

At the Generali World Open Pairs, Philadelphia 2010

Two Lucky Experts from the San Francisco Area at the world championships in Philadelphia.

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I played in the finals of the Generali World Open Pairs in Philadelphia!!

When it was announced that the 2010 World Bridge Series was coming to Philadelphia in 2010 Paul Cornelius and I made an early commitment to play there. We were not going to pass up an opportunity to play in a world championship on US soil. We signed up for the Generali World Open Pairs starting October 9th. The Open Pairs is played over 15 sessions. After 5 qualifying sessions the 240 pairs field would be cut to 132 pairs augmented by 40 drop-in pairs from the Rosenblum. After another 5 sessions of semi-finals, the field would be cut to 50 pairs plus an additional 22 drop-in pairs from the Rosenblum. The next 30 pairs not qualifying for the finals of the Generali Open Pairs would be able to drop-in to the IMP Pairs Finals.

Paul and I are from the Silicon Valley area in Northern California. We are both ACBL life masters with about 2000 master points each and some regional wins. We have been playing together for about 5 years and like to challenge ourselves in our bridge endeavors. We had never played in a WBF event before and were quite unaware of the intricacies of the qualifying process. All we knew was that we were registered to play in the World Open Pairs and had set ourselves the goal of qualifying for the semi-finals.

Our main preparation for the event was to figure out the WBF convention card. It is in a format different from the ACBL card, and there is a 74 page Guide for Completion of the WBFCC. That should tell you something of its complexity. Paul printed a copy of the ACBL defense to the multi to arm ourselves against this feared weapon used commonly outside the US. We also addressed the issue of mental preparation, and I took on the task of providing guidelines by exhorting myself and Paul to play the event "one board at a time".

Technical and mental preparation completed, we arrived in Philadelphia on October 8th ready to play on October 9th. The event was held at the Philadelphia Marriott and game times were usually 11:00am and 4:00pm.

Qualifying Session 1:

Our starting position was posted as Section C 6EW. All boards were pre-dealt and all tables had screens. We started with B#11, South was dealer and opened 2D multi. There it was already! North bid 2H, pass or correct. I doubled for take-out, South corrected to 2S. Paul doubled for penalties, and we set it one for 87%. N-S were cold for 4C, but pre-empted themselves with the premature multi. B#12 went P, P, P to South who opened 1NT and played it there. 1NT was cold on the finesse for the spade king but declarer believed my deceptive signal and declined the finesse, going one down. Another 87% to us. A great start!

The rest of the session seemed to go average plus for us without anything of note, except that the American pair of Gerard/Beatty bid an excellent 6H for 17% to us. Paul and I played down the middle, finishing the session at 55.4%, lying 59th. I was happy.

Board #25 (rotated) was against Beatty/Gerard.

Vul: NS

	Paul	
	SAKT	
	HQ96	
	DK4	
	CAJ532	
Beatty		Gerard
SQ984		S7653
HK		HJ87
DQ86		DJ972
CKQ986		C74
	Stephen	
	SJ2	
	HAT5432	
	DAT53	
	CT	

I opened 2H and Paul raised to 4H. Beatty led the club king. I won ace, and ruffed a club; cashed ace and king of diamonds and ruffed a second club on which Gerard discarded a diamond. I ruffed a diamond, all following. Now I cashed spade ace and king and ruffed a third club, Gerard discarding a spade this time. At this stage I was down to HAT5 and DT and I played the DT ruffing with heart 9. Gerard over-ruffed with the jack and returned the heart 8. Trusting Gerard not to make this play holding heart king, I played heart ace to drop Beatty's stiff heart king and had the rest of the tricks for 59% of the match points.

Qualifying Session 2:

We remained 6EW but moved to Section B. Again, we had a great start first bidding a cold 6D missed by the field for 82% and then got to the top spot of 7NT on B#12 for 69%. This was a session of slams for EW and we got most of them right. Against the Dutch pair, Prooijen/Verhees, we bid an excellent 6D which had no chance with trumps breaking 4-0 and QT53 lying wrong. Paul stayed in focus and played it carefully to hold it to one down and 54%. B#28 was 6S by me, making 7 for 64%. Then Paul and I had an excellent auction to avoid a doomed 6H, instead settling into 6D on our 4/4 fit. This made on a squeeze against the Americans, Compton/Seligman, for 89%. The slams kept us in good score, but in the last round we missed a cold 3N and an equally cold 4H to end the session at 51%. Our cumulative score was 53% and we had slipped to 79th. We had done some good things, particularly in the slams and, despite some missed opportunities, overall it had been a satisfying day.

This is Board #12 where Paul and I bid a vulnerable 6D for 82%.

Paul	Stephen
S73	SAK96
HA7	HT
DQ87643	DKJ2
CKQJ	CA9643

Paul	Opp	Stephen	Opp
1D	P	2C	P
3D*	P	3S	P
4C	P	4D**	P
4H**	P	4S**	P
5C**	P	6D	All Pass

Paul's 3D should have shown a better diamond suit, but showing the 6th diamond focused me on the slam possibility. 4D, and the subsequent auction, was all key card where Paul showed one or 4 key cards (4H) and the club king in addition to the diamond queen (5C). 6D was clear and worth 82% of the match points.

It was in this session that the Director warned us of slow play. I was surprised since I am a very fast player and whilst Paul is deliberate he is not slow. I did not argue with the Director but made sure that the Director was aware that we finished the next round in time. We also finished the next few rounds early and each time I made sure that the Director was aware of this. Finally, I engaged the Director saying that just because we had played the last card in a slow round did not mean we had been the slow party, The Director informed me that the pair following us had complained about slow play from us. I had noticed that the pair following us always seemed anxious for boards and to forestall further issues on this score, I thought it best to inform the director that I was easily in the top 10% in speed of play in this field and that he could check with Director Matt Smith who knew me from the San Francisco area. We did not have any further problems on the issue of slow play. I later found out that the Director was Egyptian and managed the Al Gezirah Bridge Club in Cairo. When I informed the Director that I had played at his club in 2009 during my vacation to Cairo, a connection was formed.

Qualifying Session 3:

This was the first session of Day 2. Again we were 6EW starting in Section D against the American father/son duo of Justin and Hemant Lall. B#11 was another great first board when Justin and Hemant bid to 6D. Holding S84; HA72; D8764; CAK75, I had been considering what to do with 5D when the tray came back 6D. Naturally, I doubled and we beat it 3 when Paul got a club ruff for 99%. Through the first 7 rounds of this session we were 74.90%!!

We had done nothing particularly brilliant - just collected our gifts. The Americans, Holman/Ferguson, missed a cold 4S; the Brazilian women, Abravanel/Vargas, missed their cold 4H; the Australians, Griffiths/Richman, missed their cold 4S then revoked against my 4H allowing me to make 6 for 100%.

This could not go on. And it didn't. In the second half, the Englishman, Bowdery, played 4S brilliantly making 5 for 27% to us. The Americans, Johnson/Simson, bid their 4H and 4S for 26% and 38% to us. The Canadian pair, Lebi/Jacob, stopped in 3H for 6% to us. Quite a roller coaster!! We finished the session 56.7% improving to 40th position.

In this session, we played Huang/Tse. Patrick Huang, of course, is well known as a top Taiwanese player from the 70s. Edmund Tse is the retired vice-chairman of AIG. I had first come to know Edmund when he played in the Summer NABC in DC in 2009. I work for an AIG subsidiary and we exchanged some emails. I learnt that Edmund had been a keen player in his younger days representing Taiwan and Hong Kong internationally. He had taken a hiatus from the game during his years as a senior executive with AIG and was now returning to the game. We had not met personally before so I made it a point to introduce myself to Edmund before the game started. He was affable and gracious. We discussed some bridge and some AIG. Edmund told me he would be coming more often to the US for our NABCs. I invited him to the San Francisco 2012 Fall NABC.

Qualifying Session 4:

The worm turned in this session. We were now 6NS, Section B. Opponents bid 6H for 14% to us. Then I played a tricky 3NT and made a complete mess of it. Down 2 and 3%. Ouch. The session continued dimly for us with scores generally below 40% and I could only hope that we would break 40% for this session. We finished at 38% and dropped 95 places down to 135th!! The cut-off was 138, and we were in severe danger of missing the cut.

I don't think we played badly, outside of my 3NT disaster, but there was very poor field protection. However, we had been the beneficiaries of this in the first three sessions so I could not complain.

Paul made a good decision on Board #17:

Vul: none; Dealer: East

Paul
SK52
H8432
D2
C87543

Hurd
ST8
HKT6
DAKQJ973
CT

Wooldridge
SQ7643
H7
D84
CAQJ62

Stephen
SAJ9
HAQJ95
DT65
CK9

Wooldridge	Stephen	Hurd	Paul
P	1H	3NT	4H
DBL	All Pass		

Paul's 4H sacrifice gave Wooldridge pause. Eventually, he decided to double and I went down the obvious one, but that was still 69% to us.

Qualifying Session 5:

This was the first session of Day 3 and we were 6NS in Section C. Paul had been North in our disastrous Session 4 so, of course, we took the needed corrective action and switched places. This worked wonders. On the very first B#11 the Americans, Jones/Krekorian, had a bidding misunderstanding to get to 6D doubled by Paul, down one and 88% to us. On the next B#12, we got to the top spot of 3C, making 4 and 69%. This session went swimmingly, and whilst I don't remember any great bidding or plays by us or poor play by our opponents, we scored 56%, and moved up to 90th position and safely qualified for the semi-final.

Mission accomplished!!

Our cumulative score for the qualifying rounds was 51.48%. It was my opinion that the general standard of play approximated a strong regional FL A Pairs. I knew that the semi-finals would be different firstly because the players in good form had queued and secondly because the drop-ins from the Rosenblum would further raise the standard of the field.

In this session we had played a Turkish pair, and as is my wont I welcomed my screen mate with a smile and a greeting. He responded and we exchanged some good humored banter. Kut later came up to me in the bar, and expressed his appreciation of my cordiality saying that I had been the first player to smile at him at the event!! He invited me to the Turkish Anatoli Bridge Festival in 2011, and in turn I invited him to the San Francisco Fall NABC in 2012. It's amazing what a smile and a little good humor can accomplish.

Semi-Final Session 1:

This was the second session of Day 3. We started at Table 12 NS, Section A.

We did not have a good start to the session but we finished with 60% and in 9th position. Amazing!!

We had one 100% score when my LHO rescued us from a poor auction doubling 6C, so I retreated to 6D, again doubled, but which could not be beat. The Australians, Delmonte/Bach, overreached to 5H, going down 2 for 97% to us. Outside of these two boards it was typical hard grinding match point bridge. A tribute to our “one hand at a time” philosophy. Could we continue to hold it together!!

I played Board #12 (rotated) as a semi cross-ruff for 11 tricks and 87% of the match points.

Vul: N-S; Dealer: East

	Paul	
	ST	
	HK832	
	DA432	
	CA982	
LHO		RHO
SJ85		SKQ743
H7		HJT94
DKT986		DJ
CJ643		CQT7
	Stephen	
	SA962	
	HAQ65	
	DQ75	
	CK5	

The bidding was a straightforward. I opened 1NT and Paul used Stayman to get to 4H by me. LHO led the club 4. I won ace in the dummy, and started with spade ace and a spade ruff. Then club king and a second spade ruff. Now diamond ace followed by club ruff to hand and a third spade ruff. I had 8 tricks and the defense could not prevent an additional 3 trump tricks.

Semi-final session 2:

We were now onto day 4 and I was still fresh. The 11am and 4pm suited schedule suited me well. We started 12NS, Section G

This was another session of basic block and tackle match points bridge going our way. On B#3 we scored 100% when the Poles, Golebioski/Kalita, found their way to 4D for no good reason. Holding AKJ6 I doubled for down 4 vul. Then Matt Granovetter, holding SK5, H743, DKJT9, CAQ97, made an injudicious take-out double in balancing seat of 2H by Paul. Pamela Granovetter jumped to 3S holding ST943, HK, DAQ3, CJ8532. Pamela played it well to hold it to down 2, but it still was 100% to us. Outside of these boards our scores generally ranged from 40% to 60% and we finished with 55% maintaining our 9th position.

We were in great position for a qualifying spot for the finals. But could we get it done!!

Semi-final session 3:

A tough session. We were still 12NS but at Section E. We started solidly with a couple of average rounds but thereafter our scores stayed generally below 50% despite minimal errors. Field protection appeared thin.

Slams played a mixed role in this session. First, we bid a 6S with complexity in the play; Paul went one down for 28%. We bid a good 6C, making for 90%. Then I was in 6S making for 63%. Then, a slam disaster. My LHO opened 2H weak with hearts and another. Paul bid 4D. In trying to process the 2H opening and what Paul's 4D might mean I confusedly passed. We were playing Leaping Michaels! In 20 years of playing Leaping Michaels this was the first time it had come up and completely leaped past me. We were cold for a grand slam in two strains!! A Zero.

Our session score was 43% and we had fallen to 46th. But still in qualifying position for the Open Pairs Finals.

Semi-Final Session 4:

We remained 12NS, Section E. We were into Day 5 and Paul and I were both still fresh. This did not help our game. Through the first 3 rounds we played 12.5%. We continued to play "one board at a time" and in reviewing the hands later, there are no obvious blunders, but I made a poor lead on B#26 to allow 4S to make – 7%. We missed our spade game on B#11 – 8%. Then I was doubled in 4H on B#19, for down 3 and 38%. Then Paul went down one on B#21 in 2H – 13%. A series of decisions going awry.

Our session score was 43% again and we had slipped to 88th position. We were no longer queued for the Open Pairs though still queued for the IMP Pairs – barely. The brass ring was still within reach; but could we grasp and hold on to it?

In this session, I met Gulzar Bilal, captain of the Pakistan Team. I was born in Pakistan and although I have not lived in Pakistan since 1980 the pull of one's birth country is strong. The Pakistan Team had topped their group in the Rosenblum round robin and I was pleased to congratulate him on a fine accomplishment. I invited Gulzar also to the San Francisco Fall NABC in 2012.

If all my invitees turn up to the SF Fall NABC 2012, I can see a major scheduling problem. I may have to call on Jim Leuker, Chairman of the San Francisco 2012 Fall NABC, for help!

Semi-final Sessions 5:

We continued 12NS, Section E. Unfortunately, our scores were also a repeat of the 3rd and 4th sessions. We allowed the Poles, Jassem/Martens, to make a pushy 3NT. Then the

Indonesian pair, Karwur/Pancono, and the Indian pair, Khare/Tolani, destroyed us for 20.5% overall in those rounds.

The Romanian pair, Coldea/Rotura, got to 4H after a contentious auction on B#9. Paul led his stiff club (I had opened 1C), but declarer won and cleared hearts, my king winning at trick 3. I played a low diamond from K97 at trick 4. Paul won the diamond queen and continued diamond ace which declarer ruffed. Now declarer had a triple squeeze on me for 10 tricks. Had I returned my diamond king at trick 4 the squeeze does not materialize and we would beat 4HX. As I said to Paul at that time, "Even in my wildest dreams I'm not that good!"

This was B#15 (rotated for convenience):

Dealer: West; Vul: EW

Karwur

S:JT8

H:AQJ6

D:K87

C:AK2

Paul

S: K632

H: 54

D: QJ953

C: 63

Stephen

S:AQ754

H:K

D:A62

C:J954

Pancono

S:9

H:T98732

D:T4

C:QT87

The auction was:

<u>Paul</u>	<u>Karwur</u>	<u>Stephen</u>	<u>Pancono</u>
P	1C	1S	X
2S	X	3S	4H

All Pass

Paul made the expert lead of the spade king to take a look at dummy. I discouraged and Paul shifted smartly to the diamond queen. We took our diamond tricks, declarer ruffing the 3rd diamond. Declarer now entered dummy with a club and led the spade jack. I wanted to play both my spade ace and queen to this trick but constrained by the legalities of the game followed with my spade ace only. From this Declarer inferred that Paul held spade king and queen, and having already seen Paul's queen and jack of diamonds, proceeded to drop my stiff heart king offside to make 4H for 87% of the matchpoints.

Whatever the merits of my spade ace at trick 5, Pancono's play brought back agonizing memories of the 1991 NAOP FL B National finals in Atlantic City, where on the very last board of the event another declarer had dropped my stiff spade king offside to make

6S and drop me from 1st to 2nd by 0.90 matchpoints. The next time I have a stiff trump king offside, I am going to do a Hideous Hog on it. Menagerie fans will know the story. The Hog is in a high stakes game on a cruise ship and is defending a redoubled vulnerable game contract. Realizing that the contract is making the Hog slip a key king into his sandwich, and calmly eats it, washing it down with a glass of fine wine. With the king “lost” the game breaks up in acrimony!!

Board #15 was not our last board in the Open Semi-finals but it came towards the end and put paid to any hopes of our making the finals.

Were we disappointed!! The brass ring had been in our grasp but we had not been able to hold on to it. On the other hand, we had qualified for the semi-finals and had strongly contended for a place in the finals. Our last three sessions had been cruel. There had been good, even spectacular play, by opponents. However, I think we had been done in by the Bridge Gods. Consider that we had been on defense 47% in the qualifying rounds, whereas in the semi-finals we were on defense for 61% of the hands. Our overall score in the qualifying was 51.48%, and in the semi-finals it was 49.63%.

Paul made the interesting comment that in 10 sessions of high level bridge, our natural 2/1 system had shown up well against the strong club, the Polish club, the two-way club, the multi, two suited pre-empts (OK OK, maybe not against two-suited preempts) and whatnot. We were proud of our showing in a world class field.

I returned to the Open Pairs Finals to kibitz the 15th and last session. There I *played the dummy for the American, Jeff Roman, and the Indonesian, Taufiq Gautama, whilst they took restroom breaks*. For a moment it appeared that I might even be able to play the dummy for Fantoni, but it was not to be.

I thoroughly enjoyed the Generali Open Pairs. The 5 sessions of qualifying gives contestants the opportunity to recover from one bad session and even two mediocre sessions. Then if you miss qualification to the Open Pairs finals, you may get to drop-in to the IMP Pairs finals. There is incentive a-plenty.

I am looking forward to the Generali World Open Pairs in 2014 and hope to actually play in the finals with the blessings of the Bridge Gods. Ready, Paul? You know the offerings the Gods are looking to bless is a commitment to improve our defense ☺