

MasterBridge August Teams

Finally, a real (well ... virtual) congress!

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

The last time I played in a face-to-face teams tournament was the Gold Coast Congress at the end of February. Since then, as I lamented last month, those of us who love the IMPs game have been feeling deprived ... except for the occasional IMPs pairs games run by some online clubs, there has been little on offer.

That changed last month, when MasterBridge Online, which is an NSWBA-registered club run by Nick Fahrer, ran their [August Teams Championship](#). Although this was an all-day event on a Sunday, just like a teams event at a face-to-face Congress, the format was different: it was run as 4 x 14-board matches and the field was limited to 16 teams.

"Why so few teams and so few rounds?" I hear you ask. Well, if you have ever set up a teams match with friends on BBO, you know the answer. In last month's column I mentioned I had been doing that each Thursday evening since bridge clubs closed in March ... and I have learnt that even getting 8 people to turn up on time, pay attention to match invitations and generally get their act together is an exercise akin to herding cats.

So I felt more than a little sympathy for Nick Fahrer and John McIlrath, who between them were trying to make this happen for 64 persons with varying levels of experience of playing on BBO and mostly no experience of playing teams on BBO. That it ran seamlessly for the participants is a credit to their efforts. That they were nervous wrecks at the end of the day is unsurprising ...

Ah, but to be able to play in a "proper" teams tournament again: how good was that?

The field included some very strong teams and they lived up to expectations. After the four matches, the winners were the top-seeded BLOOM team (Martin Bloom-Peter Gill, Matthew Vadas-Michael Courtney) on an impressive total of 73.5 VPs. In second place were the next highest seeds, the SYLVESTER team (Liz Sylvester-Yumin Li, Marnie Leybourne-Trevor Fuller) who scored 61.9 VPs. My team members (Rakesh Kumar-Julian Abel, Lee Dreyer-Frank Dreyer) were happy to finish in third place with 54.7 VPs.

Before I show you a few interesting boards, here's a little bidding problem. You hold:

♠ K7
♥ KQT6
♦ 4
♣ AKT973

Partner passes and RHO opens 1♣, promising 3 or more. What are you going to do?

We'll return to that, but first, here are a couple of boards where the partnership's approach to bidding determined the outcome. In teams matches, results are often influenced by the methods you choose, but also depend on judgement.

The result on this board from round 1 was dependent on methods, or else on misdefence:

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ 74
♥ T92
♦ AKQ6542
♣ 5

♠ KJ2
♥ J875
♦ 9
♣ Q8763

♠ A9653
♥ 4
♦ J73
♣ KJ42

♠ QT8
♥ AKQ63
♦ T8
♣ AT9

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	5	3	-	2
S	-	5	3	-	4
E	4	-	-	1	-
W	4	-	-	1	-

If South opens 1NT, North has a more-or-less automatic raise to 3NT, which is cold. However, if you don't play that a 1NT opening can include a 5-card major, you will probably find your way to 4♥. In fact 11 pairs played in a contract in hearts, which as the cards lie ought to prove problematical. But it wasn't always so... several made their game and there were many swings on the board.

This swing board, from round 2, was more about judgement:

Board 9

Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ K432
♥ K
♦ 9875
♣ AT73

♠ AQJT
♥ J875
♦ QT
♣ Q84

♠ 85
♥ AQ43
♦ A62
♣ K652

♠ 976
♥ T962
♦ KJ43
♣ J9

	W	N	E	S
		P	1C	P
1H		P	2H	P
3H		//		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	1	-	-	-
E	2	-	3	2	3
W	2	-	3	3	3

At our table the auction was 1♣ - 1♥ - 2♥ - 3♥ - all pass. Stopping in 3♥ was exactly the right thing to do and earned our opponents 6 IMPs. But most IMPs players have taken the Oscar Wilde line to heart: "I can resist everything except temptation." So 11 pairs played in 4♥ and 2 of them somehow made it. A twelfth pair bid things a little differently: 1♣ - 1♠! - 1NT - 2♥ - 3♥ - 3NT - all pass, making game legitimately.

In the modern IMPs game, non-vulnerable pre-empts are often made on any approximation to a suit of more than 5 cards. I saw that approach in action through most of the day, but nowhere more so than on this board in our round 3 match:

Board 8

Dealer W | Vul None

♠ K852
♥ AQT4
♦ 32
♣ AJ4

♠ Q
♥ KJ3
♦ KJT765
♣ 965

♠ AT9643
♥ 965
♦
♣ T873

♠ J7
♥ 872
♦ AQ984
♣ KQ2

	W	N	E	S
3D		X	P	P
	//			

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	3	1	2	4
S	3	3	1	2	4
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

At one table, West as dealer opened 3♦, a frisky pre-empt that didn't pay off this time, because North had an automatic takeout double and South had an automatic penalty pass. The resultant -800 was not good news. At the other table, West passed, North opened 1♣ and East now displayed a fair degree of friskiness by bidding 3♠, which was at least justified on the grounds that partner was a passed hand and the opponents surely had game on in some denomination. This pre-empt gave South a huge problem: it feels so wrong to pass, yet any bid is going to convince partner that you hold a serious hand. And so it was: after South's 4♦ bid, North-South staggered into a hopeless slam.

In other matches, North-South often played this board in 3NT, although not always successfully. At a few tables there were various contracts in hearts and diamonds, none of which made.

Finally, here's the hand related to the bidding problem at the start of this column, from round 4:

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ K7 ♥ KQT6 ♦ 4 ♣ AKT973	<table style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W — E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W — E	S	♠ JT953 ♥ A982 ♦ QT73 ♣
N					
W — E					
S					
♠ AQ42 ♥ J753 ♦ A9 ♣ QJ4	♠ 86 ♥ 4 ♦ KJ8652 ♣ 8652				

W	N	E	S
			P
1C	1H	1S	P
2S	//		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	2	-	-	-
S	4	1	-	-	-
E	-	-	2	3	1
W	-	-	2	4	1

At our table, after South passed and West opened 1♣, I thought the North hand was perfect for a 4-card overcall, so I bid 1♥. East bid 1♠, West raised to 2♠ and that was that. Partner led his singleton heart and in due course, East made the expected 9 tricks.

However, there was much more action at other tables, especially when South started things off with a weak 2♦ or a very frisky 3♦ pre-empt, doubled by West. The teams seeded 1 and 2 played against each other in the last round and South bid diamonds at both tables. Both sides reached 4♠, but only one was successful. Elsewhere, several pairs bid to 4♠ and then doubled a 5♣ save by North. As a result, lots of IMPs were exchanged on this board, which often determined the result of the final match.

Playing in an online tournament, one thing I thought I would miss was the post-match discussion with teammates. On the day, though, I taught myself how to make a conference call, which worked quite well for this purpose. I just can't wait for the next teams event that MasterBridge organises ... [▲](#)