

There are several annual bridge events that carry special status. In rough order: the National Open Teams in Canberra, the Gold Coast Teams, the Spring Nationals in Sydney, the Victor Champion Cup in Melbourne, and the Autumn Nationals in Adelaide. But the most important event on the national calendar is the Open Team Playoff, held every year to determine the national open team for the following year.

The winners this year were Paul Dalley, Tony Nunn, Paul Gosney, Tony Leibowitz, Jamie Thompson and Robert Fruewirth. They will represent Australia at the World Team Championship in Morocco next August, and at the World Bridge Federation's Zonal Championships.

This is the first open playoff victory for Leibowitz and Thompson, and second for Dally, the third for Fruewirth and Gosney and the ninth for Nunn.

In the final, they defeated Sartaj Hans, Peter Gill, James Coutts, Liam Milne, Shane Harrison and Andy Hung by 305 imps to 256.

The standard of play in the final is best described as mixed. Take this deal that produced 11 imps for the winners. The challenge for east-west is to find the 5♣ sacrifice against 4♠.

		<b>North</b>			
		♠ K J 9 8 5			
		♥ A Q 10 8 7 5			
		♦ 7			
		♣ 6			
		<b>East</b>		<b>West</b>	
		♠ 3 2		♠ 7	
		♥ J 2		♥ K 6 3	
		♦ K J 8 6		♦ 10 9 3 2	
		♣ A K J 10 4		♣ Q 9 8 5	
		<b>South</b>			
		♠ A 10 6 4			
		♥ 9 4			
		♦ A Q 5 4			
		♣ 7 3 2			

West	North	East	South
Gosney	Milne	Leibowitz	Coutts
		Pass	Pass
1♣	2♣(1)	2♥(2)	4♠
5♣	All Pass		(1) Both Majors (2) Good hand for clubs

Gosney's one club only promised two clubs, so Leibowitz did well to show his support for clubs. In the context of the auction, Leibowitz expected his partner to have good length in clubs, and so it proved. This allowed Gosney to find the save in five clubs, which he was allowed to play undoubled – he must have had a don't mess with me look in his eye to slip it past Coutts. This went just two off when Milne declined to lead his singleton diamond.

At the other table, Harrison opened 1NT as West, following the modern style of not being too concerned about the shape. Dalley bid 2♣ for the majors and Hung passed, so Nunn was allowed to play undisturbed in 4♠ on the South cards making an overtrick.

Sixty teams from all over Australia survived the local heats of the 2022 Grand National Open Teams. They descended on Brisbane for the knockout rounds from 25-28 November. The 56 – board final was played between CANBERRA 2: George Kozakos, Ian Thompson, Marianne Bookallil, Stephen Fischer, and SYDNEY 4: Nick Jacob, Fraser Rew, Ella Jacob, Lakshmi Sunderasan, Matt Smith, Jamie Thompson.

In a remarkable finish, the two top teams tied at 129 imps each.

				<b>North</b>					
				♠ A 9 5 2					
				♥ K 8 3					
				♦ 9 5 3					
				♣ K 8 6					
		<b>West</b>			<b>East</b>				
		♠ K J 10 7			♠ 8 6 3				
		♥ -			♥ J 10 9 6				
		♦ Q J 10 8			♦ 7 6 4				
		♣ J 10 3 2			♣ 9 7 4				
				<b>South</b>					
				♠ 4					
				♥ A Q 7 5 4 2					
				♦ A K 2					
				♣ A Q 5					
<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>						
			1♥						
1♠	2♠	Pass	4NT						
Pass	5♥	Pass	5NT						
Pass	6♥	All Pass							

A cuebid is a bid of the opponent's suit. It is a general principle that if partner has bid, a cuebid shows support for partner's suit with 10+ HCP, as was the case here. North's cuebid inspired South to immediately check on key cards. When North owned up to the two missing key cards, South floated the idea of a grand slam, but North had nothing to spare.

West leads the ♠K against your slam. How would you proceed?

Barring a 4 – 0 trump break you have 12 top tricks, so you grab the ace of spades and draw trumps – right? Understandable thinking, but here that leads to certain defeat. You are stuck with a trump loser as well as a diamond loser and there is nothing to be done. How might you do better?

The answer lies in making your three low trumps in hand by ruffing spades. This calls for having the foresight to win the spade lead and immediately ruff a spade. Now when you play the ace of trumps and discover you have a trump loser, you can still do something about it.

You start by cashing the top diamonds, followed by three rounds of clubs ending in dummy. When that goes off without a hitch, you are home.

You ruff a second spade, go back to dummy with the ♥K and ruff dummy's last spade for 12 tricks. Of course, if East ruffs in along the way you simply discard your losing diamond.