

President's Cup Final 21 April 2007

The President's Cup is probably Oxfordshire's most sought after prize. Certainly, it is the county's premier teams of four knock out event. This year's final saw the holders, my own team (Nick Smith/Alan Wilson; Richard Lonsdale/Stuart McPhee) take on David Southcombe/Tim Dickinson and Jeremy Bygott/David Bygott. The Bygotts are former winners of the trophy but for David and Tim it was (I think) their first final.

Sadly for them, they did not get off to the best possible start and after the first set the score was 28-6 to the holders. Their luck did not improve in the second set, for instance on the following board:

| | | |
|----------|--------|--------|
| | ♠J7642 | |
| | ♥Q5 | |
| | ♦5 | |
| | ♣AK976 | |
| ♠K | | ♠AQ5 |
| ♥K109764 | | ♥A82 |
| ♦AKQ42 | | ♦J1073 |
| ♣J | | ♣Q32 |
| | ♠10983 | |
| | ♥J3 | |
| | ♦986 | |
| | ♣10854 | |

As you can see, East/West can make a slam in either red suit but only because hearts happen to be splitting kindly. I think the slam is a shade above 50% (because of the possibility of a favourable lead or because the principle of restricted choice may apply), but it is not significantly so. This was the auction in our room where the Bygotts were sitting East/West:

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| D. Bygott | A. Wilson | J. Bygott | N. Smith |
| 1♥ | 2♥ | 4♥ | All Pass |

Alan's 2♥ overcall showed 5-5 in the black suits and about 7-11 points (Ghestem) and this was sufficient to persuade both David and Jeremy to take a cautious view of their cards, Jeremy because he was rather flat and David because of his shortage of aces and top trumps.

When the board was replayed at the other table, the auction was rather different:

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Lonsdale | S'combe | McPhee | Dickinson |

| | | | |
|-----|----------|-----|------|
| 1♥ | 2♥ | 3NT | Pass |
| 4♦ | Pass | 4♠ | Pass |
| 4NT | Pass | 5♥ | Pass |
| 6♦ | All Pass | | |

Ricahrd's 4♦ bid convinced Stuart to upgrade his hand since the four-card diamond suit and major suit honours look to be working well. The diamond slam still needed hearts to be 2-2 and, when they were, my team had gained a very fortuitous 10 IMPs – although there is some chance of a singleton heart honour lead against 6♦.

The last board of the second set also proved difficult for the Southcombe team.

| | | |
|--------|--------|--------|
| | ♠9873 | |
| | ♥A654 | |
| | ♦KQ9 | |
| | ♣52 | |
| ♠K1064 | | ♠J2 |
| ♥K8 | | ♥Q93 |
| ♦104 | | ♦6532 |
| ♣Q9864 | | ♣KJ107 |
| | ♠AQ5 | |
| | ♥J1072 | |
| | ♦AJ87 | |
| | ♣A3 | |

The contract at both tables was 4♥ and at our table, David Bygott led ♦10 against my game contract. How would you have planned the play?

I was thankful to have avoided a club lead and the lead also gave me maximum flexibility in the diamond suit, so I started by playing the King from dummy and overtaking with the Ace. Next I led the Jack of trumps which went to David's King and dummy's Ace (it would not have helped David to have ducked). I led a second heart off table and Jeremy played the nine smoothly. Now I figured that although David could hold KQ doubleton, it would be a clever false card on Jeremy's part from 983 and the odds favoured rising with the Jack.

When ♥J held the trick, I was on Easy Street. I cashed all my diamonds, throwing a club on the fourth round, then eliminated the club suit and played a spade off table. When Jeremy followed with the two, I was able to insert the five, knowing that David would be end-played into giving me an eleventh trick.

With the trumps so well placed, I was not really expecting to gain on the board but 4♥ was to go off at the other table ...

Our teammates knew from the bidding at their table that declarer had three

spades. Richard did well to find the club lead and declarer had little chance. He tried a diamond to dummy (believing West's 10). Next he led a club from dummy (perhaps to induce a heart lead?) but Stuart rose with ♣J and fired a spade through. Now it was hopeless for declarer. He had to lose two spades, a club and a heart.

The 11 IMPs gained on this board meant that the score for the second set was 37-3 and my side was already 56 IMPs ahead. It was always going to be a tall order for the challengers from there, and so it proved.

But they started the third set well, gaining 24 IMPS in total on boards 17 and 18. This was the second of the two:

| | | |
|----------|--------|---------|
| | ♠J | |
| | ♥Q92 | |
| | ♦AKQ43 | |
| | ♣J754 | |
| ♠A42 | | ♠Q10873 |
| ♥- | | ♥K10864 |
| ♦J109875 | | ♦6 |
| ♣Q632 | | ♣98 |
| | ♠K965 | |
| | ♥AJ753 | |
| | ♦2 | |
| | ♣AK10 | |

Having swapped opponents, Tim Dickinson (East) found an inspired overcall here:

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| D. S'combe | A. Wilson | T. Dick'son | N. Smith |
| Pass | 1♦ | 2♠ | 3♥ |
| 3♠ | 4♥ | Pass | 5♣ |
| Pass | 5♦ | Pass | 6♥ |
| All Pass | | | |

Tim's decision just to show his spades rather than a major two-suiter gave us exactly the rope we needed to bid the hopeless heart slam. From my perspective, after the 3♠ bid, there was every chance that partner was void in spades and good reason to go on over game. Even when we reached the six-level, Tim declined to double, fearing that we might have somewhere better to run to.

♠A was led and dummy was a bit of a disappointment, I confess. I decided to play for Tim to hold King doubleton in trumps. The finesse of the Jack proved "successful" for me but I was a little surprised when David showed out. Now it was just a question of damage limitation and not losing control but in the end I found I could not avoid going three off and losing -300. Still perhaps game would go off in the other room!?

No such luck. Declarer played in 3NT after a more usual Michaels overcall by East. West led $\heartsuit J$ but the bidding has given plenty away and declarer actually has a choice of which defender to end-play for 9th trick.

But by the end of the set, my team had regained all the lost IMPs and more, partly thanks to the bidding on this hand:

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | \spadesuit KQJ8643 \heartsuit K7 \diamondsuit 5 \clubsuit 654 | |
| \spadesuit A107 \heartsuit 2 \diamondsuit K93 \clubsuit AQ10983 | \spadesuit 95 \heartsuit AQ954 \diamondsuit AJ7642 \clubsuit - | \spadesuit 2 \heartsuit J10863 \diamondsuit Q108 \clubsuit KJ72 |

The auction at our table was pretty lively:

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| D. S'combe | A. Wilson | T. Dick'son | N. Smith |
| 1 \clubsuit | 4 \spadesuit | Pass | Pass |
| Double | Pass | 5 \clubsuit | 5 \diamondsuit |
| Double | 5 \spadesuit | Pass | Pass |
| Double | All Pass | | |

Superficially, there are eleven winners (six spades, three hearts, a diamond and a club ruff) but declarer has too much work to do in the black suits and, with hearts breaking 5-1 as well, was always destined to go one off.

At the other table, the McPhee/Lonsdale version of Acol made life tough for the Bygotts and they understandably took the traditional view that the five-level belongs to the opponents – doubled!

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|--------------|
| Lonsdale | D. Bygott | McPhee | J. Bygott |
| 3 \clubsuit | 3 \spadesuit | 5 \clubsuit | ?? |

The 3 \clubsuit opener showed an opening bid with a decent six-card club suit. The vulnerable raise to 5 \clubsuit looks a little frisky (although it's actually quite restrained by Stuart's standards) but gave Jeremy Bygott an impossible guess to make at the five level. Eventually he doubled and this was passed out. This will surely go two down on a singleton diamond lead but North understandably led a spade and moments later E/W were chalking up +750 after picking up the diamond suit for one loser.

So my team was 59 IMPs up at the half-way point and we had more good fortune on this deal in the next set:

| | | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| | ♠AK98732 ♥Q93 ♦72 ♣8 | | |
| ♠6 ♥K10652 ♦98 ♣AJ1072 | | ♠4 ♥AJ84 ♦AQJ43 ♣Q63 | |
| | ♠QJ105 ♥7 ♦K1065 ♣K954 | | |

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| D. S'combe | A. Wilson | T. Dick'son | N. Smith |
| Pass | 4♠ | All Pass | Pass |

The defence had three aces to cash but no more and that was +420 to our side. At the other table, Lonsdale/McPhee competed rather more energetically....

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Lonsdale | Southcombe | McPhee | Dickinson |
| 2♥ | 4♠ | 5♥ | 5♠ |
| Pass | Pass | 6♥! | 6♠!! |
| Pass | Pass | Double | all pass |

2♥ showed a weak two suiter, hearts and a minor. When South sacrificed so readily in 5♠ over 5♥ (a making contract), McPhee judged (correctly) that N/S would probably sacrifice again over a confidently bid 6♥ – given the vulnerability. After all, from the point of view of N/S, a 2-0 spade break means that a small slam at least can make.

6♠ doubled went the inevitable two off so that was a further 12 IMPS to our side.

The Southcombe team gained 12 IMPs back at the end of the fourth set when Alan and I tried another 50/50 slam:

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| | ♠8 ♥A9654 ♦J8 ♣KJ632 | | |
| ♠95 ♥QJ832 ♦KQ107 ♣Q5 | | ♠J10763 ♥K ♦6532 ♣97 | |
| | ♠AKQ4 ♥107 ♦A94 ♣A1084 | | |

| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| J. Bygott | N. Smith | D. Bygott | A. Wilson |
| | | | 1♣ |
| Double | 2♣ | Pass | 3♣ |
| Pass | 3♥ | Pass | 4♥ |
| Pass | 6♣ | All Pass | |

Alan opened 1♣, showing 16+ points (Precision) and Jeremy doubled to show hearts. My 2♣ bid showed 8+ points and 5+ clubs (GF) and Alan's 3♣ bid asked how good my clubs were. After I had shown five to one top honour, his 4♥ bid asked about my club controls and, holding the Ace and good shape, I went straight to the club slam.

There is no escaping a heart loser, so the club slam depends on picking up the trumps for no loser. In the end, Alan decided to finesse the ten on the second round and lost to West's Queen.

Alan was a little unlucky with this decision but he was left with the feeling afterwards that he might have done better. Perhaps he should have asked how many hearts has Jeremy got? Surely five is much more likely than six, given that he didn't bid 2♥ at this favourable vulnerability. The Bygotts also have system bids for two-suiters (normally nine cards, but sometimes eight at favourable vulnerability). So if he only has five hearts and doesn't have a second suit he could well be 5332. His club length could be two or three, but probably not one. If Alan cashes ♣A and plays one towards the King, up pops the Queen and everything is easy.

(In fact, West *does* have a second suit but the reasoning here remains pretty plausible.)

With that result, the lead was down to 57 IMPs at the beginning of the fifth set and we opted to continue with the original table positions. Alan and I bid and made 6♥,

a result matched by Southcombe/Dickinson at the other table, but on the next hand I was able to make a further fortuitous slam, gaining 11 IMPs and by the end of the set the lead had increased to 72 IMPs. At this point, the Southcombe team, who had all struggled long and hard to make up for the early deficit, decided to call it a day, with a final score of 136-64 to the holders.

I made a few mistakes myself but I must congratulate the rest of my team on playing more or less without error. Congratulations are also due to our opponents for reaching the final in a very tough field and playing in such sporting fashion throughout the final. I am sure they will have better luck another time.

The winners go on to represent the county in the Pachabo Cup, a national event for all the county champions, and we will hope to do better than our fifth place finish in that event last season, although that will be far from easy!

Nick Smith, April 2007 (with help from Alan and Stuart)