

## WORCESTERSHIRE V OXFORDSHIRE

### Worcester BC: 13<sup>th</sup> November 2005

Excellent wins for the B and C teams by 44 IMPs (16-4 VPs) and 69 IMPs (18-2) respectively did much to rebuild our promising positions in those divisions. The A team fared much less well, unfortunately, despite leading marginally at half-time, and went down eventually by 43 IMPs (4-16).

We had problems with late arrival, which led to some re-shuffling of our personnel and not a little stress for yours truly (not that this is any excuse for any reported misdeeds which follow). However, the fact that Worcester A played much better and more in luck than its lower-ranked teams, means that the cross-IMPing over all our three quartets is the most even I can remember. Special thanks to Jeremy Bygott, who had a re-dealt board to contend with, plus the fact that – again due to the ragged start – two of our teams played the same polarity throughout and the other moved between stanzas. His cross-IMP statistics:

Denis and Kathy Talbot (B)	+47.17 IMPs
Krys Kazmierczak and Sandra Nicholson (C)	+35.00
Andrew and Dinah Lintott (B)	+34.83
Trevor Dawe and Hugh Thomson (C)	+30.50
Nick Doe and Nick Smith (C)	+23.00
Mike King and David Watkins (C)	+10.00
Tim Dickinson and David Southcombe (B)	+01.50
Robert Procter and Michael Robinson (A)	+01.00
Tim Pike and Alan Wilson (A)	-01.33
John Williams and Chris Wilson (A)	-03.83
David and Jeremy Bygott (A)	-08.33
Mike Webley and Nigel Wilkes (B)	-09.17

There were surprisingly few hands of any constructive interest

#### Board 4: Game all, dealer W

West ♠76 ♥Q7 ♦AK864 ♣A642

East ♠KQJ1052 ♥653 ♦3 ♣K109

Most pairs play that to respond 1♠ as East and bid 2♠ on the next round is non-forcing (though some also play it coyly as “constructive” (which leaves them short of a normal bid with a weak hand and a 6-card suit, it seems to me). 1♠ followed by 3♠ is invitational. The forcing route is to use 4<sup>th</sup> suit on the way. Here, Chris took the view – which I endorse wholly – to treat his crisp values as game-invitational, bidding 3♠ at his second turn. I could have regarded my own values as promisingly crisp too, and pushed on to game, but I passed despite the vulnerability. Just as well because a singleton Club Queen was led and when South came back in with the Ace of trumps he used partner’s A and K of Hearts to gain two Club ruffs for 1 down. This lost us 5 IMPs when against Robert and Michael, the Worcs East rebid a rather pathetic 2♠. At the other end of the spectrum, Tim Dickinson relates how his opponents **did** push on to game: his side led a Heart as South and, despite a Club switch, failed to take even one ruff when in with ♠A, for minus 620. The Talbots made the same 620 to balance the books on that, but Spade partscores were allowed 9 or 10 tricks on several

occasions, so partner and I were very unlucky.

**Board 8: Love all, dealer West**

West ♠J109753 ♥53 ♦7652 ♣4

East ♠A64 ♥AK1096 ♦KQ8 ♣K7

I failed to open the West hand, being an incurable wimp. When Chris opened 1♥ and RHO overcalled 2♣ I passed again. This was raised defensively to 3♣, which partner doubled for T.O. Had this been passed to me I might conceivably have said only 3♠, but RHO made the mistake of going on to 4♣, which made 4♠ an each-way bet – so I bid it. Had the opening lead been a Diamond to K and A I would have been a quick 1 down, as you can see, but ♣10 was led. I put up the King to prevent a Diamond switch, ruffed the Club return and played Jack of trumps to the Queen and Ace, and a low trump back, finding the suit 2-2. After the now inevitable Diamond switch to King and Ace, followed by a continuation of ♦J to the Queen, I cashed Ace and King of Hearts, both opponents petering to show an even number (which was rather sweet, in passing), and ruffed a third round, to find the Hearts 3-3. It only remained to lead ♠3 back to the 6, to claim 10 tricks. Now all my friends will tell you that I found ♠3 in timely fashion, stuck to the back of ♦7. This was a great board for the County: King/Watkins and the Talbots also brought home 4♠, compared with zilch from Worcs.

**Board 12: NS Game, dealer West**

North ♠K98 ♥A63 ♦J763 ♣AJ7

South ♠6 ♥KQ108 ♦K1092 ♣KQ96

North plays 3NT on a Spade lead to the Ace and Spade return. Whether you win the second or third round of the suit, you know you now have to take 9 tricks without losing the lead. It's the old story – it costs nothing to run your clubs, in case something turns up. Sure enough here, East has to find two discards and will do very well not to agonise over at least one of them, leading you take the winning view (to finesse rather than play for the drop) in Hearts. Three Oxon declarers had their guessing boots on (or their water-divining kit) whilst two went down – which may be a tribute to their opponents' sangfroid, of course. Two Worcs declarers solved the problem by playing 5♦ instead, which makes courtesy of ♦Q being well-placed.

**Board 14: Love all, dealer East**

West ♠7 ♥AK10643 ♦K108 ♣K52

East ♠AQJ1092 ♥87 ♦A32 ♣J3

What contract would you want to be in here, as West, when the bidding starts 1♠-2♥-2♠? Chris and I adopted a scientific approach when I bid 3♣ next, followed by 3♥ over 3♦ (this is another sequence designed to transform an invitational bid into a forcing one). Chris raised to 4♥ but the job was a bad 'un with Spades 5-1, trumps 4-1 and ♣A offside. Jeremy Bygott told me how he wasn't sure the sequence I adopted would be clearcut, so opted for a slightly crude 3NT at his second turn. Wonderful! A Club lead and Clubs 4-4! (Actually, in his case, a non-Club lead and 12 tricks!) Krys and Sandra also made 3NT, proving yet again what a simple game this can be, when we allow it to be....

**Board 16: EW Game, dealer West**

West ♠AK643 ♥J ♦J64 ♣Q853

East ♠QJ7 ♥K873 ♦A5 ♣A1096

West plays 4♠ after North has (possibly) shown Hearts. I got a Diamond lead and returned the suit at trick 2, but when South switched to a trump I was in awful entry

trouble for taking a ruff in dummy, leading up to ♥K and playing for split honours in Clubs, with the small matter of drawing trumps along the way (ideally, I wanted to hold losers to a Heart, a Diamond and a Club. Whenever I lost the lead I got a trump return. I wasn't up to all this and went 1 down (I was not alone), though I could no doubt have made it double-dummy, by the simple expedient of playing North for ♣K singleton! Tim Dickinson tells me how appreciative his partner was when he led this card at trick 1, leaving declarer to draw trumps, finesse ♣J and lead up to ♥K for an overtrick. Procter (and Gamble) did the same thing. I don't know how often this was repeated, or whether anyone made 4♠ on a Diamond or trump lead. I can only relate that the number of 650s on the sheet – and complete absence of 620s - leads me to think I was at least a bit unlucky.

### Board 18: NS Game, dealer East

West ♠654 ♥J3 ♦K97 ♣109872

East ♠AKQJ7 ♥AQ862 ♦Q2 ♣3

Chris opened the East hand 1♠, I passed and North managed a pass after an inner struggle (he had a flattish 9-count). This happened at 7 tables out of 12. The other 5 tables yielded 420 or 450 (fortunately, 3 of them to Oxon). Clearly no one has done anything wrong. 4♠ only makes due to the fantastic fit, in terms of all the medium cards on either side pulling full weight. Nonetheless, I suspect that strong clubbers have an edge on hands like this, because East has more than one chance. In Acol, I think there is a small but significant grey area for those who espouse strong twos, in the difference between an opening 2♠ and hands which open 1♠ and rebid a GF 3♥.

### Board 23: Game all, dealer South

♠None

♥K965

♦108532

♣10852

♠K10865

♥A832

♦64

♣74

♠A73

♥QJ1074

♦97

♣AQ6

♠QJ942

♥None

♦AKQJ

♣KJ93

At my table South opened 1♠, Chris (East) protected with 2♥ in fourth seat, South doubled and I raised defensively to 3♥, which became the final contract. It was galling to lose 200 via two Spade ruffs and the rest but, looking at all four hands, wouldn't one want to be in 5♦ with the NS cards (or even 5♣)? ♥A lead makes this easy, otherwise you need to make sure of enough Spade ruffs in dummy. One NS pair in the entire field managed to get to 5♦ and were rewarded with a score of 600 – no doubt after much heavy breathing all round. No surprise to hear their name begins with Lintott.

### Board 25: EW Game, dealer North

West ♠7 ♥AKJ876 ♦J8 ♣AQJ3

East ♠QJ954 ♥109 ♦1063 ♣K92

At my table, North opened a Lucas 2♠, which seems to be a favourite Midlands convention – two-suited in Spades and a minor, weakish – and this was passed round to me. I bid 3♥ and played there for +170. Clearly, Chris could do nothing to improve our score on the auction given, so maybe I'd undercooked things? It's difficult to make a strong case for this. It's a pretty magic fit again, and the trump finesse works. Nonetheless, this was a bad board for the county as the only two pairs to reach game both came from Worcs (the unlucky Oxon pairs were Pike/Wilson and Dickinson/Southcombe).

**Board 27: Love all, dealer South**

West ♠KQ2 ♥A1063 ♦A85 ♣AQ7                      East ♠J10 ♥KJ984 ♦K962 ♣106

This hand is included only for the good of my soul, for which confession is supposed to be good. After a multi by South and a Lebensohl 2NT response to my double, I had an unforgiveable rush of blood and raised 4♥ eventually to 6♥. The tragic epitaph to this is that 6♥ is actually cold, because the Club finesse is right and, what's more, North holds six Clubs as well as ♦QJ10, so is automatically squeezed in the minors for the twelfth trick. However, you have to guess to play for the drop in trumps first and Chris failed to do this, no doubt influenced by the multi to play North for longer Hearts. Sympathy is due to him, but not to me. To make things worse for the A team, the Bygotts won't be pleased with their +150 for ♦2 up three!

**Board 28: NS Game, dealer West**

West ♠A76 ♥106 ♦A96 ♣AKQJ3                      East ♠985 ♥AQJ954 ♦32 ♣54

Here's another 6♥, courtesy of a winning trump finesse. Needless to say, no one bid it, but a declarer in 3NT against Pike/Wilson proved that rushes of blood are not an entirely Oxfordshire phenomenon, rejected the finesse and went 2 down.

**Board 29: Game all, dealer North**

North ♠AQ964 ♥KQ6 ♦AK ♣QJ10                      South ♠1072 ♥A854 ♦Q75 ♣952

At my table North opened 2NT, South asked for 5-card majors, found one but bid 3NT anyway (presumably he would have raised 3♥ to 4♥, though). Chris led his 6-card Diamond suit and declarer saw fit to attack Clubs. It didn't seem to occur to him that by the time he had established a Club winner he (a) had no Diamond stop left and (b) in the absence of 9 tricks (when Hearts declined to break), still needed the Spade finesse. When this was wrong, he was 2 down. The same thing happened at the Talbots table, proving that there was definitely something in the air at Worcester that day. Rob Procter and Tim Dickinson showed how to play 3NT, by playing on Spades at trick 2: you can afford to duck twice and still have a guaranteed 9 tricks, but an overtrick duly arrives when ♠KJ prove to doubleton offside.

**Board 30: Love all, dealer East**

West ♠A105 ♥1053 ♦Q963 ♣A63                      East ♠KQ987 ♥8 ♦4 ♣KQ10854

The full bidding around my table was 1♣-1♦-1NT(1)-P-2♣-P-P-2♥(2)-2♠-3♥(3)-4♣(end). Notes:

- (1) 8-10 points
- (2) No, dear friends, have another go. Have it on me.
- (3) See (2)

As Chris and I play that a Sputnik after 1♣-1♦ promises 4-3 or 3-4 in the majors, and

1♠ promises 5 cards, I couldn't assume Chris had five Spades for his possibly frisky 2♠ bid, as I could have had 4-2-4-3 shape myself. The instructive point (we've now agreed) is that East can afford to make what is technically a reverse bid of 2♠ after my 1NT, simply because we both know I've already limited my hand. There is absolutely no risk of a stupid result by doing so – the worst that's ever going to happen is reaching a thin game which doesn't make. Here, of course, it does make. 4♠ was bid and made 6 times in all, 3 by each side, and Worcs also brought in 5♣\* against Pike/Wilson. To complete an unhappy board for the county, a Worcs EW B-team pair also made 3NT against Oxon opponents whose name I've mislaid, on a non-Heart lead.

Definitely something in the air!

JOHN WILLIAMS

21/11/05