

The Bermuda Bowl 2003 in Monaco

By Pietro Campanile



The Bermuda Bowl is one of the oldest and most valued bridge trophies, equivalent in status to the World Cup in football. It was first played in Bermuda in 1950 and was such a success that it soon became the most prestigious bridge trophy. Over the last two decades the World Bridge Federation increased the teams participating in the event to allow each part of the world to be represented. Twice Israel managed to win a medal, both times bronze, in 1974 (Lev, Shaufel, Frydrich, Hochzeit, Romik and Levit) and in 1985 (Lev, Shaufel, Frydrich, Hochzeit, Zeligman and Birman).

The 2003 edition took place at the start of November in the fashionable settings of the independent principality of Monaco, on the French Riviera. The only Israeli team participating was competing in the Seniors event and included Nissan Rand, Shalom Zeligman, Adrian Schwarz, Shaya Levit and Pinkhas Romik. They were in contention for a medal till their last round loss to USA2. More about their performance in our next issue; the same goes for the Ladies event won by the USA1 team of Sokolow, Molson, Wei-Sender, Kennedy, Picus and Levin.

In the Open Championship Italy won the round robin with a clear margin, but with a heavy loss in the match vs USA1 of 6-24 resulting in a negative "carry-over" of 13 IMPs which will prove to be a decisive factor later on.

The tournament favorites, USA1 and Italy, managed to dispose rather comfortably of Chinese Taipei and Australia, their

quarter finals opponents, but had a much tougher fight on their hands when they faced respectively the USA2 team with Bobby Wolff and Norway with Helgemo. They eventually both managed to win their semifinals and so it was that Italy and USA1 stood to battle it out in the 128 boards final to adjudicate the coveted trophy.

The match opened with the Italians quickly making up ground and leading at the end of the first 48 boards by 109-79 and that included the -13 carry-over they had started with.

The Americans came back strong and led by as much as 62 IMPs halfway through the session before last, when it almost looked like we might witness a blow-out, and finished 28 IMPs in front with 16 hands to go.

On to the last session which will turn up to be the most thrilling ever played at this level. "This match will go down in history as one of the most dramatic, exciting and controversial bridge championships of all time," commented Fred Gitelman, a gold medalist with Canada's national bridge team for many years, who organized an online video-stream that allowed a global audience of up to 6000 to monitor the action on bridgebase.com, helped by the expert commentary of Michael Rosenberg, Larry Cohen and many others.

Italy pulled immediately back 11 on the first board of the set (board 113) when Hamman-Soloway had a complex auction to a no-play slam. The gap got even smaller when the Americans missed a cold slam in board 116: USA1 – Italy 272-266.

Then came board 120:

Dealer West – None vulnerable

		♠ K74	
		♥ J874	
		♦ AJ965	
		♣ Q	
♠ 105			♠ A6
♥ A96			♥ KQ32
♦ 107			♦ Q32
♣ AJ9732			♣ K1065
		♠ QJ9832	
		♥ 105	
		♦ K84	
		♣ 84	

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Duboin	Rodwell	Bocchi	Meckstroth
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
2♣	Dbl	Rdbl	2♠
Dbl	Pass	3NT	All Pass

In the closed room Bocchi-Duboin came in late in the auction after the usual feather-light Meckwell opening and were allowed to play in 3NT, making 10 tricks for +430.

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Hamman	Lauria	Soloway	Versace
Pass	Pass	1NT	2♦*
3NT	4♥	Dbl	4♠
Pass	Pass	Dbl	All Pass

* a long major

Here Lauria made the great call of 4♥ asking Versace to pass/correct to his major, a decision which should save quite a few imps since 4♠ is only one or two off. However Hamman led the ♠5 to Soloway's

♠A and the whole VuGraph theatre went up in a scream when they saw that he returned a small spade instead of trying to cash out. Now Versace had a chance to make if he guessed the diamonds. The Italian champion took the right inference from the fact that Soloway had played back a trump, something he would not likely do if he thought the diamonds would run and, after a very long pause he called for the ♦J and let it run from dummy to the dismay of the USA supporters in the audience and the obvious delight of their Italian counterparts. 15 IMPs to Italy which was now leading 281-278. A few imps changed hands in the next three boards and the score was now Italy-USA1 283-282 with five boards to go.



Norberto Bocchi

Board 124 next, dealer W and N/S vul

♠ J10942			
♥ 653			
♦ AQJ8			
♣ 5			
♠ A73		♠ K85	
♥ 2		♥ Q10987	
♦ 742		♦ K109	
♣ AKQJ107		♣ 82	
	♠ Q6		
	♥ AKJ4		
	♦ 653		
	♣ 9643		

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Duboin	Rodwell	Bocchi	Meckstroth
1♣	1♠	Dbl	Rdbl
3♣	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

In the closed room Italy found the unbeatable 3NT spot with 22 points on the line, thanks to a daring action of Bocchi-Duboin who did something which

had always been the main characteristic of their opponents, Meckstroth-Rodwell, whose style of pressure bridge is exemplified by the efforts to always strain to find game contracts with very light values.

The swings and the excitement were once again in the open room:

West	North	East	South
Hamman	Lauria	Soloway	Versace
2♣	2♠	3♣	Dbl
3♠	Pass	3NT	Dbl
4♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

The bidding in this hand resembled the scene from one of those sixties movies where the rat-pack organizes a crash race, with two cars driving towards each other at break-neck speed to see who is the bravest driver, the one who doesn't blink and waits till the last moment before turning away from the collision. Here after Hamman's 2♣ opening showing long clubs and opening values, Lauria came in at adverse vulnerability with a good contender for the prize of "the most disgusting overcall of the year", Soloway bid a competitive 3♣ and Versace doubled to show values. Hamman continued by showing his spade control, towards 3NT, an invitation promptly taken up by Soloway. Versace who, despite being the youngest at the table, was not born yesterday, must have felt that the Americans were trying to gamble on 3NT making and given his top heart honors, the Qx in partner's suit and the fact that Lauria made a vulnerable 2♠ overcall, quite naturally doubled the contract. The VuGraph audience was once again in an uproar: what was deemed to be a huge board for the Italians was now turning into a surprising loss, since declarer could not be stopped from taking 9 tricks. At the table however Versace's double created a big problem for Hamman, who had heard his Italian opponents show values and strength during every round of the bidding. To the astonishment of the spectators the great American champion, the most titled player in activity, "blinked" and pulled 3NTX to 4♣. The contract made after Versace "mislicked" and failed to cover the second round of hearts from dummy but the +130 score still meant that USA1

had dropped further behind. Italy-USA1 290-282.

After board 125 turned to be a flat 3♥ contract, well needed to allow tranquilizers and blood pressure pills to be distributed to the audience, on we go to the explosive last three boards of the Championship.

Board 126 - Dealer East - None vul.

	♠ QJ10754		
	♥ KJ94		
	♦ AK6		
	♣ -		
♠ AK983		♠ -	
♥ -		♥ 107532	
♦ Q84		♦ 973	
♣ AKQ103		♣ 96542	
	♠ 62		
	♥ AQ86		
	♦ J1052		
	♣ J87		

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Duboin	Rodwell	Bocchi	Meckstroth
		Pass	Pass
1♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Rdbl	2♠	Pass	3♦
4♣	4♥	5♣	Pass
Pass	5♦	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	Pass	Pass

The closed room had finished by now and the players joined the audience in the VuGraph theatre, for them it will be a grueling experience to witness what will unfold shortly in the open room in the last three boards. The result here would seem to be another potential plus to Italy, since 5♣ does not make and the Italians got 500 for 5♦ -3 doubled.

Open Room:

West	North	East	South
Hamman	Lauria	Soloway	Versace
		Pass	Pass
1♣*	1♠	Pass	Pass
2♣	Dbl	5♣	Dbl
Pass	5♥	Pass	Pass
6♣	Dbl	All Pass	

Once again the Italians run to the edge of a precipice, only to be rescued by the most unlikely of saviors: Bob Hamman. After Hamman's strong club opening and rebid of 2♣, Soloway jumped immediately to game on his zero count, due to his strong

distributional values. Versace doubled and Lauria bid 5♥, offering a choice of games. Soloway, happy about the spot the Italians reached and unsure as to how 5♠ would fare, passed to avoid alerting Italians about the bad split. Hamman's turn to bid and a double here would fetch the USA at least 300.

But the American made another surprising decision and put 6♣ on the table, promptly doubled by Lauria for another 300 to the Italians and a total score of Italy-USA1 303-282 with two boards to go.

Board 127 - Dealer South - NS vul.

♠ 765			
♥ 7			
♦ A9652			
♣ 8632			
♠ Q8432		♠ AJ	
♥ -		♥ AKJ109652	
♦ KQ103		♦ J8	
♣ AQ104		♣ 7	
♠ K109			
♥ Q843			
♦ 74			
♣ KJ95			

The previous scores may well have unsettled Hamman-Soloway, but this board must have cheered them up when they stopped in 4H and noticed the bad trump split which dooms any higher level contract as Bocchi-Duboin found out after investigating slam and stopping in 5♥, one off once declarer declined to take the club finesse, not yet aware of the bad split in the red suits.

Italy-USA1 303-292

Last board of the match, USA1 needed a 500 positive score to make up the 11 IMPs it trailed by. Bocchi-Duboin here had the only bad slip up of the set when Duboin played 4♥ on East-West, for an amazing 4H-4 vul and +400 to USA already marked on the VuGraph screen. This meant that Italy would win with any plus score or if they managed to lose less than 100. The match would go into an eight-boards play-off if the USA get a 100-190 plus score, but they win with any bigger plus score. Once again the huge factor of that +13 carry-over for USA1 looms over the proceedings: without that handicap Italy could already claim the trophy without having to suffer through the next and last

board.

Board 128 - Dealer West - EW vul.

		♠ 2	
		♥ AJ93	
		♦ KQ109865	
		♣ 5	
♠ J10			♠ A6543
♥ 542			♥ KQ1086
♦ A7			♦ 42
♣ K107642			♣ A
		♠ KQ987	
		♥ 7	
		♦ J3	
		♣ QJ983	

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Duboin	Rodwell	Bocchi	Meckstroth
Pass	1♦	2♦*	Pass
2♥	3♦	Pass	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		
* Michaels			

Result: 4♥-4 = 400 to USA1



Eric Rodwell

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Hamman	Lauria	Soloway	Versace
Pass	1♦	2♦*	Dbl
2♥	3♦	Pass	Pass
3♥	5♦	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Bidding started quietly in the Open Room with Lauria opening 1♦ and Soloway bidding a Michaels 2♦, followed by another very marginal double by Versace, which was explained at the table as negative. Hamman gave preference with 2♥ and Lauria continued to show his shapely hand with 3♦, passed round to Hamman who balanced with 3♥. This caused the Italian supporters in the VuGraph audience to coo with approval at the relatively restrained auction: it really looked like that the bidding might die

down and Italy would again take home the cup after 28 years. But Lauria, perhaps continuing with the pressure bidding which had worked so well in the earlier part of the set and confident that he would find some good cards in Versace's hand because of his earlier double, surprised everyone by bidding 5♦, quickly doubled by Soloway. The contract appeared destined to go two or three off on barely competent defense thus ensuring a big enough score for USA to bring them victory: despair and dismay amongst the pro-Italy audience, cheers and joy on the pro-USA side.



Lorenzo Lauria

However, this was not a normal day and the players were also not in a normal frame of mind. Destiny conspired to drag the drama on. First, Versace walked away, after putting down his cards, leaving Lauria to play the dummy. Soloway started by cashing the ♣A and paused while looking at the dummy; everyone predicted a diamond return; instead what came out is the ♥Q! Lauria took it with his ♥A and started thinking. Thanks to this return he had a chance to escape for one down by playing a spade, which will be taken by Soloway's ♠A and who will now be forced to return a diamond to Hamman's ♦A. That will ensure an entry to dummy and allow him either to pitch on the top spades or to cash a spade and ruff a heart for 1 down, +100 to USA and the match would go into a tie. Lauria realized that this line could backfire on a different layout, leading to three



The winning team and their coach (from left to right: Nickell, Meckstroth, Soloway, Hamman, Freeman, Kokish and Rodwell)

down, and, obviously unaware of the current match standing, he settled to play safely for 2 down by trying to ruff hearts in dummy. After ruffing two hearts and two clubs high, the following position was reached:

	♠ 2	
	♥ 9	
	♦ KQ1065	
	♣ -	
♠ J10		♠ A65
♥ 5		♥ 108
♦ A7		♦ 42
♣ K10		♣ -
	♠ KQ987	
	♥ -	
	♦ -	
	♣ QJ	

Lauria played the ♠K from dummy, Hamman followed with the ♠J and Soloway took his ♠A. Long pause: meanwhile the VuGraph audience and 6000 online spectators were close to nervous breakdown.. The fact that Lauria

ruffed the ♥J in dummy earlier perhaps fooled him into thinking that Lauria was out of hearts and that maybe Hamman could ruff spades; everybody watched open mouthed as Soloway played a spade back providing Lauria with an un-hoped for entry to dummy's ♠Q winner for a heart discard: once again 1 down and a tie!! The VuGraph operator instinctively played the ♠Q but Lauria, sure that Soloway must be cashing his winning heart, reached for the ♠7 and called it for the benefit of the table-scorer, Hamman quickly followed with the ♠10 and now, realizing his mistake, Lauria made a grab for the ♠Q. Hamman pointed out to him that he had already called and touched the ♠7 while Lauria demanded that he be allowed to play the ♠Q, as surely it would be illogical for him to play any other card on the spade played by Soloway. A pandemonium of jeers and shouts, anger and dismay, erupted among the VuGraph audience. Around the world, spectators

online looked on in disbelief: was it a mechanical error or a mental lapse by an exhausted player on the very last board of such a dramatic match?

Easy to guess what happened next: loud exchanges, Lauria throwing away his cards, the Tournament Director summoned to pacify and clarify the situation and her ruling that the ♠7 is a played card. The Italians appealed but the committee let the result stand: 5♦-2 X = 300 for USA for a final score of USA – Italy 304-303, while without the carry-over Italy would have won 303-291!! The Bermuda Bowl will fly back across the Atlantic with the Nickell team. After such a highly emotional conclusion it is good to note that at the prize-winning ceremony there was a much more relaxed atmosphere with well deserved congratulations being exchanged between the top two teams who had gifted us with such an unforgettable final.