

Oxfordshire vs Staffordshire - July 14th 2009.

A team +88 imps 20-0

B team +43 imps 16-4

C team +82 imps 19-1

It was great to see the A team continue with another maximum. I'm extremely pleased to see us being clinical again against one of the weaker counties and another 20 gives us a bit of breathing-room - especially as Gloucestershire have dropped some early points. The match was all about the first half where we racked up a big lead. The third set and fourth sets were relatively flat but we managed to eke out enough imps to get the 20.

The B team, may perhaps be disappointed not to record a bigger win when well placed at half time. Unfortunately the dull second half hit the momentum somewhat but 16-4 is respectable enough and sees us unbeaten so far.

The C team, with an entirely different line-up from the victorious team from the national finals, had an emphatic win. In fact, they'll probably be a little disappointed to just miss out on a 20. The first set of +75 certainly set things up nicely but an unexpected loss of 31 in the final set saw them dip below the 100 mark and unexpectedly out of the 20-0 zone. Still, 19-1 is another solid performance - well done!

The stats are below.....These have been updated since my provisional values given before. Found a mistake... sorry folks!

A team

Cooper/Youngs	Butler +42	X-imp +54
Clark/Porter	Butler +7	X-imp +25
Procter/Smith	Butler+32	X-imp +46
Angus/Piper	Butler 5	X-imp +19

B team

Williams/Wilson	Butler -2	X-imp +13
Lintott/Lintott	Butler +32	X-imp +46
Clacey/Moss	Butler 2	X-imp +19
Kaz/Nicholson	Butler +20	X-imp +32

C team

Claridge/Hayes	Butler +3	X-imp +14
Jones/Lonsdale	Butler +44	X-imp +61
Gidman/Whitehouse	Butler -4	X-imp +13
Rowland/Sheehy	Butler +43	X-imp +55

Board 1

An interesting start here. I thought our opponents did quite well to get to 5C.

1S 2D 2S X
P 3S* P 4C
P 5C end

I started off with two rounds of spades and then switched to the HQ. Declarer won this on table crossed in trumps, ruffed a spade and then drew trumps. He played off all this trumps to try to get a count and then played a diamond up. I think it's with the odds to finesse here but fortunately he played them from the top and so only had 10 tricks. If the HA isn't knocked out, then the contract is trivial to make obviously as you can ruff out the diamonds. Even so, I think that 11 tricks should really be found. When Luke/Michael (our team-mates in our mini-match) netted 11 tricks in a club part-score this was a nice way to start.

Nick Smith has described to me how his opponents went off in 3D. That appears tricky - try to work out how! Takes quite a while to spot a line for only 9.

Alistair Gidman's "random" preempt of 2S here, as he describes it, worked very well in keeping the opponents from finding a sensible spot.

Board 2

How do you evaluate the East cards here? Although this is 22 HCP, I think it is most definitely worth an upgrade. You hold all four aces and good intermediates. Our opponents showed it as 22-23 points and so easily got to game. Those who showed it as 20-22 were likely to miss game as West has a clear pass - 4333 no intermediates is not really the three count that needs to be driving to game. Ian Angus tells me that he feels he should have upgraded this one and sure enough Nathan found the obvious pass of 2N for a game-swing out in their mini-match. It was flat in game in our match... although I'm sure Luke and Michael found rather more bids than our opponents!

Board 3

Do you open the South cards? I think I agree with Bryony's 1C (we play a strong nt here) as, although there are poor intermediates, AAK is usually enough to open. I raised to 3C which is a mixed distributional raise (2C would be inverted and 2N a junk raise) and East has a decision. I favour a practical 4S here but our opponents bid 3S which ended the auction. A club lead lets through 4S - bit unlucky really and was a game-swing in for us when Luke/Michael bid and made game. We conceded 10 ourselves after the normal club lead. Even on a non-club lead, South needs to be awake enough to rise with the ace of spades and switch to a low heart. You'd be very happy to beat it.

This was flat in the A team - where we got a game-swing in our mini match and there was a game-swing out in the other. Apparently, after a 3C opening in 3rd,

Gidman/Whitehouse's opponents found the 4S bid and the inevitable club lead led to it slipping through. Unlucky!

Board 4

Well - what a hand. Can you believe that Bryony got to open the South cards in 4th seat after 3 passes? Who'd have thought there was so much distribution about! She tried 1H and West bid 1N. A dozy East didn't alert and I passed quietly expecting things to get better for us. East bid 2H and partner asked the meaning of 1N. I was willing her to pass smoothly as i'd guessed what was happening!! East started saying "15-17 bal..." then noticed the passcard and explained it as "both minors with spade tolerance". Hm.... South trudged on with 3C over 2H and so East tried 3S. Bryony now ventured a double and West bid 4C. I was more than happy to double this but wasn't capable of finding a trump lead, I'm afraid. My choice was a heart which wasn't great but at least was more effective than a spade which lets it through!. This went to the king, ace and ruff. Declarer ruffed two diamonds, crossing back to hand with spade ruffs and tried to cash some hearts. I could ruff the third round and exit with the ace of spades. I could not now be thrown in and we always had to come to one more trump trick and two diamonds for 200.. phew! Most people found 5CX-2 and so this was a swing out for us.

I should add that it was an extraordinary auction at the other table. Michael Clark started off with 3C (constructive) and this went round to South who bid.... Four Hearts! Wow - that's some bid. I can imagine what Luke was thinking with the East cards "I wonder if this will make?". Unfortunately Michael had always intended to show his splendid two suiter and so tried 4N now and Luke had to try a reluctant 5C which netted a double.

Ian Angus tells me that Nathan chose an aggressive 5C opening which seems sensible to me, just not a roaring success on this deal.

When Smith/Procter were defending 5CX, the unfortunate ace of spades lead probably should have let the Worcestershire declarer get out for 200, but they rather missed a trick and went an extra once off.

The C team really enjoyed this board netting 1500 points between them for 25 imps overall. Very sweet, I'm sure.

Board 5

Spades and NT plays very well here. I made a pedestrian 9 tricks when they opened up diamonds and hearts for me. Didn't realise I needed to play on clubs too!

Chance missed for Gidman/Whitehouse here when they had a chance to axe a diamond partial following a pen. double of their 1N opener. It's important to think carefully about these sequences to ensure you know what is and isn't forcing. Incidentally, Porter/Clark swear by light doubles of 1N in 4th seat. They think it's a long-term earner.... worth thinking about.

Smith and Wilson managed to make 11 tricks in hearts here only to see a flat board. I must confess, I'm still chuckling a little bit by Ian Angus' recounts of the off-par defence to 1N to see them concede 11 tricks there for a rather forgettable push!

Board 6

East opened 2H at our table here and Bryony overcalled 2N. I raised to 3N after checking for four spades opposite. My points seemed to all be in the right place so that was a simple 10 tricks. I'm amused to report that after a misunderstanding our counterparts in the mini match reached..... four spades. A fine spot indeed. Amusingly an unfortunate trump lead let through 11 tricks (!). One out? I laughed....

Jones/Lonsdale were quite surprised to pick up a plus here in defence when the Worcestershire pair went astray. When Hayes/Claridge rolled in a comfortable 460, all was well in the world. 6C makes, but doubt you could ever find it.

Board 7

Lazy bidding from our opponents here:

1S (3H) ?

4S bought the dummy and the good slam (grand is making) was missed. Even worse was Smith and Procter's opponents who had an uncontested auction of 1S 4S. Ugh! Still, both our A team pairs did well to evaluate the strength of the two voids and bid the good slam for a nice double gain in the A team.

Board 8

What do you do with the North cards after West opened 1D? I tried 1H and then raised partner's 2H to 4H. Simple to make this really if you safety play the spade suit. West is extremely likely to have the king, so you should cash a top spade and then duck a spade if the king doesn't appear playing him to have the king bare or Kx. Game-swing in for us when my counterpart took a spade finesse (in 4S).

The Lintotts managed to concede 110 here which seems like a poor effort by their opponents. The C team had a great result here when both our pairs defeated game whereas our declarers made no mistake. Well done all.

Board 9

Well - a thin game here - only Procter/Smith reached it. Hard to see how you can bid it. South opened 1D in third and Bryony passed as West. I think this is right - a poor suit and not too many values means an unfavourable overcall is ill-advised. Still here - it would have scored a goal. North responded 1S and I found a dubious double (at least one other person, Alistair Gidman found the same action so at least I'm not alone). Fortunately this helped us compete to 4C which scored well with 2D= on the other table. A magic fit yields the extremely thin club game.

Ian Angus has tried to persuade me that their uninterrupted auction to 4H (after an Ekren 2H opening showing both majors) was a good sacrifice.... yeah right!

I'd like to say how well Smith/Procter bid to 5C here, but I must admit, I find the auction a little baffling.

P P 1D 2C* *=not my taste
X XX 2H P
3H P 4H P
P 5C P P
P

Hm - XX? pass of 3H? then 5C? Seems to flout most guidance on competitive bidding, but obviously worked extremely well here. I would thoroughly recommend having a bid available as a good raise in partners suit rather than redouble. XX just doesn't seem like a sensible choice in my book. Still - hard to be too critical of the only pair to bid game here, but I do wonder whether it was intended as a sacrifice.....

Board 10

1H 1S
3H ?

3N seems completely obvious to me. Fortunately our opponents chose to pass and then misplayed the heart suit (you should play HA then the queen to pin any of doubleton J, T and 9 of hearts. This was 3 in when team-mates also went minus.

Some interest at the Smith/Procter table here when the defence to a strong club went awry. Still, in the end there was a ruling that the Worcestershire pair hadn't been damaged by the bidding, merely by a poor bid and in the end an appeal was withdrawn. I would have been surprised if we'd lost an appeal - sometimes the opponents just misbid and happen to get lucky!

Great effort from Gidman/Whitehouse here. Alistair cracked 3N and they ran to 4H..... that was a much more pleasurable double and 500 in!

No great surprise to see Piper/Angus roll in 3N here and it was good to see Kazmierczak and Nicholson improbably rolling in 4H. Hayes/Claridge just picked up 300 the hard way by watching their opponents go a few off.

Board 11

Hm - a chance missed and I'll take all the blame here. Partner opened 1S and I bid 2H (natural and game-forcing). Partner's 3S rebid stressed a good hand and a good suit and I was a little bit fixed. I'd like to cuebid my ace of hearts but it kinda looks like it might be non-forcing. So I settled in the end for an ugly RKCB assuming that partner's values should consist of the three missing keycards. Sure enough 5D confirmed all three and North now doubled. Now what? I found a poor effort of 5H asking for the trump queen and then passed partner's 6S response (trump queen and no kings). A much better call from me would have been 6H asking her to bid grand

with 3rd round heart control. I admit I was worried that she might think I had a good hand with a long solid stack of hearts but we agreed that I have to bid hearts at my second opportunity if I'm interested in having hearts as trumps. In the end, expecting them to miss it, I took the safe option of sticking in small slam. Still - not a good effort from me and I'm surprised no pair found this one (some only got to a rather feeble game).

Board 12

I've got a bit of stick for my bidding here. 2H P ? I raised to 3H (auto-pilot, I suppose) when I should really pass I've been told. I'm not 100% sure but irrespective of that, Bryony was quite unlucky that she couldn't get a count before playing on trumps. All she knew was that North had 3 diamonds to South's 4 so played for hearts 2-2 or South with the shortage. Unlucky, I think. (but would have scored 110 in 2H, I know). A swing out for us, in any case when our counterparts made 110 in hearts.

Slight difference in evaluation here - Rob Procter thought my hand was worth a game-try and so also got to 3H. Nick Smith tells me that the defence was a little more accommodating than ours.

Board 13

Uninteresting here. Diamond lead to hold 4H to 11 tricks. I didn't lead one, so that was a flat board in -680.

Board 14

Enterprising stuff here. South opened 1H and partner overcalled 2C. North bid 2D which I like and I bid 2S as a fit non-jump. South bid 3H which surprisingly bought the dummy. Partner led the SK and declarer won and exited in spades. I could win this and play a trump now. That was a mistake - the right play is a club through followed by a trump from partner... oops. Still, declarer won and now played the king of clubs rather than a spade. Partner could win and play a second trump and now the dummy is dead. She could ruff on black-suit loser but had to concede two more for one off. If she plays spades first, if Bryony ruffs in, declarer can simply pitch the club loser from table. A bit lucky for us, but declarer's line wasn't really consistent with A team standard if I'm honest. Unfortunately at the other table, Luke picked a bad time to revoke. I think the ruling he got was wrong with the change in revoke laws, but still..... a flat board in the end.

Great result for Angus/Piper here. Ian tells me in his own "concise" style....

"1H-(2C)-3H-(3C)-4H

D2 lead (3rd/5th), fetches K, A and ruff. I play a small spade which RHO wins. He has to switch to clubs now to beat it but played a heart.

I win. SA ruff a spade, LHO pitches a small diamond. DK pitching a club and ruff a diamond back. LHO can over ruff but gets endplayed. 10 tricks." Good stuff - still one out though when 450 slipped through at the other table.

Gidman/Whitehouse's opponents opened..... 1N. It says quite a lot about the deal that I had no clue which hand had opened!

Good swing in the C team too where Jones/Lonsdale rolled in 450 against part-score in the other room. The B team all found pluses too for a good board overall for the county.

Board 15

A rather sweaty 3N here I suppose. 3 diamonds, 3 clubs a heart and a couple of spades seems normal. Hard to combine all your chances. Flat across the A team.

Board 16

Not sure about this auction at all! Partner opened 1S and North bid 3C (intermediate). I hate intermediate jump overcalls, I must admit. This one just took up room for no real gain (what's wrong with 2C?). I passed as East and South bid 3H. North now bid 3S asking for a spade stop and South next tried 4D. North persisted with 5C at which point Bryony had had enough and furnished a double. This was 500 when declarer forgot to cash her HA early enough. When Luke and Michael only conceded 100 in a club partial, this was a nice gain.

At one table the auction was

(1S) 2C (2H) P
(2S) P (3H) X
end

that was an early Christmas present for Angus and Piper. I'm sure Smith/Procter were a little surprised to gain imps by conceding 3C! Elsewhere, things were a little disappointing where most Oxford pairs went minus.

Board 17

I think we overdid it here. South opened 1C and West overcalled 1H. I passed as North which must be right, I think. Partner doubled for takeout and West upped the stakes with 2H. I think I should definitely pass this now I've thought about it, but couldn't resist 2S at the table. Partner now expected me to have a weak hand with 5 spades, so bid game. This has no play whatsoever with everything wrong. I was lucky to get out for 2 off when they forgot to give their partner two heart ruffs. Obviously they were seduced by my failure to falsecard on the first heart ;-). Team-mates were a bit unlucky to buy the pot in 2H which can't make!

Board 18

3N - heart lead, 10 tricks. Snore. A surprising swing out when Luke/Michael took a decision to defend a doubled vulnerable contract. Disappointing only to be one off. Right decision, long term though.

Board 19

I thought this was actually quite tricky. Bryony opened 1D as South and responded 1N over my 1H response. Should I pass or bid 2H? In hindsight, I think I should bid 2H but I think it is close. This contract played rather well for 9 tricks on a club lead when West was hoodwinked into being endplayed.

Board 20

We reached 3N here when Bryony opened a strong no-trump in 4th. Momentary alarm when a spade was led, but the 4-4 split meant that 9 tricks were in the bag. A push - in this case.

Board 21

We got to 5C here rather than 3N as Bryony correctly reasoned that her hand was worth a slam-try. Not much to the play and was flat again. Only really excitement seen at Jones/Lonsdale's table where they rolled in a nice 300 to go with Hayes/Claridge's 300.

Board 22

Yet another game here. We managed to right-side this one when Bryony could open and rebid 1N as South. Played by North, a heart lead scuppers the contract but played by South East can never get in to play a heart through. A heart lead simplified the play somewhat.... This was an unexpected swing in here when our counterparts had a misunderstanding and played in part-score. Nick Smith found a throw in for 10. Another great results here where Jones/Lonsdale were allowed to make 670 in 2HX.

Board 23

I was wondering here about what to do as North. The auction started....

P 1C P 1D
1H 1S ?

I settled for 3H here which of course went one down. I think partner would have preferred me to give a good raise to 2H - it might even have stolen the pot. I dunno - I was happy enough with 3H although it is always destined to go one off. Would I open the South cards? Probably. Another flat board. Again somewhat different evaluation here in the other A team match as the auction

1H X 2N P
3H end

was their effort. 2N seems a bit of a stretch to me, but I will admit it's a bit close opposite an opening bid.

Board 24

Our opponents played in a quiet 1N here on a heart lead. Slightly fiddly to defend this. I think that an early club switch is probably needed here to break up any

endplay, but a second heart seems normal enough. Our opponents rather lazily just claimed 8 at this point when I think that they could easily have got to 9 if they'd tried hard enough. Unfortunately for team-mates the defence was less accommodating in 3N and so was a fewimps out.

Smith/Procter were sharp here to defeat 3N. Nick recounts: "A pleasing if unspectacular defence. C6 led to declarer's 7 - not a great start! Rob won the 2nd S and found H7 return to my Q. I thought of leading HK back but there seemed too big a risk of losing a tempo so I returned a C. One off. "

Gidman/Whitehouse's experience was a good instructive one. 1S P 1N P ? Do you invite? I think not - long-term, I don't think the hand is worth a raise.

Board 25

What a deal!!! What do you do as South? Our opponents heard their partner open an "intermediate" 2D and settled for an eminently practical 7H. To be honest, I think I'd have opened 7H irrespective of what happened earlier in the auction. 6 tables only got to small slam here and I've heard several comments about concerns about getting to dummy, the spades not running etc. There are a few things to consider here and I think that Michael Clark summed it up quite nicely in response to the suggestion that you should be 75% sure before bidding a grand-slam: "Figures like 75% might be reasonable in most circumstances because there's a chance that oppo won't even be in the small slam and you're taking a risk for barely any gain. But here you're 100% confident that oppo will bid at least 6H so you stand to gain 11 IMPs and lose 14 IMPs = 56% chance required. Partner might well have the nightmare xx x in the majors but then you can still make it with spades 3-3 (35%) or a pseudo-squeeze. It would be hard for the oppo, holding minor suit honours and four low spades to know to keep the spades when you haven't bid them."

I agree and that is why bidding 7H directly is a winner over a slower approach to the auction. I mean, it's not like you're going to have any methods asking about the ten of hearts and/or the jack of spades!!

Board 26

We sold out to 2S here which proved to be a make, despite the bad trump split. I was wondering about whether I should double 2S for takeout. Perhaps I'm just a bit cowardly, but I would really, rather have 4 hearts here.

Board 27

We had some slight difficulties here - mostly because the bidding sequence was unusual enough to be ambiguous. South passed for some reason and Bryony opened 1H. North overcalled 1S and so I made a takeout-double. South now volunteered 2H (good raise) and partner passed. North, quite minimum for the overcall, simply bid 2S and it was over to me. The chances here was that partner had a weak-nt but I still felt that I should take one more action here. Double, 3C and 2N all seemed plausible. I don't like double much as I only have a singleton heart, so it seemed to me that 2N was the right call. The problem is... it natural? It a scramble? or is it Lebensohl? Fortunately, my hand seems appropriate for all of those situations, so it had to be a

winner. Needless to say partner bid 3H (sigh!) but correct technique of pinning a doubleton 9 of hearts was good enough to see this one home. When Luke and Michael managed to steal the pot in 2S - this was a nice double-part score swing in.

Board 28

Well - interesting stuff here. Partner opened 1C and I was a little uncertain as East. I could bid 2D as a weak jump shift, but can't stand this with two aces. I settled on 1D and partner rebid the expected 1H. I had two options here. I could bid 1S (natural-ish and forcing) or I could bid 2D (theoretically invitational). I decided on the latter as I figured that if partner could bid on, then I would still be able to get my spades into the auction. As it happens, partner had a very suitable minimum and so I quickly rolled in 130 in 2D. Flat board.

Nick Smith rolled in a comical 2C after the precision 2C opener. Not quite such a good spot.... On the other hand Gidman/Whitehouse are still having nightmares about the defence to 5D. Unfortunate effort of CA and a trump switch.... disaster! Very disappointing, I'm sure.

Board 29

We were close here to getting to the top spot. I opened a weak two in hearts and over partner's enquiry, showed a maximum with a high-card feature in diamonds. So 4H or 3N? 3N proved to be the winner and is likely to make. 4H has no play with three aces and a trump loser. Oh well..... Flat in any case.

Nick Smith is a bit down in the dumps here after getting to 3N rather than 4H. This had some play..... "C2 lead to dummy's J. I tied 4 rounds of Hs and N led a D back, low from dummy S goes into the tank and eventually emerges with the seven. Try as I might, I could see no reason for a hesitation except that she held the Ace, i.e. I was not going to get to dummy. So I tried SK instead. S sent a C back. A 2nd D was allowed to hold, I think. Cashed SQ but J didn't drop. 5 losers now. Oh dear!" We've had a good look at this hand, and think that the winning line is to run the ST before testing hearts. This gives you the most options and you can always fall back on the hearts splitting.

Board 30

1S X 3S end was the auction. Declarer stuck with 5 losers so that was 50 in to go with team-mates 50. I like swings in like that!

Board 31

This was probably the most careless board I played all day. We were defending 1N by South on the lead of a spade round to the jack. Declarer played on clubs and partner took the third round. What should I discard? We primarily signal with standard count if anything, and I rather lazily discarded the 2 of hearts. This wasn't much use to partner and she reasoned that I probably had 5 hearts so switched to a heart. A much better discard is the jack of hearts. This is surely a "wake-up" discard and would almost certainly have got a diamond switch from partner. Very poor from

me - but fortunately a flat board when Luke and Michael also rolled in an unlikely number of tricks.

Board 32

I played in 2C and went off. I'm not really sure of the right line here but mine certainly wasn't successful. The problem is that South is ruffing hearts and North is over-ruffing dummy in spades. I won the club lead on the board and ran the HQ successfully. I would have been fine now if South wasn't ruffing the second round. When he did, I now had 6 unavoidable losers. Much to my surprise, this was a big swing in when our counterparts over-stretched to 3N. This was swiftly doubled and a bonus 500 was netted. Less good news from Gidman/Whitehouse, who were not enjoying their final set at all. A sub-optimal defence saw 3N limp in for a rather depressing result.

And that's your lot... Thanks to Chris Wilson, Rob Procter, Nick Smith, Ian Angus, Krys Kazmierczak and Alistair Gidman for sharing some thoughts on the boards. Always helps!

CC July 2009