David Bird reports on the latest

Naturalists v Scientists match

THE idea of a match between Scientists (using highly artificial bidding) and Naturalists (using no conventions except Blackwood), is an attractive one. Provided the players are of roughly equal standard, you have a chance to judge whether conventions play a big role in the game. Previously, there had been three famous encounters of this type. The third match was in 1992, with Forrester and Robson and Chagas and Branco as the Naturalists. Wolff and Hamman with Meckstroth and Rodwell represented the Scientists.

The fourth such match, played recently in London, was over-described as being in the same category. Firstly, there was a big difference in ability between the rubber bridge players representing the Naturalists and the world-class duplicate stars in the Scientists' team. Secondly, the Scientists were not playing particularly artificial methods and were not regular partnerships. 'Rubber Bridge Stars *v* Duplicate Aces' would have been a more accurate billing.

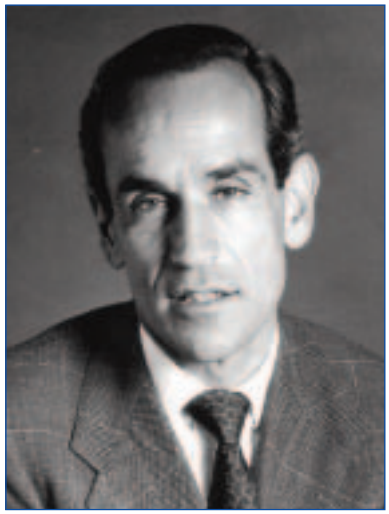
It was entertaining stuff, nevertheless. Let's see some action:

E/W Game. Dealer East.

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

West	North	East	South
Robson	*Priday*	*Zia*	*Wolfson*
		Pass	2♠
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♦
Pass	4♠	Pass	5♣
Pass	5♠	Pass	6♠
All Pass			

The Scientists had stopped in 4NT, so a big swing would result if David Wolfson could make 6♠. Wolfson won the heart lead and made a great start by cashing the king of clubs, dropping the queen of clubs from East. The Principle of Restricted Choice states that East's queen is twice as likely to be a singleton as a chosen card from queen-jack doubleton. Without playing any trumps, Wolfson continued with a club to the nine. Had this lost to the jack, declarer might still have made the slam if trumps were 3-3, since he could ruff a diamond in dummy. He would also have been in good shape if East had ruffed from three or four trumps. Unfortunately, East ruffed from a doubleton trump and West still held a trump trick. That was 11 IMPs away (£1100 at the prevailing stakes) instead of the same amount in the plus column.



Demetri Marchessini, organiser of the Naturalists v Scientists match, and Naturalists' Captain

The Scientists won the first day's 56-board match by 134 IMPs, although this was reduced by a previously agreed 56-IMP handicap. On the second day the two teams played Goulash, with the wildly distributional hands dealt by a Russian computer program. High-card points are less important than long suits. In a typical Goulash bidding system, a one-bid suggests at least a six-card suit, 1NT shows 13-19 points and no six-card suit, a two-bid (including a natural 2♣) suggests around ten tricks and a very long suit indeed. Here is a sample of the action:

E/W Game. Dealer South.

	♠ Void ♥ K 7 ♦ 9 8 3 2 ♣ K J 10 9 8 6 4	
♠ Q 10 4 ♥ J 10 9 8 6 5 4 3 2 ♦ 10 ♣ Void	N W E S	♠ A K J 9 8 7 6 2 ♥ Void ♦ K J 4 ♣ 5 3
	♠ 5 3 ♥ A Q ♦ A Q 7 6 5 ♣ A Q 7 2	

West	North	East	South
Robson	*Marchessini*	*Zia*	*Hargreave*
			1♦
Pass	5♦	5♠	6♦
6♠	7♦	Dble	All Pass

Demetri Marchessini's bid of 7♦ was brilliantly judged, since 6♠ is easily made on any lead by setting up dummy's hearts. Andrew Robson led a suit-preference two of hearts, Zia Mahmood ruffing and returning the requested club. The defenders claimed their three ruffs and the sacrifice went 500 down.

At the other table, the Naturalist West declined to raise his partner's spades and Boye Brogeland (North) made an overtrick in 5♣ for a net swing of 920 aggregate, worth £920 at the agreed stakes for the Goulash section. The Scientists won the second day by 58 rubber points.

How much did we all learn about the importance of conventions? Not a lot. How much fun was had by the ten players and the many hundreds who watched on Bridge Base Online? A huge amount! I certainly enjoyed it.

Naturalists: Demetri Marchessini, Giles Hargreave, David Wolfson, Patrick Lawrence and Tony Priday. **Scientists:** Zia Mahmood, Andrew Robson, Gunnar Hallberg, David Gold and Boye Brogeland. ❐