

# State Mixed Pairs Final 2017

## Time-hallowed advice is obsolete

by RAKESH KUMAR



*Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiastic non-expert who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.*

The State & Country Mixed Pairs Championships were held at the NSWBA over the weekend of May 27-28. Two sessions on Saturday qualified 14 pairs for the State Final on Sunday, while the top pairs from non-metropolitan regions had the option of playing in the State Final or qualifying to a separate Country Final. Everyone else could go on to play in the Autumn Swiss Pairs, to which separate direct entry was also possible.

There was a 33-table field for the qualifying stage, equalling last year's record, with a large number of country pairs. It's often the case that weekend bridge events in the city offer fairly ordinary refreshments, but that when one travels to a country congress, the food is so good that it's more memorable than the bridge. This time, however, the NSWBA did itself proud. A brand new coin-operated machine had just been installed to dispense good coffee, while the ever-versatile Wing Roberts not only managed all the entries but also provided an endless supply of delectable cakes and nibbles. The three parallel events on Sunday were directed with customary aplomb by the imperturbable Matthew McManus.

In the State Mixed Pairs Final, the lead changed repeatedly throughout the day. However, Sophie Ashton - David Wiltshire collected 42 out of 48 matchpoints in the last round to rocket up the chart, winning from Liz Fanos - George Finikiotis, with Helena Dawson - David Weston in third place. In the Country Mixed Pairs Final, Sally Clarke - Garry Clarke established an early lead and finished well clear of Judy Kingston - Grant Cowen, with Liz Hurley - Stephen Hurley a little further behind.

The time-hallowed advice for Matchpoint Pairs is that thin games and slams are best avoided: the dictum is to only bid game if it is better than a 50% chance. In the State & Country Mixed Pairs Championships, it seems hardly anyone paid the slightest attention to this!

Witness, for example, this hand. One of my regular partners, sitting North as I was, evaluated his hand exactly as I did: 6 losers, a potentially over-valued doubleton KQ and 3 quick losers in clubs. So he bid exactly as I did viz. 1♥-2♥-3♣ (long suit trial)-3♥ all pass.

### Board 5

Dealer N | Vul N-S

<p>♠ QT</p> <p>♥ J74</p> <p>♦ J984</p> <p>♣ KQ63</p>	<p>♠ A43</p> <p>♥ AKQ95</p> <p>♦ KQ</p> <p>♣ 987</p>	<p>♠ J8765</p> <p>♥ 82</p> <p>♦ T62</p> <p>♣ AJ5</p>
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<p>♠ K92</p> <p>♥ T63</p> <p>♦ A753</p> <p>♣ T42</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="text-align: center;"> </td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>18</p> <p>9 <span style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;"> </span> 6</p> <p>7</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

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

↓  
Long suit trial

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

In the State final, only one other pair stopped in a partscore, but their +180 in 1NT beat our +170s, so both of us were rewarded with just 8% on the board. The top score was +630 to Fanos-Finikiotis, who played in 3NT, while the 3 other pairs were in 4H. In the Country final, all 6 North-South pairs bid to 4H and no matchpoints were exchanged at all! Clearly the "traditional" strategy has been declared obsolete.

Much the same rewards for aggressive bidding seemed to apply to slams. At our table, East opened a multi-2♦. We play one of the ACBL-recommended defences to the multi viz. double as a takeout of spades and 2♥ as a takeout of hearts. So partner overcalled 3♥ and I promptly went slam-hunting with 4NT. There was no club lead, which made 13 tricks easy.

**Board 2**

Dealer E | Vul N-S

♠ T  
♥ KQJ  
♦ AQT9864  
♣ 54

♠ K52  
♥ 84  
♦ 732  
♣ QJ976

♠ QJ8764  
♥ 95  
♦ J5  
♣ AT3

♠ A93  
♥ AT7632  
♦ K  
♣ K82

12	
6	8
14	

W	N	E	S
		2DI	3H
P	4NT	P	5H
P	6H		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	6	6	-	6
S	1	6	6	-	6
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

In the State final, 3 pairs reached this slam, including Ashton-Wiltshire. Somewhat surprisingly, no one bid it in the Country final.

In the afternoon, there was more aggressive bidding, now in sacrifice mode. On the hand below, North is likely to open a slightly off-shape 2NT. Will you overcall in the East seat? At favourable vulnerability, why not? Over 3♣, my partner doubled to show values and we bid to 5♥ over 4♠, but East-West went on save in 5♠, which is only one off. Two took the save in the State final and one in the Country final.

**Board 5**

Dealer N | Vul N-S

♠ KQ  
♥ AKQ97  
♦ K6  
♣ KJ94

♠ J95  
♥ 653  
♦ A872  
♣ T65

♠ AT87432  
♥  
♦ QT953  
♣ Q

♠ 6  
♥ JT842  
♦ J4  
♣ A8732

21	
5	8
6	

W	N	E	S
	2NT	3S	X
P	4H	4S	5H
5S	X		

will you overcall?

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



State Mixed Pairs winners – David Wiltshire and Sophie Ashton.



2nd in State Mixed Pairs – George Finikiotis and Liz Fanos.



3rd in State Mixed Pairs – Helena Dawson and David Weston.



Country Mixed Pairs winners – Sally and Garry Clarke.



2nd in Country Mixed Pairs – Judy Kingston and Grant Cowen.



3rd in Country Mixed Pairs – Liz and Stephen Hurley.

Matchpoint pairs is, of course, a perpetual hunt for overtricks. After 1NT by South and a 2♠ bid (or an artificial 2♦ bid showing a long major) by West, what will you bid as North? In the spirit of bidding aggressively, surely 4♥. Well, you strike gold in partner's hand, but how do you play the contract for a maximum result? A reasonable inference is that the overcaller might be short in hearts, so after cashing a top heart it makes sense to come to hand with a ruff and then run the ♥J when East plays low.

**Board 23**

Dealer S | Vul All

5  
13  7  
15

♠ KQ95432 ♥ 3 ♦ AQ9 ♣ Q2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; 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	♠ 6 ♥ JT9874 ♦ 4 ♣ AT754	♠ J8 ♥ Q65 ♦ KJ753 ♣ 983
N						
W + E						
S						
♠ AT7 ♥ AK2 ♦ T862 ♣ KJ6						

W	N	E	S
			1NT
2D!	4H	P	P
P			

*Showing a long major*

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	6	—	6	—	2
S	6	—	6	—	2
E	—	1	—	3	—
W	—	1	—	3	—

In fact only one North in each of the State and Country finals did so, but in both cases the reward was a 99% score on the board! 🏆