

2022 Southern Zonal Championship

The Lazarus of COVID?

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

On Sunday 17th July, 48 keen bridge players competed in the first-ever Southern NSW Zonal Championship. The 12 teams represented clubs from all 3 regions of the Zone i.e. the South Coast (Illawarra, Nowra and Kiama), the Far South Coast (Mollymook, Moruya and Batemans Bay) and the Southern Highlands. The perpetual trophy was convincingly won by the HURLEY team (Liz and Steve Hurley, Jill MacRae, Rilla England) from the Illawarra Bridge Association. The VAN DER HOEK team from Moruya Bridge Club finished second, with the CREET team from Batemans Bay in third place.

That the event was able to be held at last was both a joy and a relief for me as the organiser. The tournament was originally scheduled for mid-July 2020, but had to be cancelled because of the first outbreak of COVID-19. Because almost all of the potential participants were keen for it to be a face-to-face event, it was postponed to the following year. However, the resurrected August 2021 competition was a victim of the delta wave. Then it was re-scheduled to the end of October 2021, but omicron took care of that! Fortunately, the fourth iteration was viable and proved to be an excellent day of bridge, as well as a very enjoyable gathering of players from around the Zone.

Of course there were plenty of interesting deals in the course of 6 x 9-board matches. Here's a chance to test yourself on a few of them. Firstly, how will you bid this hand:

♠ QJ8763
♥ AKQT
♦ J
♣ K3

After 3 passes, you open 1♠ and with the opponents silent, the auction continues with 1NT from partner, 2♥ from you and 3♣ from partner. Now what?

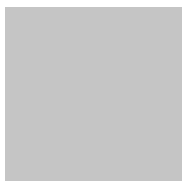
Secondly, you hold:

♠ 9764
♥ 7
♦ J964
♣ A754

You pass, as do LHO and partner. The opponents now bid 1♠-1NT (forcing)-2♥-4♥. What will you lead?

And for a play problem, consider these hands:

♠ J743
♥ AQ942
♦ 5
♣ K96



♠ T852
♥ T
♦ AKQ2
♣ AT42

North passes as dealer and East also passes. With the opponents silent you now bid 1♦ -1♥ -1♠ -4♠. How will you play this on the lead of ♣3?

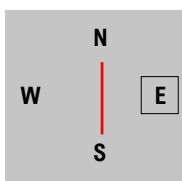
This is the deal associated with the first hand:

Board 18

Dealer E | Vul N-S

♠ QJ8763
♥ AKQT
♦ J
♣ K3

♠ K2
♥ J64
♦ 987653
♣ 85



♠ AT5
♥ 9832
♦ AK42
♣ T2

♠ 94
♥ 75
♦ QT
♣ AQJ9764

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

Partner presumably has some 8-9 hcp with 6+ clubs, which must surely be headed by ♣AQ. So you can think in terms of 3 tricks each in clubs and hearts, which means that if partner has as little as ♠10x you ought to have a play for game. Therefore a bold 4S is the best idea at IMPs.

In fact 4♠ cannot be beaten, but only 4 of 12 Norths reached game, one of whom was unsuccessful.

*The happy winners from IBA (L to R):
Rilla England, Steve Hurley, Liz Hurley,
Jill MacRae*



This is the deal in which you are on lead in the second problem:

Board 8

Dealer W | Vul None

<p>♠ 9764 ♥ 7 ♦ J964 ♣ A754</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 30px; margin: 0 auto;">W</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 30px; margin: 0 auto;">N</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 30px; margin: 0 auto;">E</div>	<p>♠ KQ ♥ 6432 ♦ QT3 ♣ KJT6</p>	<p>♠ A2 ♥ JT95 ♦ 8752 ♣ Q98</p>
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<p>♠ JT853 ♥ AKQ8 ♦ AK ♣ 32</p>	<p>♠ JT853 ♥ AKQ8 ♦ AK ♣ 32</p>
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	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	2	4	4	4
S	3	2	4	4	4
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

At my table, West found the devilish lead of ♣4. Of course I didn't rise with ♣K: would you? Unfortunately, after that the otherwise unbeatable contract can no longer be made ...

The third problem features yet another fragile trump suit. Taking a diamond ruff too early is potentially dangerous: after the first trick goes ♣3-6-J-A it's important to play one round of trumps straight away. Then the contract comes home on a successful finesse of West's ♣Q and a cross-ruff.

Board 17

Dealer N | Vul None

<p>♠ A6 ♥ KJ863 ♦ T8 ♣ Q873</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 30px; margin: 0 auto;">W</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 30px; margin: 0 auto;">N</div>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: 30px; margin: 0 auto;">E</div>	<p>♠ J743 ♥ AQ942 ♦ 5 ♣ K96</p>	<p>♠ KQ9 ♥ 75 ♦ J97643 ♣ J5</p>
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<p>♠ T852 ♥ T ♦ AKQ2 ♣ AT42</p>	<p>♠ T852 ♥ T ♦ AKQ2 ♣ AT42</p>
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	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	1	2	4	3
S	3	1	2	4	3
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Although 6 of 12 North-South pairs reached 4♠, only 4 succeeded in making the game.

This tournament was not only the first-ever Southern NSW Zonal Championship, it was also the first-ever Zonal Championship anywhere. Given its success, perhaps it will be a model for other such events across the state. I'd like to thank Steve Hurley for significantly contributing to the development of the initial idea. Special thanks also to our unflappable director Jeff Carberry, local organiser Kevin Tant and the supportive members of the Mollymook Bridge Club. 🟩