

Notts v Oxon
10th Sept 2017

Nottingham BC

The county made a solid start to the new season, with the B team in particular shining brightly. Well done to them, also to the C. By contrast, the A team struggled throughout but still had a chance to turn it round in the last quarter – but it didn't turn out that way.

Oxon A lost 8-12 (-62 IMPs)
Oxon B won 20-0 (+308 IMPs)
Oxon C won 15-5 (+86 IMPs)

There are some uncertainties in the figures but they're close enough for our present purpose. The stats by pairs are as follows:

Wilson/Lambe (NS B)	+65.3
Dickinson/Middleton (EW B)	+56.0
Cottaar/Litchfield (EW B)	+33.5
Talbot/Covill (NS B)	+22.2
Flower/Stead (EW C)	+18.4
Slater/Wilkes (NS C)	+17.8
Furnival/Birks (EW A)	+13.6
Haines/Wade (NS C)	+12.3
Procter/Robinson (NS A)	+02.8
Jones/Lonsdale (EW C)	-09.9
Williams/Wilson (EW A)	-11.4
Sheehy/Whitehouse (NS A)	-20.1

No serious minuses anywhere and some perhaps had an easier time than others, as will be seen.

Brd 1: love all, dealer N

West A87 K864 QJ84 62 East K932 Q2 32 AK1094

With both black suits 4-2, those who aspire to game will struggle but two Oxon pairs – Cottaar/Litchfield in the B and Jones/Lonsdale in the C brought in 400. Well done them. The good news on the hand is that DAK are onside and North has no entry to his 6-card heart suit. One Oxon pair – Williams/Wilson - made 120 and two lost the same score: otherwise it was minus scores all round, the most meaningful being Dickinson/Middleton's 200 from 4H-4 (not easy to find a double).

Brd 2: NS game, dealer E

	8	
	AKQ75	
	1082	
	QJ73	
A7		KQ9642
J82		1096
AKJ53		96
A62		K10
	J1053	
	43	
	Q74	
	9854	

One of our tales of woe. A month or two ago I would have opened a robust weak 2S with the East hand and been raised to game. Unless South found a heart lead I would have made game because it's impossible to get diamonds wrong. However, I've been led onwards and upwards by partner, so we now play 2C strong (any) or weak with diamonds, 2D as a two-way multi and 2H/2S as weak major-minor 2-suiters, so I remembered to open 2D and was able, opposite partner's 2NT ask, to rebid 3D showing an upper-range weak 2S. Thus partner came to play 4S, right-siding the contract to be played by the strong hand. The reward for this was to find North able to cash three top hearts and South to wait for a trump trick. So much for science! 4S was made 5 times round the room (though only twice by Oxon declarers) but Cottaar/Litchfield balanced the books by taking a well-judged 500 from 3H doubled. There has been lengthy email debate about how to play the diamond suit in isolation, having escaped a heart lead (finesse for the Q or cash tops and ruff the third round): it's very learned and statisticians will revel in this sort of thing. Emily went with her gut and finessed but clearly there are arguments the other way (Q-doubleton or singleton offside and so on). Take your choice. But leave me out of it.

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

South AJ2 A9 A107 Q1053

North 6 A987 J762 AJ92

The club finesse is wrong, as is SKQ and DKQ but 9 tricks in NT are easy once West's opening lead of SK is ducked, because he doesn't have any clubs and so is now end-played in three suits! To show that not all our luck is bad, NS against us played 5C in their 4-4 fit but the 5-0 trump break was too much for them and they finished 2 down. Two Oxon B EW pairs – Dickinson/Middleton and Cottaar/Litchfield were allowed to play 2S doubled for a relatively untroubled 670 and one Oxon C pair got 4D by West 1 off, just to demonstrate that it's a fairly silly game sometimes.

Board 5: NS game: dealer N

You hold 86 K8642 AQJ73 8, second in hand at green when North opens 1C. An easy 2NT bid to show the red suits, you might say, but what if your agreement playing Ghestem is to promise either a weak or strong hand? This is somewhat in the middle, prompting a simple 1H overcall. South passes, partner bids 1S and North 3NT. Assuming you're not contemplating 4D, what is your lead? The choice seems to lie between a spade and a diamond (probably the Ace in case declarer is fooling with stiff K)). The latter is tempting but you consider the possibility of something like KX Ax KX AKQXXX as declarer's hand, and lead a spade. When his actual hand turns out to be A3 A95 10 AKQJ1063 you've just been made to look very foolish indeed. For "you" read "me". Perhaps I was a bit unlucky in that, had partner been a passed hand I would certainly have found 2NT over 1C and the lead problem wouldn't have arisen. Maybe I should have done anyway. Maybe we should change our methods and ignore hand strength, as others do. And maybe I should have laid down DA anyway. This is the sort of thing which brings on bad dreams when you finally get to bed.

In the A team we got out with +5 IMPs when Christopher and Mary-Ann pulled off the same coup to make 3NT. Rob Procter bid 3NT despite EW having promised the red suits (what a cheek!), but West bid 4D and played there. Rob took two black Aces and then underled HA, which declarer mis-guessed to go 1 down. The B team racked up +51 when both NS pairs brought in the 3NT game and the C team got +24 when all four pairs finished with small plusses. So a good board for the county but bad for my cross-IMPs. And I'm not forgetting it in a hurry.

Board 7: game all, dealer S

South K732 KJ AJ106 A52

North Q9854 A984 987 7

Our oppo bid 1S – (2H) – 4S, making an easy 11 tricks. Quite a few missed game on these slender values but there was nothing the defence could do with trumps 2-2. Furnival/Birks made a small dent in their otherwise excellent debut for the A when they tried a save in 5C over 4S (well, E did hold 8 clubs) but three down was still -800 (not a major loss against a making vul game).

Board 8: love all, dealer W

West AQJ76 A8 J10 10873

East 1093 KJ965 Q4 K4

Christopher and Mary-Ann were very unlucky here. Most EW pairs played in a heart or spade part-score and went carefully for 140. Christopher had to find a club lead from JXX (a suit bid by West) to be sure of two club tricks and two top diamonds against 4S and this was never likely. On the actual diamond lead, Mary-Ann cashed K and A and switched perforce to a trump. Declarer could win two rounds of trumps followed by two top hearts felling the Q, then continue the suit to pick up the trump K and re-enter dummy with a trump to cash the rest of the hearts.

Board 9: EW game, dealer N

	1094	
	Q943	
	42	
	A1092	
None		QJ862
KJ7		5
KQJ8653		A107
QJ7		K654
	AK753	
	A10862	
	9	
	83	

At my table South opened 1S third in hand and partner overcalled 2D. North stuck in 2S and I raised to 3D, scenting possible blood later on. South bid 3H, partner 4D, North 4H. What might have happened next, if South had passed, is uncertain but in practice he reverted to 4S (!) which I doubled happily. Unfortunately and despite best efforts, we could take only 500, to register a small loss against the 600 available to us – but untaken - in diamonds. 5D making is something of a freak result on an effective combined 19-count but it was registered no less than 7 times (once doubled). Against Procter/Robinson East opened an intermediate 2S (!) which made 5D more reachable.

The other surprise result was the +420 scored the other way in 4H, by Lambe/Wilson. That takes some doing. DK was led and Adrian viewed his limited resources with some dismay. However, he's a resourceful declarer, as we all know. He ruffed the second diamond and played Ace and another heart to J and Q, East discarding S2 (the suit had not been bid except by himself, as he had also opened a Lucas-style 2S and Adrian had overcalled 3H). Knowing West to be void in the suit, Adrian called for S4, covering with the 7 and drawing West's King of trumps. Game was now in the bag, as Adrian couldn't be prevented from enjoying a spade ruff and the long spade. I was saved from the possibility of any such outcome by failing to open 2S, as our Lucas-bids require us to be 5-5 when vul.

Board 10: game all, dealer E

West A62 9876 J109 QJ2

KQJ103 3 86 AK754

I opened 1S and partner responded 1NT, which North doubled. I rebid 2C, South got into the act with 2D and partner corrected to 2S, which I passed. A disaster all of my own making. Partner's 2S could have been false preference on an unsuitable hand but was anything but, with all his points in my suits. However, I had also overlooked the fact that 2S was a free bid. Actually, I prefer an initial response of 2S to 1NT, which works better in that I could just blast 4S. But I think, given that I've got either 5 spades or a good hand, 2S is superior to 1NT with both red suits open, partly because of its pre-emptive value. Having said all this, I was worth a game try of 3C in the actual auction anyway. Game was bid no less than 9 times. Ouch!

Board 15: NS game, dealer N

West Q1053 KQJ5 QJ K106

East J72 72 AK65 J952

Anyone's NT part-score, you'd think, but Dickinson/Middleton got to 3NT somehow and were rewarded with an overtrick! Just look at those key intermediates (S10 and C109). Tim upgraded his 14-count to a 15-17 NT rebid and Emily upgraded her 9-count to match. When the oppo started with three rounds of spades and CQ was onside it became plain sailing. Excellent opportunism, taking advantage of already demoralised opponents.

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

	108	
	KQJ10	
	KJ104	
	854	
AQ954		J2
A542		3
A83		Q952
2		AKJ1096
	K763	
	9876	
	76	
	Q73	

We bid unopposed 1S-2C-2H-2NT-3NT, as no doubt did many others. South found the nasty H8 lead and I won the third round to take a losing club finesse. Had South switched to a diamond at this point I could have waved farewell to any chances but he woodenly continued hearts, endplaying his partner. Said partner did the best he could with a spade exit (the 8). I had bared SJ on the run of the hearts, needing to keep DQX and all the clubs, but when I played it, South ducked! Nine tricks! Emily played similarly and also got the duck of SJ, though she won the second round of hearts rather than the third. We were the only lucky ones to record +600. Every other score was a minus in 3NT, except when Lambe/Wilson defended 3C, which made 11 tricks.

Board 17: love all, dealer N

	7	
	108652	
	AK96	
	Q93	
AK983		Q6
3		KJ9
Q52		J10874
J652		AK7
	J10542	
	AQ74	
	3	
	1084	

At my table NS found their way to 4H played by North. I can't remember for the life of me how they got there, but defending against it was easy, even for me. Partner had shown spades so when SQ held I could see two clubs and a trump to come. Next board please. Not surprisingly, this deal produced a wide range of results. The most eye-catching were the 3NT made by Cottaar/Litchfield, the 5D* against which Lambe/Wilson took 300, and the 1S*+1 recorded by Dickinson/Middleton. The B team did seem to have an easy ride here and there...

Board 18: NS game, dealer E

West 9864 3 J983 K986 East K AKQJ52 AK AQ105

I opened the East hand 2C and South overcalled 2S. Partner's pass promised less than 5 HCPs. My club holding looked vulnerable so I simply blasted 4H. South made life simple when he kicked off with his singleton club so that was a quick 480. I could have picked up the clubs anyway, as it happens, so this looked like a potential loss. However, no one managed a slam of any kind except for Lonsdale/Jones in the C who bid and made 6C. I don't know how they got there but very well done to them.

Board 22: EW game, dealer E

	None	
	J542	
	AK942	
	J732	
876543		AQJ109
10876		Q3
3		J7
84		K1096
	K2	
	AK9	
	Q10865	
	AQ5	

Our auction was brief: 1S – (X) – 4S – 5D (end). Partner's 4S was brave and deserved success. 12 tricks were easy for the oppo when HQ fell. Slater/Wilkes were offered more leeway in the bidding, which was (1S) – 2D – (2S!) – 4S – (P) - 6D. If you can't get to the slam the next best thing is for the oppo to save in 5S over 5D. Lonsdale/Jones lost 800 in 4S* but Lawrence and Annabel (who made a highly satisfactory debut for the county) took 5S* for 1100.

Board 24: love all, dealer W

West A82 A10742 97 AK4 East QJ7 KJ KQ84 QJ82

We bid 1H-2C-3NT-4NT-P, making 11 tricks. This was pretty commonplace but Lambe/Wilson profited from a rather wild 6NT to gain 100. Cottaar/Litchfield, perhaps over-gorged on previous successes, stretched to a strange-looking 5H and went 1 down for -50 and one C team pair (names with-held) drifted 1 off in 3NT.

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

	J108	
	K10963	
	AK108	
	5	
Q965432		AK7
A		Q52
7		53
AJ102		KQ742
	None	
	J874	
	QJ9642	
	963	

A meandering auction went (1H) – 2C – (2H) - 2S
 (3D) – 3S – (4H) – 4S
 (5H) – P - (P) - 5S (end)

It looks pathetic, doesn't it? However, the fact is that only two pairs in the event found 6S (Furnival/Birks and Whitehouse/Sheehy's oppo). Well done our pair and hard luck to Christopher and Mary-Ann. Partner felt that I should have taken keener note of his determined bidding, whilst I couldn't see beyond my two small diamonds and wasted HQ. Also I had no idea of the big double fit we had. We agreed fairly quickly that we were given a hard time by the oppo, whose repeated heart bids denied us any opportunity to cue. We also agreed for the future that in the auction shown, 3S from Chris at the point he actually bid 2S, should be a fit-jump. Unfortunately, on this occasion, we lacked any such pyrotechnics. Procter/Robinson got out for -100 in 5H*: their auction was 1H – (2C) – 4H – (4S) – P – (P) – 5H – (Dbl); the dbl was slow and was compounded by much fiddling about in the bidding box, so East felt ethically constrained to pass. Cottaar/Litchfield got the same 100 from 5H* in the B match.

Board 27: love all, dealer S

West A2 4 J1087642 K103 East 103 Q87652 9 A964

I opened 2H (Lucas) as East, South bid 2NT, West 3D and North 4S. I led my singleton diamond, which declarer won with the K. Partner could now rise with Ace of trumps on the first round, give me a diamond ruff via a McKenny D2 and see us cash two top clubs for 1 down. Except – oh dear! – the first round of trumps was ducked and we registered -420. 7 pairs in all made game (3NT being solid and found at 5 tables) but that did nothing to assuage partner's mortification – especially as this was the second time in one afternoon when failing to grab Ace of trumps and give me a ruff let a contract through (though the second was a humble partscore). Well, we've all done it here and there, now and then....

Board 29: game all, dealer N

West 63 K965 K8654 98 East AJ4 AQJ1087 9 AJ10

Only one pair in the field attempted slam (6H) on this one and John Slater holds his hand up to letting it through after leading CK, partner following with the 3. When declarer led a diamond up, John failed to cash the Ace followed by CQ, thinking for some reason that Nigel's C3 indicated no club trick available. This isn't instructive so I don't know why I'm punishing John by publishing it – except he wouldn't have mentioned it if he didn't want me to, being the gentleman he is.

Board 31: NS game, dealer S

	643	
	A10764	
	A65	
	82	
AQ82		K95
K5		832
K94		QJ107
AKJ7		963
	J107	
	QJ9	
	832	
	Q1054	

We bid 2NT – 3NT and North led a low heart to J and K. He ducked a diamond towards dummy and ducked again after Chris came back to hand with a club to lead another low diamond. Chris could

now play three rounds of spades ending in dummy. When the suit broke 3-3 he could claim 4 spades, a heart, two diamonds and two clubs for +400. Had spades not broken he would have had to resort to the (winning) club finesse. South berated his partner for failing to win the first or second diamond and lead another heart to the Q for one down. However, the main instructive point of the hand is that South should realise that partner doesn't know where HQ is so, if playing Smith Peters, he must follow to the first round of diamonds with the 8, suggesting that he liked the opening heart lead. Partner's opening low heart lead presumably promises the Ace, though if he chooses to play low on the first diamond he too can try to encourage hearts by playing the 6 rather than the 5.

If not playing Smith Peters it's tough. But isn't this a good reason to play them? This is a classic example of the efficacy of the convention. Note that declarer took his life in his hands by playing a second diamond (he could have relied on spades 3-3 and the club finesse after 1 round of diamonds) but he read his opponents' body language well. One might argue that North should judge the situation well enough to rise with DA on the first round of the suit (if he does, South should still follow with the 8 to suggest he holds HQ).

3NT was made 6 times (twice by Notts declarers) and, although not all the scorecards indicate who was declarer, I suspect it was always played by West. It might be argued that assuming a heart lead, the contract should always fail. So there's food for thought here. If you think that these reports contain mostly rubbish, you're probably right, but the previous paragraph should make some of us pause. Having said all that, it's one thing to have a convention on the card, another to remember to use it....

Thanks to my many confidants. It's good to get such helpful feedback. Sorry this taken a while. Even rubbish takes time to compile.

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20/09/2017