

President's Cup Final 2000

This year's final of the President's Cup was between HAYES (Briggs-Hayes; Constable-Jalie) and the holders, BDIANI (Badiani-Walker; Cohen-Noble; Fearnhead-Fearnhead). When I reflected on the significant swings in the match, I came to the conclusion that the deals might not be particularly interesting or instructive for the casual reader and was in two minds about writing a report. I muttered something to this effect when Stuart McPhee asked me whether I was going to write about the match. He merely said that in that case he was looking forward to a good laugh at my expense (predictably, though, he added that he was not spoilt for such material). Stuart, I know you have a strong constitution. But a formal warning to everyone else: the bridge is not always going to be pretty in what follows.

Once again I am happy to acknowledge with thanks the contribution of Paul Fearnhead, who provided me with a detailed commentary on the sets I missed because I was sitting out. In addition, his comments on a draft of this report have helped me greatly in reducing the number of errors it contains.

First Set

The first big swing occurred when I found myself with the following decision:

♠ AKQJxxxx
♥ A
♦ Qxx
♣ x

1♠ - 2♥; 3♠ - 3NT; ?

I am sure that had anybody else chosen 4♠, I would have described it as pathetically wet, and with some justification. Four spades seems incomprehensibly cautious to my eyes now. Partner's hand is:

♠ x
♥ Jxxxx
♦ AKJ
♣ Kxxx

so slam is cast-iron. A more sensible continuation such as four clubs might have seen us reach it. Briggs-Hayes had no such problems and earned 13 imps for their side for an auction to six spades that began with a Tartan two spades.

Later in the set Jalie was faced with a more interesting question of evaluation. At unfavourable vulnerability, he was dealt:

♠ Q10xxx
♥ void
♦ KJxx
♣ xxxx

His partner, Constable, dealt and opened one spade (this in the context of a fairly traditional Acol). Walker overcalled four hearts on his right. After he made the obvious call of four spades his left hand opponent's five hearts was passed back to him, leaving what looks to me to be a difficult decision. Certainly the heart void argues for bidding again, and you have more trumps than you might. Against that, your diamond holding may well be useful in defence and there could easily be a slow club loser or two in five spades. Jalie chose to bid five spades, for which I have a great deal of sympathy. This was doubled on his left, the full deal being

N-S Vul			
Dealer North			
	♠ Kxxx		
	♥ Kxx		
	♦ Qxx		
	♣ AKx		
♠ AJ9x		♠ void	
♥ xxx		♥ AQJxxxx	
♦ x		♦ Axxxx	
♣ QJxxx		♣ 10	
	♠ Q10xxx		
	♥ void		
	♦ KJxx		
	♣ xxxx		
West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
	1♠	4♥	4♠
5♥	Pass	Pass	5♠
Double	All Pass		

Walker did well to lead ♦A and when she continued the suit, I ruffed and switched to a low club. East-West were a tempo ahead now and eventually came to two trumps, a diamond, a diamond ruff and a club for three down. Although five hearts is cold, 800 was too great a price to pay. I confess I would have been tempted to double 5♥ with those North cards, but Constable judged very well to pass (in theory). In the other room Noble, who was playing 5 card majors and a weak no-trump, had to open 1♣. Hayes also overcalled 4♥, but this was followed by three passes. That was 8 imps to BDIANI, but HAYES still led by 19-9.

Both sides misdefended towards the end of the set to allow home a game on the following deal:

Game All
Dealer South

	♠ Qxx	
	♥ KQxxx	
	♦ Axx	
	♣ xx	
♠ AJx		♠ K10x
♥ xx		♥ x
♦ Qxxx		♦ Jxxxx
♣ J1098		♣ Axxx
	♠ xxxx	
	♥ AJxxx	
	♦ K	
	♣ KQx	

Both Souths declared 4♥ (Jalie after 1♥-4♥; Cohen after opening 1♥, which guaranteed at least a five card suit, and accepting an invitational raise from Noble) on ♣J lead, won by East. We can see that a spade return is required to defeat the contract, but this switch was missed by both Easts and the contract was made at both tables.

Should the correct defence be found? It perhaps depends on how likely it is that West will lead from ♣KJ10. Suppose for now that we decide West is unlikely to lead from this combination. Then, if declarer has five trumps, it is likely that he has five trump tricks, two club tricks, the ace of diamonds and at least one ruff in dummy. (Even if declarer's shape is 5♥3♣(32), he can always arrange to throw either a spade or diamond on the clubs and later ruff a card in that suit; if, instead, declarer has four clubs then he can take two club ruffs in dummy.) So if declarer has five hearts and the ace of spades, there is no defence. In that case, East must guard against declarer's actual hand by switching to a low spade. It is true that one can construct hands for declarer with only four hearts (Axx/Axxx/Qxx/KQx for example) where a spade return destroys the defence, so I do not claim this defence is guaranteed to succeed – I do believe it is with the odds and correct, however. An alternative (if one has decided that partner is not likely to have led from ♣KJ10) is to duck the ace at trick one and hope that the play to the next few tricks will make the defence clearer. But it is equally easy to construct hands for declarer (xxx/Axxx/KQ/KQx for example) where this line of defence is calamitous.

Second Set

The set started well for BADIANI when the Fearnheads bid what transpired to be an easy 3NT that was missed by Hayes-Briggs. But it needed Alex to bid a mildly aggressive 2NT with K10x/Axxx/Qxxx/Jx after 1♣ - 1♦; 1♠ - ? to get to game.

Cohen-Noble had an opportunity to punish impudent bidding two boards later.

N-S Vul
 Dealer South

	♠ xx	
	♥ Qx	
	♦ Axxxxx	
	♣ xxx	
♠ Qxx		♠ J10xxx
♥ Jxxx		♥ xxxx
♦ Jx		♦ Q
♣ AKQx		♣ Jxx
	♠ AKx	
	♥ AKx	
	♦ Kxxx	
	♣ xxx	

West	North	East	South
Paul	Constable	Alex	Jalie
			1♦
Double	3♦	All Pass	
West	North	East	South
Briggs	Noble	Hayes	Cohen
			1♦
Double	4♦	4♠	5♦
Double	All Pass		

The North hand is awkward to describe, falling short of a 2NT bid but with a combination of high card strength and six card support that makes it less than ideal for 3♦. Although there is a case for 3NT with the South cards over 3♦ when partner has preempted at this vulnerability (hoping for ♦AQxxx and some club length, say) I think Jalie's pass may well be a winner in the long run. A disappointing plus 130 for Constable-Jalie. Noble preferred 4♦, and this more aggressive (and more accurate?) preemption seemed to have done its job when Hayes bid what looks to be a wild 4♠ (note that Alex passed the same hand a level lower). Cohen was worried that the penalty from 4♠ doubled would be insufficient compensation for 5♦ and bid on to the hopeless game. Unless dummy has a doubleton club and diamonds headed by the ace, I would have thought 500 would be available from 4♠ doubled any time 5♦ is making. That was 8 imps to HAYES.

Even good players have the occasional blindspot, but this next hand is a fairly spectacular example.

E-W Vul
 Dealer West

	♠ void	
	♥ KQxx	
	♦ 10xxxx	
	♣ 10xxx	
♠ QJxxxx		♠ K10x
♥ xxx		♥ xxx
♦ AQJ		♦ xxx
♣ x		♣ J9xx
	♠ A98x	
	♥ AJ10	
	♦ Kx	
	♣ AKQx	

West	North	East	South
Paul	Constable	Alex	Jalie
Pass	Pass	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Noble	Hayes	Cohen
1♠	Pass	Pass	2NT (1)
Pass	3♣*	Pass	3♦*
Pass	3♠ (2)	Double	3NT
All Pass			

(1) Natural, 19-21

(2) Showing four hearts and denying four spades

Against Cohen-Noble, where Hayes had doubled 3♠ to show a top spade honour, Briggs led a low spade. Cohen ducked two rounds of the suit and eventually went one off when clubs failed to break. Once East shows up with ♠K having passed the opening bid, it is clear that there is no virtue in ducking the spade because the diamond ace is with West. Perhaps the best thing to do is win the ace of spades (throwing a club from dummy) and cash the hearts then clubs, leaving West to worry about who has the ten of spades and the distribution of that suit. It should be straightforward for the defence, but there is some chance of a slip.

At the other table, Constable's failure to search for a major fit looks bizarre to me. Paul also led a spade to the king, but Jalie took his ace on the first round to cash four rounds of hearts. Alex's discard was her lowest diamond, showing an odd number of diamonds, and Jalie threw a small diamond as well. Paul could afford a low spade on this, and when Jalie tested the clubs he threw a further spade. That left:

	♠	
	♥	
	♦ 10xxx	
	♣ 10x	
♠ QJx		♠ 10x
♥		♥
♦ AQJ		♦ xx
♣		♣ J9
	♠ 98x	
	♥	
	♦ K	
	♣ Qx	

When Jalie exited with the nine of spades Paul won the jack and had all the information he needed to bang down ♦A, Alex having given him a complete count of the hand. But he had an aberration and instead played three rounds of spades, thereby presenting declarer with his ninth trick. An embarrassing 10 imps away for BADIANI. The next board gave Constable-Jalie a chance to extend their team's lead further.

E-W Vul
Dealer North

	♠ Axxxx	
	♥ AKx	
	♦ Kxxx	
	♣ 10	
♠ void		♠ J9xx
♥ xxxx		♥ Jxxx
♦ AJxx		♦ Qxx
♣ AKxxx		♣ Jx
	♠ KQ10x	
	♥ Qx	
	♦ xx	
	♣ Q9xxx	

West	North	East	South
Paul	Constable	Alex	Jalie
	1♠	Pass	4♠
Double	All Pass		

Jalie's offbeat 4♠ caught Paul with a hand that was powerful offensively and with what seemed a fair amount of defence. He made a take out double, but Alex had no reason to do other than pass and hope. She led a heart, which Constable won in dummy. He cashed the king of spades before playing two more rounds of hearts to throw a diamond from the dummy. Now he played his club ten, covered in turn by the jack, queen and ace. When Paul returned a low club, Constable made the mistake of ruffing (with both the ace of diamonds and king of clubs surely on his right, throwing a diamond appears to guarantee the contract). He finessed the ten of spades, and played dummy's diamond. Paul won and

played another low club. Throwing a diamond still works, but when declarer ruffed again East was able to overruff and play her last trump, leaving declarer with only one trump in dummy and two losing diamonds to take care of. A very sweaty plus 100 for BADIANI when it really should have been minus 590. Noble, who was declaring four spades undoubled, made no mistake in the other room.

The final board of the set had elements of humour and mystery about it. Jalie had to bid the following cards:

♠ Jxxx

♥ Jxxx

♦ x

♣ Kxx

after the auction had proceeded 2♣ - 2♦; 2♠ - 4♠; 5♣ - ?

(If, elsewhere in this report, you find a hand with only twelve cards then feel free to question my diligence. On this occasion, however, I am giving all the available information, for Jalie had his thirteenth card stuck behind one of the others and was unaware of the problem. I was kibitzing and was intrigued, to say the least, about the unknown card.) Jalie dutifully cue bid his singleton and Constable bid six spades. So what was the thirteenth card? These were the hands in question:

♠ Jxxx

♥ Jxxx

♦ xx

♣ Kxx

♠ AKxxx

♥ A

♦ AQJx

♣ AJx

The final contract is a very good one, and when spades and diamonds both behaved it made with an overtrick. Cohen-Noble stopped in game via 2♣ - 2♦; 2NT - 3♣*; 3♠ - 4♠ so the set ended on a positive note for HAYES, who had increased the lead to 21 imps after sixteen boards.

Third Set

The set began with what I feel sure will be the most inept opening lead the reader will have seen in some time.

Love All
Dealer North

	♠ xxx	
	♥ xx	
	♦ AKQx	
	♣ Axxx	
♠ Axxx		♠ Kxx
♥ AKx		♥ Qx
♦ Jxxx		♦ xxxxx
♣ xx		♣ Jxx
	♠ QJ10	
	♥ J109xxx	
	♦ void	
	♣ KQxx	

West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
	1NT	Pass	3♥ (1)
Pass	3NT	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

(1) Slam try

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
	1NT	Pass	2♦*
Pass	2♥	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

With Jalie having made a slam try, it was obvious to me that partner had virtually nothing (to be honest, I was surprised to find she had as much in the way of high cards as she did – I certainly was not expecting declarer's trumps to be jack high). Only an ace or well-placed king is likely to be of any use, and I think leading ♥K (to have a look at dummy before deciding which suit to attack) stands out. My feeble choice of a club got what it deserved when Jalie was able to win in dummy and discard all his spade losers on dummy's diamonds. At the other table, there was no particular reason for Hayes to lead a spade and Alex also made game. A flat board, then, but certainly a missed opportunity for Badiani, who had let through a game that had five top losers in the form of ace, king and queen of trumps as well as a side ace-king.

Both sides bid to 4♠ on the following deal, but only one of the declarers was successful.

N-S Vul
 Dealer East

	♠ 98	
	♥ xx	
	♦ Axxx	
	♣ AKxxx	
♠ K7xx		♠ xx
♥ Jx		♥ Axxx
♦ Qxx		♦ KJ10
♣ Q10xx		♣ Jxxx
	♠ AQJ10x	
	♥ KQ109x	
	♦ xxx	
	♣ void	

Both Briggs and Badiani led a low diamond, North having bid clubs and South having shown length in both majors. Both declarers cashed the three minor suit winners in dummy to throw diamonds from hand, before playing a heart to the king and the nine of hearts from hand. (Looking at the heart suit in isolation it may appear that declarer has to guess whether to play ♥Q, hoping to pin the doubleton jack, or a low heart, hoping for ♥Ax on his right. Because the former is guaranteed to result in an unwelcome trump switch through South, it looks correct to play ♥9. Then, if West wins and switches to a spade, declarer still has a winning line available.)

Briggs won his ♥J and now played ♣Q, but Paul Fearnhead simply cross-ruffed to make his game. Badiani did better and switched to a low spade, won by the nine in dummy. Now Jalie erred by playing another trump to finesse the queen. West won and forced declarer, who had lost control and drifted two down. Declarer succeeds by ruffing a minor back to hand, ruffing a heart in dummy (suppose for now that West discards a minor – but an interesting variation is analysed below), and ruffing whichever minor West has not discarded. That leaves him with eight tricks in the bag and ♠AQ/♥Q10 in hand, with West down to three trumps and a minor suit. When declarer exits with a heart to East's ace, provided he simply throws his last heart on East's minor suit winner (a no cost play), West will be forced to ruff and lead into the spade tenace to yield the contract.

When the third round of hearts is played, West can attempt to avoid the endplay described above by under-ruffing so as to shorten his trumps. If that happens then declarer must take his two ruffs in the *same* minor. To see this suppose, for example, that after winning West's trump switch with ♠9 in dummy, declarer ruffs a club to hand. If he is careless and now ruffs a diamond to hand, we reach this ending:

	♠	
	♥	
	♦ xx	
	♣ xx	
♠ K7		♠ x
♥		♥ A
♦ x		♦ K
♣ x		♣ J
	♠ AQ	
	♥ Q10	
	♦	
	♣	

Now if declarer exits with a heart, West can discard a club (say) as East wins his ace. The crucial difference is that East can now play a winning club through declarer, and the contract can no longer be made. If declarer discards a heart, West – who is not forced to ruff in this ending – throws a diamond and now ♦K from East ensures a trump trick; if he ruffs with ♠Q, West overruffs and comes to another trump trick by forcing declarer with a diamond. If, earlier in the play, declarer gets back to hand by ruffing the same suit twice, he exhausts East-West of their cards in that suit and they are powerless again.

Would an initial trump lead work? Declarer wins in dummy and plays a heart to the king and then ♥9 from hand. West wins with the jack but can do declarer no harm. If he continues trumps, declarer simply forces out the king of spades and concedes a heart. If, instead, he switches to a minor, declarer reverts to the line described in the previous paragraphs. The point is, East can only play trumps through declarer at the cost of a trick, by overtaking his partner's ♥J.

The next significant swing occurred when both pairs for BADIANI declared the contract on a deal in which game was available for the East-West pairs:

N-S Vul			
Dealer North			
		♠ AKJ	
		♥ KJxxxx	
		♦ xxx	
		♣ x	
♠ Q10x			♠ xx
♥ Ax			♥ xx
♦ AQJ			♦ 10xxx
♣ Q10xxx			♣ AKJxx
		♠ xxxxx	
		♥ Qxx	
		♦ Kxx	
		♣ xx	
West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
	1♥	Pass	1♠
1NT	2♥	3♣ (1)	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

(1) Forcing to game

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	All Pass	

Thanks to the successful diamond finesse 3NT is unbeatable, and cold for 10 tricks in fact. I admit that it is fairly aggressive to overcall 1NT on my hand. It is therefore no surprise to find that when he was

faced with an identical start to the auction Briggs preferred to pass, leaving Paul to declare 2♠. With the cards as they are, this contract makes easily.

After five boards of the set BADIANI had gained 23 imps but, with the two other pairs in the team having misjudged a slam, it was now the Fearnheads' turn to do likewise.

E-W Vul			
Dealer East			
	♠ 10x		
	♥ KQJxx		
	♦ AQ		
	♣ AK10x		
♠ J9xxx		♠ KQx	
♥ x		♥ xxx	
♦ xxxx		♦ KJxxx	
♣ Qxx		♣ xx	
	♠ Axx		
	♥ Axxx		
	♦ xx		
	♣ Jxxx		

West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
		Pass	Pass
Pass	1♥	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
		Pass	Pass
Pass	1♥	2♦	2NT (1)
Pass	3♣ (2)	Pass	3♥ (3)
Pass	4♣ (4)	Pass	4♠ (4)
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥
Pass	6♥	All Pass	

- (1) 4+ hearts, invitational +
- (2) Game try
- (3) Minimum
- (4) Cue bids

Constable-Jalie had a straightforward auction to game. At the other table, where Hayes made what I consider to be a very risky overcall (poor suit and balanced hand, with no real upside except maximum space consumption), Paul took a more aggressive action than Jalie. That need not have been fatal, because he was able to show a minimum on the next round. Alex looks to have done too much now, certainly facing a passed hand with a minimum invitation and especially after having been tipped off that the diamond finesse was failing. The contract had some play, and Alex made a good attempt. She

won the ♠K lead, drew trumps, and then took the club finesse. Knowing from the auction that there was no point in taking the diamond finesse North now cashed the remaining club and heart winners, coming down to ♠x/♦AQ in hand. But Briggs had discarded all his diamonds so Hayes, who had a complete count on the hand, threw the queen of spades. Alex could do no better than hope Hayes had started with ♠KQJ and exited with her spade, hoping to endplay East. But Briggs could win and cash the remainder of the suit for two down. A fine performance from both sides in the play and defence, if not the auction. That meant HAYES held on to their lead to be ahead by 7 imps at half time.

Fourth Set

The set began with a non-vulnerable game swing to HAYES:

E-W Vul			
Dealer North			
♠ x			
♥ KJx			
♦ AQxxx			
♣ KQxx			
♠ AKxxx		♠ J10xx	
♥ Qx		♥ x	
♦ Jxxx		♦ Kxx	
♣ Ax		♣ Jxxxx	
♠ Qxx			
♥ Axxxxxx			
♦ x			
♣ xx			
West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
	1♦	Pass	1♥
1♠	2♣	2♠	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	
West	North	East	South
Briggs	Noble	Hayes	Cohen
	1♦	Pass	2♥ (1)
All Pass			

(1) Weak jump shift

Walker might well have bid 3♠ rather than a tame 2♠. Even so, I think Jalie was extremely fortunate that his 3♥ bid with a minimum in high cards, no fit for partner and such an empty suit caught so suitable a hand opposite. 4♥ made in comfort. At the other table, Cohen's 2♥ (in principle 4-7 HCP and a six card suit) was atypical in that she had a seventh heart and, again, because of the defensive nature of the suit. Noble's pass still looks cautious – after all, even xxx/Q10xxxx/xx/xx gives play for game. 6 imps to HAYES, who now led by 13. Most of that lead was wiped out on the very next board.

Game All
Dealer East

	♠ KJ10	
	♥ Jxx	
	♦ Axx	
	♣ KQxx	
♠ 9xxx		♠ xx
♥ KQ109xx		♥ Axx
♦ xx		♦ KJxx
♣ A		♣ Jxxx
	♠ AQxx	
	♥ x	
	♦ Qxxx	
	♣ 109xx	

West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
		Pass	Pass
1♥	Double	2♥	2♠
3♥	Pass	4♥	4♠
Pass	Pass	Double	All Pass

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Noble	Hayes	Cohen
		Pass	Pass
2♦ (1)	Double(2)	2♠ (3)	Double
3♥	Pass	4♥	4♠
All Pass			

- (1) Multi
- (2) Either balanced 13-15 or any very strong hand
- (3) Pass-or-correct

I would normally open that West hand with a weak two bid, but on this occasion I took the conscious decision to try a one level bid in the hope that this would prove more of a deterrent to the opponents. Walker's 2♥ bid is the only realistic choice with our methods, though she could have had an ace less and still have made the same call. Knowing of relatively short spades opposite, I was happy to compete to 3♥ despite having little in the way of high cards. Now when Walker decided to have a shot at game anyway, Jalie took the push on a hand that has no extra offence. I let that pass but partner, who knows that I do not much like opening light one bids, doubled on the strength of that. So sometimes it does pay to have a relatively conservative opening bid style; the irony is, of course, that this was one of those occasions when I *was* light in terms of high cards.

I led ♥K and got a count card from Walker. When I continued hearts declarer ruffed, crossed to dummy with a trump, and forced himself again by ruffing dummy's last heart. This unusual line of play made the defence a lot easier because when South now played a club, I won and played a spade to

remove declarer's last trump. That left me with two trumps and dummy with just one. I was therefore able to win a trick at my first opportunity and force dummy's last trump by playing hearts. The contract went three down for 800 to East-West.

The bidding at the other table was similarly undisciplined, with Cohen volunteering game facing what was certain to be a 'medium' no-trump. Crucially, though, neither East nor West could really be very sure the contract was so perilous and Cohen's 4♠ escaped undoubled. She made seven tricks too, but that was still a gain of 11 imps to BADIANI, who had narrowed the gap to 2 imps at this stage. In a set where imps were handed back and forth, old-fashioned Acol responses were the source of the gain on the next board (rotated for convenience).

Love All	
Dealer East	
♠ J	♠ AKQ109
♥ KJ109	♥ x
♦ Kxxx	♦ QJxx
♣ 9xxx	♣ KQx

West	East
Constable	Jalie
	1♠
2♣	2♦
3♦	3♥*
3NT	Pass

West	East
Noble	Cohen
	1♠
1NT	2♦
Pass	

When Constable responded 2♣ to Jalie's opening bid, the East hand was never likely to stop short of game. There was no way to defeat 3NT, which made 9 tricks. At the other table Cohen, who had to choose between 2NT and a conservative 2♦, went for the latter. Noble might have raised to 3♦, but one can see why he preferred pass.

Another big penalty was on offer two boards later.

Game All
Dealer North

	♠ xxxxx	
	♥ x	
	♦ KJxxx	
	♣ xx	
♠ KJxx		♠ Ax
♥ K109x		♥ Axxx
♦ Axxx		♦ Qxx
♣ x		♣ Qxxx
	♠ Qx	
	♥ QJxx	
	♦ x	
	♣ AKJ10xx	

West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣*	Pass	2♦ (1)	3♣
Double(2)	All Pass		

- (1) No 5 card major
- (2) Take Out

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Noble	Hayes	Cohen
	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♣*	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♥	All Pass		

Four hearts was down in double-quick time. Cohen led ♣K and switched to her singleton diamond. With a lot of work to do to make 10 tricks Hayes had little choice. She played low from dummy, allowing Noble to win and return a diamond for Cohen to ruff. With a trump trick still to lose, Hayes had no chance.

At the other table, we had not yet found our heart fit when Jalie came in over 2♦ because we open 1NT freely with a five card major and attempt to locate our 5-3 major fits by playing 5-card Stayman. (I believe Jalie's methods did allow him to show two suits including hearts over Walker's 1NT but I do not know the full details.) The only way for me to attempt to find a fit was by making a take out double. Walker, who had a minimum, defensive-looking hand, would generally expect the double to include a doubleton club. With no guarantee that there was a better spot elsewhere, she passed.

I led a trump. Jalie won and played a diamond. I should take this, of course, but when I made the mistake of ducking declarer was able to make a diamond trick by rising with dummy's king. When he then called for a heart Walker went up with ♥A, thereby giving declarer a heart trick to which he had no right, in a situation where ducking looks correct. (It appears that partner's high cards are ♠KJ (though I agree he might well have led a trump even with ♠KQJ), ♦A and either ♥K or ♥QJ at the least. If partner has ♥K then ducking is surely correct. If, instead, declarer has ♥K and partner ♥QJ,

say, it looks as though East should win ♥A to play another trump. But there is no net gain because this is at the expense of a trump trick, so ducking is still correct.) At any rate, when Walker continued clubs to stop a heart ruff, declarer played ♣A instead of finessing. Although West had not taken his diamond ace when he should and East had taken her heart ace too early, the contract still finished two down, a gain of 12imps for BADIANI. However, a set of fluctuating fortunes ended as it began when Constable-Jalie bid a game missed by Cohen-Noble (board again rotated for convenience).

N-S Vul	
Dealer South	
♠ xxxx	♠ Qx
♥ Axxx	♥ KQxxx
♦ x	♦ AJxx
♣ Axxx	♣ KQ
West	East
Constable	Jalie
Pass	1♥
3♥	4♥
West	East
Noble	Cohen
Pass	1♥
3♥	Pass

Noble's 3♥ showed a mixed raise, typically about 6-9 HCP and four trumps. Cohen's pass again looks very conservative, but in her defence I ought to say that she would very often be facing a more balanced hand. The problem was as much that Noble was too strong for the call he chose (2NT would have been the equivalent of Constable's invitational 3♥). I am told that it was not misvaluation of the hand so much as anxiety about forgetting the system that caused this missed game. I cannot say I disapprove of this treatment, because I recommended it to my team mate in the first place. But there is no denying that sometimes it pays to keep things simple.

At the end of the fourth set, HAYES' lead was down to just 1 imp.

Fifth Set

The penultimate set began well for HAYES, who achieved a double game swing on the first board.

Love All
Dealer North

	♠ Kx	
	♥ KJ98x	
	♦ xxxx	
	♣ xx	
♠ xx		♠ AJ9x
♥ AQxx		♥ 10xx
♦ x		♦ K10x
♣ KJ10xxx		♣ Axx
	♠ Q10xxx	
	♥ x	
	♦ AQJxx	
	♣ Qx	

West	North	East	South
Noble	Constable	Cohen	Jalie
	Pass	1NT	2♦ (1)
Pass	2♥ (2)	Pass	3♦
Double(3)	All Pass		

- (1) Spades and a minor
- (2) Fewer than three spades
- (3) Take Out

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
	2♥	Pass	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♥	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

Where Alex opened a weak two hearts, Hayes-Briggs reached the obvious game. With Paul not having doubled the cue bid of 3♥, I think Alex might have found a diamond lead. When she chose to lead a heart, however, Briggs had his ninth trick.

At the other table, Noble gave his partner a nasty problem by choosing to pass Jalie's conventional overcall and then backing in with a double. His intention was to play in hearts if Cohen had four cards in the suit, and 3NT otherwise. But Cohen, who faced an unappetising decision, thought Noble would have a more balanced hand and chose to defend. My view is that Noble, if he intends to force to game anyway, should either bid 3♣ (natural, and probably best) or 3♠ (four hearts and no spade stopper in his methods, I believe) instead of passing 2♦. Although he did not imagine the double would be converted to penalties, his sequence had the effect of putting his partner under pressure needlessly. Plus scores of 400 and 470 gave HAYES 13 imps on the board, and a lead of 14.

But if that was a poor start for both of the pairs on the BADIANI team, the recovery was swift.

Game All
Dealer West

	♠ J9xx	
	♥ Qxxx	
	♦ AJx	
	♣ 10x	
♠ Ax		♠ K108xx
♥ AK10x		♥ x
♦ xxx		♦ KQxx
♣ KJ9x		♣ Q8x
	♠ Qx	
	♥ J987	
	♦ xxx	
	♣ Axxx	

The contract at both tables was 3NT. Where Briggs declared the contract as West (after the auction 1♥ - 1♠; 1NT - 2♣*; 2NT - 3NT), Alex did well to lead a heart to the jack and king. Declarer next played three rounds of spades. Alex, who could see three tricks and merely needed to get Paul to push a heart through declarer's hand, played a club to her partner's ace. His heart continuation ensured the defence had five tricks.

Noble declared 3NT after a similar auction (1♣* - 1♠; 1NT - 2♣*; 2♥ - 3NT) in which he too had shown four hearts and 15-17 HCP. Constable led a low spade to the eight, queen and ace. When declarer played ♣K from hand, South took it immediately and switched to a heart. Declarer won ♥A, finessed ♠10 and cleared the spades. North could continue hearts, but with ♣10 falling in two rounds Noble had nine tricks without needing to guess the clubs on the third round of the suit.

Then, after both sides had played in a diamond partial with 4♥ cold, came:

Game All
Dealer South

	♠ AQ10x	
	♥ KQx	
	♦ AQ9x	
	♣ xx	
♠ Kxx		♠ 9xxx
♥ A10xx		♥ x
♦ K8x		♦ 10xx
♣ A105		♣ QJxxx
	♠ Jx	
	♥ J98xx	
	♦ Jxx	
	♣ K6x	

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
			Pass
1NT	Double	2♣	Pass*
Pass	Double(1)	All Pass	

(1) Take Out

In the other room, North-South for HAYES had declared a peaceful 2♥, making nine tricks. Paul decided to defend 2♣ instead. He started with ♠J lead to the king and ace. Alex switched to ♥K, won by dummy's ace. The spade continuation was won by North, who attempted to cash ♥Q. East ruffed, played a low club to the ten in dummy, and then a spade towards the nine in hand. Alex won and played a fourth round of spades. This was ruffed with the ♣6 by South and overruffed in dummy with the ace (when discarding a diamond might have been better). From declarer's point of view, this simultaneously had the unfortunate effect of ruffing away her spade trick and creating a trump trick for the defence. With nothing better to do now, Hayes played a club to draw the outstanding trumps. In with ♣K, Paul had to guess who had the ♦Q. If North has at least ♦AQ9, the correct defence is to play a diamond. That allows his partner to win ♦Q and exit with a heart, leaving declarer with two further diamond losers. If, however, declarer has ♦Q10x, then a diamond switch is disastrous. Paul guessed wrong and played ♥J, ruffed by East. With the diamonds as they are, declarer can limit the damage to one off by playing a diamond to the 8. When she instead played a diamond to dummy's king, that was two off and 8 imps to North-South.

Now look again at the play from the point at which declarer played a club to dummy's ten. If she instead draws trumps by playing ♣Q and two more clubs, and then a spade from dummy, the contract looks cold. The best that Alex can do is win ♠Q and play another heart. But declarer ruffs with her last trump, cashes her fourth spade, and plays a diamond towards dummy. If South puts in the jack, declarer's ♦10 scores a trick in the ending. If not, the eight is played from dummy and this endplays North. Declarer makes five club tricks, a spade, a heart and a diamond.

On the final board of the set, Constable-Jalie stayed out of a game that was bid at the other table.

Love All	
Dealer West	
	♠ AQ108xxx
	♥ void
	♦ Qxx
	♣ Qxx
♠ Kxx	♠ x
♥ AKJxx	♥ 10x
♦ xxx	♦ AKxxx
♣ xx	♣ KJxxx
	♠ J9
	♥ Qxxxxx
	♦ Jx
	♣ A10x

Against Constable-Jalie, Cohen as East was allowed to declare 4♦, which was defeated by three tricks. At the other table, Briggs opened 1♥ with the West cards, Alex overcalled 4♠ and Hayes' penalty double ended the auction. East led a top diamond before switching to a heart. North ruffed and played a diamond to East's king. After ruffing the heart continuation, Alex threw a club from dummy on ♦Q and played a club towards the A10 in dummy. Hayes split her honours, allowing Alex to win ♣A and finesse against the spade king twice. Even if East plays low, declarer has little choice but to play the ten from dummy.

After conceding 13 imps on the first board of the set, the Fearnheads and Cohen-Noble had scored 39 imps unanswered in the remainder to leave BADIANI ahead by 25 imps with eight boards to play.

Sixth Set

The first board of the last set could be viewed as an opportunity for a team trailing by 25 imps.

E-W Vul		
Dealer North		
	♠ KQ10xxx	
	♥ Axx	
	♦ Ax	
	♣ Kx	
♠ Ax		♠ 9xxx
♥ KJx		♥ Qxx
♦ QJxxxx		♦ Kxx
♣ xx		♣ Qxx
	♠ J	
	♥ xxxx	
	♦ xx	
	♣ AJ10xxx	

Four spades by North (perhaps after West has bid diamonds) is an interesting contract. On a diamond lead, suppose declarer wins and plays a trump to the jack. If West takes this the rest is easy, so suppose ♠J is ducked. Declarer plays a club to the king and forces out ♠A. Again, if West plays a heart the rest is easy. But suppose West plays a club into dummy's AJ10. Now declarer requires spades 4-2 and the hand with four spades to have three clubs. Not very likely a priori, perhaps, but on the actual layout North's luck is most certainly in. If declarer foresees the club return to threaten his communications, he may decide to play for trumps 3-3 at the outset by playing ♠K from hand. That would lead to defeat, of course. In practice, both Norths declared a spade partial for a flat board.

A few more quiet boards led us to the penultimate deal.

N-S Vul
Dealer South

	♠ Kxxx	
	♥ Qxxxx	
	♦ xxx	
	♣ 9	
♠ AQJ987x		♠ 10
♥ K		♥ Axx
♦ J		♦ AKQxx
♣ xxxx		♣ AQxx
	♠ x	
	♥ Jxxx	
	♦ xxxx	
	♣ Kxxx	

West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
			Pass
4♠	Pass	6♠	Pass
Pass	Double	All Pass	

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
			Pass
3♥ (1)	Pass	6♠	All Pass

(1) Transfer preempt

At the first table, I think Walker's 6♠ was a little lazy. ♠AKQxxxx plus an outside king, or even ♠AKQxxxxx and nothing else, both produce a decent grand slam (though I concede the latter will be hard to diagnose). Constable, having found a sporting double, led ♣9, leaving me to worry whether he was devious enough to find this lead from ♣K. Eventually, I decided to play for diamonds to break 4-3 instead of taking the club finesse. After playing dummy's ♣A, cashing ♠A and ♥K, I needed three rounds of diamonds to stand up (or for Constable to be ruffing in with a natural trump trick). When they did, I was home and dry. At the other table there was no lead to threaten declarer.

The final board of the match produced the wildest distribution, and yet another poor slam auction for the BADIANI team.

E-W Vul
Dealer West

♠ AKQxx		♠ x
♥ 10xxx		♥ AKQxxxx
♦ Qx		♦ void
♣ Kx		♣ AQJxx

West	North	East	South
Badiani	Constable	Walker	Jalie
1♠	Pass	2♥	3♦
4♥	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♥	All Pass

West	North	East	South
Briggs	Alex	Hayes	Paul
1♠	Pass	2♥	4♦
4♥	5♦	7♥	All Pass

In the auction at the first table, it was (and remains) unclear to me what should be required of the West hand to bid slam over the 5♣ cue bid. East could have bid 5♥ to command me to bid slam with a diamond control. So either there is no worry about the diamond control, or more is needed than simply a diamond control. Similarly, partner's hand appears to be unsuitable for using RKCB. This would usually be because partner has no diamond control or because she has a void somewhere. With no diamond control, I decided signing off in 5♥ was best. I think Walker was worth a further try of 6♦ now – the fact that West appears not to have a diamond control makes it quite likely that he has precisely the hand he did have. I would like to think that had she done so, I in turn would have recognised the value of my superb black suit holdings and bid the grand slam. At the other table, Hayes' leap to 7♥ looks the most practical shot – admittedly this could be off a cashing ace, but against that any scientific approach risks putting far too much pressure on West to evaluate ♠A and ♣K correctly.

Having added 2 imps to their lead in the final set, BADIANI therefore won a very friendly contest by 27 imps.

Let me finish by saying that I am aware some of what I have written in this report could be viewed as being unduly harsh or critical. In the main I think this merely reflects my view that bridge is a game of mistakes rather than brilliancies. I do think this match contained more errors than most. I am also aware that I have given a personal opinion of players' actions more often than I usually do (in print, at any rate). It can be hard to analyse bridge objectively without appearing to be constantly critical. I do not intend to give offence, and apologise in advance if anyone feels that is the case.

A Badiani
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