

Victorian Bridge Association Bulletin

March 2022

Editor: Dee Harley

COMING EVENTS

Northern Region Bridge Association

11:00 am Saturday 5th March Matchpoints

10:00 am Sunday 6th March Swiss Teams

Contact: Derek Poulton

Email northernregionbridge@gmail.com

Venue: Shepparton Bridge Club Esson St
Shepparton

Rye Beach & Dromana Bridge Club

10:00am Saturday 12th March Swiss Pairs

10:00am Sunday 13th March Swiss Teams

Contact: Jill Haworth,

Phone 0410652298

Email: chefdaisy52@yahoo.com.au

Venue: Rosebud Memorial Hall 994 Point
Nepean Road, Rosebud 3939

Frankston Bridge Club

10:00 am Saturday 9th April Swiss Pairs

10:00 am Sunday 10th April Swiss Teams

Contact: Barbara Crawford

Email: barbaracrawford4@gmail.com

Venue: St Francis Xavier Church Function
Room Cnr Baxter & Davey Streets, Frankston

CONGRESS RESULTS

Yarra Valley Swiss Pairs

1. Eva Samuel, Peter Hollands
2. Stan Klofa, George Lovrecz
3. Stephen White, Chelliah Arul

ERBA Teams

1. George Campbell, Sandor Varga
Terry Nadebaum, Nick Nadebaum
2. John Quayle, Matti Shub
Kaye Douglas, John Sutton
3. Lorraine Robinson, Elizabeth Thomson
Dawn Braham, Viv Braham

ERBA Swiss Pairs

1. George Campbell, Sandor Varga
2. Pam Dingwall Alison Farthing
3. John Sutton John Currier

GOLD COAST CONGRESS - PAIRS

The principal pairs event at the Gold Coast Congress is the Bobby Richman Pairs, named after the first Australian player to become Emerald Grand Master (10,000+ master points) and who played extensively with our own George Gaspar in the latter part of his remarkable career. This Matchpoint Pairs event is noted for being one of the toughest on the Australian calendar, with a cutthroat qualifying process that ends up dividing the field into multiple divisions and the cream then having to rise to the top in three hard-fought finals sessions.

This year Victorians featured prominently in the finals with Justin Mill and Ben Thompson a superb second in the Open A Final and James Coutts (playing with Sydney's Liam Milne) finishing third. Also in the main final was Dee Harley playing with Elizabeth Havas (ACT) and the youth pairing of our own VBA Council Member Rebecca O'Reilly and S.A.'s David Gue, who very creditably qualified in the top category. Finally, in the A division, two VBA members, Simon Rose and Barry Rawicki, both well below Grand Master status (unlike the vast majority of the field) did extremely well to qualify for the A Division and performed very creditably throughout against top opponents. In the other Open finals, Jamie Thompson combined with Jo Haffer to win B Division, with Chris Hughes in second spot with Kim Morrison (NSW).

In the other divisions, the standout performance of Victorian participants was in the Restricted (<300 MP) division) with Diana Saul and Doug Harrah outstandingly winning the A Final of the event and earning themselves 12 Gold Points in the process. Matthew Tiplady (Berwick) managed second place in the Restricted B Final with a South Australian partner he met literally minutes before play began.

Congratulations to all Victorian participants and we look forward to good things in the Teams event ([See later](#))

MATCH AND TOURNAMENT COMMITTEE

The Poath Road premises of the VBA is still unavailable due to the severe rainstorm on 28th January. As such Monday and Wednesday night state events are being held online on Real Bridge.

The final of the Victorian Open Butler event being held on 19th March will also be held on Real Bridge. We will keep everyone up to date with what is happening in this space.

Nominations are still open for two **VQP teams** to challenge to be the Victorian Open Team at the Victorian Open Team Selection Final held at on the weekend of the 2nd and 3rd April. The winner of that final will represent Victoria in the Open Teams at the 2022 Australian National Championships to be held in Adelaide in the early part of July.

Players are encouraged to organize teams from the [eligible player list](#) on VBA website and nominate teams of 4 or 6 players. Team nominations should be submitted to the VBA MTC via email MTC@vba.asn.au.

The submission deadline is 12th March, 2022. Teams with the highest combined VQP player totals will be invited to participate in the final.

FUNNY ONE-LINERS

"With you as dummy I have a chance to make it."

"My mistake, partner, sorry. I thought you had your bid."

"Four hearts is a very good bid - but on some other hand."

"You're a has-been who never was".

EDITORIAL

The ebbs and flows of everyday life continue. I came out of hospital, battered and bruised, having had a bad reaction to Ketamine which was used to control pain. I have to say I didn't feel much pain as such, however I certainly caused my wife and some of my relatives a bit of a scare as it took me a while to believe that the hallucinations I was having were not real.

Thinking that I could get back to business as usual however was a mistake, the NBN decided to curse us with a 9-day outage in our street, added to the fact that my mobile phone did not work I felt incredibly cut off from the world. I focussed on recovering my health and then flew (a little unsteadily) to the gold coast for the first live congress I have attended in a while. This event was not so successful for me, mask wearing, physical discomfort, and a general malaise contributed to a less than stellar performance.

There was a theory being expounded at the gold coast, that wearing a mask all day reduces the Oxygen intake, and people were feeling more tired than usual. I certainly felt that way.

Covid has been with us for over 2 years now, and it's difficult to say how much closer we are to resolving the issues.

Then Russia decided to invade Ukraine. Why on earth would they think that would be a sensible thing to do? Some sort of mind control must be going on, which makes the killing and injuring of thousands of people unimportant.

Now I must prepare for the Australian Women's team matches in Salsomaggiore (Italy). I will be leaving here on March 22nd, braving the Covid restrictions for international travel, and may end up having to decide whether or not we should compete against a Russian or Belarussian team which may be competing under the WBF banner ([see WBF view on Ukraine crisis](#)).

PLAY PROBLEM #26 SOLUTION

Last month you were in 4♠. How did you do?

Dlr: West ♠ J4
 Vul: E/W ♥ J6542
 ♦ Q876
 ♣ 82

♠ ?		♠ ?									
♥ K?		♥ ?									
♦ ?		♦ ?									
♣ ?		♣ ?									
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 80px; height: 80px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ AKQ10532										
	♥ -										
	♦ K4										
	♣ KJ43										

Contract 4♠ Lead: ♥K

Bidding:

W	N	E	S
1♦	Pass	1♥	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♥K and you ruff in hand.

You have 7 spade tricks, you will be able to force a diamond, and your best bet is to try to ruff a club in dummy, as well as making the ♣K. At first you may be tempted to lead the ♦K to create an entry to dummy, but West would probably snaffle it up and switch to trumps leaving you a trick short, so what instead if you lead a small diamond towards the ♦Q?

If West wins the ♦A and returns a trump (best) – you can win in hand with the king, Cash the ♦K and then another spade to dummy’s ♠J and you will have a club discard on the ♦Q, then you can lead a club to the ♣J hoping East has the ♣Q. Losing only 2 clubs and a diamond for 10 tricks!

So west probably ducks the diamond, allowing dummy to be entered and a club can be lead to the ♣J, but if that forces the ♣A to win you should be able to force a club ruff in dummy. Losing 2 clubs and a diamond!

Thanks to cheeky monkey for providing this problem hand last month.

PLAY PROBLEM #27

Dlr: East ♠ A3
 Vul: Both ♥ K5
 ♦ Q9432
 ♣ K1032

♠ ?		♠ ?									
♥ ?		♥ ?									
♦ ?		♦ ?									
♣ ?		♣ ?									
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 80px; height: 80px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ K6										
	♥ Q764										
	♦ KJ5										
	♣ AQJ6										

Contract 3NT Lead: ♠Q

Bidding:

W	N	E	S
-	-	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	Pass	

West leads the ♠Q. How do you play this one?

Last month’s suit combination (also kindly provided by Cheeky Monkey) threw up a query from Arthur. Playing AJxx opposite K9xx how do you play to guarantee three tricks. The stated solution was to cash the Ace and lead up to the 9 (covering any higher card). Foolproof!

But Arthur reckoned you could also cash the Ace and lead towards the Knave and still be able to guarantee 3 tricks. You know what? – he is correct, that play will also guarantee three tricks...However! In the case where the Queen lies doubleton over the Knave, Arthur would only make three tricks, the other line of leading up towards the 9 will make 4 tricks! I cannot see any other combinations which make a material difference so I will stick with Cheeky Monkey’s line. I like an extra trick occasionally.

**♣♣♣ KNAVE OF CLUBS ♣♣♣
A SQUEEZE FROM THE PAST**

This hand is from the 2014 Roger Penny Senior Swiss Pairs. The North hand is likely to be one of the strongest hands you might ever hold. N-S were playing a strong club and these systems often have artificial bids which can deal well with very strong hands as well as the often problematic 4441 hands. North opened the 28 hcp hand with an artificial 1♣ and received a 1♦ (0-7hcp) negative. The 1♥ rebid was also artificial and showed any 19+ hcp hand. South now revalued the spade ace slightly, since they are undervalued at 4 hcp, and his jump to 2NT showed precisely 4441 and 5-7 hcp. With no fit, South just bid 6NT. Only 6 of 27 pairs bid 6NT and one pair strayed into the failing 7NT. If you get a normal lead like the ♣6, you can count four club tricks, three diamond tricks, one heart trick and three spade tricks leaving you one short. There are many possible chances and the trick is to try as many as possible.

Dlr: West ♠ KQ10
Vul: E/W ♥ A42
 ♦ AKQ
 ♣ AKQJ

♠ J863 ♠ 95
♥ QJ98 ♥ K10
♦ 5 ♦ J9874
♣ 9732 ♣ 10654

 ♠ A742
 ♥ 7653
 ♦ 10632
 ♣ 8

Contract 6NT Lead: ♣7
Bidding:

W	N	E	S
-	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	2NT
Pass	6NT	All Pass	

The various chances include diamonds being 3-3 or singleton or doubleton jack and the same chances in spades which can be combined to give just under 80%. There are other extra chances when one defender has to guard two suits so the first thing to do is lose

a trick so that you need all but one of the remaining tricks. This is called 'rectifying the count'. The only convenient way to do this is by ducking a heart at trick 2. At my table, a heart was returned at trick 3. Declarer played 3 rounds of diamonds to find none of the chances in that suit existed. Next, 3 rounds of clubs were played. The end position shown is as the last club is being led.

Dlr: West ♠ KQ10
Vul: E/W ♥ 4
 ♦ -
 ♣ J

♠ J863 ♠ 95
♥ Q ♥ -
♦ - ♦ J
♣ - ♣ 10

 ♠ A742
 ♥ -
 ♦ 10
 ♣ -

When East follows to the last club, declarer can discard the useless 10D and attention turns to West. If West discards the last heart, the 4H is good for the twelfth trick. If West keeps the QH then a spade must be thrown and declarer's spades are now all good. This is what is known as a 'simple squeeze' where one opponent guards two suits. The heart duck left only East guarding the hearts and the minor suit winners left him unable to guard both the hearts and the spades! If the hearts were 3-3 the squeeze would fail on the heart return as East could guard the red suits.

However, the squeeze fails only when a heart is returned at trick 3. Suppose a neutral minor suit card is mistakenly returned at trick 3, then the late heart entry with the ace allows us to reach the ending shown on the next page.

Now, when the ♣J is led, West can, apparently, safely let go one of the hearts.

Declarer then plays three rounds of spades to see if they are 3-3 or the jack is coming down. Neither of these is happening but what does East throw on the third spade?

Dlr: West	♠ KQ10
Vul: E/W	♥ A4
	♦ -
	♣ J
♠ J863	♠ 95
♥ Q8	♥ J9
♦ -	♦ J
♣ 9	♣ 10
	♠ A742
	♥ 3
	♦ 10
	♣ -

	N	
W		E
	S	

If the ♦J is thrown, the ♦10 is the twelfth trick. If the ♥9 is thrown then a heart to the ace and the ♥4 is the twelfth trick!

This version of the hand is a 'non-simultaneous double squeeze' where both opponents are squeezed in two suits but not on the same trick!

WBF VIEW ON THE UKRAINE CRISIS

The WBF notes that the IOC has passed a resolution urging all International Federations to relocate or cancel their sports events currently planned in Russia or Belarus.

The WBF has no plans to stage any events in either country, but urges the Zonal Conferences to relocate or cancel the events, if any, currently planned in either Russia or Belarus.

In addition, from now on, no Russian or Belarussian national flag will be displayed and no Russian or Belarussian anthem be played in the events organised by the WBF. The players from Russia and Belarus, participating in WBF events, will participate under the WBF flag. The Zonal Conferences and affiliated NBOs are urged to adopt the same rule.

This statement is being sent to all the Zonal Conferences and affiliated NBOs, confirming the WBF's strong condemnation of the invasion of Ukraine by Russia with the support of Belarus and expressing even more strongly its solidarity with our Ukrainian Friends.

JAMES AND THE GOLD COAST TEAMS

Last month James Coutts reached the final of the NOT (National Open Teams) and did not get a mention in the VBA Bulletin. By way of apology to James (because it has happened before!) I offered him the opportunity to write an article about his progress in the event. I expected a page, or maybe a page and a half, but James surprised us and wrote a full 6 pages.

Not only that, but the erudition is amazing, the thought process explanations are fascinating, and the article was so good as an instructive guide to all players that I have just included the whole 6 pages verbatim. You can savour them [below](#)

Meanwhile, back at the Gold Coast Teams this month, after 12 rounds, James Coutts was part of the leading team (Milne), and Jamie Thompson was in the team lying second (Haffer) (These 2 teams get a bye into the semi-finals). Chris Hughes was in the team lying fourth (going into a knockout stage known as the round of four which is contested between 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th places, the two winners gaining a place in the semi-finals)

The semi-finals were almost a formality for the Milne and Haffer teams (having a rest match may have helped – maybe not!), so the final was between the Milne team and the Haffer Team.

Being runner-up in the NOT last month was an amazing feat, but this month James Coutts went even better, winning the final comprehensively (along with team-mates Liam Milne, Nick Jacob, Geo Tislevoll, Tony Nunn, and Paul Dalley).

Dare I hope that next month we can have a report on the Gold Coast Teams from James??

In the Ivy Dahler Pairs:

Justin Mill and Seigfried Konig – 5th
Barry Rawicki and Simon Rose - 10th
Sylvia Gluck and Ben Kingham – 11th

NOT the result we were hoping for – adventures in the online Summer Festival of Bridge

by James Coutts

There are pros and cons to online bridge events. Missing out on the social aspect of tournaments, inevitable internet connectivity issues, and not feeling cards in your hands are all pretty big downsides. But not having to travel, not having to take time off work, and enjoying the comforts of home between matches certainly help to balance out the negatives. Online events also allow more people from different places including overseas to participate. My team of Nick Jacob & GeO Tislevoll, Matt McManus & Michael Ware, and Liam Milne & myself played the online SWPT and NOT from 6 different towns/cities across 2 countries.

We muddled our way through the qualifying (8x 12 board matches) to finish 11th, with the top 16 teams moving to the NOT knockouts out of 90 entries. We met several Victorians in our knockout journey, firstly Jamie Ebery and Kim Frazer (playing with Nick Hughes and Nicoleta Giura from Sydney) in the round-of-16. My team won all 4 stanzas of this match, but it was only in the second half that the scores really started to spread. In the third set, my partner found a very nice play to make a delicate 4♠ contract and bring in 11imps.

In the other room, the hand was declared from east by Nick Hughes, and Michael Ware led a low heart (hand: <https://tinyurl.com/492u8xwj>). Nick got off to a good start by winning the heart lead in hand, but then seemingly focused on trying to develop something in clubs to get rid of his diamond losers from the dummy. After the ♣K at trick 2 was covered with the ♣A, Nick ruffed, played a spade back to his king and then ran the ♣9 pitching a diamond. Matt McManus now found the nice play of a low diamond to partner's king (why else would declarer be in such a rush to throw diamonds?), and Michael played a third round of clubs which promoted the ♠J in Matt's hand.

30		N Matt McManus#4	W N E S
		♠ J43	2♣ P
		♥ J4	2♦ P 2♣ P
		♦ A107653	4♣ P P P
		♣ Q4	
W Nicoleta Giura#2		E Nick Hughes#714	
♠ AQ108762		♠ K	
♥ A653		♥ K98	
♦ QJ	♣ 8	♦ 42	
♣		♣ KJ109763	
		S Michael Ware#38	
		♠ 95	
		♥ Q1072	
		♦ K98	
		♣ A852	
		4♣ E NS: 2 EW: 3	

At our table, Liam Milne declared the hand from the west seat. (Hand: <https://tinyurl.com/4anr4k5v>).

1♥ from Liam showed 4+♠, and the 1NT overcall from Jamie was either natural or a weak single-suited hand. After my voluntary 2♣ rebid and Kim's pass-or-correct 2♦, Liam made the practical bid of 4♠. Jamie started off with A♦ and a diamond to Kim's king. At this point, Kim switched to a trump, which was won in dummy with the ♠K. Liam played a low club from the table, which Kim did well to duck, drew the remaining trumps, and now made the crucial play of ducking a heart. Kim returned a diamond, which Liam ruffed and then played all of his trumps. This set up a squeeze against either hand if they had 4 hearts and the AC, and if hearts were 3-3 all along then Liam's hand was high. Liam's foresight was rewarded when Kim indeed had 4 hearts and the ♣A, and there was nothing she could afford to pitch at this point:

30		N Jamie Ebery#393	W N E S
		♠ J43	1♠ P
		♥ J4	1♥ 1NT 2♣ 2♦
		♦ A107653	4♣ P P P
		♣ Q4	
W Liam Milne#7745		E James Coutts#80	
♠ AQ108762	♦ 6	♠ K	
♥ A653	♠ 8	♥ K98	
♦ QJ	♣ J	♦ 42	
♣		♣ KJ109763	
		S Kim Frazer#7002	
		♠ 95	
		♥ Q1072	
		♦ K98	
		♣ A852	
		4♣ W NS: 3 EW: 6	

The next day in the quarter-final we faced a team of strong players who are always there or thereabouts in the late stages of national tournaments: Ron Klinger-Matt Mullamphy-Ian Thomson playing in all combinations as a rotating three were at one table, and Tony Nunn-Paul Dalley were at the other. The match was very close throughout, and in fact we lost all of the first three stanzas by small margins.

In the last set we had just taken the lead in the match the board before (not that we knew at the time of course), when a very interesting part-score defensive problem arose. Defending 2♥ isn't normally the sort of material for bulletin articles, but this hand reflects an important theme: if you want to remain on good terms with your partner, don't squeeze them!

After Ron had opened 1♦ (3+, only if 4432 exactly) in third seat and I had overcalled 1♠, Ian was a bit stuck for a bid. Hand: <https://tinyurl.com/4kkt8kfa>

43 D		N Ron Klinger#336	W N E S
		♠ QJ73	P 1♦ 1♠ X
		♥ KJ106	P 2♥ P P
		♦ AK4	P
		♣ 32	
W Liam Milne#7745	E James Coutts#80		
♠ 65	♠ AK842		
♥ 53	♥ A987		
♦ Q10982	♦ 765		
♣ KJ96	♣ 7		
		S Ian Thomson#14	
		♠ 109	
		♥ Q42	
		♦ J3	
		♣ AQ10854	
		2♥ N NS: 0 EW: 0	

I'd have bid 2♣ personally, but Ian chose the not-unreasonable alternative of double. Liam passed and Ron bid 2♥, which became the final contract. One of my favourite defensive agreements, which comes up surprisingly often, is we lead K from AK when we have a singleton in a side suit. If we lead A from AK (as we generally do), a switch to a new suit promises at least two cards in that suit. That way if we lead an ace and then switch, partner knows we are not ruffing the second round of the switch suit and can duck their ace in that suit if they have it. I employed that approach

on this hand, leading ♠K and switching to a club. Ron won the ♣A and started on hearts: low to his king and my ace. After the 1-major overcall from me and the double from Ian, Liam has two ways of raising to 2♠, one of which shows a maximum of about 7 points. Because of this it's pretty unlikely that Liam has 3-card spade support, which is good news: if I now play ♠A and a spade, dummy will not be able to ruff low without being overruffed. That's what I did, and Ron ruffed with the ♥Q.

Ron now played 2 more rounds of hearts (making the contract if hearts are 3-3), and when those didn't break, he made the nice play of cashing the ♠Q first and then playing the last heart, which I won. The defensive side has 4 tricks in the bag so need 2 more. There are no more trumps left so the fifth spade is a trick we can cash. Hang on a minute though – what's happening on this hand? Declarer is now marked with 4432 (Ron has shown up with 4-4 in the majors already) so he has the remaining small club left, and 3 diamonds. Your partner has the ♣K for sure, and also 3 diamonds. If we play the last spade now, dummy will throw a club and then what will partner do? If declarer's third diamond is bigger than my third diamond, Liam is completely stuck – if he throws the ♣K declarer pitches a diamond from hand and crosses to the ♣Q with the remaining club; if Liam throws a diamond, then declarer pitches their club loser and the A, K, and last diamond are all good!

43 D		N Ron Klinger#336	W N E S
		♠ QJ73	P 1♦ 1♠ X
		♥ KJ106	P 2♥ P P
		♦ AK4	P
		♣ 32	
W Liam Milne#7745	E James Coutts#80		
♠ 65	♠ AK842		
♥ 53	♥ A987		
♦ Q10982	♦ 765		
♣ KJ96	♣ 7		
		S Ian Thomson#14	
		♠ 109	
		♥ Q42	
		♦ J3	
		♣ AQ10854	
		2♥ N NS: 5 EW: 4	

I was pleased to have the presence of mind to pause and take stock before cashing my easy spade trick at the time and worked out that if

instead of doing that I play a diamond, partner cannot be squeezed by declarer (only I can do it!) and we will beat the contract. I played a diamond, and we earned a hard-fought +50. We had a big last set and ended up winning the match by 42 imps.

In the semi-final we played against some more Victorians: Rob Fruewirth and Jamie Thompson, who had teamed up with Pauline Gumby and Warren Lazer. We were down by 15 imps at the halfway stage, in a tight and relatively low-scoring match. Liam and I sat out the third set, and both of our other pairs put together strong sets to win the stanza by 35 and lead the match by 20. Isn't it great to have teammates? We came back in for the last set, and near the end of the match with the scores close, Rob chose a much better bid than I did to win a well-deserved 12 imps. Holding this hand in second seat, all vul, both Rob and I had the dealer on our right pass, we passed, south opened 1♠, partner overcalled 2♣, and north raised to 2♠.

Hand: <https://tinyurl.com/4x7czzh3>

E	James Coutts
♠	A2
♥	A763
♦	1093
♣	J1084

I am in general quite obsessed (some would say, and have said, too obsessed) with right-siding NT contracts, and I firmly believe that Ax is almost never a good stopper. I bid 3♣ south bid 3♠, and when it then went pass-pass to me I felt like I had quite a lot for my bidding so far but couldn't come up with anything sensible to do now, so passed. -140. Rather than 3♣, Rob bid 2NT. As a passed hand, 2 aces and 4-card support are huge opposite a vulnerable overcall which is usually a good hand and a 6-card suit. Ax is not a great stopper, but we can't sit around waiting for the perfect hand. It will be very difficult for partner to ever bid 3NT if we start with 3♣, since he will need both something in spades and extra values. After Rob's 2NT and Nick Jacob's 3♠, Jamie bid 3NT which was completely cold when this was the dummy:

W	Liam Milne
♠	107
♥	82
♦	AQ2
♣	AK7532


Given we have 9 top tricks even if west doesn't have the ♦Q, it's clearly a game we want to be in. Despite this we managed to hang on and win the match by 15 imps. The full hand:

D	45	N	Pauline Gumby#1	W	N	E	S
		♠	J65			P	P
		♥	J94	2♣	2♠	3♣	3♥
		♦	KJ854	P	3♠	P	P
		♣	96	P			
W	Liam Milne#7745	E	James Coutts#80				
♠	107	♠	A2				
♥	82	♥	A763				
♦	AQ2	♦	1093				
♣	AK7532	♣	J1084				
		S	Warren Lazer#35				
		♠	KQ9843				
		♥	KQ105				
		♦	76				
		♣	Q				
				3♠ S		NS: 0	EW: 0

In the final, we faced the tournament favourites: team Ashton, consisting of two thirds of the Australian Open team (Sartaj Hans-Peter Gill, Andy Hung-Nabil Edgton) along with Sophie Ashton and Tony Leibowitz, who played some sets with Nabil and Andy respectively. The Ashton team was well-rested after their opponents conceded the other semi-final at half-time, down by more than 100 imps.

The first stanza of the final was a frustrating set of missed opportunities. Even though we only lost it by 2 imps, there were a lot of things that we could have done differently to put ourselves in a strong position in the match. One such occurrence was board 7, although in reality it was a missed opportunity for both sides.

Hand: <https://tinyurl.com/ypjmdn6v>


		N Andy Hung#6152 ♠ K109542 ♥ 93 ♦ AJ ♣ 1063	W N E 2♥ P 4♥ P P
W Liam Milne#7745 ♠ A108542 ♥ K942 ♣ 754			E James Coutts ♠ A8 ♥ KQ7 ♦ 73 ♣ AQJ982
		S Tony Leibowitz#2 ♠ QJ763 ♥ J6 ♦ Q10865 ♣ K	4♥ W NS: 0 EV

At our table, Liam opened a weak 2 in hearts and I raised to 4♥, which had the effect of freezing the opponents out of their 11-card spade fit. Andy led a low spade, and there were a lot of considerations for Liam at trick 1. If he wins the ♠A, starts playing hearts and they turn out not to break 2-2, continues drawing trumps and takes a club finesse which loses, he will then lose 3 diamond tricks if the ♦A is in the north hand. So instead of doing that, he chose to ruff the spade lead in hand and take a club finesse right away, while the trumps are still intact on the table for later access to the club suit. This is a reasonable approach, and only loses when south has the singleton ♣K, the ♦A is offside, and north can give their partner a club ruff when they get in. This was indeed the exact layout, and 4♥ went down 1.

At the other table, Sophie Ashton chose to pass with Liam's hand, which allowed GeO Tislevoll to open 2♠ (6 spades, 8-10 points). Nabil bid 2NT with my hand, over which Nick Jacob, knowing about the 11-card fit, bid 4♠. Sophie had a tricky decision over that, not knowing how much stuff partner has in spades. She chose 5♥, certainly reasonable, and I'm sure she was very pleased to see such a suitable dummy. GeO, like Andy, led a spade, which Sophie won with the ♠A and pitched a diamond from hand. She then cashed the ♥K and ♥Q, discovering they were 2-2. At this point the hand seems to depend on the club finesse or the ♦A onside, so Sophie ruffed a spade, took a club finesse losing to the (singleton) ♣K, and tried putting

up the ♦K when Nick switched to a diamond. That was 3 tricks for the defence and a flat board with -100.

The missed opportunity at Sophie's table was a very interesting safety play of sorts. Did you spot it? At trick 4 when on the table with the ♥Q, the club finesse, while intuitive, is actually an illusion.

		N GeO Tislevoll#78 ♠ K109542 ♥ 93 ♦ AJ ♣ 1063	W N E S P 2♠ 2NT 4♠ 5♥ P P P
W Sophie Ashton#7 ♠ A108542 ♥ K942 ♣ 754	♥3 ♥4 ♥Q ♥J		E Nabil Edgton#59 ♠ A8 ♥ KQ7 ♦ 73 ♣ AQJ982
		S Nick Jacob#7625 ♠ QJ763 ♥ J6 ♦ Q10865 ♣ K	5♥ W NS: 0 EV: 3

If north has the KC we don't need to finesse it at all – instead, just play ♣A then ♣Q. North will win, and they can never get their partner in to play a diamond through. The clubs are all set up and if the opponents don't take their ♦A now, their second (and only other possible) trick will disappear on the clubs. If south has the ♣K and it's not a singleton, we haven't lost anything at all by playing this way instead of finessing in clubs – south will be on lead as they were at the table after the club finesse, and we still have the ♦A onside as our final chance to make the contract.

I'm sure it will be news to none of you that Sartaj Hans and Peter Gill are two of Australia's best bridge players. They have been playing together as a pair for a few years now, so in addition to their individual talent they are a formidable partnership. As I mentioned we lost the first stanza by 2 imps; we then lost the second by 1 imp. So when after the first half of the match, Liam and I sat down against Sartaj and Peter, we were trailing by a mere 3 imps. Set 3 of our semi-final match was where my team pulled away from team Gumby and built a match-winning lead. The same thing happened again in set 3 of the final, but sadly we were on the receiving end this time.

When board 30 came around, we were trailing by 10 imps. I think everyone would be very happy to be in a game that required no trump losers in a suit of AKT5432 opposite Q9 to make. At my teammates' table, Michael Ware led a top diamond against Nabil Edgtton's 4♠ contract, and upon seeing dummy switched to a trump to cut down on diamond ruffs (hand: <https://tinyurl.com/bt3s6vm7>):

30		N Andy Hung#6152	W N E S
♠ Q9		♠ Q9	P 1♠
♥ Q6432		♥ 2♥	P 2♠
♦ 8		♦ 3♣	P 3♠
♣ AQJ74		♣ 4♠	P P
W Michael Ware#38	E Matt McManus#4		
♠ J87	♠ 6		
♥ J10	♥ AK97		
♦ AK632	♦ Q1074		
♣ 1093	♣ 8652		
♠ 7			
S Nabil Edgtton#59			
♠ AK105432			
♥ 85			
♦ J95			
♣ K			
		4♠ S NS: 0 EW: 1	

The hand was easy now for Nabil, who played 3 rounds of clubs pitching both of his hearts, ruffed a heart, ruffed a diamond, ruffed another heart, drew trumps and conceded the last trick for +450.

At my table, after a slightly different auction where I owned up to 2-card heart support rather than repeating my spades again (<https://tinyurl.com/jfk6snjz>), Sartaj and Peter found a brilliant defence. Sartaj, like Michael Ware, led a top diamond. But rather than focusing on cutting down on ruffs, Sartaj instead switched to the ♥J. I played low but Peter overtook anyway, cashed the ♥A as well, and played a third heart. Knowing this was going to be ruffed by Sartaj if I didn't ruff it myself, I had to find a way to avoid losing a trump in this position:

N Liam Milne#7745
♠ Q9
♥ Q6432
♦ 8
♣ AQJ74
♥ 7
S James Coultts#80
♠ AK105432
♥ 85
♦ J95
♣ K

If trumps are 2-2 or the ♠J is singleton, I can ruff high, draw trumps in 2-3 rounds, and throw my diamond losers on dummy's club honours. If trumps are 3-1 and Peter has Jxx, I can ruff the heart with the 10 which Sartaj will be unable to overruff, draw trumps in 3 rounds, and again pitch my diamonds on the good clubs. If trumps are 3-1 and Sartaj has Jxx (seems more likely than Peter having Jxx given Sartaj is known to have only 2 hearts, and given the way they have defended so far), what can I do? I can ruff high and play a spade to the 9, but the trumps are blocked, and I can't get back to my hand to finish drawing them! I have the option of ruffing a club in order to get to my hand, but before doing that I also need to pitch my diamonds. Since Sartaj will throw a club when I ruff high, this will only work if he had started with 5 clubs (because in addition to the initial club discard, I would need him to follow to another 4 rounds of clubs). This layout seemed implausible (and indeed it was) so I chose to play trumps from the top instead of finessing the JS, making when they break 2-2 or the jack is singleton.

30	N Liam Milne#7745	W N E
	♠ Q9	P 2♥ P
	♥ Q6432	P 3♣ P
	♦ 8	P 3♠ P
	♣ AQJ74	P P P
W sartaj#561789	E Peter Gill#22381	
♠ J87	♠ 6	
♥ J10	♥ AK97	♥7
♦ AK632	♦ Q1074	
♣ 1093	♣ 8652	
	S James Coutts#80	
	♠ AK105432	
	♥ 85	
	♦ J95	
	♣ K	
	4♠ S NS: 0	

As can be seen, the trumps were indeed Jxx with Sartaj and x with Peter, so my 9-card trump fit which included AKQT9 was not good enough to avoid a trump loser, and Sartaj and Peter were duly rewarded for their excellent defence.

A few hands later, I found myself in another interesting situation – I had the suit of AQ54 in hand opposite J6 in dummy and known length (5 or 6 cards) in the suit on my right. My only chance in 3NT was to play this suit for 3 winners and no losers. Although I had a 5-4 diamond fit which was all cashing, that suit was also my communication between the two hands to cash any heart tricks other than the ace, so I didn't have the luxury of running those to look at some discards. The only legitimate way to get 3 tricks out of this holding is, obviously, to find a singleton king in either hand. Peter Gill is not going to make the defensive error of not covering the ♥J with the ♥K when you lead it off dummy, so don't even think about trying for that mistake instead of your legitimate chance.

Hand: <https://tinyurl.com/2p85s95z>

On the face of it, my play certainly looks very strange, but given what I knew about the hand (Peter on my right had shown 0-6 points and 5 or 6 hearts, and had already shown up with the ♠K at trick 1, so the ♥K as well would give him an absolute maximum), at the table I thought it actually had quite a reasonable chance of success (west with singleton K, east with T98732).

34	N Liam Milne#7745	W0-6, 5 or 6 hearts	S
	♠ Q96		2♥ 2NT
	♥ J6	P 3NT P P	
	♦ K1097		
	♣ Q1042		
W sartaj#561789	E Peter Gill#22381		
♠ A10432	♥6	♠ K87	
♥ 83	♥10	♥ K10972	
♦ 86	♥A	♦ 54	
♣ AK53		♣ 987	
	S James Coutts#80		
	♠ J5		
	♥ AQ54		
	♦ AQJ32		
	♣ J6		
	3NT S NS: 1 EW: 2		

As you can see, no miracle this time. I felt vindicated when Peter Gill later described my play as "unlucky", but it did lose us 3 imps in the match when at the other table Nabil took a heart finesse through the person who opened 2♥ to secure -100, deciding that the miracle layout was too unlikely to risk the extra -100. But to be fair, the information Nabil had was slightly different – Matt's 2♥ opening was just a 5+ card weak 2, and not limited to 6 points at the top end.

With the help of those two boards, we lost the third stanza by 37 imps. Although the fourth and final set was back to being much closer (we lost it by 6 imps), the damage was done, and we lost the match by 46 imps in the end. NOT the result we were hoping for in the NOT, but it was an enjoyable event anyway. The format, with full-day knockout matches against strong teams, is the best possible. Many interesting hands and situations came up over the course of the 6 days, and despite falling at the final hurdle, making the final is still a decent achievement, and hopefully the beginning of a successful year of bridge as live tournaments start happening again (fingers crossed) – something I'm sure we all have missed.