

Captains report by Rick Hanley.

Suffolk vs Norfolk, 14th January 2024.

First of all, a declarer problem for you from the match. The answer is at the end of the report.

You are North as declarer in 4h and the lead is a low spade. In the bidding East shows at least 10 cards in the minors. The lead was a low spade to your King, plan your play.

♠K
♥97632
♦A764
♣A104

♠AQ87654
♥A54
♦K
♣32

Suffolk bounced back reasonably well from three defeats in their previous ECL match against Herts. Most importantly, the C team kept their championship hopes alive with a 16-4 victory. All four pairs performed well and finished in the top half of the cross-imp table. They are now just 3 points behind Herts with both teams having one more match to play. Exciting times.

The B team lost by 12-8. They were a little unlucky because Suffolk B1 were +37 and B2 were -28. So, you might think that Suffolk would have won by 9 imps. However, it doesn't work quite like that because of the way that teams of 8 matches are scored in the ECL. Take board 26 as an example. Both Suffolk pairs bid and made 3NT for plus 600 each. Both Norfolk pairs bid and made just 1NT for plus 90 each. That made an overall score of plus 1020 for a gain of 14 imps for Suffolk. If, however, the matches were scored as two separate teams of 4, then Suffolk would have been plus 510 in each match. Both Suffolk teams would have then gained 11 imps. So that explains how these discrepancies can come about. Sadly, the scoring system was in Norfolk's favour. There are fairer ways of scoring teams of eight matches (as in the Tollemache event) but these are considered too complicated for ECL matches. Nevertheless, congratulations to David and Helen for finishing top of the cross-imp table.

As far as the A team goes, well done to Dennis who stepped up to play for the second time in the absence of his regular partner (Jo Harpur). On both occasions he achieved a positive cross-imp score. Jeff and Michael also achieved a positive score largely due to their bidding a grand slam on board 28. At my table, the Norfolk pair went all round the houses and ended up in only 6NT. Jeff sat North and held:

♠AQ10
♥AQ1075
♦QJ10
♣K7

Michael sat South and held:

♠4
♥K6
♦AK42
♣AQJ1084

The bidding went 1H by Jeff, 2C (game forcing) by Michael, 2NT (12-14 or 18-19), 6NT (bid 7 if 18-19), 7NT. Simple and elegant and a good advert for a 2/1 bidding system.

The date of the next match is March 17th.

Declarer problem:

You must play a heart to the Ace. East plays the queen and west plays the 8. Almost certainly east is now out of trumps. You now play two top spades and ruff a spade. Now a diamond to the King, a club to the Ace, ruff a diamond on the table and play spades. West is now powerless. Unfortunately, I did not find this line at the table and went one down. This was board 24.