

Gold Coast Congress Rescue One

A golden rescue ...

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

This month, rather than writing about a NSWBA congress, my column focuses on events run by the Queensland Bridge Association, with support from the ABF. Why? Because it's a heart-warming story about bridge players supporting bridge ...

The 2022 Gold Coast Congress was the first major national event since May last year and was of necessity held after an interval of 2 years. It was, as usual, superbly organised – as well as being an exemplary COVID-safe event. However, because some 50% of entries were cancelled when the Omicron wave rolled in, the Congress ran at a loss, which was compounded by the penalty costs incurred when it became necessary to withdraw from the original contract with the Gold Coast Convention Centre for hall space.

In the aftermath, therefore, a series of gold point fundraising events was arranged, to be held on RealBridge. The first two were run over the weekend of 5/6 March. There was an enthusiastic turnout of bridge players – the Swiss Pairs on the Saturday had 98 entries and the Teams on the Sunday had 54 – with participants from Western Australia to New Zealand. Obviously many were keen to help support the GCC!

The Pairs was won by Kevin Davies – Rakesh Kumar, who finished just 0.1 VPs ahead of Piotr Marcinowski – Karol Miller. Unusually for Swiss Pairs, this was a day on which super-aggressive bidding was often not rewarded. Indeed the winners made most of their gains from careful defence after their opponents over-reached. However, this board from the afternoon session was exciting:

Board 36

Dealer W | Vul All

<p>♠ QJ952 ♥ J ♦ K653 ♣ 762</p>		<p>♠ KT8764 ♥ A63 ♦ JT94 ♣</p>
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<p>♠ A ♥ KQT974 ♦ AQ8 ♣ AKT</p>

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

Not too many folks would open 3♣ with the North hand when vulnerable, although those who dared found that it worked out well on this deal. A more usual story was for East to start proceedings with a weak 2-bid in spades. Now whether South overcalls in hearts or doubles, West will bid 4♠. When this comes back to South, it's hard to resist doubling for penalties, but the contract is absolutely cold – in fact as the cards lie, 11 tricks are always available. Across the field, there were 14 in 4♠ or 5♠, many of them doubled.

Those North-South pairs who bid on did much better: 22 were able to play in hearts, making just about whatever they bid (including 6♥x made by two pairs, one of whom was Marcinowski – Miller) while 9 played in clubs (including two in 6♣). Swings thus ranged from +15.5 to -13.5 IMPs ...

In marked contrast to the Pairs, the margin between first and second in the Teams was huge! The event was won by by the ZHU team comprised of Wayne Zhu – Bob Sebesfi with Avril Zets – Axel Johannsson, who were undefeated throughout and finished on 103.61 VPs i.e. an average of 17.27 per match. Given the strong field, this was an outstanding result. In second place was the GUE team including Phil Gue – Tony Burke with Michael Courtney – Joan Butts, on 88.65 VPs.

Here are two boards from the Teams that emphasise how IMPs strategy can be different from matchpoints, including the need to play safely after making a plan at trick one. Firstly, as North you are in 4♠ after a short sharp auction: 1♠-2♣-4♠-all pass. East leads ♣K, then the ace and you ruff. How will you play?

Board 8

Dealer W | Vul None

	♠ A6543		
	♥ J43		
	♦ AKT6		
	♣ T		
♠ 9	N	♠ K8	
♥ A9872	W	♥ T	
♦ J854	E	♦ Q732	
♣ J95	S	♣ AKQ862	
	♠ QJT72		
	♥ KQ65		
	♦ 9		
	♣ 743		

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

Count your winners and losers: you have already lost a club, will have to lose a heart and might have to lose a spade. However if you do lose a trick to ♠ K, you will still have 10 tricks: 6 trump tricks including two ruffs, 2 hearts and 2 diamonds. As long as spades break 2-1, the only way you can go down is if East holds ♠ Kx and gets to ruff something with the low spade. So the safe line at IMPs is to play ace and another spade, then you can claim.

The not-so-safe and unnecessarily greedy approach is to play ♦ A, ruff a diamond and run ♠ Q. This loses to the king and East returns ♥ 10 to West's ace, then a heart back sets the contract. While 23 declarers made their game, 12 went down in 4♠ because they took this line. Other scores on the board included East-West going on to 5♣, often only 2 down, sometimes doubled; and North-South stretching to 5♠, which of course was always down.

On this next board, you are once more in 4♠, this time by East, the auction having been 1♠-2♣-3♣-3♠-4♠. South leads ♦ 7. What is your plan?

Board 42
Dealer E | Vul All

<p>♠ A97 ♥ AT3 ♦ AK5 ♣ JT64</p>	<p>♠ KQ43 ♥ QJ865 ♦ T32 ♣ 8</p>	<div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p>N</p> <p>W —+— E</p> <p>S</p> </div>	<p>♠ JT862 ♥ K97 ♦ J ♣ AQ97</p>
	<p>♠ 5 ♥ 42 ♦ Q98764 ♣ K532</p>		

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

Again, you need to stop and think at trick one. Looking at the two hands in the simplest possible terms, you have at least 3 spade tricks, 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and 3 clubs. Once again, the only way you can end up going down is if someone gets a ruff. You take the first trick with ♦ A, cross to ♥ K and run ♠ J to North's queen. Back comes ♣ 8. Taking the safe approach, you rise with ♣ A to lead another spade, which reveals the bad break, so you play the ace and continue with a spade to North's ♠ K. Now you need North to have started with a singleton club and thus be unable to return another club to South's king for a ruff. When that proves to be the case, you are safe – you can ruff the diamond return, draw the last trump and concede a club to South. That's exactly how Wayne Zhu played it!

Many either finessed in clubs or cashed a second diamond/took a diamond ruff early and thus 33 declarers went down. Matchpoint tendencies seem difficult to suppress. Only 18 made 4 ♠, while 3 were successful in 3NT.

Yes, Bridge Solver indicates 4 ♠ can always be beaten, but that requires North-South to attack and persist with diamonds (i.e. no club switch) so that declarer runs out of trumps before the clubs are set up. This defence was indeed found at a couple of tables ... ♠