



Simon Cochemé

# Bridge: Celebrity Grand Slam

**Excellent news for bridge! A brand-new TV series, *Bridge: Celebrity Grand Slam*, will be shown later this month. The programmes feature eight celebrities playing bridge for charity.**

THE participants are:

- ★ Sue Lawley, radio and TV presenter, host of *Desert Island Discs* for eighteen years.
- ★ Mike Gatting, former cricket captain of England and Middlesex.
- ★ Susan Hampshire, actress, especially famous for her role as Fleur in *The Forsyte Saga*.
- ★ David Rowntree, drummer with pop group Blur.
- ★ James Mates, ITN journalist and newscaster.
- ★ Pattie Boyd, photographer and writer, former wife of George Harrison and Eric Clapton.
- ★ Val McDermid, best-selling author of crime thrillers, including *Wire in the Blood*.
- ★ Kay Burley, Sky News anchor. Kay is a bridge novice who only started to learn to play bridge three and a half weeks before the series was filmed.



Mike Gatting

The programmes are expertly compered by Clive Anderson, assisted by England internationals Glyn Liggins and Andrew

McIntosh. It was Andrew McIntosh who taught Kay Burley to play.



James Mates

Most of the celebrities are social, so-called 'kitchen-bridge' players. James Mates is perhaps an exception in that he is a regular duplicate player, but he did indeed learn to play at the kitchen table of his girlfriend. He must have shown promise, because she is now his wife.

'It was good talking to the bridge experts. I asked Andrew lots of questions, but most of the time he wanted to talk about cricket!' — Mike Gatting

There are eight half-hour programmes, with each celebrity playing four deals with a new partner. The deals are played simultaneously at both tables and aggregate scoring is used. After seven programmes everyone has played with everyone else, so there is a twist in the final show: the player in eighth

place has first choice of partner, the player lying seventh chooses next, and so on.

The players use a simple Acol system: weak no-trump, strong twos, Stayman and Blackwood. Glyn and Andrew are in the control room with Clive Anderson during the action, watching the TV monitors and commenting live on the bidding and play.

Here is a deal from the first programme:

Game All. Dealer West.			
	♠	A Q 5 3	
	♥	4	
	♦	A J 7	
	♣	A 9 5 4 3	
♠	9 7 4 2		♠ K 10 8 6
♥	6		♥ 8 7 5 3
♦	8 6 5 2		♦ K Q 3
♣	Q 10 8 2		♣ J 7
	♠	J	
	♥	A K Q J 10 9 2	
	♦	10 9 4	
	♣	K 6	

Glyn Liggins suggested that an expert auction might go:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♣	Pass	2♥
Pass	2♠	Pass	4♥
Pass	6♥	All Pass	

4♥ shows a solid suit and 6♥ shows faith. 6♥ should always make, despite the spade and diamond honours all being off-side. On a spade lead South can duck in dummy to set up the spade ace-queen for diamond discards. On a diamond lead declarer again ducks in dummy and East has to make the passive return of a heart or club. Now South can draw trumps and has the entries to set up the fifth club for a diamond discard.

I don't think the celebrity Norths will trust partner to have such a perfect heart suit. If the auction starts 1♣ – 2♥, my prediction is that North will end up playing in 6NT and make it by running the ♠J for a certain twelfth trick, rather than relying on the double diamond finesse or the club break.

The celebrities who will be playing this hand on April 20th are James Mates and Pattie Boyd.

There are no hand or bidding diagrams shown on the screen, so if you want to get the most out of the programmes, I suggest you go to the Sky Arts website, [www.skyarts.co.uk/bridge](http://www.skyarts.co.uk/bridge), and print off the deals before watching. The results will be added to the website after the programmes have been aired.

The players are competing for a £20,000 charity pot, with the winner donating £10,000 to his or her chosen charity, the runner-up £3,000, down to eighth place, who gets £250 to donate. The real winners will be the eight charities!

This deal is from programme six:

N/S Game. Dealer North.			
		♠ 9 8	
		♥ K Q 5 2	
		♦ K J 4	
		♣ K J 10 2	
♠ A 3			♠ K J 10 7 6 5 2
♥ J 3			♥ A 10
♦ 7 3 2			♦ 10 8 5
♣ 9 8 6 5 4 3			♣ 7
		♠ Q 4	
		♥ 9 8 7 6 4	
		♦ A Q 9 6	
		♣ A Q	

I predict that East will overcall North's 1NT with 2♠ and that South will end in 4♥ and make it. The defence can prevail if they play three rounds of spades and West ruffs in with the ♥J to promote East's ♥A-10. Tune in on April 24th to see how James Mates and Pattie Boyd get on this time.



Sue Lawley

The series is the brainchild of bridge-playing TV producer Hugh Dehn. He and Sky Arts are to be congratulated on showing a side of bridge away from the complex bidding systems and double squeezes of tournament bridge. This is social bridge, as played by hundreds of thousands of people in the UK, for fun. I encourage you to watch it for fun, and tell your friends to watch it too. I hope the programmes are a great success – maybe celebrity bridge will take off and get an early evening slot on Saturdays, hosted by Bruce Forsyth and Nevena Senior!



Photo: courtesy of Pattie Boyd

From the left: Mike Gatting, Susan Hampshire, James Mates, Val McDermid, Kay Burley, Sue Lawley, Glyn Liggins, Clive Anderson, Pattie Boyd and David Rowntree

'The filming bit didn't worry me, but I had a fear of making a fool of myself at the bridge and I did a couple of silly things that I hope I wouldn't normally do.'

— Sue Lawley

The whole event is played in a relaxed atmosphere – well, as relaxed as you can be, with extra lights, half a dozen cameras recording your every move, and bridge experts ready to point out your mistakes to the viewers.

At the time of writing I had seen rough cuts of a few of the programmes. What comes shining through is the shared love of the game that the celebrities all have. The bridge may not be of a high standard, but the players are clearly enjoying themselves.

I spoke to Sue Lawley after the filming was finished and asked her how everyone had got on. 'There was tremendous camaraderie among the players,' she said. 'A couple of the men were keen to win, but we all got on very well.' Later I spoke to Mike Gatting. He agreed that the whole event was good fun, but had a different view on who was trying hardest: 'It was very competitive,' he told me, 'especially the women.'

'I really hope lots of people watch the programmes and see the fun side of the game – and understand that bridge needn't be cerebral and difficult. You can get such pleasure from just playing.'

— Val McDermid

Bridge: *Celebrity Grand Slam* will be shown on Sky Arts 2 and Sky Arts HD daily at 7pm every evening from April 20, with the grand final on Sunday 26 April. □



Val McDermid