

Wagga Wagga Swiss Teams

Getting what you asked for...

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

The Wagga Wagga Swiss Teams was won by the LINDH team (Eric Lindh – Patricia Phillips – James Palmer – Mitch Dowling) in a nail-biting finish. After 6 x 9-board matches, the leaders made it over the line just 0.52 VPs ahead of the RANSON team (Nico Ranson – Matt Smith – Julian Foster – David Weston) who in turn were a mere 0.15 VPs in front of KAHLER (Peter Kahler – Janet Kahler – Adrienne Stephens – Peter Quach). Although I didn't attend this Congress, I found myself involved in it from afar, more or less by accident. There's a story to that ...

On the Tuesday before the weekend of the event, some long-standing NSWBA members who have always been supportive of Youth bridge were contacted by Nico Ranson, seeking teammates for James Palmer and partner. In 2021, James had been a member of the Youth Team representing NSW at the Australian National Championships, with Nico as the non-playing captain. James was really keen to play in the Wagga Wagga Congress because a number of Youth players would be participating. There's a story to that too ... but before I tell you any stories, here are a couple of problem hands.

Firstly, with neither side vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠ 3
♥ J9632
♦ A9
♣ A9762

After this fiercely competitive auction you are on lead:

W	N	E	S
	1H	4S	5H
5S	6H	6S	X
P	P	//	

Your choice?

Secondly, vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, your RHO passes as dealer. What will you bid with this hand?

♠ AKJ6
♥ K
♦ AQ8765
♣ KQ

Wagga Wagga is the home town of Charles and John McMahon, both of whom were regular members of the NSW Youth Team for the ANC between 2015 and 2019. Nico Ranson and Matt Smith had been teammates of the McMahon brothers on some of those Youth representative teams and unsurprisingly, this generated a lot of friendly rivalry. The bridge-playing McMahon family has been victorious at the Wagga Wagga Congress on more than one occasion. In 2022, Nico promised to assemble a Sydney team to challenge them on their home turf – which thus turned the event into something of interest to other Youth bridge players.

Unfortunately, with less than a week to go, James hadn't been able to organise teammates. However, when the email from Nico arrived I noticed that my friends Eric Lindh and Patricia Phillips, regular pairs winners at Southern Highlands Bridge Club (my home club) had previously entered for the Wagga Wagga Congress but were now in limbo, because their teammates had been forced to withdraw for family reasons. Several phone calls later, two and two rapidly became four – although by the time the team came together in Wagga Wagga, James had changed partners and was playing with the very capable Mitch Dowling (a teammate of mine on more than one occasion).

So all through the Sunday I watched with great interest via the internet as events unfolded. The McMAHON team started the day with a maximum win and led after round 1, but the RANSON team took the lead after round 2 and stayed there through the next 3 rounds. Meanwhile the LINDH team made its way up the leaderboard, to reach second place after round 4. At that stage the gap was quite large, but LINDH faced RANSON in the next round and had a big win, so they went into the last round less than 1 VP behind. Remarkably, both teams lost their final matches, but the difference in the margins was sufficient for LINDH to overhaul RANSON and claim the day!

After the first round, the McMAHON team didn't have a particularly great run, but Charles and John had had a convincing win in the Swiss Pairs the previous day. The first problem hand comes from that event:

Board 1

Dealer E | Vul None

♠ A94	♠	AKQ875	♠ KQJT87652
♥ 4	♥	KT763	♥ T
♦ QJ2	♦	T4	♦ 854
♣ KQJ853	♣	W	♣
	N	E	
	S		
	♠ 3		
	♥ J9632		
	♦ A9		
	♣ A9762		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	2	5	6	-	-
S	2	5	6	-	-
E	-	-	-	3	-
W	-	-	-	3	-

Did you choose ♦ A for your opening lead? If so you could take the first 4 tricks. A heart lead would also set 6 ♠. However, quite a few Souths elected to lead ♣ A, which was not a success. East ruffed, drew the sole outstanding trump and discarded all her/his losers to make an overtrick!! Eric Lindh later told me that's what happened at his table ... this board swung up to plus or minus 15 IMPs.

The second problem hand is from the Teams. This board was a significant contributor to the substantial win by LINDH in round 3:

Board 19

Dealer W | Vul E-W

♠ Q853
 ♥ J932
 ♦ T7543
 ♣ AKJ6

♠ AKJ6
 ♥ K
 ♦ AQ8765
 ♣ KQ

♠ QT74
 ♥ A62
 ♦ 4
 ♣ AJ986

♠ 98532
 ♥ JT974
 ♦ KT
 ♣ 2

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	5	1	6	6
W	6	5	1	6	6

Playing natural methods, the West hand is difficult to bid. You could consider opening 2♣ and faking a 2NT rebid. However, if partner has nothing in hearts, that could be a disaster. A better idea might be to open 1♦, hoping partner has enough to respond, then splinter with 3♥ over partner's 1S. After that you could perhaps convert 6♠ to 6NT, to protect the diamond tenace. Those playing a strong club or two-way club system would have had less difficulty working out what to do. Across the field of 18 teams, 2 made 6♠ despite the 5-0 break, while 5 bid to the slam but went down. Only Eric and Patricia successfully landed in the less stressful 6NT, making on the diamond finesse.

In round 5, this board was one of two game-going-down *vs.* part-score-making swings that contributed to LINDH's win against RANSON:

Board 10

Dealer E | Vul All

♠ J984
 ♥ AT
 ♦ AK65
 ♣ KT2

♠ Q5
 ♥ KJ986
 ♦ JT
 ♣ 9874

♠ K2
 ♥ 742
 ♦ Q842
 ♣ AJ53

♠ AT763
 ♥ Q53
 ♦ 973
 ♣ Q6

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

After North opens 1NT in fourth seat, South will transfer to spades and if North simply accepts, South might bid an invitational 2NT, which North will convert to 3♠. Alternatively, if your agreements include minimum and maximum super-accepts, North might bid an immediate 3♠ showing a minimum hand with 4-card spade support. In either case, what should South do now? With a 9-loser hand, it's a good time to show a little restraint. However, 6 North-South pairs played in 4♠ and 4 of them duly went down.

Nico Ranson got what he asked for when he emailed the stalwarts of the NSWBA i.e. teammates for James and Mitch. What he might not have expected was that the team that was formed would turn around and beat his own team! Shades of Frankenstein ...