

10th NEC CUP

The 10th edition of the prestigious NEC Cup has taken place from the 7th through the 13th of February and once again the organizing committee, in the person of the tireless Tadayoshi Nakatani, put together a high-quality field with a batch of strong foreign teams as well as some very qualified local players. A total of 47 teams ended up taking part in the event under the expert direction of the ever smiling Richard Grenside.

Hard to pinpoint the pre-tournament favorites: the general consensus short-listed as possible winners the teams from Poland/Russia (Balicki-Zmudzinski, Gromov-Dubinin), from Holland (Jansma-Verhees, Schollaardt-Drijver), from Poland (Gawrys-Kowalski, Kwiecien-Bizon), and USA/Egypt (Robson-Shugart, El Ahmady-Sadek). There were plenty of other good quality contenders to make up the field: strong teams from Canada, Indonesia, Israel, the Russian ladies, recent Olympiad winners, an open and ladies teams from China, the Japanese Open and Ladies team not to mention quite a few competitive local teams whose performance would surprise more titled opponents.

The format of the tournament was based on an eight round Swiss of twenty boards per match, with the top eight finishers clashing in direct knock-out matches over forty boards leading to semifinals and a sixty-four boards final.

Now for some action let us move straight to the match between Holland and Israel. Detailed agreements in competitive auctions can play a very big part in determining the outcome of hands where both sides are quickly pushing the bidding to the 4 or 5 level and our first deal is a clear example of a swing which is mostly the product of careful homework.

Bd: 10 North Dlr – Both Vul

♠ Q		♠ K9
♥ A987653		♥ Q42
♦ K62		♦ QJ1094
♣ AQ		♣ K84
	♠ 108653	
	♥ 10	
	♦ 75	
	♣ 107632	

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Verhees	Israel	Jansma
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♠	4♠
5♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Schollaardt	Barel	Drijver	Campanile
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♠	4♠
Dbf(1)	Pass	Pass	Pass
(1) Interest in bidding 5♥, extra values			

If a pass of 4♠ would be forcing, there's much to be said for passing with the West hand, with its defensive values in the minors, but as West has opened in third position and N/S are vulnerable, there's nothing explicit about the auction to suggest that a pass should be forcing. In that context, Schollaardt's double said he was keen to go forward, but was willing to give his partner the option of defending. Bingo! A diamond lead would have been best by a wide margin for the defense against 4♠ doubled (down three was a real possibility), but Drijver led the ♥2. Best defense now would have been to cash two high clubs and play a diamond,



The Yadlin brothers against Jansma-Verhees in the Israel-Netherlands match broadcasted live on bridgebase.com

but Schollaardt returned a diamond. Barel won, discarded dummy's diamond on the ♥K, ruffed a diamond, came to the ♠A, ruffed a diamond, and exited with a trump. With clubs blocked, the defense had to concede a ruff and discard, so Barel lost only two clubs and the major-suit aces limiting the damage to one down, -200. The Netherlands gained 7 IMPs and eventually defeated Israel to win 41-32 (17-13 in VPs) leaving both teams with plenty of chances to make the top eight. The fifth round saw an intriguing derby between the Poles of Gawrys, Kwiecien & Co. and the Polish-Russian combination of Balicki-Zmudzinski, Gromov-Dubinin. Two boards were particularly indicative of the different approach used by the players.

Bd: 9 North Dlr: E/W Vul

♠ Q10		♠ AK984
♥ AQ7		♥ J65
♦ AK74		♦ 5
♣ AJ75		♣ KQ96
	♠ 7632	
	♥ 1098	
	♦ 10983	
	♣ 102	

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Nakamura	Israel	Shimizu
	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♥(1)
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

(1) 5+♥/5+♠, invitational

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Chen	Barel	Furuta	Campanile
	1NT	Dbl(1)	2NT(2)
Pass	3♣(3)	Pass	3♥(4)
Pass	3NT(5)	All Pass	

(1) Many hand types, ostensibly a puppet to 2♣;
(2) Undiscussed, but surely a two-suiter;
(3) I don't know what 2NT means, so I'll make the cheapest bid and see what happens;
(4) Surely, he'll know I have majors;
(5) Better my hand should be declarer

Against 4♥, the lead of the ♦6 went to the king and ace, Shimizu ruffing the diamond return to play a heart to the ace, a spade to the king, and second heart to the jack and queen. Shimizu ruffed the ♦J return, played a spade to the queen, then drew trumps and conceded two clubs for down one, -50.

Against the arcane Closed Room 3NT, Furuta led the ♣A, three, six, four, then continued with the ♣5 to the jack and queen. Barel cashed the ♥A, crossed to the ♠A, and tried the heart finesse. Furuta won the queen and hopefully tried the ♣K. When that failed to bring down the ten, he wisely cashed the ♦A, holding declarer to



Shall we dance, Adam?

nine tricks. Plus 400 but 10 IMPs to Israel who managed to hang on to the slender lead all the way to the end winning 86-70 and thus qualifying for the final for the second year running.

The two teams in the final had met already three times before in the NEC, twice last year with Israel losing 25-4 in the qualifying rounds and then winning a very tense quarter-final by a single IMP, once this year with Israel winning again 17-13. The fireworks started immediately:

Bd: 1 North Dir; Vul: None

♠ 10			
♥ 75			
♦ A1092			
♣ A109532			
♠ AQ9842			♠ J7653
♥ 10			♥ KJ986
♦ K4			♦ Q86
♣ KQ84			♣ -
♠ K			
♥ AQ432			
♦ J753			
♣ J76			

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Gromov	Israel	Dubinin
	Pass	Pass	1♥
1♠	1NT	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Zmudzinski	Barel	Balicki	Campanile
	Pass	2♥(1)	Pass
2♠(2)	3♣	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	Pass	Pass

(1) ♥+another suit;
(2) Pass-or-correct

Whether Gromov was uncharacteristically trying to throw sand in the Israeli's eyes with his 1NT bid or whether he was systemically showing clubs (or the minors?) only his shrink may know. But whatever the motive, the Yadlins had no trouble reaching their cold 4♠ and Doron took twelve tricks when Gromov led the ♥7 to the queen and Dubinin tried to cash the ♥A at trick two. Plus 480.

At the other table the wheels came off for the Poles. Methinks the blame lies with the hopeless 2♥ convention: 2♠ could be based on three small if responder is short in hearts, so East cannot risk competing

with 3♠ over 3♣. Obstructive methods such as these come with a price: much of the time they confuse the opponents but occasionally they confuse the users. If one is philosophically wedded to their use, one must be prepared to pay the piper when called to do so and get on with life. In this case the ticket to getting on was -470 when Barel scored up 3♣ doubled: spade to the ace, ♦K to the ace, club to the jack and queen, diamond to the queen, diamond ruff, claim. 14 IMPs to Israel.

A few boards later Israel stretched the lead even more:

Bd: 9 North Dir; E/W Vul

♠ Q643			
♥ AQJ63			
♦ K&5			
♣ Q			
♠ A85			♠ KJ102
♥ 10954			♥ -
♦ 1094			♦ A63
♣ K109			♣ J76532
♠ 97			
♥ K872			
♦ QJ82			
♣ A84			

Both N/S got to 4♥ from the North seat and both Easts led the ♣5. Both declarers won dummy's ace, ducked a spade, ruffed the club return, ducked another spade, and ruffed another club return. At trick six Gromov ruffed a spade in dummy, played the ♦Q, ducked, then led a heart to the jack followed by a low diamond toward dummy. Israel rose with the ace and played the killing ♠K, promoting a trump trick for Doron when Gromov ruffed with the ♥K; -50. (It would not have helped Gromov to ruff low as Doron could either pitch his last diamond or overruff, as he wished. The culprit was Gromov's premature spade ruff at trick six.) At the other table Barel led a diamond to the queen at trick six, then a heart to the jack, and the ♦K to Balicki's ace. Balicki played a fourth club, ♥7, ♥9, ♥Q. Barel ruffed a spade, crossed to the ♦J, and claimed the last two tricks on a high crossruff for a well deserved +420. 10 more IMPs to Israel, leading 35-4 but a late comeback meant that their first quarter lead was cut down to 17 IMPs, 46-29.

Second quarter and the first board of the set proved again to be favorable to the Israelis:

Bd: 17 North Dir: Vul. None

♠ A43		♠ K2
♥ AKQ96		♥ J85432
♦ Q		♦ 96
♣ KJ84		♣ Q76
♠ Q85	W N E	♠ 7
♥ 7		♥ J85432
♦ K108432		♦ 96
♣ A52		♣ Q76
♠ J10976		♠ 10
♥ 10		♥ AJ75
♦ AJ75		♦ 1093
♣ 1093		

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Balicki	Israel	Zmudzinski
	1♣(1)	Pass	1♦(2)
Pass	2♥(3)	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

- (1) ♥+another suit;
- (2) Pass-or-correct
- (1) Polish, FI;
- (2) Usually 0-7;
- (3) Strong, nat., unrelated to clubs

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Dubinin	Barel	Gromov	Campanile
	1♥	Pass	1♠
2♦	Dbl(1)	Pass	2♠
Pass	4♠		

- (1) Three-card spade support

Doron led his singleton heart against Zmudzinski's 4♠. Declarer won in dummy, led the ♦Q to his ace, and ran the ♠9. Israel won his king and played a diamond

What happened to my ruff?



to force dummy. Zmudzinski, who had been playing Doron for short spades from the outset, cashed the ♠A.

With no good news there, he reverted to hearts, discarding a diamond. Doron ruffed, cashed the ♦K, and continued diamonds, but then rose with the ace when Adam led the ♣10. Accurate defense and one down, -50.

Dubinin led the ♦3 against Campanile, the queen holding the trick. She played ♥AK, discarding a club, and West ruffed, cashed the ♣A, and continued clubs. Declarer won the ♣K and simply played ♠A, spade, taking the rest when the trumps behaved. There was still a trump in dummy to ruff a diamond, and the ♥Q, on which to discard her last losing diamond, +420. 10 IMPs to Israel pulling away to 56-29.

The first half finished with Israel leading 72-60 and everything still to play for.

The third set saw an explosive exchange of swings during which Migry & Co. were overtaken half way through but returned to lead soon after, thanks to two double digit swings. The end of the set provided one last gasp for the thousands of online kibitzers:

Bd: 47 North Dir: Vul. N/S

♠ 102		♠ J7
♥ AJ964		♥ KQ1075
♦ K		♦ A83
♣ AJ864		♣ K107
♠ Q65	W N E	♠ 83
♥ 832		♥ 1073
♦ Q7542		♦ J1042
♣ 53		♣ K872
♠ AK9843		♠ 1052
♥ -		♥ J982
♦ J1096		♦ 73
♣ Q92		♣ QJ103

Both West players led the ♦4, fourth best leads, against 4♠. East took the king with the ace and returned the ♠7. Declarer took the ace, and passed the ♦J, Doron following with the seven, Zmudzinski with the deuce. On the third round of diamonds Doron (sheepishly, we'd bet) followed with the ♦7. Dubinin elected to let the ten run, but when West covered the fourth diamond, he ruffed in dummy and was over-ruffed with the jack. Israel returned the ♥K. Dubinin ruffed, got the bad news on the ♠K, and lost the club finesse for -100.

Campanile did better by ruffing the third diamond in dummy and cashing the ♥A to discard her last diamond. She ruffed a heart to hand, cashed the ♠K, and took the losing club finesse, but had lost only one spade, one diamond, and the ♣K, for +620. 12 IMPs to Israel. R/P gained an overtrick IMP on the last deal of the set, but Israel had outscored R/P 56-31 over these 16 deals, and with 16 boards left to play in the 2005 NEC Cup, led mighty Russia/Poland by 37 IMPs, 128-91.

The quality and depth of Gromov-Dubinin's system agreements was showcased in the third board of the final set:

Bd: 51 North Dir: Vul. E/W

♠ AKQ94		♠ 83
♥ AK65		♥ 1073
♦ 95		♦ J1042
♣ A6		♣ K872
♠ 1052	W N E	♠ 1052
♥ J982		♥ J982
♦ 73		♦ 73
♣ QJ103		♣ QJ103
♠ J76		♠ J76
♥ Q4		♥ Q4
♦ AKQ86		♦ AKQ86
♣ 954		♣ 954

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Gromov	Israel	Dubinin
			1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠(1)	Pass	3♥(2)
Pass	3♠(3)	Pass	4♥(4)
Pass	7♠(5)	All Pass	

- (1) Game-forcing relay;
- (2) 3=2=5=3;
- (3) Sets Diamonds as trumps and asks RKCB;
- (4) 2 key cards for plus the trump queen
- (5) I can count to thirteen!

