

The 6th Generali World Masters

By Pietro Campanile

"**B**ridge is a partnership game", the self-evident truth of this statement is that it is extremely difficult to identify with absolute certainty the strongest player in the game. All too often a pair's success is the result not only of the sum of their individual skill but also of partnership chemistry which can unexpectedly raise or lower the quality of their performance.

The question of "Who is the best player?" remains nevertheless an intriguing one and that is what the Generali World Masters Individual Championship attempts to answer by carefully selecting the top performing players all over the world and inviting them to compete with and against each other using the same convention card, based on a 5 card major, 15-17 NT structure, closely resembling a standard French system.

The 6th edition of this lucrative event has just taken place in the idyllic surroundings of Verona, Italy, from the 8th to the 11th of September. The championship was divided as usual in two sections, both matchpoint scored: the Men's competition included a field of 52 participants playing two boards with each other for a total of 102 boards over four sessions; the Ladies' competition included a field of 28, playing three boards with each other for a total of 81 boards over three sessions.

J.L. Quantin and Zia Mahmood against a classic French partnership of the 80's": Christian Mari and Henri Szvarc

The wealth of talents in both championships was outstanding: in the Men were attending four of the previous winners (Piotr Gawrys, Jon Baldursson, Paul Chemla and Antonio Sementa) as well as great champions like Alain Levy, Zia Mahmood, Bob Hamman, five out of six members of the new Italian Blue Team (only missing Lauria), Gabriel Chagas, Andrew Robson and many others.

In the Ladies, besides four of the previous winners (Maria Erhart, Nicola Smith, Migry Zur Campanile and Benedicte Cronier), were present great names like Jill Meyers, Shawn Quinn, Janice Molson, Sabine Auken, Tobi Sokolow, Catherine d'Ovidio, Bep Vriend and many others.

In such exalted company it was great to notice the participation of three Israeli players: David Birman in the Men, Matilda Popilov and Migry Zur Campanile in the Ladies.

Now let us jump straight into the action:
Board 14 None Vul dealer East

<p>♠ 972 ♥ AKJ62 ♦ 92 ♣ 1043</p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">N E S W</p>	<p>♠ KJ3 ♥ Q1095 ♦ J874 ♣ Q9</p>	<p>♠ 65 ♥ 843 ♦ A1063 ♣ AK86</p>
<p>♠ AQ1084 ♥ 7 ♦ KQ5 ♣ J752</p>			

West	North	East	South
Mouiel	Zia	Bocchi	Ferraro
		1♣	1♠
Dbl	2♠	Pass	Pass
3♥	Dbl	All Pass	

The lure of the magic +300 meant that Zia did not hesitate to double Mouiel's 3♥ bid and his decision seemed justified since at a first glance declarer looked like losing two spades, a diamond, a club and two hearts. Zia led his ♠K followed by the ♠J then switching to the ♦8. Declarer ducked the diamond, won by Ferraro with the ♦Q, and ruffed in dummy the spade continuation. After ♦A and a diamond ruffed in hand, he cashed the ♥A and both top clubs before leading the last diamond from dummy, ruffing it low. Declarer then exited with his low club and Zia was obliged to ruff in and to gift Mouiel with the last two tricks, having to lead from his ♥Q10 into declarer's ♥KJ. Essentially Mouiel succeeded in not conceding a single useful trick to the Q109x offside!! 3♥ doubled making was worth +530 and a well deserved top.

Did you spot the winning defense? West must switch to a club at trick two (the ♣9 is better than the queen). East eventually scores the ♣J and is also able to lead a fourth club to force an early trump trick in the West hand, so the contract is defeated two tricks. Ironically, Zia had a better chance to defeat this hand if he held two small clubs! (If declarer held the ♣Q, a club shift would still set up a club ruff, which is needed to avoid the trump endplay.)

At the end of the first session the top five positions were as follows:

1. Jens Auken Denmark 64.06%
2. I. Del Monte Australia 59.72%
3. Bob Hamman USA 59.55%
4. Tor Helness Norway 58.68%
5. Luis Lantaron Spain 58.51%



Polish tête-à-tête: Krzysztof Martens and Apollinaire Kowalsky

Thursday the 9th, the second day of competition, saw the start of the Ladies event:

Board 4 All Vul West Dealer

♠ AJ72			
♥ 5			
♦ 74			
♣ Q98752			
♠ Q854		N	♠ 1063
♥ 109762		W	♥ AQ
♦ J85		E	♦ AKQ62
♣ A		S	♣ KJ10
			♠ K9
			♥ KJ843
			♦ 1093
			♣ 643

West	North	East	South
Sokolov	von Arnim	Migry	Osberg
Pass	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Dbf	3NT	All Pass

After South led the ♣6 (top from three small, second best from four), declarer must have had that all too familiar sinking feeling when dummy came down and she realized that dummy's stiff ♣A meant that the lead value of her ♣KJ10 was basically lost. Furthermore, the double from a suit led by Queen empty would not be a popular choice and it was a safe bet that at most other tables the lead against 3NT would probably come from a major suit providing the vital ninth trick.

Migry took the lead perforce in dummy and returned to hand with a high diamond to play a spade up. South went in with her ♠K and exited safely with a diamond, taken by declarer in her hand. A second spade went to the ♠9, ♠Q and the ♠A and von Arnim played back the ♥5 to the ♥Q and Osberg's ♥K, who continued with a heart to declarer now known stiff ♥A.

Declarer could now take stock of the position since the heart return had provided a lot of information to help her guessing the actual layout: Osberg had five hearts and very likely two spades (the ♠9 had to be a true card), probably three clubs (since von Arnim should at least have a six-carder for her aggressive lead directing double on Queen empty) and therefore three diamonds, giving von Arnim's a 4-1-2-6 shape.

This was the current position with East to play:



♠ J7			
♥ -			
♦ -			
♣ Q985			
♠ 85		N	♠ 10
♥ 1097		W	♥ -
♦ J		E	♦ Q62
♣ -		S	♣ KJ
			♠ -
			♥ J84
			♦ 9
			♣ 43

Backing her analysis, Migry continued with the ♠10 putting the German in an impossible bind: ducking would give declarer her 9th trick, while taking would leave her the choice of exiting towards declarer's club tenace or giving her access to the good spade in dummy.

Worth noting that exiting with her last diamond after taking her ♥K would not have helped Osberg much since Migry could now make the hand by cashing her diamonds, squeezing North down to the ♠J and ♣Q9. Then a spade lead would force a club return. 3NT making was worth only 65% as at the other tables South led a heart, while two pairs went overboard in 6♦.

At the end of the session the first five in the rankings were:

1. Tobi Sokolow USA 62.04%
2. Gloria Ho Taipei 58.33%
3. Benedicte Cronier France 56.48%
4. Sabine Auken Germany 54.48%
5. Catherine d'Ovidio France 54.17%

The second session of the Men was also scheduled on the afternoon of Thursday and the surprise leader, Jens Auken,

continued to accumulate good results in the first rounds only to flounder towards the end, holding on to a narrow lead over a tight closing pack headed by Andrew Robson.

The third session for the Men started off very well for the provisional leader:

Board 4 All Vul Dealer West

♠ Q108			
♥ 95			
♦ 875			
♣ J9874			
♠ J754		N	♠ A92
♥ KQJ7		W	♥ A64
♦ Q9		E	♦ K4
♣ 652		S	♣ AKQ103
			♠ K63
			♥ 10832
			♦ AJ10632
			♣ -

West	North	East	South
Auken	Forrester	Jansma	Zia
Pass	Pass	2NT	3♦
4♦	Pass	4♥	All Pass

When Zia decided to step in with 3♦, Auken took the inferior, but perhaps safer, option to bid 4♦ asking partner to choose a major, an action usually guaranteeing a better fit than the 4-4 he was offering. Yet the normal alternative of doubling for take-out might have been misinterpreted and one of the key factors for success in this competition is never to make a call which might be misunderstood, given the nature of these two-boards makeshift partnerships.

Anyway Jansma closed the auction with 4♥ and Zia led the ♦A and the ♦2, a tell-tale suit preference signal. Jansma took

for Robson, Drumev elected to go for the second option and played back a small club, a switch that allowed declarer to shine by taking his ♣Q, cashing his red suit winners, thus setting up a show-up squeeze on the Bulgarian who was forced to jettison a top club honor. Finally declarer took a spade finesse and finished with 11 tricks for +460 and a top that cost the Englishman the first place and the 4000 USD difference between the first and second place cash award!!

It is worth adding that Drumev, feeling desperately sorry for his partner's plight, made a point of apologizing publicly to him during the prize giving ceremony for making the play that cost him the victory.

The final ranking of the Men:

1. Norberto Bocchi Italy 56.68%
2. Andrew Robson England 56.23%
3. Jens Auken Denmark 55.28%
4. Antonio Sementa Italy 53.82%
5. Herve Mouiel France 53.44%

The Ladies event saw the well deserved victory of Tobi Sokolow who had led

throughout the tournament.

The final ranking of the Ladies:

1. Tobi Sokolow USA 59.67%
2. Benedicte Cronier France 58.13%
3. Nicola Smith England 56.58%
4. Gloria Ho Taipei 54.84%
5. B. A. Kennedy USA 54.22%.

As for our representatives, all three of them managed to finish in the prizes: David Birman placed 13th in the Men, while Migry Zur Campanile and Matilda Popilov respectively 12th and 18th in the Ladies.



Norberto Bocchi (Italy) gets the coveted Generali trophy: the Golden Lion.



A radiant Tobi Sokolow after the prizegiving

Improve your bridge with me

Which suit offers the best chances?

Going after diamonds and discarding dummy's ♥2 seems an attractive possibility: the idea is to take the top diamonds and ruff a diamond. If the diamonds break 3-3 (36%) we make the grand slam. If the diamonds break worse than 3-3, we take the three top hearts, throwing a club, and make the grand slam if the hearts break 3-3. This is not an additional 36% but merely 36% of the cases in which the diamonds did not break favorably, exactly an additional 23% (36% x 64%). Finally, if neither suit breaks well, we can try the club finesse. Let us work out our chances of success: one red suit or the other breaks well about 60% of the time, and both suits therefore break badly 40%. The finesse will succeed in 20% of

the cases (half of the 40%). Add that to 60% and you get 80% for this line of play (actually we would get only 79.2% if we used more accurate figures, but 80% is close enough for our purposes).

Is there a better line?

We can get significantly better odds if we plan to go after the hearts: we discard two diamonds from the dummy on the third and fourth trumps, saving all of dummy's hearts, then we cash three top hearts, pitching a club, and ruff a heart if we need to. We will develop an additional heart trick if the missing six hearts divide either 3-3 or 4-2. This time it is proper to add the chances together. The chance of getting either a 3-3 or a 4-2 break is the sum of 36% and 48% - or 84%. In the remaining 16% of the cases,

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we are not yet done for. We can still try the club finesse and thus win half of the time or an additional 8%. Our full chance is thus about 92%: a magnificent figure, and far better than 80%.

The complete hand;

♠ 9873	♠ 5	♠ 62
♥ 103	♥ AQ752	♥ J986
♦ Q1094	♦ AK762	♦ J8
♣ K53	♣ 74	♣ J10982
	♠ AKQJ104	
	♥ K4	
	♦ 53	
	♣ AQ6	