

WORCESTERSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE: 14TH JAN 2018

Oxfordshire returned to winning ways, taking all three matches (A 13-7, B 14-6 and C 17-3). This leaves B and C handily placed with A mid-table.

Performance by pairs:	Cross/IMPs
Swadling/Gidman (C)	+39.19
Lishkov/Covill (B)	+36.00
Procter/Robinson (A)	+32.91
Nicholson/Kazmierczak (C)	+28.64
Whitehouse/Sheehy (A)	+24.28
Furnival/Birks (B)	+12.09
Wilson/Noble (A)	+11.35
Lambe/Quainton (C)	+02.24
Williams/Wilson (B)	-05.99
Lawton-Smith/Slater (C)	-10.92
Lintotts (B)	-11.19
Ren/Covill (A)	-37.64

Board 1: love all, dealer N

West QJ Q9876 2 KQ1053

East 1094 AK KQ876 J84

NS have a 6-2 spade fit and good intermediates in diamonds, which adds up to an easy 8 tricks (9 if West prefers a singleton diamond lead to King of clubs.

EW have the balance of the points, however, and it's reasonable to bid to 3H for 1 off. The trick for both sides is to stop at the three level. However, if EW push on to 4H, which is excusable, NS must defend, as 4S is sure to be punished (as happened here and there).

Board 4: game all, dealer W

West Q76 954 642 A972

East A85 AKQ J975 Q103

An age-old Acol problem when West promises 6-9 points for his 1NT response to an opening 1D. Does East, with his bits and pieces of intermediates, push to 2NT in the hope of a maximum opposite (and a following wind)? It's tempting when vulnerable (from which you'll gather that I for one yielded to temptation, leaving partner to toil in a poor 2NT contract). Partner felt he could have done better but the cards lay poorly for him and he lost a few points by going one down. Some you win, some (perhaps mostly) you lose...

Board 5: NS game, dealer N

	1083	
	K1082	
	A85	
	654	
A5		K62
A4		QJ975
KQ763		J104
KQ87		J9
	QJ974	
	63	
	92	
	A1032	

Left to their own devices EW might bid 1D-1H-3C-3NT or (if East thinks 3C too pushy and 2C too timid) 1D-1H-2NT-3NT. And South might risk a 1S overcall (for the lead, partner), given the chance. However, the end-product will almost certainly be 3NT by either West or (more normally) East. After SQ lead, East has an easy 9 tricks providing he can guess which Ace the danger hand holds and attack that suit first. A purely 50/50 guess. These days Lucas-style 2 bids are increasingly popular and they can be a devastating weapon. Equally, as with all conventions, they may make life easier for declarer when they end up defending. At my table South opened 2S (5 spades and 4+ in a minor) which obliged partner to double and I scraped up 3H, just preferable to a Lebensohl 2NT. When partner bid 3S I could/should have settled for 3NT, making when the laws of probability indicated that South's second suit was likely to be clubs and therefore likely to include the Ace. My first error was to settle in 4H instead, an inferior contract in that I had an almost certain trump loser to contend with. However, I took two rounds of spades and a ruff, cashed Ace of trumps and exited with a low club. North introduced a diversion by following with a low diamond as his partner won with the Ace, which led to raised eyebrows all round. Having prohibited a diamond lead, I ruffed the spade exit and played Queen of trumps, losing to the King. When in with a diamond I could have made the hand by eliminating clubs and continuing diamonds, making my two remaining trumps en passant, so to speak. But I played for trumps 3-3 and went down, when I should have realised that this line meant South starting with a singleton diamond, which he might have led. Oh dear! I wasn't the only ninny. Alan Wilson admits to a whoopsy defending 3NT by West. He led a spade, declarer winning the second round to play a club to the Jack, which Steve Noble did well to duck. Declarer now switched to a diamond,

which Alan won to lead his third spade. Declarer now took the heart finesse and Alan sadly ducked, not appreciating that he had only to win and switch back to clubs for one down. Procter/Robinson's oppo played 3D after a bidding misunderstanding, so who knows what might have happened in 3NT? Lishkov/Covill's oppo played 2NT and just made it. I'm sure there were other tales of woe on this hand, but I'm not privy to all of them.

Board 6: EW game, dealer E

South None AK75 K752 KQJ65 North KQ76 J642 10 10973

This is an excellent thin 4H for NS. After South opens 1C and West overcalls 1D, North's best shot is probably a T.O double, even if this promises 5-4 or 4-5 in the majors. Then 4H is reached easily enough. There is a trump loser and DA is wrong, but the ruffing spade finesse is right if needed. My oppo played 3C+1, whilst Lishkov/Covill made 4H and Lintotts found 6H a bit too high (and doubled!). Whitehouse/Sheehy's oppo played a hopeless 5C. Wilson/Noble bid and made 4H for two big gains in the A, as did Procter/Robinson.

Board 7: game all, dealer S

South QJ5 K985 865 K62 North AK107 1074 A109 AQ3

There are ample points for 3NT but on a diamond lead there are two hearts to lose and three diamonds, so it really depends on which hand declares. If it goes P-1S-1NT-2NT-3NT (we've had this discussion already), West has to find a diamond lead from KXX to beat the contract. We were aggrieved when our oppo North passed his partner's 1NT response, making 10 tricks, to find that Lishkov/Covill had lost 100 after a strong NT opening by N (though Lintotts got 630 at the other table. Rob Procter got a lucky break when declaring 3NT by North: he got HQ lead to King and Ace, followed by a nasty small diamond return, but after ducking diamonds twice Rob was OK (in fact the defence just switched back to hearts after two rounds of diamonds), so he wasn't put to any test).

Board 9: EW game, dealer N

West K8742 10943 10 K62 East AJ65 KJ5 K83 A84

We bid 1S-4S, leaving nothing unsaid, and initially I felt very pleased to make it. However, there's nothing to the play. I got a club lead, won in dummy, drew trumps which were 2-2 and led a diamond up, which North won with the Ace. I could now win the club return, throw dummy's club loser on DK and claim (both hearts were offside). There was no other sensible play for the contract, which was made several times, including by Christopher Whitehouse.. Playing

on hearts instead of the diamond up might work sometimes, but looks an inferior line. Lishkov/Covill played 4D undoubled -3 the other way. Nuff said.

Board 10: game all, dealer E

	95	
	AK62	
	108	
	KJ763	
AQJ763		10842
None		Q9874
Q543		76
Q82		95
	K	
	J1053	
	AKJ92	
	A104	

We bid (1H)-1S-(3H)-3S-(4H)-4S-(X). I bid 3S in the hope of defending 4H if they got there, though I didn't fancy a double which would alert declarer to the bad break. Chris took the push to 4S unfortunately, which gave oppo the easy option of a double. He got out for -500, which looked like a disaster until Lintotts (among others) saved the day by making 4H. Not everyone made 4H, of course. Matthew Covill went one down, as did Mike Robinson, Steve Noble a rueful 3 down. Elsewhere Mary-Sheehy managed to escape for 1 down in 4S*, as Chris could have done, I think.

Board 12: NS game, dealer W

West A432 1072 Q107 652 East J65 K9 AKJ543 104

North opened a weak NT and as 2D from me would mean something else, I passed. We had six diamond tricks and the Ace of spades. Would I have still passed had a 2D overcall been natural? I hope so., Christopher W comments that after a short 1C opening and a 3D overcall, he and partner were somewhat fixed as NS (they had a combined 22 count and a 4-4 heart fit). Still, they surely got a plus score.

Board 13: game all, dealer N

West KJ9 K10753 AQ2 75 East Q107 A98 K1094 Q94

Many pairs were 1 down in 4H (including me) but some made 3NT, thanks to clubs being 4-4 with AK onside and a kindly diamond suit. Very close!

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

	2	
	10752	
	J107	
	AK972	
975		J4
AKQJ96		843
93		AKQ64
QJ		1053
	AKQ10863	
	None	
	852	
	864	

At my table South opened 4S and partner doubled. I took out some degree of insurance with 5D, which went 2 down undoubled for -100. It was galling to see that had I passed, my humble club 10 would have proved to be the setting trick against 4S*. Needless to say, there was a variety of results on this one. Steve Noble played 4S down 1 undoubled. Procter/Robinson defended 5H*. They had 4 top tricks and a trump promotion available after a third round of spades, but this went begging.

Board 16: EW game, dealer W

	A632	
	105	
	J10852	
	Q5	
Q87		J1054
Q94		J83
Q7643		K
74		KJ1098
	K9	
	AK762	
	A9	
	A632	

Everyone's 3NT, I would have expected. Declarer didn't play to best advantage. On a diamond lead a possible (and fairly obvious) line is to win and

duck a heart. Even if West wins and finds the club switch, declarer has only to duck once and switch back to diamonds before taking 2spades, 4 hearts, 2 diamonds and a club. But our chap continued diamonds at trick 2, which Chris ducked. Declarer was right to play a second diamond because, if Chris was silly enough to win it, there would be four diamond tricks to go with two spades, two hearts and a club: however, when Chris – not being silly - ducked, he overtook the 9 with the 10 and then forced out the Queen. I had signalled heavily for a club switch, which duly followed. Declarer now had only 8 cashing tricks (assuming my club request was kosher), and provided Chris clung to his hearts and me to my spades. Poorly played. Whitehouse/Sheehy defended 4H, which had no real chance.

Board 26: game all, dealer E

	A5	
	AQJ32	
	A6542	
	7	
QJ96		10874
107		K6
Q73		10
AKQ9		1086432
	K32	
	9854	
	KJ98	
	J5	

At last a real bit of genius! At my table the bidding went 1NT-(Dbl)-Rdbl-(P)-2C-(Dbl)-(4H). Well bid, except the final bid never happened and 2C* was the final contract. At least they saved the overtrick by leading three rounds of spades. We would have overcalled 2C with the North hand, showing several things including a good hand with both red suits, so South would have bid 2H and North would have jumped to 4H (even any try would have proved enough). So most pairs were in 4H. It's good to have simple rules after doubling 1NT for pens: we play all subsequent doubles by either player as pens – a bit crude perhaps but easy to remember... Quite how we finished with a small minus in the cross-IMPs is a bit of a mystery. There must have been some crushing cards our way, particularly in the C team, so well done to them.

Sorry to be tardy as usual. And a pity there wasn't more to write about in the second half. Still, thanks as always to my reliable informants.

JOHN WILLIAMS
28/01/18