## OPATIJA DIARY

# THE 52ND EUROPEAN TEAM CHAMPIONSHIPS

JUNE 21ST - JULY 1ST 2014

BRIAN SENIOR



Open Champions - Israel

#### Introduction

The 2014 European Team Championships were held at the Sport Hall Marino Cjetkovic, Opatija, Croatia from June 21<sup>st</sup> to July 1<sup>st</sup> 2014.

The three series had three different formats. There were 36 teams in the Open. These were split into two groups of 18, each of which would play a complete round robin of 17 x 16-board matches. The top nine teams in each group would then play in the second stage, where they would meet the nine qualifiers from the other group. There would be full carry-over of scores aganst the other qualifiers in a team's own group, plus a very small carry-over from their results against the teams that did not qualify. This second part of the carry-over involved calculating how many VPs each team had scored against the non-qualifiers, ranking them on that basis, and then awarding zero VPs to the ninth-placed teams, 2VPs to the eighth-ranked team, and 2 more VPs for each position above that, such that the leading qualifier in each group would get 16 VPs.

There were 23 teams in the Women's series, and they would play a simple round robin of  $22 \times 16$ -board matches with one bye.

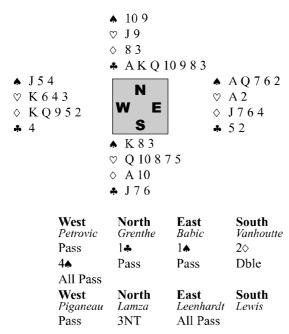
Twenty-six countries had entered the Senior Teams. They would play a 12-round Swiss qualifying stage of 16-board matches. The top ten teams would qualify for the A Final and would play a complete round robin of 16-board matches, while the remainder would play an eight-round Swiss Consolation. The top-ranked team in Final A would have a carry-over of 22.5 VPs, reducing by 2.25 VPs down to zero for the tenth-placed qualifier. In the Consolation Final, the bottom team would again start on zero, with each higher position being worth 1 extra VP.

As well as being a stand-alone European Championship, the top six teams in each series would qualify for the 2015 World Championships, to be held in Chennai, India, for the Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup and d'Orsi Trophy. Even seventh place was worth fighting for because, as we have seen in previous years, if another zone fails to take up its full allotment of places at the world championships, that space is usually filled by the next ranking European team.

### Day One – June 22<sup>nd</sup>

The first session of the championships featured only matches from the Seniors series. This deal was something of a triumph for the host nation, Croatia, in its match against reigning champions, France.

Board 4. Dealer West, All Vul.



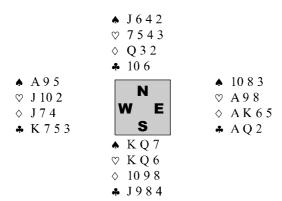
This was a huge success for the gambling 3NT opening. Goran Lamza's opening scooped the pool. The recommendation against such an opening has always been to lead an ace and then hope to know what to. On this occasion, to lead a spade seemed to be normal and Leenhardt duly chose the ace – not that it mattered, as Lamza would have had to put up the king on a low spade lead, as he could not afford a diamond switch. When Lamza followed with the ten he continued with the queen. Lamza won the king and cashed out his nine tricks for +600.

Grenthe did not have the option in his methods of opening 3NT so opened at the one level and now his opponents got together in spades. Petrovic did very well to find the pressure bid, raising to game with only jack-to-three trumps, when many would have taken a slower route. Vanhoutte doubled but found that, with all his partner's values in the long club suit, there was no way to beat it. He led a club, won by Grenthe, who switched to the jack of hearts. Babic won in hand, ruffed his club loser and led the five of spades to the queen and king. Back came a second heart to dummy's king. Babic cashed the jack of spades, ruffed a heart back to hand and drew the last trump then played on diamonds for ten tricks and +790; 16 IMPs to Croatia, who led by 22-11.

Three No Trump can be defeated by a diamond lead or the ace of hearts followed by a diamond switch. The only player to lead the ace of hearts rather than the spade was Mihaly Kovavs of Hungary. His argument was that, given his own spade length, dummy's spade stopper rated to be the king, so that a spade lead would establish an extra trick for declarer, while the heart stopper might be a collection of lower cards, so that he would get to see dummy without setting up an extra trick and might then know how to continue. That was well-reasoned, and worth a game swing to his team.

This next deal comes from the Italy v Netherlands match, also from Round 1 of the Seniors.

Board 8. Dealer West. None Vul.



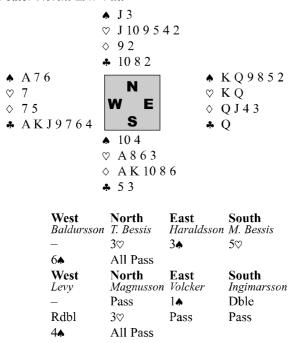
South was on lead against the rather unrevealing auction of 1NT-3NT. Even against the lead of a top spade, found by Failla for Italy in the Open Room, the Dutch declarer might have succeeded, though the winning line is rather double dummy, requiring him to lose a diamond trick to South, the hand that does not contain the thirteenth spade. South can then be squeezed in hearts and clubs.

In practice, declarer won the third spade, led a low heart to his nine and South's queen, and later cashed the clubs then took a second heart finesse for down two and -100.

Mariani, declaring 3NT for Italy, got a less threatening  $\Diamond$  10 lead, which he won in hand. A low diamond went to the jack and queen and a heart came back, South winning her queen. Winning the passive diamond return, declarer now ducked a spade. South won and returned a club but declarer was in control. He won in hand and cashed the last diamond, noting South's discard of a spade. When the  $\bigstar$  K appeared under the ace, declarer simply played out the clubs, forcing South to lead a heart away from the king to give the ninth trick; Italy +400 and 11 IMPs.

Round 1 of the Open series featured a match between Iceland and France.

Board 25. Dealer North, E/W Vul.



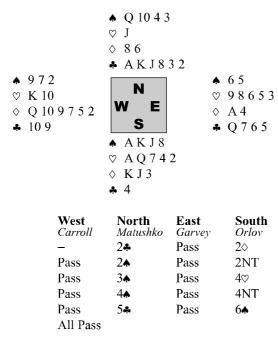
Pre-emption may be a two-edged sword, but it does cause terrible problems for the opposition when it comes at the right time. The French E/W pair had an easy time of it after North's pass – the pre-emptive jump to  $3\heartsuit$  at his next turn came too late to be a problem.

The older generation of French players would not even have opened a weak two bid on the North cards, let alone opening at the three level. Thomas Bessis is very much of the new generation and his 3% opening allowed father, Michel Bessis, to really put on the pressure with his jump to 5%. Can Jon Baldursson really be blamed for guessing to jump to slam?

Four Spades was, of course, and easy make, while there were three top losers in the slam for -200 and 13 IMPs to France, on their way to a maximum 20-0 VP win.

Also in Round 1, in the match between Ireland and Russia, came a perfect opportunity to underlead an ace against a slam.

Board 17. Dealer North, None Vul.



For Russia, Georgi Matushko's **2.** opening was Precision-style and Sergei Orlov's **2**\$\phi\$ response an inquiry. Two No Trump was another asking bid but **4**\$\phi\$ confirmed the spade fit. Orlov continued with RKCB and bid the thin slam.

Well, my introduction has already told you what Tommy Garvey chose as his

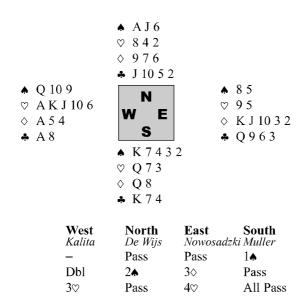
opening lead – the four of diamonds – the auction had made it clear that dummy must hold a diamond control so he just had to hope that there was a king-jack guess! Matushko was suspicious, of course, but had no good reason to get the guess right. He called for dummy's jack and that meant that the slam was down immediately. He lost a third trick in the wash for down two and –100.

As the Irish N/S were in game at the other table, that was a 22-IMP swing, Ireland gaining 11 instead of losing 11 had the slam been made. Russia went on to win the match by 44-32 IMPs, 13.28-6.72 VPs, so this was very important to the Irish, who could have suffered a very serious beating had this board gone against them.

Both Poland and Netherlands were among the favourites to qualify for the 2015 Bermuda Bowl, and met in Round 2 of the Open, both teams having had big wins in their first match.

There was a major swing on the first deal of the match.

Board 1. Dealer North. None Vul.



West described a hand too strong for a 2♥ overcall, and East raised to a game. Though the ♣J lead developed a trick for the defense, it also made it

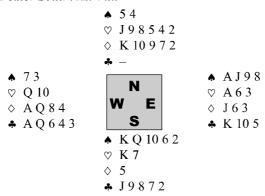
easy for Kalita. The jack was covered all around and declarer immediately played back a club. North won and continued the suit, West discarding a spade. The fall of South's  $\clubsuit$ 7 meant that, after a successful trump finesse, Kalita no longer required the diamond finesse, since dummy's  $\clubsuit$ 6 was available for a discard. When the  $\lozenge$  Q fell, he claimed 12 tricks.

<b>West</b> <i>Verhees Jr</i>	<b>North</b> <i>Balicki</i>	<b>East</b> v Prooijen	<b>South</b> Zmudzinski
_	Pass	Pass	1♠
Dbl	2♠	2NT	Pass
3♡	Pass	4♡	All Pass

After a similar bidding sequence, 40 was again reached, but Balicki led a trump to the queen and ace. Verhees drew trumps, but was no longer able to ruff a spade, so the outcome depended on the diamond guess. Actually, it was not a straight guess, as playing South for the queen might have meant no discard for the club loser. So Verhees played for the diamond to be in the North hand and, on winning the queen, South switched to a spade, setting the contract.

This was careless play by declarer. After winning the heart lead, he should have played a small diamond to the  $\Diamond$  J, risking losing a diamond trick while there was still a trump in dummy to protect against a spade switch. On this layout there are ten sure tricks even after the finesse fails, though had diamonds been four-one and the defence read the position correctly this line might not have been a success. In another match the winning line was found by Lotan Fisher, for Israel against Italy, also in the Open series.

Board 23. Dealer South, All Vul.



<b>West</b> Rimstedt	<b>North</b> Senior	<b>East</b> Sjoberg	South Dhondy
_	_	_	Pass
1NT	3♡	All Pass	

In the Women's match between Sweden and England, Sandra Rimstedt's 1NT opening was 14-16. England's Nevena Senior is generally aggressive in the auction and her vulnerable 3 $\heartsuit$  overcall on this North hand certainly qualifies.

Emma Sjoberg led the five of clubs and declarer ruffed West's ace, played a spade to the king and the a diamond. Rimstedt went in with the ace and returned a spade. Sjoberg took the ace and returned the nine, covered by dummy's ten, ruffed by West's ten and over-ruffed with the jack. Senior cashed the king of diamonds, ruffed a diamond and then pitched a diamond on the queen of spades as West ruffed with the queen. She ruffed the club return, ruffed a diamond, then a club with the five of hearts. Sjoberg over-ruffed and cashed the ace of hearts for one down and, -200.

West Smith	<b>North</b> <i>Gronkvist</i>	East Brock	<b>South</b> Ahlesved
_	_	_	Pass
1*	2♡	Dble	Pass
3 <b>.</b>	Pass	3♡	Dble
Pass	Pass	Rdbl	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

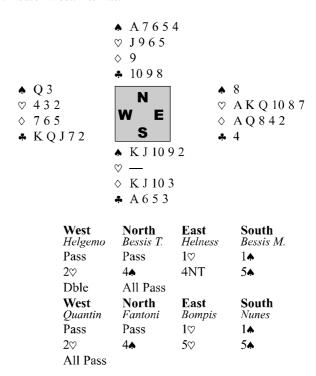
Sally Brock's redouble of the 3\infty cuebid would usually, as here, promise the ace and encourage partner to bid no trump.

Maria Gronkvist led the four of hearts and Catharina Ahlesved won with the king and returned the seven to declarer's queen. Nicola Smith led a club to dummy's king, seeing that North pitched the five of hearts — not good news. She continued with a diamond to the queen and Gronkvist won with the king and exited with a heart to dummy's ace, Ahlesved pitching the two of spades and declarer the four of clubs. Smith cashed the diamond jack and, when South discarded the ten of spades, cashed the spade ace and continued with the jack. Ahlesved won the queen and exited with the seven of clubs but Smith could run that to dummy's ten and cash two clubs and a diamond. When North pitched a diamond Smith had an overtrick for a nicely played +630 and 10 IMPs for England.

#### **Day Two**

This was an interesting deal from the Open Round 3 meeting of France and Monaco.

Board 20. Dealer West, All Vul.



Geir Helgemo, for Monaco, led the king of clubs, which Michel Bessis won in hand and drew trumps in two rounds ending in dummy. He led the nine of diamonds and Tor Helness ducked in tempo. Now Bessis had a decision to make. He rose with the king but this was giving up on the contract as there was nowhere to get an eleventh trick. Had he run the nine he could then have come to hand by ruffing a heart and then established a diamond via a double loser on loser play and the established diamond would have been the eleventh trick.

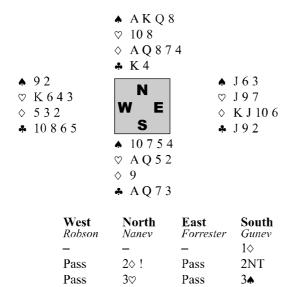
True, had the nine lost to the queen the contract would almost certainly have been down two, but Helgemo's opening lead had marked him with the club honours, plenty for his simple heart raise, and the potential gain from trying to make the contract was much greater than the potential loss from conceding a second undertrick.

The same contract was reached in the other room but without the double, and the first three tricks were identical. Here, however, when the diamond was led from dummy, Marc Bompis won the ace, giving the contract to Nunes, who could later cash the king and make a single loser-on-loser play on the jack; 13 IMPs to Monaco.

Bulgaria outbid England on this next deal, also from Round 3 of the Open.

Board 23. Dealer South, All Vul.

Pass



64

One Diamond was Precision, not promising even one diamond in the Bulgarian style, and 20 was natural and game-forcing. Three Hearts showed spades. When South confirmed his 4-4-4-1 by bidding 34, North knew had all the information he felt he needed and jumped to the small slam.

All Pass

Played by South, the contract gets the extra chance of a heart lead from West, and this is what happened at the table so Rossen Gunev soon had twelve tricks when both spades and diamonds broke evenly. Even on a trump lead, declarer can ruff two diamonds, draw trumps, throw a heart on a top club and

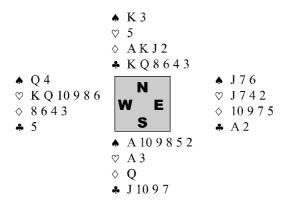
concede a diamond to establish the long diamond for his twelfth trick; Bulgaria +1430.

West Mihov	<b>North</b> <i>Bakhshi</i>	<b>East</b> Stefanov	South Gold
_	_		1♣
Pass	1◊ (i)	Pass	1♡
Pass	2\$	Pass	2♡
Pass	4NT	All Pass	

(i) Natural or any 12-14 bal V/15-17 bal NV 10 Natural, occasionally three cards

Here, 1♣ was either natural or two-plus cards with a weak no trump, and 1♦ natural but occasionally only three diamonds. Two Diamonds was a gameforcing inquiry and 2♥ natural. Now David Bakhshi made an invitational jump to 4NT, not considering the possibility of a spade fit (this could not be Blackwood as, with a heart fit, he could have bid a quiet 3♥ to set the suit). Four No Trump made exactly, the tenth trick coming when East switched to the jack of hearts when in with a diamond, but +630 still meant 13 IMPs to Bulgaria

Board 31. Dealer South, N/S Vul.



West Robson	<b>North</b> Nanev	<b>East</b> Forrester	<b>South</b> <i>Gunev</i>
_	_	_	1♠
3♡	Dble	5♡	Pass
Pass	6 <b>.</b>	Pass	Pass
6♡	Dble	All Pass	

Gunev's 1♠ was limited to 15 HCP in his Precision style. Tony Forrester's pre-emptive 5♡ raise bullied Ivan Nanev into bidding 6♣ at his second turn Andy Robson sacrificed in 6♡ doubled.

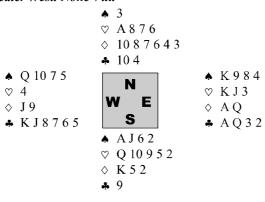
Nanev led the king of diamonds, dropping Gunev's queen and, rather than continuing the suit and giving the fourth-round ruff, he switched to king and another spade. Missing the diamond ruff meant that the contract was only down five for -1100 instead of down six for -1400.

<b>West</b> Mihov	<b>North</b> Bakhshi	<b>East</b> Stefanov	<b>South</b> <i>Gold</i>
_	_	_	1♠
3♡	4♡	5♡	6 <b>*</b>
All Pass			

For many pairs, 4% would promise a spade fit, but not for the English pair, for whom it showed clubs. David Gold could therefore introduce his second suit at the six-level and Bakhshi was delighted to pass. England scored a fine +1370 to gain an unexpected 7 IMPs.

When Poland met Netherlands in Round 4 of the Women's championship, back-to-back game contracts gave the Dutch two big swings.

Board 8. Dealer West, None Vul.



West	North	East	South
Miszewska	Wortel	Kazmucha	Michielsen
Van Zwol	Sarniak	Arnolds	Baldysz
Pass	Pass	1*	1♡
Dble	4♡	<b>4</b>	All Pass

Identical auctions saw the two East players declare the thin spade game.

Marion Michielsen won the ace and switched to a diamond, on which Kazmucha rose with the ace and took a diamond discard on the king of hearts. She continued with a spade to the queen followed by a second spade to the eight and jack, ruffed the heart return and led a club to the queen. Next she ruffed the diamond queen and started running the clubs, so Michielsen made the six and ace of spades for down one and –50.

The first three tricks were the same at the other table but then, in an attempt to keep better control of the hand should spades lie badly, Arnolds ran the nine of spades, winning the trick. A second spade went to dummy's seven and now Arnolds simply set about the clubs. All Baldysz could take were the jack and ace of spades; ten tricks for +420 and 10 IMPs to Netherlands, who led by 34-1 at the midpoint in the match.

The deal was also interesting when Monaco met Russia in the Open series:

West	North	East	South
Nunes	Gromov	Fantoni	Dubinin
Pass	Pass	1.	2♡
<b>3♣</b>	3♡	3NT	All Pass

South's  $2\heartsuit$  showed both majors and Dubinin led the  $\heartsuit$  5 against Fantoni's 3NT. North won with the ace and returned a heart to the jack and queen (double-dummy a diamond switch defeats the contract). When Dubinin now cleared the heart suit, Fantoni had eight tricks and no time to set up a ninth trick in spades. His options were to take the diamond finesse or to strip the South hand, aiming to force him to lead away from  $\diamondsuit$  Kx at the end.

When six rounds of clubs were played, declarer reduced himself to  $\bigstar$  K9  $\diamondsuit$  AQ. Dubinin, meanwhile gave himself a chance by retaining  $\bigstar$  A  $\heartsuit$  92  $\diamondsuit$  K. A spade exit was no good now, since South would have too many tricks to cash, so Fantoni had to guess which defender had started with the  $\diamondsuit$  K. After a couple of minutes' thought, he finessed the  $\diamondsuit$  Q and was two down.

At the other table 44 went one down so it was only 2 IMPs to Russia.



Women's Champions - Netherlands



Seniors' Champions - England