

The Final of the Liga Leumit 2003/2004

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2004 started off with the decisive knock-out matches to adjudicate the coveted first place of the Liga Leumit: two semifinals and a final played over 56 hands, divided in four sessions of 14 hands, were scheduled to take place in Raanana, over the 3rd and 4th of January.

At the end of the round robin the standing was as follows:

1) Kalish 211

(Kalish-Podgur, Yadlin-Yadlin, Herbst-Herbst)

2) Birman 193

(Birman-Levin, Cohen-Altshuler, Zeligman, Zwillingner)

3) Vax 189

(Y.Vax- Gilboa, Barel-Schneider, I.Vax)

4) Amit 187

(Amit-Amit, Reshef-Ginossar, Liran-Levi)

The two semifinals matches were Kalish-Amit and Birman-Vax.

While the first encounter saw the easy victory of Kalish with a result of 158-78; the second semifinal turned into a close contest and it was only at the very end that the Birman team managed to edge Vax with a last session score of 46-12, when it was trailing by 12 IMPs with 14 hands to go.

The two pre-tournament favorites, therefore, did not disappoint: the Kalish and the Birman teams faced each other once again in the classic derby of Israeli bridge.

The first quarter started with Kalish-Podgur against Birman-Levin and at the other table the Herbst brothers against Cohen-Zeligman; with Kalish leading by 14 IMPs thanks to the carryover from their round robin match.

The final began quietly: several flat hands interrupted by a double part score for Birman that brought 6 IMPs.

The first big swing came from this hand:

Board 5; North Dealer E/W Vul

♠ 1096532		♠ -
♥ 10943		♥ AJ5
♦ 95		♦ KQ1073
♣ A		♣ Q9872
♠ AK4	W N E	♠ -
♥ Q862	W N E	♥ AJ5
♦ J	W N E	♦ KQ1073
♣ K10653	W N E	♣ Q9872
♠ QJ87		♠ -
♥ K7		♥ K7
♦ A8642		♦ A8642
♣ J4		♣ J4

Deals where a strong concentration of values faces an unexpected void in partner's hand are notoriously tough to bid and this one was no exception.

West	North	East	South
Zeligman	O.Herbst	Cohen	I.Herbst
	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♠	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

Here the bidding proceeded normally until Zeligman's 3NT bid. After partner had shown such good values in spades, Cohen's decision to continue with a slammish 4♣ looks over-optimistic.

Kalish-Podgur, instead, managed to stop in 5♣ after a very controlled auction in which Podgur provided his partner with all the necessary details, his 0355 shape and minimum values, needed to make an informed choice over whether to go on to slam or not.

West	North	East	South
Kalish	Birman	Podgur	Levin
	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠(1)	Pass	3♥(2)	Pass
3NT(3)	Pass	4♦(4)	Pass
5♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

1) Relay with values in the minors or interest to hearts

2) three hearts and minimum

3) to play opposite a hand with values in hearts

4) Cue-bid with clubs at least as long as the diamonds

In board 12 the Kalish team gained another 9 IMPs thanks to a very sharp double and some accurate defending by

the Herbst. Against them 3NT went 3 off doubled, while only two off undoubled at the other table.

The 14 IMPs of advantage for Kalish after the first quarter added to the 14 of carryover made up to a sizeable lead of 28 IMPs.

In the second quarter Kalish-Podgur played against Cohen-Altshuler while Birman-Levin faced the Herbst brothers.

It was easy to see that Lady Luck had taken temporary residence in Haifa:

Board 18 NS Vul East Dealer:

♠ 106		♠ K73
♥ 52		♥ 93
♦ QJ1072		♦ 9653
♣ J865		♣ K972
♠ AQ9852	W N E	♠ K73
♥ AK	W N E	♥ 93
♦ 8	W N E	♦ 9653
♣ A1043	W N E	♣ K972
♠ J4		♠ J4
♥ QJ108764		♥ QJ108764
♦ AK4		♦ AK4
♣ Q		♣ Q

West	North	East	South
Kalish	Cohen	Podgur	Altshuler
		Pass	1♥
Dbl	Pass	2♣	2♥
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
6♣!!	Pass	Pass	Pass

Lead ♦A

Dani Cohen was probably looking forward to defeating 6♣ after Altshuler opened 1♥ and with a nice trump holding of J8xx. Unfortunately for him, he ended up writing 920 in the negative column of the score after Podgur ruffed the diamond continuation and proceeded to play ♣A and small club towards the ♣7, finding the miraculous distribution in trumps that ensured the success of the unlikely contract. A gain of 10 IMPs against the normal 4♠+2 bid at the other table.

Board 27 All NV, South Dealer.

♠ QJ5		♠ A10
♥ KQ10974		♥ J62
♦ 982		♦ J
♣ 3		♣ AQJ8742
♠ K7632	W N E	♠ A10
♥ -	W N E	♥ J62
♦ AK7643	W N E	♦ J
♣ K9	W N E	♣ AQJ8742
♠ 984		♠ 984
♥ A853		♥ A853
♦ Q105		♦ Q105
♣ 1065		♣ 1065

West	North	East	South
Levin	O.Herbst	Birman	I.Herbst
			Pass
1♦	1♥	2♣	2♥
2♠	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
5♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

At the other table instead:

West	North	East	South
Kalish	Cohen	Podgur	Altshuler
			Pass
1♦	2♥	3♣	3♥
3♠	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♥	Pass	6♣	Pass
Pass	Pass		

After having ruffed in dummy with the ♣9 the ♥A lead, Podgur continued with ♦A, diamond ruff, club to the ♣K, diamond ruffed high, two more rounds of trumps and spade to dummy's ♠K: 6♣ +1 - 940 and another 11 IMPs for Kalish.

Given what they had been suffering one cannot be surprised when Cohen-Altshuler pushed to find a slam on very thin values in the following hand:

Board 25 Dealer North, E/W Vul

♠ AJ10			
♥ 8			
♦ 98742			
♣ AJ106			
♠ 98		♠ 32	
♥ QJ532		♥ 10964	
♦ KQJ103		♦ 6	
♣ K		♣ Q98532	
	♠ KQ7654		
	♥ AK7		
	♦ A5		
	♣ 74		

West	North	East	South
Kalish	Cohen	Podgur	Altshuler
	Pass	Pass	1♠
2♦	3♦	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♣	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	6♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	Pass

Lead: ♦K

The chances of success of 6♠ are a lot better before the 2♦ overcall: it simply requires diamonds 3-3 or 4-2. After the overcall declarer needs to find diamonds 5-1 and not 6-0 and exactly one club honor with East.

The good news for Gilad Altshuler were that there was not an awful lot to the

Checking the scores left to right: Ilan Herbst (back), Ophir Herbst, Doron Yadlin, Israel Yadlin



play. Once East followed to the diamond lead, he had to take with the ♦A, eliminate trumps and then all there was left to do was to close one's eyes, cross fingers and proceed to play clubs to the ♣K and the ♣A and ♣J for.... East ♣Q.

After a moment of pregnant pause, declarer could then slowly reopen his eyes, uncross his fingers: happiness, joy and...a flat hand!

At the other table, in fact, the super-aggressive opening of 1♦ with the cards of North smoothed the way for the Herbst to get to the same contract.

West	North	East	South
Levin	O.Herbst	Birman	I.Herbst
	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥
Dbl	2♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♠	All Pass	

Ophir showed a 3154 shape, two out of five aces over the RKCB enquiry and no kings after the 5NT ask.

The lead was a surprising trump instead of the ♦K, a big help for declarer because, without a diamond overcall, Ilan Herbst could not legitimately expect to find diamonds 5-1 and would probably have tried to play for the suit splitting 3-3 or 4-2 to make good dummy's diamonds for a club pitch from hand, a line clearly doomed to failure on the actual layout. As it was, on the trump lead declarer had only time to play on the double finesse in clubs and when the ♣K popped up, all his problems were solved.

After such an unlikely sequence of events it was no surprise that this second quarter turned into a minor Waterloo for the Birman team which, partly due to bad luck, partly

due to an opaque performance from some of its best players, ended up losing 41 IMPs in 14 hands. The halfway advantage of 69 IMPs for Kalish turned to be unassailable and although at the end the final result will be a more contained 115-92, that will be due mostly to the bunker approach employed by both Herbst and Yadlin brothers in the second half, trying their utmost not to compromise their huge lead with risky actions. In the last 14 hands in particular Cohen-Altshuler and Zeligman-Levin managed to pull back 36 of the 59 IMPs of disadvantage with which they started the quarter.

Here is their biggest gain thanks to an excellent display of hand evaluation by Gilad Altshuler:

Board 20; Dealer West, All Vul

♠ AK1042			
♥ AK84			
♦ 4			
♣ Q85			
♠ J83		♠ 95	
♥ Q52		♥ J9	
♦ 1072		♦ J653	
♣ 9742		♣ AJ1063	
	♠ Q76		
	♥ 10763		
	♦ AKQJ9		
	♣ K		

The Herbst got to the doomed 6♥, losing the inevitable ♣A and a trump.

At the other table Altshuler decided to conceal his heart support and to drive to a slam in spades confident that he would be able to pitch some eventual heart losers on his diamonds. This inspired view led them to the unbeatable 6♠ for a well deserved 17IMPs.

Final score: **Kalish-Birman 115-92.**