

WBF Online Youth Bridge Team Championships

The WBF Online Youth Bridge Team Championships occurred from March to August 2019. The USA U26 team was Hakan Berk, Nathan Finkle, Cyrus Hettle, Daniel Sonner, David Soukup, Ilan Wolff, and Victor Xu with Dave Caprera as coach and non-playing captain. The U26 competition started with 33 teams, split into two groups. Each team played seven 14-board matches on BBO, scored by VPs, with the top four teams from each group advancing to the knockout stage. About two to three weeks were given to schedule and play each of these matches, and due to scheduling complexities teams were allowed to have up to eight players. USA finished second in their group, with China, Portugal, and Italy rounding out the other qualifiers. Israel, France, Bulgaria, and New Zealand moved on from the other group.

The quarterfinal match versus Bulgaria was two segments of 14 boards. USA was down at the half 13 to 41 and still trailed by 27 with eight boards to play, but started a rally. The deficit was cut to 5 with four boards to play, and then a double game swing capped off the comeback:

11	N hakanberk ♠ AQJ86542 ♥ 5 ♦ K ♣ 1083	W N E S 3♥ 4♠ P 3♦ P	11	N muffin007 ♠ AQJ86542 ♥ 5 ♦ K ♣ 1083	W N E S 3♥ 3♠ X 3♦ 4♥ P P P
W v_yotov ♠ 9 ♥ AKQ986 ♦ 109 ♣ AQ94	E niki98 ♠ 1073 ♥ J74 ♦ QJ76 ♣ KJ5	W guplex ♠ 9 ♥ AKQ986 ♦ 109 ♣ AQ94	E cyrenman ♠ 1073 ♥ J74 ♦ QJ76 ♣ KJ5		
S assault1NT ♠ K ♥ 1032 ♦ A85432 ♣ 762	S mspy ♠ K ♥ 1032 ♦ A85432 ♣ 762				
4♠ N NS: 0 EW: 0		4♥ W NS: 0 EW: 0			

Table 1:

North: Hakan Berk
 South: David Soukup
 East: Nikolay Yaninski
 West: Viktor Yotov

Table 2:

North: Marina Koycheva
 South: Mark Andonov
 East: Cyrus Hettle
 West: Daniel Sonner

Both NS pairs were playing multi 2D and did not have a two level diamond preempt available, so the auctions started at a high level with both Wests overcalling 3H. Berk bought the auction

with an aggressive 4S call. Against 4S, the defense started with two hearts, giving declarer the timing to discard a losing club on the AD. At the other table, Sonner's 4H was untouchable, with declarer losing only two diamonds and a spade for a 13 IMP pickup which gave the USA their first lead of the match. They would not relinquish this lead in the final three boards, going on to win 61-47.

The semifinal match versus Israel was three segments of 14 boards. The first two segments were largely quiet, with each side putting up 19 IMPs in the first segment and Israel taking a four IMP lead after a 26-22 score in the second.

This game swing kept things close towards the end of the second segment:

D 13	N hakanberk ♠ K32 ♥ AK109 ♦ AK87 ♣ A10	W N E S 2NT P 3NT P P P	D 13	N gal123m ♠ K32 ♥ AK109 ♦ AK87 ♣ A10	W N E S 2NT P 3♣ P 3♦ P 3NT P P P
	W nir khut ♠ QJ965 ♥ J752 ♦ Q10 ♣ 85	E avivz12345 ♠ A874 ♥ 86 ♦ J52 ♣ QJ76		W guplex ♠ QJ965 ♥ J752 ♦ Q10 ♣ 85	E cyrenman ♠ A874 ♥ 86 ♦ J52 ♣ QJ76
	S assault1NT ♠ 10 ♥ Q43 ♦ 9643 ♣ K9432	S 2yonatan4 ♠ 10 ♥ Q43 ♦ 9643 ♣ K9432		3NT N NS: 0 EW: 0	3NT N NS: 0 EW: 0

Table 1:

North: Hakan Berk
 South: David Soukup
 East: Aviv Zeitak
 West: Nir Khutorsky
 2NT: 20-21

Table 2:

North: Gal Matatyahou
 South: Yonatan Sliwowicz
 East: Cyrus Hettle
 West: Daniel Sonner
 2NT=20-22; 3C=puppet Stayman; 3D=no five card major, but at least one four card major

Berk won the low club lead with the ten, giving him eight tricks and chances in every suit for his ninth. He cashed his winners and when Khutorsky showed out on the third club and the HJ didn't fall, he played a third diamond, setting up his ninth trick and scoring two more when Zeitak cashed his club and continued with a low spade. In the other room, Hettle led a low spade, won

by the king. After cashing his four minor suit winners, Matatyahou had no choice but to try to take four heart tricks. Cashing the king, queen, and ace was not successful and he went down one: 13 IMPs to the USA. After a few gains for Israel, USA trailed by 18 IMPS with nine boards to play in the final segment, but rallied to squeak out a 79-68 victory.

In the championship match USA faced France, who advanced by defeating China in the semifinals. The final, comprising four segments of 14 boards, was played over two days due to the time difference. The first two segments were played on August 14th while the second two segments were played on Vugraph on August 18th.

As in the semifinals, the first two segments were low-scoring, with France taking a 19-12 lead after the first and a 23-7 advantage after 13 boards of the second. With the USA needing a swing, the last board of the second segment offered opportunities at both tables:

14	N lbellicaud	W N E S	14	N hijunny132	W N E S
	♠ KQ109	1♦ 1♥ 2♦ X		♠ KQ109	transfer P 1♣
	♥ QJ10	P 3♥ P 3♠		♥ QJ10	P 1♥ P 1♣
	♦ Q64	P 3NT P		♦ Q64	P 3NT P
	♣ K72	P 3NT P		♣ K72	P
W victorxu	E assault1NT		W tutur300	E theoguille	
♠ J752	♠ 83		♠ J752	♠ 83	
♥ K5	♥ 98762		♥ K5	♥ 98762	
♦ K10972	♦ A83		♦ K10972	♦ A83	
♣ Q3	♣ J86		♣ Q3	♣ J86	
S mihawk_			S ijwolff		
♠ A64			♠ A64		
♥ A43			♥ A43		
♦ J5			♦ J5		
♣ A10954			♣ A10954		
	3NT N NS: 0 EW: 0			3NT N NS: 0 EW: 0	

Table 1:

North: Luc Bellicaud
 South: Thibault Vincenot
 East: David Soukup
 West: Victor Xu
 1H=transfer to spades; X=takeout

Table 2:

North: Nathan Finkle
 South: Ilan Wolff
 East: Théo Guillemin
 West: Arthur Boulin
 1C=5+ clubs or balanced; 1H=transfer to spades; 1S=11-13, less than 4 spades

On the H8 lead, Finkle faced a problem at trick one. If West is allowed to win the HK and shift to diamonds, declarer will have only eight top tricks (three spades, two hearts, a diamond, and two

clubs) and will not have time to set up a third club (barring a stiff honor offside or QJ doubleton). Therefore, he will likely have to fall back on guessing spades for four tricks. On the other hand, if he can take four club tricks, he could win four clubs, three spades, and a heart, and can then either win a diamond trick if the defenders play diamonds or have time to set up the HQ for the ninth trick.

The lead of the H8 made it appear as though Boulin had the HK, so Finkle took the latter approach. He rose with the HA and played a low club to the 3, 7, and 8 (better would have been playing low to the King and then low to the 10, taking four tricks unless East had four or more clubs with both the queen and jack or West had all five outstanding clubs.) The defense then took the HK, DA, and DK, but had to concede the rest: +400 for the USA.

As an aside, Arthur Boulin (West) of France did well to win the second diamond with the King and save an overtrick. Had he ducked, then when declarer cashes his heart and clubs Boulin would have been squeezed and forced to either discard the DK, promoting declarer's DQ, or discard a spade, making declarer's fourth spade good. [Not totally sure if this is worth mentioning or not—good observation and it's nice to point out something good the opps did, but it didn't end up saving an IMP.]

[Note that the contract can be made on the AD lead. Even if West ducks the second diamond, declarer can cash four spades and one or two clubs, then exit with a diamond to West, who is now endplayed into leading away from the Kx of hearts.]

At the other table, Soukup led the D3 against 3NT after Xu's light overcall of 1D. The defense's problems do not end there, however, as West needs to duck the first diamond. If he wins the DK and the defense continues with the DA and a third diamond to knock out the stopper, declarer can safely lose a club to East, who has no way to get to West's hand to cash the last two diamonds. Ducking the diamond is not without risk, because it costs dearly if declarer has the doubleton DQ and the CJ and guesses clubs correctly. But between the possibilities that partner has only three diamonds, declarer cannot run clubs, declarer finesses in hearts, or declarer takes the percentage line in clubs (to finesse East for the Queen of Clubs), there is a good chance that ducking will set the contract.

Xu put in the D9, with the DQ taking the trick. Bellicaud cashed the CK, and when no club honor appeared he took the heart finesse, losing to the HK. When Xu returned the DK, trying to force out all of the diamond honors, the tightrope defense had to continue, but Soukup was up to the job. He overtook with the DA to unblock the suit and played a low diamond back, assuring five tricks for the defense. 10 IMPs to the USA, narrowing the halftime score to USA 29 – France 42.

Midway through the third segment, the USA still trailed by 13, but went on a run starting with this board:

