

Israel Teams Championship

by Pietro Campanile



The most prestigious event on the Israeli bridge calendar is the National Teams Championship. The play-offs of its top division, the "Liga Leumit," took place earlier this year to assign the title that gives the holders the chance to represent Israel in certain international competitions, like the European Champions Cup.

The championship is structured over several levels with divisions ranging from the national down to club level, and at the end of the regular playing season there are promotions to a higher division and relegations to a lower one according to the results. In the "Liga Leumit" however the top four teams are admitted to a play-off stage where they play a semifinals and final of 56 boards to decide the title.

In the first semifinal the Segev Team (Segev-Tal, Gelbard-Engel, Lilo and Matilda Poplilov) defeated the Bareket Team (Bareket-Roll; Lengy-Leibovits; Reshef-Ginossar) by a clear 139-92.

The second semifinal saw the clash of the two pre-tournament favorites, including players with a lot of international experience. In the end the Birman Team (David Birman, Zwillinger, Alon Birman [David's

son], Levin, Altshuler, Fohrer) defeated the Herbst Team (Ilan and Ophir Herbst; Barel, Zack, Barr) by 140-100 after having trailed by 50-84 at the half.

Here are a few interesting hands from both semifinals. The last hand before the interval proved to be quite swingy in both matches:

| | | | |
|--------------|---------------|-------------|--|
| East dealer | North | | |
| None vul | ♠ J 9 3 2 | | |
| | ♥ — | | |
| | ♦ A K Q 9 3 2 | | |
| | ♣ A 4 3 | | |
| West | | East | |
| ♠ 6 4 | | ♠ Q 8 | |
| ♥ Q 10 6 3 2 | | ♥ J 9 7 4 | |
| ♦ 8 7 6 5 4 | | ♦ J 10 | |
| ♣ 8 | | ♣ K 9 6 5 2 | |
| | South | | |
| | ♠ A K 10 7 5 | | |
| | ♥ A K 8 5 | | |
| | ♦ — | | |
| | ♣ Q J 10 7 | | |

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------|-------------|-------------|
| West | North | East | South |
| <i>Bareket</i> | <i>Matilda</i> | <i>Roll</i> | <i>Lilo</i> |
| — | — | pass | 1 ♠ |
| pass | 2 NT (1) | pass | 3 ♠ (2) |
| pass | 5 ♥ (3) | pass | 6 ♣ (4) |
| pass | 7 ♠ | (all pass) | |

- 1) Game forcing raise in spades
- 2) 17+ pts with shortness somewhere, usually 6 spades or 5-4-3-1
- 3) Exclusion Blackwood
- 4) Two keycards excluding ♥A and no ♠Q

Matilda and Lilo Poplilov bid aggressively to 7♠. With such a good source of tricks in the diamond suit, Matilda (North) pressed on to the grand slam, encouraged by her partner's 3♠ bid, which showed 17+ points and usually six spades.

East dealer ♠ J 9 3 2
None vul ♥ —
♦ A K Q 9 3 2
♣ A 4 3

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| ♠ 6 4 ♥ Q 10 6 3 2 ♦ 8 7 6 5 4 ♣ 8 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td> </td><td>N</td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td> </td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td>S</td><td> </td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♠ Q 8 ♥ J 9 7 4 ♦ J 10 ♣ K 9 6 5 2 | ♠ A K 10 7 5 ♥ A K 8 5 ♦ — ♣ Q J 10 7 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | | |

East dealer ♠ 9
N-S vul ♥ A K 8 3
♦ A K Q 5 2
♣ J 8 7

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|---|
| ♠ 8 4 3 ♥ 9 5 2 ♦ 10 9 7 ♣ K Q 3 2 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td> </td><td>N</td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td> </td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td>S</td><td> </td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♠ 10 5 2 ♥ Q 10 4 ♦ J 8 6 4 3 ♣ 6 5 | ♠ A K Q J 7 6 ♥ J 7 6 ♦ — ♣ A 10 9 4 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | | |

The lead of the ♦8 did not create too many problems for declarer: ♦A, ♠A-K, finding out the good news, ♥A-K and a heart ruff, diamond ruff uncovering the ♦J-10 doubleton and a claim, since dummy's diamonds are now set up. At the other table Ginossar-Reshef played in 6♠ and, quite naturally, Barel (West) led his singleton ♣8. Reshef inexplicably played low from dummy, letting East in with the ♣K. East was only too happy to return a club back for Barel to ruff: 6♠-1 with 7♠ making at the other table meant 17 imps to the Segev team, who closed the half leading 64-47.

In the second semifinal Amir Levin and Alon Birman got to 6♠ after this bidding:

| West | North | East | South |
|-------|-----------|------------|---------|
| Barel | A. Birman | Zack | Levin |
| — | — | pass | 1 ♠ |
| pass | 5 ♥ (1) | pass | 6 ♣ (2) |
| pass | 6 ♠ | (all pass) | |

- 1) Exclusion Blackwood
- 2) Two keycards excluding the ♥A and no ♠Q

The Herbst brothers at the other table earned their team 11 imps when they reached 7♠, leading 84-50 at the half.

The second board of the third quarter was another very swingy affair:

In the Barel-Herbst match it very much looked like the Herbst team was heading for a significant loss on the board as Herbst-Barr only managed to reach 3NT after this bidding:

| West | North | East | South |
|-------|-----------|------------|-------|
| Levin | I. Herbst | Altshuler | Barr |
| — | — | pass | 1 ♠ |
| pass | 2 ♦ | pass | 2 ♠ |
| pass | 3 NT | (all pass) | |

At the other table Birman-Fohrer explored the hand much more thoroughly and got to the grand slam in spades. The trailing team could now significantly narrow the gap with a successful declarer view in 7♠ on the lead of the ♣K.

The contract is obviously laydown if diamonds are 4-4, as declarer can now pitch all his round suit losers on dummy's diamonds after ruffing one round of the suit. However, that is only a measly 33% chance, which is only slightly improved by the added odds of finding a doubleton ♥Q somewhere. The most natural line looks to be a squeeze in clubs-hearts on West and that is what Fohrer tried to execute, going one off when the diamond split proved unfavorable and the guard in the red suits was held by East.

East dealer

N-S vul

♠ 8 4 3
♥ 9 5 2
♦ 10 9 7
♣ K Q 3 2

♠ 9
♥ A K 8 3
♦ A K Q 5 2
♣ J 8 7



♠ A K Q J 7 6
♥ J 7 6
♦ —
♣ A 10 9 4

♠ 10 5 2
♥ Q 10 4
♦ J 8 6 4 3
♣ 6 5

♠ —
♥ 9 5 2
♦ 10 9 7
♣ Q 3

♠ —
♥ A K 8
♦ A K Q 5 2
♣ —



♠ 7 6
♥ J 7 6
♦ —
♣ 10 9 4

♠ —
♥ Q 10 4
♦ J 8 6 4 3
♣ —

A perhaps less intuitive alternative can be arrived at if one considers that East is a very likely candidate to hold length in the red suits, once West shows up with three trumps and some club length. The winning line combines diamonds 4-4 and the ♥Q doubleton with an elegant trump squeeze on East.

After taking the club lead with the ♣A, start cashing four rounds of spades, discarding a heart and two clubs from dummy. The opponents will need to pitch accordingly and you shall probably get to a layout like this:



David Birman declares as the Herbst brothers defend.

Now cash the ♠7 and West will jettison a club while you discard another heart from dummy. What can East do? If he pitches a diamond, he will give a strong signal that diamonds can now be cashed as there are only seven left, which will split 4-3 an overwhelming amount of time. So you'll get to dummy with the ♥A, ruff a diamond with the last spade, go back to dummy with the ♥K and make the rest of the tricks. While a heart pitch will let you enjoy your ♥J in hand, for the thirteenth trick, if you guess the position.

As it goes, Fohrer's 7♠-1 meant a somewhat undeserved 13 imps for the Herbst team, which were to be their last big gain of the match: From now on it would be one-way traffic and a steady series of gains for the Birman team.

In the other match, again one pair reached a notrump contract while the other was in spades, the difference being that the notrump contract reached by Leibovits-Lengy was an unmakeable 7NT, while Lilo and Matilda stopped in 6♠, which made comfortably. That meant a second swing of 17 imps to the Segev team, all the more staggering if we think that with a different view those two heavy losses could have been turned into an overall gain of 7 imps for the Bareket team.

Another critical swingy board which sealed the fate of both matches came close to the end:

| | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------|--|
| North dealer | North | | |
| Both vul | ♠ K Q 10 8 7 5 | | |
| | ♥ — | | |
| | ♦ Q J 6 | | |
| | ♣ 10 8 3 2 | | |
| West | | East | |
| ♠ J 4 | | ♠ 3 2 | |
| ♥ — | | ♥ A K Q 8 3 2 | |
| ♦ 9 8 7 5 | | ♦ K 10 4 3 2 | |
| ♣ A K J 9 7 5 4 | | ♣ — | |
| | South | | |
| | ♠ A 9 6 | | |
| | ♥ J 10 9 7 6 5 4 | | |
| | ♦ A | | |
| | ♣ Q 6 | | |

| | | | |
|-------|------------|---------|--------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Roll | Matilda | Bareket | Lilo |
| — | 2 ♦* | 2 ♥ | pass |
| 3 ♣ | pass | 3 ♦ | 3 ♠ |
| 5 ♦ | pass | pass | double |
| redbl | (all pass) | | |

*Multi, either strong balanced or a good weak two in a major

The North-South defenders cashed their two spades. Declarer took the club switch and guessed diamonds, playing small to the ♦10 and ace. Another inevitable trump loser meant two down and -1000 because of the misguided redouble. The loss on the board for the Bareket team could have been much less if at the other table Reshef-Ginossar would be left to play in 4♠, which is only defeated by an unlikely trump lead and might generate +620. This is what happened instead:

| | | | |
|--------|------------|---------|--------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Engel | Ginossar | Gelbard | Reshef |
| — | 3 ♠ | 4 ♥ | double |
| 5 ♣ | double | 5 ♦ | 6 ♠ |
| double | (all pass) | | |

The contract went two down for another -500 and a third 17-imp swing to Segev, who went on to win 139-92. In the Herbst-Birman match the board turned out to be no less exciting: Birman-Fohrer bought the hand for 5♦ undoubled (!) which drifted two off, while this is what happened at the other table:

| | | | |
|------------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| West | North | East | South |
| I. Herbst | Altshuler | O. Herbst | Levin |
| — | 2 ♦ | 3 ♥ | double |
| 4 ♣ | pass | pass | 4 ♠ |
| 5 ♣ | pass | pass | double |
| (all pass) | | | |

The defense took no prisoners: Altshuler led the ♠K, overtaken by Levin with ace in order to cash his ♦A and play back a spade to his partner's ♠Q. Altshuler understood what was required of him and played back the ♦Q, covered with the ♦K and ruffed by Levin, who returned a sneaky ♥5. Declarer pitched a diamond and Altshuler ruffed. Back came the ♦J, ruffed by Levin in order to return another heart and ensure another trick for the defense by promoting Altshuler's ♣10. All in all the defense had collected two spades, a diamond and four club ruffs for a well deserved +1400 and a final match score of 140-100.

The Final

So it came to be that the final would be an unexpected encounter between Birman and Segev, with Birman odds on favorite to take the trophy, mostly thanks to the superior experience of his players who had reached this stage of the competition many times before, often winning it.

Nevertheless, the final was an incredibly close and exciting affair, with both teams going neck and neck until the last hand. This made for a great show for the thousands of kibitzers who watched it online through the BBO VuGraph, organized thanks to the industrious efforts of Ilan Shezifi, a leading bridge director in Israel. The initial score was set at 7-0 for the Segev team thanks to the positive

carryover originating from the 18-12 victory in the direct clash from the round-robin stage.

We pick up the commentary of the last set of 14 boards when the score was a close 88-89 in favor of the Segev team. The first two boards of the set were flat leaving the score unchanged. The first significant swing occurred on board 45:

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|--|
| South dealer | North | | |
| E-W vul | ♠ K 9 7 | | |
| | ♥ 3 | | |
| | ♦ J 8 6 4 | | |
| | ♣ A Q 6 4 2 | | |
| West | | East | |
| ♠ Q 8 3 | | ♠ J 6 | |
| ♥ 10 9 7 5 | | ♥ Q J 6 4 | |
| ♦ A K 7 3 | | ♦ Q 10 9 5 2 | |
| ♣ J 7 | | ♣ 10 3 | |
| | South | | |
| | ♠ A 10 5 4 2 | | |
| | ♥ A K 8 2 | | |
| | ♦ — | | |
| | ♣ K 9 8 5 | | |

on the ♥K and then setting up dummy's spades with ♠K, ♠A and spade ruff for +940, 10 imps to Segev and a score of 99-88 in their favor.

Next comes a hand that presents a bidding problem in which the approach is heavily affected by the type of scoring.

What would you reply to partner's 1♦ opening with:

| |
|-----------|
| ♠ J 10 3 |
| ♥ 7 5 3 |
| ♦ K J 8 6 |
| ♣ Q 5 2 |

Birman-Fohrer stopped in 4♠ after a very quick 1♠-2♣; 4♣-4♠. Declarer made 12 tricks for +480.

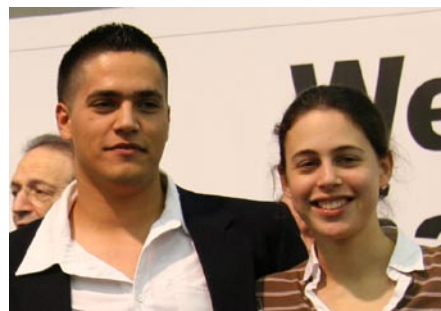
Segev opted for 1NT because of his flat shape while Birman chose 2♦, probably because of his poor major holdings. In both cases partner invites game with 2NT, showing a likely 18 or bad 19 count. Do you accept the invitation or not?

At the other table Israel's new young bridge star Dana Tal found a much more descriptive bid to send across her shape:

Here is the complete hand:

| | | | |
|----------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
| South | West | North | East |
| Tal | Levin | Segev | Altshuler |
| 1 ♠ | pass | 2 ♣ | pass |
| 4 ♦ (splinter) | pass | 4 ♥ (cue) | pass |
| 4 ♠ (cue) | pass | 4 NT | pass |
| 6 ♣ | (all pass) | | |

With clubs 2-2 and spades 3-2, declarer had no trouble bringing home 13 tricks after drawing trumps, pitching a spade



Ron Segev and Dana Tal

Board 46
 West dealer
 Both vul

♠ K 8 6 5
 ♥ K 9 8 4 2
 ♦ 4
 ♣ 7 6 4



♠ 9 7 4 2
 ♥ A Q J
 ♦ A Q 10 5
 ♣ A J

♠ A Q
 ♥ 10 6
 ♦ 9 7 3 2
 ♣ K 10 9 8 3

Board 52
 East dealer
 Both vul

♠ J 10 8 6 4 3
 ♥ 7 4
 ♦ 8 6 4
 ♣ K J



♠ A K
 ♥ 6 3 2
 ♦ A 10 7
 ♣ A Q 8 5 3

♠ Q 9 7
 ♥ Q 10 9 5
 ♦ 2
 ♣ 9 7 6 4 2

Segev passed 2NT while Birman bid on to 3NT. The decision is a really close one: It is true that North has a flat shape and the points are not good; on the other hand we do know that we have 25-26 points and the vulnerable game bonus is a powerful incentive to bid on. In my view passing 2NT with the North hand is a long-term losing decision, because even if we assume we're facing an 18 count (with 19 many players would bid 3NT in this specific sequence), at teams it is good policy to press the opponents into defending a possibly tight game rather than risking a sizeable negative swing by stopping in 2NT.

As you can see, unless you can set up a spade in time, 3NT needs both the ♥K and the ♣K onside or some unlikely defensive error. After a heart lead by West at one table and a club lead by East at the other, both declarers took eight tricks, and Segev stretched their lead by another 6 imps to 105-88.

After five rather uninteresting boards where each team scored one imp, this exciting hand came up:

| West | North | East | South |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|---------------|
| <i>Matilda</i> | <i>D. Birman</i> | <i>Lilo</i> | <i>Fohrer</i> |
| — | — | pass | 1 ♣ |
| pass | 1 ♦ | pass | 2 NT |
| pass | 4 ♣ (Gerber) | pass | 4 ♦ (0 or 3) |
| pass | 7 ♦ | (all pass) | |

Once Fohrer upgraded his 17 count and opened 1♣, it did not need a lot of bids for Birman to get to 7♦.

| West | North | East | South |
|--------------|--------------|------------------|---------------|
| <i>Levin</i> | <i>Segev</i> | <i>Altshuler</i> | <i>Tal</i> |
| — | — | pass | 1 NT |
| pass | 2 ♣ | pass | 2 ♦ |
| pass | 3 ♦ | pass | 3 ♠ (cue) |
| pass | 4 ♣ (cue) | pass | 4 ♦ |
| pass | 4 ♥ (cue) | pass | 4 NT (RKCB) |
| pass | 5 ♠ (2+♦Q) | pass | 5 NT (kings?) |
| pass | 6 ♥ (♥K) | pass | 7 ♦ |
| (all pass) | | | |

At the other table Dana opted to open 1NT with the South hand and that meant that the World Schools champions would have a much tougher task in getting to a grand slam with a possible combined count of 29-31 points on the line.

As the great Edgar Kaplan used to say: "Both pairs have bid to the top spot; all that they have to do now is to find a way to make the contract!"

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|--|
| Board 52 | ♠ 5 2 | | |
| East dealer | ♥ A K J 8 | | |
| Both vul | ♦ K Q J 9 5 3 | | |
| | ♣ 10 | | |
| ♠ J 10 8 6 4 3 | | ♠ Q 9 7 | |
| ♥ 7 4 | | ♥ Q 10 9 5 | |
| ♦ 8 6 4 | | ♦ 2 | |
| ♣ K J | | ♣ 9 7 6 4 2 | |
| | ♠ A K | | |
| | ♥ 6 3 2 | | |
| | ♦ A 10 7 | | |
| | ♣ A Q 8 5 3 | | |



Birman was playing the contract from the North seat and received the ♣7 lead. He naturally rose with the ♣A, noticing the fall of the jack from West. Declarer continued with a small club from dummy, ♣K from West ruffed in hand, three rounds of trumps finishing in dummy, ♣Q and another club ruffed, ♥K, ♦J and ♠A-K leading to this position:

| | | | |
|-----|-------|-----|--|
| | ♠ — | | |
| | ♥ A J | | |
| | ♦ — | | |
| | ♣ — | | |
| ♠ 8 | | ♠ — | |
| ♥ 7 | | ♥ Q | |
| ♦ — | | ♦ — | |
| ♣ — | | ♣ 9 | |
| | ♠ — | | |
| | ♥ 6 | | |
| | ♦ — | | |
| | ♣ 8 | | |



So far East-West have really done their best to conceal the heart position from declarer: especially Lilo by counting declarer's hand* and therefore choosing to anticipate the heart discard at an earlier point of the hand when it would not arouse declarer's suspicion.

*East knows that declarer has only two spades; otherwise he would ruff one in dummy.

At the other table Dana Tal was playing the contract from the South seat on the lead of the ♠J. After a similar sequence of plays, with declarer also trying ♣A and club ruff, Dana got to the exact same final position of two cards with Levin-Altshuler also succeeding in concealing the actual position thanks to an early heart discard by East.

David Birman and Dana Tal were unknowingly facing similar problems: They knew that East had started either with a 3-4-1-5 or a 4-3-1-5 shape. East was now down to a heart and a club (in which case the remaining hearts are 1-1) or a spade and a club (in which case the hearts would be 2-0). It was a question of where the ♥Q was.

So they needed to figure out whether to go for a heart finesse or to play for the drop, since if East held the ♥Q, the club-hearts squeeze he was under had by now forced him to bare the ♥Q. Birman was playing the hand a little earlier, since his table had been playing more quickly, and, after some thought, he played a heart to the . . . ace, dropping the ♥Q offside and making the slam.

So all the kibitzers following the event knew that 7♦ had been made at the other table, by the time that Dana had reached the position. One particular kibitzer had more at stake in the outcome than anyone else: Moti Gelbard, one of the leading bridge teachers in Israel, had decided to let the two juniors play in the last set and was now frozen in front of the computer screen at home watching the nail-biting finish and waiting for Dana to decide what to play. Dana eventually played a heart to the . . . ace, and at the same time a loud primeval yell was recorded by the inhabitants of the usually quiet Philadelphia Street. After such a long tension watching the hand

unfold Moti could finally scream out his joy when Dana succeeded in bringing home the slam. All this excitement and a flat board!

The fact that the two juniors were playing very solid bridge was shown on board 54, with only three boards left to play.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--|-----------|---|---|---|--|--|------------|--|
| | ♠ A Q 5 | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ K 10 8 3 | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ J 8 7 3 | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ 7 3 | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ K J 8 4 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td><td style="padding: 2px;"></td><td style="padding: 2px;"></td></tr> </table> | W | N | E | S | | | ♠ 10 9 6 2 | |
| W | N | E | | | | | | | |
| S | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ A Q 6 5 | | ♥ J 7 2 | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 10 2 | | ♦ Q 9 | | | | | | | |
| ♣ K J 8 | | ♣ A Q 9 6 | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ 7 3 | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 9 4 | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ A K 6 5 4 | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ 10 5 4 2 | | | | | | | | |

At both tables East-West got to the contract of 2♠ after West had opened

1♣ and raised his partner 1♠ reply. Both Souths led the ♦A and switched to a heart at trick two. Both declarers played small from dummy, but while Birman (North) inserted the ♥10 and was thus unable to stop Lilo from making his contract, Segev (North) rose with ♥K and returned a club (though a heart back would have been better as then the defense would always defeat the contract). Altshuler took in hand and finessed in spades, losing to the ♠Q. This allowed the defense to score a club ruff. (Declarer did not find the scissors coup play of the ♦Q to take away South's entry.) North returned a club, taken in dummy, and declarer played spades again hoping to find an original holding of ♠A-x-x with South. Segev won his ♠A and played a diamond to his partner in order to receive the club ruff, which scuttled the contract. That meant a further 5 imps for the Segev team, who were now leading by 111-90 with only two boards left.

All was not lost though.

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--|---------------|---|---|---|--|--|----------|--|
| Board 55 | | ♠ Q 9 8 | | | | | | | |
| North dealer | | ♥ 7 2 | | | | | | | |
| Both vul | | ♦ 7 3 | | | | | | | |
| | | ♣ K 9 8 5 4 3 | | | | | | | |
| ♠ J 7 6 5 3 | <table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td><td style="padding: 2px;"></td><td style="padding: 2px;"></td></tr> </table> | W | N | E | S | | | ♠ A K 10 | |
| W | N | E | | | | | | | |
| S | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ 10 9 6 5 | | ♥ Q | | | | | | | |
| ♦ A Q 8 | | ♦ J 10 9 6 2 | | | | | | | |
| ♣ 7 | | ♣ A Q 10 2 | | | | | | | |
| | | ♠ 4 2 | | | | | | | |
| | | ♥ A K J 8 4 3 | | | | | | | |
| | | ♦ K 5 4 | | | | | | | |
| | | ♣ J 6 | | | | | | | |

| West | North | East | South |
|-------|------------|-----------|-------|
| Levin | Segev | Altshuler | Tal |
| — | pass | 1 ♦ | 1 ♥ |
| 1 ♠ | pass | 3 ♥ | pass |
| 4 ♠ | (all pass) | | |

Amir Levin got the ♥7 lead to the ♥K and a diamond back. He successfully finessed the ♦Q and played ♣A and club ruff. The fall of the ♣J and the opponents' carding seemed to pinpoint a 6-2 break in the suit, so declarer now cashed a high spade and finessed again in diamonds with small to the ♦8.

Confident that spades had to be 3-2 (since North could be placed with two hearts, two diamonds and six clubs), Levin simply cashed the ♠A and played a diamond to the ace. When North discarded, declarer ruffed a heart in dummy with the ♠10 and played another winning diamond, pitching another heart from hand. The defense could only take two hearts and a spade.

Board 55 ♠ Q 9 8
 North dealer ♥ 7 2
 Both vul ♦ 7 3
 ♣ K 9 8 5 4 3

♠ J 7 6 5 3 ♠ A K 10
 ♥ 10 9 6 5 ♥ Q
 ♦ A Q 8 ♦ J 10 9 6 2
 ♣ 7 ♣ A Q 10 2

 ♠ 4 2
 ♥ A K J 8 4 3
 ♦ K 5 4
 ♣ J 6



North dealer ♠ Q 9 8
 Both vul ♥ 7 2
 ♦ K 7 4 3
 ♣ K J 8 5

♠ J 7 6 5 3 ♠ A K 10
 ♥ 10 9 6 5 ♥ Q
 ♦ A Q 8 ♦ J 10 9 6 2
 ♣ 7 ♣ A Q 10 2

 ♠ 4 2
 ♥ A K J 8 4 3
 ♦ 5
 ♣ 9 6 4 3



| West | North | East | South |
|---------|------------|------|---------------------|
| Matilda | D. Birman | Lilo | Fohrer |
| — | pass | 1 ♦ | 2 ♥ (<i>weak</i>) |
| double | pass | 3 ♣ | pass |
| 3 ♦ | pass | 3 ♠ | pass |
| 4 ♠ | (all pass) | | |

At the other table the contract was played from the East seat and the lead was the ♥K followed by a switch to the ♦5. Understandably deceived by Fohrer's top-heavy "weak 2," Lilo assumed that the ♦K was offside and South's ♦5 might even be a singleton. So he rose with the ♦A, making sure of the contract if the layout had been something like this:



The winners: (L to R): Zvi Engel, Ron Segev, Dana Tal, Moti Gelbard, Matilda and Lilo Poplilov

His plan was to ruff a heart in hand and then cash ♠A-K. If the ♠Q did not drop, declarer could now simply give the lead to North with a diamond, who had no hearts left to play. Naturally things did not quite turn out that way, and when the diamond was played, Fohrer was only too happy to jump in and cash two more hearts, sending the contract two down for a last gasp 13 imps to Birman, who was now trailing by 103-111 with one board left.

Unfortunately the last board did not present enough spice to be able to gain the required imps and despite gaining 4 imps on it, the final result of 110-106 rewarded a first time winner of the Liga Leumit: Team Segev (Moti Gelbard-Zvi Engel; Matilda and Lilo Poplilov; Ron Segev-Dana Tal) who pulled together a remarkable season by playing good all round consistent bridge even faced with teams who on paper were supposed to be their better. For the Birman team the consolation was that they actually ended up scoring more imps than their opponents and could attribute the loss to the 7-imp carryover.

Once again, hearty congratulations to both winners and runners-up for providing us with such an exciting and well played final!