

WARWICKSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE
12th November 2017
Solihull

I've taken so long to get round to this report that memories will have faded – perhaps a good thing for some of us. Anyway, I'll try to consider some of the more interesting hands from the viewpoint of my correspondents (to whom many thanks) and promise to do better next time. With Christmas carol services looming ever closer, this may prove a little difficult, but we'll see.

For the record, our A team lost 3-17 (a blow to our prospects in the Tolle, perhaps? – no not a bit of it, well done to all of them!), the B team lost 8-12 and the C team continued its winning ways with a 13-7 victory. I couldn't seem to be able to extract a spreadsheet of results from WCBA website but the cross-IMP stats in terms of results by pairs were as follows:

Jo Murray and Annabel Wade (C)	+18.65
John Slater and Helen Lawton-Smith (C)	+17.29
Alastair Gidman and Lorna Swadling (B)	+16.87
David Flower and David Stead (C)	+08.99
Nigel Birks and Liza Furnival (B)	+00.41
Robert Procter and Michael Robinson (A)	-09.47
Mary-Ann Sheehy and Cristopher Whitehouse (A)	-11.09
Andrew and Dinah Lintott (B)	-13.32
John Williams and Chris Wilson	-14.29
Emily Middleton and Nick Smith (A)	-18.34
Krys Kazmierczak and Sandra Nicholson	-20.40
Chris Cooper and Alan Wilson	-34.61

Bidding/making of slams played a major part in the results, particularly in the A team.

Board 2: NS game, dealer E,

	107	
	J84	
	9876	
	AKJ6	
K96		A4
AK95		Q63
532		AK10
Q73		98542
	QJ8532	
	1072	
	QJ4	
	10	

The computer (deep doodoo for want of a more respectful name) says that 3NT can't be made. The computer, as we all know, is always right: this is sometimes becomes it plays double-dummy, taking account of unlikely eventualities. Here, for instance, when 3NT is almost sure to be played by East, the pretty certain prelude to defeat is an opening lead of Queen of diamonds. This will alert North to continue diamonds whenever he is on lead (this will be frequently as declarer, who has 8 top tricks thanks to the kindly heart break, can only acquire a 9th by tackling clubs, where he has to lose the lead three times. The defence will make two diamonds and three clubs without much fuss. However, in the real world, South will lead a spade, which gives declarer a theoretical chance. He needs to play for spades to be 6-2 because, if he wins at trick one and starts on clubs, North may return a spade, which declarer can win to play a second club: now he has a vital tempo, with only

one further club to be lost and two diamond stops still in hand. But to prove deep doodoo right, North can decline to return a spade when in with his first club winner and switch to diamonds immediately: now it is the defence who have the vital tempo, eventually making two diamond tricks to go with their three clubs. Finally, if declarer does duck the first spade, which looks tempting, North can still lead a diamond when first in (after south leads either a second spade or Queen of diamonds), so declarer will lose at least a spade, three clubs and one diamond. This is a mighty tough hand early on, for both declarer and defence. Nick Smith was perhaps a little lucky when declarer won his spade lead, led a club to 10, Q and K, won the second spade and played a diamond to the 10 and Jack (for two down)! Bizarre!

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

West AK97 AK102 Q6 Q76 East Q643 Q3 AK108 A54

I sat West when we held these hands and the bidding started 1H-1S-4S-4NT-5C-5NT-6H. At this point partner knew I held at least my actual cards (5NT asked for specific Kings and 6H showed that King and no other. So if I held a flattish hand I most likely had two Queens outside my tops, plus possibly a Jack, and/or possibly a fifth heart. It took partner a long while to mull over all of this and eventually he decided that the odds were on his side and jumped to 7H. My dummy, when tabled, offered the usual degree of disappointment. Once trumps were 3-2 he could see 12 tricks and the 13th could only come either from Jack of Hearts dropping, or a heart finesse, or a diamond finesse, or a squeeze if one opponent was caught with both red suits. Not great. The heart suit yielded nothing (except the knowledge that a winning finesse had been spurned) so it came down to the diamonds. Partner cashed the Queen and finessed the 10 successfully. Whew! Not a great grand slam but on this occasion fortune favoured the brave. It was nice to see +2210 on our scorecard but anyone who had to write the same score in the minus column would feel justifiably aggrieved. I know one Warwicks A pair bid the grand too, which contributed to the A team's miserable first set, where around 120 cross-IMPs were lost. Michael Robinson reports that after a horrid whoopsy on brd 1, when they were lucky to avoid a big penalty after a bidding misunderstanding following an oppo multi, he and Rob got this board wrong as well when oppo tried their luck with another (grotesque) multi: they went awry in the bidding and ended in a mere 4S (or was it a merer 3NT?).

Board 4: game all, dealer W

	K754	
	AJ98	
	9	
	KJ74	
QJ10963		None
None		106432
AKJ8		Q7632
652		Q83
	A82	
	KQ75	
	1054	
	A109	

I opened 1S as West, which was passed round to South who protected with 1NT (11-14). North lost no time in raising to 3NT and I had to decide between a top diamond lead or a top spade. I took the view that South's only duty was to have at least one spade stop, whilst North looked after the other three suits. Ace of diamonds was tempting but would turn to ashes if North turned up with something like Q10X(X) in diamonds. The advantage of a spade lead, on the other hand, was that I preserved two entries outside and if declarer was going to lose the lead in hearts or clubs, it could only be to partner. So yes, I led Queen of spades. After declarer had taken the first 10 tricks by taking an early finesse against partner's Queen of clubs, partner quietly asked what my diamond

holding was. I couldn't tell a lie. Partner, as a high officer in the Results Merchant Navy, felt that I should have laid down Ace of diamonds to have a look at dummy, and had no truck with my protestation that had I done so I might (on a different layout) have wasted my second outside entry to the long spades. Of course, I've every sympathy with him. There's nothing more galling than to see a major swing vanish through the window. Secretly, though, I retain some sympathy for myself. The outcome wasn't a complete disaster because 4H is a comfortable enough spot despite the 5-0 trump break. Still, an opportunity missed, to say the least. John Slater made the same 10 tricks in 3NT. I don't know who else helped spare my blushes. As Christopher Whitehouse reports, 4H did go off a couple of times, once when played by North on a taxing trump lead. Alastair Gidman had a smile when oppo left him in 2S* by West and then let it through! Nick and Emily bought the contract in 3H, making a comfortable 9 tricks.

Board 7: game all, dealer S

	K86	
	K654	
	Q10943	
	A	
Q3		9752
8		972
AJ75		K62
1098743		KJ2
	AJ104	
	AQJ103	
	8	
	Q62	

Our oppo catapulted themselves into slam via a long series of cuebids, after an opening salvo of 1H-2NT, without really ascertaining whether or not they held the overall values to justify their actions. Having said that, it's easy to see how tempting it all was. I led a club to dummy's Ace and declarer played a diamond to the 8 and my Jack. Having been born the day after yesterday (if only just) I wasn't about to follow up with Ace of diamonds, so continued clubs. Declarer then cross-ruffed several tricks in the minors, which accomplished nothing except to mark my partner with his actual club holding, apparently. This at least suggested that I was the more likely holder of short spades. But when declarer finessed the second round of spades to my Queen he had lost trump control, so after another club exit he went two down. In the B match this meant a swing of 17 IMPs with Nigel and Liza, who bid 6H and made it somehow and of 13 IMPs with the Lintotts who (amazingly) judged not to bid a slam at all. However, this hand was another big blow to the A team, where I know Chris Cooper was in 6H and went one down after again finessing spades into the known shorter hand. Michael Robinson reports another misfortune when West failed to lead a club or low diamond against 6H, meaning that declarer didn't need to find Queen of spades (he had led it!).

Board 13: game all, dealer N

	J42	
	K1085	
	AJ	
	K1062	
K73		AQ1098
A2		QJ76
K1097632		2
3		AQJ
	65	
	943	
	Q85	
	98754	

After partner opened the dreaded 1 weak NT and was doubled, we appeared to be very fortunate to escape to 2CX and to go only 1 off for -200. But we lost 19 cross-IMPs in the B match when it appeared that EW were unable to make any game. This was hard to take.

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

West AK109874 KQ A 975 East J32 10742 J1074 J8

I opened a cautious 1S as West which was passed round to South. He held 5 J853 KQ832 K103. He protected with a double, which may be beyond major criticism but seems to me to have little going for it. (1) the opponents hold the highest-ranking suit and can easily control the subsequent auction should they wish and (2) game is unlikely. Perhaps I'm being unduly critical of South. The one thing he had going for him on this occasion was the presence of a rank idiot on his left, who contented himself with a miserable 2S (instead of a double as a possible prelude to the same bid) and then supinely passed out 3C. Pathetic! There's always one hand in any set where I have to lay my inadequacy bare... Most of those who kept the bidding open when 1S was passed round were rewarded by the obvious 420 to EW. In fact, as Nigel Birks reports, only three EW pairs in the entire field bid and made 4S, so some discipline must have exercised by a number of NS pairs. Nick and Emily were one of the few "unlucky" pairs who could have passed out 1S but backed into the auction and registered -420.

Board 20: game all, dealer W

West AK543 J A763 AK7 East Q102 K1084 8 QJ1083

In 4S after North had pre-empted in diamonds, I got King of diamonds lead and switched to my singleton heart. North won the Ace and played Queen of diamonds. I ruffed and was over-ruffed but this was fine because I was going to lose a trump anyway and now had the rest. Michael Robinson reports that he cashed Ace of trumps at trick 2 (whereas the heart exit would have acted as a scissor coup) and then, seeing the 9 on his left, just played on clubs, making 10 tricks. Fair enough. Helen L/S overcalled only 2D with North's spicy 10-count (Ax hearts and KQJ9542 diamonds) – a better description of her hand – and was rewarded by being left in 2D doubled, where there are 7 top tricks. Whitehouse/Sheehy propelled themselves into 5S but escaped when North failed to appreciate that partner held a singleton diamond. Alastair Gidman opened 1S and North had an intermediate 3D available (much better choice, if available): he then left in partner's T.O double, to lose a few IMPs (500 against 620 or more) and asks whether this was a sound decision at IMPs? Sure, why not? Jo Murray and Annabel Wade did actually beat 4S: declarer won the diamond lead and played Queen of trumps followed by another to the Ace, revealing the 4-1 break. When he then tried to ruff a diamond with dummy's last trump, South could over-ruff and put North in with Ace of hearts to cash two diamond winners. Well defended, but not played in masterly fashion by declarer!

Board 26: game all, dealer E

	AJ104	
	KJ2	
	A92	
	963	
K753		9862
9853		Q
QJ10		753
Q4		108752
	Q	
	A10764	
	K864	
	AKJ	

In the B match both Nigel and Liza, and the Lintotts, bid and made 6H, which brought in 26 cross-IMPs when compared with the 680 Chris and I conceded trying to beat a game contract. 6H takes a lot of playing. Andrew told the story at his table: the lead was Queen of diamonds round to the King. Andrew saw that he needed spade winners to cope with possible losers in the minors, so he ran Queen of spades successfully at trick 2. He now needed to get hearts right before setting up a loser-on-loser play in spades in order to dispense with two small diamonds and Jack of clubs, but entries to dummy were needed for this to succeed. So he decided to play Ace of hearts followed by a heart to the Jack. The Queen dropping on the first round was both good and bad news. It meant that he had to leave a trump out and rely on the adverse spades being 4-4. So after a heart to the Jack he played Ace of spades followed by the Jack, ditching his two losing diamonds. LHO won his spade King to table Jack of diamonds but Andrew could win in dummy, cash spade 10 throwing Jack of clubs (phew!). cash King of hearts, come back to hand with Ace of clubs, draw the last trump and claim. It was no doubt a bit disappointing to find that Queen of clubs would have dropped all the time! Still, very well played. Nick Smith made 6H in exactly similar fashion, card for card!...

Board 28: NS game, dealer W

North 743 KJ964 K9 974 South AKQ2 A105 A854 K10

South mostly played 3NT after East pre-empted with 3D. This made 6 times out of 7. East might try a club at trick 1, holding AQJ632, but he might also be tempted to go with SJ, holding J109X, hoping partner has an entry to come clubs through. If he does that, declarer simply crosses to King of diamonds to finesse hearts into the safe hand, making 11 tricks when this works. Nigel Birks preferred a T,O double of 3D with the South hand, resulting in 4H by North. This didn't go well after a diamond ruff and spade return, followed by a trump finesse losing to QX! Unlucky! Chris Cooper was also unlucky: after a club lead against his 3NT he took a heart finesse into the hand presumably short in the suit (and in points outside diamonds), losing to QX and going 3 down. Nick Smith got a low club lead to his 10, tried three top spades in vain and followed with his top diamonds, hoping West might discard a couple of clubs, enabling him to exit with a black card and wait for a free finesse in diamonds. No luck there either but West did the next best thing, ditching a heart and (to make it even easier) a second heart. Well played, for 11 tricks.

Board 32: EW game, dealer W

	J9873	
	KJ84	
	J7	
	82	
Q6		4
None		1032
Q943		AK10852
KJ107654		AQ3
	AK1052	
	AQ9765	
	6	
	9	

There was fun and games all over the place on this last board. For my part, I opened 3C and heard partner raise to 5C. South contested with 5H and that was 450 to NS. This auction was repeated many times. Nigel and Liza were terribly unlucky on this one. East raised his partner's opening 3C to 4C only, and it seemed natural to double. This had the effect of the hand being played eventually in 5S rather than 5H, where, having cashed both minor-suit Aces, East was able to read partner's carding sufficiently to give a heart ruff for one off. Given that EW can make 6D or 6C trivially, this didn't seem to be a major disaster. However, playing in slam at red after a highly competitive auction which doesn't make it clear whose hand it is, was asking a lot of EW pairs. Chris commented that he might have bid 4D rather than 5C, had he been confident that I would read it as a fit-jump, then I could have bid 5D over anything the oppo did and slam would hopefully be reached. However, it's all very difficult! Of course, it would be an excellent effort for EW to get to 6C or 6D but this doesn't mean they would profit by +1370 to go with maybe +450 the other way: NS would surely not risk a making vul slam and would therefore save in 6H* (-1) or 6S* (anywhere from -100 to -500) – still a healthy swing, though.

Apologies once again for taking so long to put these thoughts together. Being busy doesn't excuse it. I'll try to be a whole lot better next time. And let's hope there's good news v Glos to make it all worthwhile.

Happy Christmas one and all!

JOHN WILLIAMS
04/12/17