

LEICESTERSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE

19th February 2006 at Loughborough Grammar School

The results were: Oxon A lost by 6 IMPs (9-11 VPs), Oxon B won by 59 IMPs (18-2) and Oxon C won by 61 IMPs (18-2). With the final match of the season (v Warwicks) still to come, this leaves our A team in 6th place in the Dawes League, our B team leading the Porter by 11 VPs and our C in 3rd place in the Markham (apologies for misinformation in an earlier message: the League Secretary forgot about second-placed Worcs and told me **we** were 2nd). So while the A team has only pride to play for, the B team are poised for victory, short of a collapse – we won't, will we? - and the C are playing realistically for 2nd or 3rd place.

I'm grateful to Michael Robinson for doing the cross-IMPing on this occasion, which reveals the following statistics:

	<i>Cross-Imps</i>	<i>Butler</i>
Tim Dickinson, David Southcombe (NS C)	+87	+104
John Slater, Nelson Stephens (EW A)	+48	+40
John Williams, Chris Wilson (EW B)	+45	+43
Marian Day, Nick Perceval-Price (NS B)	+27	+26
Geoff Nicholas, Debbie Roberts (NS B)	+18	+14
Tim Pike, Alan Wilson (NS A)	+15	+9
John Clifford, Gillian Lonsdale (EW C)	+12	-1
Robert Procter, Michael Robinson (EW A)	+10	-7
Chris Cooper, Greg Moss (EW C)	+3	-14
Mike Brown, Clive Keep (NS C)	+2	-4
Andrew and Dinah Lintott (EW B)	-1	-10
Keith Bennett, Steve Noble (NS A)	-32	-48

The unusually large discrepancy between cross-IMP and Butler results is for cleverer people than me to explain. The cognoscenti seem to place greater emphasis on Butler. Whichever way, congratulations to Tim and David on a splendid card; also to John and Nelson, whose results were obtained against a good Leics A team (the standard of their B and C teams on the day was pretty poor). In the report which follows I'll follow the fortunes of two NS (Dickinson/Southcombe, Bennett/Noble) and two EW (Slater/Stephens, Williams/Wilson) pairs. It's a shame that one of these pairs had a very bad day at the office but they've had the good grace to catalogue their disasters, just to show how a top pair can come unstuck occasionally. Of the remaining pairs, Tim Dickinson and John Slater have also told me their highs and lows. That leaves me and Chris and I can't be prevented from recording a few triumphs – even if some of them were down to a rare lucky day. (PS: further commentary just received from Chris Cooper, so I'll incorporate some of his livelier moments as well).

Board 1: love all, dealer N

North ♠965 ♥J6 ♦KJ103 ♣K1054 South ♠KJ743 ♥KQ875 ♦A9 ♣J

It's a pretty grotty 4♠ to bid but lots did, of course. West is on lead holding ♠Q2 ♥A102 ♦Q82 ♣AQ632. Any schoolboy would plonk down his two unsupported Aces and then wonder what to do next but short of a complete stupidity he'd have two trumps to come for 1 down. However, proper bridge players don't normally plonk

down unsupported Aces and the alternative of a small diamond was the popular and normal choice, after which declarer could win the Ace, finesse the 10 and discard his club loser for 10 tricks. I say could, because at Keith and Steve's table, this didn't happen and they went down. Tim and David duly made their game, as did my opponents. Chris Cooper's oppo ended up in 3NT by North, which looks impregnable, thanks to the heart break. Unlucky!

Board 2: NS game, dealer E

	♠732	
	♥QJ102	
	♦A86	
	♣AQ5	
♠Q8		♠KJ1096
♥753		♥A98
♦73		♦K92
♣J98763		♣42
	♠A54	
	♥K64	
	♦QJ1054	
	♣K10	

I suppose 4♥ has some kind of play but that's for the birds anyway. Once East has opened 1♠, the problem is to avoid 3NT by South. At my table South overcalled 2♦ (well, OK, just), North made a UCB and South jumped to 3NT: down 2 after ♠Q lead served him right! Chris Cooper's oppo also got to 3NT on a spade lead, having spurned the opportunity to defend 2♣ doubled – serve them right again. Tim is still wondering how his 2♦ overcall was passed out, but is grateful for the +110. John Slater has a horror story to tell: At his table South passed the 1♠ opening round to North, who protected with 1NT. When this was raised to 3NT he naturally assumed that a Spade lead would be unproductive and found an imaginative alternative of ♥8. Ouch!

Board 3: EW game, dealer S

West ♠A85 ♥A ♦Q7 ♣AKJ10432 East ♠10 ♥KJ952 ♦AK93 ♣965

This is a good hand for those who play Acol 2s, and a dangerous one for those who don't (and possibly even for strong clubbers) because after any opening bid of 1♣, West is liable to be bidding next at the 5 level following (2♠) - 3♥ - (4♠). A grand slam was bid only twice – against Brown/Keep in the C and Nicholas/Roberts in the B – whilst 5 pairs didn't get beyond game. Tim and David conceded 720 in 3NT and John and Nelson carded the same score in the plus column. Keith and Steve conceded 1390 and Chris and I made the same score after an auction which went 2♣ (Benji) - 2♦ (relay) - 3♣ - 3♥ - 3NT - 4♣ - 4♥ (cue) - 6♣. As the perpetrator of the last bid I was due some heavy treatment on the way home but fortunately Procter/Robinson, who were our travelling companions, were one of the pairs in 3NT so I was spared. Actually, though it's easy to laugh at our efforts, there's an awful lot of information to get over in order to bid the Grand with complete confidence (ie including certainty that there isn't a hole in the trump suit – they were 2-1 in practice): West has to get over his trump length as well as two outside controls, and he needs to know his ♦Q is

working, East has to get over his heart and diamond controls, plus the Spade singleton. OK, if I'd bid 5♦ over 4♥ and then heard 5♠ from partner, I might have been ready to rumble. Incidentally, against Nicholas/Roberts, the auction was virtually identical to ours, except 6♣ was raised without ceremony to 7NT! I don't know the auction against Brown/Keep and don't want particularly to hear about the hand ever again...(some hope!)

Board 4: game all, dealer W

West ♠QJ964 ♥A97632 ♦A ♣A East ♠K1032 ♥J8 ♦92 ♣KQ1076

An excellent bidding hand. At my table Chris opened 1♥ and splintered with 4♦ over my 1♠ response. I took the view that my clubs were unlikely to be a big factor opposite a major 2-suiter, and my heart holding was unpromising (King or a singleton would have made a huge difference, obviously), so I signed off in 4♠. Chris still employed RKCB but on finding we were short a top trump, he respected my previous bidding and signed off in 5♠. Chris Cooper more or less decided to bid 6♠ on his own, he told me: this might have been a triumph if partner's trump control had been the Ace and the finesse had worked, but really it's better to find a way of consulting partner (who should realise that the key to the hand is his heart holding). Slam was bid 4 times in all: one was against Tim and David, one against Marian and Nick and one (hurrah!) against Keith and Steve, so this was a good board for the county overall.

Board 6: EW game, dealer E

West ♠5 ♥52 ♦98653 ♣AK952 East ♠KQ63 ♥A93 ♦AK107 ♣QJ

At my table the bidding went 1♠ - (2♥) - X - (P) - 4♦ - (P) - 5♦ and I was favoured with ♦J lead, so I could set up a spade discard for the losing heart in quick time. As it happens the lead was a singleton but I had 11 tricks without worrying about where ♦Q was. As South held ♥KQ10764, his choice of opening lead was a little wayward, perhaps. On ♥K lead I would have needed to play restricted choice to bring the trumps in for no losers, by cashing the Ace, overtaking a club in dummy and finessing ♦10. Steve and Keith lost 600 thus, John and Nelson made the same and Tim and David got 200 from a hopeless 6♦ (as did Pike/Wilson in the A team, to counterbalance Procter/Robinson's down 1 in 5♦). It looks as though everyone who bid 5♦ did well to avoid 3NT but in practice, declarer in 3NT needs only to duck a round of hearts to succeed (unblocking clubs and playing for the drop in diamonds, because North has ♠A). Whilst several declarers went down in 5♦, the two in 3NT both brought it home - lucky for Clifford/Lonsdale perhaps, and unlucky for Day/Price.

Board 9: EW game, dealer N

As ever, confession is good for the soul. At my table the unopposed NS bidding went 1♣ - 2♦ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 3♣ - 3NT, against which Chris led ♥9. Dummy hit with ♠632 ♥A762 ♦Q ♣AK432 and I was looking at ♠J1098 ♥108 ♦J102 ♣J10. Lulled by the bidding into "how many overtricks" mode, I with-held my ♥Q. Maybe partner had good spades and KX of diamonds, so I could come in eventually to lead a triumphant spade through. This didn't really stand up to close analysis, of course, but neither did anything else. So declarer won ♥10 and played three rounds of clubs, on the last of which, following through my brilliant insight, I let go a spade - a pity as declarer's hand was actually ♠AKQ7 ♥108 ♦98743 ♣Q8 (presumably the 2♦ bid

had been a bidding box accident). Amazingly, 3NT made on three other occasions, though the only Oxon pairs to benefit were Brown/Keep. I was dissuaded by the oppo bidding into believing that partner, if he held so little, would scarcely have led a heart from precisely KJ9 (had his third one been the 2 it would have been easier for me.) The point of this sorry tale is that it's almost always the case that if you **do** lead from KJX you're hoping to justify it by partner holding the Queen, or some other lucky accident occurring, so the least misleading thing you can do is to lead the **Jack**. This now represents entry number 98 in the Williams/Wilson catalogue of Things We'll Remember Next Time It Comes Up (copies available on request - £1000 + PP)

Board 12: NS game, dealer W

North ♠A ♥97 ♦Q8753 ♣AQ962 South ♠J104 ♥AKQ8543 ♦K10 ♣K

West opens 1♠. Not a single NS pair in the match reached slam on these cards though everyone made 12 tricks (or 13 after ♠K lead). Clearly it's an awkward hand to judge. However, it struck me that at my table North overcalled 2NT to show the minors, and though he raised a forcing 3♥ response to 4♥, South obviously assumed he had a weak 2-suiter. People who always show their hand-type in these situations, regardless of strength, seem often to get away with more than they deserve. Surely it's better to have greater definition – either weak or strong, or always weak? The problem with North's hand here, of course, is that otherwise he has to either pass initially and await developments, or overcall a grotty 2♦ and hope to have the chance to compete further with 3♣, without overexciting partner. Still, I prefer that to a random 2NT.

Board 14: love all, dealer E

	♠J853	
	♥A76	
	♦4	
	♣QJ1092	
♠KQ		♠1097642
♥Q94		♥J3
♦QJ93		♦K10762
♣A764		♣None
	♠A	
	♥K10852	
	♦A85	
	♣K853	

Only Ace and another club beats 4♥ but only two pairs got to play there, Nicholas/Roberts for Oxon and Clifford/Lonsdale's oppo for Leics (both emerged with 11 tricks). The Lintotts were unlucky when their oppo landed in the miraculous spot of 5♣, where declarer has only to play three rounds of hearts. He can then use the established hearts as extra trumps to play through West and limit him to one more winner. Other big winners on the hand for Oxon were Day/Price who got to play 3♥* for +630 and Procter/Robinson who took 5♥* for 500 somehow, plus Tim and David (inevitably) who got 300 from 4♠*, and small winners were Cooper/Moss and Slater/Stephens, who at least took 5♥* 1 down. Chris and I enjoyed a curiosity when the bidding, starting with South, went 1♥ - (P) - 2♥ - (P) - P - (2NT) - P - (3♦).

That ended proceedings and though I couldn't quite make it, -50 was OK. Chris's unusual unusual 2NT was quite smart, I thought (no 5♣ for NS now!) but what the oppo thought they were doing thereafter, I have no idea.

Board 19: EW game, dealer S

	♠KJ9742	
	♥2	
	♦K82	
	♣KQ5	
♠AQ6		♠10
♥K4		♥AQJ10765
♦A76		♦104
♣J10983		♣764
	♠853	
	♥983	
	♦QJ953	
	♣A2	

West opens 1NT and North overcalls 2♠. East's winning bid here is 3NT: (a) it's the most likely one to buy the contract and (b) it happens to have 9 or 10 top tricks. It's funny how we all find this bid when our long suit is a minor but never think of it otherwise (obviously, the downside is that when 3NT is wrong, it's down an awful lot. Those who bid 4♥ mostly found themselves 1 down, or provoked NS into saving in 4♠, which doesn't look right to me, somehow, but was often spectacularly successful – this was actually made by Pike/Wilson, Nicholas/Roberts and Bennett/Noble (and they were doubled – hurray!) and by one Leics declarer. I just bounced to 4♥ and played there on a spade lead to the Ace. I drew trumps and ducked a club to the Queen. The defence played a second club to the Ace and switched back to spades! Plus 620 – oh dear. I notice one Oxon pair lost the same score, but I'm not saying who.

Board 22: EW game, dealer E

West ♠10753 ♥AJ532 ♦Q7 ♣A9 East ♠KQ64 ♥K104 ♦J109 ♣QJ7

Although the intermediates were good, I opened a weak NT with the usual degree of trepidation. Because we play Stayman followed by a jump in a major as game forcing, Chris had to start with a 2♦ transfer, intending to follow up with an invitation in spades. After my 2♥ South came alive with 3♣ and somehow we managed to go plus by passing this out. South held ♠A ♥Q9 ♦AK53 ♣K108543 and his partner not a lot. This was a very difficult hand for either side to go plus on. The bad news was Keith and Steve doubling 1NT as NS and conceding 380 but the good news was spectacular: John and Nelson got their oppo into 5♦* and took it 5 off for 1100! (As it's the one good result they haven't referred to, I suspect their part in the auction may not have been completely edifying...)

Board 24: love all, dealer W

West ♠42 ♥6532 ♦AK952 ♣A4 East ♠109 ♥4 ♦Q8764 ♣K9632

When Chris found a 1♦ opening and North doubled for TO I thought it was likely that I'd end up bidding 5♦ over 4 of a major, so might as well do so straight away and let the oppo guess what to do. They did and we were 1 down doubled. It was galling to

discover that with the adverse clubs 3-3, 4♥ or 4♠ couldn't make. That doesn't mean they didn't, because Brown/Keep notched up 420 and two Leics C pairs did the same. To complete our misery on this board, Steve Noble led a trump against 5♦*, for -550.

Board 25: EW game, dealer N

North ♠None ♥A62 ♦AK75 ♣AQJ653 South ♠AKQ8543 ♥105 ♦962 ♣2

How does the sequence 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♦ - 4♠ - P appeal to you? It looks normal enough to me. 8 tables duly made 4♠, some with overtricks (trumps are 3-3 but clubs 5-1 offside). Two pairs – one on either side - stayed alive in 3NT (hearts are 6-2, diamonds 3-3 and the long heart hand has no entry). Cooper/Moss's oppo found 4NT too high, though. John Slater recorded sympathy for his own opponent who, asked about trump quality, thought it reasonable enough to bid 6♠, only to discover that the club layout meant he couldn't get to hand to draw trumps before setting up clubs via a ruffing finesse. I felt even more sympathy for my opponents – indeed, offered them a sedative after the following sequence: 1♣ - 1♠ - 2♦ - 3♠ - 3NT - 4♦ - 5♣ - (dbl) - 5♦ (end). Yes, I was the dumbo who doubled 5♣, though I managed to not give them another chance after the final bid. Needless to say, what I should have done was to advise dummy – as per the famous Reese/Schapiro story – to drop his cards out of the nearest window rather than on the table. Declarer won the heart lead and played Ace and another club, ruffed and over-ruffed. Partner put me back in with a heart, and safe in the knowledge that my Q10X of trumps meant a plus, I led another club, also ruffed and over-ruffed. I ruffed the next heart with 10 of trumps and exited with the Queen to await a further club trick and down 3. So the 7 playing tricks available in spades had yielded precisely none in clubs. It has to be said that the quality of the Leics B team was no better than the C.

Board 29: game all, dealer N

	♠AJ1097	
	♥9	
	♦7532	
	♣Q73	
♠6		♠Q43
♥AQJ732		♥K8654
♦AJ86		♦10
♣108		♣KJ94
	♠K852	
	♥10	
	♦KQ94	
	♣A652	

Seven tables played in heart games by EW, some peacefully and some in stressful contracts like 5♥* (all the latter made except the Lintotts, who presumably misguessed clubs to go 1 down). Tim and David, in keeping with their day, got to 5♠ but then got defend 6♥*-1, a score which stood even after a brisk interlude with the TD. Those who bought into spade sacrifices had mixed fortunes: Oxon pairs went down by two or three tricks three times compared with Leic's twice – but one of theirs (against Procter/Robinson) was doubled for -800.

Board 30: love all, dealer E

North ♠AQJ ♥J8 ♦J83 ♣AQJ95 South ♠532 ♥K1093 ♦KQ1097 ♣6

At my table Chris (West) volunteered a frisky weak 2♠ third in hand, with a 5-4-2-2 7-count. North bid 2NT, South looked for a heart fit and then put him to 3NT. I led a club from KXXXX, which didn't unduly embarrass declarer. However, late in the play, and having never broached the heart suit himself, he misguessed to put up the King when I led one, and went 1 down. However, four Oxon pairs (Dickinson/Southcombe of course, Day/Price, Pike/Wilson and Nicholas/Roberts) made 3NT, compared with only one from Leics. Leics found some comfort at the Procter/Robinson table, where the alternative contract of 2♣* by East (!) went for 800.

Board 31: NS game, dealer S

North ♠4 ♥K6 ♦AK83 ♣AQ10953 South ♠AJ7 ♥AQ82 ♦QJ75 ♣62

At my table South opened 1NT and North, who hadn't exactly covered himself in glory in this set, responded 1♣. A kindly Mr Noble told him on enquiry that as correcting the bid to 2♣ would invoke a convention, he was able to bid whatever he liked but his partner would be silenced thereafter. After due consideration he settled for 5♣, which made 12 easy tricks after playing for split trump honours. No one found the technically superior 6♦ but four Oxon pairs got to 6♣ compared with three Leics ones: well done to Dickinson/Southcombe, Day/Price, Nicholas/Roberts and Pike/Wilson. Bennet/Noble were one of the pairs who languished in 3NT.

Board 32: EW game, dealer W

	♠987652	
	♥A83	
	♦J9	
	♣A10	
♠A		♠KQ
♥J7542		♥Q9
♦1032		♦K74
♣Q762		♣KJ8543
	♠J1043	
	♥K106	
	♦AQ865	
	♣9	

After a pass by West, North decided to open a weak 2♠ - not exactly the hand weak 2s were invented for but we can't always choose the cards we hold. I overcalled 3♣ - dangerous perhaps when vul opposite a passed partner, but we can't always choose the cards we hold. South leaped to 4♠, at which point we were destined to lose a few IMPs because only four pairs were inspired enough to reach game (2 of ours to 2 of theirs), but the deficit became a great dealer bigger when Chris decided to bid 5♣ (he called it an each-way bet, I called it -800). There were a few others in 5♣, but no one else was doubled and they were let off for 2 down, to boot. Steve Noble finds his side's defence to a modest 3♣ by EW too gruesome to record in detail.

So there it is. Good luck to our teams in the last match. I'm doing the best thing to ensure a happy result, by not playing.

JOHN WILLIAMS
23/02/06