NSBC Morgan's Swiss Pairs

Still about courage…

by RAKESH KUMAR

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

This online tournament was not the typical weekend congress that usually features in eCongress News. In the past, the Morgan's Swiss Pairs has been a North Shore Bridge Club members event, held over 4 consecutive Thursday evenings. However, in 2021 it moved to RealBridge and was made open to all ABF members, so in effect it became a congress, with unusually generous cash prizes for the first to fourth place-getters. The field comprised 46 pairs, mostly from all over Sydney but also including some representation from elsewhere around the country. The format was 3 x 9-board matches each evening.

After 12 rounds, the final placings were: 1st Witold Chylewski - Wieslaw Przewozniak; 2nd George Finikiotis - Steven Bock; 3rd Martin Bloom - Les Grewcock; 4th Wayne Zhu - Yixiang Zhang.

As in any Swiss Pairs event, doing well meant bidding and making tight games, as well as finding slams. There were many deals that posed tricky problems in both bidding and play. Here are a couple for you. Firstly, not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you hear partner open 1♠ as dealer. RHO overcalls 2♠, a Michaels cue bid showing 5+/5+ in hearts and a minor suit. What will you bid?

♠ KQJ8
♥ A
♦ T652
♣ KQ96

Secondly, both vulnerable, partner opens 1♠ and RHO overcalls 2♣. You arrive in 4♥ and LHO leads ♣5, which you win in dummy with the ace. How will you proceed from here?

♠ KT9653
♥ AK5
♦
♣ AJ96

♠ 84
♥ JT9743
♦ AQ87
♣ 7

The first problem comes from a board in the second round of the event. Only 9 of 23 reached 6 ♠. Clearly a significant factor in this is whether East is prepared to open 1 ♠. I would have thought it would be automatic – after all, this is notionally a 6-loser hand that includes 2 aces. However, some didn't open at all and a few chose to open 2 ♠ even at favourable vulnerability.

Board 18
Dealer E | Vul N-S

	♠ T96 ♥ KJT ♦ Q973 ♣ 873	
♠ KQJ8 ♥ A ♦ T652 ♣ KQ96	N W E S	♠ A7543 ♥ Q53 ♦ ♣ AT542
	♠ 2 ♥ 987642 ♦ AKJ84 ♣ J	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	2	2	-	-
S	-	2	1	-	-
E	7	-	-	7	2
W	7	-	-	7	2

If partner does open 1 ♠, then with no interference it's easy to reach slam after a Jacoby 2NT response. However, if South bids a Michaels 2 ♠ (or a Ghestem 3 ♣) then West needs to be able to simultaneously show 4+ support, shortage in hearts and slam interest. Easily the best approach is a 4 ♥ splinter raise, but several players sitting West did not find this bid. Even in those partnerships where 4 ♥ was bid, East sometimes signed off, possibly because it was not clear that the bid indicated slam interest, or because East failed to re-evaluate his/her hand in the context of the auction.

The second problem arose at the very beginning of the event – this board generated many swings in both directions:

Board 4
Dealer W | Vul All

	♠ A7 ♥ 8 ♦ K32 ♣ KQT8432	
♠ KT9653 ♥ AK5 ♦ ♣ AJ96	N W E S	♠ 84 ♥ JT9743 ♦ AQ87 ♣ 7
	♠ QJ2 ♥ Q62 ♦ JT9654 ♣ 5	

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

Some East-West pairs found their way to 4 ♠ and some reached 3NT, neither contract proving successful at any table. However, for those who reached the optimum contract of 4 ♥, either via a negative double or an immediate mild overbid of 2 ♥, there were still pitfalls. On the lead of ♣5, won in dummy, East sometimes attempted to return to hand via ruffing a low club with ♥4. This led to disaster as South over-ruffed, then played ♠Q and whether declarer covered or ducked, eventually ruffed another club with ♥Q.

A better line would be to cash one top heart and, noting the fall of ♥8, ruff a club to hand with ♥ 7 or higher, just in case. Now South might over-ruff with the queen and return her/his remaining heart. It's not all over yet, though, as the spade suit still has to be established and entries to dummy are limited … if South ducks smoothly when a spade is led towards the king, what then? Fortunately for declarers in this situation, South usually split her/his honours and when declarer played the king, North took the ace. Overall, 5 of 11 declarers made the game.

This was another swing-generating board on which only 6 pairs reached 4♠:

Board 9
Dealer N| Vul E-W

	♠ JT ♥ AK852 ♦ 8 ♣ AJ865	
♠ AQ953 ♥ 974 ♦ KQ2 ♣ T2	N W E S	♠ K76 ♥ T6 ♦ AJ95 ♣ K974
	♠ 842 ♥ QJ3 ♦ T7643 ♣ Q3	

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

The deal raises several questions. Firstly, would you double with the East hand after North opens 1♥? Many wouldn't and didn't. Secondly, would you overcall 2♠ with the West hand at adverse vulnerability if partner passes and South raises to 2♥? If not, that might be where the auction ends! Of course 10 tricks in spades are easy, provided declarer doesn't fall for the mandatory falsecard of ♠J from North after two top hearts, a heart ruff and ♠K.

In round 7 there were 10 who reached 3NT on this board, of whom 6 made it:

Board 4
Dealer W | Vul All

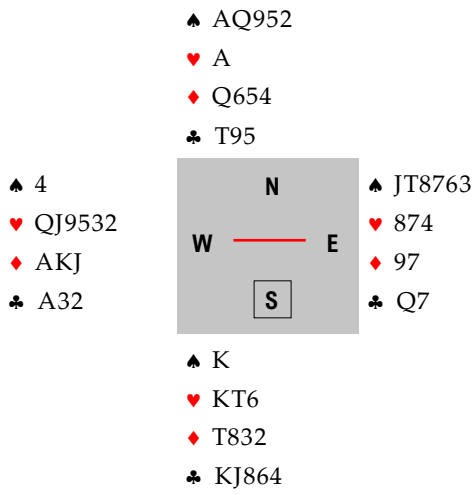
	♠ QJ642 ♥ AKJ ♦ A4 ♣ J74	
♠ 975 ♥ Q764 ♦ QT8732 ♣	N W E S	♠ AK8 ♥ T8 ♦ K6 ♣ QT9863
	♠ T4 ♥ 9532 ♦ J95 ♣ AK52	

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

Four played the contract from the South seat – for those declarers, a successful outcome was more or less guaranteed because West will lead a diamond, ducked to the king. After this even if East returns a diamond to the ace, the defence has no prospects of winning any further tricks in that suit. But when North is declarer e.g. after 1NT—2♣—2♠—2NT—3NT as at our table, East will lead a club and West will show out, discarding an encouraging diamond. Now when North plays a spade towards dummy and East hops up with ♠K to shift to ♦K, will you win or duck? It seems reasonable to assume that ♠A might be with West, in which case ♦J will provide a second stopper if you grab the ace now. However, at both tables where declarer played this way, the roof fell in when East took the second spade to play a diamond through dummy's ♦J9.

When the final round began, partner and I had struggled into fourth place and faced Chylewski-Przewozniak, who had been leading for the previous 3 rounds. This board cemented their lead and pushed us back down the ladder:

Board 19
Dealer S | Vul E-W



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

Chylewski-Przewozniak bid Pass – 1♥ – 1♠ – Pass – 1NT – 2♥ – 3♦ – Pass – 3NT. No other North-South pair reached this contract. As West, what would be your opening lead? The obvious choice is ♥Q, but now the contract is unbeatable: it turns out that only the lead of a low heart would have worked. Yet another fine demonstration of courageous bidding that proved to be successful!