

The 2006 European Open Teams Championship in Warsaw

By Pietro Campanile

The coaches predicted it, the press expected it, the players had already resigned themselves to it, and yet the seventh consecutive Italian victory in the European Open Teams, also because of its apparent “inevitability”, is an enormous achievement. It is quite amazing

the end they won with 661 VPs, 67 VPs ahead of second place at the incredible average of over 20VP per match!

Here are the final standings with the top six teams qualifying for next year's Bermuda Bowl in Shanghai:

objective of a top-six finish to land qualification to the next Bermuda Bowl. In the direct clash there was a very interesting battle of wits between two of their stars: Vladimir Marashev and Marcel Bompis.

Board: 15. Dealer South. North/South Vul.



The three winning teams (Italy in the Open, France in the Ladies and Germany in the Seniors) smile for the camera

that a team, any team, is able to stamp so firmly its imprint on the highly competitive European bridge scene that it sweeps the field again and again, effortlessly winning the most coveted continental trophy two or three matches before the end. The uncontested dominance of the Italians in this event has reached the point that there has even been talk among the powers at be about changing its format, currently an all-play-all round robin, in order to give back some semblance of uncertainty to its final outcome.

In Warsaw the Italian juggernaut, in its usual line-up of Bocchi-Duboin, Fantoni-Nunes and Lauria-Versace, soon ran away from the field, building up a lead which stabilized around the 50-60 VP mark. In

- 1) Italy 661
- 2) Ireland 594
- 3) Norway 590
- 4) Sweden 582
- 5) Netherlands 581
- 6) Poland 579
- 7) Iceland 572
- 8) France 555

Detailed reports on the performance of the Israeli team will be published in the Hebrew section in the usual format of Captain's report. Here we shall concentrate on examining a few interesting hands from the event.

French and Bulgarian fans must have been sorely disappointed with their teams' final result as they both failed to achieve their

♠ 52
♥ AK3
♦ 4
♣ KQ97643
N W E S
♠ AJ10863
♥ 5
♦ AJ92
♣ A10

In the closed room Mouiel-Levy got to 4♠, which made easily. The Bulgarian pair in the Closed Room investigated the deal much more thoroughly:

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Sainte	Marashev	Bompis	Petkov
			1♠
3♦	4♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♠
Pass	4NT(1)	Pass	5♦(2)
Pass	6♣	All Pass	
(1) RKCB			
(2) 0/3			

Marcel Bompis in East started off with the ♦3, taken by declarer with the ♦A. Without the diamond preempt, declarer would attempt to set up the spades by conceding a trick in the suit before exhausting dummy's entries, in order to cater for a variety of distributions in addition to the 75% given to him by the double finesse in spades. Here, however, declarer had no choice but to immediately pull trumps in three rounds and then resort to the double finesse in spades to succeed. When



The Bulgarian Stefanov deep in thought

Marashev played the ♠5 from hand towards dummy's long spades. Bompis followed with the ♠K and after declarer correctly ducked (if the play of the ♠K is from ♠Kx, the slam is unmakeable anyway as dummy's spades cannot be set up), the Frenchman continued with the ♠4.

Declarer now was at a crossroads: if Bompis' original spade holding was ♠KQ4, he should now play the ♠10 as indeed he had meant to do at the start when he had planned on the double finesse. However there was also the chance that the French champion, realizing declarer's problem, might be trying to test his mettle and give him a losing option by rising with ♠K from ♠Kxx.

What would you do now?

After a lengthy pause, Marashev decided to trust in Bompis' resourcefulness and played the ♠A, finding with some relief the ♠Q dropping offside.

Here is the complete hand:

♠ Q7	♥ AK3	♦ 4	♣ KQ97643
♥ Q106			
♦ KQ108765			
♣ 2			
♠ AJ10863	♥ 5	♦ AJ92	♣ A10

This is truly a beautiful example of a defender who succeeds in creating a losing option for declarer where none exists and of a declarer who successfully evades the trap landing his contract. Bravo to both!

Bulgaria was involved in another technically interesting deal this time against middle-ranked Finland.

Board 17. Dealer North. None Vul.

♠ 1082	♥ 84	♦ 10	♣ AKJ10432
♠ AQ974	♥ AK96	♦ J54	♣ 6
♠ KJ53	♥ J5	♦ AQ9732	♣ 7
♠ 6	♥ Q10732	♦ K86	♣ Q985

West	North	East	South
Aronov	Koistinen	Stefanov	Nyberg
	3NT(1)	Pass	5♣(2)
Dbl	Pass	5♦	Pass
Pass	Pass		

(1) Pre-empt in either minor

(2) Pass or correct

Lead: ♠6

The auction made it virtually impossible for the Bulgarians to reach the optimal spade contract. At first glance 5♦ appears to be unmakeable after the singleton spade lead, since sooner or later declarer will be forced to concede a diamond trick to South's ♦K and that will enable the defense to obtain a spade ruff for the setting trick.

The unusual lead, however, had fully alerted Stefanov to the dangers of an impending ruff and the Bulgarian found an elegant solution to thwart it. He took the ♠6 with dummy's ♠A and, after cashing

the ♦A, he continued with ♥AK and the ♥9 pitching the club in his hand: a very neat and timely application of the "Scissors Coup", which consists of conceding a trick in a suit where there are no losers in order to discard another loser in a side suit and, by doing so, to sever communications between the defenders. Surprisingly enough a similar auction led to exactly the same 5♦ at the other table: the Finnish declarer did not fail his team mates and found the same play to score his contract for an unlikely flat board.

The Italians aside, the best performing team in the first part of the championships were the Hungarians, who were firmly ensconced in second-third place thanks to a very solid stream of results before succumbing to a swift decline in the rankings in the second half of the event. Their match against Sweden, another top contender, was considered by most pundits to be amongst the best played of the entire event. Here is a choicy morsel from their encounter:

Board: 6. Dealer: East. E/W vul.

♠ KJ98632	♥ 8	♦ A6	♣ KQ8	♠ Q5	♥ Q1073	♦ J105	♣ A1097

West	North	East	South
Szalay	Bertheau	Macsksay	Nystrom
		Pass	Pass
1♣(1)	1♥	1NT	2♦
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass
1) Strong 16+			

North leads the ♥A and switches to the ♦8, covered by the ♦J and the ♦Q.

How would you plan the play to give yourselves the best chances of making the contract?

The danger in the hand is the possibility of a trump promotion if the defenders' spades for instance are 3-1 with the singleton ace in South. The pedestrian solution would be to take the ♦A and simply play a spade to the ♠Q, which works if spades are conveniently placed for declarer. A more careful declarer will duck the ♦Q, since diamonds can hardly be 7-1 after South passed initially, then take the diamond continuation, go to dummy with a club and play a small spade to cater for ♠A singleton in South. The Hungarian Gyorgy Szalay chose a



Gyorgi Szalay

more flamboyant route: he won the ♦A immediately, then went to dummy with the ♣A and played the ♥Q pitching his second diamond from hand, another example of "Scissors Coup".

However Bertheau in North rose to the challenge and found an equally effective counter. Let us look at the complete hand to better appreciate it:

♠ A4			
♥ AKJ92			
♦ 87			
♣ 6432			
♠ KJ98632	N	E	♠ Q5
♥ 8	W	S	♥ Q1073
♦ A6			♦ J105
♣ KQ8			♣ A1097
♠ 107			
♥ 654			
♦ KQ9432			
♣ J5			

To recap: ♥A lead, ♦8 switch to the ♦J, the ♦Q and the ♦A. Club to the ♣A and ♥Q discarding a diamond. This is the position we have reached:

♠ A4			
♥ J92			
♦ 7			
♣ 643			
♠ KJ98632	N	E	♠ Q5
♥ -	W	S	♥ 107
♦ -			♦ 105
♣ KQ			♣ 1097
♠ 107			
♥ 6			
♦ K9432			
♣ J			

Bertheau knew from the auction and the line Szalay had chosen that declarer had a likely 7-1-2-3 shape, since with eight spades he would not have been worried



David Birman

about a trump promotion, and that placed his partner with a doubleton spade and a doubleton club. Seizing on the only chance to defeat the contract, after taking the ♥K, he switched to a low club! When declarer played a low spade from his hand, Bertheau jumped in with the ♠A and played a third club to give his partner a ruff and defeat the contract! Sweden thus gained 7 IMPs on the deal when at the other table South opened 3♦ and the Swedish West overcalled 3♣ which became the final contract for a score of +170 when it made with an overtrick.

Having introduced some of the top flyers of the event it is time to show-piece the accurate card play displayed by the Italians. Against Israel, Italy managed to overcome no less than three negative slam swings to pull out of the hat an amazing 19-11 victory. The next board shows another fascinating battle of wits, this time between Alfredo Versace and our own David Birman.

Board. 4. Dealer West; both vulnerable.

♠ AQ94			
♥ Q10			
♦ K1095			
♣ 1073			
♠ J73	N	E	♠ K862
♥ K62	W	S	♥ AJ98
♦ AQ72			♦ 864
♣ A62			♣ K4
♠ 105			
♥ 7543			
♦ J3			
♣ QJ985			

West	North	East	South
Versace	Birman	Lauria	Fohrer
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Once the Italians bid both of his long suits on the way to 3NT, Birman correctly decided to go for a passive lead and struck gold when he selected the ♣7, unknowingly hitting his partner's long suit. Versace ducked Fohrer's ♣J and the Israeli, devoid of entries, decided to return a diamond. Perhaps the ♦J would have been more effective, but fearing to give away too much, Fohrer opted for a more obscure ♦3. Versace played small again, Birman's ♦9 taking the trick, and took perforce in dummy Birman's club return. Trying to keep the situation fluid, Versace continued with a diamond from dummy, carefully selecting the ♦8 to avoid a blockage when he next would play the suit in case he found a residual Honor-10 or Honor-9 anywhere. The ♦8 was covered by the ♦J, the ♦Q and Birman's ♦K. Well aware of the danger of being end-played, Birman kept the ♣10 as a future exit card and found the very good play of the ♥Q, knowing from Fohrer's failure to insist on clubs that the ♥K had to be with declarer and that his ♥Q was therefore worthless anyway. After some thought Versace took the ♥Q in dummy with the ♥A and came back to hand with the ♥K, reaching this position:

♠ AQ94			
♥ -			
♦ 105			
♣ 10			
♠ J73	N	E	♠ K862
♥ 6	W	S	♥ J9
♦ A7			♦ 8
♣ A			♣ -
♠ 105			
♥ 75			
♦ -			
♣ Q98			



The Irish Open Team celebrates their historic silver medal

It was time for the Italian declarer to draw the necessary inferences from the play: despite having found his weakest suit, South had for some reason changed tack and switched to diamonds, when he could see a stiff ♣K in dummy. The ♣7 lead and that defensive switch seemed to indicate that South had no entries to his long suit and therefore knew that it could never be set up profitably. Such a view pointed to North holding only three clubs and placed South with ♣QJxxx. Furthermore this also strongly hinted that North had to hold the near totality of the remaining defensive assets. Such inspired card reading meant that Versace could essentially play the ending double dummy: he cashed the ♣A to take out Birman's exit card in the suit and played a small spade. Birman ducked and the ♣K won the trick. Next came the two good hearts and the best Birman could do now to avoid being endplayed and forced to concede the last two diamonds, was to jettison the ♣A and the ♣Q, in the hope that partner held the ♣J. A brilliant effort but one doomed to failure when the ♣J turned up to be with declarer.

Bravo to both declarer and defender who succeeded in making the most of their chances in this difficult board.

The biggest surprise of the Championships was without a doubt the second place achieved by the Irish team. The result was the triumph of a policy which had seen ever increasing amount of investment by the Irish Bridge Federation into the development of the game and the

sourcing of new talent, while at the same time inviting top class coaches like Eric Kokish to provide working seminars for their top pairs, both Open and Ladies. The Irish had already claimed a top spot in international bridge ranking after reaching the quarter finals in the 2004 Olympics, where they lost to the powerful Dutch team. Here we see one of their unsung young pairs in action: Tommy Garvey and John Carroll

Board: 2. Dealer: East. N-S Vulnerable

♠ A9	N	♠ 6
♥ 94	W	♥ J
♦ QJ543	E	♦ 96
♣ 8763	S	♣ 2
♠ -		♠ 8
♥ 8		♥ -
♦ A		♦ -
♣ AQ9		♣ KJ104
♠ 10	N	♠ KQJ64
♥ 8752	W	♥ AKQJ
♦ A1082	E	♦ K96
♣ AQ95	S	♣ 2
♠ 87532		
♥ 1063		
♦ 7		
♣ KJ104		

The Irish pair reached 6♥ from the West seat after a detailed strong club auction and, before leading, the Serbian North was told that East had shown the ♣K, the ♦K as well as the top three heart honors. Hoping to catch the bulletin headlines with a spectacular lead and to find the classic holding of ♣Q with partner with ♣KJ on the table, Duricic decided to lead the ♣9!! Carroll must have been somewhat surprised when his singleton ♣10 took the

first trick and continued pulling trumps in three rounds and then taking the "marked" ruffing finesse in spades, discarding a diamond from hand.

Duricic took the trick with his ♠A, to declarer's amazement no doubt, and obviously enjoying this "cloak and dagger" defense style he switched to the ♦J!

Declarer made the normal play of taking in dummy with the ♦K and must have been about to claim 12 tricks when the 5-2 split in spades surfaced as the third round of the suit was played, forcing him to regroup and think again. Hoping to get more information about North's hand, Carroll cashed another spade reaching this position:

♠ -	N	♠ 6
♥ -	W	♥ J
♦ Q5	E	♦ 96
♣ 876	S	♣ 2
♠ -		♠ 8
♥ 8		♥ -
♦ A		♦ -
♣ AQ9		♣ KJ104
♠ -		
♥ -		
♦ -		
♣ -		

Declarer had now to take a key decision: where was the ♣K? If it was with North he could make the hand with an exotic trump squeeze by ruffing a spade and checking North's pitch. If he discarded a club, declarer could play ♣A and club ruff, while discarding a diamond would promote dummy's ♦9. If however the ♣K is with South, all that would be needed is a trivial club finesse. Faced with the choice between the spectacular and the mundane, Carroll did very well to resist the temptation of selecting the flashy line: he correctly surmised that had North held a well placed ♣K, he would never have tempted fate with such an unorthodox lead, so he opted for the club finesse and brought in his slam.

For the final deal of this article it is only fitting to pay homage to one of the most talented player of the "new Blue Team": Fulvio Fantoni, affectionately nicknamed "Deep Fantoni" for his amazing feats of declarer play, often executed in seemingly double dummy fashion just as the computer program "Deep Finesse". Here is a telling example from the match versus Norway of his ability to make easy work of complex hands which would fox many a declarer.



Alfredo Versace



Board 20 Dealer West – Both Vulnerable

	♠ 3		
	♥ Q976432		
	♦ A106		
	♣ A7		
♠ K5		N	♠ QJ87
♥ J		W	♥ A87
♦ KQJ98532		E	♦ 4
♣ J5		S	♣ K10832
	♠ A109642		
	♥ K10		
	♦ 7		
	♣ Q964		

In the Open Room Versace bought the contract in 4♦, after North-South had entered the auction showing their majors. The bidding in Closed Room was a lot livelier:

West	North	East	South
Brogeland	Fantoni	Saelensminde	Nunes
1♦	1♥	1♠	Pass
2♦	2♥	Pass	3♥
4♦	4♥	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Pass		

I) Strong 16+

Fantoni took the ♦K lead with his ♦A and ruffed a diamond. Back to hand with a club and another diamond ruff with the ♥K. The Italian declarer played a club from dummy and West took the trick with his ♣J and returned another diamond.

After a moment's thought, Fantoni ruffed the diamond with the ♥9 and after holding the trick he quickly tabled the ♥Q: 4♥ doubled and made. The line selected by the Italian champion seems deceptively easy and yet it takes into consideration a vital factor: the need to look for the only kind of layout which allows the contract to make and then playing for it. Here 4♥ is

Fantoni-Nunes under the limelight of the BBO Vugraph

hopeless if East has started with any combination of three or more hearts including ♥AJ so one should simply discount that possibility. In the same vein, it is obvious that the diamond losers cannot be parked anywhere so they have to be ruffed. The correct approach to the hand is therefore to ruff the diamonds and then play for the one heart layout which allows the hand to be made. Simple, isn't it?

Finally a brief mention of an instructive tale of partnership bridge "crime and punishment" which surfaced halfway into the tournament when a brief communiqué in the daily bulletin reported that Peter Fredin, one of the most representative

players in the Swedish team, had been given his marching orders by the Swedish captain and sent back home, when the team found him guilty of repeatedly disparaging his new partner, Fredrik Bjornlund, and of alluding in many public instances to his alleged bridge incompetence. This extraordinary step certainly speaks volumes about the high standards of behavior that the players who represent Sweden are expected to conform to. A lesson which we should heed very carefully, as all too often the ebullience of our Mediterranean character leads to behavior which is quite unbecoming of a player representing his country abroad.

The triumphant Italians singing away

