



Stars and Stripes Bridge

By Pietro Campanile

Spring in the USA is a very lively time for American top bridge players who find plenty of challenging events to test them.

For a start, the Spring US Nationals took place in Dallas, Texas, at the end of March and saw record attendances of for a total of 10320 tables in play for the week. All the best American players took part as well as a wide selection of the best players from Europe (including the six members of the Italian juggernaut, albeit playing in different sponsored teams), Asia and South America.

The first important event of the week was the Silodor Open Pairs won by David Berkowitz and Larry Cohen with an incredible 65% average score in the two sessions final. By winning yet another important Matchpoints event, Cohen-Berkowitz have succeeded in doing the unthinkable: to turn a Precision based system into a Matchpoints winning machine, exactly the opposite of what one would expect since so many times the system typical bidding goes against the field. Their extremely detailed agreements and fine judgment often got them to effortlessly reach the best contracts like in the following hand:

Dealer West – Both Vulnerable

♠ AKQ52			
♥ 9			
♦ A32			
♣ AKJ4			
♠ 983	N	E	♠ J106
♥ J3	W	S	♥ 875
♦ 107			♦ KQJ5
♣ Q96532			♣ 1087
♠ 74			
♥ AKQ10642			
♦ 9864			
♣ -			

West	North	East	South
	Berkowitz		Cohen
Pass	1♣(1)	1♦	3♠(1)
Pass	7NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

- 1) Strong 16+
2) Solid seven card suit somewhere

If that is not the shortest auction ever to get to 7NT in a major championship, then I invite the readers to let me know. After opening a strong club and hearing that partner had a solid source of tricks Berkowitz only needed to add his own six top tricks to bid the grand slam in NT.



Larry Cohen and David Berkowitz: the winners of the Open Pairs

When the hearts split 3-2 declarer had 13 top tricks and an 80% score thanks to that very useful agreement.

The central event of the Spring nationals was the Vanderbilt Open teams and there the surprises abounded: most of the top seeds got knocked out in the first rounds leaving space for some unlikely although worthy contenders going all the way to the final and fighting for the championship against the last of the top seeded team left. So it was that the Deutsch team (Fu-Zhao; Chang; Deutsch-Hallberg) tried to engineer a final upset vs the original third seed: the Welland team (Welland-Fallenius; Martel-Stansby; Balicki-Zmudzinski). The Polish champion Balicki had already shown in the semifinal that he was in excellent form:

Dealer West; N/S Vulnerable

♠ AK107			
♥ A65			
♦ Q3			
♣ AJ32			
♠ 9832	N	E	
♥ 432	W	S	
♦ AJ54			
♣ 54			
West	North	East	South
Mittelman	Zmudzinski	Del Monte	Balicki
1♦	Dbl	Rdbl	1♠
1NT	Dbl	2♥	Dbl
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

You are in this delicate 4♠ and receive the lead of the ♣K. How would you plan the play?

Assuming that you duck the first club, West will now switch to the ♥K. What now?

The Polish champion ducked again and when Mittelman played the ♣Q, he took his ♣A, ruffed a club with the ♠2 and

played the ♠9, intending to run it if West did not cover, given his revealing 1NT bid. Mittelman covered the ♠9 with the ♠Q and dummy's ♠K took the trick. Balicki continued with a diamond to the ♦A, making sure of the contract whenever West had started, as it seemed likely, with a 4-1-5-3 shape (the singleton ♥K was marked for his failure to continue hearts instead of having to play the ♣Q with ♣AJx left in dummy). To appreciate Balicki's accurate play here is the full hand:

	♠ AK107 ♥ A65 ♦ Q3 ♣ AJ32	N	♠ 5 ♥ QJ10987 ♦ 86 ♣ 10986
♠ QJ64 ♥ K ♦ K10972 ♣ KQ7	W E S		♠ 9832 ♥ 432 ♦ AJ54 ♣ 54

Declarer now ran the ♠8 and drew trumps reaching this position:

	♠ - ♥ A6 ♦ Q ♣ J	N	♠ - ♥ J109 ♦ 8 ♣ -
♠ - ♥ - ♦ K1097 ♣ -	W E S		♠ - ♥ 4 ♦ J54 ♣ -

Now he simply cashed the ♥A and exited with the ♦Q forcing West to give him access to the ♦J in hand which became his tenth trick.

At the other table the contract went two down.

The final turned up to be a very exciting high scoring affair and it went all the way down to the wire with the Deutsch team (which had originally been the 44th seed!) emerging victorious by 16 IMPs. Here is the board from the last set that made up most of the difference:

Dealer West – None Vulnerable

	♠ Q62 ♥ AKJ9 ♦ 1072 ♣ K63	N	♠ KJ10743 ♥ 842 ♦ Q8 ♣ Q4
♠ 985 ♥ Q1076 ♦ J6 ♣ 10985	W E S		♠ A ♥ 53 ♦ AK9543 ♣ AJ72



Fu Zhong

West	North	East	South
Welland	Fu	Fallenius	Zhao
Pass	1♣	2♠	3♦
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♦	Pass	4♠(1)
Pass	4NT(2)	Pass	5♣(3)
Pass	5♥(4)	Pass	6♦(5)
Pass	7♦!!	Pass	Pass
Pass			

- 1) Cue-Bid
- 2) RKCB in Diamonds
- 3) 1-4 Keycards
- 4) What about the ♦Q?
- 5) I don't have it

After the ♠5 lead, the slam rolled in thanks to the diamonds splitting 2-2 and the friendly ♣Qx onside which saved declarer any

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hoping to catch ♦Q9 stiff in West. When West discarded a club, South was not happy but he didn't despair because he could afford to lose two diamonds and two spades. There was danger only if East could get three spade tricks. That is, of course, just what happened. East got in with the ♦Q to force out the ♠A and when East took the ♦10 he could take three spade tricks to defeat the contract.

Yet the contract was unbeatable once the ♦9 dropped. South could continue with a low diamond, losing dummy's jack to the queen. Declarer wins the spade return with dummy's ace and leads a diamond through East's ♦107, winning a finesse with the ♦K8. The correct line gives South ten easy tricks instead of only eight. This variation of the safety play works only if West drops the singleton ten or nine. The singleton queen would also be a welcome sight. If no high singleton drops, South should still continue by leading a low diamond at the third trick because West may have started with Q-10-9-x of diamonds.

guessing. Interesting to note that on the ♦6 lead declarer might have run into trouble as that would give declarer a losing option in trumps (whether to play East for Qx or QJx). 7♦ making meant a 14 IMPs gain since at the other table Martel-Stansby had stopped in 5♦.

Most of the talk in the VuGraph room was about that strange and "courageous" 7♦ bid holding 10xx in trumps. Where did that come from? Sometimes the most unlikely explanations are the truth: after Zhao denied the trump queen with 6♦, Fu went into the tank. Why? Well the Chinese pair had been playing every single board of this five days long tournament and they were both very very tired! Fu quite simply could not remember if 6♦ denied the ♦Q or showed it. Eventually he came to the conclusion that 6♦ had to show that critical card because, as Fu explained after: "I was sure that without the ♦Q you would simply bid 5♦". To which his partner replied calmly: "How do you expect me to be able to bid 5♦ over 5♥?" After that totally unexpected and yet extremely logical answer Fu, realizing the utter ridiculousness of his trend of thought at the table, went into uncontrollable laughter and probably decided to light a few candles in the temple of whichever deity must have been looking after the tired Chinese pair in that deal.

Some of the players who had been knocked out of the Vanderbilt played in the two sessions IMP pairs. Zia Mahmood was one of the many top players who unexpectedly found themselves with a lot of spare time after his team (Jacobs - Katz; Lauria - Versace; Mahmood - Rosenberg) surprisingly lost its first match in the round of 32 and decided to have some fun playing in the side event with Walid El-Ahmady from Egypt.

As always Zia displayed a lot of creativity at the table and sometimes things worked for him, sometimes they went horribly wrong. When that happens his sense of humor allows him to take it all in good stride and the Pakistani champion is happy to share the disaster with all who care to listen like in the example below.

Vulnerable vs Non, you are dealer and you hold:

♠ KQ632
♥ 10
♦ 10
♣ A109876

and the auction proceeds as follows:

West	North	East	South
	El Ahmady		Zia
			Pass
1♦	1♠	Pass	?



Zia Mahmood

A common mortal would now bid 4♠, an optimist might ask for aces hoping to find partner with a perfect hand, a scientist might bid 3♣ showing a long club suit and good spades. All these options were not appealing enough for Zia, whose main worry was that all these bids would push the opponents into a cheap save. So he

decided to slow down the auction with 1NT, thinking that there was so much distribution about that the auction would not stop there. Alas his slowing down effort was extremely successful as the next three bids he heard were three passes!! West proceeded to table his lead, the ♦J (fourth best), and with a wide grin said to our champion: "I know who you are but believe me you will not make this contract!".

How right he was as this was the whole layout:

♠ A9874	♦ 32	♣ K2
♥ K953	-	♦ 54
♦ 32	-	♣ Q43
♣ K2	-	♠ J105
♠ -	♦ AKQJ9876	♥ Q8642
♥ AJ7	♣ J5	♦ 54
♦ AKQJ9876	♠ KQ632	♣ Q43
♣ J5	♥ 10	♦ 10
♦ 10	♦ 10	♣ A109876
♣ A109876	♦ 10	♦ 10

The defense took the first nine tricks for a huge score of +300 in a deal where North-South are cold for 5♠ and will get at least 300 from 6♦ doubled. Better luck next time Zia! For the record the event was won by Fred Gitelman and Geoff Hampson.

The Vanderbilt winning team: (from left to right) Zhao, Chang, Zhong, Hallberg and Deutsch



The last important events of the Nationals were the Swiss Open and Ladies Teams which saw our Chief Editor involved playing with Sarah Granovetter together with two other good pairs: Moss-Radin and Breed-Quinn.

After a slow start in the qualifying round, Migry's team chopped up the rest of the field in the final, winning the event with one round to go and scoring large victories against the most qualified opponents like for instance the 20-0 inflicted on the powerful Baker team (Mc Callum-Sanborn; Auken-von Arnim; Schulle-Baker). The board below showed off how inferences from the bidding can lead to the best contract:

Dealer West – N/S Vulnerable

		♠ KQ1054	
		♥ 82	
		♦ A7	
		♣ 7643	
♠ 7		♠ A983	
♥ QJ5		♥ A109	
♦ KJ1093	N	♦ Q864	
♣ AJ108	W	♣ K9	
	E		
	S		
♠ J62			
♥ K7643			
♦ 52			
♣ Q52			

West	North	East	South
Granovetter	Auken	Migry	Von Arnim
1♦	1♠	2♠(1)	Dbl(2)
3♣	Pass	4NT!	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		
<i>(1) Forcing raise in ♦</i>			
<i>(2) a good raise to 2♠</i>			

Auken led the ♠K against 6♦, which Granovetter won with dummy's ♠A. Next came a diamond to the ♦K and Auken's ♦A. At this point declarer can now draw an important conclusion from South's double to assist her in the play: the only cards that could justify such a bid are the ♥K and the ♣Q, which must both be in South. Such a deduction means an easy 12 tricks after declarer can safely spurn the heart finesse, ruffs out the spades and, with the last trump from dummy, squeezes South between clubs and hearts.

As Sarah Granovetter reports in her article on the event: "Notice how costly that double of 2♠ turned out to be. For one



The Ladies Teams winners: (back) Granovetter, Quinn and Migry; (front) Moss, Radin and Breed

thing, Migry now knew I had a singleton spade. In addition, my 3♣ bid in this situation showed extras, which I didn't really have. So why did I bid 3♣? I was under pressure and with tremendous spot-card strength and a singleton in their suit, I upgraded my hand. Without the double of 2♠, 3♣ would have been an "ordinary" bid, showing nothing special, but as it was, Migry "knew" I had extras and, therefore, that we had a good shot at 12 tricks. Finally, and most costly of all, that little double placed the cards for me as declarer." Another case of "Silence is golden".

The other important gathering of the Spring is the event with the richest prizes in the international bridge calendar: the Cavendish Pairs. As our readers will recall, the event has an extremely high quality field which gets auctioned off to the best bidder prior to the start of the event. The cash from the auction goes to the owners' prize pool, with a smaller slice going directly to the players. One of the caveats to stop every Tom, Dick and Harry from participating is the fact that if a pair does not find buyers then it is forced to buy itself at the minimum starting price of \$12500!

The top selling pairs were:

- 1) Zia Mahmood – Andrew Robson 48000
 - 2) Fulvio Fantoni – Claudio Nunes 43000
 - 3) Bobby Levin – Steve Weinstein 42000
 - 4) A. Sementa – Alfredo Versace 42000
 - 5) Waleed ElAhmady – T. Sadek 34000
 - 6) Geoff Hampson – Eric Rodwell 32000
 - 7) Sam Lev – Jacek Pszczola 29000
 - 8) Alain Levy – Herve Mouiel 25000
- The total pool was \$821,000, which was

to be paid back to the buyers of the top 10 finishers, first prize being \$193,236. Second place paid \$124,223 and third \$82,816.

The pair which sold for the highest price, a staggering 48000\$, was the brand new partnership of Zia Mahmood and Andrew Robson. Here is how they fared in this difficult deal against one of the best players of all time, Bob Hamman.

Dealer North – Both vulnerable

♠ Q93			
♥ 1052			
♦ K86			
♣ 8642			
♠ AKJ1076	N	♠ 54	
♥ KJ94	W	♥ 3	
♦ A	E	♦ J432	
♣ AK	S	♣ QJ10975	
♠ 82			
♥ AQ876			
♦ Q10975			
♣ 3			

West	North	East	South
Robson	Hamman	Zia	Seamon
	Pass	Pass	2♥
Dbl	3♥	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

Seamon led the ♥A and then switched off to a diamond. Instead of trying to guess the position of the ♠Q, Zia made his slam in a simple and yet much more elegant way: he cashed the ♥K, discarding a diamond, ruffed a heart, spade to the ♠A, ♠K and another heart ruff reaching this position:

♠ Q			
♥ -			
♦ K			
♣ 8642			
♠ J1076	N	E	♠ -
♥ -	W	S	♥ -
♦ -			♦ J4
♣ AK			♣ QJ109
♠ -			
♥ Q			
♦ Q1097			
♣ 3			

All he had to do now is face his cards up and claim the rest of the tricks on a high crossruff. From the events bulletin comes this instructive deal, brilliantly commented by its Editor, Richard Colker.

Dealer South Vul: None

♠ Q1043			
♥ A542			
♦ 83			
♣ J94			
♠ A98765	N	E	♠ 2
♥ 1086	W	S	♥ KJ97
♦ K106			♦ QJ75
♣ 6			♣ Q732
♠ KJ			
♥ Q3			
♦ A942			
♣ AK1085			

"Bridge is all about helping partner, and that is just what Lew Stansby tried to do on this deal. Claudio Nunes opened 1♣ as South and JoAnna Stansby overcalled 1♦ as West. Fulvio Fantoni, North, doubled and Nunes rebid 1NT showing 15-20 with no spade stop. (Have you noticed that the Italians bid differently than the rest of us?) Fantoni bid 2NT and Nunes bid one more for the road. (This was, after all, the final board of the session.)

Looking at the East hand Lew realized that unless he did something to alter the course of the hand JoAnna would lead her suit, and Lew's stiff deuce would not be of much help. On the other hand Fantoni's double suggested the hearts were located on his right, and his holding there could be of more value than his spade. If only he could somehow encourage that lead. Aha, "Double."

JoAnna dutifully led a heart, but as Robert Burns so aptly put it, the best laid plans of mice and men.... Nunes ducked the lead to Lew's king, won the heart return, and cashed the ♠K followed by the ♠J. When JoAnna ducked Claudio overtook



The Cavendish Pairs winners: Huub Bertens and Ton Bakkeren

the ♠J, led the ♣J off dummy and passed it. When that held he cashed the ♥A and repeated the club finesse for an overtrick; +650. Mamma mia."

The last set of the five session event soon turned into a two-horses race for the lead between the Dutch Bakkeren-Bertens and the Americans Hampson-Rodwell. With only a few boards to go, the Dutch were just ahead and they managed to hold on to that lead to finish winners of the 2006 Cavendish Pairs. Here is a hand from the second session

Dealer North – E/W Vulnerable

♠ 952			
♥ KJ7			
♦ K632			
♣ Q87			
♠ AKQ64	N	E	♠ 10
♥ 1093	W	S	♥ 8642
♦ 8			♦ 10754
♣ J652			♣ K1094
♠ J873			
♥ AQ5			
♦ AQJ9			
♣ A3			

East and West were vulnerable. The bidding:

West	North	East	South
Bakkeren	Wolpert	Bertens	Demuy
	Pass	Pass	2♦(1)
Pass	2♠(2)	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

1) 18-19 Balanced

2) Txfer to 2NT

At most tables South became declarer in 3NT after opening 1♦ and West overcalled 1♣. Due to the auction, most Wests would

lead a low spade hoping to find partner with a doubleton in the suit and an outside entry. This reasonable plan would not however work on the actual deal and declarer would gather nine easy tricks.

After the actual auction Bakkeren had no reason not to hope that his spade suit would run, so he led the ♠K and continued with the ♠A on which East discarded the ♥2. While this development cannot have pleased Bakkeren as that meant his spade suit was not running, it also helped him in choosing what to do next since the ♥2 was a Lavinthal signal discouraging in hearts and encouraging in the lowest suit, clubs. The club switch put declarer in an impossible position and despite trying all he could Demuy could only come up with the obvious eight tricks for 3NT-1 and a terrible score.

Interestingly enough at another table the same defense was testing Steve Landen, a top US professional. After two top spades and a low club switch to the ♣9 declarer, however, realizing the precariousness of his position decided to duck smoothly from hand and hope for the best. East was in an awkward spot now: if declarer had started with ♣Axx he would give away a trick by returning a club. If instead he only had a doubleton, a club return would scuttle the contract. After a very long pause East decided...to switch and Landen could claim his nine tricks. Steve, I would hate to have to play poker against you!

The final ranking of the event:

- 1) Bakkeren – Bertens
- 2) Hampson - Rodwell
- 3) Cohler – Weinstein
- 4) Sementa - Versace