

WALES IN THE CAMROSE: DUBLIN – March 2013

The second weekend of the 2013 Camrose season saw the same line-up for Wales – the two “new” pairs of Filip Kurbalija with Patrick Shields, and Tim Rees with Gary Jones, completed with Peter Goodman and Mike Pownall and Alan Stephenson back as captain. The first weekend saw Wales just 2 VPs above average, not their best performance it must be said but closer to the leaders than they were at this time last year.

[This year’s Camrose has two teams from the Republic of Ireland, since they are hosting this 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 & SCOTLAND. We had a narrow (17-13) win in the January encounter, pulling back from a half-time deficit. We started with Jones-Rees and Kurbalija-Shields against the two Scottish pairs who had returned for the second weekend (they had changed one pair). At the same time the two leaders after the first weekend played each other – those being England and Northern Ireland.

There were (and this happened throughout the weekend) a surplus of slam hands – 9 candidates in the 32 boards of this match. But before we get to those, board one was a straightforward game and at the bridge club it is hard to imagine more than one auction taking place, but here with just 6 tables ...

		Everyone did open 1H and after pass we had four different responses : 1S three times plus 1N (where 1S would have promised 5), 2C (which showed a GF balanced hand) and 2D (which showed a raise in hearts). After the 1S bid the next hand made a take-out double and now the openers produced one 2S, one 3S and one 4S. So we have six different auctions which resulted in 3 different games being reached but in all cases the swings were just the overtricks. What this does mean is that boring hands with no swings are difficult to find!
AJ52	K876	
AQ9763	KT8	
93	K82	
T	KJ9	

Another curious hand was this : 974 – 942 – J974 – 863 holding which you hear your vulnerable partner open 1H. RHO bids 1S and you are happy to pass but on the second round, over their raise partner tries 4H. You are expecting the axe to descend on this but it doesn’t and with void – AKQ853 – AK3 – AJT2, partner makes an easy 10 tricks. Neat! The first slam swing went Scotland’s way when Wales provided one of the three pairs who stopped in game. There was plenty of variety in the bidding on this -

		Five Easts opened 1C and 4 Souths were in with 2S, despite being vulnerable. It’s all about suit quality, not about points! Over this two Wests doubled and two started by showing their diamonds. The takeout double got a free bid of 4H by opener and now West insisted on the heart slam. Play was easy when Ireland led a diamond – declarer could engineer to ruff two diamonds and then draw trumps (six trump tricks) and run the clubs (five tricks, playing them carefully A then Q) and cash the SA. When Wales led the C9 declarer had an entry less to do this comfortably and after CQ, diamond ruff, HQ and HA and another diamond ruff – John Matheson had to ruff a spade to get to dummy and draw the last trump and then finesse for the CJ onside to make his contract. Which he did.
	754	
	J3	
	AQT5	
	J743	
--	AQ63	When West started bidding diamonds, East headed for 3N, with Wales ending in 5C making but N Ireland getting eventually to 6C which North doubled with his attractive diamonds, only to find them run to 6D (!) and then to 6N, which was duly doubled for 500 and 14 imps to England. Rather unfortunately Forrester & Gold had an uninterrupted auction but when East bid clubs and then spades, West preferred to support clubs than to introduce hearts and the suit with 12 tricks available was never mentioned! [The sixth table opened 2D as West showing a 3-suiter but stopped in 4H] This hand produced 13 imps for CBAI, 15 imps for England and 13 for Scotland.
AK86	Q975	
KJ7643	---	
Q62	AKT85	
	KJT982	
	T42	
	982	
	9	

One other hand worth noting was this – almost flat - hand

QT875 KQ5 754 K5	KJ943 98 AJT96 T	-- T7642 Q3 A98432	North-South were vulnerable and West dealt and passed. One North opened 2S (spades and a minor) while Andy Robson opened 1S and the rest passed. What surprised everyone – not least the four Easts – was that all four players in this position decided to open 3C. Two Souths bid 3N which was making in practice. Only Tony Forrester was confident enough in partner to try 4C and this jostled the opponents into 4S, which he was happy to double. David Greenwood proceeded to make 10 tricks by playing East (known by now to have 6 black cards to West's 7) for the DQ, which worked. In the other room North's 1S let East show two suits with 2S and now EW sacrificed in 5H which cost 500 against 790 at the other table.
	A62 AJ3 K82 QJ76		

After the set finished Scotland had produced a near whitewash beating Wales 43-6, while CBAI were 1 imp ahead of Ireland, and England were 15 down to N Ireland. Scotland's new pair came in, and their oldest sat out – while Wales continued unchanged. The slam theme continued and the second board of the set was this

AQ8 Q7 K6 QT6423	K42 AT AQ987 KJ9	Most openers were 1C (one 1N) after which responder shows diamonds and a balanced hand, and then opener got to bid clubs again. Investigation proceeded and when a heart cue was doubled to show the king, Wales stopped in 5C, while silent opposition led Scotland to bid 6C. After the 3C bid, Andy Robson followed his own advice and just bid 6C over that. Both 6C ventures made (on a spade lead) and England and Scotland both notched up 13 imps.
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The play was scrappy after that and Wales gained a bundle when the Scots had a Blackwood accident and bid 7S missing a cashable ace. The most interesting play hand was a success for Scotland –

862 J732 AJ K864	KJT9 KQ954 T6 53	3 A86 973 AQJT97	North South bid easily enough up to 4S here, but at four tables East sacrificed in 5C. This got 5S three times but one of these gifts was refused, with England bidding on to 6C (duly doubled). The play in spades is trivial for 10 tricks, but against clubs South started with the DK to the DA. Both declarers started immediately on spades (very necessary) and were able to eliminate both spades and diamonds while drawing trumps.
	AQ754 T KQ8542 2		

At the end of the set, Wales had pulled back a little but lost the match 10-20 (and with it Scotland took the Jourdain Trophy). England had pulled back to lose by 3 imps to N Ireland, and Ireland had managed a 5-imp win over the CBAI team.

WALES – ENGLAND. We had played much of this England team in the Camrose last year, and were hammered by them then; they were no weaker this time, with Bakhshi & Townsend being the new pair to the team. The first set was full of slam bidding exercises, of which England won two and Wales won one. Here are a few of them

K9876 KT 8 JT753	- J7654 AKQ AQ962		AJT3 932 T543 84	Every North opened 1H and four Souths responded 2D, the others being 1S (natural) and 1S (denying five spades). Over 2D, and non-vul against vul, one West passed but the others bid 2H (once) and 2N (twice). Easts all reacted differently – one bid 3S, one 4S and the third 5S! These all resulted in a doubled spade contract making either 8 or 9 tricks; For Wales, Kurbalija-Shields collected +500 but that was nowhere near enough ...
	Q542 AQ8 J9762 K			After 1H-P-1S (artificial) at the other table, West was able to double to show spades and the Welsh then bid up to 4S but Forrester & Gold bid on to 6H which was impregnable. That cost Wales a massive 14 imps. Only England bid that slam.

Two boards after that came this

AKJ43 K95 Q AK93	QT AQ874 A42 Q75	One opener upgraded to 2N and ended in 6N, which isn't best. The others all opened at the one level and had no problem bidding to 7H. Unfortunately today the hearts were 4-1 and it could not be made. You really want to be in 7S, but that depends on diagnosing in which major suit your side holds the J. The better 7S contract was missed by all but failed anyway with the spades 5-1.
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and three boards later we had

AQ2 AQJ86 A32 J5	3 -- KQJT875 AK987	After a 1H opener, three pairs reached 6D and three 7D. On a trump lead you need the clubs to be 3-3 or 4-2 on the right side - this is above 50% but given you lose 14 if it is wrong and only gain 11 if it is right, the expectation is a net minus. It was bid by CBAI, England and Wales – but avoided by the other three. The most convincing starts to the auction went 1H-2D-2N-4D, and then cue bids, but no-one found a way to check dummy didn't have three small clubs.
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Another hand involved a 6H contract purely on a finesse, but only bid by Wales and it was only Wales who lost points on it. ☹ When the smoke had cleared England were 20 imps ahead, Scotland were beating Ireland by 14 imps to 3 (the only swing being a game swing on the first hand reported above) and CBAI were 39 ahead of N Ireland (with gains on all three hands reported above).

The second half of the match had only two slam hands, and these were easy and flat apart from one where CBAI outbid N Ireland to gain 9 imps. These curious boards came one after the other

AKQ2 K8 QT8653 6	874 T3 K74 AQJ97	Both England and Wales bid up to 5D after a second in hand 1D opener. The difference was that in one case the third hand overcalled 1H with a suit of AJ974 and got a strong raise from partner. This induced the lead of HA which gave Gary Jones his eleventh trick. Alex Wilkinson also made 5D for Scotland after a passive SJ lead; he lost the DA but then a second spade gave him time to ruff out a club trick and discard a loser on CJ. So 13 imps to Scotland here and 12 to Wales.
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and

AT2 AKQ5 985 J98	8 JT2 QJ7 AKT754	The Welsh weak 1N opening was doubled to show the majors after which Wales defended 4S (one down). Clearly the spades are a weakness in 3N but making the attractive 4H also depends (after a spade lead) on the clubs running. The clubs were running but this time the hearts were 5-1, so England's venture to 4H was doomed, while three of the other tables bid a mundane 3N and made comfortably.
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and then this ...

KQ85 53 AT542 Q5	T62 K974 Q7 AT94		A lot swung on small decisions here. Three tables started off (from North) with P-P-1H. West passed and North raised and soon they were in 4H, making ten tricks with no guesses on this club layout. Not bad for 19 hcp!
		AJ943	Two tables started off with P-P-2H and in both those cases a lazy North passed and now East protected with 2S. Ireland raised this to game, while Scotland raised only to 3S. The last table saw a new weapon used by East – the intermediate 2S from Tony Forrester (10-13, spades and a minor); this silenced South opposite a passed hand and it was raised to 4S. The spotlight now fell to South. Filip Kurbalija managed a club after which Wales cashed four tricks and later got the DQ too; Scotland led an unfortunate D9 which solved declarer’s problem and meant 4S made. Game both ways on this hand!
		62	
		KJ86	
		J3	
	7		
	AQJT8		
	93		
	K8762		

After the set finished, England had gained one more imp to win the match 18-12, while Northern Ireland had pulled back to lose to CBAI by the same margin and Ireland had edged Scotland to a 16-14 win. England led the overcall table now with 124 VPs ahead of 117½ for Ireland and 115 for the North. Wales were fourth.

WALES – CBAI. CBAI was rated by many the weakest team in the event but they had come out fighting this weekend, losing by only 5 imps to the Irish national team in the first match and beating N Ireland by 20 imps in the second – thereby collecting almost as many VPs as they did from all five matches the previous weekend. Slams were more sparse than previously (3 candidate hands and none of them “good” slams). This hand from early on was curious

T853 8 A874 AK96	AQJ32 T432 9 J82	Two tables opened the 4441 11-count and were pleased to hear their partner show spades. They raised to 2S and it was passed out there. The other tables all passed and three of the dealers, after LHO opened, heard a 1S overcall. They drove straight to game, which was an easy contract making an overtrick. So it is better to open light, or not to ? Swings in all three matches here (including 8 imps for Wales).
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This hand highlighted some difficulties with current bidding styles ...

4 AKQ52 Q3 KJ964	T975	AKJ862	The four tables we know of all opened 2S, and twice South overcalled 3C, twice South passed. Pass gave the problem to West who both times bid 2N (although a pass is quite acceptable). A response of 3N at one table left North leading the JH, but declarer finessed the SJ next and was soon three off. At the other the response happened to be 3C (shortage) which South doubled. Now there was a CT lead against 3N and the contract made easily when South won and switched to diamonds.
	JT6		
	T965		
	T5		
	Q3	3	When South overcalled 3C, one West doubled and the other passed. 3C passed out was cheap (-150) but when doubled South decided to run to 3D; that too was doubled (by Tom Townsend) to collect +500. There is a good case for East re-opening with a double after 3C-P-P which West will happily convert to penalties (but could escape to hearts if holding weaker clubs).
94			
AK87			
AQ872			

and we ended the set with this hand

K874 853 T43 A82	AQ92 AQ 85 KJT75	After a pass the opposition opened 1D in all rooms, and East chose between double, pass and 1S. Two tables reached 4S and the opposition started with top diamonds. North was known to have a 2.6. shape for the opening bid and after the heart finesse failed the question was who had the CQ? There was one unlucky expert who false carded as North, pretending to have 3 hearts and so persuaded declarer that his partner had longer clubs. His partner only had Q9, but Tom Townsend was fooled and made his game as a result !
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After the stanza completed, Wales was 2 imps ahead of CBAI; England were 18 ahead of Scotland and N Ireland led the Republic by 17 imps. Wales swapped out Jones & Rees and set down to improve on that margin. The three slams turned up in this half – one where Scotland played a no-play slam against England, one where England bid a slam needing rather more than a finesse (and made it), plus this hand ...

QT75 J42 Q53 832	A83 A7 AK94 AK76	62	For reasons which are not clear, two tables ended in slam here – England in 6S and Scotland in 6N. In the latter contract, Alex Wilkinson won the club lead, cashed DA and checked the heart suit was breaking. He now ran the DT and eventually made the long diamond as his 12 th trick. Tony Forrester ended in 6S in the other room on C2 lead. He won that and started immediately with three rounds of hearts. After the good news there he crossed to DK to discard a diamond on CK and ruff one club, and then back to DA to ruff another club with the S9. This was over-ruffed by the ST but with the A8 of spades over the queen, Tony could not be denied the last four tricks. Flat board all round !
		T65	
		J62	
		QJT95	
	KJ94 KQ983 T87 4		

This hand had quite a few twists before most people made game ...

5 Q9752 J962 T82	KJ2 KT3 AKT7 Q53		Dealer was East and NS were vulnerable. Half the field opened the bidding as East (1C), one of the others opened as South (1S), a fifth table opened as West (2H) and only once did North get to open 1N. Two tables ended in 3N, both cashing their 9 tricks quickly after an opening heart lead round to the king. Against 4S, England benefited from the H7 led and run round to the H8 at trick one. In fact, Tony Forrester managed 12 tricks after that, eventually end-playing East to lead away from the CK. Others in 4S had the leads of C8, DQ and H5. After the club lead to the CJ and CA, CBAI drew trumps and tried a heart to the HT and HJ. Peter Goodman could exit safely with the DQ as the fourth trump had squeezed dummy out of the fourth diamond, and declarer had no chance, drifting two down. On the H5 lead, Paul Tranmer for N Ireland played the HT to the HJ, and this was followed by four rounds of spades. Paul threw C3 on the last of these and now played to the DA; spotting the DQ, he continued with the D7 off dummy. West can continue diamonds at no cost but East is squeezed down to 2 cards in each of the rounded suits, and will be end played in one or the other. In practice, West exited with the CT, covered, and in the end game East had to concede a trick to the nine of clubs. Finally, for Wales, Patrick Shields won the DQ, crossed to dummy and led a heart to the HT and HJ. East continued trumps and on the fourth round away went the C3. Now a diamond to the D7 expected to lose to the DJ (and end play East) but it won the trick, so there were 10 tricks for the taking (and 13 imps for Wales)
		9874	
		AJ64	
		Q	
		KJ76	

There was another instance in this set of a chancy overcall which got raised by partner, and led the perpetrator to lead the ace of the supported suit; this gave Tony Forrester his 10th trick in an otherwise doomed 4H contract – contributing to England collecting 50 imps to 9 against Scotland in this set. Wales had gained only 12 against CBAI, winning that match 17-13, while Ireland had pulled back a little against the North to lose only 14-16. The order of the contestants was unchanged, but England was inching away.

WALES-NORTHERN IRELAND. The North had turned the tables on Wales in Belfast, winning both stanzas to win a match against us for the first time in many years. And they had continued the good form of Belfast into the start of this weekend, beating both England and Ireland. Wales started with Kurbaljia-Shields and Goodman-Pownall. There were only 3 slam hands, and only 7imps swung on these in this match, but Wales and the North set a new record for the weekend by turning over 95imps in 16 boards – a record they were to exceed themselves in the next set! Here is the problem on board 1

AQJT965	4	Partner opens 1H in second seat and you end in 4S, with RHO having bid clubs followed by LHO bidding diamonds. All the finesses look good and you get the
3	QJT987	C9 lead. Only John Carroll showed the way, winning trick one and playing
65	AQ43	spades from the top. Those who let the opponents lead diamonds (by going for
A73	QJ	a club ruff or leading a heart) suffered a diamond ruff, as North had K8 of
		spades in a 2362 shape. Three declarers went down – a swing in every match.

And starting with board 13 there were these three excellent problems

	KT9642		North dealt at both vul and passed; East opened 1D (except for one
	32		strong club) and South (with one exception) showed a major two suiter.
	842		Despite minimal values, three Wests were able to show their clubs
	96		before North leapt to 4S. Tommy Garvey judged it right to bid 6D at this
75		--	point, protecting the heart king, but others supported clubs or settled for
84		K95	5D. In all cases South bid on, with one even volunteering 6S over 5D.
J3		AKQT976	Only one (Scotland, to their dismay) left the opposition in 5S, with CBAI
KQT7532		AJ4	and N Ireland bidding to the failing 6C in which they were left. England
	AQJ83		pushed on to the making 6D but a 6S sacrifice flattened the board.
	AQJT76		
	5		In the end two pairs bid to 6C and went down, two to 6D and defended
	8		the 6S sacrifice, and two missed the slam and let NS buy the hand. The
			only big swing was 13imps to CBAI over Scotland.

and then

	AJT94		South opened at love all and everyone opened 1H apart from England who
	J8		used a 2H gadget on this hand. Over 1H, four of the five Wests showed their
	AQ72		shape and North began licking lips. [Against Wales they just bid 1S, making it
	95		much more difficult to penalise them] One of the four who showed a two-
KQ732		6	suiter escaped but three of them played in 3D doubled. The play started
T9		Q753	similarly in all cases, one top heart and then the D8 through to the DQ. The
KJ954		T63	defence can secure down five at this point by playing back a small diamond –
J		KQ832	thus killing any ruff in the short hand while retaining control – but nobody
	85		found that ☹ After ace and a third diamond declarer needs to overtake the
	AK642		DT and draw the last trump to avoid four down (and didn't in two cases). But
	8		to achieve down four South must realise West has only one club and cash
	AT764		the CA and any top hearts before exiting in spades; nobody managed that ☹
			Wales partly volunteered to go -1100 on this hand but both Scotland and
			Ireland let their opponents off the hook (for -500 and -300 respectively).

and next was

	J654		South dealt and most commonly opened 1C. Two tables overcalled 1D and
	K982		got a positive bid from North and then 4D or 5D – at which point it is best to
	K		defend the hand to get a small plus. But three tables found themselves in 4H.
	KJT3		BJ O'Brien was the only doubled and the only one to succeed. After winning
A9		832	the second diamond with the DQ, he instantly placed the HJ on the table and
AQ74		T	promptly scooped up the heart suit for the necessary one loser, and with
AJ953		T8742	careful timing thereafter he could always make his game. To beat 4H, West
65		Q842	must play his short suits early, which cuts the communications declarer
	KQT7		needs with the South hand. BJ picked up 12imps for CBAI on this while the
	J653		other declarers lost 8 and 11imps on the hand (and will see the same trump
	Q6		suit another thirty times before the singleton ten is there for them!). It does
	A97		amaze me how often the one distribution you need to make the contract is
			actually present. Well done, BJ!

After that set was done N Ireland were leading Wales by 1 imp, Ireland were leading England by 19imps and CBAI were 37 ahead of Scotland. The line ups changed with Jones & Rees coming in for Wales, Anderson & Greenwood coming in for Northern Ireland. The hands were very swingy – with many 50-50 decisions in the bidding (and sometimes the play); the result was that this half-match produced the highest imp turnovers of any stanza during the weekend. Here is the opening board –

-- J7432 A4 AKJ765	AKJT8743	952 A98 QJ986 T2	Every table but one opened 4S which was passed around to West who showed a two suiter with 4N. Partner chose diamonds of course and this was doubled by South; the retreat to 5H was also doubled. Ireland ran to 6C but the other three stood their ground. Only three because the man who opened 3S was allowed to play in 4S doubled for a very cheap save, and one pair got to play in 5C doubled making (auction unknown, and it should go one down). Against 5H doubled. twice the lead was a top spade and once a diamond. Only Hastings Campbell showed the easy route – ruffing the spade and ducking a heart, then finessing first in diamonds and after that in clubs. England chose to cash HA and then run the clubs giving North a trick with the HT for one off. Scotland had the diamond lead to cope with; they needed to play on clubs next to allow for ace and another heart later; but when they ducked a heart at trick two, BJ O'Brien gave his partner a diamond ruff for one down. Game swings to N Ireland and to CBAI here.
	T5		
	5		
	93		
	Q6		
	KQ6		
	KT732		
	Q84		

The next hand generated a few smiles.

	Q62	AKJT874 943 -- K74	Neither West nor South came into the bidding. The likely contract was 3N by North (achieved twice) making, but at two tables East upset this by opening 3N in first seat (showing a good 4M bid). After the 3N opening, North-South did actually bid their game but where Tim Rees and Adam Mesbur opened a boring simple 4S they bought the hand, as the balanced 17-count in fourth seat couldn't find a bid and the playable 6D went unnoticed.
	AQ2		
	AKQ93		
	T9		

The other big hand in the set was this

8 4 AQJT54 QJT87	A643	T95 QJ 76 AK9653	South dealt at both vul and passed. The Irish opened 2N to show the minors but the others settled for 1D. North found a bid in all cases showing hearts, at which point South began to get excited. East got his clubs in (at the 5-level where the 2N opener promised clubs), and West supported vigorously. Wales bid to the 5-level over 5C but passed out 6C undoubled, while the other table had 5C passed out (3imps to Wales). England and Ireland both bid to the 5 level but at one table England sacrificed in 6C only to hear the opposition bid 6H, and now they had to bid on to 7C (doubled for +800 and a 3 imp gain over +710). CBAI bid over 5C, and then bid again over 6C – but Scotland didn't sacrifice; they doubled and that was +1660 to CBAI and 17imps to the hosts.
	AT9832		
	K32		
	--		
	KQJ72		
	K765		
	98		
	42		

After adding the large number of imps up a few times we found that Wales had gained 14 against the North to win the match 17-13, while Ireland had more than doubled its margin to beat England 22-8, and CBAI had raised 7 more imps against Scotland to beat them 22-8. At this point Ireland had collected 68 VPs this weekend, over the CBAI's 67 and England's 65, but overall England were 3½ VPs ahead of Ireland in the Camrose table.

WALES – IRELAND. So Wales finished the weekend with the hosts on their home turf – never easy. We had actually collected 25 VPs against them the last time we had played them in Dublin, but they had beaten us quite soundly in Belfast earlier this year and their win over England in the previous match showed they were now warming up. As before, this set had a number of slam hands – this time board 5 was an easy 7N and every table bid the grand, while board 11 needed no loser from AK982 – T64 in trumps (and more) and only David Greenwood was in it (and he made). Board 16 was a decent 6D with a 4-4 fit, only bid by the Irish and making easily. But there was one slam hand everyone was talking about

A9865 KQT73 3 65	Q4 86 QJ982 T874	KT7 AJ5 A5 AKQ92	South dealt and passed; two Wests opened the bidding. Otherwise it was a 2-level opening from East, after which one West settled for game, one showed spades and then jumped to slam in hearts, and a third explored and duly got to the right contract of 6H. All that was boring ! For England, East-West broke the mould and bid all the way to 7H, played by East after an auction in which East disclosed little. The trump lead was taken by the ace and declarer continued with four rounds of the suit. North could discard a diamond on the third but on the fourth had a choice as to which 4 card minor to discard from. It seemed like a 50-50 choice but when the club went away, so did the defence and England had +1510 and a gain of 11 imps rather than a loss of 14. Fortunate, methinks, although if South managed some sort of McKenney in playing those three trumps (and partner read it right) then it might help.
	J32		
	942		
	KT754		
	J3		

A much lower level but curious defence occurred on another board

T8 T98643 A985 8	Q7 AJ7 KJT73 A62	A542 2 Q642 KQT9	The six auctions were essentially identical, with North opening 1N and then South transferring to hearts and following that with showing clubs. North finalised things with 3N in all cases. Three times East led a diamond and three times a top club. Curiously two declarers ducked the club and got a club continuation. Andy Robson won that with the CJ and set about spades for nine tricks, but the man from the North won the second one with the ace, failed later to count his tricks, and went one off.
	KJ963		
	KQ5		
	--		
	J7543		

The diamond lead was more interesting – in two cases it went a diamond to the ace and the D5 back to the DJ and DQ. At this point both David Gold and Rex Anderson switched to one of their lower clubs. Who can blame declarer for ducking? This was followed by a top club to set up five tricks for the defence. Neat! Nick Fitzgibbon was having none of that nonsense when the D5 was returned against him – he rose with the DK and made his contract by playing on spades immediately.

There were a few other interesting hands. Mike Pownall earned a game swing by leading low from KT in dummy's side suit at trick one against 4S, and this gave declarer an attractive alternative to playing for a 3-3 break – a losing alternative of course, while everyone else had no alternative option and made their game contract. On another hand only Scotland felt empowered to raise to game after a vulnerable partner overcalled a strong 1N opening with 2S, when holding K7 – A53 – AQT98 – 763, to reach an excellent game. The overcaller opened 3C on the next hand on Q72 – 32 – 8 – AQJ8643, and expectations were low again with most partners passing even though 4S is cold and 5C is on a finesse. The habit of opening weak does make it difficult when you are dealt a better hand!

At the end of the stanza the scores were 43-28 for Wales over Ireland, 71-3 for England over CBAI and 24-8 for Northern Ireland over Scotland. Just one set to go. The last set is always exciting and it started with England gaining 35-0 over the first nine boards, Wales gaining 23-0 over the first five and Northern Ireland gaining 22-0 over the first six. In all cases the next board went the other way and only in one case (England over CBAI) did the pattern of the opening boards stick.

Wales' first loss on the set was when our team played in 4S with a trump suit of 7642 opposite KJ83 and they broke badly, with just the singleton queen onside. With the losing choice of which hand should win trick one, our man was in trouble and went down two – while Ireland never bid the suit and played in the easier 3N making an overtrick. Game swing out ☹ Two boards later we had this ...

	32		Everyone was in 3N on a diamond lead except one, where East was declarer and the lead was the H3. In most cases the DT was ducked to the DJ and South had to find a switch. The easy choice was H3 which declarer ran to dummy, and then played to SJ and took the club finesse emerging with 10 tricks. For Ireland at trick two Adam Mesbur found the switch of the H7, indicating limited interest in that suit and now when it proceeded with HJ, SJ and a club, Nick Fitzgibbon rose with the CA and returned – not his partner's suit – but a spade, which set up two spade tricks in South's hand.
	T84		
	KT983		
	AQ5		
AJ74		Q65	Filip Kurbalija was now faced with a dilemma. He had 7 tricks outside clubs and could make it if the CQ was onside by finessing, or by cashing his winners and exiting with the last spade to end-play South if it was offside. The defenders gave him no clues, as rising with the CA was the only way to beat 3N if the CQ was wrong. You can guess what happened, 10 imps away and all credit to the Irish pair for creating the chance.
AK5		J9	
752		AQ64	
T94		KJ82	
	KT98		
	Q7632		
	J		
	763		

This brought the stanza back to level pegging but soon another disaster hit Wales – who stopped in 1S with a combined 25 points and a 5-3 heart fit. Actually game was not great odds, but it was normal to bid it. Our pair did however score better than some did on the hand – look at what happened at other tables ...

863 AJ7 J4 AQ853	AKJ K9532 986 K7	974 Q4 T752 JT62	<p>One table had an accident and ended in 3N but 4H played by North was normal. South had opened the bidding on three of those occasions but on the fourth South had passed and West opened 1C. When Wales defended 4H declarer won the opening lead with the SQ and played a trump to the HQ; he continue hearts from dummy when in and could not be defeated.</p> <p>When West had opened for N Ireland, the lead was the CJ and David Greenwood ducked this to declarer's king. Next came a diamond to dummy and a heart to the HQ. Rex Anderson picked up the diamond count (they play reverse) and returned that suit. Now David could rise with the HA, put his partner in with the CT, and get a diamond ruff to beat 4H – the only pair to do that.</p>
	QT52 T86 AKQ3 94		

This hand was a loss for Wales that might have been avoided, but only because declarer went for the second best line

AK8 97532 AK JT7	Q732 KT Q93 Q652	Every table opened 1N and three were raised to game. Everyone had a diamond lead from a five card suit and everyone played on clubs. For those in a part-score this is best, as if either black suit breaks 3-3 they get 8 tricks from that approach. To make 3N however depends on both of those suits breaking 3-3. Today the clubs broke but the spades didn't, so 3N failed (except where the Welsh defender threw a spade). Better odds for making the contract is to play for hearts 3-3 with the ace onside. And that is exactly how the cards were – so three declarers went wrong but only two were punished! Missed chances for England and for CBAI.
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The only two slam ventures so far in this set were very poor slams and the 4 pairs which bid a slam duly went off – this was a much better slam opportunity ..

		West dealt at green and two opened 2S, two opened 3S, one opened 4S and one passed(!). Pass was actually quite effective as over partner's 2N opener this let Wales explore and get to 6C, while the others split their relatively uninformed choices evenly between 6S and 6N (with the one rogue who, correctly, raised the over-strength 3S opener to 4S).
4 T986 Q985432 7		The lead to 6C or 6S was a top heart from North. All the contracts reached are cold if spades behave but chances differ if they don't. To make 6S you need a trump coup and everything works nicely. Tom Townsend for England got a club switch after the HQ, and crossed to dummy's SQ and immediately ruffed a heart, before returning to dummy to find the bad news. He was well placed but needed to be able cash six winners before the end position. It wasn't likely the clubs would last that long (although they do) so he ruffed a second heart and successfully ran the DJ to give him tricks there to cash. All routes lead now to a successful trump coup and 12 tricks – meaning only England made their slam. The Scots in a similar position mangled their entries and the North were able to beat their attempt at 6S.
AT9853 5 J KJT85	KQ KJ43 AKT6 AQ6	
J762 AQ72 7 9432		Wales played that hand in 6C which, after two rounds of hearts, could cope with North having Jxxx spades and three clubs but not South. Filip went for the best odds line, but today that was doomed. Curiously if his spades had been less strong (missing the 9) his only choice would have been a winning line.
		Finally we have the declarers in 6N, who could see only 10 top tricks after they found out about the bad spade break. They had no chance on this layout but if you swap the DJ and the DT it makes all the difference as they can arrange a third diamond trick and eventually throw South in with HA to lead from the SJ.

When the scoring was eventually done, Wales had lost 27 imps to Ireland, Scotland had pulled back 2 imps against N Ireland, but England had kept their earlier momentum and won their set 68-3. The final table was now out and England had won both weekends and so were first overall. The Republic of Ireland had overtaken the North to be second this weekend and Wales remained in fourth. All teams had lower scores this second weekend except for one – the CBAI collected 67 VPs against the 36 they had in Belfast – well done to Gay Keaveney and his squad in pulling their socks up. Congratulations to England on another convincing win; they had lost two matches in Dublin and had only a losing draw to report from Belfast. The English Dublin team is off to the World Championships in Bali in September and we wish them the best of luck.

That's it for another year – it wasn't Wales' finest by any means. They had two new pairings this year but we cannot put the results down to lack of familiarity. There was a little of that but there had been lots of practice games (thanks to Julian and others) – we just hadn't played to our best at any time. The main failure (to me) was that we didn't collect any big scores against the weaker teams; beating the stronger teams consistently is difficult, but big scores outside that would give us some headroom. Next year !