

Each year, the June long weekend offers players so much choice of top bridge that it's hard to decide which event to enter. Probably it's the weather that attracts people to the Barrier Reef Congress, held in Townsville this year. Teams going north were mainly from Queensland, but the NSW and South Australian line-ups were strong, and seeded highly. There were 44 Open teams and 18 Restricted teams, a Restricted Pairs event, and the Walk-in Pairs on the Friday were very popular too.

Our team, seeded 2, consisted of Andy Braithwaite, who was off to represent Australia in the Seniors straight after the Barrier Reef, Nathan Van Jole, a talented young dynamo, 26 years of age, returning to bridge after setting up a business for himself (good thinking, 99), David Beauchamp, a top Sydney player and teacher, and me (lucky me). Nathan and David played together and had a 20 minute system discussion before the event started. They weren't the least bit concerned. "David's a pro!" Nathan told me, suggesting he could handle anything. Indeed anything could happen!

Our second match, vs SCUDDER, containing the Sydney pair of Marcia Scudder & Inez Glander teamed with 2011 Qld reps Maureen Jakes & Rosie Green, produced two boards on a similar theme.

BD: 18	♠64 ♥QJ65 ♦J9532 ♣92	Dlr: E Vul: N-S
♠ 8 ♥AT743 ♦Q7 ♣AKQJ8	♠AKQJ ♥K982 ♦KT86 ♣4	♠T97532 ♥ ♦A4 ♣T7653

Bidding:

E	S	W	N
2♠	X	p	3♥
P	4♥	X	all pass

Andy Braithwaite, (E), feeling frisky with his 6/5 shape non vul, opened 2♠. Marcia chose to double, maybe because she was holding four hearts. I passed, Inez bid 3♥, and Marcia raised 4♥. Naturally I found the double. When declarer lost control of the hand, the result was – 5 (1400). Having such spade values should caution South against entering the fray. The same thing appeared a few boards later, although the opening bid was not a pre-empt.

BD: 26	♠T76543	Dlr: E
	♥4	Vul: Both
	♦QT8	
	♣J52	
♠AQ82		♠KJ
♥T852		♥K63
♦J		♦97642
♣AKQ4		♣T76
	♠9	
	♥AQJ97	
	♦AK53	
	♣983	

Bidding:

E	S	W	N
P	1♥	X	p
2♦	all pass		

Andy passed, Marcia opened 1♥, and I had a choice of bids. Holding four cards in the opened suit was not attractive, and I chose the worst option, double. We discussed the bidding later, and voted for 1NT being the best action, and 1♠, second choice. Inez passed, and Andy made a normal bid of 2♦. Marcia passed, and I was stuck. I passed, hoping for the best (but that's not bridge!), and Andy went -300 in the revolting contract of 2♦. We undeservedly gained on the board when EW somehow got to 3♠ X, (-500).

So: as ever, values and length in the opponents' suits reduce the quality of a hand, and if you feel on these occasions that you *must* enter the auction, there are better bids than double!

Brd 24 in our match against Bowden yielded a strange result.

BD: 24	♠T7	Dlr: W
	♥K84	Vul: None
	♦Q983	
	♣Q974	
♠J65		♠K92
♥965		♥AQT
♦AKT76		♦5
♣KT		♣J86532
	♠AQ843	
	♥J732	
	♦J42	
	♣A	

Bidding:

W	N	E	S
P	p	p	1♠
2♦	all pass		

At David & Nathan's table, there were three passes to David Beauchamp, (South), who opened 1♠. West overcalled 2♦, and Nathan passed. So that's where it was played – going 5 down. At our table, I didn't overcall 2♦, and somehow NS got into the same contract – 2♦! This time it went -3 ,so the result was + 250, and +150!

Overcalling in a minor is a dangerous thing to do without a very good suit and points. David said that he encourages his partners to have a 6 card suit when overcalling a minor at the 2 level, as then they know there's a source of tricks for the most likely game contract of 3NT. West's 5332 shape is balanced (defensive –not offensive), and the suit lacks pip cards.

Suit quality, or, rather the lack of, reared its ugly head again in our match against the Brockwell team (John Brockwell , up from Canberra's cold temperatures), Richard Wallis, Annette Maluish and Neville Francis, in the second last match.

D: 1	♠QJ84	Dlr: N
	♥J9	Vul: None
	♦A72	
	♣8765	
♠AK75		♠
♥KQ72		♥T6543
♦6		♦KQJ8
♣KJ43		♣AQT2
	♠T9632	
	♥A8	
	♦T9543	
	♣9	

Bidding:

N	E	S	W
P	1♥	1♠	4♦
4♠	p	p	X all pass

Richard Wallis, sitting North, passed in 1st position, and Andy opened 1♥. John Brockwell couldn't resist entering the auction, with 1♠! He was certainly heating up the pace and the place! I bid 4♦, a splinter agreeing hearts, and Richard jumped to 4♠ (getting very hot now!). Andy passed and I was able to double. This went -5 , for 1100, and more than half the field were in 6♥, failing when they omitted to discover that they were off two (cashing) aces!!! Sure enough in our match the same thing had happened, so it was +1100, +50.

I'd organised for Andy, David and me to do some talks after the games, a mini-Celebrity Speakers programme. Andy's topic of "Improve Your Opening Leads" must have struck a chord with many players, because they would regularly come up to ask what he thought of various leads (usually their partner's bad ones, of course). He didn't seem to approve of some of mine, so I am busily re-reading his notes! The lead Andy found on this hand is really worth a mention:

BD: 8 ♠AQ963 **Dlr: W**
♥3 **Vul: None**
♦A4
♣KQJ64

♠852	♠KT4
♥A65	♥JT942
♦QJ72	♦KT5
♣987	♣T5

♠J7
♥KQ87
♦9863
♣A32

Bidding:

W	N	E	S
P	1♣	p	1♥
P	1♠	p	3♣
P	3NT	all pass	

I passed as West. N opened 1♣, Andy passed, and S bid 1♥. They then bid to a reasonable 3NT. Andy led the ♥4, 4th highest from ♥J10942. His reason for 4th highest instead of top of the ♥J109 sequence?

When the opponent on your left has bid the suit you want to lead, the books say it is correct to lead 4th highest from your long suit holding regardless of your holding in it! I have read about this, but had never seen it work in action.

Declarer naturally called for the ♥K, and I won the ♥A, and did not continue! I switched to the ♦2, which, if continued, would also have beaten the contract, but Andy returned the ♥J, forcing the ♥Q, and later his ♥10 and ♥9 removed dummy's ♥8 and ♥7, and his ♥2 scored as well. We beat it by 2 tricks. I must admit, I didn't think he had started with the ♥J10942

David Beauchamp had talked about Common Mistakes at the Bridge Table, and one of his interesting tips was that if you hold Axxx of the trump suit, try ducking twice before taking your A.

BD: 12 ♠JT75 **Dlr: W**
♥6 **Vul: N-S**
♦QT4
♣K7654

♠A	♠K986
♥KJ53	♥QT74
♦A98	♦J73
♣JT832	♣AQ

♠Q432

♥A982

♦K652

♣9

Bidding

W	N	E	S
1♣	P	1♥	P
3♥	P	4♣	p
4♦	p	4♥	all pass

That very trump holding appeared on this board, in our match against the No 1 seeded Fordham team (Peter Fordham, once a Queenslander so he told me later, Ross Stuart, returning to bridge after a long absence, David Lusk, and Bruce Neil, with various claims to original Queenslanders!).

At both tables, W opened 1♣, 1♥ from E, 3♥ from W, (at one table, now 4♣ (cue) E, 4♦ (cue) W) then 4♥. At our table, we didn't; bother to cue, and landed in the same 4♥ spot.

At Nathan and David's table, David led the ♠2- with trump length it's always best to lead long suits, hoping to set up a forcing defence. It seemed from the cue bidding auction that perhaps the opposition were missing spade controls. Best line of play for declarer is to establish the side suit, clubs. Peter Fordham's error was changing tack – first drawing trumps, then ruffing spades, then playing the side-suit.

At trick 2-he led ♥K which David ducked (naturally following his lesson tip) , then played a club to his ♣Q. Trick 4 was a spade ruff, then club to Ace , David ruffed and exited a small ♦ to Nathan's ♦Q. Nathan now did well returning a spade- declarer won ♠K, and discarded a diamond from dummy. He now led a trump – David won ♥A and led another diamond. Declarer now ran ♣J, Nathan ducked and David ruffed for - 1.

At our table, Andy went about setting his club side suit up, and David Lusk continued to refuse to ruff. Eventually the defenders made two tricks, the ♥A, and a diamond honour, 11 tricks to us, +450.

We were in a strong position, and finished first. I was so pleased to be in such a team. The boys were always positive, and we had great fun, during the day, scoring up, at drinks, at dinner, always. There's no doubt that a positive attitude and a non-fault-finding approach allows everyone to stay focused and confident.

Thanks to everyone who organised the congress, and thanks in particular to Larry Norden, whose business, Cosmetics Plus, sponsored the event. Bring on next year!

Results: Open Teams:

1. Braithwaite. (Andy Braithwaite, Joan Butts, Nathan van Jole, David Beauchamp) 196
2. Travis. (Barbie Travis Lauren Travis, Peter Gill, John Gill) 182
3. Fordham (Peter Fordham, Ross Stuart, David Lusk, Bruce Neill) 181

Restricted Teams

1. David O’Gorman, Julie Jefferies, Evelyne Mander, Brenda Lazarus 129
2. Jillian Tuckey, Rozanne Thomas, Christine Baynes, Angela Hall 115
3. Clive Bunnett, Maria Chippendale, John Tradrea, Carol Blackman 103

Restricted Pairs

1. Evelyne Mander, Brenda Lazarus 136
2. David Earnshaw, Chris Mayfield 111
3. Rebecca Delaney, Lesley Fraser 105