



EMBA players were the big winners in all flights in the recent Grand National Teams District Finals in Sturbridge, earning 15 out of the 16 nationals qualifying berths, and taking the lion's share of the prize money. Overall attendance was record-breaking! 47 teams competed in Flight C – which is the highest by far of any district in the entire ACBL, and EMBA's own Emily Marcus, David Maze, Catherine and Ira Cooper finished 1st Overall in this huge Flight C event. Jeff Scott, Michael Tallent, and Jack Vecchione, accompanied by Lance Ribiero from NH, took top honors in Flight B, and Zack Grossack, Amnon Gabay, Charlie Polay, and Don Caplin won in "A".

The Championship or Open Flight final two teams were actually entirely composed of EMBA players. Luke Gillespie, Jim Streisand, Anton Tsytkin, and Walter Lee had the advantage of enough carryover to enable them to eke out a narrow win in a very well-played and even final match to past EMBA President Jim Rasmussen, Pam Miller, Lloyd Arvedon, and John McLaughlin.

Whereas the Gillespie and Rasmussen teams had very few big swings in their final match, the semifinals were extremely exciting. The Rasmussen squad dispatched a heavily favored team from Connecticut, and Gillespie came back from a 19 IMP deficit at the half to beat a top notch all-EMBA team by a mere 2 imps! Today's hand features a huge swing hand from that semifinal match that proved to be instrumental in allowing the Gillespie team to even make it to the finals.

Even though both North – South pairs were playing similar strong club systems, the bidding went quite differently at the two tables:

GNT District Finals, January 26, 2013
 Vul: Both Dealer: North
 Contract: 4♠ Opening lead: ♣A

		North		
		♠ J95		
		♥ Q		
		♦ A10972		
		♣ KJ107		
West			East	
♠ K			♠ 87643	
♥ KJ10874			♥ A96532	
♦ 86			♦ 5	
♣ 9654			♣ A	
		South		
		♠ AQ102		
		♥ ---		
		♦ KQJ43		
		♣ Q832		

Open Room:

North	East	South	West
Jim Streisand	Alan Watson	Luke Gillespie	Kevin O'Donnell
Pass	Pass	1♦	2♥
X	4♥	4♠	Pass
Pass	5♥	5♠	Pass
Pass	6♥	X	Pass
Pass	XX	All Pass	

Result: Down 1 (NS +400)

Closed Room:

North	East	South	West
Rick Binder	Anton Tsytkin	Bill Braucher	Walter Lee
Pass	Pass	1♦	2♥
3♥	4♥	4♠	Pass
5♦	5♥	Pass	Pass
X	All Pass		

Result: Making 5 (NS +850)

In the Open Room, Jim Streisand really muddied the waters when he made a takeout double of 2♥ with only 3 spades. One can only suppose that he felt his holding a stiff heart might allow his scoring some ruffs in the short trump hand, if indeed his side did end up playing a spade contract. The negative double fooled his partner, but it completely bamboozled poor Alan Watson, who, as the bidding progressed, was completely convinced that his partner was void, and with a 6-6 trump fit, his slam would be ice cold. His 5♥ bid along the way to slam is what is known as “walking the dog”. He was fully intending to bid 6♥ and couldn’t wait to get doubled so he could send it back. In the old form of scoring, before an extra 50 points was added for making redoubled contracts, on most days Alan would have scored up an appropriate score of +2020 as a tribute to his “visionary” bidding.

At the other table, Rick Binder might have been better advised to either jump directly to 5♦ or bid 4♥ to show a hand with near opening bid strength, many good diamonds and a singleton heart. His 3♥ bid had the advantage of allowing the hand to be played in 3NT, which, on a different day, might very well have been the best and the only makeable game contract – or possibly to stop in 4♦.

After having corrected Bill Braucher’s 4♠ bid to 5♦, when 5♥ came around to him, Rick’s double is actually quite understandable, and not at all unreasonable. Knowing his partner didn’t open a strong club, Rick thought slam his way was unlikely, and even more unlikely was it that his a passed hand opposite a preempt would score 11 tricks.

Despite the terrible result, the Binder team really didn’t do anything terribly wrong at either table. Rick might have passed 5♥ instead of doubling, and Alan might have been content to play 6♥ undoubled, but that would have still been a big loss. They would have been -650 and -200, for a total of -850 and still incurred a huge 13 imp loss. Instead, they lost a total of 1200 points and 15 imps,

Oh. By the way, did I mention that Luke Gillespie’s team won this match by just 2 imps! Sometimes, the bridge gods can be very, very cruel.

Today’s Shark’s Pointers are:

- *When you know that your side has a huge trump*

fit, make the bid that conveys this as soon as possible – especially if you should suspect that your opponents have a huge trump fit as well,

- *Don’t double without trumps – even in so-called “forcing pass” situations. If you think bidding on is a losing action, consider just passing.*
- *Don’t waste or squander. Sometimes small gains or losses on a hand can be the difference between winning or losing a long match.*
- *Sometimes even well-thought out plans can backfire at the bridge table. Assume that when things appear too good to be true, they usually are.*
- *Keep reading and abiding by “Shark’s Pointers” and you, too may find yourself in the winners’ circle – just like our EMBA players in the GNTs!*