

Southern Highlands Congress 2019

Just another flat board?

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiast who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

As always, the Southern Highlands Bridge Club ran a superb congress, which this year moved to a new venue in Moss Vale. The Services Club provided a bit more space and proved to be very satisfactory. And as always, a very large number of club members volunteered a great deal of time and effort to make everything run smoothly. Definitely a Congress that's high on my list – and not just because it's my home club!

On Saturday, the Open Swiss Pairs was convincingly won by Liz and Stephen Hurley (who have something of a track record for doing well at this Congress) followed by Andrew Struick - Brian Thorp, with Ian McKinnon - Virginia Dressler in third place. Ian and Virginia then made an excellent weekend of it by winning the Teams on Sunday with Kerrie and Peter Johnman. In second place were George Bilski - Witold Chylewski with Warren Dobes - Mark Kolodziejczyk, while the McMahon family team of parents Susan and Ken with sons Charles and John finished third.

SHBC members Tony Lye - Stephen Brabyn also had a fine weekend of bridge, winning the Regional Pairs trophy on Saturday and then joining David Weatherall - Craig Curry (the hard-working President of SHBC) to win the Regional Teams trophy on Sunday.

My partner Jenny Michael and I enjoyed ourselves, but on both occasions we started well and then ran into obstacles. On Saturday our principal obstacle proved to be David Weston, who handled a fragile trump suit very well to bring home his game contract on this board:

Board 24

Dealer W | Vul None

<p>♠ J97 ♥ AQT3 ♦ 874 ♣ A82</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td></tr> </table>	W	<p>♠ AQ652 ♥ KJ98 ♦ A3 ♣ Q9</p> <p>♠ K4 ♥ 7542 ♦ JT92 ♣ J54</p>
W			
<p>♠ T83 ♥ 6 ♦ KQ65 ♣ KT763</p>			

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	3	3	4	4
S	3	3	2	4	4
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

The auction at our table was 1♠ by David, sitting North, raised to 3♠ by his partner, which promptly led to 4♠. The heart lead did declarer no harm, nor did the diamond return, taken by the ace. However, with a sure club loser to come, trumps have somehow to be played for only one loser. Missing the king, jack and nine, what would you do at trick 3?

Without apparent thought, David eschewed any attempt at crossing to dummy for a finesse and instead led low towards ♠10. Naturally, East took the king – and that was that. The ♥9 could now be ruffed in dummy, trumps drawn in two more rounds, a club played to knock out the ace and the ♥J discarded on a top diamond.

I thought David's play in the trump suit was very clever – he would gain whenever the missing cards were favourably divided and was no worse off the rest of the time. Certainly his outcome was much better than that achieved across the rest of the room: 19 pairs made 9 or fewer tricks in spades, while only 4 made 4♠.

In the Teams, our good early performance was at least in part because of partner's bold bidding on this board:

Board 9

Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ AKQ2
♥ J6
♦ K75
♣ JT75

♠ T53
♥ 93
♦ QT83
♣ 6432

♠ 9864
♥ K8742
♦ J9
♣ Q8

♠ J7
♥ AQT5
♦ A642
♣ AK9

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	5	6	7	7
S	7	5	6	7	7
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

As North, I opened a 14-17 hcp 1NT with a bare minimum hand and partner bid 2♣ (simple Stayman) looking for a heart fit. When I responded 2♠, she decided not mess about and jumped directly to 6NT. The heart finesse was taken twice, successfully, so I then played ♣AK expecting to concede a club, but was surprised to finish with 13 tricks. Only 12 of 43 pairs bid the slam.

Immediately after lunch, this board appeared – at least briefly – to be potentially exciting:

Board 6

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ 97643
♥ 2
♦ KJT42
♣ JT

♠ KQT52
♥ AQJ97
♦
♣ AK9

♠ 8
♥ 8653
♦ Q7
♣ 876543

♠ AJ
♥ KT4
♦ A98653
♣ Q2

	W	N	E	S
			1D	P
1S		P	2D	P
2H		P	2S	P
4NT		P	5H	P
5NT		P	6H	P
7S		//		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	3	3	7	7	7
W	3	3	7	7	7

Our opponents Liz Fanos - George Finikiotis bid 1♦-1♠-2♦-2♥ (forcing new suit by responder)-2♠ (2-card support)-4NT-5♥-5NT-6♥ (showing the heart king)-7♠. As North, I led the ♣J, hoping that my spade holding would be enough of a problem for declarer for a whole lot of IMPs to swing in our favour. It wasn't to be: trumps were drawn in 5 rounds and 13 tricks claimed.

Meanwhile, at the other table, Paul Weaver - Terry Bodycote bid 1♦-1♠-2♦-3♥ (suggesting a 5-card heart suit)-4♥ etc and reached the rather more sensible 7♥. Remarkably, across the field only 5 pairs bid the grand slam, but in our match it was just another flat board – there were 5 out of 8 in that match!

Then there was real excitement on another potential slam hand in the very last round. You hold:

♠ AKQJ83
♥ AT98
♦ 53
♣ 6

Vulnerable against not, you open 1♠ and hear LHO overcall 2♣. Partner bids 3♣ promising an 8-loser or better spade raise. RHO bids 4♣ and, over your 4♠, LHO goes on to 5♣. Partner bids 5♠, now surely showing a better-than-minimum raise. RHO passes, as do you, and LHO bids 6♣!

Of course there is a plus score available by doubling 6♣, but is it enough of a plus score? Partner must have very useful values in diamonds and hearts, which means 6♠ must have a good chance and would be worth a much larger plus. Before you look at the full hand below, decide what you would do.

Board 21

Dealer N | Vul N-S

♠ 7	♠ AKQJ83	♠ 42
♥ QJ65	♥ AT98	♥ 743
♦ KT964	♦ 53	♦
♣ J82	♣ 6	♣ AKQJ9753

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ T965	♠ T965
♥ K2	♥ K2
♦ AQJ872	♦ AQJ872
♣ 4	♣ 4

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	3	2	5	-
S	-	3	3	4	-
E	3	-	-	-	-
W	3	-	-	-	-

I did bid 6♠ and when dummy came down as East led the ♣A, figured that the ♦K must surely be finessable and that the slam would make. So it was a horrible surprise to find that East was void in diamonds!

In some respects, the auction at our table illustrated Neil Kimelman's suggestion in *The Thin Fine Line* that a non-jump overcall, which suggests possible strength, can mislead opponents more than a jump overcall: he calls this a reverse pre-empt. Across the field, East usually bid 5♣ immediately and when South bid 5♠, this was passed out. Thus 25 North-South pairs were successful in their contract. However, 12 did get pushed to 6♠, with disappointing results. The few East-West pairs who were doubled in 6♣ got out for -300, so they turned a profit if their teammates were not among those who were pushed. And in our match? Oh, it was just another flat board ... ♠