

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 K972 QT652 T3	AT6 T84 AK8 A984	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.
	J98 AQJ5 J97 Q62		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.

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 Q98 6 AT95	6 KT7653 QJT7 Q8	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.
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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 Q2 K65 AKQ54	5 KJT76 Q872 972	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!
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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		

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		

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.

WALES – SCOTLAND. We've always have close matches with Scotland in this series, although we came out on top in 2011 and 2012. We started with Jones & Rees in one room, Kurbalija & Shields in the other. Although it was flat in the other two matches, board 6 was a big swing in this one ...

AKQ3	--	Purely a bidding exercise this, with 2N being the most common opener (three times) and 1H just behind (twice). The Scots and the CBAI produced convincing auctions where they went through setting clubs as trumps and then Exclusion Blackwood in spades to confirm there was a missing ace. You must judge for yourself whether it was a reasonable gamble for Ireland, N Ireland or Wales to bid the grand and hope the ace was not found at trick one. In all three cases it was on lead! The three small slams were successful.
KJT3	4	
A3	KQJT65	
QT6	AKJ975	

The next hand produced a challenge for the pair sitting in the other direction

AKJ54	6	Three Wests chose to start with 1H and three with 1S. After 1S the heart fit quickly came to light, and West cued in clubs; twice West let it go in 4H but Nick Fitzgibbon sensibly continued 4S – the only catch was that over his partner's Blackwood he felt unable to show his void, so they stopped in 5H when Adam thought there were two aces missing. The only successful auction was when Jeffrey Allerton opened 1H and got a 3N (strong spade splinter) from Chris Jagger. They now cue bid with Chris bidding slam eventually on the basis of his partner's strong bidding. Kurbalija & Shields had the system to find out it was a club void, and did, but misjudged the suitability of the two hands. So – only one pair in 6 managed to get to this excellent slam.
QT9864	KJ52	
75	AKT8	
--	KT63	

The most interesting play hand of the set was this

JT	Q8764	A953	West dealt at North-South vulnerable, and five of the six dealers opened a weak two hearts. All five of those were raised to game and they mostly got a spade lead. Declarer won the SA and cashed two diamonds ditching a spade. The winning play now is to ruff a spade low and then play a club to start a cross ruff. The defence is likely to try HA and then a diamond and if it does, declarer should know to ruff with the HK and then a cross ruff succeeds. Most declarers failed by playing CJ before taking a spade ruff, and some tried to cash the DQ (ruff, CA, and another diamond now beats the game).
	Q73		
	J7		
	KT4		
KJT94		8652	It's almost just good technique to take the spade ruff early with the small trump, but it might be difficult to resist cashing DQ later. So do we crime the declarers for going off in a cold contract? Flat board except for a small gain to Scotland whose first in hand pass led to the contract being only 2H.
8		AKQ9	
87632		J	
	K2		
	A		
	T65432		
	AQ95		

At the end of the stanza, Scotland were leading Wales while N Ireland were 8 ahead of Ireland, and England were 28 ahead of CBAI. For the second half, Gary & Tim rested and Mike & Peter came in. As well as the usual bidding tests, there were two declarer tests in this set.

93	AK7	Everyone opened 1H with the North hand and South generally chose to raise but the hand was awkward – between a 2H raise and a 3H raise. It was solved by Kurbalija-Shields who had a 3D gadget to show a raise of that strength, and by Hinden-Osborne whose constructive 2H raise covered it well. These and one other pair reached 4H against silent opposition and all got the lead of a spade.
KQJ	AT9752	
AK952	Q8	
J65	T8	
	T8652	
	8	
	JT43	
	K74	Two tables quickly played ace and another heart and were down immediately. Patrick Shields for Wales saw that the club finesse would come at some point so started by winning SA and finessing CQ. Now came HA and then back to clubs, ruffing the third round. This could have cost the contract if the hearts were 2-2 and the clubs 4-2 the wrong way – but it gains when the hearts are 3-1 and the clubs 3-3 (both aspects of which are more likely). This was worth 10 imps to Wales where going off would have cost 6 imps.
	QJ4	
	643	
	76	
	AQ932	

and the very next board was this one

	T	East dealt at East-West vulnerable; only one South opened the bidding but all Norths showed a longish heart suit over West's 1N and five of the tables got to 4S (the others – the Scots - stopped in 3S against Wales). Three times hearts were led and when North continued with hearts South got a ruff, but declarer won the continuation and crossed to the SK, and then finessed the SJ. Now SA and a heart ruff allowed the diamond finesse and one club loser disappeared, for ten tricks.
	AJT9876	
	532	
	74	
AJ7		K8654
532		K4
AKT9		J84
A93		J65
	Q932	Both Ireland and N Ireland managed to resist the HQ lead and led the CK. Rex Anderson knew what to do with this and ducked. Now came QH to the ace and a second heart – again for ten tricks. When Hasting Campbell's CK was taken at trick one, declarer played the SK and to the SJ before playing a heart toward his king. Greer went in with the ace and importantly continued with a club – the only way to beat the contract.
	Q	
	Q76	
	KQT82	

We have to record serious bad luck for England and a little bad luck for Scotland on this hand

A872	K3	For England, Price & Simpson started with 1C-1D-3H and they bid after that up to the excellent 6D. It needs little more than the trumps 3-2 and can survive some 4-1 breaks but today the trumps were 5-0 and there was no answer. This was unlucky because their opponents stopped in game – as did both the pairs in both the other matches. The Scots bad luck was stopping in 5D and finding that too high on this occasion.
K	A952	
KQ32	J986	
KQJ5	A72	

But to cheer them up both England and Scotland invited a slam on board 32 and partner had the perfect hand opposite and bid the making 6N. So they – along with N Ireland in the third match – gained 11 imps on the last board of the set. At the end of match four we find that England's 22-8 win over CBAI has put them at the top of the table, while N Ireland's 21-9 win over the Republic has moved them into second place, and the Wales 17-13 win over Scotland left them above average but 3 VPs behind Ireland.

WALES-ENGLAND. This was much of the same England team which Wales met in March 2012, against whom they had lost narrowly. The first board was a damp squib in this match but more interesting in the others.

QJ532 T853 A 974	K64 Q92 QT853 AQ	987 K4 J962 KJ52	Everyone played 3N, once by South and the rest by North. Twice West had used a chance to bid spades, and spades were led at 5 tables. England-Wales both won the SK at trick one and played a diamond to the king and ace, after which they were doomed.
	AT AJ76 K74 T863		When Scotland had a small spade round to the ST at trick one, and when David Greenwood ducked the first spade and won the second, and when Louise Mitchell won the SA at trick one, it was natural for them to lead a diamond from South and the ace rose. These were all now destined to make 9 tricks. When John Matheson led the C2 at trick one, declarer got the diamonds wrong, and won the club return with the CA. He cashed the DQ to get the bad news and continued with three rounds of hearts, jack, ace and queen. John now did well by discarding a winning club and retaining his three spades. If he doesn't he will be end-played when declarer cashes S-AK and exits in clubs.

But board three went the other way – only grasped properly by England and Wales ..

874 T AKJ5432 K2	KQT96 KQJ32 -- 743	AJ5 A5 T96 AJ985	In second seat, albeit vulnerable, it was curious to see two Wests open 3D, while the others all opened in that suit at the one level. All Norths showed a major two suiter (4D over 3D for two of them), and East made some sort of positive noise. At four tables South had the choice of 3H or 4H. The former let West bid 4D and Mike Pownall did for Wales while Scotland didn't. The result was that Mike Pownall could now easily bid to 6D, while the Scots faded out in 5D. When the heart support was 4H it was more difficult to bid the slam and only England succeeded here, by 4H-P-P-X and then David Price removed the double to 5D. With a strong inkling to collect penalties when they could, this was known to be a good long suit and Colin Simpson raised to slam. The only big gain on the board was for the Irish ladies who were allowed to play 4H doubled going one off.
	32 98764 Q87 QT6		

Another interesting play hand came with board 11 and again England-Wales were in a different camp to all the other tables ..

73 K875 A92 Q876	KJT84 AJT2 63 53	AQ Q63 KJT74 AJ2	South dealt at love all and after two passes four of the six Norths opened 1S. Wales (uniquely) chose to double 1S and passed the hand out when South raised to 3S. England bid 1N and West's double of 2S was passed out. Both contracts made 7 tricks for a flat board, but it was 3N by all the other Easts which was the interesting contract.
	9652 94 Q85 KT94		After the spade lead there are always 9 tricks if the diamonds come in, and three declarers went straight after diamonds; Greer Mackenzie was the only successful one, choosing to play the spade bidder for short diamonds. John Mathieson delayed the choice by playing a heart first to the king. When that lost and a second high spade came back from North he deduced that North was unlikely also to have the DQ and pass in third seat, so he got the diamonds right by running the jack next. His good work earned Scotland 11 imps.

After the penultimate stanza was complete, Wales was 19 imps ahead of England, N Ireland led CBAI by even more, while Scotland-Ireland was a draw. For a second time this weekend, Northern Ireland were proud to be at the top of the Camrose leader board.

The second half of the last match produced plenty of opportunities, but Wales didn't take many of them. Kurbalija-Shields managed to bid two very poor slams, which cost 21 imps when England stopped in safe games on both. Here are two hands where double figure swings abounded.

A9653 8743 Q4 K4	J842 AK6 JT T862	KT Q52 AK5 AJ975	<p>West dealt and East played in 3N at every table. Both Wales and Ireland led the HJ and North cashed two tops in the suit to give declarer 9 easy top tricks. The others all led diamonds. The best result for East-West is to win the DQ and play hearts, but all four won the DQ and played a black suit (clubs three times). The best play in clubs (K then to the J) was found by all. When South was on lead (either CJ-CQ or ST-SQ ducked) the continuation was key. Three returned the HJ – the exception being John Mathieson for Scotland whose return of the SQ worked rather better. Nobody returned the passive but effective diamond. The HJ return cost the contract twice by setting up tricks in that suit for declarer (and perhaps should have cost in the third case too).</p> <p>In terms of likelihood of 4 tricks, playing CK and then finessing the C9 gives the same chance as CK and then finessing the CJ. The latter has a better chance of 5 tricks in clubs, which is why it is preferred. But if ever you want a swing in a match, the C9 offers an opportunity at very little cost!</p>
	Q7 JT9 987632 Q3		

and this hand finally

AK74 3 KJ7432 K7	QJ KJ987642 A 93	T9652 -- Q9 AQJ862	<p>East-West were vulnerable and East dealt. Two Easts opened 1C while the others passed; the consequence of this was that later these two Easts were more keen to defend than to bid, and these were the two tables which defended 5H. Three other tables started P-P-1D-4H (the fourth opened 1S) and the spotlight shone on East. Two found a pass and one a bid of 4S. This last choice is interesting, and must imply some serious distribution to have passed and done this opposite a third in hand opener; partner must recognise when not to pass. Over 4S it continued 5H-5S-6H and he now bid 6S. Unfortunately he noticed the SJ fall on the first round of that suit and came back and finessed into the SQ, ending one off. After 1D-4H-P one table defended 4H (unsuccessfully – you are left to guess how) and the other protected with a double. The double led to East bidding 4S and then 5S when South continued to 5H. This made easily. The preferred choice over 4H is for East to double (and recognised as not just declaring that the hearts are lying badly). There were big gains on this hand for England, Ireland and N Ireland.</p>
	83 AQT5 T865 T54		

After the scoring completed we found that England had pulled back to a draw with Wales, CBAI had pulled back a little against N Ireland but still lost, and Ireland had pulled well clear of Scotland, beating them 22-8. The leader board now showed as follows

England	92
Northern Ireland	87
Ireland	$88 - 2\frac{1}{2} = 85\frac{1}{2}$
Wales	$78 - 1 = 77$
Scotland	60
CBAI	$37 - 1 = 36$

with all those minuses being fines for slow play – taking any longer than 125 minutes for 16 boards is just not tolerated! For Wales this was a disappointing results – they had not played as well as they could. It is however the same score (apart from the slow play fine) as they had in January 2012, only this time England are not as far ahead as they were then. The venue was new for bridge, and apart from being in the middle of nowhere (a positive attribute say some) - it, the administration by the home team, and the food, were all excellent. Very well done by the smallest of our bridge associations!