

Eastbourne Bulletin 1 – Friday Night

By Michael Byrne

214 Pairs sat down to contest the Harold Poster Swiss Pairs on Friday night, and as is traditional the hands were wild with several exciting slam deals lurking about.

Board 15 looked like something straight out of a bidding challenge:

♠KJ9	♠A8
♥AQ875	♥4
♦AKJ	♦Q98432
♣K10	♣A986

7♦ was an excellent contract, needing either the ♦10 to fall doubleton to allow two club ruffs, or a long heart to be ruffed good, or the spade finesse. If you could arrange to play it by West then the opponents were very likely to help you with a major suit lead.

Two pairs attempted 7NT by West and both got a heart lead into the ♥AQ. Up to 12 tricks now, one pair took the spade finesse and scored 0 match points for one down, the other pair ran their diamonds and the defenders lost their way to give them all 220 match points.

No fewer than 35 pairs played in game in no trumps (although a few pairs reached 4NT and one the dizzy heights of 5NT!) to score between 25 and 33% depending on whether the defenders allowed them a 13th trick and 30 pairs reached 6♦ to score just a touch over average.

A popular method in responding to 2NT is now the “2 under slam tries” whereby 4 level responses are slam tries in the suit 2 below the one you bid, so 4♣ shows hearts, 4♦ spades etc. This works quite well with the major suits as you have plenty of room but less well for the minor suits where you often run out of space. Norman Selway and Kay Preddy, (winners of this competition in 2012) found this out when they had the auction:

2NT- 4♠ (diamond slam try)
5♣ - 5NT
?

5♣ was RKCB for diamonds and 5NT showed 2 and the queen. In my book the West hand has to ask for kings now to confirm all the keycards and give partner a chance to bid 7 when they have extras. In any event West signed off in 6♦, thinking reaching the right strain would be good enough for a good score.

28 pairs bid 6NT to score well, some getting the overtrick when North led a spade from the queen and the heart finesse was right, with some defenders losing their way as we saw earlier. 990 was 73% and 1020 86%, so not a huge difference in scores.

10 pairs bid accurately to 7♦, including amongst others the holders Robson/Alfrey. I was asked in the final round how the bidding should go and I relayed the auction at my table:

2NT – 3♠*
3NT – 4♦
4♥* - 4♠*
4NT – 5♠*
5NT - 6♦
7♦

3♠ was a minor suit slam try, with is generally a better approach with 6-4 hands (especially when the 6 card suit is mediocre) and 3NT denied a 4 card minor. 4♦ was now ongoing suggesting 6-4 (although a strong 5-4 would bid the same way) and after two rounds of cue bidding RKCB was used. 5NT asked for specific kings and 6♦ denied any. It appeared likely that East was 6-4 given how good West's diamonds were so the raise to 7 seemed like a good shot.

+1440 was worth 95% to the EW pairs, the NS pairs could do little but grumble about their luck.

One pair who had the grand bid against them was Alan and Jette Bailey from the West Country who came to me to moan about their luck.

"It's totally unfair" they said to me, "why couldn't we have had that hand our way?" I consoled them as best I could with the usual platitudes about luck balancing out and then asked them how they did. "Well as it happens we won 20-0 even with that board" they replied with a sheepish grin.

Board 17 was also pretty lethal and few EW pairs emerged with a plus score.

♠6
♥A632
♦K95
♣J8743

♠2	♠AKQ10984
♥K10984	♥J5
♦Q862	♦AJ43
♣AK5	♣Void

♠J753
♥Q7
♦107
♣Q10962

With spades 4-1 offside 6♠ is beaten in top tricks if the opponents lead a heart at trick one, but even on a club lead declarer's look of triumph will be dashed as he cashes two rounds pitching his hearts and takes a diamond finesse. It looks good from here but bad luck is revealed when you have a spade loser and with the diamond king failing to drop that was one down.

One slam that did make (on the wrong lead) was 6♦, successfully bid by Liz McGowan / David Liggat. Receiving a club lead they pitched two hearts and took the diamond finesse, when it held they cashed the ace and carefully ruffed a spade in the dummy, whether or not North overruffed that was his last trick.

Making 920 was worth 95% to the 3 EW pairs that had managed it, as a few lucky pairs had made 6NT and 6♠ after the defence had gone awry.

Our final hand was a mixed bag of results and I will present it to you first as a problem without sight of your hand, and then with sight.

At game all you see the following auction:

<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>
2♥	P	4♥	5♦
5♥	?		

My question is – without sight of your hand, how many hearts do you think the opponents have between them?

I would guess that North normally has 4, but could have 5 or 3, and South should have 6, though 7 is possible. This averages out at something between 10 and 11. South breaking discipline and re-raising himself to the 5 level does sound a bid like he is setting a trap for you though....

Anyway now you can see your hand which is the following collection of 13 cards:

AKJ
9842
A1074
97

You passed 2H and partner has come in at the 5 level (admittedly under duress) and the opponents have raised. A grand slam is quite possible if partner just has something like this:

Xx
Void
KJxxxx
AKxx

However at pairs it doesn't pay to guild the lily and the West player chose to raise sensibly to 6♦.

Why all the fuss over the number of hearts NS held? This was the full hand:

Board 23 Game all Dlr S

♠87
♥A76
♦6
♣KQJ10865

♠AKJ
♥9842
♦A1074
♣97

♠Q954
♥10
♦KQJ9532
♣2

♠10632
♥KQJ53
♦8
♣A43

South cashed the ♥K followed by the ♣A for one down. With a few NS pairs making game (sometimes doubled in a competitive auction) -100 was worth 20% to EW. One has to have sympathy with West (if I'm honest I wouldn't have even considered doubling 5♥) but most of the marks go to South, who took two bids on his hand, both of them "not classical" and created a problem for his opponents.

Was South some young turk recently returned from the Junior Europeans? No South was Dan Crofts, who is one of the oldest (and apparently the bravest!) entrants in this competition, and contributed to his 20-0 win over Phil King / Willie Whittaker.

After 3 matches the field is led by Jerry Harouni / Gary Jones who have started with 20,19,19 to put them on 58 out of 60 but as we all know.....there's a long way to go yet.