

2006 NZ Nationals at Hamilton

As part of a promotional push for the Gold Coast Congress in 2007, Therese Tully, Meta Goodman, Tony Jackman and myself went to Hamilton, NZ in July, to play in their Winter Nationals. Our results could be described as fair but not outstanding, but we were warmly received by most of the Kiwis we met, and engendered a lot of interest in the next Gold Coast Congress from those who regularly attend, as well as potential newcomers. In addition, as the GCC was one of the minor sponsors, Therese was given ample opportunity to push the GCC when presenting the free entries to the lucky recipients.

It was a full week of bridge, more so than the GCC, as play was morning, afternoon and night on each of the 8 days of the competition. The first event was a 6-session open pairs, comprising 2 qualifying rounds which reduced the field to 104 pairs, and then another 2 semi-final rounds which reduced the field to 28 for the Final and another 28 for the Plate. Tony and Meta made the Final, and Therese and I made the Plate where we crept into 4th. The first stage of the open teams was 10 matches of 14 boards after which the top 16 continued in a knockout format. After being in the top 16 for most of the way, in spite of three 14-16 losses, we had another small loss in our last match and dropped from 15th to 20th. For those knocked out of the open teams, a 2-session teams event was followed by a 3-session Swiss pairs, with the week finishing up with a 3-session Mixed Pairs or Same-Sex Pairs. The only joy for any Qld Pair was in the Same-Sex Pairs, won by Ralph and Ziggy, and David Appleton and Andy Braithwaite (now a Qld resident) won the Plate.

With over 400 hands to chose from, I could go on endlessly, so to restrict the length of this report, I will confine myself to the 9 matches in the Open Teams qualifying.

<p>M 1 J92 Bd 4 A932 Dlr W AK6 Vul All KT4 QT75 K T75 J9753</p>	<p>84 75 Q9832 Q862</p>	<p>AK63 QJT864 J4 A</p>	<p>Board 4 in the first match was a bad hand for those who play 4-card majors. When North's 1H was passed around to me I was sure that Therese had the values to bid but too many hearts, and strained to find a take-out double, but it was not there.</p> <p>The opening lead was the SA, and to prevent a spade ruff, Therese next led the HQ, crashing our 2 honours together. Thereafter we were in control, and declarer managed just 2 diamond tricks and 2 heart tricks for 3 off and +300.</p> <p>At the other table Meta and Tony were playing Precision, so the opening bid was 1NT, doubled by East and passed out, although 2D was a possible escape. Naturally, East also led the HQ, giving Tony 2 heart stops, and when East won the CA and led 3 rounds of hearts to Tony's H9, he had +580.</p> <p>Of course East should have cashed the SA after winning the CA, and after getting an encouraging signal from partner, EW could have cashed 4 spades, 2 hearts and 1 club for 1 down. This would still have been 3 Imps to us, but better than the 13 Imps for the actual result.</p>
<p>W N E S / 1H //</p>			

M 1	9653			
Bd 6	432			
Dlr E	QT64			
Vul EW	94			
AJ			Q72	
Q8			JT97	
J97			AK5	
QJ7653			AT8	
	KT84			
	AK65			
	832			
	K2			
W	N	E	S	
		1NT	2H	
2NT	/	3NT	//	

Therese opened a weak 1NT and South's 2H showed both majors. We may have the points for game but it will depend on the club fit so I firstly transferred to clubs with 2NT.

Therese had good clubs and a maximum 1NT with a certain heart stop, so tried 3NT, expecting me to return to 4C with a weak hand, but of course I was happy to pass, and fairly confident that my major suit cards would make 3NT a breeze.

After the lead of the S4 she had 9 easy tricks, and the defence let another one slip through on the run of the clubs, so we gained +630.

At the other table, EW were less adventurous, and stopped in 3C, which is a good spot since 5C can be defeated. This contract made 11 tricks for -150, but 10 Imps to us.

M 2	J96			
Bd 18	AKQ65			
Dlr E	6			
Vul NS	QJ73			
Q73			KT82	
T983			J2	
T83			A92	
965			AK82	
	A54			
	74			
	KQJ754			
	T4			
W	N	E	S	
/	3C	/	2D	
	3NT	//	3D	

On board 18 in the second match we were against a junior team from Dunedin, and they bid fearlessly on a number of occasions, this time, unsuccessfully.

Without the DA, North was very optimistic to push to game after the 2D overcall, but his 3C bid put Therese onto the spade lead, and his dummy was dead at trick 1. Not only does the spade lead and continuation take away his entry to the long diamond suit, but it also sets up 3 spade tricks, and declarer finished 2 off and +200 to us.

At the other table, Tony recognized the misfit and did not disturb Meta's 2D overcall, and this contract just made for +90 and 7 Imps.

On a good day, the hearts may break 3-3, and East may not take out the only entry by leading a spade, but if North was going to 3NT anyway, he would have been much better just bidding 3NT rather than 3C. On a 4th highest club lead (or a red suit), 3NT is cold.

M 2	KQ987543			
Bd 25	Q			
Dlr N	632			
Vul EW	3			
T62			AJ	
96432			KJ7	
T984			AQ5	
Q			87542	
	-			
	AT85			
	KJ7			
	AKJT96			
W	N	E	S	
	4S	//		

On board 25 in the second match declarer was overly pessimistic with his 3 small diamonds opposite KJ7, and finished 1 off instead of making.

Therese led the C7, and declarer knew that the easy time he was expecting when dummy went down was not going to happen when I played the CQ under dummy's Ace.

I ruffed the CK, and instead of over-ruffing and relying on good things in diamonds, declarer discarded the D2. I led a diamond, and Therese won the DA and led another club.

Obviously it is useless to ruff small, so I ruffed with the St and this converted Therese's AJ into 2 tricks for 1 down.

At the other table, Tony played a straight-forward line and over-ruffed the 2nd club to lead a trump. Another club by East would have set up the 2 trump tricks again via the promotion, but East did not find this line and 11 tricks emerged for +450 and 11 Imps.

M 2 JT952
Bd 27 T86
Dlr S QJ95
Vul Nil J
 AK643 Q8
 AJ32 KQ97
 - 63
 QT62 AK984
 7
 54
 AKT8742
 753
W N E S
 X 5D X 3D
 //

On board 27 in the second match the young turks from Dunedin got us at both tables.

At our table, I had an obvious double on the first round, but without taking a plunge into the unknown, I could do little other than accept what was on offer when Therese showed some values by doubling 5D.

From Therese's side of the table, she knew that we were likely to have game on, but did not fancy 5H on a possible 4-3 fit, and slam was not obvious.

There was not much in a 5DX contract for us, and we emerged with a paltry +300.

At the other table after the same 3 bids, East decided on a slam and bid 6C on his own! This bold manoeuvre paid off handsomely when 13 tricks were easy. He may have even been worried about missing the lay-down grand slam in either hearts or clubs.

M 3 Q543
Bd 3 J876
Dlr S J42
Vul EW T8
 9 A82
 QT4 95
 K5 AT98763
 AKQ5432 9
 KJT76
 AK32
 Q
 J76
W N E S
 3S X 3NT 1S
 //

Board 3 in the third match caused a lot of fun around the room, and many hard-luck stories.

My 3S bid simply asked Therese to bid 3NT with a spade stopper, and North's double showed a spade honour, so South did lead a spade.

Without the double, almost certainly showing the SQ since Therese would not bid 3NT after the double with only the SQ herself, South may have led the H2, but even there we were safe because of the 4-4 break.

Therese won the SA and led across to dummy and proceeded to run her clubs, cleverly discarding diamonds before the obvious 4 major suit losers. This ruse worked as North also discarded diamonds when it came to the crunch, and then NS had to endure 5 more diamond tricks for a total of 13 tricks altogether and +720.

At the other table EW had a bidding accident and stopped in 4C, which was just as well as declarer did not get the diamonds right so only made 10 tricks, for 11 Imps to us.

M 3 KQT5
Bd 5 A92
Dlr N Q92
Vul NS J98
 732 J986
 T74 QJ63
 T86 K54
 Q654 32
 A4
 K85
 AJ73
 AKT7
W N E S
 1C / 1D
 / 1NT / 4C
 / 5D / 6NT
 //

Board 5 in the third match was a peculiar hand in that the level of the contract was likely to determine how many tricks declarer could make.

At our table, NS climbed to 6NT and Therese made the safer lead of the HQ in the slam contract, rather than leading from J986 (many times I have seen it cost a trick to lead from Jxxx) or 4th highest from QJ63.

Declarer has many chances in 6NT, but all of them fail, and when I encouraged the heart lead at trick 1, Therese was able to discard the hearts and avoid the squeeze. Declarer finished with only 10 tricks for 2 down and +200 to us.

However, in a 3NT contract, even those averse to leading from Jxxx may lead the H3 instead of the HQ, and then when West plays the HT at trick 1, East is subject to a triple squeeze and 12 tricks come home. Even the spade lead only gives 11 tricks as West can still guard the hearts.

At the other table the minimal slam was not reached and we gained 13 Imps.

M 4 54
Bd 20 AJT42
Dlr W Q632
Vul All A3
 - AK9872
 KQ75 -
 T5 AK9874
 KQJ8762 9
 QJT63
 9863
 J
 T54
W N E S
 5C X //

On board 20 in the fourth match Therese was looking at the most shapely had that she had had thus far, when I spoiled the effect by opening at the 5-level in her singleton.

She did not really know whether to pass or raise, when North offered another choice, by doubling. Now the option was whether to pass or redouble, and she chose pass, as did South.

If North leads the CA to look at dummy, any continuation holds declarer to 11 tricks, but the actual lead of the HA meant 12 tricks and +950. The CA lead cannot really cost as when the opening bid is 5C, there does not figure to be too many gaps in the trump suit.

At the other table EW did not stop bidding until 6D, which went 3 off and another +300 for 14 Imps.

This hand caused heartache at many tables, and 5CX or 6CX was sometimes the end, but often East did not stop until 6D.

M 5 4
Bd 1 KJ83
Dlr N Q875
Vul Nil AT53
 KQJ32 T95
 T96 Q75
 32 AJT96
 J42 Q9
 A876
 A42
 K4
 K876
W N E S
 / 2C 2D /
 / 2H 2S /
 / 3D 3H /
 / 4H 4S X
 / / 6C //

On board 1 in the fifth match, Tony and Meta correctly did not value the NS cards as good enough for game, although their final contract of 2NT made 9 tricks for +150.

At our table, NS, also playing an artificial system, got to the dizzy heights of 6C! What a difference in valuation. Mind you, even double-dummy 6C has no chance.

Therese led the ST and declarer ruffed a few spades in dummy, possibly trying for a Devil's Coup or reversal, but when the HQ was wrong, he had no chance and went 2 down for +100 and 6 Imps.

It was hard to imagine what was going through South's mind when he opted for slam, but maybe North had painted the wrong picture of his hand in response to the asking bids. I think that the Spade singleton was probably defined by the responses, but 13 HCPs opposite 10 is often too few for a minor suit game let alone a slam.

M 5 A86
Bd 3 QT
Dlr S AJ6432
Vul EW 87
 T7542 KQ3
 A9865 42
 T5 K
 K QJT9543
 J9
 KJ73
 Q987
 A62
W N E S
 2H 3NT 4S 1NT
 // X

Board 3 in the fifth match was essentially a misfit, but it demonstrated the power of the closed hand, especially in the hands of a powerful declarer.

My 2H showed either single-suited in spades, or 5-5 in both majors, or 4 spades and a good hand with another longer suit. The NS bidding seemed to rule out the good hand, so Therese knew I had at least 5 spades.

At the adverse vulnerability, 4S does not seem to have a lot going for it, especially when a double of 4NT would produce a spade lead, and 3NT would fail by at least 1 trick, however, the play is the thing.

South led the D7 and North won and led the CA and a small spade, Therese winning with the SK.

There are now plenty of tricks, but trumps have to be drawn finishing in hand, and that looks impossible. Luckily, NS cannot see Therese's club tricks, so a heart to dummy and a spade off the table saw North rise and return a club, for 10 tricks and +790. At the other table a pedestrian 3NT was reached, and with nothing to guide him, West led a heart - +460 and 15 Imps.

M 6 AQJT32
Bd 23 T
Dlr S A762
Vul All K4
8 K75
KQ532 AJ64
53 J94
J9853 A62

 964
 987
 KQT8
 QT7
W **N** **E** **S**
 / / /
2H 2S 4H //

On board 23 in the sixth match my 2H showed 5+ hearts and a 5+ in a minor, with less than opening points. Therese jumped to game on the known 5-4 fit.

In my view, North only made a token overcall of 2S, and thus South was loath to push it to the 4-level with such a flat hand and dubious minor suit values, so we stole the hand for 1 off and -100.

After the heart lead I won in hand and led a spade up, and when North won the SA and continued spade, I was able to pitch a diamond and even imagine 10 tricks, but EW were not that kind.

North is clearly worth more than just a simple overcall with such a good 6-card suit and 14 HCPs, and then South is likely to have bid 4S over 4H.

At the other table Tony and Meta do play intermediate jump overcalls, so 4S was reached and duly made for +620 and 11 Imps.

M 7 QJ42
Bd 7 2
Dlr S KQ2
Vul All Q9865
9873 -
AK5 J98763
J94 AT75
K74 AT2

 AKT65
 QT4
 863
 J3
W **N** **E** **S**
 / / /
1NT / 2D /
2H / 3H //

On board 7 in the seventh match I upgraded my hand with 2 and a half quick tricks and opened 1NT, ostensibly, 12-14.

However, when Therese showed her heart suit and invited game in hearts, I had to refuse, in spite of my good trumps.

Alas, all of our meagre honour cards were working to their fullest, and I made 11 tricks for +200. The key to the fit is xxxx opposite the void, which reduces the hand to a 30-point deck!

Of course you could just blast 4H and hope for the best, but if I had values in spades and only xx in hearts, 4H could be hopeless.

At the other table Meta and Tony stole the hand in 2S, which went 1 off for -100, so we still picked up 3 Imps in spite of missing game.

M 7 -
Bd 9 A54
Dlr N T9865
Vul EW Q9432
AK9653 QJT84
QT7 K863
K74 AJ
8 A5

 72
 J92
 Q32
 7642
W **N** **E** **S**
 2NT 3D /
4S / / 5C
/ / X //

On board 9 in the seventh match we were jostled by the aggressive NS bidding at red versus green, and had a difficult choice to make over their 5C, eventually deciding on the teams tactic of defending rather than bidding at the 5-level. Therese's 3D is take-out with spade preference, so 4S was easy.

However, our defense was less than perfect and not less than 3 tricks escaped from our grasp, 2 of which should not.

Double dummy, West leads a heart, and then EW can take 2 hearts, 2 diamonds, a club and a diamond ruff for 4 off and +800. After a normal SA lead, we could still take 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and a club, for +500, or 2 diamonds, 1 clubs and a diamond ruff for +300, but we missed all of that to get a miserable +100.

At the other table, EW did not stop until slam was reached, and that is cold because the HJ is under the QT, but luckily for us the declarer managed to go 1 down, so we picked up 5 Imps after all. Even 6H can be made by West, because of the heart position and break.

M 8 J973
Bd 22 Q54
Dlr E Q94
Vul EW Q52
 T854
 KT976
 T7
 63

A2
A82
8652
T974

KQ6
J3
AKJ3
AKJ8

W	N	E	S
		2C	/
2D	/	2NT	/
3D	/	3H	/
3S	/	3NT	//

On board 22 in the eighth match Therese's 2NT rebid showed 20-22 balanced, and I was able to show my 5-4 in the majors and then leave the decision as to the best game to Therese.

Looking at all 4 hands, 4H is cold and 3NT should go off, but that is double dummy, and very few people can defend in that manner. This shows the power of the good intermediates, as the 5-2 heart suit has only 2 losers.

South got Therese off to a good start with the opening lead of the CT, and then South continued the good work for declarer by leading the C9 when they won the SA at trick 2.

Now it was North's turn to help when they switched to the D4 after winning the HQ, and that was 4 clubs, 4 diamonds and a spade for 9 tricks and +600.

At the other table, Meta and Tony were not so helpful and declarer finished 1 down and 12 Imps to us.

M 8 QJ3
Bd 24 2
Dlr W AKJ
Vul Nil QJ7652
 K652
 A3
 T97
 AK98

974
KQJT98
8652
-
AT8
7654
Q43
T43

W	N	E	S
1NT	X	2H	/
/	3C	3H	/
3NT	//		

On board 24 in the eighth match Therese's 2H bid was not invitational, but when she repeated the suit at the 3-level, I judged that her suit was at least 6-cards and pretty good opposite my Ax.

Accordingly, with clubs well held, (the double showed a single-suited hand) I bid 3NT, and then was disappointed to see North lead the DK!

Luckily, when North continued diamonds, the small diamond in dummy was my 9th trick, so I could win South's club, cash the other club throwing another spade, and then take 6 hearts and the diamond.

If North starts off by leading a club, I have to win, take dummy's 6 heart tricks throwing clubs and spades, and lead a spade the table hoping South has the SA.

At the other table East played in 3H and only made 8 tricks for another +50 and 10 Imps.

M 9 K9
Bd 3 A98
Dlr S T975
Vul EW AJ87
 QT2
 KT752
 86
 Q63

AJ643
-
KQJ32
T42
875
QJ643
A4
K5

W	N	E	S
/	1NT	2S	/
/	3H	/	/
X	//		

On board 3 in the ninth match sitting North for the first time I did not place enough emphasis on the penalty double by West and paid the penalty by going 1 down when I felt I had enough information to make 9 tricks. 3D by Therese was transfer to hearts, so I knew she has some values but not enough for game.

On winning the DA I made the fatal mistake of leading the HQ for the certain finesse, but West ducked, and then I knew that I should have led a small heart and inserted the H9 if West ducked. This gives me a tempo and may have allowed me to sneak a 9th trick in.

As it was, when I next led a small heart West rose with the HT and the tempo was hers. I eventually finished 1 down for -100 to match the score from the other table and a flat board.

If I win the H9, I can next lead to the CK and take a success full finesse, discarding the D4, and exit with the DT. Discarding the S5. East is endplayed and either gives me a spade trick or leads another diamond, and if a small one, I can discard another spade.

M 9 AK6
Bd 8 AJ9
Dlr W K987
Vul Nil A97
 85 974
 QT62 K5
 Q5 JT64
 KJT53 Q864
 QJT32
 8743
 A32
 2
W N **E** **S**
 / 1D / 1S
 / 3NT / 4S
 //

On board 8 in the ninth match my 3NT rebid showed 19 HCPs and 3-card spade support, so Therese had no problem in bidding game. On the actual hand, 3NT would not have presented any problems either.

The opening lead was the CJ and Therese played with the odds for 10 tricks by leading towards the hearts and inserting the H9. When that forced the HK and the subsequent finesse of the HJ won, there were 10 tricks and +420.

Another successful line would be to reverse dummy by ruffing a club at trick 2 and playing 2 rounds of diamonds finishing on the table to ruff another club.

Next exit with a diamond. Win the return in hand if a trump, or on the table if a heart, and enter dummy with the second round of trumps to ruff the last diamond with a high trump. The remaining high trump in dummy is the 10th trick.

At the other table they were using a medium range 2NT and after transferring to spades, passed it out making 11 tricks but 6 Imps to us.

M 10 AQ87643
Bd 19 T72
Dlr S 83
Vul EW 4
 J K
 J8 AK9643
 AKQ7 95
 J98763 AKT5
 T952
 Q5
 JT642
 Q2
W N **E** **S**
 / 3S 4H 4S
 5C 5S 6C //

On board 19 in the tenth match we were pushed around by opponents with the vulnerability in their favour, but aggressive bidding got us to the right spot.

I was not happy to introduce such a bad suit at the 5-level, but I did have tricks in diamonds and a doubleton heart to offer if Therese was very short in clubs, so took the risk and was rewarded when she had great clubs and raised to slam. The risk was that if we did sell out to spades, Therese may lead a club, whereas in that case I would prefer a diamond.

The opponents may have felt they pushed us, but Therese knew that I had bid a bad suit, which could not be a sacrifice. Thus even though I am a passed hand I must have diamond tricks and a maximum of 2 hearts, so slam had to be well within the odds.

There was no problem in the play and the slam was duplicated at the other table, so no swing.

M 10 AJ43
Bd 20 J5
Dlr W 8642
Vul All T75
 Q 9862
 AKT73 84
 Q953 AJ7
 986 AQ32
 KT75
 Q962
 KT
 KJ4
W N **E** **S**
 1H / 1S /
 2D / 2NT //

On board 20 in the tenth match a card combination came up that I had not noticed before. All experienced players know that to make 2 tricks with AJ9 in one hand the best play is to lead towards it and play the 9, hoping that the hand under it has KT or QT. The EW heart combination in board 20 has the same ingredients, and the best play for 4 tricks in the suit is to finesse the 7 (or run the 8) on the first round, and if this loses to an honour, finesse the Ten on the next round.

Against Meta, when she saw the H8 run around to Tony's Jack on the first round and declarer won the return and next led the H2, she quickly played the card she was known to hold, the 9! Declarer looked at this card for long time before finally deciding the hearts were likely to be 3-3 and went up with dummy's Ace, converting 4 tricks into just 2. If Meta had followed with her lowest card again, declarer was certain to finesse dummy's Ten. This would have won, and then he would have made 4 tricks in the suit in spite of the 4-2 break, and chalked up the game instead of going 3 off for a 3 Imp gain to us.