, as our Captain says, with all three teams succumbing to the old enemy, in marked contrast to results in recent years. Several contributors to these notes have commented on running out of steam in the second half. That was certainly true of yours truly (I ruined a very solid card late on with three very avoidable errors). No one was hopeless but no one really excelled either. The stats (over three teams, calculated after the C team rather confused the seating), offer the following:

	<i>Butlers</i>	<i>Cross-IMPs</i>
Procter/Robinson (NS A)	+17	+16.5
Middleton/Smith (EW B)	+07	-09.5
Covill/Nettleton (NS B)	+03	-03.8
Whitehouse/Kazmierczak (NS C)	+01	
Jones/Lonsdale (EW C)	-02	
Williams/Wilson (EW B)	-06	-07.6
Geary/Patterson (EW A)	-10	-08
Noble/Wilson (NS A)	-13	-11.2
Lintotts (NS B)	-23	-26.1
Angus/Lishkov (EW A)	-24	-23.4
Lawton-Smith/Slater (NS C)	-24	
Cottaar/Litchfield (EW C)	-24	

The match was remarkable for the rather unusual number of contracts which might have made but didn't and equally the number which might have been defeated but weren't. This applied to both sides but the better record of the Glos pairs was what made the difference.

Board 1: love all, dealer N

	K4	
	QJ10532	
	8	
	A743	
Q109762		853
A6		K97
943		A752
J2		KQ9
	AJ	
	84	
	KQJ106	
	10865	

We like to think that we're masters of our own fate but this isn't always the case. We frequently have to play where we're put. Here the North hand looks too strong for a weak 2H opening, even playing 6-10, yet whenever North opens 1H and South responds 2D, the only winning action for NS is to resign in 2H, which is unlikely. Anything else, even 2NT, will result in a minus score. Even if the NS bidding finishes at 1H-2D-2H-P, West will be able to protect with 2S, without fear of partner making a game try, and this results in 110 to EW, or a smaller plus if NS compete further. But if N does open 2H and South passes, as happened at my table, it's EW who are booked for a minus score. They can either let the contract stand for -110, or protect and go minus – because the one certainty is that West will never get to play in 2S. From his (my) point of view, it's guaranteed that both partner and RHO hold some sort of weak NT but East can't have the same inside information: he'll assume that partner holds some or even most of the points which NS actually hold and will actually make a game try. I knew this so had to decide whether I was prepared to play in 3S. I thought so (just) so duly protected with 2S, knowing full well that in partner's eyes I was promising better

values. At the table he responded 3H and – trying not to appear indecently hasty – I ran to 3S. Partner should possibly have passed this (after all, he knows that I’ve already bid at least some of his values) but it’s not that easy perhaps at teams and the result was 3NT for a quick -150. As South couldn’t underwrite a penalty double this was sort of OK (-150 instead of -110) but I would have had a chance in 3S (it takes a diamond lead rather than a heart to beat it). Nick Smith even made 3S after a diamond lead (ducked and a diamond ruff) thanks to poor defence. A silly hand really.

Board 2: NS game, dealer E

	J6	
	A98	
	K953	
	Q1065	
K98743		Q102
65		J743
Q2		10764
984		A3
	A5	
	KQ102	
	AJ8	
	KJ72	

Another silly board. Only two NS pairs kept their trousers on (Noble/Wilson for Oxon who managed to play 5C) and a Glos C team pair who played 4H+1 against MC/PL. 5C is no laughing matter on a spade lead but Steve Noble (North) was favoured with a heart lead, so the spade loser went away after knocking out Ace of trumps. Nick and Emily defended 5C on a spade lead, after which declarer got both hearts and diamonds wrong. (Actually, getting hearts right, ie taking four tricks after finessing, gains nothing as the North hand still has three diamonds: so all that matters is finding Queen of diamonds, which comes down to the normal drop or finesse position – and in isolation, the odds favour the finesse when West can be counted for a doubleton.) At my table NS steamed into 6C, batting hearts and clubs back and forth with gay abandon: no chance on a spade lead and two down when diamonds were got wrong at the end. What makes it all silly is that 3NT is just as hopeless as 6C, so what feels like a major killing turns out to be a miniscule gain.

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

	J10532	
	74	
	5432	
	K2	
K6		Q98
53		KQ10862
KQ10987		J
643		985
	A74	
	AJ9	
	A6	
	AQJ107	

As 3NT has no chance on a diamond lead from either hand, I’ll assume that all the four -50s involved going down in 4S. Everyone in the C match made it and all except Angus/Lishkov’s oppo in the A, but the only successful declarer in the B were my opponents. Typical! Chris led his singleton diamond in preference to King of hearts and declarer won to exit with a small trump, which I won with the King. I cashed a top diamond on which partner threw a small heart, so I continued diamonds to reduce

dummy's trumps to the blank Ace. No good! Declarer cashed it and turned to clubs, making in comfort. A switch to hearts instead of the third round of diamonds would have yielded the same result by similar means. So would an opening top heart lead have made the difference? Not at all: three rounds of clubs, ditching the heart loser, followed by the same low spade, leads to success. So the key to the hand is trump management, pure and simple (this seems to be a recurrent theme for the afternoon). Or maybe the key is to avoid 3NT in the first place. Actually, the defence to this isn't a simple matter, when declarer runs club winners, as Nick Smith relates: keeping the right cards is critical, so well done to both players for coming through the test.

Board 4: game all, dealer W

North AK652 K632 A86 9 South QJ1043 AJ1098 9 J3

A contract of 6H or 6S relies solely on picking up the Queen of Hearts so you'd expect that a number of pairs would bid one or the other. In practice only two pairs (one on either side) ventured slam and this is partly due to the fact that West has a pre-empt available (4C or, if Texas is on the menu, a heavy 3C) and is likely to be raised by his partner. It was an unlucky board for Oxon A when Angus/Lishkov suffered -1430, though Geary/Patterson were allowed to play 5C-1 as EW.

Board 5: NS game, dealer N

West Q106 103 AJ754 K42 East None AQ8 Q9862 AQ1087

Another potential slam, this time bid by absolutely nobody. Perhaps we're all getting old. This time it's North who sets the tempo with a likely vul 3S opening. Chez moi partner doubled 3S and I jumped to 5D, making 7 when the trump suit came in unscathed and clubs behaved. This was pretty flat in the B and C teams but there was bad news in the A when Angus/Lishkov defended 3S-1 and Geary/Patterson played 3D+4.

Board 6: EW game, dealer E

	A8	
	A52	
	AJ10654	
	95	
75432		KQ6
KQ1086		43
K		Q987
J4		AKQ8
	J109	
	J97	
	32	
	107632	

When Chris opened 1C I had to decide which major to respond with. It's normal to bid up the line with 4-4 but to bid the higher with 5-5. However, the suit discrepancy here is wide enough to make one wonder. I bid 1S anyway and rather regretted it when North came in with 2D and Chris found a natural 2NT bid (showing, I assumed, some sort of 16-count or so). I couldn't bear to bid 3H now in case partner gave preference with some weak doubleton spade, so I bid 3NT, hoping for the best. It sounded as though King of diamonds might pull some weight. This proved to be the best spot. Chris won the second diamond and played a heart to the Queen, which North astutely ducked. He continued with a spade to the Queen and a club to the Jack. When a further spade drew the Ace he was in complete control, emerging with 9 tricks after forcing out D10. Emily was also in 3NT and got the same duck in hearts but there the ways parted: eventually a second heart towards dummy was misguessed, for 1 down. Most pairs made either 3NT or 4S but, as our captain points out, 4S can be beaten. After two rounds of diamonds North can win Ace of trumps and play a third round of diamonds to promote an additional trump trick. I know that Wilson/Noble each blamed themselves

for letting the contract through: Steve thought that his carding holding J109 could have been made clearer to partner and Alan thought he should have got it right anyway. Actually, I think that finding the right carding with this holding is very difficult, especially in a slightly irregular partnership. It's normal to peter to show three trumps, so I guess either Jack followed by 10 (promising Q or better, or 9) or 10 followed by the 9 (promising J or better, or 8) is possible. Either way, one wouldn't ever peter with two touching cards if the third trump was too low to be promoted, or if there was a danger of costing a trick. With three non-touching cards one would simply peter to promise any card higher than the first. I'm probably talking rubbish (nothing new there) but that doesn't matter if it stimulates discussion and leads somewhere....

Board 9: EW game, dealer N

North AQJ6 AK4 A106 A102 South K1072 108 K743 K75

6S is a decent spot, needing something good to happen in the diamond suit (it does, if deeply, in that East holds 98 doubleton, so leading to the 10 works as West needs to split his honours). However, there is further good luck in reserve, as West also holds QJ doubleton in clubs. So it's just a matter of whether 12 or 13 tricks are made. The entire A match stayed out of slam, as did three-quarters of the C, whilst in the B three-quarters bid it. In fact my own opponents steamed into the Grand! This might have led to moments of discomfort (I was West) but declarer kindly gave up a diamond straight away, to go one off when my clubs fell painlessly. Assuming a 2NT opening from North, it does seem very ambitious for South to envisage a slam of any sort, but what do I know?

Board 10: game all, dealer E

West AK J1076 AKJ92 KQ East J852 AK4 Q1054 J2

Another thin slam to be contemplated. It has to be in diamonds, though, which is tough to diagnose **after another likely 2NT opening. Perhaps it's easier for Strong Club. No one reached the dreadful 6NT** except Richard Butland for Glos and Geary/Patterson for Oxon, which was very unlucky for Procter/Robinson and one Glos pair (yes, I should have mentioned that North holds Q95 of hearts. 6D, by contrast, needs only the simple finesse, not the 3-3 break. Well done to Emily and Nick for finding it.

Board 12: NS game, dealer W

North K109 K3 QJ107 AKJ10 South A642 A872 4 9863

This looks like a routine 3NT for NS but the only good news is in spades, where East holds singleton J. Nothing else breaks and the club finesse is wrong. Chris and I counted ourselves unlucky when oppo stopped in 2NT and got home. It's true that game failed 7 times (one Oxon pair played a club partscore) but 4 pairs brought 3NT home (unfortunately, three of them were from Glos). Our only successful pair was Procter/Robinson, who got lucky when Ace and King of diamonds were led out.

Board 14: love all, dealer E

	73	
	AKQ43	
	3	
	KJ962	
J2		AK10865
982		75
97642		108
1043		AQ7
	Q94	
	J106	
	AKQJ5	
	85	

It looks as though NS have to lose 2clubs and 2 spades in a contract of 4H. However, East has bid spades so, even if West was on lead (unlikely) spades would be cashed with no prospect of East gaining the lead for a club through. The only winning defence is for East to persevere with a third round of the suit, enabling partner to ruff the Queen. Now the unlikely diamond break means that only three clubs can be discarded. Procter/Robinson were one of only three pairs in the field to go minus, so it follows that best defence was usually lacking. There was a complex ruling over events at the Covill/Nettleton table which resulted in a violent swing of IMPs away from our pair. I haven't enquired further.

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

	K98	
	K853	
	9873	
	104	
Q32		654
A2		10
KQ65		AJ2
A952		KJ8763
	AJ107	
	QJ9764	
	104	
	Q	

Another strange excursion. I can't remember the exact sequence at my table (2H-2NT-4H?) but we ended up defending 4H-1 and were pleased to note that 5C our way had three losers. Our reward for landing on this particular pin-head? Not a lot! 3NT our way is cold and we would even have made 5C probably, because it takes Ace of spades lead at trick 1 to beat it (not impossible, perhaps, but awkward certainly). Smith/Middleton were the only other EW pair to be sandbagged in this way. It's a recurring theme in this set: strategic overbidding (or in some cases plain bashing) can reap rewards luckily. Glos seemed to overbid consistently, happy to accept reverses when they occurred, and look who won the match! Perhaps some of us are becoming a little bit reticent (I'm looking mainly at myself).

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

North K8 QJ109 K63 Q953 South AQ K3 10982 A10842

A further case in point. NS waltzed into 3NT after I opened the West hand with a multi, 3 down after a spade lead when clubs failed to come in for no losers. The only man to make game was Alan Wilson, who got a heart lead won in dummy and mis-guessed clubs by playing Ace and another. This was followed by DQ switch to the A and a heart back, so there was even time to knock out CJ and claim 9 tricks.

Board 21: NS game, dealer N

	QJ98653	
	8632	
	108	
	None	
A2		1074
K5		104
J73		AQ942
AKQ1032		976
	K	
	AQJ97	
	K65	
	J854	

North had the worst vulnerable, first-in-hand 3S opening I've ever seen, which was quickly raised to 4S and I had to decide whether or not to save in 5C. I had good defensive prospects and decided to take my chances, which proved to be non-existent. The only other pair to suffer this fate was Lishkov/Angus. OK, I was tired after a Gold Cup marathon the day before, but that's no excuse. So what if we can take 4S 1 off? 5C*-1 makes it a small board, provided it's not worse than that. The really galling thing is that 4 pairs (3 of them from Glos) made 3NT after North's hand was passed or opened with less than 3S and another Glos pair made 5D (which the Lintotts failed to find a club lead to beat, understandably). The only failing game is 5C on a spade lead: declarer will win, get the bad news and play diamonds; if he plays a diamond to the Queen South can win and play Ace and another heart; declarer needs two dummy entries, first to pick up trumps and second to throw the losing spade on a long diamond; if he broaches diamonds first by playing the Jack from hand, North must start a peter to show his doubleton, enabling South to duck, again killing dummy.

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

West J82 AQ72 KJ543 J East KQ43 J1054 AQ 1072

I mention the hand only to allow Chris to bask a little – the only declarer to bring home 4H, despite North holding A965 K963 2 A653. Clearly a diamond lead from South spells fairly instant defeat but even without it there are numerous hurdles to be jumped and he leapt them all. Well done!

Board 26: game all, dealer E

West 9873 J109 9 KQ763 East A1054 Q75 AKQ8 A4

Chris Wilson uber alles once again, this time in 4S. Clearly a heart lead puts paid to this but it's hard to find from 3 small so he was favoured with a diamond lead to 9, 10 and Ace. He took three rounds throwing hearts from dummy and conceded a heart. When they switched to a low trump he ducked all round, winning the trump return to play heart ruff, club to Ace, heart ruff and two more rounds of clubs, throwing his diamond loser. So he lost just two trumps and a heart. The key play is to duck the first round of trumps, it seems to me (Nick Smith was not alone in cashing it at the first opportunity, but this allows the defence to draw two rounds later, after which the 4-2 club break kills the contract..) This was a bad board for the A team when the only two successful declarers were both from Glos; Chris shone alone in the B and the C secured a 1-1 draw.

Board 27: love all, dealer S

	J72	
	108754	
	K832	
	Q	
Q1096		A8
AKJ96		Q2
4		Q975
932		J10765
	K543	
	3	
	AJ106	
	AK84	

Mostly a quiet board. At my table South opened 1D, I overcalled 1H and Chris bid 1NT to end the auction. South led A and another club (!) which didn't do us any harm so the result was +120. The only excitement was at Mike Robinson's table, where the bidding was 1D- (Dbl)-2D-(3C)-P-(P)-3D (Dbl). Once Mike knew that East had 5 clubs the hand played itself: he ruffed the second round of hearts, took CQ, ruffed another heart and cashed two more top clubs pitching spades from dummy. He could then ruff his last club and exit with SJ, winning the King when East played low, for a second overtrick. A very handy +670. It's not my place to judge, but maybe EW's problems started with a

T.O double being preferred to 1H: East clearly expected more opposite when he doubled 3D for penalties.

Board 28: NS game, dealer W

	QJ87	
	KJ	
	K62	
	A1098	
K1062		None
A763		Q9542
A97		1085
73		KJ642
	A9543	
	108	
	QJ43	
	Q5	

We took 3S one off for +100, only to find that we'd missed game on our combined 17-count. Mind you, it was bid only twice, once by Angus/Lishkov in the A and once against Covill/Nettleton in the B. And mind you, a diamond lead would be awfully embarrassing... And I notice that Procter/Robinson took the contract 2 off and haven't even bothered to comment.

Board 32: EW game, dealer W

West AQ1053 76 7 Q10752 East 98642 Q9 KJ106 J3

This was my baptismal effort with the dreaded Lucas Twos. I opened 2S, promising 5-5 in spades and another, 6-10 HCPs. Looked OK to me, with all my points in the two suits. LHO overcalled 3H and Chris bashed 4S which was doubled on my right. I failed to drop the singleton King of trumps offside so that was -800 when I emerged from the baptismal font. As partner was quick to concede, maybe he needed a bit more shape to bid as he did at red. With 4H making the other way it wasn't a total disaster. Nick Smith got away with 4S-3 undoubled after opening 1S (!) so maybe we were a bit unlucky too.

That's all folks. Sorry to be a bit tardy (again!)

JOHN WILLIAMS

25/01/17

(at least I know what year it is)