


The Open and Women's ITS Finals

The final stage of the NSW Interstate Teams Selection is most certainly not a congress, but it's a very special blend of marathon and tightrope walking for the 12 pairs who qualify to each field. The event is a round-robin of 11 matches, each of 14 boards, played over 3 days. The successful pairs who will represent NSW are of course recognised on the NSWBA website, but the bridge usually gets no write-up, so this year I thought I might keep a close eye on it – after all it's fun reporting about *The Clash of the Titans* or about those who sink like the *Titanic*. I spent the first two days tracking the action via the NSWBA website, then went in to kibitz as the battle was joined on the final afternoon. I've never done that before and had no idea kibitzing could be so much fun!


Right from the first day, there was plenty of action. One of the swing-generating boards in the very first match was this:

Board 4	♠94	
Dealer W	♥K7	
Vul Both	♦QJT63	
	♣AJ72	
♠762		♠AKQJ853
♥Q98654		♥J
♦2		♦74
♣KQT		♣983
	♠T	
	♥AT32	
	♦AK985	
	♣654	

If W is silent, N will open 1D and might optimistically get to 3NT, hoping for S to have a stopper. This happened twice in the Open Final, leading to -300 when E quietly passed and cashed the first 7 tricks. However, if W opens 2D (multi) or 2H, N might overcall 3D and then NS ought reach 5D, which is cold. Two pairs played in 5D in the Open, but things were different in the Women's Final, where EW were allowed to play in 2H on three occasions, or else went off in 4S.




There was, unsurprisingly for this event, plenty of gutsy bidding. However, across both fields, only 2 pairs bid this thin 3NT:

Board 13	♠KQ98	
Dealer N	♥963	
Vul Both	♦K842	
	♣J3	
♠T43		♠A7652
♥J7		♥A8
♦97		♦A65
♣KQT976		♣A84
	♠J	
	♥KQT542	
	♦QJT3	
	♣52	

It is in fact completely cold, but getting there is hardly straightforward. One of the successful auctions I heard about was 1NT (14-17 hcp)-2S (transfer to clubs)-2NT (super-accept)-3NT (figuring the clubs were now worth 6 tricks).



A little later on, only half the Open field bid this 3NT in match 3:

Board 4	♠Q96	
Dealer W	♥A976	
Vul Both	♦Q983	
	♣K4	
♠KT84		♠J73
♥K52		♥QJT83
♦52		♦
♣JT93		♣AQ852
	♠A52	
	♥4	
	♦AKJT764	
	♣76	


Much depends on whether one opens flat 11 hcp hands. The auction I heard about went

P-	P	-P	-1D
P-	1H	-P	-2D
P-	3NT.		

If N passes and E opens 2H, the 3NT contract might never be reached. Then again, if N opens, it probably is a lot easier ... the Women's Final clearly was much more courageous, because all the NS pairs reached the 3NT contract!




How do you handle this monster? Too much subtlety is a bad idea, because even if you have a mechanism for showing 31-32 hcp, partner will pass whatever you bid. This misfortune befell one EW pair. But then there was the elegance of Paul Gosney's approach. Figuring that all he needed for a grand slam was the ♠Q, he effortlessly bid 2C (game forcing)-2D (waiting)-2S!! (setting spades as the suit)-4S (weak with support)-4NT-5C (what a surprise)-5D (asking for the ♠Q)-5H (sorry, don't have it)-6NT. Creative bidding at its best, but unfortunately on this occasion it did no better than the agricultural approach of opening 6D or 6NT.

Board 11	♠J92	
Dealer S	♥J9743	
Vul None	♦J5	
	♣Q93	
♠T83		♠AK4
♥852		♥AKQ
♦T42		♦AKQ97
♣7654		♣AK
	♠Q765	
	♥T6	
	♦863	
	♣JT82	



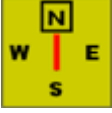
A grand slam was in fact bid – quite readily – on this hand from match 2, but it turned out to be challenging:

Board 21 ♠AK863
 Dealer N ♥8
 Vul N-S ♦AJ765
 ♣A3

♠J52		♠T4
♥J9654		♥Q732
♦Q942		♦T3
♣4		♣J8765

♠Q97
 ♥AKT
 ♦K8
 ♣KQT92

Across the two fields, 4 pairs played in 7S, while 2 of the Open finalists played in 7NT. One of the 7NT contracts was played by S, who received a heart lead. This left W guarding both red suits, and after 5 spades and 3 clubs, there was no place to hide. However, to avoid taking any finesses, more skillful cardplay is required by N after the give-nothing-away lead of a spade. AK of clubs reveals the bad news, so declarer then needs to cash the ♦AK, the ♣Q, and run the spades. When the last spade is played, this is the position:

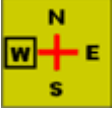
	♠6	
	♥8	
	♦J7	
	♣	
♠		♠
♥J96		♥Q73
♦Q		♦
♣		♣J

♠
 ♥AKT
 ♦8
 ♣T

E must guard the clubs so comes down to 2 hearts. The ♣10 has served its purpose so can now be discarded. W in turn must guard diamonds so also comes down to 2 hearts, and declarer makes the contract with 3 heart tricks on a double squeeze. Alan Walsh did just that!




On day 2, in match 4, this board was a bidding challenge:

Board 4	♠QT764	
Dealer W	♥KQJ	
Vul Both	♦9753	
	♣6	
♠A92		♠KJ
♥A86542		♥97
♦2		♦KT
♣Q54		♣AKJ9832
	♠853	
	♥T3	
	♦AQJ864	
	♣T7	

Across both fields, only 2 pairs (Buchen-Brown, Griffiths-Beauchamp) reached the cold 6C. The bidding is likely to begin 1H-2C-2H and now it's tricky if one is playing Standard -- perhaps E, who has a 5-loser hand with slam potential, could manufacture a 2S rebid, eliciting 3C from W. Things are quite different if playing 2/1 game force, which both pairs were using: now a 3C rebid by E is efficient and effective. Buchen-Brown bid this 1H-2C-2H-3C-4D (splinter)-6C.




By Sunday afternoon, the top 3 pairs in the Women's had pretty much been settled. However, there was still lots of action in the Open, where 4 highly competitive pairs were vying for the top 3 places and the rank order changed repeatedly. In round 10, this was a thin but cold 3NT, which was bid by only 3 of the 6 pairs in the Open and none of the pairs in the Women's:

Board 12	♠KT92	
Dealer W	♥T973	
Vul N-S	♦93	
	♣T93	
♠QJ8		♠43
♥AJ4		♥Q865
♦KT8		♦A7
♣KJ85		♣Q7642
	♠A765	
	♥K2	
	♦QJ6542	
	♣A	

At the time, I was watching George Bilski, who opened the W hand 1NT, showing 15-17 hcp. When his partner went via Stayman and bid 2NT invitational, he raised himself to 3NT, presumably on the basis of well-located tens and jacks. His hand evaluation was obviously faultless – in fact on the lead of the ♥10 he subsequently dropped the doubleton ♥K and made 10 tricks!




But it was round 11, the final round, that was truly action-packed. On this board, I watched Buchen-Brown, the eventual winners in the Open, bid to 7S:

Board 20	♠AQT97	
Dealer W	♥85	
Vul Both	♦2	
	♣AT982	
♠63		♠852
♥92		♥J74
♦JT643		♦KQ987
♣KQJ4		♣63
	♠KJ4	
	♥AKQT63	
	♦A5	
	♣75	

The auction was 1S-2H (game forcing)-2S (minimum)-3S (please cue)-4S (sub-minimum)-4NT-5S (2+Q) ... then Terry Brown thought for quite some time and produced the 7S card. Three other pairs also bid the grand slam in the Open but, remarkably, none in the Women's Final.




Here's another demonstration of good hand evaluation, from Nye Griffiths. On this board, he upgraded the distributional S hand, with just 10 hcp, to a maximum for a notrump contract!

Board 26	♠83	
Dealer E	♥QJ52	
Vul Both	♦J4	
	♣AKT83	
♠Q75		♠J4
♥AK874		♥963
♦Q8		♦A9753
♣Q95		♣J74
	♠AKT962	
	♥T	
	♦KT62	
	♣62	

The bidding therefore went 1S-1NT (forcing)-2D-2NT (invitational)-3NT, which was cold when E quite reasonably led a heart. David Beauchamp ducked a spade at the first opportunity, and that was that. Buchen-Brown similarly bid to 3NT, and they were the only other pair across both fields to bid and make this contract.



In the match involving Griffiths-Beauchamp, one board later along came this:

Board 27	♠J9865	
Dealer S	♥	
Vul None	♦KQ9763	
	♣A4	
♠Q2		♠AT7
♥AJT73		♥K652
♦2		♦T84
♣QT983		♣KJ5
	♠K43	
	♥Q984	
	♦AJ5	
	♣762	

Les Grewcock and Peter Jeffery bid 2NT (odd suits)-(3D overcall by N)-4H-X-all pass. The play was ♦A, ♦J ruffed; heart to the king, heart finesse; club to the king, ducked, which was ominous; then of necessity ♣J, taken by the ace. David Beauchamp thought for quite some time, so it became obvious that no third club was coming back for a ruff. When he played ♦K, Peter discarded a spade from table and the contract was now cold – as he pointed out, another diamond would be ruffed, while a spade would be taken by the ace, so one way or another the heart finesse would be repeated, and dummy's clubs were high. Despite the 14 IMP loss on this board, Griffiths-Beauchamp won the match and a place on the team.