

2017 BBC Graded Butler Pairs by Richard Wallis

A disappointing entry of 54 pairs contested the Graded Butler Pairs at BBC this year, down from 56 pairs last year, but the competition was fierce, with the lead constantly changing, especially in A grade.

At the end of the day Neville Francis and Murray Perrin emerged victorious in A grade, with Chuan Qin / Charlie Lu in second and Phil Hale / Pam Shoen third.

B grade winners were Alan Boyce and Ian Barfoot from Janet Price / Richard Spelman in second and Ross Murtagh / Annette Hyland in third. Twins Pat and Peter Burke won the C grade, from Unis Suliman / Steven Parkes in second and Nanette Hinsch / Jill O'Malley Jones in third place.

I played with Tim Runting, and we could never get out of second gear, small wins and small losses, leaving us mid-field. Even two matches that seemed like a win for us turned out to be a small loss.

M 1	AT3				On board 6 in the first match I have no serious call to make, but
Bd 6	AK9842				wanted to suggest a lead if West became declarer, so I over-called the
Dir E	42				1C opening bid with the robust 4-card spade suit! West doubled to
Vul EW	76				show the hearts, but Tim's 2S raise silenced the opposition bidding.
65		9874			West dutifully led the C2, and I ruffed the third club to lead a diamond
QJT6		5			off the table. The hearts in dummy daunted West, so after winning the
A765		K98			DK, he led another diamond. East won with the DK and she returned
QT2		AKJ95			a spade, which I won in dummy and cashed the spades and the top
	KQJ2				diamonds and hearts for 9 tricks and +140.
	73				This was worth a modest 5 Imps, but the defence could have been a
	QJT3				lot harder, putting 2S in serious jeopardy.
	843				A trump lead or at the very least a trump switch after East wins the CK
W	N	E	S		would have been very awkward.
X	2S	1C	1S!		
		//			
M 3	QJ4				On board 21 in the third match East made a normal 3D preempt at
Bd 21	T9753				favourable vulnerability and West took a chance on 3NT. Only 16
Dir N	8				HCPs, but Kxx in the long suit is golden, so worth a shot at game.
Vul NS	Q532				The spotlight then fell on Tim, who had to lead in the dark and
A972		53			obviously after my take-out double, chose to lead a major suit!
KQ62		-			Fourth highest of your longest and strongest is an old stand-by, and
K43		AJT9762			Tim fell back on it by leading the H5!
KJ		T964			Technically I think the HT is better than 4 th highest if you lead hearts,
	KT86				but that is immaterial since a heart lead gives declarer her 9 th trick, or
	AJ84				10 if I win the HA at trick 1.
	Q5				While the 5-card suit offers the chance for the most tricks, the spade
	A87				suit is where North can help, so that is the best chance to set up 5
W	N	E	S		tricks, and I would have led the SQ, which leads to a 1 trick set and 10
3NT	/	3D	X		Imps to us.
	//				

M 3 T84
Bd 22 T83
Dir E QT93
Vul EW KQ8
KQJ A976
KJ76 542
A65 2
J64 AT953

532
AQ9
KJ874
72

W	N	E	S
		/	/
1NT	/	2C	!
2H	/	2NT	//

On board 22 in the third match I was tempted to open the South hand 1D (at least a 4-card suit), but I did not have a convenient rebid so meekly passed.

When East made a Stayman inquiry, I was again tempted to bid 2D to suggest a lead, but meekness won again and I passed.

When 2NT was passed out, to my surprize, Tim led the DT! Even if declarer had the DA it is still what I wanted, so I encouraged and when declarer ducked, Tim continued with the DQ to unblock the suit, so declarer ducked again, discarding 2 hearts from dummy.

The third diamond set up my suit, so declarer was on the wood unless the diamonds broke 6-3 and the HA was not with the diamonds.

Declarer cashed the top spades, and focussing on the clubs, led the CJ. This was covered by Tim, and he won the club return and exited with a diamond.

Declarer was squeezed on the diamonds and discarded her club and a heart, and when I cashed the HA for 1 off, declarer miss-guessed the next heart and went 2 off for +200 and 5 Imps.

M 4 QJ
Bd 3 Q942
Dir S Q64
Vul EW KT43
9753 AKT85
AT65 KJ83
87 JT5
A87 6

62
7
AK932
QJ952

W	N	E	S
			1D!
/	1H	1S	2C
2D!	3C	3S	/
4S	/	/	5C
X	//		

On board 3 in the fourth match since we were not playing two-suited weak opening bids, I took advantage of the favourable vulnerability to open the South hand 1D.

I showed my second suit over the 1S overcall, and West cue-bid 2D to show a good raise in spades. When Tim raised clubs I waited to see if West was going to pass or bid 1 more, and when he did bid the game, I took the sacrifice.

EW took the commonsense action by doubling 5C rather than bidding again, and West led the S3 to 5CX, East cashing 2 spades and exiting with a trump.

There was nothing to the play and even with the 3-1 club break I had 9 tricks for 2 off and -300.

The 3-1 trump break was good news for me, as since the HQ was marked by Tim's response, 11 tricks in spades were easy, so it looked like a pick-up for us, however most missed game so we lost 3 Imps.

M 5 J4
Bd 9 KQ98
Dir N Q7
Vul EW T9763
KT52 Q876
A732 JT4
AJ86 K
8 QJ542

A93
65
T95432
AK

W	N	E	S
	/	/	1D
X	1H	2S	//

On board 9 in the fifth match Tim made a risky take-out of the 1D opening, hoping for a major suit contract, and got lucky when as a passed hand, I jumped to 2S, which became the final contract.

South led the H6, and I ducked in dummy, North winning the HQ. After some thought, she returned the H8, which I won in hand.

I wanted at least 1 round of trumps, so cashed the DK and led to the SK in dummy, to pull a club, ducking to South.

South now led a diamond, and I won the DA in dummy, since I was planning a cross-ruff, and got a pleasant surprize to see the DQ drop from North.

North ruffed the DJ and I over-ruffed to ruff a club in dummy, setting up the CJ and ruffed another diamond to hand.

South was forced to ruff the CJ which I could over-ruff and now the only trump was the SA thus I could cross-ruff for 10 tricks and a modest 2 Imps.

M 6 AJ3
Bd 20 AQT63
Dir W 94
Vul All Q53
 T75 96
 7 J85
 J8632 AKQT75
 AK42 86

 KQ842
 K942
 -
 JT97

W N E S
 / 1H 3D 4D
 5C! / / X
 5D / / 5H
 //

On board 20 in the sixth match I ignored my spade suit and supported Tim's hearts by cue-bidding 4D.

West bid 5C over this and when it came back to me I made a classical mistake when I doubled for penalties instead of bidding the obvious 5H!

If I had left East to his own deliberations, he is likely to lead the DA as most of the field did, and then 5H can make an overtrick.

However, when West pulled my double of 5C, he showed his true colours by bidding 5D, and now East reconsidered his opening lead and ignored his great diamond suit to lead a club, leading to a painless 1 off, -100 and 12 Imps away.

West knows from East's jump that there is at most one diamond trick so it was important that East lead a club, hence the lead-directing bid.

Two tables played in 5HX on the diamond lead for 12 tricks to NS, so the average was -710.

M 6 Q53
Bd 21 Q875
Dir N 8
Vul NS AJ532
 87 KJ642
 JT96 43
 QT32 96
 KQ9 T874

 AT9
 AK2
 AKJ754
 6

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

On board 21 in the sixth match I took a positive view with my great distributional hand and raised to game in hearts, knowing that it could be a 4-3 fit, but at least a cross-ruff was viable.

East led the S4 and the S9 won on the table. Tim cashed the top diamonds and ruffed the D4 with the H8, winning the trick!

A club ruff next and another diamond which he could have ruffed with the H7, but just in case East had made a mistake earlier, and now having 10 sure tricks, he made sure of the contract by ruffing with the HQ and ruffing another club.

That was 2 hearts in hand to go with 3 in dummy, and 2 spades, 2 diamonds and a club make 10! Game in Notrumps or hearts was a common contract, so +620 was a flat board.

Deep Finesse suggests that 3NT can be held to just 9 tricks, but 10 were more common. Even though East can set up his spade suit, he has no entry to cash them.

M 6 QJ74
Bd 22 AK63
Dir E 7
Vul EW QT87
 AT9832
 T954
 J9
 9

6
 8
 K85432
 KJ652

K5
 QJ72
 AQT6
 A43

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

On board 22 in the sixth match Tim and I were on different pages of the system notes, and Tim ended up in 4S on a reasonable 4-2 fit, but luckily for him, against a 6-1 break!

My 2NT over the weak 2D was natural, and Tim's 3C was asking for a major suit. East's double of 3C showed another suit and my 3H was a 4-card suit.

Tim was doing me the favour of playing my system, and he mixed up some of our complicated responses, bidding 4S thinking that I had denied hearts and shown spades. West was so content that he did not double for fear of steering us into a better contract!

East led the H8, and Tim won in hand to lead a spade to dummy, won by West who returned a heart. The cat was out of the bag when East discarded, but now Tim was able to cash 4 hearts, 2 diamonds (via the finesse) and 1 club. He now led a diamond off the table and caught West in a trump coup with this position.

QJ7

—

—

Q10

109832

—

Irrelevant

—

—

5

—

106

43

If West ruffs the diamond high, Tim discards and wins the high spade return to exit with a club which West has to ruff. Now declarer has J7 over West's 83 and therefore makes 10 tricks for +420 and a flat board.

M 7 AJ5
Bd 25 JT98652
Dir N KQ
Vul EW 4
 -
 A
 T6543
 AKQT753

KQT962
 KQ4
 2
 J82

8743
 73
 AJ987
 96

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

On board 25 in the seventh match I jumped to 2S over the 1H opening to show a 6-card suit and 10-12 HCPs.

When Tim bid 3C, it looked like 5C would be a safe contract, but I thought I would give 3NT a go first although I had serious misgivings about my diamond shortage.

This was exacerbated by the diamond lead and the initial sight of the long clubs in dummy, but my fears were eased by the 5-card diamond suit that was finally placed down on the table.

North won the DQ and after much thought switched to a heart, so I was able to cash 10 tricks and concede the final 2 for +630 and a flat board.

5C can take the same 10 tricks, plus one or more diamond ruffs for 11 or 12 tricks and this would still be true if Tim's hand had 3 small diamonds, giving 3NT no real chance on a diamond lead, so 5C was a safer contract.