France v. Iceland

In the opening round of the Open Teams in Group A, France faced Iceland. In the open room the father and son pairing of Thomas and Michel Bessis were pitted against Sigurbjorn Haraldsson and Jon Baldursson, whilst in the closed room Magnus Magnusson and Throstur Ingimarsson competed against Frederic Volcker and Alain Levy. This match was interesting to me for two reasons: firstly I play most of my bridge in France and so I am cognisant of the standard bidding system employed in France which forms the basis of both French pairs’ system card. Secondly I have been having discussions about the relative merits of a strong no-trump five-card major system. So the results on these deals could prove ammunition for either of the parties involved in the discussions.

The very first board produced a swing.


| ♠️ Q 10 4 3  |
| ♦️ J         |
| ♣️ A K J 8 3 2 |
| ♠️ 9 7 2     |
| ♦️ K 10      |
| ♣️ Q 10 9 7 5 2 |
| ♠️ 9 6 5     |

Open Room

West  | North    | East    | South
---    |---        |---      |---
Baldursson | Bessis T. | Haraldsson | Bessis M.
1♠️     | Pass      | Pass    | 1♥️
1♠️     | Pass      | Pass    | 2♦️
3♠️     | Pass      | Pass    | 3♠️
4♠️     | All Pass  |         |

South made no forward move to slam, perhaps realising that his red honours were not going to be full value opposite his partner’s hand being black-suited. East cashed the diamond ace and declarer peacefully made eleven tricks to record +450.

Closed Room

West  | North    | East    | South
---    |---        |---      |---
Levy   | Magnusson | Volcker | Ingimarsson
1♠️*   | Pass      | Pass    | 1♦️*
1♠️    | Pass      | Pass    | 2♦️*
3♠️    | Pass      | Pass    | 3♠️
4♠️    | Pass      | 4NT     |
5♠️    | Pass      | 5♦️     |
6♠️    | Pass      | 6♣️     |
All Pass |

Here South was more forceful and pressed on to the slam. Which way would the swing go? East led the ♥️3. Declarer went into the tank and eventually played low, West took his king and returned a diamond for an immediate one-trick defeat -50 and 10 IMPs to France.

In the Open series the hand was played in the slam twenty one times and was made fifteen losing only six times. Of course some declarers had an easier ride, especially those declaring from the South hand. Personally if any of my students had led a small heart I would have been up with the ace in a flash and put my faith in establishing the clubs and correctly guessing the diamonds without realising that the deal is an awful lot more complicated than that. If you take the time to investigate the various possible ways of playing the hand against all reasonable distributions by using Deep Finesse you will find that it is important that either the ♠️10 or the ♥️K is doubleton.

Should the finesse succeed, then you need very little else for the slam to come home. It is easy sitting here viewing all four hands to be dismissive of a play, but it was self-evident that the declarer gave a great deal of thought as to the correct plan to make his contract.

Board 2 was a flat game and Board 3 was an overtrick IMP in a part-score to the French, then came:

Michel Bessis, France
South led his singleton ♣K and East recorded an easy eleven tricks for 10 IMPs to Iceland.

Board 5 was amusing that in both rooms the opponents doubled a game bid and misdefended to give declarer an overtrick.

Board 6 was a flat 4♣+2. For the French camp, dummy discovered a 4-4 spade fit with 14 points opposite an opening strong NT but made no effort, whilst the Icelanders had a more informative auction but still subsided at the four-level. The slam was not a particularly good one (though excellent according to Hamman), needing a 3-3 club break with some other chances.

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Without the barrage E/W had no problem in remaining at the four-level and the contract was made easily enough for 13 IMPs to France.

This was followed by a confidence sapping bombshell.

Board 26. Dealer East. All Vul.

West showed that his opening bid was really based on a club suit by continuing to the five-level, doubled by North. That player would have had to find a diamond lead to beat the contract but in this case ‘father knows best’ and removed to 5♣. East led the ♦8, won by West with the jack and switched to ♦7, East contributing the 3. Declarer now played a low diamond towards the queen which was taken by West, who attempted to cash the ♦K — much to his chagrin as North now wrapped up the contract. West knew he had to cash out but it seems that East/West either had a signalling error or there was genuine confusion as the BBO commentators conjectured that East would have to lead the 8 from both 98 and 986.

Closed Room

West
Levy

North
Magnusson

East
Volcker

South
Ingimarsson

Rdbl* 1♠

3♥

Pass

Dble

Pass

All Pass

Semi GF or GF in hearts

North had to lead a diamond but naturally enough cached his ♦A and played a small spade to put his partner in to give him a heart ruff. This was an excellent strategy but no one had told West that this was the plot as he cruelly ruffed the spade and claimed plus one and a huge 15 IMPs to France, who now led 41-11.

Sigurbjorn Haraldsson, Iceland
South had obviously read the Bols Tip about responding (I expect the editor will put a comment in here) and West joined the fun with a light double. North showed his strength with a Redouble and East showed his values with jump to 2♠, eventually South bid 3♣ in response to his partner's double and West thought he had done enough with his original double and so East/West sold out. After a trump lead declarer was not too thoroughly tested. At trick two he lead an unblocking nine of diamonds and finessed, pinning the ten. He then drew trumps and cashed four more diamond tricks making the contract +1.

Closed Room

It was not made clear as the exact meaning of South's first bid though without intervention it is game-forcing with a four-card fit. Whatever it was or supposed to be North got over excited and they ended a level too high. East/West cashed the first three tricks to record another 12 IMPs.

Board 29. Dealer North. All Vul.

GRATIS CARDS
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Used cards are also sold at low prices.
A part-score battle and obviously with the way the wind was blowing it would be icy for Iceland. It is noteworthy to look at North’s hand and compare it with the heart preempt earlier and then this time not even a weak two squeak, presumably because it was too strong. When East’s precision-style 2♣ bid was overcalled by a passed hand he re-entered the fray showing his other black suit with a double. South showed confidence and general strength with a redouble and West retreated to the club suit. The defence started with two rounds of hearts, the second being ruffed by declarer, who tried to encourage an error from the defence by repeatedly leading diamonds but they played with straight and true bat and came to their five tricks for one off and +100.

North plucked the weak two arrow from his quiver but to no avail. Maybe he was hoping that East/West would overextend themselves in 4♥ or that there might be a play for game South bid the heart game. Yet again the defence took the contract off with the first tricks, in this case four of them. Five Imps to France and a lead of 71-11. The final three boards were flat, so that became the final score. This translated into 20 VPs to France and thus after the first round of the Open Series Group A they were leaders.

You can replay all the deals from this match at: BBO O1 France Iceland

Budapest 2016

Yesterday representatives from Hungary made a presentation to the EBL Executive regarding their candidacy for the 2016 European Team Championships. There are two possible venues and later this year a delegation from the EBL will carry out a formal inspection.

If all goes according to plan it is anticipated that a contract will be signed during the 2014 Champions Cup later this year.