

The European Teams Championship in Malmo

By *Pietro Campanile*

The 47th European Teams Championship has been held in Malmo, Sweden, from the 19th of June to the 3rd of July and, given our publishing deadline, the extensive captains' reports on the performance of the Israeli teams will be included in the next issues. Here, however, I would like to have a general look at the championship as a whole, which saw an entry of 34 teams in the Open, 22 in the Ladies and a disappointing 16 in the Seniors, causing a late change in the format of the event. The prizes, apart from the European title and medals to the runners up, consisted also of qualifying slots for the top placed teams to next year World Championship (a.k.a. the Bermuda Bowl and the Venice Cup) to be held in Estoril, Portugal.

The Ladies event was quite difficult to forecast: although France, England, Germany, Austria, Sweden and Holland could be expected to fight it out for the top five places, it was hard to pinpoint a favorite. In the end the medals were decided by a final rush involving four teams: Sweden, Austria, France and Netherlands, while Germany, Poland, England and our own team fought hard for the coveted fifth place, the last qualifying berth to the Venice Cup. A complete report on the event will be forthcoming, suffice to say that right at the bell Sweden managed to snatch victory from the other contenders and Israel successfully headed off all challengers to finish in a very impressive fifth place.

The Seniors event was based on a new formula which saw a round robin of 16 teams leading to a final A and a final B, each of eight teams, to determine the ultimate placements. Unfortunately, Israel (reinforced by the late addition to the team of David Birman, in his first outing as a Senior) finished ninth after the round robin, narrowly missing out on the chance to contest the top places in the final A.

The winners were Denmark, while the other medals went to Poland and France. Israel finished a comfortable first, and ninth overall, in the final B.



Italy six times european champions

In the Open event, there were few people prepared to bet against Italy (Bocchi-Duboin, Lauria-Versace, Fantoni-Nunes) stretching again its record breaking winning streak to six victories in a row. The Italians had demonstrated in the past an amazing ability in rolling over weaker teams while holding their own against other top ranked competitors and this uncanny talent in regularly squeezing maximum scores when needed had been the magic recipe which had seen them taking the European crown again and again since 1995 in Vilamoura.

This year's toughest obstacles to an Italian six-peat were the home team (Fredin-Lindkvist, Bertheau-Nystrom, Sylvan-Sundelin), Poland (Balicki-Zmudzinski, Tuszynski-Kowalski, Chmursky-Puczynski), while Russia, Norway, Turkey and Holland could play the role of rank outsiders. In practice, however, most teams in the championship could be relied upon to provide the occasional surprise and take the scalp of some more quoted opponent, especially since the format of 33 matches of 20 boards each would inevitably tax the stamina and the nerves of a lot of players.

Israel's youngest ever team was a big unknown factor as many felt that the players' lack of experience in competing at such a high level could easily affect

their performance. It was clear from the first rounds that such fears were completely unfounded: the enthusiasm and the determination displayed when meeting the best that Europe had to offer produced an amazing run of results which saw the Israeli team quickly rise in the standings and contend for a Bermuda Bowl qualifying spot until the last rounds when a heavy defeat against the Italian juggernaut meant a drastic drop in their ranking, from which they never recovered. All in all, despite their poor last rounds and keeping in mind the excellence of the event, the team put up a very good effort. Besides, taking part in the championship meant an incredibly valuable experience for all the players involved, who will undoubtedly benefit from their exposure to high level bridge to sharpen up their competitive edge and perform even better in the future.

After a very colorful opening ceremony, the players settled down to the business at hand in the hyper-modern surroundings of the hi-tech Malmo Massan Conference Centre, located in close proximity of the town centre.

The first six rounds of the competition saw a rather unexpected development: Poland took up the pace and quickly gained a useful 15 points lead over Italy and a closely packed chasing group.



Opening ceremony

The meeting between the top two teams in the seventh round thus became of vital importance and it was soon clear that Italy was well up to the task of clipping the wings of the Polish team.

One of the trademarks of the success of Lauria-Versace is accurate declarer play coupled with aggressive bidding which enables them to drive home many games which ordinarily fail elsewhere, and here is a telling example:

Board 5. Dealer North. N/S Vul.

♠ A862		♠ Q5
♥ 1043		♥ KJ976
♦ A10743		♦ 852
♣ 7		♣ J98
♠ J74		♠ K1093
♥ AQ		♥ 852
♦ KQ96		♦ J
♣ AQ32		♣ K10654

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Versace	Tuszynski	Lauria	Kowalski
	Pass	Pass	Pass
2♦(1)	Pass	2♠(2)	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♦	Pass	3NT	All Pass
(1) 18-20 balanced			
(2) 4+♥			

North led the ♦4 and West won with the king and immediately played the ♣Q, trying to establish an additional entry in dummy, prior to running the hearts. If South had taken the ♣K and switched to a heart - neither play being easy to find - then in theory the defenders could have countered anything declarer would try, but South understandably ducked. Now declarer played a diamond and North

won cheaply, cashed the ♦A and sent a diamond back, setting up his fifth diamond while holding the ♠A as an entry. Declarer took the diamond and cashed the ♥A and, by overtaking the ♥Q, made his contract thanks to the friendly position in hearts; for a deceptively simple +400.

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Zmudzinski	Bocchi	Balicki	Duboin
	Pass	Pass	Pass
1♣(1)	Pass	1♥	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

North led the ♦3 and declarer won with the ♦K and cashed the ♥A, the ♥Q and only then tried to reach dummy with a club. Now there was no way to get home, and declarer finished two down; -100 and a loss of 11 IMPs.

Two boards later it was Bocchi-Duboin's turn to earn some useful imps for Italy with an impressive bidding display.

Board 7. Dealer South. All Vul.

♠ AJ2		♠ Q10
♥ J109		♥ A853
♦ Q106		♦ 75
♣ AKQ9		♣ J7532
♠ K9875		♠ 643
♥ 74		♥ KQ62
♦ J94		♦ AK832
♣ 1064		♣ 8

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Versace	Tuszynski	Lauria	Kowalski
			1♦
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	3♦	Pass	3♥
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

After Lauria's ♠Q lead (unbid suit), declarer quickly gathered eleven tricks: +660.

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Zmudzinski	Bocchi	Balicki	Duboin
			1♦
Pass	2♣(1)	Pass	2♦(2)
Pass	2♥(3)	Pass	2♠(4)
Pass	2NT(3)	Pass	3♣(5)
Pass	3♦(3)	Pass	3♠(6)
Pass	4♦(3)	Pass	4♥
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥(8)
Pass	6♦	All Pass	
(1) Asking			
(2) Any minimum			
(3) Game forcing relay			
(4) Diamonds and hearts			
(5) Club singleton (2=4=6=1 or 3=4=5=1)			
(6) 3=4=5=1 and bad spades			
(7) RKCB			
(8) Two aces			

Knowing that Duboin's spades could be pitched on his clubs and that his partner had all his points in the red suits meant that Bocchi could more or less safely ask aces and reach the excellent spot of 6♦, only needing a decent trump break. The ensuing +1370 meant another gain for Italy which led 64-11 after only seven boards!

The match eventually finished 24-6 and propelled Italy to first place, a position they were never to relinquish till the end of the championship.

Let us look at another impressive Italian combined effort in this hand from the match they played against Belgium.

Board 7. Dealer South. All Vul.

♠ J2		♠ A1063
♥ AJ7		♥ K10
♦ AJ1072		♦ K98
♣ A109		♣ Q654
♠ Q985		♠ K74
♥ 85432		♥ Q96
♦ 43		♦ Q65
♣ J2		♣ K873

Both North-Souths got to the standard 3NT played by North after 1NT-3NT and both Easts led a low spade. Declarer played



Italy vs Poland

low so West won the ♠Q and returned the suit to the ♠A, then East played the ♠10 to dummy's ♠K. Both declarers now ran the ♦Q to the king reaching this position with East to play:

♠ -	♠ -
♥ AJ7	♥ K10
♦ AJ107	♦ 98
♣ A109	♣ Q654
♠ 8	♠ 6
♥ 85432	♥ K10
♦ 4	♦ 98
♣ J2	♣ Q654
♠ -	♠ -
♥ Q96	♥ Q96
♦ 65	♦ 65
♣ K873	♣ K873

The Belgian player in East, Coenraets, now returned his last spade to his partner's, Neve, ♠8. Neve switched to a heart and Bocchi rose with the ace and cashed the diamonds. That squeezed Coenraets between his club stopper and the ♥K and Bocchi had nine tricks for +600.

At the other table, after winning the ♦K, Lauria in East did not cash the last spade, but instead opted to return a diamond. This suggested to the Belgian declarer, Alain Kaplan, that Lauria might have led from a three card suit and he proceeded to cash his diamonds on which Lauria quickly pitched the ♥10 and a club. Declarer finally crossed to dummy in clubs to take the "safe" heart finesse, since West was marked as holding the remaining spades. That was one down, of course, as Lauria now "discovered" a fourth spade; -100 and 12 IMPs to Italy

thanks to Lauria's nice defence brilliantly complemented by Bocchi's fine declarer effort, especially when reading the play on the heart return and judging that West would probably not lead away from the ♥K with the ♥Q in dummy and while not being certain that declarer held the ♥J.

The reigning champions eventually cruised to victory in front of Sweden, while Poland narrowly edged out Russia in third place. The last admission place for next year's Bermuda Bowl went rather surprisingly to England, while Israel finished in 14th place.

Here is a good effort from Swedish declarer Peter Fredin in their match against Portugal:

Board 6 – East dealer – E/W Vul

♠ J87	♠ 1093
♥ Q52	♥ K987
♦ KJ64	♦ Q105
♣ K84	♣ 752
♠ Q64	♠ 1093
♥ A63	♥ K987
♦ 9872	♦ Q105
♣ AJ3	♣ 752
♠ AK52	♠ 1093
♥ J104	♥ K987
♦ A3	♦ Q105
♣ Q1096	♣ 752

In the Open Room, Madeira played 3NT from the North seat, going quickly one off after Sundelin got the defence to the best start with a heart lead. Sylvan took his ♥A and returned a heart, ducked by Sundelin. Eventually declarer misguessed the club position and had to concede defeat.

In the Closed Room, Fredin opened 1NT (14-16) with the South hand and Lindqvist immediately raised to game. Folque in West had no particularly attractive lead - a diamond looks safe, of course, but the auction suggests that a major suit lead might be more effective. Folque chose the ♥6. Fredin started very well with the excellent psychological play of the queen from dummy, making it almost impossible for Henriques to duck. He won the king and returned a heart and Folque won and cleared the suit but defensive communications to cash the fourth heart had been broken.

The defensive carding suggested that Folque had led from a three card suit so

Fredin decided to play him for the club length. Accordingly, he made his second good play by running the ♣10 then playing a second club. Folque correctly won the second club and exited passively with a third round so Fredin was left to find his ninth trick from either spades or diamonds. He played a spade to the ♠K, Henriques contributing the ♠9, and cashed the last club. Folque and dummy each pitched diamonds and Henriques the ♠3. Fredin cashed the ♠A, after all, the queen might fall, and paused to take stock. He hadn't come this far to get the ending wrong. If Henriques really had the ♠Q it meant that Folque had started with five diamonds, which seemed improbable after the opening lead, so Fredin played a third spade and chalked up +600 and 13 IMPs for his team.

The English put in a spirited performance in the second half of the tournament to recover much of the lost ground and finish a very good fifth. Here is a fine declarer effort reported by their captain, Raymond Brock, against the solid Greek team.

Board 12. Dealer West. N/S Vul.

♠ A10987	♠ 63
♥ KJ6	♥ Q74
♦ 6	♦ A10732
♣ AKQJ	♣ 1073
♠ KQJ	♠ 63
♥ A532	♥ Q74
♦ Q4	♦ A10732
♣ 9852	♣ 1073
♠ 542	♠ 542
♥ 1098	♥ 1098
♦ KJ985	♦ KJ985
♣ 64	♣ 64

In the Closed Room, Kannavos played in 2♠ on a heart lead which should have held him to nine tricks but the defence went astray and he ended up making ten.

The stakes were higher in the Open Room:

West	North	East	South
Lambrinos	Price	Zotos	Simpson
1♣	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	4♣	All Pass	

South's raise to 2♠ would not be everyone's choice and on this deal it led to the wafer-thin game.

One difficult aspect of defence is when dummy has a possible source of tricks and the defender with most of the high

cards does not have a strong holding in that suit. If his partner guards that suit it is sufficient simply to defend passively; if his partner does not hold that suit then it is important to set up side-suit winners quickly.

Here East led a low spade and West's jack was allowed to hold the trick. West now made a small mistake when he switched to a low heart. Declarer, David Price, went up with the king, cashed the ♠A and played four rounds of clubs discarding dummy's hearts. Now he led a diamond.

This was not a guess for him because he could not afford West to gain the lead. He won dummy's king, ruffed a diamond and ruffed a heart with dummy's last trump. That was eight tricks in the bag and he still had two certain trump tricks to come for a healthy +620 and 10 IMPs which contributed to England's 17-13 victory.

The fact that over 1400 boards were played during the championship means that it is impossible to give more than a tiny sample of the bridge played. After having given due coverage to the winners and their main challengers, it seems only right to have a look at an interesting deal from players who are not as much in the limelight, like for instance, those hailing from the distant Faroe Islands, a very recent addition to the European bridge family.

Its team had many ups (few) and downs (a lot) and finished third before last but had also its shares of successes, namely two large wins against Lithuania and San Marino. From the earlier match comes a hand of rare technical beauty, reported by Danish bridge journalist, Svend Novrup.



"Maybe you do not win a long championship by executing coups and squeezes - but it helps! Board 1 in Round 14 caused problems in many matches, and we have heard of pairs who, sitting North-South, were happy to get a plus score in their game contract. Well, against Lithuania in the Open series, Hedin Mouritzen from the Faroe Islands landed a small slam by means of a rare guest at the bridge table, a stepping-stone end-play that undoubtedly is one of the best achievements of the championships so far.

Board 1. Dealer North. None Vul.

♠ AKJ43			
♥ AQJ93			
♦ AQ			
♣ 9			
♠ Q7	N	E	♠ 10986
♥ K10862	W	S	♥ 754
♦ 73			♦ J642
♣ Q864			♣ K10
			♠ 52
			♥ -
			♦ K10985
			♣ AJ7532

West	North	East	South
	Hedin		Joannes
	2♣	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♠	Pass	5♠
Pass	6♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

An extremely difficult hand to bid, and probably you will not consider 6♠ to be the top spot to end up in but good slams are slams that make! 3♣ showed a hand with HHxxx in clubs and almost no side strength, so Jóannes Mouritzen thought that he had to do something extra on the next round. He felt like bidding 6♠ but,



Peter Fredin - Sweden

as Hedin never refuses an invitation, he bid only 5♠ (pard, you have to take care of the top trumps yourself!) putting the responsibility on the shoulders of Hedin! East, who expected to see ♣AQxxxx in dummy, led a shrewd ♣10, a lead chosen at several tables(!). Hedin won ♣A, planned the play and started his voyage towards 12 tricks: ♦Q, heart ruff, ♦A, heart ruff, club ruff, ♠A, ♠K, ♠J, and ♥A, hoping for the ♥K to drop. Probably he was happy that this was not the case, as he now had to play for the stepping-stone variation in this position:

♠ -	N	E	♠ 10
♥ K10	W	S	♥ -
♦ -			♦ J6
♣ Q			♣ -
			♠ -
			♥ -
			♦ K10
			♣ J

East was put on lead with the last trump while the ♣J was discarded from dummy, and he had to lead away from the ♦J. One admiring fan later on, breathless from admiration, asked Hedin: "How did you know to finesse for the ♦J?" Hedin had a prosaic answer to that: "If East had held a non-diamond, he probably would have cashed it!"

Can you hear me now? (Antonio Riccardi)