

USBF Team Trials, USA-2 Finals Wrap
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USA-2 to Nickell

The Nick Nickell, Capt (Richard Freeman, Bob Hamman- Zia Mahmood, Jeff Meckstroth - Eric Rodwell) and Marty Fleisher, Capt. (Michael Kamil, Russell Ekeblad- Peter Weichsel, Matthew Granovetter -Ron Rubin) teams, competing for USA-2 and the right to play in this fall's Bermuda Bowl in Sao Paolo Brazil, played 30 of their 90 board match on Sunday followed by a full evening's rest for recharging mental batteries. Nickell, the original #1 seed led the #9 seed Fleisher by 6imps 62-56.

'Hostilities' resumed Monday morning and Fleisher put together a strong 3rd segment, winning 42-20, and then fought back from some weak results in the 4th 15-board segment to a 41-41 segment tie with 60 of 90 boards completed. The score after 60 boards: 139 – 123, a 16imp Fleisher lead.

The tide turned on board 62 when Fleisher and Kamil bid to a very low percentage slam that failed by 3 tricks.

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s5.htm#bd62

Nickell outscored Fleisher 42-3 in the segment, and then in the first 10 boards of the last segment by 43-3 to put the match away. They accomplished this by sustained pressure, better judgment, and superior card play. Board 65 was an example of the former:

Dealer: N

Vul.: none

♠ Q642
♥ 5
♦ 8642
♣ KT62

♠ KT5
♥ AKQ983
♦ Q3
♣ Q5

♠ J
♥ J742
♦ KJ7
♣ 98743

♠ A9873
♥ T632
♦ AT95
♣ AJ

North	East	South	West
Ekeblad	Rodwell	Weichsel	Meckstroth
Pass	Pass	1D*	X
1S	2H	2S*	X#
Pass	3C	3H	4H
All Pass			

Hamman	Kamil	Zia	Fleisher
Pass	Pass	1S	2H
4S	5H	X	All Pass

In the Open room Ekeblad-Weichsel employ a canape style whereby the longest suit is not the first suit mentioned. The auction proceeded constructively and Meckwell were allowed to play in 4H with 4 top losers for -50.

Hamman bounced the auction directly to 4S with his "mini mini-splinter" hand putting Kamil under the kind of pressure that made 5H seem like a reasonable save?! given his partner's overcall (not a strength-showing double first?), his modicum of defense, and stiff spade.

4S would have failed by a trick but -300 swung 6imps to the Nickell squad. You may be thinking that the canape system was partly at fault, but look at board 55 where the system led to a 7 imp gain due to the terrible rebid problem by the West hand:

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s4.htm#bd55

On Board 73 Hamman, at favorable vulnerability, opened 2S, in first chair on KQT42 943 A984 6. Fleisher held A9 KQJ75 T75 A93 in the passout seat, and chose to double and play in 3C after partner's lebensohl 2N. Anyone for a balancing 2N? Tough problem and kudos to Hamman for the aggressive NV 1st chair preempt.

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s5.htm#bd73

The last board of the segment, Board 75, was an exercise in trust and probability:

Dealer: N

Vul.: none

♠ 63
♥ K2
♦ AJT743
♣ KQJ

♠ T7
♥ QJ87
♦ 952
♣ 8752

♠ AJ854
♥ A965
♦ 8
♣ A96

♠ KQ92
♥ T43
♦ KQ6
♣ T43

North	East	South	West
Ekeblad	Rodwell	Weichsel	Meckstroth
Hamman	Kamil	Zia	Fleisher
1D	1S	1N	Pass
2N	Pass	3N	All Pass

The auction was exactly the same at both tables, and a good example of the optimistic attitude of top flight players. It should be noted, particularly, that Ekeblad's hand was limited by his failure to open a forcing club.

Fleisher gave his lead some thought, then led, not unnaturally his partner's suit. Meckstroth, however, decided that Weichsel was prepared for a spade lead and found the killing HJ (Rusinow) which quickly led to 6 tricks and 11imps for Nickell. I'm sure he factored in the possibility that this was probably his only chance to be on lead in the entire hand. Well done!

The commentators discussed the pros and cons of double vs. the spade overcall with the east hand. This issue is exacerbated when 1D may be short.

Eric complimented Jeff at the hand's conclusion. I wonder what he might have said had Zia held the HA with Ekeblad holding the HT???

A comment was made that the Fleisher team might well win a trip to Sao Paulo for the Ernesto D'Orsi Cup with a Senior Team trial win. That event will start in Las Vegas after the July 4 holiday.

There are literally thousands of hands available for your pleasure from the Open Trials at usbf.org. Here is a link for the hands in this article:
http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s5.htm#bd75

The Fleisher team played 11 days straight and reached the finals of both brackets. The Nickell team had a bye into the semifinals of USA-1 and didn't start play until last Wednesday. How much does stamina and fatigue factor in? One commentator said that it is harder to win the Team Trial than it is to win the Bermuda Bowl. I saw more than a few surprising plays that bespoke a level of tiredness on all sides. All in all though, some truly fascinating bridge.

Here a few more great hands:

The Fleisher team recovered from a rash of bad results in the middle of the 4th segment and gave Meckwell a taste of their own medicine by bidding a 3N contract with only 20hcp that made! Check out boards 57 and 59 to see Rubin and Granovetter in form. The 21imps on these 2 hands helped them halve the set 41-41.

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s4.htm#bd57

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s4.htm#bd59

Hamman & Zia outbid Rubin & Granovetter on 2 slam decisions:

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s4.htm#bd52

http://usbf.org/docs/vugraphs/USBCUSA2/html/USBCUSA2_2009_F_2_s6.htm#bd86

I didn't watch the initial segments of the USA-1 120 board Semifinal with Fleisher against Nickell where Fleisher had a lead of 217- 140 with 30 boards to play, but I intend to review that match using the excellent interface on the usbf.org website.

The html vugraph files for that match are denoted: USBC2009_SF_4_s#_scores.html where # is the segment from 1-8. Oddly enough, SF_1 are the same hands...dunno why. Be sure to start with the "Open Trials" event results link and not the USBCUSA2 results if that's where you want to explore.

I wonder if the Nickell squad changed any tactics after being down 80imps in the first 90 boards? Or if they made a conscious decision to be more disruptive to the relay forcing club system in the USA-2 finals. Whatever they did worked and congratulations are in order for the Nickell squad who has represented the USA, with roughly the same lineup, in nearly every Bermuda Bowl since 1995. IMPRESSIVE