

The 12th Bridge Olympiad

By Pietro Campanile

The Bridge Olympiad is by far the biggest event in the international bridge calendar and the excellent choice of venue, Istanbul, a friendly and inexpensive location, has encouraged the attendance of a record number of teams: 73 in the Open, 44 in the Ladies and 29 in the Seniors. A large attendance of course translated itself also into a sometimes random playing field: the participation of teams from countries like Mauritius, Bangladesh and Polynesia means a lot in terms of enlarging the geographic horizons of the game but it cannot be expected to contribute to a high standard of bridge. A telling example of the huge gap between the established bridge playing countries and some of the newcomers occurred during the match between Sweden and Botswana: the Swedish player in South opened 1♦, West doubled, North bid redouble and that was followed by two passes. The Botswana player in West gave the tray a cursory look and put the green pass card on it. Trying to be helpful, the Swedish South advised him that if he did indeed pass that would mean the end of the bidding and it might not be an altogether wise thing to do, (hint! hint!). A brief pause of thought and then West passed anyway stating with austere finality that he had already bid his hand with the double and everybody knew that it was bad bridge to bid one's hand twice! The result of a vulnerable 1♦ redoubled plus three must have raised a few eyebrows at the scoring corner since it happened to be exactly 1430, the same as 6♥ or 6♠ and West was holding the aces of both suits!!

Anyway back to serious bridge and the likely contenders for the Open title,

apart from the Italians (Lauria-Versace, Bocchi-Duboin, Fantoni-Nunes) who were the obvious favorites, included the USA team (Rosenberg-Mahmood, Levin-Weinstein, Fallenius-Welland), the Poles (Balicki-Zmudzinski, Tuszinsky-Kowalsky, Chmursky-Puczinsky), Sweden (Fredin-Lindqvist, Bertheau-Nystrom, Sundelin-Sylvan), with many other teams like Norway, Netherlands, Russia, Norway, England, China and Israel (Kalish-Podgur, I. Herbst-O.Herbst, D. Yadlin-I.Yadlin) holding outside chances for a medal.

In the Ladies there seemed to be two firm favorites: the USA (Meyers-Montin, Molson-Sokolow, Letizia-Steiner) and China (Wang-Liu, Zhang-Gu, H.Wang-P.Wang); while France, Austria, Germany, England, Sweden and perhaps Israel (Levit-Birman, Popilov-Nosacki, Faur-Graizer) could be relied upon to provide a valid challenge.

The 73 Open teams were divided in four groups from which the top four would go on to the knock-out stages, while in the Ladies the teams were split in two groups of 22 with the top eight qualifying. The Seniors were the only ones where the medals would be adjudicated merely on the results of the round-robin competition, an unusual format which was probably adopted because of the unexpected numbers of teams enrolled meant that there would be no time to set up a suitable knock-out stage. The Seniors title was won by the USA (Bell-Miles, Schermer-Chambers, Robison-Onstott) ahead of the Netherlands and Germany. The Israeli team (Levit, Rand, Schwartz, Romik, Kaminski) finished 6th and Nissan Rand and Shaya Levit gained the distinction of topping the Butler ranking in the event.

A detailed look on the performance of

all the Israeli teams will be published, as customary, when each captain submits his report. Here I shall try briefly to illustrate the competition as a whole.

Let us start with one of the boards which created one of the biggest swings in the round robin phase.

All Nv, you hold

♠ 962
♥ -
♦ KQ1098532
♣ 102

South opens 1♥ and I guess you bid 4♦, North bids 5♦, alerted as a cuebid, and over South's 5♥ he goes on to 6♥.

What do you lead?

In the Ladies USA-Poland match, after identical bidding sequences, both Wests selected the ♦K.

In the other round robin match on Vu-graph, Italy-Netherlands, both Versace and Jansma led the ♠2.

Last chance to reconsider before I show you the whole hand...

		♠ KJ103	
		♥ A952	
		♦ -	
		♣ AKJ63	
♠ 962			♠ A874
♥ -			♥ K83
♦ KQ1098532			♦ 64
♣ 102			♣ 9874
		♠ Q5	
		♥ QJ10764	
		♦ AJ7	
		♣ Q5	

After the routine lead of the ♦K, made at most tables, declarer succeeds as he can throw his spade losers on dummy's clubs.

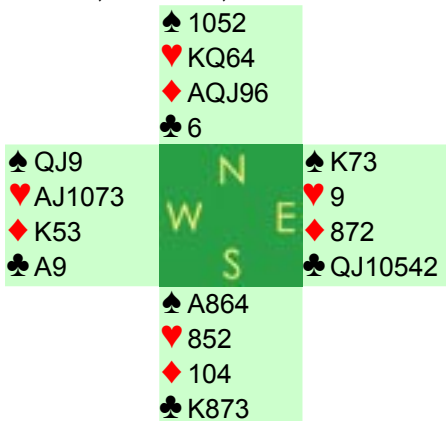
The bidding, however, strongly suggested that dummy would be void in diamonds, in which case a lead in that suit would be a dead end. Both Wests, Jan Jansma and Alfredo Versace, read the auction correctly and hit on

the essential spade lead. East took his ace, and scored his heart king later for down one, no score.

At his table Jansma actually tried an old swindle. When the ♥Q was led at the third trick, he promptly followed with the ♦K. A careless declarer might think that he had seen the ♥K and call for the ♥A. Surprisingly enough it did not work against Duboin, but it cost nothing to try.

Sometimes low level contracts can provide more of a chance to show off one's card playing skill than a grand slam. In the encounter between two highly fancied teams, USA and Norway, Rosenberg produced some of the magic that causes many to rate him as one of the world's best declarers. After making a normal balancing call in the West seat, the American player landed in the tricky contract of 2♥.

Board 9, E-W VUL, Dealer North

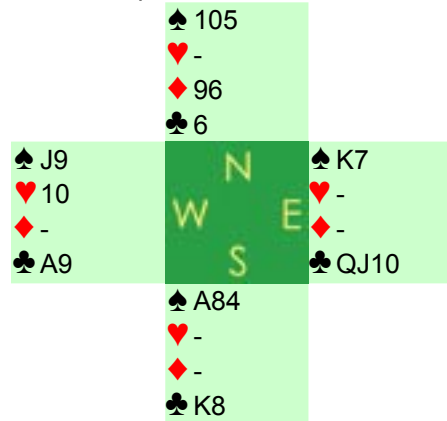


West	North	East	South
Rosenberg	Saelensminde	Mahmood	Brogeland
	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Lead: ♦A

Despite the unusually friendly lead, the contract was still in very perilous waters. The continuation of the ♦Q was taken by the ♦K. After long thought, Rosenberg made the unexpected play of the ♥3 on which Saelensminde opted to play low, thinking that partner might be holding a singleton ♥10 or ♥J. The ♥9 won in dummy, and Rosenberg spurned the club finesse in favor of a low spade to the ♠Q, in

order to try and gather more information about the location of the missing honors before committing himself. When the ♠Q won he continued with the ♥A and the ♥J, losing to North's ♥Q. Saelensminde now cashed his ♦J and made what appeared to be an automatic play, cashing the ♥K, which however proved fatal to the defense. This is the position we have reached:



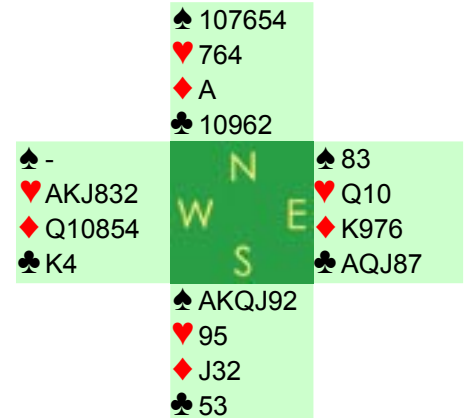
When North exited with the ♦9, Rosenberg pitched a club from dummy and ruffed in his hand. But South suddenly found himself caught in a rare position known as a nonmaterial squeeze. He had to discard a spade, an apparently unimportant card. When declarer played the ♠J, Brogeland was helpless. If he won and led a spade, the declarer would be able to take a club finesse. And if he held up his spade ace, he would be endplayed in that suit and forced to lead a club at the 12th trick. A neat showing and a 5 IMPs gain, since the Norwegians played 3♣-1 at the other table, which helped the USA to a 20-10 win.

The end of the Open round robin saw a few surprise exclusions, including Poland, Norway and, regrettably, our own Israeli team. A major surprise was the fact that neither the USA or Italy won their respective groups, which meant that they would play each other in the round of 16, an unfortunate occurrence which would sideline far too early one of the two teams, anticipating what most pundits had predicted would be the likely final. In the Ladies competition there was a huge scramble for the qualifying places and the

Israeli Ladies team was in contention throughout for a top eight finish until an unlucky sequence of results in the last round, which they had to sit out as a bye, relegated them to ninth place.

As expected, Italy-USA provided a lot of excitement. The first set was won 18-11 by Italy while the second saw a powerful USA surge which gained a 20 IMPs lead also thanks to boards like this one:

Board 26. Dealer East. All Vul.



West	North	East	South
Duboin	Rosenberg	Bocchi	Zia
		1♣	1♠
2♥	4♣	Pass	Pass
5♦	5♠	6♦	All Pass

Sometimes accurate defensive carding takes second place when the paramount consideration should be to conceal from declarer the location of the missing honors.

Here Duboin ruffed the ♠7 lead as Zia false-carded with the ♠A.

How should declarer play trumps in this situation?

The bidding indicated that North was probably shapely and without a lot of high cards, probably holding the ♠K, and so South was more likely to have the ♦A.

Therefore the Italian made the reasonable play of a club to the ♣Q and a low diamond from dummy, playing the ♦Q. That was down one.

At the other table after a similar auction and lead, Versace played the ♠J, an action consistent with a holding of ♠KQJ or ♠AKQJ. Thinking that North would never have underled his ♠A and



Italy retains her Olympic crown and the new Blue Team sing away as the Italian anthem is played at the prize-giving ceremony

since there was not an awful lot left that he could hold apart from the $\heartsuit A$, Weinstein in West took the correct inference and played immediately a low diamond from hand: $6\diamond$ making for a huge swing to the USA.

The see-saw struggle continued board after board with the Italians overtaking the Americans at the end of the fourth quarter and again dropping back in the next set where an explosive series of swings produced a 60-32 score for the USA which put them 25 IMPs ahead with 16 boards left to play setting up a show-down which would remind many of the legendary final match from the 2003 Bermuda Bowl.

After losing 5 IMPs in the first board, widening the gap to 30 IMPs, Italy sounded the charge.

All Vul, East Dealer

	\spadesuit J96		
	\heartsuit 642		
	\diamondsuit AJ95		
	\clubsuit Q86		
\spadesuit 1073		\spadesuit AK85	
\heartsuit AQ1053		\heartsuit K98	
\diamondsuit 2		\diamondsuit Q108	
\clubsuit KJ73		\clubsuit 1094	
	\spadesuit Q42		
	\heartsuit J7		
	\diamondsuit K7643		
	\clubsuit A52		

In the Open Room the Americans got to $3\heartsuit$ just making. In the Closed Room Bocchi-Duboin bid aggressively to $4\heartsuit$,

trying to make up lost ground.

West	North	East	South
Duboin	Mahmood	Bocchi	Rosenberg
		$1\clubsuit$	Pass
$1\diamond(1)$	Pass	$1\heartsuit(2)$	Pass
$1\spadesuit$	Pass	$1NT$	Pass
$4\heartsuit$	Pass	Pass	Pass
(1) Transfer to Hearts			
(2) I have three of them			

Rosenberg led the $\diamondsuit 4$ to Zia's $\diamondsuit A$, who returned safely a heart. Bocchi cashed the $\heartsuit A$ and the $\heartsuit K$ and ran the $\clubsuit 9$. North won and sent back his last trump taken in hand. Next came a club to South's $\clubsuit A$. Rosenberg took stock of the situation and opted for a passive club exit (a spade would have caused declarer more problems). Declarer cleared the suit in two rounds, discarding a spade and reaching this position.

	\spadesuit J96		
	\heartsuit -		
	\diamondsuit J9		
	\clubsuit -		
\spadesuit 1073		\spadesuit AK8	
\heartsuit A10		\heartsuit -	
\diamondsuit -		\diamondsuit Q10	
\clubsuit -		\clubsuit -	
	\spadesuit Q42		
	\heartsuit -		
	\diamondsuit K7		
	\clubsuit -		

When Bocchi played the $\heartsuit A$, North had to hold on to his diamonds, so he discarded a spade, declarer doing the

same. Now Rosenberg had to choose what to pitch: an impossible task since a spade would immediately promote dummy's $\spadesuit 10$ while a diamond pitch would let declarer set up the $\diamondsuit Q$ after crossing to the $\spadesuit A$ and ruffing a diamond dropping the $\diamondsuit K$. He opted for the diamond discard and declarer duly completed his masterful execution of this rare trump squeeze for +620, and a desperately needed 10 IMPs.

Later on, Duboin gained another 10 IMPs taking a remarkable view in the following board:

Dealer West. None Vul.

	\spadesuit Q43		
	\heartsuit A985		
	\diamondsuit Q6		
	\clubsuit 10652		
\spadesuit AJ8		\spadesuit K106	
\heartsuit 63		\heartsuit Q107	
\diamondsuit AK532		\diamondsuit 984	
\clubsuit Q83		\clubsuit AKJ4	
	\spadesuit 9752		
	\heartsuit KJ42		
	\diamondsuit J107		
	\clubsuit 97		

The two Wests in both rooms got to the same 3NT contract after a concise 1NT-3NT auction.

Zia started with a low heart and the defenders quickly cashed four tricks in the suit, Zia exiting with a club at the end. Duboin embarked on a scheme to try to get a count on the opposing hands. He won the $\clubsuit Q$ in hand at trick five, cashed the top two diamonds, then played off dummy's three clubs, pitching his last diamond. Rosenberg, meanwhile, had followed to two clubs and discarded two spades. It looked as though Rosenberg started with four spades, making it more likely that he held the $\spadesuit Q$, the card declarer needed to locate to make the contract.

Naturally, Duboin was aware that such inference would also be available to his American counterpart in the other room. Therefore the Vugraph audience was treated to a very unusual scene when the Italian player made a point of picking up his scorecard for a look as a prelude to finessing North rather than South for the $\spadesuit Q$. Estimati-

ing that his team was still trailing and believing a swing was needed, Duboin wanted to show that he was about to make deliberately an anti-percentage play to try and turns things around. As you can see, Duboin was right. In the Closed Room, the play proceeded along identical lines and Weinstein was able to gather the same information on the layout of the hand. After giving the matter due thought, Weinstein played with the odds and finessed South for the ♠Q. Down one and 10 IMPs to Italy who went on to lead by 5 IMPs.

A few more exciting boards led to a dramatic finale: Italy was by now 12 IMPs ahead but in the last hand of this incredible match the USA had got to a vulnerable 7♣. If the Italians did not equal their result, the USA would overtake them and win the match:

Board 32. Dealer West. E/W Vul.

	♠ Q105		
	♥ QJ96		
	♦ 8764		
	♣ 74		
♠ A3	N	♠ K72	
♥ A4	W	♥ K853	
♦ AK102	E	♦ Q	
♣ A6532	S	♣ KQJ108	
	♠ J9864		
	♥ 1072		
	♦ J953		
	♣ 9		

Not many would bet against the Italians on this deal, however, and indeed they had no trouble getting to the top spot:

West	North	East	South
Duboin	Mahmood	Bocchi	Rosenberg
1♣	Pass	2♣	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♦	Pass	3NT	Pass
4♣	Pass	4♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	7♣	All Pass

Flat board and a 157-146 victory for Italy in what would turn out to be by far their toughest match.

The quarter finals included a few unexpected appearances but, with the exception of Russia squeaking by



The new "kids on the block": the Russian girls show off their trophies after their astonishing win in the Ladies event

Hungary with the narrowest of margins (206-205), the others presented little doubt as to their outcome. Italy–Pakistan 209-120, Netherlands –Ireland 296-177, China-Japan 296-195.

The semifinals were also a fairly one-sided affair with Italy slowly grinding down China 180-136 and Netherlands defeating Russia 195-116 in low scoring matches of a very high level.

In the Ladies event the semifinals saw the USA beat China 173-146 and the Russians, truly the Cinderella team of the event, convincingly defeated England 212-166.

The two finals proceeded along completely different patterns. In the Open final, after a jittery start, the Italians made the most of the swingy deals in the third and fourth set thanks to superbly accurate play combined with aggressive bidding. In those 32 boards they outscored the Dutch 111-38, opening a huge gap of 70-80 IMPs which allowed them to control with ease the rest of the match, cruising to a 310-259 victory, and to deservedly retain the Olympic title already won in Maastricht four years ago.

The Ladies final between the highly fancied USA team and the Russian

girls, the biggest surprise of the tournament, provided all the excitement one might wish from an Olympic final. The Americans seemed to justify their role of favorites jumping off to a 101-54 score after the first two sets. The Russians came back, amazed everyone and probably even themselves, with an incredible third set where they managed to put 76 unanswered IMPs on the board before the Americans regrouped and cut their losses. With 48 boards to go the two teams were separated by a mere four IMPs. The next sets were full of unorthodox, and often unsound, decisions from both sides which made for a great show for the bridge fans following the match in the Vugraph theatre and the thousands watching the superb online relay offered by Bridgebase.com. An avalanche of IMPs exchanged hands on boards which at a first glance seemed to offer very little chance for swings, but when the smoke cleared Russia emerged victorious to claim its first World team title defeating the USA by 271-259 over 96 boards (with an incredible average of 5.5 IMPs exchanged per hand!).