

DERBYSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE

Derby School of Bridge

23rd May 2004

Oxfordshire kicked off the new season with three wins, the A team by 18-2, the B by 11-9 and the C by 20-0 (not a bad way to start one's defence of a trophy). We were grateful to Michael Goldsmith and Nick Perceval-Price, who volunteered their services to the C team so as to release Krys Kazmierczak and Sandra Nicholson to play in the County Mixed Pairs (as it turned out, the latter weren't well enough to play in either event).

The results were obtained as follows:	<u>IMPs</u>	<u>VPs</u>
<u>A</u> : Pike/Wilson with Slater/Stephens	+55	
Procter/Robinson with Smith/Prior	<u>+11</u>	
	+66 =	18-2
<u>B</u> :Claridges with Williams/Wilson	+07	
Hayes/Landy with Brown/Keep	<u>+00</u>	
	+07 =	11-9
<u>C</u> :Flower/Stead with Gascoyne/Squires	+73	
Goldsmith/Perceval-Price with King/Watkins	<u>+57</u>	
	+130 =	20-0

I'm grateful to Michael Robinson who, in the absence of Jeremy Bygott, undertook the cross-IMPing, which produced the following (rounded up/down) results by pairs:

Flower/Stead (NS C)	+56 IMPs
Goldsmith/Perceval-Price (NS C)	+50
Gascoyne/Squires (EW C)	+48
Pike/Wilson (NS A)	+46
King/Watkins (EW C)	+45
Slater/Stephens (EW A)	+43
Williams/Wilson (EW B)	+29
Smith/Prior (EW A)	+28
Hayes/Landy (NS B)	+25
Procter/Robinson (NS A)	+13
Claridges (NS B)	+06
Brown/Keep (EW B)	+02

I can't recall everyone being plus before and the results are remarkably close. Michael commented that cross-IMPing is a pernicious way of trying to assess performance. We all know this is true because it takes no account of whether good results are obtained by luck or judgment, or bad results by the opposite. Neither does it take the relative quality of the opposition into account. An awful lot of the hands in this match bid themselves, so that success or failure depended on which way up they were played, dictated in turn by the vagaries of style and system, or on a two-way guess to find a Queen etc. There was very little which was genuinely instructive. However, there was fun a-plenty...

Board 1: love all, dealer N

	♠87	
	♥KQ10742	
	♦J2	
	♣J93	
♠AKJ10963		♠Q2
♥J98		♥3
♦76		♦KQ108543
♣4		♣K102
	♠54	
	♥A65	
	♦A9	
	♣AQ8765	

The popular contract was 4♠, of course. This came home five times. However, as many have pointed out, it should never be allowed to make. The defence doesn't even have to attack trumps at trick 1: it's enough to play two rounds of hearts, provided South makes the key play of ducking the first round of diamonds to kill the suit. Procter/Robinson didn't have to worry about any of this – the oppo were in **six** spades. This was a terrific start for the county. We conceded 420 only once and our only other minus score was when Brown/Keep – who didn't enjoy much luck on their debut – were taken 1 off in 4♠.

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

West ♠Q6 ♥KQ7 ♦J107 ♣AK542 East ♠A1087 ♥842 ♦A84 ♣J109

South opens 1♠. This proved awkward to handle: West doesn't have a proper 1NT overcall available and will usually prefer 2♣ to double; East is just short of the values for 2NT and may settle for a slightly top-heavy 3♣ (as I confess I did); West stares at this but is likely to let it go. ♦10 is a big card in this lie-out, of course, and with South holding all the key cards, 3NT is trouble-free. Well done to Slater/Stephens, Brown/Keep, King/Watkins and Gascoyne/Squires who brought in game. Our only unlucky pair were Hayes/Landy who conceded it.

Board 4: game all, dealer W

North ♠3 ♥QJ532 ♦AQ2 ♣AK72 South ♠A10762 ♥A84 ♦5 ♣10863

West opens 1♠. This mostly proved to be a tough 4♥. There are two trumps and a club to lose and spades are 5-2, obviously. The only good news is that ♦K is bound to be right. You can amuse yourselves deciding whether 4♥ is always makable against best defence. Procter/Robinson brought it home, as did Goldsmith/P-P, whilst Brown/Keep conceded it. No one else managed 10 tricks. Stead/Flower avoided the problem by taking 500 from 1♠* (not the classic penalty pass by South but certainly successful here), whilst Smith/Prior got caught by similar means as East/West to concede the same score.

Board 7: game all, dealer S

	♠QJ7432	
	♥AKJ8	
	♦85	
	♣6	
♠AK1098		♠65
♥643		♥752
♦642		♦K73
♣73		♣KQJ104
	♠None	
	♥Q109	
	♦AQJ109	
	♣A9852	

For half the field this was a routine 3NT by North: win the club lead, heart to Jack, diamond to 9, heart to King, cash two more hearts (why not?), diamond to 10, 10 tricks. If West is brave/foolhardy enough to overcall 1♠ and North decides to go for the penalty, South has to co-operate by re-opening with a double rather than 2♣. Pike/Wilson got 800 by these means, Goldsmith/P-P 1100 (how on earth were they able to defend **two** spades doubled?). Not being one to hide my light under a bushel (even when it goes out), I must relate how at my table N/S bid unopposed to 3NT by North, via 1♦-1♠-2♣-2♥(4th suit)-3♣-3NT. I led ♣K to the Ace and declarer, after what passed for long thought, played ♦A followed by the Queen! Naturally, I now (mis)read the situation deeply. I could cash 2 clubs to get a signal, or 3 clubs at the risk of setting up a critical extra trick for declarer, but neither of these would do unless partner held an Ace. What if partner held ♠K and ♥KJ? (I was confident declarer didn't have ♥AK, as (a) he might have bid 3NT a round earlier and (b) he would have used them to take two diamond finesses. It was essential therefore to lead a heart now, whilst partner still had a club to get back to me for the setting tricks. This was all equally OK if partner held ♥Ace rather than KJ. So, proud of my general acumen and in-depth analysis, I switched to ♥7. The looks on partner's face and on declarer's were in sharp contrast – though the underlying thought was identical: *what a plonker!* As this was my first board of the match (I went on to let through a partscore on the second), it says much for Chris's composure – and mine I suppose – that we played relatively sanely for the other 30.

Board 9: EW game, dealer N

West ♠K6542 ♥K76 ♦Q5 ♣A105 East ♠AQ107 ♥J542 ♦A74 ♣98

At my table North opened 1♥, passed round to Chris who overcalled 1♠. North persisted with 2♦ and I bid 2♥ (the usual thing). South came to life with 3♦ which was passed round to me and I bid 3♠. Chris passed this, got a diamond lead away from the King (South's fault for supporting partner's second suit with J96 – and a singleton heart to boot) and made 10 tricks. 620 was scored up only twice, both times by Derby declarers on a diamond lead. So this was one of the county's very few bad boards.

Board 12: NS game, dealer W

	♠KJ93	
	♥3	
	♦K1098642	
	♣K	
♠874		♠A
♥AKQ7		♥J65
♦Q753		♦AJ
♣74		♣A1086532
	♠Q10652	
	♥109842	
	♦None	
	♣QJ9	

At my table North opened 1♦, I overcalled 2♣, partner essayed 2NT and I raised to 3NT, hoping for a fitting honour in clubs. North found a sharp spade lead and Chris saw that his only chance was to find South with bare ♦K – hence 2 down rather than 1. 3NT was tried 6 times in all, never successfully. Nick Smith has written in his *Oxford Times* column about the joys of making 4♥ against a 5-0 break so I won't spoil the party except to say that whenever else 4♥ was tried (twice) it went 3 down. But look at the possible club contract – game is guaranteed against a 3-1 break and slam against 2-2! Brown/Keep had the right idea but languished at the 4 level for +150. The honours go to Flower/Stead's opponents and to King/Watkins, both of whom bid and made 5♣. The only way of getting there that I can see after the 1♦ opening (and assuming that 3♣ isn't available as some sort of strong and natural intervention) is for West to respond 2♦ and East to rebid 4♣, which in turn may be enough to persuade West to push on to game. Very tough!

Board 15: NS game, dealer S

North ♠AQJ62 ♥104 ♦K104 ♣Q65 South ♠10983 ♥A875 ♦Q ♣A1084

Against me, North opened 1♠ third in hand, South invited game and then bid it anyway after North declined. There were no problems in the play with both black Kings onside (David Stead managed well to get an endplay without needing to broach clubs himself). The point of the hand is that South may be tempted to undervalue his holding (only 10 HCPs and it includes a stiff Queen) but, particularly when vulnerable, one should take a more positive view and say *I have four trumps, two Aces and a singleton*. Actually I'm preaching to the converted because all six Oxon pairs bid game, compared with only two Derbyshire pairs – hard luck Chris and me, Gascoyne and Squires, who had to write down -620.

Board 17: love all, dealer N

	♠K1052	
	♥AKJ1095	
	♦7	
	♣94	
♠QJ73		♠A
♥8643		♥Q72
♦AJ4		♦Q96532
♣A2		♣KJ8
	♠9864	
	♥None	
	♦K108	
	♣Q107653	

At my table North opened 1♥, I overcalled 2♦, Chris responded 2NT and I passed. Chris got the lead of ♦7 (!), took his eight top tricks after conceding a diamond, and was delighted to find that North couldn't prevent an overtrick in the endgame. Some pairs were more adventurous: three Derbyshire pairs bid and made 3NT, and two Oxfordshire pairs. Actually, a third might have made game when North, no doubt expecting the heart stop to be on his right rather than his left, led a sneaky ♥J. John Slater now "knew" that South must have a singleton or doubleton honour, and so ducked, leaving North to cash out gleefully. Pike/Wilson defended 3NT played by East, where Tim's inability to lead a heart, though blameless, proved terminal.

Board 19: EW game, dealer S

	♠873	
	♥954	
	♦1052	
	♣10983	
♠KJ5		♠AQ
♥872		♥AKJ106
♦KQ6		♦J943
♣AKJ2		♣Q6
	♠109642	
	♥Q3	
	♦A87	
	♣754	

This was undoubtedly the key hand of the day. Everyone had their own story on it and all the stories were variations on the same theme – play 6♥ or 6NT, finesse or drop ♥Q? Chris and I had a simple auction: 1♣-1♥-2NT-6NT. As we had values to spare (34 or 35 HCPs plus a 5-card suit), there was no point in me asking partner whether or not he had 3-card heart support. Even 6NT has its problems: declarer can lead twice towards ♦KQ but if South ducks each time declarer has to decide whether to go for the diamond break – with or without cashing ♥AK first – or take the heart finesse. Chris had it easy when South rose with ♦A on the first round (!) but is confident he would have gone for the 3-3 diamond break, if put to the test. John Slater, unlucky

again, **was** put to the test and opted for the losing heart finesse. Elsewhere 6♥ was played surprisingly often: this, of course, comes down simply to guessing the trump Queen, where the odds favour the finesse (here one can cope even with a 4-1 break onside) – so there were lots of minuses around. Pike/Wilson were unlucky when their declarer took an inference that Tim had risen early with ♦ Ace (against 6♥) because he thought he had a possible trump trick, and so played to drop ♥Q – however, a more likely reason for rising with ♦ A is that South knows discards are coming on clubs. As a defender it's possible to encourage declarer to take the losing finesse (always supposing he's watching the pips): David Stead followed to the first round of trumps with the 4 and the second with the 9 – a standard falsecard in this position. One Oxfordshire defender did even better: he followed on the first round with the 4 and on the second he fumbled inadvertently in his hand, and two cards fell face up on the table – a heart and a club – causing declarer additional anguish before he took the losing finesse, not to mention great embarrassment to both defenders. Being both loyal and tactful I won't reveal who the culprit was, except to say that he was one of our wheelchair players, with a long-established reputation for spilling his cards, his bidding-box and his beer at regular intervals.

Board 22: EW game, dealer E

	♠K73	
	♥3	
	♦52	
	♣QJ86532	
♠QJ10962		♠A
♥Q7		♥A1098
♦AQ8		♦KJ10763
♣107		♣K9
	♠854	
	♥KJ6542	
	♦94	
	♣A4	

My auction went 1♦ - (2♥weak) - 2♠ - 3NT and South found the potentially ruinous lead of ♠8, to the 2, 3 and Ace. Keeping as much concealed as possible, I led a low heart at trick 2. South went in with the King. Had he led a second spade, had ♣Q come through and had I covered, I would have been 5 down (except that I'd still be in Derby, considering whether to cover ♣Q). Fortunately South didn't play a second spade – though he should probably just about have known where the King was – preferring Ace and another club, in the hope I'd bashed game without a stop. Alan Wilson has told me a long comedy of errors story about his adventures in 5♣ doubled on this hand (from the North hand, I'm pleased to say), which resulted in only two down for –300. If you want the full story, ask him (or his grandchildren in years to come).

Board 29: game all, dealer N

West ♠J82 ♥K953 ♦K4 ♣AK54 East ♠95 ♥A62 ♦AQ97 ♣J863

John Slater tells how he and Nelson play 1NT in fourth seat as 11-13, to stop passed hands having to invite game with 11 and finding 2NT too high. Guess what happened here? West downgraded his hand to 13 because of the non-working ♠J and lack of

intermediates, so with 25 combined HCPs they played in 1NT making 7 tricks precisely! Needless to say, the sheet was littered with –200s in 3NT on a spade lead. Chris and I found a better way still of dealing with these hands – we never bid with them at all! North opened a sub-minimum 1♠, South raised to 2♠ and there they played. No, despite our best efforts, this didn't make...

Board 32: EW game, dealer W

	♠Q	
	♥KQ65	
	♦K42	
	♣KQ874	
♠J9732		♠K105
♥A32		♥874
♦J7		♦95
♣J32		♣A1096
	♠A864	
	♥J109	
	♦AQ10863	
	♣None	

The trouble with 3NT is that played by South a spade lead defeats it; by North, of course, it takes ♠K lead to achieve the same result. And which hand plays it will depend on how you treat the sequence 1♣-1♦-1♥-1♠ (natural, 4th suit forcing, or both). Two Oxfordshire pairs were down in 3NT, to one Derby pair. But what about 4♥? It's difficult to see how this could ever be down, particularly with both red suits dividing equally. Flower/Stead found this spot, as did two Derby pairs. And what about 6♦? Pike/Wilson bid 1♣-1♦-1♥-1♠(FSF)-3♦-6♦. Tim made this without even having to resort to the ruffing club finesse: well done!

However, it must be said that the cards lay as favourably as they possibly could, perhaps making the top spot 5♦, as was bid by Procter/Robinson and two Derby pairs

Let's hope this augurs for a better season for the A team – it's their turn for a trophy now!

JOHN WILLIAMS

25/05/04