

Seniors Interstate Team Selection 2022

Small is beautiful

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiast who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

This report comes not from a one-day Congress but from the 3-day selection event for the Seniors Team to represent NSW at the ANC in Adelaide in July.

Although the field was small (originally 12 pairs entered, but one had to withdraw) the quality was very good indeed. The format of the competition was 10 rounds of 14-board matches, scored as cross-IMPs with a maximum win of +30 and a maximum loss of -36 IMPs. The 3 top-ranking pairs at the finish would form the ANC representative team.

Peter Buchen-Avi Kanetkar took the lead after round 3 and except for one minor hiccup, did not relinquish it from then on, finishing well ahead of everyone else. However, the competition for the other two spots was fierce! Four pairs battled it out, with the eventual second and third place-getters being Robert Krochmalik-Paul Lavings and Pauline Gumby-Warren Lazer.

With 154 boards played, I could write a *lot* about this event, but here is a sample of interesting hands and some stories. Firstly, though, a few problems for you ...

With the opponents vulnerable, you hold:

♠ T764
♥ 986
♦ 2
♣ J7432

You pass as dealer and the opponents bid 1 ♠- 2 ♦-4 ♣ (splinter in support of diamonds)-4NT-5 ♥ (2 keycards, no queen)- 7 ♦. What will you lead?

Now vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, this is your hand

♠ A54
♥ 98762
♦ A2
♣ KJ6

Partner passes and RHO opens 1 ♠. What will you bid?

And for one more, with neither side vulnerable, RHO deals and starts proceedings with 3♦. You overcall 4♠ and LHO raises to 5♦. Partner continues on to 5♠, which is passed out. LHO leads ♣K. You win and cash ♠A, both opponents following. What will you do now?

♠ J652
♥ AQJ87
♦ K6
♣ 92



♠ AKQ9873
♥ T4
♦ 2
♣ A65

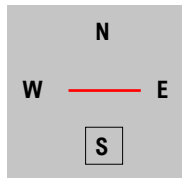
The board associated with the first problem illustrates that even in a serious event, not everything is about skill – it never hurts to have a bit of luck. Sometimes you get to make your own luck, even out of your misbids! Bruce Neill-Mike Hughes did so on this board from match 1:

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ J83
♥ QT732
♦ Q97
♣ 85

♠ AKQ952
♥ AKJ
♦ J63
♣ T



♠
♥ 54
♦ AKT854
♣ AKQ96

♠ T764
♥ 986
♦ 2
♣ J7432

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	5	7	4	6	7
W	5	7	4	6	7

East assumed that West's splinter bid promised a good hand with 4+ support as well as club shortage, so believed he had at least a 10-card fit. Therefore he bid to 7♦ even though the trump queen was missing.

Do you always lead a trump against a grand slam? Based on the auction, South quite reasonably concluded that the opponents must have solid diamonds and therefore led a "safe" trump. And that was that ... Neill-Hughes became only pair to succeed in 7♦ (of the 5 tables in play, another 3 East-West pairs reached 7♦ but went down, while one played in 6♦).

*John McIlrath
has been selected by the
team members to be
their captain.*

Australian National Championships
NSW Seniors Team
ADELAIDE 2022
WELCOME TO

1. John McIlrath (NPC)
2. Avi Kanetkar
3. Peter Buchen
4. Paul Lavings
5. Robert Krochmalik
6. Warren Lazer
7. Pauline Gumby

This is the board associated with the second problem – it's from match 2:

Board 22

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ QT87
♥ AT5
♦ T96
♣ T83

♠ A54
♥ 98762
♦ A2
♣ KJ6

♠ J
♥ KJ43
♦ KQ8754
♣ 94

♠ K9632
♥ Q
♦ J3
♣ AQ752

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	2	-
S	-	-	-	2	-
E	-	4	5	-	1
W	-	4	5	-	1

Obviously after 1♠ by South, your heart suit is unfit for an overcall. However, what about a takeout double? As a passed hand, partner isn't likely to get too excited in a minor suit, so there is minimal risk.

In fact that gets you to 4♥. Only Peter Buchen-Avi Kanetkar reached the game. At the other 4 tables, East-West defended 2♠ (making) or 3♠ (one down).

Buchen-Kanetkar were out on their lonesome again on this next deal, from match 4:

Board 16

Dealer W | Vul E-W

♠ 93
♥ 6
♦ KQJ765
♣ 8652

♠ QT6
♥ T9872
♦ T82
♣ Q9

♠ AKJ54
♥ Q53
♦ A94
♣ K3

♠ 872
♥ AKJ4
♦ 3
♣ AJT74

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	3	-	-	-
S	3	3	-	-	-
E	-	-	2	1	1
W	-	-	2	1	1

Their auction was P-(P)-1♠-(Dbl)-2♠ (weak raise)-(3♦)-3♥ (long suit trial bid)-all pass! Avi, who was sitting West, clearly believes in the notion that a weak hand plays better in its long suit. While 3♥ can be defeated, in practice it made: a diamond was led, but Peter played on hearts, losing 3 top tricks, while noting that diamonds were not continued so were obviously 6-1. Eventually he reached dummy to draw the last trump, then ran the spades, discarding diamond losers from the West hand. At every other table, East-West went one or two down in spades.

This deal from match 5 relates to the third problem. It's quite simple but almost all the declarers developed a blind spot during the play. Here is the board, now in its correct orientation:

Board 8

Dealer W | Vul None

♠ AKQ9873
♥ T4
♦ 2
♣ A65

♠ T
♥ K2
♦ QJ87543
♣ T43

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 4
♥ 9653
♦ AT9
♣ KQJ87

♠ J652
♥ AQJ87
♦ K6
♣ 92

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	4	5	3
S	-	-	4	5	3
E	2	3	-	-	-
W	2	3	-	-	-

After the first two tricks, it is obvious that you have one loser each in clubs and diamonds. Does that mean you need to take the heart finesse immediately?

Of course not – you need to lead a diamond towards the king. This costs nothing, but if East has ♦A then you can discard a potentially losing heart on ♦K. The fact that East did not lead a diamond supports the possibility that the ace is on side. However, 4 of 5 declarers failed to find this play, instead taking the heart finesse and making just 10 tricks.

One of the notable features of the deals in this event was the number of borderline slams, most of which were not bid. As an example, here is one from match 9 that aficionados of strong club systems would love:

Board 2

Dealer E | Vul N-S

♠ K652
♥ 984
♦ J52
♣ J63

♠ A
♥ Q6
♦ AQ9873
♣ KT82

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q843
♥ AKJ75
♦
♣ AQ54

♠ JT97
♥ T32
♦ KT64
♣ 97

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	7	5	6	4	5
W	7	5	6	4	5

No one bid a slam: the usual result was 3NT making 11 tricks, after an auction such as 1♥-2♦-2♠-3♣-3NT. A strong club system would both reveal East's strength immediately and find the 4-4 club fit, so would at least enable East-West to reach 6♣. A full relay system might have the opportunity to really strut its stuff and get to 7♣! Would you have bid at least 6♣? ♠