

WALES IN THE CAMROSE: BELFAST – January 2013

The first weekend of the 2013 Camrose season sees a fresh line up for Wales – familiar names but Filip Kurbalija and Tim Rees have had two years away from the team and now return in new partnerships, Filip with Patrick Shields and Tim with Gary Jones. The team is completed with Peter Goodman and Mike Pownall – again seasoned players and in this partnership for a second year. Both of these have played with Filip in the past. Alan Stephenson is back as captain.

Last year Wales collected its highest ever Camrose score (over both one weekend and over two); it has increased its score for each of the past four years. The team has had plenty of practice in the run-up thanks to the efforts of Julian Pottage, with regular matches against Australia and Cayne, and a smattering of others.

This year's Camrose has two teams from the Republic of Ireland, since they are hosting the second weekend. The numbers allow 3 concurrent matches in each of 5 rounds each weekend, but with an almost random draw each time and so a different sequence of matches. As always, each board is played 6 times and almost all the bidding and play has been recorded, courtesy of the wonderful BBO system - many thanks to Fred Gitelman and all the operators involved.

WALES & NORTHERN IRELAND. Wales had won all its encounters with Northern Ireland since this format started (12 matches) but sometimes they have been very close. This time Northern Ireland turned the tables on Wales, The opening boards were dynamite - bidding problems primarily.

		This hand is a tricky slam, since the heart suit is so fragile. In practice there is a singleton heart ace sitting over the queen, so a positive danger of losing three heart tricks.
AQJ8	--	For the Republic of Ireland, the strong club pair opened 2D showing a three suiter with short diamonds and they quickly got to 6C. A spade lead through the AQJ8 at trick one set up two winners to take care of heart losers and now two diamond ruffs gave Nick Fitzgibbon 12 tricks. For Northern Ireland the Blue Club pair opened 1S and then bid diamonds and clubs, ending in 6C without mentioning hearts. They got HJ lead to the singleton ace and that was an easy 12 tricks (and 14 imps to Ireland and to N Ireland on the first board), The only pair to open a natural 1C were the Scots, after which they ended in 6C but they got a trump lead. Playing a second trump cost them when they later lost a heart honour to the stiff ace and could not recover.
Q976	K842	
5	AK82	
KT43	AQJ92	
		Which leaves the three tables which ended in hearts, they all started with 1C and responder showed hearts and they could not get out of that suit. Wales and England played 5H while BJ O'Brien played the impossible 6H. In 5H, Frances Hinden won the prize by winning the DA at trick one and playing to the H6 and HA. When Wales played a heart to the queen, that was -1 and 14 imps for England.

The next board was a little simpler

A84	KQ63	After the bidding starts 1D-1H-2D, responder needs to recognise that this implies a 6+ card diamond suit and with the SA opposite there are good chances of 13 tricks. The odds only just favour the grand slam, but if opener had the DJ or a seventh diamond it would be an enormous contract. It was missed once in each of the three matches, and only in Wales vs N Ireland did it reverse the swing of board one. Ireland and England were both now well ahead.
54	AK9872	
A98763	KQ	
K2	A	

Hands continued to be (smaller scale) bidding challenges until this play hand came along ..

Q4	AT6	K7532 63 43 KJ75	Every team played in 3N by North on a spade lead to the SQ and SA, except where Scotland had opened an injudicious 2D in third seat and generated a diamond lead to the DT and DK. If the hearts play for 4 tricks, then there are an easy 9 tricks, but if they don't another is needed, and there is the danger of the opponents running the spade suit.
K972	T84		
QT652	AK8		
T3	A984		
	J98	KJ75	David Greenwood (NI) and Tom Hanlon (Republic of I) recognised that West was not a danger hand and losing a heart later might not hurt, so they played a club towards the queen at trick two. That took out the entry from the long spades and generated 9 tricks. CBAI, Scotland and Wales all missed the problem and played on hearts immediately, and two of these three (but not Wales!) were punished by West winning and returning a spade – and so beating the contract. Or at least beating it in practice when neither declarer managed to take the double finesse in diamonds to recover. So it was 10 imps to each of England, Ireland and Wales.
	AQJ5		
	J97		
	Q62		

Then came along this chunky 14-count in second seat at both vul : AQT9 - KT9 – QT - K853. It was opened twice as a 12-14 no trump, twice as a 14-16, and twice as a 15-17. The partners of the first two stopped in 2S after enquiring with their 4531 8-count, while the others all bid game. Northern Ireland and Scotland each gained 10 imps for that – moving the hosts a single imp ahead of Wales.

At the end of the stanza, Wales were 35-42 down to N Ireland, while Ireland was ahead 83-19 and Scotland-England was a draw at 36 all. All the sitting out pairs came in now, with Kurbalija-Shields replacing Goodman-Pownall.

The second half started quietly. First significant swing was on the third board where third hand at green was looking at JT9 – 743 – Q9753 – 63 and heard the bidding start 1S-P. The three who bid at this points played a spade part-score going minus, while the three who passed defended the cold 3N that gave the opposition 11 imps. England, Scotland and Wales all bid – while the three Irish teams passed.

Apart from that hand, N Ireland were on top form – look at this hand

AT954	6	In second seat the 10-count opened 1S (it happened at one other table too) and over his partner's non-forcing 3H, raised to game. The lead was C3 away from the king and that saved him a club loser after which he was home. We can't say it was just luck as even without the lead declarer can make because the North hand has D-AK. When one honour rises on the lead of D6, declarer can play diamonds for two losers but in doing that throw away all dummy's clubs and eventually ruff the CQ in the short heart hand – for ten tricks.
Q98	KT7653	
6	QJT7	
AT95	Q8	

The next hand produced a choice for the person in third seat at green : you have T962 – T5 – AKQ9653 and a void club. The choices were three diamonds twice, four diamonds twice, five diamonds once and – really – one spade once (from a Blue Club pair). The last choice resulted in 4S-X – making when the man on lead cashed his AKQ of spades before looking for the fourth trick (which never came as now the diamonds ran). Three of the pre-empts got a takeout double after which partner raised one level. This was too little opposite the 3D pre-empt, allowing the opposition to play the cold 5C. It was too much opposite the 5D pre-empt since the 6C offering was off two aces. It was a Goldilocks bid over 4D (by the Scottish youngsters) and resulted in the par contract of 5D-X down two.

The final hand of the set proved too difficult for most

A86	5	After opening in fourth seat, the 1C opener got a 1S overcall, a negative double and a spade raise. Four tables now ended in the hopeless 3N. The only winners on the board were Ireland who opened 2H on the weak hand and got raised to game. Good bidding sequences on a postcard please to the Welsh selectors!
Q2	KJT76	
K65	Q872	
AKQ54	972	

At the end of the set N Ireland had continued their good run, gaining another 14 imps over Wales to win the match 18-12. Meanwhile Ireland had whitewashed the CBAI (25-0) and England had edged ahead of Scotland (16-14).

WALES – CBAI. These teams last met five years ago and Wales had won each stanza then. They started off well when Peter Goodman (reasonably on his auction, different from all the others) sacrificed on board one and the opposition chose to bid on – and that was too high for them. Wales started with 11 imps in the bag when everyone else played 4S.

A4 J92 Q8 QT9862	KT72 KQT643 65 J	Q963 75 AJ93 K43	This looks to be a straightforward 4H hand, about a 50% game but success rate varied. With the DA onside it depends on playing the spade suit for two tricks. The spade lead from East made it easy, but two declarers got a club lead. Curiously both declarers started wrongly by leading SJ at their first chance. Had West covered that with the ace, three spade losers would have been inevitable. But both ducked! A spade lead later towards the KT7 would work but you have to draw all the trumps first and use the DK entry for the second spade – and you know you need the DA onside, so you can assume this entry. The Scots missed the need to draw trumps but their opponents failed to find the ruff – so back to 4H making. The CBAI drew trumps and tried top spades from North and that was fatal. Comedy of errors all round, which shows the game is not an easy one! Wales gained by leading C3 against 4H and stopping in 3H in the other room.
	J85		
	A8		
	KT742		
	A75		

There was an awkward choice for North again a few deals later

AKQ74 KQ8 753 A5	J95 6 62 KJT8632	Over a vulnerable, first in hand 3H pre-empt, the strong hand bid 3N and partner removed to 5C. The lead in both rooms was ST and declarer won and tackled trumps. The Irishman assumed a short club with the pre-empt, and finessed and went down two, while the Scots played clubs from the top to make the contract.
		The a priori odds favour Qxx with the third hand over Qx with the pre-empter (a 65% -35% split at the time the choice is made), but there is the added chance of cashing the spades and throwing two diamonds. It looks attractive but even with the hearts 7-2, the spades are still 3-2 more often than 4-1 and that doesn't give enough value to avoid the finesse. Unlucky for Nick Fitzgibbon. Lucky for Scotland.

There was one curious hand toward the end which was passed out at three tables but bid to game at the other three (11-count opposite 11) and it was a good game, going off only when Colin Simpson led his doubleton and found his partner with an outside entry to which he could underlead from his A6532 to get a ruff. Flat board for Scotland & N Ireland in game, flat for Wales and CBAI but passed out.

At the end of the first segment of this match England were 12 ahead of Ireland, N Ireland 21 ahead of Scotland, and Wales 5 ahead of CBAI. For Wales Goodman & Pownall swapped out and Jones & Rees came in. Swings flew in the Welsh direction like a gale in the second half, 6 double figure swings on two of which they were lucky (one was CBAI in a good 6H which the opening lead was letting them make despite the 5-1 trump break, but they failed). These two were the most interesting hands in the set ...

K7
T873
86
AT953

Five tables placed in 3N by East. At two of them East had hidden the spade suit the spade lead from South gave an easy 3 spade tricks and the contract made as a result. The other three got a diamond lead and declarer had to tackle spades for himself. Only Phil Stevens – the Scottish junior having his first Camrose – knew how to play the suit and won in hand to lead towards the QT9. That got him the contract.

QT9
QJ52
AJT4
J7

A652
A6
KQ97
K82

When the other two led a high spade and gave up a trick to the SJ, Graham Osborne for England found the club switch (but Scotland didn't). At Graham's table the spades had started with the queen, and he had won the second round. So after a club to the ace and a club ducked back to the queen, he could play a third spade to set up the S8. Declarer could recover by end-playing him in spades to lead from the HK, but he just took the finesse and now he was one off. The choice of the ST on the first round at the other table (odd that it makes a difference but it is probably good technique to prefer to lose the necessary spade trick early) meant that the CQ switch would be needed to beat 3N. There is a decent argument for finding this, but nobody did.

J843
K94
532
Q64

and this was a hand which was remarkably flat, except ...

K84
K64
8654
T94

65
JT92
KQT2
Q76

AQJT93
Q5
A
AJ83

On this hand only Rex Anderson – on his 101st appearance for N Ireland – managed to play in 3N which was impossible to touch. The remainder were in 4S and they all led a diamond. One declarer bashed out his spades (we can see no reason for this) but three of the others, at trick two, led a club towards the queen. South went in with the king and deduced that the only place for tricks would be hearts, so HA and another to the HK gave three tricks and declarer had to lose a spade and go one off.

72
A873
J973
K52

At the last table, Tim Rees for Wales played H5 at trick two. South thought that might be a search for a dummy entry, and deduced – like the other three declarers – that the defensive tricks lay in the fourth suit. So he won HA and switched to clubs. Oops! Nice one, Tim! 12 imps to Wales.

At the end of the match the scores were 25-3 for Wales, while N Ireland had continued well against Scotland to win 20-10 in VPs, and England had continued well against Ireland to win 19-11 VPs. Northern Ireland were now leading the Camrose table.

WALES – IRELAND. This is always a difficult team, although we have won three of the last four encounters. We started with 10 imps in when they tried to cash a winner unnecessarily early, and it got ruffed, costing them their 4S game. Another play choice – we failed to give partner two ruffs to beat a doubled game – went the other way, but the other swings were more interesting, and both competitive bidding decisions

7
AT7
KQ742
QT94

KQT853
KJ
JT
AJ7

A642
Q96542
--
653

Everywhere started with 1S from West and most people doubled with the North hand (one bid 2D). Three tables raised immediately to game with 4S, while the others bid only to the three level. The latter made life easy for South who could now take an interest with 4D. West continued with 4S over 4D and the spotlight shone on North. England and Scotland bid on to 5D but Wales didn't. Over the 4S raise, we had one double and two 5D bids. East-West made 4S easily when left there and 5S also made when Stephen Peterkin continued there for Scotland after a 5D bid.

J9
83
A98653
K82

In 5D Peter Goodman for Wales was careful to overtake the SK with the SA and play through a heart, ensuring defeat. Against Scotland they let the SK hold and when DJ continued declarer had a chance but he mis-guessed the position of the CJ to go one off. England, Ireland and Scotland all gained.

and the last hand of the set was

JT2 J9 AQ53 Q742	A AQT52 JT64 K86	Q987654 K73 87 A	West dealt and passed at red, and North opened 1H. Most Easts overcalled 2S and had to decide whether to continue after 3H-3S. Only one of the three for which we have records went on at that point, and when the DK and the HA were well placed, that was ten tricks and a score of +620. Where records are missing we also had one in 4S making. The third table to bid game was where Padraig O'Briain overcalled just one spade. This allowed his partner to show values and a fit, and that encouraged him to bid 4S. It was the three Irish teams who bid game here, all for significant gains.
	K3 864 K92 JT953		Looking at just the East-West hands, game is about 25% (two cards right) but probably better given the 1H opener (against which spades might be 3-0). At the same time, beating 4H needs a trick out of either the CQ or the DQ, so that contract might make as much as 25% of the time. This makes a good case for bidding 4S as a two way shot, even vulnerable.

After 16 boards, Ireland were 24 ahead of Wales, England 18 ahead of N Ireland and CBAI had come back after two heavy defeats with their first positive stanza to lead Scotland by 9 imps. The second half started off with an explosive deal.

J KT AQ8 AKJ9852	KQT954 2 753 T63	A7 AQJ63 JT942 4	The most common start to the auction was (from North) 2S-3H-4S. The exceptions were two cases where South bid just 3S and the one where East's overcall was 4D (showing diamonds and hearts). One 3S venture got a 5C from the English West, passed out. All the other Wests pushed to slam but had the dilemma of which suit to play in. The Irish found the best contract by committing to hearts (no-one else did) and bidding the grand opposite S-A and H-AQ. This is an excellent contract given the HJ in the East hand but it had to fail after a spade lead with the hearts 5-1. Where East (for CBAI) had shown diamonds, West bid 6D and that was easy. The others all offered clubs – one got pushed back to 6H, one got passed out in 6C, and the third got raised to 7C. Wales were the lucky ones here when 7C made and that was 16 imps back (most of which they would have received from playing 6C or 6H). The other big gain was for N Ireland.
	8632 98754 K6 Q7		

England had a big gain a few board later when they had the only declarer not to suffer ace and a ruff against an excellent 6S – the man on lead preferring his KQJT93 suit. Who can tell what is right, but well done to Filip and the others with ATxxx who led and continued the suit. The other big swing for England, and a big swing for others was board 25 ...

5 KQJT93 7532 32	96 852 AQT64 T76	QJ72 A7 K6 KQJ98	With dealer North and EW vulnerable, two Norths stretched to open a weak two in diamonds. They each got a 2N overcall and a 4H response from West. Otherwise East opened 1C – twice a prepared club, once a strong club and once natural (but might be 3). South overcalled 1S at the other tables but both Souths in the Ireland-Wales match bid 2S. Over the strong club West bid to 4H, but over the prepared club Shields declined and passed 2S. Over 1S there were two choices – one table doubled to imply hearts but not enough strength to bid at the two level, and the other managed a non-forcing 3H bid. The latter got raised to game but the double got a 2D bid from North and led to partner choosing 3N – which was hopeless.
	AKT843 64 J9 A54		Against 4H, everyone led the S9 which South won and switched to the DJ. All four Norths won this, after which there is no defence. To beat 4H, North must duck the DJ; if the defenders subsequently duck one club and play one round of hearts, they will succeed. It is difficult, but not impossible to do this as North can expect the contract always to go down if partner has a singleton diamond.

There was one more spectacular hand in the set : you heart partner open what is usually a weak NT and you hold A87 – T – AQT98765 – 5 and – if you've got the system – you transfer into diamonds and then jump in hearts to show a shortage. Partner responds with a cue bid in clubs and you check for aces, finding 3 opposite. Now the very ambitious try 6D (both tables in Wales-Ireland) but those who realise partner has at most an outside queen do not yield to temptation and stop in 5D, just making. Flat board all round (or nearly, one was doubled in 5D).

After quite a few exchanges there, the Irish margin over Wales had risen to 35 imps (21-9 but cut back due to slow play fines), while England had piled through to 20-10 against N Ireland and Scotland had pulled back to a 15-15 draw with CBAI. At this point Ireland took over the lead in the Camrose table, with England less than 2 VPs behind.

to be continued.