

Eric Parson's Pairs at the 2007 Barrier Reef Congress

by Richard Wallis

2007 was my first time at the Barrier Reef Congress, and a fine time it was too, enjoyed by all of the 240 players. Kim Ellaway, the ever popular QBA Secretary and her equally hard-working spouse Ray jumped to table 1 after the first round, and defied all attempts to remove them, leading from start to finish. I played with John Brockwell, and we stormed home for equal second with Greer Tucker and Margaret Millar.

After 6 rounds, when after 2 small losses we had finally climbed back to equal 2nd, we were surprised to find that we were drawn to play against the top seeds Fred Whittaker and Andy Braithwaite in the final round (we were number 2). In spite of us being the only pair in the top section to stay out of a cold slam, we had the better of the other 7 boards to win 20-10. Although Kim and Ray lost this round to Greer and Margaret, it was not enough to drop them out of first place.

The only hint of a complaint that I heard was that with Butler Pairs instead of match-pointed Pairs, it was effectively teams play for the whole weekend.

M 1	T87643				On board 2 in the first match I doubled for take-out in spite of only having 3-card support for both majors, as after all, nothing is perfect. However this defect, even though John jumped to 2H to show almost an opening bid, prevented me from inviting game and North remained silent denying me another chance.
Bd 2	7432				
Dlr E	T5				
Vul NS	5				
AQ9			J		
AT5			QJ986		John won the opening lead of the CK in dummy to set about drawing trumps immediately to minimize any club ruffs by North, and was pleasantly surprised when he cashed the HA at trick 2 to see the HK fall on his left.
8763			AQJ		
A32			T984		
	K83				
	K				
	K942				He now drew trumps and could be reasonably certain that North, who was marked with at least 5 spades, was very short on points, so the diamond finesse was likely to fail. Eschewing the likelihood of another singleton King with South (with 11 black cards South would have bid again), he led deceptive DJ at trick 6 and South ducked. Now the SJ overtaken in dummy when South played low, and the DQ was discarded on the SA followed by a club setting up 11 tricks. The board average was only 140, so his enterprise had netted 2 Imps.
	KQJ76				
W	N	E	S		
		/	1C		
X	/	2H	//		

M 2	AK4				On board 10 in the second match John open 3C and since I had such a weak hand, our defensive prospects looked poor so it looked like NS had a possible game on.
Bd 10	KQ5				
Dlr E	K985				
Vul All	742				
QJ987			T52		A bluff 3NT was contemplated, or a strong looking 3S, but we had no systemic agreements, so I bid 3S hoping to be able to wing it. When John raised to 4S and North took no action, I expected that nothing bad could happen.
982			AJ		
64			T2		
AJ3			KQT986		When the HK was led and dummy went down my prospects for 10 tricks before the 5 losers occurred were not good, but it appeared as if NS would have a chance for game in the red suits, so even 2 off could be a pick-up.
	63				
	T7643				
	AQJ73				
	5				
W	N	E	S		With this in mind I decided to let the power of the closed hand do its work by leading trumps and seeing what happened. North took the bait of the impending heart ruff by cashing the top spades and a heart before exiting with a trump, whereupon I could claim 10 tricks for +620, versus the board average of +350 for 14 Imps.
		3C	/		
3S	/	4S	//		

M 3	J9			
Bd 23	9			
Dlr S	AQT73			
Vul All	QJ742			
KQT84		A3		
4		QT87632		
J84		965		
K983		6		
	7652			
	AKJ5			
	K2			
	AT5			
W	N	E	S	
			1H	
1S	X	/	1NT	
	3NT	//		

On board 23 in match 3 John did not have a stopper when he rebid 1NT, but his 4-card holding and East's failure to support spades gave him a hope that between our spade holding we could prevent West from running the suit.

As is evident from the dummy that I put down after I raised to 3NT (thinking that my spade holding was bound to be a help) his hope was not realized. EW have a fast 5 tricks even surviving if West leads the SK for East to overtake and lead one back.

However, West had a secret weapon up their sleeve and chose to lead their other suit, clubs, whereupon John had 9 tricks of his own via the friendly diamond break and the extra club trick on the lead.

He could have even finessed the HJ for 10 tricks, but wisely chose to take his 9 (it was effectively teams scoring after all), but still ended up with 10 for +630 and 11 Imps when EW got a little mixed up in the end game.

M 4	QJT7642			
Bd 6	AT2			
Dlr E	T5			
Vul EW	7			
AK83		5		
43		KQ75		
K932		AQ76		
T98		AJ62		
	9			
	J986			
	J84			
	KQ543			
W	N	E	S	
		1C	1H	
2H	2S	/	/	
2NT	3S	/	/	
X	//			

On board 6 in match 4 John made what appears to be an odd overcall of 1H on his meagre 4-card suit, but against the Precision 1C this showed hearts and a minor, and less than an opening bid.

My heart holding looked good, but I was still determined to play in my 7-card suit, since John's tricks would enhance those I got with spades as trumps, but in a heart contract, my spade suit was worthless.

2H from West was a general force, and 2NT showed the spades stopped. I was glad to be able to buy the contract in 3SX, as I expected it to be cheap, but the hands did not fit well and I was booked for at least -500.

Luckily EW got a little too active in the defence and also missed their heart ruff, so I was able to get out for -300 and a modest 2 Imps against the board average of only +360, which in itself was disappointing.

M 5	K85			
Bd 9	QJT76			
Dlr N	J853			
Vul EW	8			
AT7643		Q92		
AK92		85		
QT		742		
4		AKJT9		
	J			
	43			
	AK96			
	Q76532			
W	N	E	S	
	/	1S	/	
1S	X	2S	3D	
4S	//			

The opening lead is often where the contract is made or broken, and board 9 in match 5 was no exception to this rule.

North probably looked at her hand and partner's 3D free bid in response to her double, and thought at least this time I have a safe lead of the HQ. Not so!

There is no real reason to prefer the diamond lead over the HQ, since South's 3D does not have to promise AK. However if NS take their 2 diamond tricks and force me to ruff the 3rd round, I still have to lose to the SK and it is not possible to prevent the S8 from winning a trick or losing a heart at the end.

When North led the HQ, I had a flash-back to another hand where it was essential to cash the trump Ace before trying to get a pitch on the CK, and instantly regretted the C4 at trick 2.

North was able to get 2 club ruffs, but when I did cash the SK both outstanding honours fell together and 10 tricks were mine, for +620 and 8 useful Imps in a losing match.

M 5 KT6
Bd 11 J9
Dir S K83
Vul Nil KT742
Q5 A873
AKQT64 2
QJ75 T9642
A 963

 J942
 8753
 A
 QJ85
W **N** **E** **S**
 // /
1H //

How weak you can be to respond to partner's opening bid has been debated for years without any definitive answers, but it really depends on how the hand fits in general. John passed with the East hand in spite of holding an Ace, but this would have been influenced by his shortage in my suit.

I am sure that if the heart and club holdings were swapped, he would have responded, but probably by bidding 2H, the reason for responding. The singleton club balances the possible 4-3 fit.

I have an easy 10 tricks in hearts, as long as South leads a spade before the diamonds are set up, so the board average of -200 was a little odd, as it would appear that only an unlikely spade lead from North would yield 11 tricks.

North led the C4, and I was able to draw trumps and lead the DQ, but was a little too hasty in popping up with her DK so I made a lucky 12 tricks for 1Imp.

M 6 AJ86
Bd 17 Q832
Dir N A9
Vul Nil KJ6
T742 3
AJT74 6
T2 Q8763
Q3 A98754

 KQ95
 K95
 KJ54
 T2
W **N** **E** **S**
 1H / 1S
 / 2S 2NT 4S
 //

On board 17 in match 6 we managed to right-side our 4S contract, so did not get the heart lead for the ruff. However in response to her partner's 2NT showing both minors West made the attacking lead of the CQ, and East won the CA and led back the H6 so the ruff happened after all.

The heart ruff was the end of the defence as John was able to win the CT, draw all of the trumps, and cash out the remaining 9 tricks in Notrumps

Without the heart lead and ruff, which actually sets up 2 heart tricks for declarer, it is not clear how to garner 10 tricks, and some game contracts at other tables must have failed, as the board average was only -240, so we gained 5 Imps.

According to Deep Finesse, NS can make 4H as well, but it looks a challenge.

M 7 T
Bd 25 876432
Dir N 76
Vul EW K973
72 AQJ95
QT9 J5
QT9542 J8
52 JT84

 K8643
 AK
 AK3
 AQ6
W **N** **E** **S**
 / 4H // 2S 3NT

On board 25 in match 7 John had no good bid available over the 2S multi on his right, so bid a practical 3NT and hoped that he was neither too high, or not high enough!

It was seemed likely from my hand that more tricks would be forthcoming in a heart contract rather than 3NT, although John could have had a spade stopper and 9 running tricks.

After the opening lead of the CJ, with the friendly breaks I had no trouble making 11 tricks for +450 and 4 Imps against the board average of -300.

It is hard to think of a better bid than 3NT with John's hand, but if my heart suit hand been headed by the Queen, slam would have been easy. That is why people play the Multi, as with an easy run the slam can be investigated, and the strong hand can be declarer.

M 7 AKJ5
Bd 26 K98753
Dir E J7
Vul All J
 T 873
 AQJT6 52
 T6 95432
 AT542 963
 Q9642
 -
 AKQ8
 KQ87
W N E S
 2H 4C / 1S
 / 6S // 5S

On board 26 in match 7 the signs seemed to be pointing to a game contract. My splinter in one of his good suits, John's void in hearts when East's silence implied that I had hearts, and his poor trump suit might have persuaded some to stop out of slam.

However, John was not perturbed and his 5S bid asked me to bid slam with good trumps and I dutifully obliged.

Another interpretation of the 5S bid would be to bid slam with 2nd control in the overcalled suit, but then John would have good spades and I would not.

As it turned out my minor suit Jacks were both full value and 12 tricks were easy for +1430, against a board average of -920, so we gained 11 Imps.

This was just to redress us missing on board 31, where we appeared to be the only pair in the top half of the draw to not bid the slam.

M 7 A954
Bd 29 A752
Dir N KJ83
Vul All 6
 63 KQJ82
 T 64
 AT95 Q74
 AKQ732 J84
 T7
 KQJ983
 62
 T94
W N E S
 3C 1H / 2D
 X 3D / 4C
 X / / 4H
 X //

The only player at our table who knew what was going on during the auction of board 29 in match 7 was John!

With my minimum hand I had an easy non-forcing 3D bid, and then when he cue-bid 4C, my pass of the double showed 2nd round control.

I was not sure if 4H was offering a choice of contracts (I had only promised a 4-card suit), or a cue-bid, and I had not made up my mind which way to take it when East doubled.

Now I could see if the 4H was a cue-bid, intending to bid slam over a 5D bid, and was not totally surprized when 4HX was passed out.

The sight of dummy was a revelation to me and depressing to EW and it only needed me to pick the diamonds for 10 tricks and +790.

This was relatively easy as I knew that East did not expect to make many club tricks on the bidding, so placed him with AQ over John's diamond holding for his double. Luckily only 1 diamond trick was required, and not everyone picked the diamond as the board average was only -300, so 10 Imps.