

2009 Seniors Trials by Richard Wallis

The 2009 ANC is at Wodin in the ACT, and all of the trials to select the Open, Womens and Seniors Teams have now been completed. This is a grueling process, taking place over two weekends for the Open and Womens, followed by two separate weekends for the Seniors. It would be more convenient, in a packed QBA calendar, to have trials for all three teams on the same weekend, but that would preclude eligible players double-dipping by playing in the Seniors after missing out on the Open or Womens. This gives us the best chance for our strongest available teams, and in fact some would prefer all three to be on separate weekends to allow the stronger women to also try out for the Open Team, but this does not seem possible due to an already packed calendar.

Sixteen pairs entered into Stage 1, which comprised 8/16 board matches to reduce the field down to ten pairs for Stage 2, and those ten pairs then played a complete round-robin of 20 board matches to determine the top three. Mike Pemberton and John Gough started out strongly in the first match, and then powered away from the field, only losing their last match after they were locked into first place. Four pairs were in contention for the final two places in the team as the last match got underway, and all four pairs had strong wins, thus the placings did not change and Tony Jackman and I, along with Eva and Tony Berger, joined Mike and John in the team for Canberra.

128 boards on the first weekend and 180 on the next weekend represents a true test of stamina, and many of the hands were of interest, a select few of them being included in the following report.

M 1	AQ6543			On board 7 in the first match everything was going our way, but we did not realize it at the time, and a good slam was missed.
Bd 7	A			
Dir S	QJ5			My 2C opening was natural and limited to 15 HCP, and I gave thought to upgrading it to 16+ and opening 1C, but kept within system limits. In retrospect, an additional Jack, especially in the red suits, is not going to make this hand much better, so I should have opened 1C and then we were certain to get to slam.
Vul All	642			
98		JT7		
KQT75		J943		
A974		T862		
98		JT		
	K2			Tony's 2S was forcing, and my 3C rebid ignored one of my Kings, but three small hearts did not look to be an asset when RHO did not support hearts, so I envisaged at least 2 losers.
	862			
	K3			I missed a cost-nothing bid of 4S instead of bidding the obvious 5C, and then Tony may have been interested, but also he could have shown his club support by cue-bidding 4H instead of bidding 4C, and then I would have had any easy time bidding slam.
	AKQ753			
W	N	E	S	
			2C	
2H	2S	/	3C	
/	4C	/	5C	Only 1 pair bid the slam, (in clubs), but everyone else played in spades, scoring 710 when East failed to lead a diamond, so we lost Imps to everyone.
//				

M 1 AT9
Bd 16 KQJT964
Dlr W -
Vul EW T62
 QJ5 6432
 3 A5
 J97 AKT83
 AKJ953 Q7
 K87
 872
 Q6542
 84

W	N	E	S
2C	4H	4NT	//

On board 16 in the first match the par contract was not clear to anyone, and when Tony jumped to 4H over the Precision 2C opening, East thought that 5C was a little high, but with 10 likely tricks in notrumps, 4NT was the most likely game for EW, and in any case was good insurance against the possible heart game for NS.

As it turned out, Tony was the one sacrificing against 3NT by EW, and EW were destined to lose 1imps on the deal.

I was not without a scare for use, however, as Tony was sure that declarer would duck the opening lead, and played the HK at tricks 2 to show his spade entry, but when East won the first trick, Tony was not on lead.

Missing the SA, declarer was not able to take any advantage of the penalty card. If he ducked a diamond to me and forbid a heart lead, I would be forced to lead a spade, and status quo would have been restored, so he cashed 9 tricks and accepted 1 off, but 10 1imps to us.

M 1 KT87654
Bd 20 T62
Dlr W A8
Vul ALL Q
 A2 QJ93
 A94 8
 765 KJ432
 KJ963 T82
 -
 KQJ753
 QT9
 A754

W	N	E	S
1D	1S	/	2H
/	2S	/	3H
/	4H	//	

On board 20 in the first match West opened with a Precision 1D, and it ended up a good pick-up for us when it was nearly a small loss.

My hand did not look nearly so game-likely when Tony overcalled 1S, and it got worse when he rebid 2S. He rebid spades because he had a 7-card suit, forgetting that while my 2H was virtually forcing, his 2S was not forcing.

From my point of view, I could have been looking at a solid spade suit and a void in hearts, but I felt that one more try for game was warranted on my good suit, and was pleasantly surprised when Tony raised to game, even more so when dummy went down with 3 trumps and a singleton.

West led the C6, won on the table, and I cashed the DA, ruffed a spade to hand to pitch away the diamond loser on the CA, ruffed a club (West's 1D opening had denied a 6-card club suit), ruffed another spade bringing down the SA, and ruffed a diamond. I next ruffed a spade high and West pitched, so I ruffed a diamond with dummy's last trump, then I pitched my last club on the SK while West ruffed, and made 11 tricks for +650.

M 2 AKT752
Bd 4 -
Dlr W 4
Vul All K98432
 86 J94
 Q5 AJT932
 AKJ765 T82
 Q75 6
 Q3
 K8764
 Q93
 AJT

W	N	E	S
1D!	2S!	//	

On board 4 in the second match Tony opened with a Precision 1D, and South had a momentarily lapse when he initially informed us that the 2S overcall was natural, forgetting the 1D opening was at least 2, and then remembered they had agreed to treat 1D as natural, so corrected his explanation to spades and clubs.

South had no way of knowing he had such a good fit, and elected to play in the lower level contract with the 5-2 fit, rather than the possibly easier 5-3 club fit, so 2S was passed out.

Since we could have had the majority of the HCPs (and did!), I went for the maximum and led my singleton club, which picked up Tony's CQ and, with the aid of the even break in trumps, gave declarer 12 easy tricks for -230.

However, this was not a joy for declarer, who had a very shapely hand with a great fit and knew that a game swing had been lost, and was right, +10 1imps to us.

M 2 T9
Bd 9 K97532
Dlr N JT3
Vul EW 75
 A82 KQ76
 84 QT
 AQ82 K76
 AQT4 KJ92
 J543
 AJ6
 954
 863
W N E S
 / / 1NT /
 3NT //

System was very important on board 9 in the second match, as the unfortunate West that ended in 3NT (there appeared to be only 1 out of 5) was very quickly down when North led a low heart and NS took the first 6 tricks for -200.

At our table our 1NT opening showed 13-15 and balanced, with no thoughts of slam, Tony raised to 3NT and South was on lead with nothing to guide him.

There is no text-book lead from South's motley collection, although with such a poor hand many would shy away from leading spades, and I would guess that a minor suit might be favoured, trying to find North with something.

As it turns out, West has got so much that South is actually stronger than North.

If you are going to lead a heart, it does not make sense to lead the H6, as that may block the suit, and leading the HJ may cause confusion in partner's mind, so it may as well be the HA!

M 3 J8
Bd 1 T9
Dlr N 9542
Vul Nil 98764
 T92 AKQ543
 AKQ4 3
 KJ8 AQ87
 KT5 A2
 76
 J87652
 T3
 QJ3
W N E S
 / / 1C! /
 1NT / 2S /
 3S / 4C! /
 4S / 6S /
 6NT //

On board 1 in the third match a systemic stuff-up lost us 8 lmps when we stayed out of cold grand slam, bid at 3 other tables.

Tony's 1NT response showed 11+ and balanced, and his next bid of 3S showed 3-card (or 4) support and a stronger hand.

I intended my 4C as a cuebid, hoping for 4H from him, after which I would have bid 5D, looking for the grand slam, and I took his 4S response as denying the HA, which surely meant he had the minor suit Kings, so I jumped to 6S.

Alas, the 4C bid is actually a control-ask in clubs, and Tony's 4S response showed the King or a singleton, and with such a good hand himself, he knew that if I already wanted to be in slam opposite what he had shown thus far, the grand slam was on.

He bid 6NT intending to offer either 7S or 7NT, but I thought he was trying to protect the HK from being led through, and expecting to be off the HA, I could only pass!

M 3 A6
Bd 3 AKJ98
Dlr S 42
Vul EW 9753
 J873 K2
 7 Q654
 KT73 AJ85
 AQJ8 KT2
 QT954
 T32
 Q96
 64
W N E S
 / / / /
 1D 1H 2H /
 3C / 3NT //

Board 3 in the third match looked initially like I had a guess for the DQ to make 9 tricks in 3NT.

After Tony opened 1D (11-15) I was interested in game, but not committed to it. When he rebid 3C instead of 2S, as my cue-bid was likely to deny a 4-card spade holding, I assumed that this meant he had both minors, so I was encouraged to bid 3NT myself.

South led the H2, showing an honour, and North put in the HJ, but I ducked, trying to sever communications. It was 2 to 1 that South had a top honour, so I was planning to duck hearts if continued by North and I would have gone off!

However, North cashed the top hearts and exited with the H9, which I assumed to be suggesting a spade entry and I saw the South had the HT.

After 4 rounds of clubs I knew 9 of North's cards, and probably the SA was a tenth, so I finessed diamonds the right way for +600.

M 3 53
Bd 20 76
Dir W JT95
Vul All 96543
 JT987 KQ4
 QJ5 92
 74 Q32
 JT8 AKQ72

 A62
 AKT843
 AK86
 -

W	N	E	S
/	/	1C	X
/	1D	2C	3H
/	4D	//	

On board 20 in the third match we were lucky that NS could not believe their good fortune and stayed out of game.

South doubled my Precision 1C opening, and showed a good suit in a good hand when she bid 3H, but South did not raise hearts as he might have done, nor did he try his other suit, and inexplicably, when North rebid 4D, South did not raise to game!

Tony has a number of safe leads against 4H, but the only lead that defeats the game is a trump. On any other lead South can duck a spade and ruff a spade in dummy to take the diamond finesse before playing 3 rounds of trumps to lose just 2 tricks.

On a trump lead, I can win the first or second spade and lead another trump, eliminating the ruff, and the entry to dummy to take the diamond finesse.

5D has no problems, North can lose either 2 spades, or a spade and a diamond.

M 4 KQ86
Bd 15 7
Dir S AKJ9
Vul NS AQ94
 T9732 54
 A32 KQJ8
 - Q87643
 KJT83 5

 AJ
 T9654
 T52
 762

W	N	E	S
2S!	2NT	/	/
	3NT	//	3D!

Board 15 in the fourth match was a small gain for us but it should have been a large loss.

West's 2S opening showed spades and a minor, and Tony had nowhere to go, so he bid a flawed 2NT, a little too strong, and with too few hearts.

My 3D was meant to be transfer to hearts, and I was puzzled when Tony ignored the transfer and carried on to 3NT, but I had nothing further to say.

East dutifully led his partner's major, and Tony won with the SA and led the DT, playing low when West showed out.

On winning the DQ East led the HK, and when that held, continued with the H8 to West, who returned the S3! Now it only took the club finesse for Tony to chalk up +600 and +3 Imps.

East asked why the heart did not come back to take the contract 1 off, but West had had a 'Seniors moment' and forgot about the hearts.

M 4 KQT
Bd 20 QT83
Dir W J96
Vul All J87
 985 42
 J65 K74
 KQ732 A85
 T9 K6532

 AJ763
 A92
 T4
 AQ4

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

Board 20 in the fourth match was very difficult to evaluate for all of the pairs, and in spite of not getting to the cold game, we gained an 3 Imps for making 11 tricks.

My suit was not good, but I preferred the 1S overcall to 1NT to show my points, and when Tony supported spades, my thoughts immediately turned to game.

For some reason he did not think his trumps and heart honours constituted enough help, so he declined my invitation, and West led the CT.

I drew 2 rounds of trumps finishing in dummy and called for the HQ, covered by East, which meant I now had 10 tricks, with the club loser being parked on the long heart, but West won the HJ and led the C9, so I had 3 club tricks and a diamond loser went on the long heart, for 11 tricks.

Only 1 pair got to game and they went down.

M 5 96542
Bd 11 3
Dlr S QT976
Vul Nil 32
 - AQT7
 AQT976 K
 K53 AJ84
 K986 AQ54
 KJ83
 J8542
 2
 JT7

W	N	E	S
			/
1H	/	1S	/
2H	/	3NT	/
4H	/	5H	/
6H	//		

It is often remarked that many a contract is doomed by the play to the first trick, and board 11 in the fifth match was such an example.

I was quietly confident of beating 6H, given my 5 trumps and spade holding, but was not going to give anything away by doubling, since 6H going off was unlikely to be a bad board for us.

Tony led the C3, and West made what turned out to be a fatal mistake by winning in hand with the CK, leading a trump to the table, then ruffing a spade to lead out the trumps, throwing 2 spades and a diamond, and putting me in on the fourth round.

Nothing looked good for me to return, so I tried my only shot and returned the D2, which West felt compelled to run to the table for the free finesse, but nothing is free, as she had no way to return to hand to draw the last trump and I ruffed the next diamond for +50 and 14 Imps.

West lamented the failure to win the first trick on the table, then she had an entry with the CK and we would have lost a couple of Imps.

M 5 KJ8653
Bd 18 76
Dlr E Q2
Vul NS KJ3
 972 QT
 5432 QJT8
 KJ9 84
 842 AQ765
 A4
 AK9
 AT7653
 T9

W	N	E	S
		1C	2D!
/	2S	/	3C!
/	3NT	//	

Fourth highest of your longest and strongest used to be a standard maxim, and it is still true on many hands today, as it was for board 18 in the fifth match.

My 2D was intermediate style, and my 3C was a request forward going, and Tony's 3NT closed out the auction.

If East had led the C6, good old 4th highest, Tony would have had to get the hand just right to make 10 tricks, and any slip would have spelled defeat, but East had a surprise for us in the form of another good suit, so they led the HQ.

Tony won on the table and with more entries in dummy attacked diamonds, leading towards his DQ. West rose with the DK and led a club, but with everything friendly, he won the third club and made the rest of the tricks for +630 and 9 Imps.

On a club lead, the diamond play is not successful, and he has to play the spades for 6 tricks, but maybe he would have when East drops the ST on the first round, as the precise layout is the only chance, assuming that East was not being devious with Tx.