

The 2015 EBU Spring Foursomes Final

Two tight semi-finals saw VITAS beat ALLFREY by 8 IMPs and HINDEN overcome MOSSOP by 6 IMPs. The final proved to be even tighter. HINDEN had the better of the first set but the swing on this first deal went the other way.

Board 3. Dealer South. E/W Vul.

				♠	A Q 8 6 4	West	North	East	South
				♥	K 5 3	Osborne	Schwartz	Hinden	Fisher
				♦	6	—	—	—	1♥
				♣	Q 8 7 6	Pass	1♠	Dble	1NT
♠	J 5 3		♠	10 7 2	Pass	2♣	Pass	Pass	2♦
♥	Q 10 9 6		♥	A	Pass	3♥	Pass	Pass	4♥
♦	10 9 8		♦	Q J 7 4 3	All Pass				
♣	9 4 2		♣	A J 10 3					
				♠	K 9				
				♥	J 8 7 4 2				
				♦	A K 5 2				
				♣	K 5				

Two Clubs was checkback, demanding a 2♦ response, after which any bid from North would be invitational.

In the other room the HINDEN pair declared 4♣ and, when the first heart play was low to the king and ace, were down two for -100. The same play in 4♥ would, of course, also doom that contract.

Graham Osborne led the ten of diamonds. Lotan Fisher won the ace, led the nine of spades to the queen and a low club off the table. When Frances Hinden ducked, the king scored and now Fischer cashed the king of spades, played king then ruffed a diamond, then cashed the ace of spades for a club discard. A club ruff, followed by a low diamond ruff as Osborne pitched his last club, meant that Fisher had won the first nine tricks and could not be prevented from coming to one more trump trick for +420 and 11 IMPs to VITAS.

The remainder of the set went in favour of HINDEN, who led by 24-12 after eight boards.

Board 13. Dealer North. All Vul.

				♠	J				
				♥	K Q 4				
				♦	A K 9				
				♣	K Q J 8 7 4				
♠	8 5		♠	A K 9 7 6					
♥	J 6 5 3		♥	A 10 7					
♦	J 7		♦	6 3 2					
♣	A 9 5 3 2		♣	10 6					
				♠	Q 10 4 3 2				
				♥	9 8 2				
				♦	Q 10 8 5 4				
				♣	-				
West	North	East	South						
Osborne	Schwartz	Hinden	Fisher						
—	1♣	1♠	Pass						
Pass	Dble	Pass	2♦						
Pass	3♣	All Pass							

When the 1♠ overcall came back to Ron Schwartz he doubled and followed through with 3♣, showing a strong hand with long clubs. That, of course, did not excite Fisher, who passed and hoped his partner would be able to make his partscore. Hinden led the king of spades, asking for reverse count, then switched to the ten of clubs, ducked to declarer's jack. Schwartz continued with the club king, again ducked, then the queen, losing to the ace. Osborne now played a heart to the queen and ace and Hinden switched back to spades, playing the ace. That was ruffed and Schwartz played the eight of clubs, won the heart return and drew the last trump then cashed dummy's winners for +110. Had Hinden returned a heart after winning the ace, the defence would have had a second heart winner for down one.

West	North	East	South
Padon	Cooke	Naqvi	Allerton
—	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

For reasons best known to himself, Waseem Naqvi chose not to make the normal 1♠ overcall so Jeff Allerton had the opportunity to lay claim the that suit himself. The 3NT rebid showed long strong clubs and a hand that was too good to rebid only 3♣. Allerton could not have been thrilled at this development, but there was nothing he could do about it so passed and prayed.

Naqvi led the ace of spades and, on sight of dummy, switched to ace then ten of hearts. Jon Cooke could win and knock out the ace of clubs and the favourable diamond split meant that he had nine tricks for +600 and 10 IMPs to HINDEN, who led by 35-19 after 16 boards.

Had Naqvi switched to a low heart at trick two, his partner would have returned the suit on winning the club ace and the defence would have had five tricks - two hearts, two spades and the club.

The third set provided a little more action in what had been a very quiet match to date.

Board 18. Dealer East. E/W Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
Olanski	Osborne	Vainikonis	Hinden
—	—	1♦	Dble
2♠	All Pass		

Vitas Vainikonis found a wafer-thin 1♦ opening - particularly given the adverse vulnerability - and Wojtek Olanski made a weak jump shift in response over the take-out double. Osborne had an awkward hand now, with 9 HCP but no attractive bid. He chose to pass and hope to defeat 2♠, and duly did so, but would +100 for two down be sufficient for N/S?

West	North	East	South
Cooke	Schwartz	Allerton	Fisher
—	—	Pass	1NT
2♠	Dble	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

Allerton did not open the East hand, and who can blame him? Fisher's 15-17 no trump gave the Israeli pair a firm foundation for the subsequent auction, though the intervention took away any possibility of Schwartz following an invitational sequence. He made a take-out double of the 2♠ overcall and followed through with a stopper ask. Three No Trump would only ever be under threat on a diamond lead, and even then declarer can duck twice to cut communications, pick up four heart tricks and cash the top clubs before endplaying West to give a second spade trick and the contract. In practice, Cooke led the queen of spades and Fisher had nine tricks without breaking sweat when the heart proved to be onside. He actually came to an overtrick for +630 and 11 IMPs to VITAS.

Board 21. Dealer North. N/S Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
Olanski	Osborne	Vainikonis	Hinden
—	1♦	1♠	Pass
Pass	Dble	Pass	2♥
3♣	All Pass		

Olanski did not respond to the overcall - perhaps his partner shop play that a 2♣ response would be a one-round force and he simply didn't wish to make that commitment on a potential misfit? Osborne reopened, which gave the Lithuanian pair a second chance, but Vainikonis was never going to look for game facing a partner who could not respond to 1♠. After a trump lead, Olanski took a heart pitch on the second spade and came to nine tricks for +110.

West	North	East	South
Cooke	Schwartz	Allerton	Fisher
—	1♦	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Dble
3NT	All Pass		

Cooke did respond, and he repeated his long suit over Allerton's 2♥ rebid. Now Allerton appreciated the potential offered by his club ace so asked for a diamond stopper and, despite Fisher's lead-directing double, Cooke duly showed one.

Schwartz led a low diamond to the queen and king and Cooke rattled off the clubs. Fisher held on to his five low spades so there were only four spades to be cashed but that still meant 12 tricks in total for +490 and 9 IMPs to HINDEN.

Board 24. Dealer West. None Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
Olanski	Osborne	Vainikonis	Hinden
Pass	1♦	2♣	Dble
3♣	Pass	5♣	Dble
All Pass			

This time a thin opening bid worked out less well, as Osborne dredged up a 1♦ opening and Vainikonis now had an easy 2♣ overcall. When Hinden made a negative double and Olanski raised the clubs, Vainikonis jumped to 5♣, which rated to have fair chances if Olanski was short in diamonds as appeared to be the case. Getting to game had already won the board for VITAS, and Hinden's double was merely the icing on the cake.

Hinden cashed the king of spades then switched to her trump, but Osborne had one trump trick to come and that was it for the defence; +550.

West	North	East	South
Cooke	Schwartz	Allerton	Fisher
Pass	Pass	1♣	1♠
Dble	2♥	2NT	3♠
All Pass			

Schwartz did not open so Allerton opened 1♣, potentially only a doubleton. Fisher overcalled, Cooke made a negative double, and 2♥ showed a good spade raise. Now Allerton competed with a good/bad 2NT, rather like Lebensohl, to show a hand that wished to bid but was weaker than if he bid three of a suit immediately. When Fisher made the barrage raise to 3♠, it might look as though Cooke should have competed, as partner probably has genuine clubs - but could East be bidding freely here with a weak no trump type with five diamonds and not clubs? The price of playing the short-club style, perhaps.

Three Spades drifted down three with the defence taking three hearts, two aces, a spade and a diamond ruff, for -150 but 9 IMPs to VITAS, tying the match up at 47-47 with eight boards to play.

The final set was the quietest of the lot, with only 12 IMPs changing hands in total. VITAS picked up two 2-IMP swings and HINDEN a 3-IMP swing, leaving the match to be decided on this deal:

Board 30. Dealer East. None Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
Cooke	Schwartz	Allerton	Fisher
—	—	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	1NT	All Pass

Fisher led the two of spades, imagining that someone would have bid spades had his opponents had a fit there. Schwartz won the king and returned a low spade to the queen. Now Fisher switched to the queen of clubs. Allerton won the ace and knocked out the ace of diamonds. Fisher won the second round and led a spade for his partner to cash two more tricks in that suit but, with no entry to the eventual club winner, the defence could only take the heart ace from here and the contract was home for +90.

That was an average-plus result for HINDEN, but it was easy to see how 1NT could again be allowed to succeed in the other room. If this board proved to be flat, VITAS would win by a single IMP, though of course none of the players could know that.

West	North	East	South
Olanski	Osborne	Padon	Hinden
—	—	1♦	Pass
1♥	1♠	Pass	2♠
All Pass			

Osborne's four-card overcall won the auction for his side. Now, all he had to do was to make 2♠ to win the match, while one down would mean extra boards and two down would leave VITAS as the winners.

Padon led the king of diamonds. Osborne won the ace and played the ten of clubs round to Padon's ace. Padon now underled his queen of diamonds as he could read from the play at trick one that Olanski had begun with either the jack or a singleton, and Olanski duly won the trick and played king and another club. Osborne threw a heart from hand as he won the third club in dummy, and now played ace and another heart to Padon's king. The ten of diamonds was ruffed with the jack and over-ruffed with the king, and next a heart was ruffed with the seven and over-ruffed by the queen. Osborne was allowed to ruff a diamond low, not that it mattered what the defence did, and he continued with his last heart. Padon could ruff with the ten in front of dummy but Osborne had the last two tricks for +110, +5 IMPs, and a HINDEN had won the 2015 EBU Spring Foursomes final by 55-51.

Frances Hinden, Graham Osborne, Jon Cooke and Jeff Allerton had won all eight matches to remain undefeated throughout the weekend and were worthy winners. Not only were they undefeated, but they were also the only team in the latter stages of the event to play as a foursome throughout, an impressive effort in what is a very demanding event.

The runners-up were a multi-national squad: Vitas Vainikonis and Wojtek Olanski (Lithuania), Dror Padon, Lotan Fisher and Ron Schwartz (Israel), and Waseem Naqvi (England).