

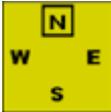
The GNOT Sydney Metropolitan Final

Technically, the GNOT Metropolitan Final is not a congress, but in practice it is, because direct entry is possible. In any case, it's an opportunity to play a lot of bridge over a weekend, because the format is 8 × 14-board matches over 2 full days. There was a strong turnout this year, with 50 teams at the NSWBA over the weekend of 12-13 October.

Two teams asserted their dominance fairly early: MORRISON (Kim Morrison, Matthew Thomson, Avinash Kanetkar, David Beauchamp, Marilyn Chadwick, Terry Brown) powered through the field, while MOSS (Tom Moss, Dennis Zines, Robert Grynberg, David Stern, Tony Leibowitz, Peter Buchen) played steadily and gave little away. By lunchtime on Sunday, both teams had qualified to the national final at the end of November. The DAVIES team (Kevin Davies, Steven Bock, Rakesh Kumar, Gary Lane) was knocked out by MOSS in round 3 and joined everyone else in the Swiss repechage, for a chance at the other 3 qualifying places.

The Swiss was led for most of the way by the SPEISER team (Ron Speiser, George Bilski, Paul Gosney, Nicky Strasser) but with one round to go, DAVIES overhauled their total to briefly take the lead. As a result, we played SPEISER in the crucial last round.

The computer dealing software demonstrated a deviousness of which I did not know it was capable, by holding this slam hand in reserve for the last round:

♠AQ5		♠K9643
♥8		♥AQ9632
♦Q42		♦A
♣AKQ852		♣9

We reached 6♠ by East, played by me, and South led a small trump. I called for the ace from dummy and North followed with the jack. What now?

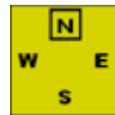
There's quite a lot to think about. Is North playing the mandatory falsecard with JT doubleton, to try to persuade me to find a losing option? The odds of trumps breaking 3-2 are of course much better than those of clubs breaking 3-3 but can one cater for all the various possibilities? Dummy is in fact very short of entries if one plays the ace of clubs and ruffs a club ...

The correct line is to play a low trump to the king at trick 2. When North shows out, there is then no alternative but to play for 3-3 clubs. As you can see below, that works, because after South ruffs a winning club, East can cope with any return, draw trumps and claim:

Board 17
Dealer N
Vul None

♠AQ5
♥8
♦Q42
♣AKQ852

♠J
♥JT754
♦JT98
♣T43



♠T872
♥K
♦K7653
♣J76

♠K9643
♥AQ9632
♦A
♣9

To my chagrin, I didn't get this right. At the other table, EW stopped in 4♠ making 11 tricks, so that was a loss of 11 IMPs. We lost the match by 13 IMPs (12-18 VPs) and SPEISER were thus victorious in the Swiss, with 146 VPs, closely followed by JEFFERY (Peter Jeffery, Julian Abel, Tom Goodyer, Les Varadi) and CLIFTON (John Clifton, Cevat Emul, Titus Ling, Catherine Zhang) tied on 145 VPs. If I had found the correct line, we would instead have won 17-13 for 147 VPs. Glug!

But there's more to this remarkable hand, which featured prominently in all the matches among the contenders. Peter Jeffery played in 6♠ and knew what he was doing, so when the opponents stopped in 3NT, his team gained 10 IMPs. The CLIFTON team, which stormed in with 25 VPs in the last round, solved the problem in a completely different way. They played in 6♣, which is bullet-proof, while their opponents went down in 6NT. To get that right, one needs to see through the back of the cards to drop the ♥K, then cash the ♥Q, after which South is squeezed on the run of the clubs (West keeps the low spade and the ♦Q) and 13 tricks are duly made. In the match involving the FINIKIOTIS team, which came fifth, both tables reached 6♠ but both went off, so only 2 IMPs changed hands for an additional undertrick. And finally, in the match involving the KOWALCZYK team which came sixth, one table reached 7♠ and the other reached 6NT, both going 2 off for no swing!!

Bidding and making slams wins matches. Now that's a novel idea ...