

10th NEC CUP

The 10th edition of the prestigious NEC Cup has taken place from the 7th through the 13th of February and once again the organizing committee, in the person of the tireless Tadayoshi Nakatani, put together a high-quality field with a batch of strong foreign teams as well as some very qualified local players. A total of 47 teams ended up taking part in the event under the expert direction of the ever smiling Richard Grenside.

Hard to pinpoint the pre-tournament favorites: the general consensus short-listed as possible winners the teams from Poland/Russia (Balicki-Zmudzinski, Gromov-Dubinina), from Holland (Jansma-Verhees, Schollaardt-Drijver), from Poland (Gawrys-Kowalski, Kwiecien-Bizon), and USA/Egypt (Robson-Shugart, El Ahmady-Sadek). There were plenty of other good quality contenders to make up the field: strong teams from Canada, Indonesia, Israel, the Russian ladies, recent Olympiad winners, an open and ladies teams from China, the Japanese Open and Ladies team not to mention quite a few competitive local teams whose performance would surprise more titled opponents.

The format of the tournament was based on an eight round Swiss of twenty boards per match, with the top eight finishers clashing in direct knock-out matches over forty boards leading to semifinals and a sixty-four boards final.

Now for some action let us move straight to the match between Holland and Israel. Detailed agreements in competitive auctions can play a very big part in determining the outcome of hands where both sides are quickly pushing the bidding to the 4 or 5 level and our first deal is a clear example of a swing which is mostly the product of careful homework.

Bd: 10 North Dlr – Both Vul

♠ Q		♠ K9
♥ A987653		♥ Q42
♦ K62		♦ QJ1094
♣ AQ		♣ K84
	♠ 108653	
	♥ 10	
	♦ 75	
	♣ 107632	

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Verhees	Israel	Jansma
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♠	4♠
5♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Schollaardt	Barel	Drijver	Campanile
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♠	4♠
Dbf(1)	Pass	Pass	Pass
(1) Interest in bidding 5♥, extra values			

If a pass of 4♠ would be forcing, there's much to be said for passing with the West hand, with its defensive values in the minors, but as West has opened in third position and N/S are vulnerable, there's nothing explicit about the auction to suggest that a pass should be forcing. In that context, Schollaardt's double said he was keen to go forward, but was willing to give his partner the option of defending. Bingo! A diamond lead would have been best by a wide margin for the defense against 4♠ doubled (down three was a real possibility), but Drijver led the ♥2. Best defense now would have been to cash two high clubs and play a diamond,



The Yadlin brothers against Jansma-Verhees in the Israel-Netherlands match broadcasted live on bridgebase.com

but Schollaardt returned a diamond. Barel won, discarded dummy's diamond on the ♥K, ruffed a diamond, came to the ♠A, ruffed a diamond, and exited with a trump. With clubs blocked, the defense had to concede a ruff and discard, so Barel lost only two clubs and the major-suit aces limiting the damage to one down, -200. The Netherlands gained 7 IMPs and eventually defeated Israel to win 41-32 (17-13 in VPs) leaving both teams with plenty of chances to make the top eight. The fifth round saw an intriguing derby between the Poles of Gawrys, Kwiecien & Co. and the Polish-Russian combination of Balicki-Zmudzinski, Gromov-Dubinina. Two boards were particularly indicative of the different approach used by the players.

Bd: 9 North Dlr: E/W Vul

♠ Q10		♠ AK984
♥ AQ7		♥ J65
♦ AK74		♦ 5
♣ AJ75		♣ KQ96
	♠ 7632	
	♥ 1098	
	♦ 10983	
	♣ 102	

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Kwiecien	Balicki	Bizon	Zmudzinski
	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣(1)	Pass	2♦(2)	Pass
2♥(3)	Pass	2NT(4)	Pass
3♣(3)	Pass	3♥(5)	Pass
4♣(6)	Pass	4NT(7)	Pass
5♦(8)	Pass	6♣(9)	Pass
7♣	All Pass		

- (1) Nat. or strong balanced;
(2) I have 4+ clubs
(3) Relay
(4) Good suits and not minimum
(5) 5=3=1=4 shape
(6) RKCB in clubs
(7) Two keycards and the ♣Q
(8) What are your spades?
(9) AK in spades

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gromov	Gawrys	Dubinini	Kowalski
	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣(1)	Pass	2NT(2)	Pass
6NT	All Pass		

(1) Any Game-Force
(2) Not maximum

Kwiecien-Bizon explored the hand much more efficiently than Gromov-Dubinini.

With West declarer in 7♣ and both black suits lying favorably, Kwiecien was not under any pressure in the play. After a trump lead, he drew two more rounds, tested spades, and claimed, +2140. 6NT by East needs a bit of luck. Kowalski led a diamond, and with spades producing five

tricks, Dubinin had 12 tricks, +1440.

Bd: 18 North Dlr: N/S Vul

West	North	East	South
♠ Q103	♠ 954	♠ AK8762	♠ J
♥ AK	♥ J76532	♥ Q4	♥ 1098
♦ AKJ10	♦ 5	♦ Q74	♦ 98632
♣ K1063	♣ J75	♣ 82	♣ AQ94

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Kwiecien	Balicki	Bizon	Zmudzinski
		Pass	1♠
Dbl	Pass	2♥	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♥	All Pass

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Gromov	Gawrys	Dubinini	Kowalski
		3♥	All Pass

Gromov/Dubinini describe their three-bids in this scenario as destructive, which gives you some idea why Gromov courageously passed 3♥. That he might have been able to catch a big fish by passing in tempo was another matter. Kowalski led the ♠A and switched to the ♣2, low from two or four. Two clubs and a ruff, ♠K, spade ruff, and a fourth club to promote the ♥Q produced three down, -150. "Sorry, partner, I'll try to bring a better dummy next time" giggled

Gromov.

Same contract, different auction at the other table. Same defense. An unexpected flat board at -150.

At the end of the round robin the final standings were as follows:

- Poland 161
- Japan Hana 151
- USA/Egypt 148
- USA 144
- Japan Open 141
- Russia/Poland 140
- Holland 139
- Israel 138
- Canada 138

After lengthy calculations based on the IMPs scored in each match, Israel managed to edge Canada for the last qualifying berth to the knock-outs.

The quarter-finals brought a few surprises: both Japanese teams proved their mettle by defeating their more qualified opponents, Japan Open beating Poland 74-50 and Japan Hana emerging victorious over USA 67-54.

Russia/Poland had the best of the Dutch Open team in their all-European encounter while Israel had an unexpected easy time against the star-studded team of Robson-Shugart and El Ahmady-Sadek, running up a 135-43 win.

That meant a quite unexpected semifinal line up with two Japanese teams in contention and hotly supported by the home crowd.

To state that the first semifinal between Balicki-Zmudzinski & Co. vs Japan Hana was not a close affair is somewhat of an understatement: Russia/Poland quickly buried the match after a 64-12 first half score and eventually won 128-49.

The other semifinal was much tighter and the action started from the word go:

Bd: 1 North Dlr: Vul None

West	North	East	South
♠ 1075	♠ Q62	♠ J4	♠ Q62
♥ 105	♥ AKJ	♥ Q62	♥ Q62
♦ Q9865	♦ K74	♦ AJ32	♦ AJ32
♣ J62	♣ Q1084	♣ AK95	♣ AK95

One of the surprises of the tournament: the highly fancied team of Helgemo-Helness and Hackett-Hackett does not qualify for the knock-out phase



Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Nakamura	Israel	Shimizu
	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	3♥(1)
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

(1) 5+♥/5+♠, invitational

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Chen	Barel	Furuta	Campanile
	1NT	Dbl(1)	2NT(2)
Pass	3♣(3)	Pass	3♥(4)
Pass	3NT(5)	All Pass	

(1) Many hand types, ostensibly a puppet to 2♣;
(2) Undiscussed, but surely a two-suiter;
(3) I don't know what 2NT means, so I'll make the cheapest bid and see what happens;
(4) Surely, he'll know I have majors;
(5) Better my hand should be declarer

Against 4♥, the lead of the ♦6 went to the king and ace, Shimizu ruffing the diamond return to play a heart to the ace, a spade to the king, and second heart to the jack and queen. Shimizu ruffed the ♦J return, played a spade to the queen, then drew trumps and conceded two clubs for down one, -50.

Against the arcane Closed Room 3NT, Furuta led the ♣A, three, six, four, then continued with the ♣5 to the jack and queen. Barel cashed the ♥A, crossed to the ♠A, and tried the heart finesse. Furuta won the queen and hopefully tried the ♣K. When that failed to bring down the ten, he wisely cashed the ♦A, holding declarer to



Shall we dance, Adam?

nine tricks. Plus 400 but 10 IMPs to Israel who managed to hang on to the slender lead all the way to the end winning 86-70 and thus qualifying for the final for the second year running.

The two teams in the final had met already three times before in the NEC, twice last year with Israel losing 25-4 in the qualifying rounds and then winning a very tense quarter-final by a single IMP, once this year with Israel winning again 17-13. The fireworks started immediately:

Bd: 1 North Dir; Vul: None

♠ AQ9842		♠ J7653
♥ 10		♥ KJ986
♦ K4		♦ Q86
♣ KQ84		♣ -
	♠ 10	
	♥ 75	
	♦ A1092	
	♣ A109532	
	♠ K	
	♥ AQ432	
	♦ J753	
	♣ J76	

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Gromov	Israel	Dubinin
	Pass	Pass	1♥
1♠	1NT	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Zmudzinski	Barel	Balicki	Campanile
	Pass	2♥(1)	Pass
2♠(2)	3♣	Pass	Pass
Dbl	Pass	Pass	Pass

(1) ♥+another suit;
(2) Pass-or-correct

Whether Gromov was uncharacteristically trying to throw sand in the Israeli's eyes with his 1NT bid or whether he was systemically showing clubs (or the minors?) only his shrink may know. But whatever the motive, the Yadlins had no trouble reaching their cold 4♠ and Doron took twelve tricks when Gromov led the ♥7 to the queen and Dubinin tried to cash the ♥A at trick two. Plus 480.

At the other table the wheels came off for the Poles. Methinks the blame lies with the hopeless 2♥ convention: 2♠ could be based on three small if responder is short in hearts, so East cannot risk competing

with 3♠ over 3♣. Obstructive methods such as these come with a price: much of the time they confuse the opponents but occasionally they confuse the users. If one is philosophically wedded to their use, one must be prepared to pay the piper when called to do so and get on with life. In this case the ticket to getting on was -470 when Barel scored up 3♣ doubled: spade to the ace, ♦K to the ace, club to the jack and queen, diamond to the queen, diamond ruff, claim. 14 IMPs to Israel.

A few boards later Israel stretched the lead even more:

Bd: 9 North Dir; E/W Vul

♠ Q643		♠ KJ102
♥ AQJ63		♥ -
♦ K&5		♦ A63
♣ Q		♣ J76532
	♠ 97	
	♥ K872	
	♦ QJ82	
	♣ A84	
♠ A85		♠ KJ102
♥ 10954		♥ -
♦ 1094		♦ A63
♣ K109		♣ J76532

Both N/S got to 4♥ from the North seat and both Easts led the ♣5. Both declarers won dummy's ace, ducked a spade, ruffed the club return, ducked another spade, and ruffed another club return. At trick six Gromov ruffed a spade in dummy, played the ♦Q, ducked, then led a heart to the jack followed by a low diamond toward dummy. Israel rose with the ace and played the killing ♠K, promoting a trump trick for Doron when Gromov ruffed with the ♥K; -50. (It would not have helped Gromov to ruff low as Doron could either pitch his last diamond or overruff, as he wished. The culprit was Gromov's premature spade ruff at trick six.) At the other table Barel led a diamond to the queen at trick six, then a heart to the jack, and the ♦K to Balicki's ace. Balicki played a fourth club, ♥7, ♥9, ♥Q. Barel ruffed a spade, crossed to the ♦J, and claimed the last two tricks on a high crossruff for a well deserved +420. 10 more IMPs to Israel, leading 35-4 but a late comeback meant that their first quarter lead was cut down to 17 IMPs, 46-29.

Second quarter and the first board of the set proved again to be favorable to the Israelis:

Bd: 17 North Dir: Vul. None

♠ A43		♠ K2
♥ AKQ96		♥ J85432
♦ Q		♦ 96
♣ KJ84		♣ Q76
♠ Q85	W N E	♠ J10976
♥ 7		♥ 10
♦ K108432		♦ AJ75
♣ A52		♣ 1093

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Balicki	Israel	Zmudzinski
	1♣(1)	Pass	1♦(2)
Pass	2♥(3)	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

- (1) ♥+another suit;
- (2) Pass-or-correct
- (1) Polish, FI;
- (2) Usually 0-7;
- (3) Strong, nat., unrelated to clubs

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Dubinin	Barel	Gromov	Campanile
	1♥	Pass	1♠
2♦	Dbl(1)	Pass	2♠
Pass	4♠		

- (1) Three-card spade support

Doron led his singleton heart against Zmudzinski's 4♠. Declarer won in dummy, led the ♦Q to his ace, and ran the ♠9. Israel won his king and played a diamond

What happened to my ruff?



to force dummy. Zmudzinski, who had been playing Doron for short spades from the outset, cashed the ♠A.

With no good news there, he reverted to hearts, discarding a diamond. Doron ruffed, cashed the ♦K, and continued diamonds, but then rose with the ace when Adam led the ♣10. Accurate defense and one down, -50.

Dubinin led the ♦3 against Campanile, the queen holding the trick. She played ♥AK, discarding a club, and West ruffed, cashed the ♣A, and continued clubs. Declarer won the ♣K and simply played ♠A, spade, taking the rest when the trumps behaved. There was still a trump in dummy to ruff a diamond, and the ♥Q, on which to discard her last losing diamond, +420. 10 IMPs to Israel pulling away to 56-29.

The first half finished with Israel leading 72-60 and everything still to play for.

The third set saw an explosive exchange of swings during which Migry & Co. were overtaken half way through but returned to lead soon after, thanks to two double digit swings. The end of the set provided one last gasp for the thousands of online kibitzers:

Bd: 47 North Dir: Vul. N/S

♠ 102		♠ J7
♥ AJ964		♥ KQ1075
♦ K		♦ A83
♣ AJ864		♣ K107
♠ Q65	W N E	♠ AK9843
♥ 832		♥ -
♦ Q7542		♦ J1096
♣ 53		♣ Q92

Both West players led the ♦4, fourth best leads, against 4♠. East took the king with the ace and returned the ♠7. Declarer took the ace, and passed the ♦J, Doron following with the seven, Zmudzinski with the deuce. On the third round of diamonds Doron (sheepishly, we'd bet) followed with the ♦7. Dubinin elected to let the ten run, but when West covered the fourth diamond, he ruffed in dummy and was over-ruffed with the jack. Israel returned the ♥K. Dubinin ruffed, got the bad news on the ♠K, and lost the club finesse for -100.

Campanile did better by ruffing the third diamond in dummy and cashing the ♥A to discard her last diamond. She ruffed a heart to hand, cashed the ♠K, and took the losing club finesse, but had lost only one spade, one diamond, and the ♣K, for +620. 12 IMPs to Israel. R/P gained an overtrick IMP on the last deal of the set, but Israel had outscored R/P 56-31 over these 16 deals, and with 16 boards left to play in the 2005 NEC Cup, led mighty Russia/Poland by 37 IMPs, 128-91.

The quality and depth of Gromov-Dubinin's system agreements was showcased in the third board of the final set:

Bd: 51 North Dir: Vul. E/W

♠ AKQ94		♠ 1052
♥ AK65		♥ J982
♦ 95		♦ 73
♣ A6		♣ QJ103
♠ 83	W N E	♠ J76
♥ 1073		♥ Q4
♦ J1042		♦ AKQ86
♣ K872		♣ 954

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Gromov	Israel	Dubinin
			1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠(1)	Pass	3♥(2)
Pass	3♠(3)	Pass	4♥(4)
Pass	7♠(5)	All Pass	

- (1) Game-forcing relay;
- (2) 3=2=5=3;
- (3) Sets Diamonds as trumps and asks RKCB;
- (4) 2 key cards for plus the trump queen
- (5) I can count to thirteen!

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Zmudzinski	Barel	Balicki	Campanile
			1♦
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♦(1)	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♠
Pass	5♣	Pass	5♦
Pass	5♥	Pass	5♠
Pass	6♠	All Pass	

(1) Game-forcing inquiry

7♠ was much easier to make than to bid, but Gromov's strategy—setting diamonds as trumps and extracting the valuable key-card information worked brilliantly. In practice, Gromov won the club lead, drew trumps, and banked on four-two or three-three diamonds, with the ♥Q as the late entry to dummy, +1510. Barel played the same way in 6♠, +1010. 11 IMPs to R/P, 102-132.

The grand seemed to put wings to Russia/Poland which narrowed the gap to 118-132 before overstretching to a slam which went down after Barel found the only lead to defeat it and make sure to be on the plus side of the resulting 25 IMPs swing. With four boards to go the Israelis were leading by 24 IMPs when the next board effectively ended R/P's chances:
 Bd: 59 North Dir: Vul. None

♠ A			
♥ AJ85432			
♦ 82			
♣ 1096			
♠ KJ1094			♠ 8753
♥ 976			♥ K10
♦ AK9			♦ Q763
♣ Q7			♣ 842
			♠ Q62
			♥ Q
			♦ J1054
			♣ AKJ53

Open Room

West	North	East	South
Doron	Gromov	Israel	Dubinini
			1♦(1)
1♠	2♦(2)	2♠	Pass
Pass	3♥	All Pass	

(1) Precision, but 4+♦; (2) Hearts



Tense moments at the end of the qualifying rounds: Doron and Migry having a peek at the Poles while they score their last match

We did it!



Closed Room

West	North	East	South
Zmudzinski	Barel	Balicki	Campanile
			1♣
1♠	2♥	3♠(1)	Pass
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

(1) Preemptive

With the Russians stopping in 3♥ and the Israeli's in 4♥, there was sure to be a swing. A spade was led at both tables to the nine and ace, and a low heart went to East's king. Israel Yadlin continued spades. Gromov ruffed, drew trumps, led to the ♠A, ruffed himself in with a spade, and led the ♠10 to dummy's king, deliberately playing on an anti-percentage ♣Qx offside to succeed against the likely line in 4♥ adopted at the other table: +230.

The stakes were higher for Barel in 4♥. Balicki switched to the ♦3 when he won

the ♥K, and West played three rounds. Barel ruffed, drew trumps, led to the ♣A, ruffed dummy's last diamond, and eventually dropped the ♣Q, believing East would not have bid 3♠ with that card in addition to the ♥K and ♦Q; +420. Israel gained 5 IMPs to increase the lead to 30 IMPs, 154-124.

Nothing momentous occurred in the final deals. R/P won the fourth quarter 36-30 but Israel won the match and the 2005 NEC Cup by 31 IMPs, 158-127.

Special congratulations to the Israeli team, who have already replaced their disappointment in the 2004 final with the shining memories of their triumph in 2005. they will be a tough act to follow.

This article contains deals previously published in the tournament bulletins edited by Eric Kokish and Richard Colker