

## Bulldogs Versus the World

by Pamela Granovetter

It's just amazing how the Nickell team wins championship after championship after championship. Sure, Nickell has a great team, but their record is against all odds – after all, there are many other strong teams in the world. So what makes Nickell so unique? I say it's because Nickell has bulldogs on his team. Regardless of what goes wrong (and plenty *does* go wrong), the Nickell players just go on to the next hand as though nothing happened. They don't seem to get fazed or depressed or upset the way lesser mortals do.

Bob Hamman has explained this many times publicly. His philosophy goes like this: "We're bad but they're worse." Rather than feel bad or hate himself for making an error (in cardplay or judgment) or feel sorry for himself when the luck goes sour, he just sits there and concentrates on the next board. He already knows he's "bad" so what's to get depressed about? There's the comforting knowledge that "they're worse" so surely the tide will change! And it usually does!

Look at the line scores from the recent USA Team Trials:

Quarterfinal Match		Semifinal Match	
<i>Weed</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Meltzer</i>	<i>Nickell</i>
29	1	68	8
78	17	84	43
98	47	110	68
106	126	145	113
126	151	166	162
150	200	195	183
163	237	238	212
Withdrew		248	254

### Final Match

<i>Welland</i>	<i>Nickell</i>
56	26
85	36
93	76
112	89
121	124
149	146
172	235
193	293

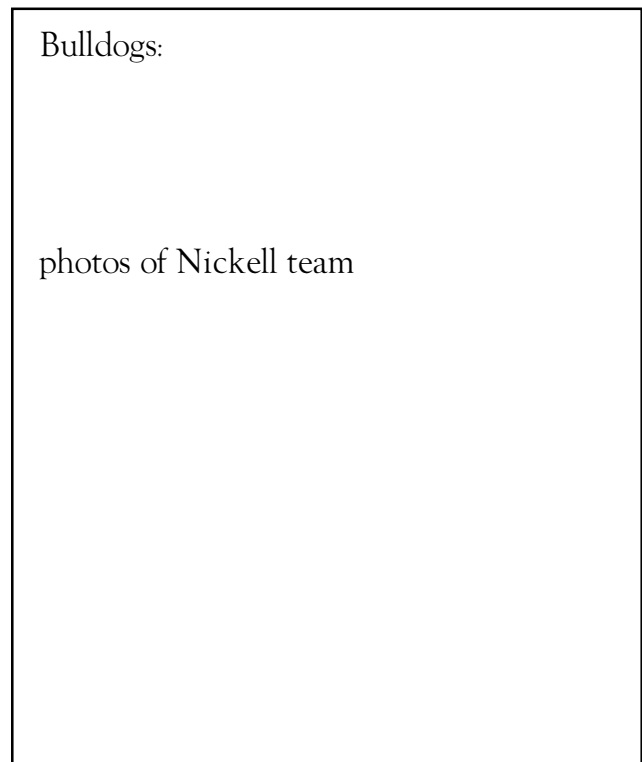
In the quarterfinal Nickell was crushed the first two sets but then came back to crush Weed. In the semifinal, Nickell was crushed the first set, but then fought back slowly, not regaining the lead until the very end. In the final, Welland held the lead five sets out of the first six. Nickell came out of the box slowly and fought back to a 3-imp difference. Did Nickell wilt or get depressed when they were losing? Au contraire, in the final two sets they outscored Welland by 103 imps! Bulldogs tenaciously hang in there and never let go. Mind you, Welland had been playing the entire tournament four-handed, whereas the Nickell players had enjoyed a little rest to go along with their tenacity.

Here are a few hands from the final which demonstrate that the life of a bulldog isn't always a bed of roses.

Early in the match, Welland gained 17 imps on what we can call a "system swing:"

North dealer	North		East
N-S vul	♠ 9 8		♠ 6 3 2
	♥ 3 2		♥ J 9 8 7 5 4
	♦ Q J 10 6		♦ 7
	♣ A Q 8 5 3		♣ 9 7 6
West		South	
♠ 5 4		♠ A K Q J 10 7	
♥ K Q 10 6		♥ A	
♦ A 9 5 4 3		♦ K 8 2	
♣ J 4		♣ K 10 2	

When Roy Welland sat in the South seat, the auction went:



<i>Welland</i>		<i>Fallenius</i>	
South	West	North	East
—	—	pass	pass
1 ♠	pass	1 NT	pass
2 NT	pass	3 ♥	pass
4 ♣	pass	4 ♦	pass
4 NT	pass	5 ♣	pass
6 ♠	(all pass)		

The 3♥ bid showed clubs, and 5♣ showed one keycard. West led the ♥K and that was that. When Hamman sat South, the auction went:

<i>Hamman</i>		<i>Soloway</i>	
South	West	North	East
—	—	pass	pass
1 ♣*	1 ♥	2 ♣	4 ♥
4 NT	pass	5 ♦	5 ♥
6 ♠	(all pass)		

\*16+

Michael Rosenberg (West) knew from the auction that no hearts were cashing so he led the ♦A and continued diamonds. That was 17 imps for Welland.

True, Rosenberg did well to overcall one heart rather than one diamond, and he found the killing lead, but the point is that he had the chance to do these things because Hamman-Soloway play a strong club.

What would you do in the East seat, all vul, with:

♠ A K 10 8 7 3
♥ J
♦ 6 5 2
♣ 5 4 2

South opens 1♥, West passes, and North bids 3♣, which is a forcing heart raise. Your call.

Board 7	North	South	West	North	East
South dealer	♠ —	Zia	Hamman	Rosenberg	Soloway
All vul	♥ Q 9 4 3	1 ♥	pass	3 ♣	3 ♠
	♦ K J 10 9 8 4	pass	4 ♠	5 ♠	pass
	♣ A K 7	7 ♥	(all pass)		
West		East			
♠ J 6 5		♠ A K 10 8 7 3			
♥ 8 7 6		♥ J			
♦ Q 7 3		♦ 6 5 2			
♣ Q 10 8 3		♣ 5 4 2			
	South				
	♠ Q 9 4 2				
	♥ A K 10 5 2				
	♦ A				
	♣ J 9 6				

Do you think a 3♠ bid at this point is the worst bid in the world? Of course not, but it had the effect of bouncing them into a cold grand-slam:

Rosenberg and Zia were pushed around but coped very well. Rosenberg cuebid his void, Zia's 7♥ bid was then obvious, and the play was relatively easy. He ruffed the lead, tested trumps, and then embarked on diamonds, cashing the ace and later ruffing one in his hand. Once East followed twice in diamonds, Zia could finish drawing trumps and then go to dummy twice in clubs, if necessary, to establish the diamonds and cash them.

In the other room, the auction began 1♥-pass-2NT (raise), but there East chose to pass. It was no longer easy to reach the 26-point grand slam and Nickell-Freeman rested in 6♥ (see Bulldog box below, left column). That was 13 imps to Welland.

**Bulldogs Trying to be Needle-Threaders:**

Opener	Responder
♠ Q 9 4 2	♠ —
♥ A K 10 5 2	♥ Q 9 4 3
♦ A	♦ K J 10 9 8 4
♣ J 9 6	♣ A K 7

1 ♥	2 NT (1)
3 ♣ (2)	3 ♦ (3)
3 ♠ (4)	5 ♥ (5)
5 ♠ (6)	6 ♥

- (1) Jacoby 2NT
- (2) Minimum opening with a singleton somewhere
- (3) Where is it?
- (4) Diamonds
- (5) Slam try looking for good trumps
- (6) Not clear at this point. Perhaps responder should now cuebid 6♣ in search of a 6♦ cuebid. Maybe Exclusion Blackwood would have done the trick, if responder could jump in spades, but bulldogs don't usually use such methods.

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♠ K 5 2
♥ 4 3
♦ K Q 7 4
♣ J 7 5 2

West	North	East	South
Pass	1 ♦	pass	1 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	pass	4 ♥
(all pass)			

What is your lead?



On the very next board, they reached a no-play slam, and two boards after that Rodwell was given a chance to sink his teeth into this one:

South dealer	North (Meckstroth)	
N-S vul	♠ K J 10 8 7 6	
	♥ 10 8 2	
	♦ 9	
	♣ A 8 5	
West (Rosenberg)		East (Zia)
♠ 9 5		♠ Q 4 3 2
♥ K J 9 4		♥ —
♦ K Q 8 4		♦ A J 7 5
♣ 9 6 3		♣ J 10 7 4 2
	South (Rodwell)	
	♠ A	
	♥ A Q 7 6 5 3	
	♦ 10 6 3 2	
	♣ K Q	

South	West	North	East
Rodwell	Rosenberg	Meckstroth	Zia
1 ♥	pass	1 ♠	double
2 ♥	pass	4 ♥	pass
pass	double	(all pass)	

Should Zia have doubled 1♠? Should Rosenberg double 4♥? You be the judge, but I will say this: At the other table East-West were silent, and South played in 4♥ down one after the ♦K was led by Hamman and diamonds were continued (Hamman wanted to force dummy, so he would score his three trump tricks). Declarer, the unsuspecting Roy Welland (South), ruffed the second diamond in dummy, unblocked clubs and played the ♥A. He was cold as long as hearts were not 4-0. But now West had three heart tricks for down one, -100.

After East-West so graciously provided Rodwell with a roadmap of the hand, however, it was a different story. Zia overtook the opening ♦K lead to play the ♣J through, in case partner had the ♣K. So Rosenberg didn't have the chance to lead a second diamond. Rodwell won the club shift at trick two and cashed the ♠A. Then he ruffed a diamond, ruffed a spade (to reduce his trump length), cashed the ♣Q and ruffed another diamond. Now dummy's ♣A was cashed for a diamond discard, leaving declarer "trump tight," and then the ♠K was ruffed and overruffed. Rosenberg, down to the ♥K-J-4 and one diamond, exited with the diamond. But Rodwell ruffed with dummy's ♥10, and played a spade, which he ruffed low. Rosenberg overruffed and then had to lead from the ♥K-4 at trick 12. Plus 790.

Even if the defenders had started with two rounds of diamonds, the auction would

	♠ K J 10 8 7 6	
	♥ 10 8 2	
	♦ 9	
	♣ A 8 5	
♠ 9 5		♠ Q 4 3 2
♥ K J 9 4		♥ —
♦ K Q 8 4		♦ A J 7 5
♣ 9 6 3		♣ J 10 7 4 2
	♠ A	
	♥ A Q 7 6 5 3	
	♦ 10 6 3 2	
	♣ K Q	



allow Rodwell to make the hand. He could take a similar line. For example, he ruffs in dummy at trick two, cashes the ♠A, ruffs a diamond, ruffs a spade, cashes the ♣K, overtakes the ♣Q with the ace and ruffs a club. Then with only four trump and a diamond left, he ruffs a diamond. That's eight tricks already, and he still has the ♥A-Q-7-6 for two more.

I could be wrong, but I bet bulldogs take their judgment errors in stride and do not have two more disasters\* on the next three boards....

♠ 8 4  
 ♥ J 6  
 ♦ A 10 9 4  
 ♣ K 9 7 4 2

Amazin' Mecks

All the players in the final made excellent bids and plays to win points for their teams. I think this one by Meckstroth was amazing. He had to lead with:

West	North	East	South
—	2 NT	pass	3 ♣
pass	3 ♦	pass	3 ♠*
pass	3 NT	pass	4 ♥
(all pass)			

\*Smolen, 4 spades and 5 hearts (the subsequent 4♥ bid revealed 4 spades and 6 hearts)

\*By "disasters" I mean bad results caused by busy bidding or pushy bids rather than by unlucky leads or great bids or plays by the opponents.

Meckstroth led the ♠8 anyway! Wow! The whole hand was (next page):

Rules for Bulldogs

Bulldogs don't cry when they lose by one imp.

Bulldogs never thread the needle; if they can sniff a game, they just bid it.

Bulldogs back their judgment in the cardplay even if it's anti-percentage.

Bulldogs bid the same way on every hand, so their partners know what they have. In fact, bulldogs never think too much in the auction.

Bulldogs don't second-guess themselves or partner or teammates.

Bulldogs don't try to get the board back on the next hand.

Bulldogs don't get depressed (in pub-

lic). They never lose heart or get down on themselves.

Bulldogs don't smile at the table.

Bulldogs aren't so good for the game's public relations (no entertainment value).

Bulldogs are not social at the table.

Bulldogs never underbid.

The Nickell team has a monopoly on bulldogs.

Bulldogs never wilt.

Bulldogs don't change partners very often.

Bulldogs win at pairs and teams equally. They don't care what the form of scoring is.

