

Tollemache Qualifying Competition 9th & 10th November.

The Tollemache is the National Inter-county Team of 8 competition, attracting many very good players. It is the strongest competition that I play in, and it is an endurance test with 8 boards against each of 13 counties over 2 days. Many of the counties have a squad of 5 or 6 pairs and rotate them. Northants had some availability issues and made do with 4 changing pairs. I was picked to play with 3 different partners. For the first two matches I was playing with Chris Wormleighton. We started well but also had some luck.

With 104 boards over the weekend, you have to try to keep concentration high and avoid mistakes. However, even the top players can make errors.

On B2, Chris (West) opened 2♦, a weak-only multi showing a 6c Major and 3-7 HCP.

| | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Board 2 Dealer E NS Vul | ♠ AKJ87 ♥ Q64 ♦ 652 ♣ 82 | |
| | ♠ – ♥ KJ732 ♦ 94 ♣ KQJ1076 | ♠ Q106542 ♥ 98 ♦ 103 ♣ A53 |
| | ♠ 93 ♥ A105 ♦ AKQJ87 ♣ 94 | |

The bidding went:

| W | N | E | S |
|-----|-----|-----|----|
| | | 2♦* | X |
| 2♠* | X | P | 3♦ |
| P | 3NT | P | P |
| P | | | |

2♠ was “pass or correct”, implying heart length. 2♠x goes only 2 down NV, so NS bid the vulnerable 3NT.

3NT goes off a club lead, which East had no trouble finding (♣K) when played by South.

But not a single West found the killing club lead

Chris led the ♥9. Declarer, a well-known top bridge player and author, can win the ♥A and has 9 top tricks. But for some reason, he ducked the ♥. I won the ♥K and switched to ♣K. Chris unblocked ♣A and continued clubs for 3 down. As with many things in life, it is better to be lucky than good !

At teams, it is important to bid the games (particularly when vulnerable) and sniff out the slams.

On B3, Chris bid to a thin 4S contract after I had opened a strong 1NT.

| W | N | E | S |
|------|----|-----|---|
| | | | P |
| 1NT* | P | 2♦* | P |
| 2♥ | 3♦ | 3♠ | P |
| 4♠ | P | P | P |

| Board 3 | | ♠ A97 | |
|----------|--|----------|---------|
| Dealer S | | ♥ 105 | |
| EW Vul | | ♦ AKJ985 | |
| | | ♣ J7 | |
| ♠ KQJ2 | | | ♠ 6543 |
| ♥ A4 | | | ♥ QJ983 |
| ♦ 106 | | | ♦ 73 |
| ♣ KQ852 | | | ♣ A9 |
| | | ♠ 108 | |
| | | ♥ K762 | |
| | | ♦ Q42 | |
| | | ♣ 10643 | |

About a third of the field bid 4♠, and all made it, but it goes off against best defence.

South led a diamond to the ♦K and North then cashed ♦A. Can you work out what he needs to play next to take the contract off ?

He had to play a third round of diamonds, conceding a ruff and discard!

Declarer cannot then draw trumps and ruff the clubs good. If he tries to ruff the third round of clubs before drawing trumps, North can ruff in with ♠9. It is a tough defence to find.

On B8, the opposition bid well to a cold 6C:

| W | N | E | S |
|---|-----|---|-----|
| P | 1NT | P | 2♠* |
| P | 2NT | P | 4NT |
| P | 6♣ | P | P |
| P | | | |

2S was transfer to clubs, and 4NT was quantitative. Only half the field bid the 75% slam, but we were lucky that our declarer mis-played.

Board 8
Dealer W
None Vul

| | | |
|-----------|------------|-----------|
| | ♠ AQ7 | |
| | ♥ KQ62 | |
| | ♦ A75 | |
| | ♣ J75 | |
| ♠ J82 | | ♠ K106543 |
| ♥ AJ105 | | ♥ 984 |
| ♦ J106432 | | ♦ Q |
| ♣ – | | ♣ 432 |
| | ♠ 9 | |
| | ♥ 73 | |
| | ♦ K98 | |
| | ♣ AKQ10986 | |

Chris (East) led the DQ. Declarer simply has to win in hand, draw trumps ending in dummy South, and lead twice up to the Heart honours, with a spade finesse as a fallback (not necessary in this case). He has the entries to table (trumps, ♦K and a spade ruff) to do all this. Declarer (not on best form that day) won on the table and led a small heart. I was alert enough at that early stage to fly in with the ♥A and play a diamond for partner to ruff for one down.

In our next match, we started well (B9) by cashing the first 11 tricks against 1NT for 5 down. The opponents had 21 HCP between them but the cards sat well for us.

On B11 we bid well to 6H, a 75% slam, as it needs one of two finesses. Two thirds of the field were in slam.

Board 11
Dealer S
None Vul

| | | |
|--------|-----------|---------|
| | ♠ Q763 | |
| | ♥ 1074 | |
| | ♦ K1062 | |
| | ♣ Q8 | |
| ♠ K4 | | ♠ A |
| ♥ 983 | | ♥ AKQJ6 |
| ♦ AQJ3 | | ♦ 754 |
| ♣ AK74 | | ♣ J1096 |
| | ♠ J109852 | |
| | ♥ 52 | |
| | ♦ 98 | |
| | ♣ 532 | |

Against me, North led a passive ♥4. I drew trumps, cashed ♣A, returned to dummy with ♠A and ran the ♣J. When that failed, I tried the diamond finesse which also failed so I went 1 down.

Afterwards, I noted that 6 pairs had made the slam. Of those, two played by West received an aggressive diamond lead after which there were 12 top tricks. Of the other four, one played clubs early and guessed correctly (against the odds) to drop the ♣Q. The other 3 played on diamonds before clubs. After cashing one top club, ruffing the fourth round of diamonds, and playing the last trump, South has to make three discards. At two of the tables, South discarded two clubs, giving declarer no guess at all in clubs ! At the last table, South discarded only one club but declarer judged well not to finesse the ♣Q. Declarer went off at all the tables where no clubs were discarded.

It is clearly a superior line to play the diamond suit (where there is no option but to finesse) before the 8-card club suit with two top honours (where there are the options to cash both or to finesse), hoping that the defence will make mistakes to clarify the situation.

With Chris departing to Chile, I now switched partners, playing with Ufuk Cotuk.




Board 21 is the board that I remember best, but not for good reasons.

| | | |
|-----------------|----------|--------|
| Board 21 | ♠ – | |
| Dealer N | ♥ Q85 | |
| NS Vul | ♦ AJ742 | |
| | ♣ KQ1052 | |
| ♠ QJ942 | | ♠ AK87 |
| ♥ K103 | | ♥ J64 |
| ♦ K1063 | | ♦ Q8 |
| ♣ 3 | | ♣ AJ94 |
| | ♠ 10653 | |
| | ♥ A972 | |
| | ♦ 95 | |
| | ♣ 876 | |

Playing against the North-East, we quickly reached 4♠ with me, West, as declarer.

I won the ♣K lead with the ♣A and cashed the ♠A, revealing the bad trump split, and in fact a losing play: best defence will now get this contract one down.

I then finessed the ♥10, losing to the ♥Q and another heart was played to ♥A. South switched to ♦9. However North won with ♦A, a mistake that gives me two top diamond tricks and puts 4S back on track to make, as I can ruff a losing diamond high on the table after cashing the ♦Q and finesse the trump 9 and drawing trumps. She tried to cash the ♣Q which I ruffed to leave this position:

| <div style="text-align: right;">✕ 6</div> <div style="background-color: yellow; padding: 5px;"> Bd 21, Dlr N *4♠-1 W </div> <div style="background-color: white; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> W Tim Durdin </div> | ♠ — ♥ 5 ♦ J74 ♣ 1052 | <div style="background-color: #d9534f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N Val Gibson </div> <div style="background-color: yellow; padding: 5px;"> Other table 4♠-1 W </div> <div style="background-color: white; border-radius: 15px; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> Ufuk Cotuk E </div> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|----|---|---|----|---|----|---|---|---|--|--|
| ♠ QJ9 ♥ K ♦ K63 ♣ — |  | ♠ K87 ♥ 6 ♦ Q ♣ J9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">  3  3 </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; gap: 10px; margin-top: 10px;"> < > </div> <div style="background-color: #d9534f; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Bill March S </div> | ♠ 1065 ♥ 97 ♦ 5 ♣ 6 | <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 5px;">W</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">N</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">E</th> <th style="padding: 5px;">S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">1♦</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">X</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">P</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">2♠</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">P</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">4♠</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">P</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">P</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">P</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | W | N | E | S | | 1♦ | X | P | 2♠ | P | 4♠ | P | P | P | | |
| W | N | E | S | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1♦ | X | P | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2♠ | P | 4♠ | P | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| P | P | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

With four top winners outside trumps (♦Q, ♣J, ♥K and ♦K) and the means to untangle them by playing them in that order, I thought that I would speed up proceeding by claiming: "Drawing Trumps". South thought for a while so I added "4 top outside winners" but he called the director. The director ruled against me quoting law 70, and awarded an adjusted score of 4S-1. We appealed, as the team captain thought the play after drawing trumps was "blatantly obvious", but the ruling was upheld on appeal. To add salt into this wound, the swing from 4S making to 4S-1 was enough for us to lose that match. I was very careful after that hand not to make any claims where there could be any doubt !

B27 was not a good hand for those opening a weak NT:

| | | | |
|-----------------|----------|---------|--------|
| Board 27 | | ♠ 8432 | |
| Dealer S | | ♥ J1074 | |
| None Vul | | ♦ J97 | |
| | | ♣ 54 | |
| | ♠ Q75 | | ♠ K109 |
| | ♥ A | | ♥ K983 |
| | ♦ AK3 | | ♦ 8652 |
| | ♣ KQJ983 | | ♣ 107 |
| | | ♠ AJ6 | |
| | | ♥ Q652 | |
| | | ♦ Q104 | |
| | | ♣ A62 | |

South opened a weak NT, which I doubled, which was passed out.

I led ♣K and after the dust settled, South managed to get 3 tricks for 4 down -800 !

B36 was a better hand for the weak NT.

| | | | |
|-----------------|---------|---------|-----------|
| Board 36 | | ♠ 104 | |
| Dealer W | | ♥ J974 | |
| All Vul | | ♦ 8732 | |
| | | ♣ QJ8 | |
| | ♠ A32 | | ♠ KQJ975 |
| | ♥ A852 | | ♥ 6 |
| | ♦ KQJ10 | | ♦ - |
| | ♣ 76 | | ♣ AK10942 |
| | | ♠ 86 | |
| | | ♥ KQ103 | |
| | | ♦ A9654 | |
| | | ♣ 53 | |

Some of the Wests who opened a weak NT ended up in a making 7S, as East could transfer to spades, make a game force in clubs, and when spades were preferred, could bid an Exclusion Roman Keycard Blackwood 5D.

However, playing a strong NT, I opened 1D and raised 1S to 2S. Ufuk & I don't play together very often and we do not have an understanding that 5D would be Exclusion RKCB, so Ufuk punted 6S.

| W | N | E | S |
|----|---|----|---|
| 1♦ | P | 1♠ | P |
| 2♠ | P | 6♠ | P |
| P | P | | |

After winning the ♥K lead in dummy, Ufuk (East) played a club to ♣A and made the safety play of playing a small club from both hands. This avoided the risk of the ♣K being ruffed and could deal

with 4-1 breaks in the club suit as the third round of clubs would be ruffed with the trump Ace before drawing trumps. Most declarers came up with an alternative safety play of simply establishing 3 diamond winners by playing a diamond from table and discarding a club. Both plays rely on at worst 3-1 trump breaks, but making the safety play in clubs is superior if declarer cashes the trump K first as he can then pick up 4 trumps in the North hand.

Northants ended day 1 in the unfortunate position of 12th out of 14. Happily day 2 was a lot better, with Northants finishing second that day for an overall placing of 10th out of 14 well out of the qualifying positions.