

Matchpoint Swiss Pairs

Breaking rules and getting away with it

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

On Sunday of the Australia Day long weekend, the NSWBA hosted a Matchpoint Swiss Pairs event. The format was similar to the Dick Cummings Pairs that are part of the Sydney Spring Nationals. In such events, the strategy is essentially the same as for matchpoint pairs i.e. overtricks matter, it's much better to score -100 than -110 and much better to score +430 than +420 etc. However, sets of 9-10 boards constitute a match — for this event, there were 6 × 9-board matches — with the percentage scores for each match being converted to Victory Points and the Swiss Pairs movement then being based on the cumulative VP score.

Personally, I find this a difficult and challenging form of contest, but Julian Foster and Maurits van der Vlugt, who won by a large margin, clearly don't think it is. They had maximum 20-0 wins for their last 3 consecutive matches! In second place were Steven Bock and Axel Johannsson, who were apparently the only pair never to lose a match all day – although they did have one draw. Placed third were Paul Dalley and Peter Gill.

Before I show you some hands, here's a lead problem for you. The bidding has been a pass by partner as dealer, 1NT (15-17) by RHO, a transfer to spades by LHO and a prompt subsequent bid of 4♠. Here's your hand:

♠ J
♥ J53
♦ QJ73
♣ AQ852

Scoring well at matchpoints isn't just about sound bidding and skilful play. Matters of style, system and small discretionary choices can have a large impact on results. For example, witness this hand from match 1:

Board 6

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ A83
♥ AKT8
♦ KT94
♣ T3

♠ 942
♥ 42
♦ A865
♣ 9764

♠ J
♥ J53
♦ QJ73
♣ AQ852

♠ KQT765
♥ Q976
♦ 2
♣ KJ

14
4 11
11

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

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

At our table, North upgraded a good-looking 14 hcp hand and opened 1NT so I was on lead against 4♠ – of the 19 tables, this was the only one at which 4♠ was played by North. With nothing obviously worthwhile, I led the ♦Q and partner duly took his ace. Now to get a 50% board he had to find the club switch immediately, but the urgency was far from obvious. Declarer proceeded to take a ruffing finesse of ♦J and thus pitched both clubs from dummy on winning diamonds. The resultant extra overtrick was a disaster for us, because North-South earned 94% on the board.

Do you play 4-of-a-minor as a Keycard ask? It's also known as Minorwood and the basic idea is that after minor suit agreement in an uncontested game-forcing auction, going past 3NT and bidding 4m (including via suit agreement at the 4-level) is used as RKCB. Some folks I know object to the method, but I love it. Minorwood worked very well for us here:

Board 22

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ A3
♥ AQ32
♦ AKJ3
♣ 642

♠ 76
♥ KJT75
♦ Q94
♣ JT7

♠ JT852
♥ 964
♦
♣ AQ853

♠ KQ94
♥ 8
♦ T87652
♣ K9

18
7 <input type="checkbox"/> 7
8

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

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

At many tables, East opened 2♠ showing 5 spades and a 4+ minor suit. However, our East passed and so North began with 1♦, promising 4+ cards. South bid 1♠ and North rebid 2NT showing 18-19 hcp. Now South jumped to 4♦ and North's 4♥ response, showing 1 or 4 keycards, promptly led to 6♦. No one else was in it!

Things didn't work out so well for us on this board:

Board 7

Dealer S | Vul All

♠ AJ54
♥ QJT4
♦ T32
♣ 83

♠ KQT9
♥ AK7
♦ 5
♣ AKQJ6

♠ 72
♥ 98652
♦ AQ87
♣ 72

♠ 863
♥ 3
♦ KJ964
♣ T954

8
22 <input type="checkbox"/> 6
4

W	N	E	S
			P
1C	P	1H	P
1S	P	2C	P
2D	P	2NT	P
3H	P	?	//

3NT or 4H?

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

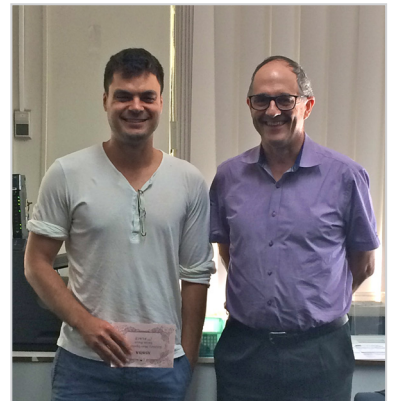
After an auction commencing 1♣-1♥-1♠ (showing shape)-2♣ (showing weakness)-2♦ (FSF to game)-2NT (with much trepidation, but the stopper is pretty good)-3♥ (3-card support so 4-3-1-5 or 4-3-0-6 shape) what do you bid? While Deep Finesse can make 4♥, in real life the 5-3 fit turned out to be a bad idea. We broke Hamman's rule viz. "if you have a choice of reasonable bids and one of them is 3NT, then bid it" to our considerable cost.



Winners of The NSWBA January Matchpoint Swiss Pairs – Julian Foster and Maurits van der Vlugt.



Steven Bock and Axel Johannsson came Second.



Third place were Paul Dalley and Peter Gill.

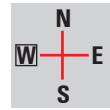
And yet ... breaking rules is often what seems to be required for success at matchpoints. Any hopes we might have had of making a comeback in the last round were destroyed on this hand:

Board 20

Dealer W | Vul All

♠ 865
 ♥ 97543
 ♦ A32
 ♣ J3

♠ A432
 ♥ K86
 ♦ T84
 ♣ 965



♠ KJ7
 ♥ QJT2
 ♦ J75
 ♣ Q84

♠ QT9
 ♥ A
 ♦ KQ96
 ♣ AKT72

5
 7 10
 18

W	N	E	S
P	P	P	1NT
P	2D!	P	3NT
//			

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

South decided to open 1NT with his not-exactly-balanced hand and then ignored North's attempt to sign off in hearts by simply bidding 3NT. Of course we didn't lead hearts – instead the spade lead and return set up a spade trick for declarer. When the club finesse succeeded and both minor suits broke 3-3, he made his contract with tricks to spare and a score of 97% on the board!! 🍀