

2023 Southern Zonal Championship

Now improved for Improvers!

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

The second iteration of the Southern NSW Zonal Championship was held on Sunday 23rd July. The field was slightly reduced because of withdrawals due to illness but was still representative of the entire Zone, with club teams from Moruya, Merimbula and Nowra, two teams each from the Southern Highlands and Mollymook, as well as 3 teams from Wollongong.

An important change in 2023 was that in addition to the perpetual trophy for the overall winner, an Improvers Prize was offered to the best team having <1200 aggregate masterpoints for all team members, with no individual player having >500 masterpoints. The prize was in the form of book vouchers from Paul Lavings Bridgegear – particularly apt as these days Paul is also based in the Southern Zone.

At the end of 6 x 9-board matches, the Championship winners were once again from the Illawarra Bridge Association – the team included stalwarts Liz and Steve Hurley, this time playing with Cathy Ashcroft and Andrew Smith. The Nowra team of Christine and Wayne Houghton, with Adrian Riepsamen and Jeff Lassman, finished in second place, just 2.3 VPs behind. In third spot, another 2.4 VPs back, was the Southern Highlands team of Stephen Brabyn, Tony Lye, Jenny Michael and your scribe.

Easily the biggest success story of the day was that in fourth place was the Southern Highlands Improvers team of Kirsten Hartley and Simon Elderfield, with Fiona Khoo and Margaret Malcolm. These folks had a total of just over 200 masterpoints between the four of them, but they gave several of the open teams a very hard time, including achieving a 1 IMP winning draw against the champions!

There were plenty of interesting deals, of course, and as usual I'll first offer a few to you as problems. Let's start with a bidding challenge. You hold:

- ♠ QT92
- ♥ AKJ843
- ♦ QJ
- ♣ 6

With both sides vulnerable, partner opens 1♦ in second seat and you respond 1♥. Partner rebids 1♠, promising 5+ diamonds and 4 spades or 4=1=4=4 shape, so you raise to 4♠. Now partner bids 4NT RKC and when you respond 5♣ to show one keycard in spades, continues with 5♦ asking for ♠Q. You reply 5♥, confirming that you have the queen and showing ♥K but denying any lower-ranking king.

Partner now signs off in 5♠. Would you like to continue to 6♠?

Next a declarer play problem. After an auction in which RHO opened 1♣, you overcalled 1♠, LHO bid 2♦ and RHO jumped to 3NT over partner's raise, you find yourself in 4♠x. You are vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, so there is potentially much to lose. Here is your hand and dummy:

♠ A82
♥ A65
♦ T85432
♣ 2




♠ KJ765
♥ 873
♦ 6
♣ AK94

LHO leads ♦K on which RHO plays the ace, to return ♣6. What is your plan?

And for the third problem let's try defending:

♠ K6542
♥ 7
♦ KT4
♣ KJ76



♠
♥ AQ962
♦ Q87
♣ AQ985

The auction was 1♠ by LHO followed by a 4♥ splinter by RHO which you doubled, then LHO signed off in 4♠. Partner chose not to lead a heart, instead starting with ♠3. Declarer played low from dummy as you discarded, then led a club to the jack, which you won. What will you do at trick 3?

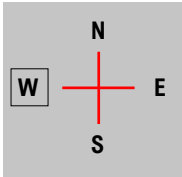
Here is the deal associated with the bidding problem:

Board 20

Dealer W | Vul All

♠ AKJT3
♥ 6
♦ KT762
♣ AQ3

♠ 654
♥ T95
♦ A54
♣ K542



♠ 87
♥ Q72
♦ 983
♣ JT987

♠ QT92
♥ AKJ843
♦ QJ
♣ 6

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

When partner signs off, she doesn't know about two crucial features of your hand: the singleton club and the fitting ♦ QJ. The auction suggests that she must have 3 keycards, so you have every reason to continue to 6♠, which turns out to be unbeatable – and the automatic club lead makes it quite easy. However, only 2 of 10 North-South pairs reached the slam.

Now to the play problem. Here is the full deal:

Board 2

Dealer E | Vul NS

<p>♠ 4 ♥ Q42 ♦ KQJ97 ♣ J853</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ A82 ♥ A65 ♦ T85432 ♣ 2</p> <p>♠ QT93 ♥ KJT9 ♦ A ♣ QT76</p>
N					
W E					
S					
<p>♠ KJ765 ♥ 873 ♦ 6 ♣ AK94</p>					

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

There is only one way of having any chance of making 10 tricks and that's on a cross ruff. However, you know a lot about RHO's hand – he clearly has a singleton diamond ace, probably 4 spades including ♠ Q10, plus he must have values in hearts. You need to make tricks with all of your small trumps, so you win the club return, cash another club discarding a heart from dummy, cross to ♥ A to ruff a diamond with a low trump, ruff another club and now exit a heart. This is the position:

<p>♠ 4 ♥ Q ♦ QJ9 ♣ J</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ A8 ♥ ♦ T854 ♣</p> <p>♠ QT93 ♥ K ♦ ♣ Q</p> <p>♠ KJ76 ♥ 8 ♦ ♣ 9</p>
N					
W E					
S					

Even if East now returns a trump, you can win in dummy, cross ruff some more and lead a diamond at trick 12 to make 10 tricks. To beat 4♠, East needs to return one of ♠ Q109 at trick 2, which is counter-intuitive. Two pairs made 4♠, both doubled.

Winners— Andrew Smith,
Steve Hurley, Liz Hurley and
Cathy Ashcroft



And finally to the deal relating to the defence problem, now in its correct orientation i.e. you are South:

Board 4

Dealer W | Vul All

<p>♠ AQJ98 ♥ K843 ♦ J63 ♣ 2</p>		<p>♠ T73 ♥ JT5 ♦ A952 ♣ T43</p>
<p>♠ AQJ98 ♥ K843 ♦ J63 ♣ 2</p>		<p>♠ K6542 ♥ 7 ♦ KT4 ♣ KJ76</p>
<p>♠ AQJ98 ♥ K843 ♦ J63 ♣ 2</p>		<p>♠ T73 ♥ JT5 ♦ A952 ♣ T43</p>
<p>♠ AQJ98 ♥ K843 ♦ J63 ♣ 2</p>		<p>♠ T73 ♥ JT5 ♦ A952 ♣ T43</p>

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

Did you return ♦ 7 at trick 3? If so, partner will take her ace and continue diamonds. On any other return, declarer is able to discard a diamond either from dummy or from hand, so he makes his game. In practice all but one made 10 tricks.

Overall, the players deemed this year's Championship event to have been a very successful day. Special thanks to our always-humorous director Ian Lisle, as well as to local organiser Kevin Tant and the supportive members of the Mollymook Bridge Club led by John Reid. 🍀