

Eastbourne Slams

The Seniors Teams at the EBU Summer Meeting was won by the team of John Holland and Alan Cooke, Gayle and Colin Webb.

On this deal from the second session, seven N/Ss bid and made slam, one doubled, five stopped in game and made it, three went off in slam, and there was the scary result where someone went down in game – if we are to believe the travelling score slip!

Board 6. Dealer East. E/W Vul.

	♠	A Q 3 2		♠	7 6 5 4
	♥	A K 9 2		♥	–
	♦	K J 8 2		♦	Q 9 6
	♣	10		♣	K 9 7 4 3 2
♠		K J 10			
♥		8 7 6 5 3			
♦		10 7 4			
♣		J 6			
	♠	9 6			
	♥	Q J 10 4			
	♦	A 5 3			
	♣	A Q 8 6			

A five-nil trump split is always a bit of a blow to declarer but on this occasion it should be overcome without too much difficulty.

One declarer went down despite being blessed with the lead of the jack of clubs round to the queen. Declarer took the spade finesse and cashed a top heart, getting the bad news. Ace and a third spade, ruffed with the queen, was followed by ace of diamonds and a diamond to the jack and queen. back came a fourth spade, so declarer ruffed with the jack and attempted to cash the king of diamonds. That was ruffed and the contract was down one.

Success simply required that declarer count her winners. The diamond finesse was actually for the overtrick, though clearly declarer had not worked that out, but cost the contract when it failed. After the spade finesse wins declarer can play a diamond to the ace, cash the ace of clubs, then cash the king of diamonds. A black-suit cross-ruff gives 12 tricks, West under-ruffing a few times before finally ruffing his partner's winning diamond at trick 13.

The Eastbourne winners of the Mixed Pairs were Nicole Cook and Robert Miller, while the overall national winners were Jeremy Willans and Jill Skinner in the Tunbridge Wells heat. There was a borderline slam on this deal:

Board 26. Dealer East. All Vul.

	♠	9 8 5 3		♠	A K J 6 2
	♥	Q 10 8 7 6		♥	K 5
	♦	9 3		♦	A 10 8 7
	♣	K 7		♣	9 3
♠		Q 7 4			
♥		A 9 4 2			
♦		K 4			
♣		A J 10 8			
	♠	10			
	♥	J 3			
	♦	Q J 6 5 2			

♣ Q 6 5 4 2

The E/W hands fit together very well, such that 6♠ is quite a decent contract. However, after winning South's lead of the jack of hearts, doesn't it look normal to play to take at least one diamond ruff in the dummy? The resultant over-ruff leaves declarer with no scope for recover and the contract is down one.

In Eastbourne, only one pair bid the spade slam and have to be considered to have been rather unlucky to go down.

The alternative line of play is to try to get three club tricks. Simplistically, that can be achieved when South has either both missing honours or one honour in a two- or three-card holding, but not when South has one honour in a four-card holding. However, there is a little more to it than that.

While the only pair to play in 6♠ went down, Jacqueline and David Collier got to 6NT, and now diamonds ruffs were, for obvious reasons, not an option. But see what happens when declarer plays on clubs. Though South has five to the queen, so that the double finesse only provides two tricks, the run of the major-suit winners crushes South, who has the only diamond guard, and to retain that guard South has to shorten the club holding sufficiently that declarer has three club tricks after all.

It is a simple squeeze which pretty much plays itself once declarer has taken an early club finesse, losing to the king, but still all credit to the Colliers for getting to 6NT and bringing it home.

Incidentally, if you would like to brush up on your squeeze play, English junior international, Stephen Kennedy has two new books out on the subject. Written in a very readable style, you can buy them either from Stephen or from my bookstall on floor one of the bridge venue.