

GCBA NEWSLETTER

Season 2023-24

January 2024

GCBA RESULTS

Series 24 of the 9-High Swiss Pairs was won by Pauline Mussi and Hugh Wilkinson, with Sheila Constable and Neville Shorrick occupying the runners-up position. This competition is now on hold for a few months and may restart if there is sufficient interest.

County Leagues

The first half of the County League programme has now completed, and after minor adjustments to the division participants, the second half has now started. In round six, wins were recorded by teams led by Constable, Sanis, Shields, Simons and Waggett.

MIDLAND COUNTIES LEAGUE

The January round saw Gloucestershire matched against Oxfordshire with the following results: The Dawes team lost 15-5, the Porter lost 19-1 and the Markham won 16-4. These results leave our teams in second, fourth and second places in their respective divisions with two more matches remaining.

COTSWOLD CUP

On February 4th, Cheltenham Bridge Club is hosting the Cotswold Cup for the first time since the pandemic. You enter and play as a pair, using deals (generally from some past international event), and your scores are compared to the experts who first played the hands. It is great fun and competitors are provided with an analysis of the deals at the end. Entry costs £5 per player to include a hot drink. To enter visit the GCBA website.

CONGRESS SUCCESS

Congratulations to Alastair Catchpole whose team finished fourth in the Swiss teams at the EBU Year-end congress. Alastair Catchpole and Jack Armorgie were also in the team that finished fifth in the Swiss teams at the recent Midlands Counties Congress.

A CURIOSITY

This hand occurred in a recent game involving local players.

	♠ AKJ76		
	♥ A9732		
	♦ K2		
	♣ 4		
♠ T8		♠ 95	
♥ 8		♥ KJ5	
♦ AQJ85		♦ 9743	
♣ A9652		♣ QJT8	
	♠ Q432		
	♥ QT64		
	♦ T6		
	♣ K73		

South	West	North	East
	1♦	2♦	3♦
4♦	5♦		

The bidding is explained as follows: A natural 1♦ opener was followed by a Michaels overcall showing both majors. East made a natural raise and South bid 4♦ to ask partner to pick the major they preferred. West decided to sacrifice (a good view given that game is making for N/S). Hence the first five bids were all made in the same suit!

At the table, the story did not have a completely happy ending for N/S when North proceeded with 5♠, a contract which had to fail by one trick. If you have any unusual bidding sequences that you would like to share, please let the editor know.

YOUR LEAD?

You pick up:

♠KT963 ♥T♦A9 ♣Q9862

and need to find a lead after the auction goes, from partner, 1♥-5♦ and you double to finish the auction. Most players would look no further than leading their singleton heart. They would argue that it is likely that partner has the Ace and will give them a ruff, or that partner has a slow heart trick and an outside entry that means you can get to his hand after winning the first round of trumps. But I do not believe that leading a heart is correct.

If partner has the ♥A, then you will still have time to get that ruff (if indeed you have one), and it may be necessary to set up tricks in a black suit. Moreover, if partner has an outside winner, then you may not need a ruff. Rather than making a stab in the dark, you can learn more by cashing the ♦A at trick one. You see dummy and can make an intelligent continuation. On this deal, dummy will put down:

♠J852 ♥AQ7432♦T4 ♣3

and now you will either play a second trump to prevent any club ruffs on the table, or you will switch to a spade to take your top winners there.

Either will result in the contract being beaten. On a heart lead, declarer wins the Ace, throwing a spade loser and then takes a club ruff for eleven tricks. This hand was played in the last county match and eleven tricks were made on the nine times that the hand was played in five diamonds – everyone leading the 'automatic' singleton in partner's suit. For the record, declarer's hand was:

♠74 ♥- ♦KQJ87653 ♣AK4

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IMPROVER'S CORNER

We are taught that when returning partner's suit, we should lead back our original fourth highest card when we started with four or more cards, and our highest card when we started with three. This is a sound method that makes it easy for partner to get a count of the suit. So when partner leads say the ♥3 and you hold ♥A84 you win the Ace and return the eight, but with ♥A842 you return the two. However, there are occasions when you would not do this.

Suppose you are defending no-trumps and partner leads the ♥3 and you hold ♥Q972, dummy holding a singleton ♥J. You play the Queen on the first round, losing to declarer's King. Later you get the lead in another suit and return what. You know declarer started with four hearts and if you return the ♥2 (original fourth highest), then declarer merely covers your card to prevent the run of the suit.

So instead, you should lead back your ♥9, so that you can win three tricks when partner started with, for example ♥A843 and declarer with ♥KT65. There is another situation when the return of a high card is best. When the suit is distributed like this:

	♥ J8	
♥ A742		♥ Q953
	♥ KT6	

Trick one goes 2-J-Q-K. When East gets the lead he must return the ♥9 to pin dummy's ♥8 and deprive declarer of a second trick in the suit. Similarly if trick one goes 2-8-9-T then East should later return the Queen to pin dummy's knave.

Returning to the special situation when dummy originally held a singleton, we can see from the above that it is correct to return the highest card from 3 remaining, so the corollary of this is that when the lowest card is returned, it must be from an original five card holding and it is imperative the opening leader is aware of the risk of blocking the suit. Consider this layout:

	♥ J	
♥ AT82		♥ Q9753
	♥ K64	

Under traditional methods, trick one goes 2-J-Q-K. East comes in and returns the ♥5 (original fourth best); South plays the ♥6 and West carelessly wins the ♥8, blocking the suit and restricting the defence to three tricks in the suit. However, if one follows the rule of returning your lowest card from an original 5-card suit, then West knows his partner started with five and wins the second round with the ten, continuing with Ace and another to take four tricks in the suit. Here is another simple example.

	♥ 2	
♥ KQ86		♥ AJ943
	♥ T75	

Trick one goes 6-2-A-5. Now when East returns the 3, West knows this is from 5 and unblocks by winning with the Queen, rather than the eight.

So the tip is:

Against no-trump contracts, when partner has led his fourth best in a suit where dummy has a singleton, you should return your smallest pip if you have five cards in the suit. But be sure to discuss this with your partner so you are both on the same wavelength.

SOLUTION TO DECEMBER PROBLEM

♠ K42		♠ QT53
♥ AK3	3NT by	♥ 74
♦ QJ82	West	♦ AT764
♣ AK6		♣ 94

North leads the ♥5 to South's ten, and you need a plan for making nine tricks? You have five top tricks and can easily develop at least three more diamond tricks and a spade to bring your total to nine. However, if you allow the defence to set up their long suit, you are in danger of losing five tricks if the diamond finesse loses.

One thought might be to duck the heart lead, win the heart continuation and then knock out the Ace of spades before finessing the diamond. If the opening lead is from a five-card suit you will be OK as South will have no more hearts to play. However, ducking trick one is far from safe as South can switch to a club at trick two and now the defence can set up two club tricks to go with one trick in each of the other suits to defeat you.

The winning line is to take the first trick and play the King of spades at trick two. If the defence wins and continues hearts, now is the time to duck. Then you can win any continuation and finesse diamonds into the safe hand.

JANUARY PROBLEM

♠ AKQJ		♠ 9632
♥ 97	6♠ by	♥ A86
♦ 4	West	♦ AK76
♣ QJ9532		♣ A6

You play in 6♠ after North has opened the bidding with 3♥. North leads the ♣4. Plan the play.