OXFORDSHIRE BRIDGE COMMUNITY NEWS OCTOBER 2026

WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN THIS ISSUE

1. Editorial
2. Around the clubs
3. Bridge and a holiday
4. Cafe bridge
5. Forthcoming events - Nov Dec
6. Junior bridge
7. Outstanding performances
8. CountyTeam
9. The county congress - a report from Joe Conlon
10. Hand of the month and a challenge

All feedback and ideas for the next issue please to The Editor.

1. EDITORIAL

A big thank you to Kathy Talbot for undertaking the editorial duties in the August issue. And what a good job she did. I can't match her technical skills with the links but I hope numbering the items will help you to find what you want.

There is a lot of work in maintaining a thriving bridge community both locally in clubs and wider in the county. I asked AI for ideas as to how to get more people involved. For many people bridge is a chance to wind down and get away from the responsibilities that go with work. So it advised steering away from open-ended roles with job titles that might be expected to involve committee meetings and responsibility. It suggested there might be some more specific jobs people might be willing to take on. **Would one of these be something you could do?**

1. Organising a social event for members and potential members.
2. Writing an item for club or county newsletter or website.
3. Contacting former members and encouraging them to come back.
4. Helping to teach beginners.
5. Running or helping to run a duplicate session.
6. Publicising an event locally — noticeboards, social media, local press, village newsletters, etc.
7. Contacting another bridge club and arranging some form of joint event.
8. Bringing a potential new player to the club.
9. Helping with dealing, scoring or other practical jobs needed to run sessions.
10. Demonstrating bridge at a community event, fair, U3A meeting or similar gathering.
11. Persuading one lapsed player to return to bridge

2. AROUND THE CLUBS

It is good to see so many green shoots appearing everywhere you look. Some may put this down to the rain that has followed a long dry summer, but the cognoscenti know that it is down to the tremendous efforts of a small band of active bridge players promoting the game. Here are some of the green shoots we have been told about. Write with your stories to The Editor.

Burford - Amir Hashimi's group have moved venue to Shilton School on a Tuesday afternoon at 4 o'clock, playing 12 boards and finishing before 6 o'clock. One week each month they have a seminar provided by Christine Bishop and one week each month they are joined by "experts" from Oxford and Witney. Thank you to all those who have contributed .

Burford Golf Club - on a Monday afternoon you will often find a bridge session taking place in the clubhouse. They are also playing regularly online. We have a contact there if you would like to join in.

Chipping Norton - now moved to Chadlington Memorial Hall, a move necessary to accommodate all the extra players that have been encouraged to attend. Hats off to the secretary, Ann Bunker, we say, but no doubt it is a team effort.

David Lloyd Gym - Kathy Talbot is encouraging gym members to hone their minds as well as their bodies with regular bridge workouts if that is the appropriate term.

Kings Sutton - in our previous issue Ken Langdon reported on Kings Sutton Bridge Club's efforts to revitalise itself following Covid. Their annual Teams Challenge was held in October and provided a very relaxed and enjoyable evening's bridge for 18 teams. To great applause it was announced that the Trophy will be renamed The Ken Langdon Challenge Trophy. Very well deserved, Ken.

Oxford, Wallingford and Abbey Smith - all three are teaching high levels of new students this year. Teachers, keep up the good work.

The most difficult part can be that “toe in the water” moment when a student first joins a club duplicate. We can all help by ensuring that newcomers are made to feel welcome and are not overawed. Mentors step forward please.

Thame - Barbara Jordan reports that she is now teaching four groups of students at Thame. She says “My latest group that I’m teaching, I have 14 students, and they are all meeting in a local pub. I’m not being charged for the room as the landlord is really happy to have a dozen people in his pub on a quiet Wednesday evening buying drinks and keeping his staff busy. They’re a very jolly group of students!!” Food for thought there. On the theme of helping other clubs, she says that some of her students go on to play at Haddenham and Wallingford rather than her own club Thame. No doubt they will come back to Thame once they have more experience and confidence obtained at gentler duplicates.

Witney U3A - Doreen Kennard, who helps to run the Thursday group at Witney U3A, writes:
“We have recently started a new Beginner’s bridge course, which will run for 10 weeks on Friday mornings and has 20 members. Our Improver’s bridge group has increased in numbers and has 20 members, and they meet weekly on Tuesday afternoons.
The Duplicate bridge group (which was the original beginner’s group) has 40 members. They meet on 2nd and 4th Thursday afternoon in the month. and enter charity competitions promoted by ECatsBridge. The next competition is on Thursday 12th November for Children in Need.
The fourth group also with 40 members meet on 1st and 3rd Friday afternoon in the month to play Chicago bridge and eat cake. There is overlap of about 50% of the members who play on a Thursday and Friday afternoon.”
That makes all told at least 100 bridge players at Witney U3A. She thinks that some of their players are ready to spread their wings and play at other clubs, where we are sure they will be very welcome. The door is open for them to engage with other clubs and maybe some friendly matches would make a good start or they might consider joining the Wessex League.

Doreen says that they are considering changing to using the BriAnBridge app for scoring, as has been used in our recent cafe bridge events. We will be interested to hear how that develops.

All of these success stories depend upon people and often people from different clubs, showing how much we can all help each other. A big thank you is due to all those who make these things happen.

3. BRIDGE AND A HOLIDAY

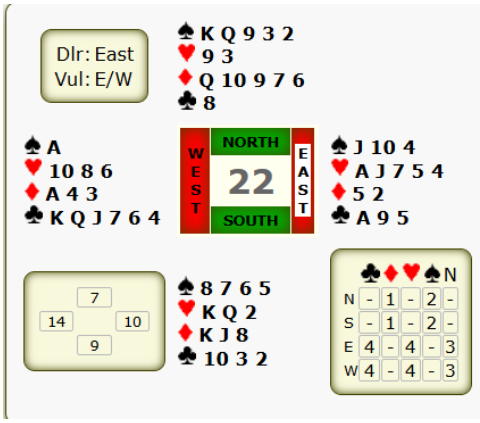
Kathy Talbot writes:

Have you ever thought about playing bridge overseas? You can combine a great location, good food, relaxation and of course lots of like-minded people to play bridge against.

Some companies run bridge holidays with the emphasis on relaxation. The EBU runs overseas congresses that play rather more bridge and are more challenging. So. you choose your level then just go and enjoy yourself.

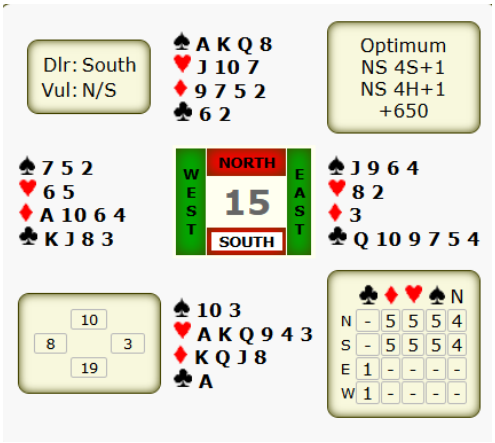
The last EBU Overseas Congress was in Rijeka, Croatia. The hotel was amazing: all rooms had windows occupying an entire wall with stunning sea views and all had balconies. The curtains were operated by a switch by the bed. All very luxurious. The food was good, though the drinks were a little expensive. During our one day off, (with bridge just in the evening) we did a walking tour of the ancient town of Rovinj and enjoyed a good lunch.

Personally, my bridge was not a great success. But others from Oxfordshire did rather better. Graham Orsmond and Jackie Fairclough won the Swiss teams, playing with Gad Chadha and Debbie Sandford from London. Graham stresses the importance of getting in the auction.



Here, North has great shape and after two passes, when West opens 1C, North should overcall 1S. East should bid 2H, forcing, showing five hearts. South will raise to the level of the fit, bidding 3S. Now, when West bids 4H, North has a good save in 4S. Two off doubled for -300, when 4H is making +620.

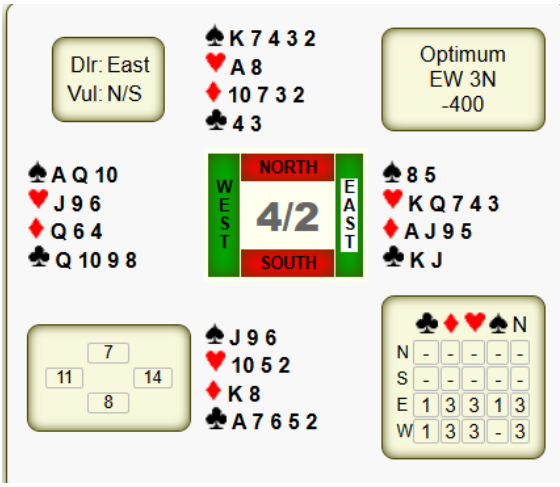
Peter Randall and Liza Furnival won the cross-IMPed pairs. Instrumental in their success was this slam hand.



What slam do you want to be in? Peter and Liza were in 6H. This goes off on a diamond lead, as the defence get a diamond ruff. 6D also goes off because the diamonds break 4-1 offside so there are two trump losers. In practice, only two out of nineteen pairs defeated 6H.

In hearts, you have a simple 12 tricks: 3 spades, 6 hearts, 2 diamonds and a club. The only possible threat is a ruff (in diamonds). In diamonds, however, you need the diamond suit itself to play for just one loser (not an issue in hearts). And also with 9 hearts and 8 diamonds between the hands, a heart ruff in a diamond contract is more likely than a diamond ruff in a heart one. Sadly, I was in 6♦, down one.

Mid September saw us going to the Guernsey Congress. This was full-time bridge, starting every day after lunch. Held in Les Cothils, a beautifully sited old nunnery, the field saw a wide spread of ability: from novices to international players. This hand from the Swiss teams saw Graham, Jackie, Denis and me gain 11 IMPs.



At our table, West decided to bid 3NT rather than 4H: no ruffing ability and good stops in the black suits. North led 2S. Declarer just forced out AH. On a diamond switch, take AD and force out AC, playing KC to unblock. Playing in 4H, there are always four losers provided South leads a spade. If played by East, North must lead a diamond. South then switches to a spade when in. Graham and Jackie defeated 4H at the other table.

There it is: a flavour of bridge holidays! I hope to see many more of you overseas in the future.

4. CAFE BRIDGE

On September 15 one hundred players gathered in Henley to play in the first of Oxfordshire's two cafe bridge events this year. The second will be in Burford on November 9. Much credit for the organisation at Henley this year goes to Jayne Castle in conjunction with BriAN Bridge.

The event raised £1900 for the charity Flexicare, an Oxfordshire charity that gives families with a severely disabled child a break caring for children in their own home with an appropriately trained adult or two carers so that siblings can have one-to-one fun too.

Here on the left is Jayne presenting the cheque to Maureen Tossi, manager of Flexicare:



5. FORTHCOMING EVENTS

On the Oxfordshire Bridge Association website there are details of three events:

Handicap Pairs on November 8

Cafe Bridge in Burford on November 9

County Swiss Pairs on December 8

On the English Bridge Union website there are details of several events including:

Jack High Pairs on November 8

Year-end Congress in London from December 27 to 30

Events you can watch on RealBridge (kibitz.realbridge.online):

Tollemache Cup Qualifier - Oxfordshire will be in one of two groups from which the top four counties in each qualify for the final next year - November 7 and 8

National Teams League - every Wednesday from 7.50pm and often featuring at least two Oxfordshire pairs - Nick Smith and Alan Wilson playing for Objectivity and Finn Clark and Stuart Forsyth playing for North South as well as occasionally some others

6. JUNIOR BRIDGE

Oxfordshire has a long tradition of bringing young players into the game. Over many years two people have made significant contributions - Joan Bennett has organised taking minibridge and bridge into Oxfordshire's primary schools whilst Holly Kilpatrick and has led the Junior Bridge Club in Oxford.

Joan Bennett now serves as the Youth Bridge Coordinator / Youth Officer for the bridge charity EBED. Joan writes this month about efforts to revive the Oxford University Bridge Club: "Thought you might all be glad to know that this is now really alive again. Having been pulled back to life last year and won the Portland Bowl it was

still not a club, struggling to run 1 or 2 tables. Henry and Linus have worked really hard, had a stall at the Freshers Fair and last night had 3 tables of beginners being taught by Chris Derrick as well as 5 tables of players of widely differing standards. Both lads were really worried that although lots of people had signed up at the FF, no one would turn up but they needn't have done. All the pizza went and they are now looking for a bigger room." Well done Henry and Linus and Joan and EBED for supporting them.

You may have read in English Bridge of the exploits of the England Women's Team winning the European Team Championships in Latvia in July. Joan writes as follows:
"Lucy Norman and Lottie Bedford both aged 19. Played very well in the England women's team that won the European gold medal. Alison Nicolson had Lucy in her minibridge group at our first camp in Cheltenham(2016), and although she lives in Dorset, she is now at Worcester College, Oxford and was part of the team with Nick who won the Portland Bowl in April.
Lottie Bedford was at St Helen and St Catherine in Abingdon with Jo Murray. She lives in Berkshire. She is now at Bristol and was in the losing finalist team for the Portland Bowl. Lottie has been to OBC for junior events but was not part of Holly's group."
Lottie was also a member of the winning team at the Oxfordshire Congress in August.
So there is quite a big connection with Oxfordshire in this highly talented pair.

Readers will recall that earlier this year Holly Kilpatrick retired from her role of running the Oxford Junior Bridge Club. With gratitude for years of work dedicated to youth bridge the Association presented her with a Garden Centre voucher. Here she is with her purchases:



7. OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES

Congratulations go to:
Diana Nettleton who teamed up with Tosh McIntosh, David Gold and Tom Paske to carry off the Crockfords Cup - a prestigious national success
Nick Smith and Alan Wilson for coming second in the Division 1 of the summer series of the National League playing in the Objectivity team
Finn Clark and Stuart Forsyth for coming second in the Division 2 of the summer series of the National League playing in the North South team and being promoted to Division 1 for the autumn series

And more locally:
Kathy and Denis Talbot, Graham Orsmond and Jackie Fairclough for winning the Harwell Cup
John Howie and Helen Morton, Liz Madeley and Gill Weeks for winning N/S and E/W respectively in the Henley Cafe Bridge

As well as overseas:
Kathy and Denis Talbot, Graham Orsmond and Jackie Fairclough for second place in the Swiss Teams at the Guernsey Congress. They also came second and fourth respectively in the Senior Pairs And a considerable Oxfordshire contingent played in the EBU Congress in Croatia. In addition to the successes reported by Kathy in item 3 above Ursula Bowler and Pat Lewis won the BC stratification prize in the Teams event.

8. COUNTY TEAM

A new season of the Midlands Counties League started in September with four matches against Leicestershire. In these Oxfordshire was successful at all levels, the first team winning 17-3, the second team winning 16-4, the third team winning 20-0 and the 9-High team winning 11-9. After Derbyshire withdrew from the league there are now seven counties involved. These are Gloucestershire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. After a bye in October, November's match will be against Gloucestershire.

If any reader would like to be considered for selection the county is always looking for newcomers. Details of how to apply can be found on the county website.

On November 7 and 8 the county will be fielding a team in the Tollemache Qualifier. You can watch this on RealBridge - see under Forthcoming Events above.

9. THE COUNTY CONGRESS

Oxfordshire Bridge always welcomes new players. It is particularly good when those players are young! Joseph Conlon reports below on the Oxfordshire Congress, in which he played with his son, Alex. Alex is 16 but at the time of playing was 15. They also made their debut in September playing inter-county teams of eight against Leicestershire and produced an impressive set of cross-IMPS.

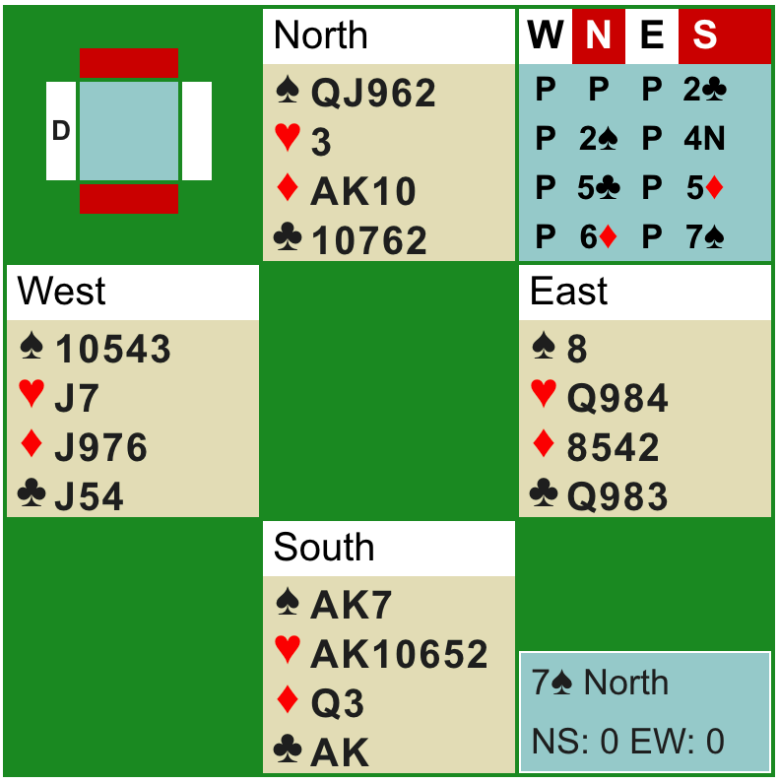
GRAND SLAMS ARE LIKE LONDON BUSES

Just over 2 years ago, our family (Lucy, me, Alex and George) attended a taster session at Wallingford Bridge Club. I had played some kitchen bridge at home as a child, Lucy had played a bit at university, but that was it. Young minds learn easily: Alex (and then George) was soon attending Holly Kilpatrick's junior club in Oxford, started playing club duplicates, joined the national junior squad system and rapidly had 50 pages of bidding system to absorb. Meanwhile, we adults were learning to keep up.

Fast forward to the present day. Berrick and Roke Village Hall. Northampton. Eastbourne. Reading. A windowless hotel basement in west London. Many and varied were the exotic locations to which bridge had taken us.

But up until this August, Alex and I had played around 1500 boards together and were still yet to bid a grand slam. Of course, there had been many cases where 13 tricks were there for the taking, but at most pairs sessions – even more so in club duplicates -- there is precious little equity available in bidding grand slams unless you can count the tricks in your partner's blood. For what shall it profit a man at matchpoint pairs, if he shall bid a grand slam when the room stops in game? -- as the Bible almost said.

The scene now shifts to Sunday 16th August, the second day of the Oxfordshire Congress at Abingdon school. Pairs had been on Saturday and Sunday was Teams and IMP scoring. A nice venue, a friendly atmosphere, lots of tables – and in the second match Alex and I, playing NS against Kathy + Denis Talbot EW, pick up the following hands:

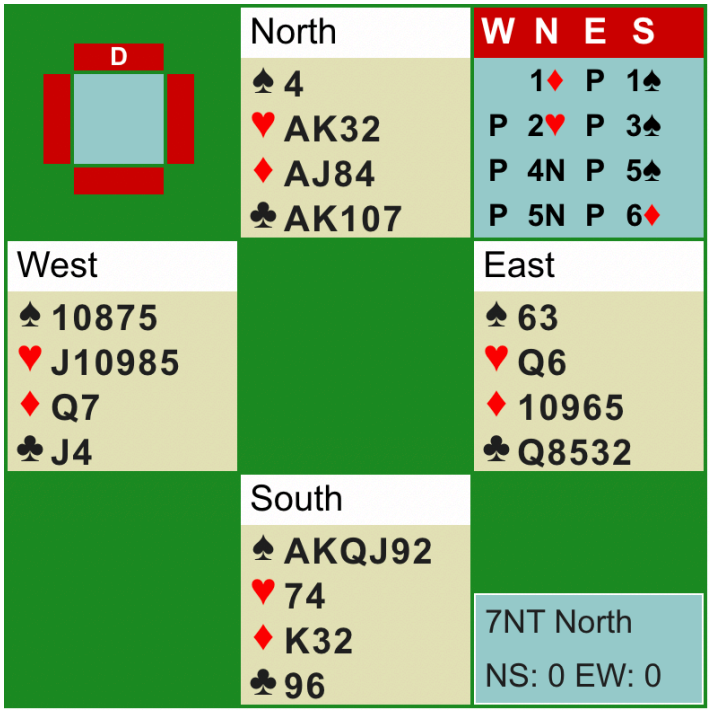


2nd seat at unfavourable vulnerability, Alex declined to open as North and the auction came round to me. I have a big hand and was not expecting the positive spade response to my 2♣ opening.

Probably, softly-softly-catchee-cuebid, it is better to go more slowly with 3♠, but I decided there and then we were playing in slam and launched Blackwood. After the 5♦ Queen enquiry came back with Alex showing the trump Queen plus the King of Diamonds, I took the plunge and for the first time reached into the pristine 7 row of the bidding box. Not alone -- around 1/3 of the field would play this hand as a grand slam, mostly in spades.

Following a diamond lead, Alex played to establish the 13th trick by ruffing out hearts, relying on spades 3-2 and hearts no worse than 4-2 or, alternatively, spades 4-1 and hearts 3-3. The line works about 70% of the time but not – alas – on this layout. Instead, the winning line relies on ruffing a club in dummy where (as happens) it will not be overruffed.

In any case – one down in an IMPed vulnerable grand slam. Ouch. Keep smiling, keep on on keeping on, and next board please –



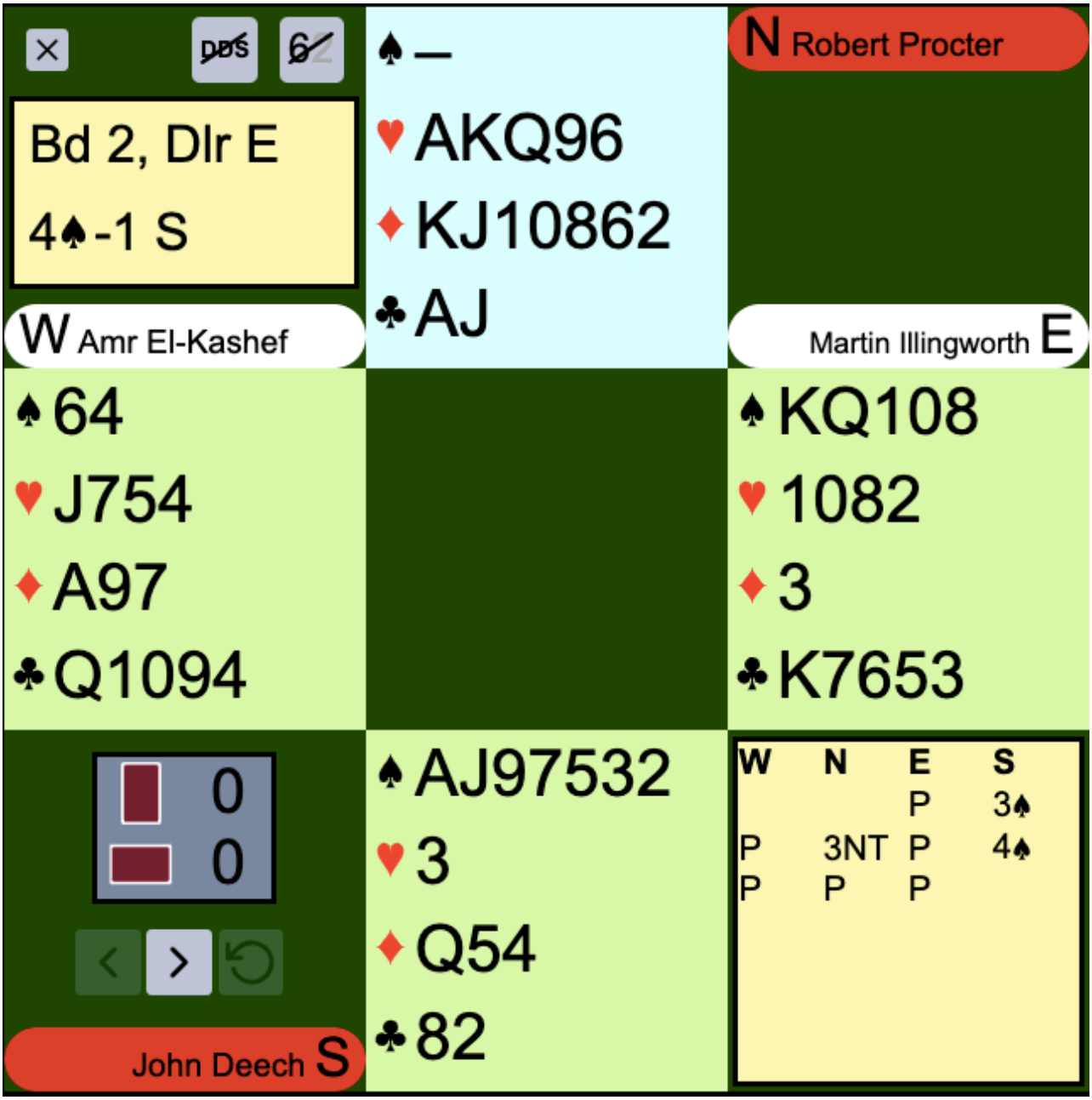
Alex reversed; I showed my big spade suit; he launched Blackwood and heard about the AKQ of spades; he asked for more and heard about the diamond King – and, undeterred by the previous board, out came 7NT. `Good luck partner' was said with slightly more than usual feeling as I put dummy down. But just as he was about to take the diamond finesse at the end, the diamond Queen dropped doubleton and 7NT came home.

Two vulnerable grand slams bid on successive boards, one missing and one making. It is likely to be more than another 1500 boards before we do that again.

10. HAND OF THE MONTH AND A CHALLENGE

Here is a hand from the Oxfordshire X-IMP Pairs in October:

This hand was played nine times, five in division 1 and four in division 2. Below is the bidding at my table. In division 2 all four Souths opened at the three level and the Norths found four different responses, 3NT (above), 4♦, 4♥ and 4♠. Each is a gamble with



a reasonable chance of finding the right hand opposite. If a game is there we want to be in it. A computer programme might work out which is the most likely, but for mere humans it looks like a gamble. Bidding diamonds has the advantage of offering a choice of two contracts, whereas bidding hearts, spades or no trumps will end the auction, but each choice might be right. The 4♦ was raised to 5♦ making with an overtrick and 4♥ was also made. 4♠ was one off at the two tables as in fact 3NT would have been. So two N/S's achieved a game swing.

What about division 1? Well maybe they were more cautious because of the adverse vulnerability. Some maybe play that a first or second seat vulnerable pre-empt shows two of the top three honours, a rule that pays off on the occasions that partner has the third honour and can bid 3NT with fewer values than the North hand this time. For whatever reason four of the five South's opened a weak 2♠. However they still did not find the diamond fit, all ending in 3NT or 4♠ and going one down for a flat board in the division.

So here was a hand where the only two winners were the pairs forced to gamble by their partner's three-level opener and the pairs who had more space to explore still didn't manage to find the best contracts. What would you and your partner have done? How can the diamond slam be reached? Maybe a sequence starting 2♠ - 3♦ - 4♦ would have had a chance. Suggestions to the editor please.