



ERIC KOKISH & MARK HORTON

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

BRIDGE'S GREATEST MATCHES

BOOK 2: 2003 TO 2017

Master Point Press • Toronto

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Master Point Press
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Websites: www.masterpointpress.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Kokish, Eric, author

Close encounters : bridge's greatest matches / Eric Kokish and Mark Horton.

Contents: Book 2: 2003-2017.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-1-77140-045-9 (book 2 : softcover).--ISBN 978-1-55494-641-9 (book 2 : PDF).--

ISBN 978-1-55494-686-0 (book 2 : HTML).--ISBN 978-1-77140-885-1 (book 2 : Kindle)

1. Contract bridge--Tournaments--History. 2. Contract bridge--Bidding.
3. Contract bridge--Defensive play. I. Horton, Mark, author II. Title.

GV1282.6.K65 2018

795.41'58

C2018-902754-1

C2018-902755-X



We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.
Nous remercions l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada.

Editor

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Copy editor/interior format

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Cover design

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21 20 19 18

Publisher's Note

Close Encounters was a long time coming — indeed, it began life as a totally different book. After initial discussions, the authors departed to their respective continents, and began to work. Both have been writing about top-level bridge for decades, and their files contain a wealth of fascinating material. Three or four years later, when the manuscript finally arrived, it was about twice the length I had envisaged — but it would have been tragic simply to discard half of it. The solution was to divide it into two books, one of which you are holding as you read this. After further lengthy discussion, we decided on a simple approach to this — we would break it into two books chronologically. That way the reader could see something of the evolution of theory and practice in top-level bridge over the decades, and even follow the fortunes of some of the players who are recurring characters in the narrative.

Close Encounters I covered the twentieth century, beginning with the Blue Team era, and ending with the dramatic Venice Cup final in Paris in 2001. This second book deals with the past twenty years, starting with an account of the 2003 Bermuda Bowl, a match that featured perhaps the most bizarre finish in the history of bridge. It ends with the most recent World Championship final in Lyon in 2017, which was decided by slam bidding on the final two deals. Inevitably, the Nickell team features prominently in this book — but then they have been the preeminent force in world bridge for the last thirty-odd years.

Ray Lee
Master Point Press

Forewords

After surviving the emotional roller coaster of the first book, you're about to be exposed to some of the center-court matches of the young millennium. As you might imagine, choosing from among many worthy candidates was a challenge, and we could easily have presented some different matches or some additional ones. The truth is that we initially sent only one very long book to the publisher, but soon learned that it would have to be divided into two volumes to make the project viable. That reality spawned a protracted discussion about the best way to create books of relatively equal length before settling on chronological order as the criterion. That has left us with only four chapters in Book 2 while Book 1 covered seven matches somewhat less comprehensively, but we're hopeful that you will find the depth and intimacy of our coverage satisfying.

I confess without regret that I sometimes shed a tear during the playing of national anthems, some sports events and certain movies, and just looking back at some of the matches we've written about in *Close Encounters* — the most poignant remains the Brazil-USA semi-final in the 1985 Bermuda Bowl (covered in Book 1) — has had the same effect for me. I hadn't considered before writing these books that I would be hoping, perhaps subconsciously, that readers might experience similar reactions, but now I guess that amounts to a further confession.

It goes without saying that there will always be dramatic high-level matches with the issue in doubt until the very end, so if these books prove popular, we can't rule out a future *Close Encounters, Book 3*.

Eric Kokish, Toronto, Canada, 2018

Bridge matches can be frustrating affairs, especially if a vast amount of your time is taken up by watching them unfold. It's tricky to entertain your audience as a VuGraph commentator or journalist if the deals are uncooperative. (One famous author of my acquaintance refuses to write up deals that end in 1NT.) However, every once in a while, one is lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time to witness the most dramatic events unfold.

This second volume of *Close Encounters* continues the in depth reporting of bridge matches from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that are entertaining, instructive, emotional — choose your own adjective and it will not be out of place. Once again we have chosen contests that will have you metaphorically sitting on the edge of your seats.

These unbelievably exciting matches are instructive in so many ways, but most of all they are a testament to the skill and nerves of the participants.

Mark Horton, Sutton Bengier, UK, 2018

Acknowledgements

Tracking down information and photographs is never easy, sometimes impossible. We could not have managed without the assistance of the ACBL, the USBF, Bridge Winners, BBO, Nikos Sarantakos and the VuGraph Project, *The Bridge World*, *Bridge Magazine* (RIP), *Le Bridgeur*, *Bridge d'Italia*, *International Popular Bridge Monthly* (RIP), Tim Bourke, Francesca Canali, Wolf Klewe, Tracy Yarbrow, Jeff Rubens, Simon Fellus, Richard Fleet, Gabriel Chagas, Benito Garozzo, Sami Kehela, Sally and the late Raymond Brock, Brian Senior, Zia Mahmood, Peter Hasenson and so many of the players who appear in action in these books.

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1. 2003 The Count in Monte Carlo

In 2003, the World Championships returned to Monaco for the third time, the principality having previously hosted the Bermuda Bowl in 1954 and both the Bermuda Bowl and Teams Olympiad (in consecutive two-week slots in May) in 1976, the only time in history that two World Championships were held in the same year. (The year 2000 was an anomaly: the official 2000 World Championship — the Olympiad — was staged in the fall in Maastricht, Netherlands, but the 1999 Bermuda Bowl, which had been awarded to Bermuda, was deferred until January 2000 to commemorate the Golden Anniversary of the first edition of the event in 1950.)

Monte Carlo is an expensive town. USA 1, my guys*, are bunking at the Hotel de Paris, together with the Hermitage around the corner the two brightest five-star joints in the constellation, steps from the Casino and the so-called Carré d'Or (the Golden Square), which have featured in several movies. My wife Beverly, for some time the active player in our family, is here with me because she's playing for Canada in the Venice Cup, so this hotel treat feels a lot like a honeymoon. We have a spectacular view from our balcony, which is a valuable perk for couples like us with only one smoker. Ah, this is the life!

The WBF has not done badly for its staff this time, many of whom are housed in Le Mirabeau — marginally less luxurious (its restaurant boasts only *one* Michelin star) — and located on the route of the annual Formula One Grand Prix. Among the movies featuring motor racing and Monte Carlo is *Monte Carlo or Bust!* — a comedy film based on the Monte Carlo Rally. It follows the adventures of the contestants as they race across Europe and use all possible means in an attempt to win. No relation to bridge, then.

* Primary author Eric Kokish.

Day One. We're tired. We contemplate room service. Sticker shock: 47 Euros for a cheeseburger (\$56 at current exchange rates!). Fries are included with that, however. We resign ourselves to seeking alternatives.

Day Two. We come down for breakfast *inclus* and are guided gently to a gorgeous garden café with an equally gorgeous spread of delectables. Soft music in the background. Bliss.

Day Three. All smiles, we come down for breakfast *inclus* and are guided rather brusquely to an ugly, uncomfortable room (if that is possible in the Hotel de Paris!) with terrible acoustics, where we are told by the particularly snooty maître d' that this is (the trough) where the bridge players (he sneered) will be fed. The poor quality, limited-options breakfast with abominable service is not the stuff of honeymoons, and skipping breakfast becomes a serious consideration. Did anyone read the fine print in the (slightly discounted room rate) contract negotiated by the WBF?

But Monte Carlo has beautiful vistas everywhere, ideal for short walks in all directions. The Café de Paris across the square is one of our frequent haunts, and early on, we find a nearby restaurant — Rampoldi — which becomes our go-to dinner destination. This is in no small measure due to the ambience and joyful service, but also due to a consistently perfect *steak au poivre*, seductive langoustines, immaculate *carré d'agneau* and sinful desserts, which include the fabulous Paris-Brest, last enjoyed by Beverly in Deauville in 1983 and missed ever since.

But I digress. We're here for the Bermuda Bowl.

Italy (Maria Teresa Lavazza, npc: Lorenzo Lauria, Alfredo Versace, Norberto Bocchi, Giorgio Duboin, Fulvio Fantoni, Claudio Nunes with Massimo Ortensi, coach) finds its form early in the round robin, builds a big lead, then coasts home despite an ominous loss (by 39 IMPS, 6-24 VP) to USA 1 in the last round. The Italians have every reason to believe that this is their year, their chance to win the title for Italy for the first time since 1975. In the 128-board final, Italy will face USA 1 (Sidney Lazard, npc: Nick Nickell, Dick Freeman, Bob Hamman, Paul Soloway, Jeff Meckstroth, Eric Rodwell with Eric Kokish, coach), the team that finished second by nearly a full match to Italy in the round robin. These traditional rivals are widely regarded as the world's best teams.

Thanks to that lopsided round robin win over Italy, USA 1 will start with a 13-IMP advantage, carrying forward one-third of the 39-IMP margin (had the Italians won that match, they would have carried forward *half* of the IMP difference, thanks to their superior overall finish in the round robin).

Bocchi-Duboin (variable notrumps) have scrapped much of their artificiality and can now pass a 1♣ (2+ cards) opening, as can Lauria-Versace, who have been operating from an ostensibly natural base (strong notrump) for years. All Fantoni-Nunes' opening one-level bids are forcing, 14+ HCP, and their weak notrump openings could include any 5-4 apart from major two-suiters. Their high-frequency two-bids are constructive (about 9-13 with one- or two-suited unbalanced hands) and often create scenarios leading to decisions that would not be faced at the other table. All three Italian pairs play five-card majors.

Hamman-Soloway (four-card majors, some canapés into the minors, medium notrumps) and Meckstroth-Rodwell (five-card majors, mini-notrump when logical, strongish otherwise) play very different strong-club systems, with Nickell-Freeman employing mainstream natural methods, five-card majors and strong notrump. It is going to be interesting to see whether the forcing club, limited opening bids and four-card major openings will be a factor. It was not so many years ago that these were Italian staples, but now it is the Americans who have embraced these methods.

Some of the innovative Italian competitive methods are threatening to become quite popular in the expert community, but in this match their opponents will not be using them and there may be some swing potential in this area, one way or the other. Another feature to look for will be the two challenging Brown Sticker conventions fielded by Lauria-Versace: a 2♥ opening to introduce a weak two in one of the majors and a 2♠ opening to indicate either a 'bad' three-bid in one of the majors or 10-15 HCP, 6/4 in the minors. In contrast, Meckwell's contribution to this genre is a relatively-benign 2♠ opening to show a 'bad' preempt in clubs or any diamond preempt. Although Meckstroth-Rodwell have earned a reputation for light openings and responses leading to hyper-thin game contracts, they are nowhere near as aggressive as Lauria-Versace when it comes to initial defensive actions. By comparison, the other four pairs in the final would have to be labeled conservative, although in an absolute sense that is not the case.

Segment One (Boards 1-16)

Keep in mind the 13-IMP carryover enjoyed by USA 1.

Board 1. Neither Vul.

	♠ Q 5 2					
	♥ J 10 9					
	♦ 10 6 3					
	♣ 7 4 3 2					
♠ J 10 8 3 ♥ Q 7 2 ♦ Q J 9 2 ♣ 10 5	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ K 9 6 4 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ A 5 ♣ A K 9 6	
N						
W E						
S						
	♠ A 7					
	♥ K 8 6 3					
	♦ K 8 7 4					
	♣ Q J 8					

Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
	pass	2♦ ¹	pass
3♣ ²	pass	3♦ ³	pass
3♥ ⁴	pass	3♠	pass
4♠	all pass		

1. 18-19 HCP, balanced.
2. Puppet Stayman.
3. No five-card major.
4. Four spades.

Freeman leads the ♣Q against Lauria, who wins the ace, cashes the ♣K and ruffs a club, establishing his nine. On the lie of the cards, a trump finesse would make life easy for him, but instead he passes the ♦Q to the king. Freeman exits in the same suit to the ten and ace, tucking declarer in hand. Lauria advances the ♣9, ruffing his winner in dummy when South parts with the ♥6. He cashes a diamond to discard a heart, then passes the ♠J to the ace. Freeman has no good answer, but he saves the overtrick by exiting with his remaining diamond to let Nickell ruff dummy's winner. Lauria loses a heart for +420.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Rodwell</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Meckstroth</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
	pass	1♣ ¹	pass
1♦ ²	pass	1NT ³	all pass

1. Strong, artificial.
2. Negative.
3. 17-18.

It's not often that an aggressive pair, playing a strong club system against silent opposition, will miss a game that is reached by their counterparts playing a natural system, less often still that the pair is Meckstroth-Rodwell. That is not to say that 4♠ is a particularly good contract, not vulnerable, but on the lie of the cards declarer must take a series of wrong views to fail.

Against 1NT, Nunes leads a heart, and declarer wins in hand and plays the ♠K. Nunes takes that with the ace and continues with the ♥3 to dummy's queen. Fantoni takes the third spade and switches to the ♣7, but Meckstroth wins and plays the ♦A and another diamond. Nunes wins the king and cashes his hearts, +120, a 7-IMP gain for Italy.



Jeff Meckstroth

Board 2. N-S Vul.

<p>♠ 10 9 8 5 2 ♥ A Q 8 2 ♦ A 10 6 ♣ 5</p>	<p>♠ 7 6 4 ♥ K J 9 7 6 ♦ K Q 8 ♣ 10 3</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: 0 auto; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;">N</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;">W</div> <div style="margin-bottom: 5px;">E</div> <div>S</div> </div> <p>♠ Q ♥ 5 4 3 ♦ J 5 3 2 ♣ A 9 6 4 2</p>	<p>♠ A K J 3 ♥ 10 ♦ 9 7 4 ♣ K Q J 8 7</p>
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Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
1♠	pass	1♣ ¹	pass
4♣ ²	pass	3♠	pass
4♠	pass	4♥ ³	pass
6♠	all pass	5♣ ⁴	pass

1. 2+ clubs.
2. First- or second-round club control.
3. First- or second-round heart control, no diamond control.
4. First- or second-round club control, slam-suitable non-minimum.

Lauria-Versace climb all the way to 6♠. Lauria, hoping for the especially-valuable ♣A and not a shortness control, aggressively goes past game lacking diamond control because of his strong trumps. Versace, expecting a bit more, commits to slam on the strength of his first-round controls in diamonds and hearts and a fifth spade, but perhaps 5♦ would be enough at his fourth turn. Although partnership style and individual judgment are key elements in this disaster (Versace believes he bid too much, looking for perfect cards), this combination is simply a difficult one for the ‘economical’ Italian control-showing style. With this deal as the catalyst, Lauria-Versace would soon revise their methods: 3NT would show a high-card club control, 4♣ a shortness control. With the diamond lead clearly indicated on the auction, Versace has no chance in 6♠, and goes two down after winning the first diamond, cashing one high trump and leading the ♣K from dummy. Freeman wins the ace and the defenders take two diamonds, +100.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Rodwell</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Meckstroth</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
		1♦ ¹	pass
2♣ ²	pass	4♠	all pass

1. 2+ diamonds, 10-15.
2. 5 spades/4+ hearts, game-invitational.

Rodwell is also held to ten tricks on the lead of the ♦K, +420, 11 IMPs to USA, ahead 24-7.

Board 8. Neither Vul.

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

Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
pass	1♠	pass	2NT ¹
pass	3♦ ²	pass	3♥ ³
pass	4♣ ⁴	pass	4♠
all pass			

1. Forcing spade raise.
2. Extra values, undisclosed singleton.
3. Which?
4. Clubs.

Freeman, who would have responded 2♣ had his suit been better, opts for an artificial game-forcing raise. After Nickell shows both a short suit and extra values, Freeman learns that he is facing club shortness, and settles for game, expecting Nickell to make another move if slam were a good proposition.

Nickell gives it plenty of consideration, but finally passes. Lauria leads the ♥2 (low from an odd number), and Versace covers in case his partner has underled the ace. Although Nickell misguesses clubs when Lauria follows low to the first round, he wins the heart return in dummy, ruffs a club, goes to the ♠K, ruffs a club, crosses to the ♠Q, and can claim, establishing clubs, for +480.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Rodwell</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Meckstroth</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
pass	1♠	pass	2♣ ¹
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♦	pass	3♠ ²
pass	4♣ ³	pass	4♦ ⁴
pass	4♥ ⁵	pass	4♠
pass	5♦ ⁶	pass	6♠
all pass			

1. Game-forcing: natural, or spade support, or balanced.
2. Denies a heart control, stronger than an artificial 3NT.
3. Club control, implies heart control.
- 4-5. Control-showing.
6. First-round diamond control, odd number of keycards.

Although 6♠ is hardly lay-down, it's worth bidding. Nunes' 2♠ leaves Fantoni in the dark about the number of spades he holds, a crucial piece of information. In that context, Fantoni does well to bid on over 4♠; when he shows three keycards and significant extra values, Nunes, with strong trumps and playing strength, is obliged to commit to slam. Meckstroth shortens the play by leading the ♣A. He continues clubs, Fantoni playing the jack and ruffing away the queen. When he tests trumps and they divide 2-2, he has the rest: +980, 11 IMPs to Italy, 18-25.

To have a legitimate chance to defeat 6♠, East must lead a trump, then duck when declarer leads a club towards dummy. If declarer misguesses, putting in the jack, West leads a second trump and with both minors lying badly for declarer, the slam will fail.

Board 9. E-W Vul.

<p>♠ 10 9 8 7 ♥ Q J 2 ♦ 8 2 ♣ K J 9 6</p>	<p>♠ J 4 2 ♥ K 8 5 ♦ K 10 7 5 3 ♣ A 5</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">N W E S</p> </div>	<p>♠ A K 6 5 3 ♥ A 7 4 ♦ Q 4 ♣ Q 7 2</p>
<p>♠ Q ♥ 10 9 6 3 ♦ A J 9 6 ♣ 10 8 4 3</p>			

Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
	pass	1♠	pass
2NT ¹	pass	3NT	pass
4♠	all pass		

1. Three-card limit raise or lesser four-card raise.

Freeman leads the ♥10, and Nickell, holding the supporting ♥8, covers dummy's queen to allow the defenders to continue hearts from either side. Although that seems like a sensible idea, with a threatening club holding in dummy, it may well cost the defenders their best chance to set the contract. Lauria wins the ♥A, cashes the ♠A, and leads a club to the king and ace. Nickell drives out the ♥J, but Lauria runs the ♠10, draws the last trump, plays a fourth round of trumps (diamond discards) and plays the ♣Q followed by a club to the nine for an excellent +620.

Even if North withholds the ♥K at Trick 1, 4♠ can be made with some very good views by declarer. When the ♥Q wins, he must cash the ♠A and lead a club to the jack. Declarer can always force a club entry for the spade finesse (by finessing the nine: it doesn't help South to put up the ten to block the suit because there's a fourth-round trump entry to the West hand). Once declarer credits South with a singleton spade, this line becomes less far-fetched.

As it happens, an apparently unfortunate initial club lead would leave declarer with no real chance, North taking the ace and returning the suit.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Rodwell</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Meckstroth</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
	1NT	dbl	pass ¹
pass ²	rdbl ³	pass	2♣ ⁴
dbl	2♦ ⁵	pass ⁶	pass
2♠	pass	3♠	all pass

1. Non-forcing, but opener passes only with 4-3-3-3.
2. 6+ HCP (2♣ would have been artificial and weak).
3. Two places to play or no strong five-card suit.
4. Scramble, more or less natural.
5. Typically four or five diamonds plus four hearts or four spades.
6. Forcing.

When Fantoni-Nunes extricate themselves from 1NT doubled (Fantoni's strategy might have landed him in a 3-3 heart fit: he bids too quickly), which might have made, Meckstroth-Rodwell find their spade fit, but are not able to stop at the two-level with any confidence. As Fantoni's aggressive opponents would not have anything in reserve when they stop short of game, he starts with the ♠2.

Rodwell, declaring from the short side, wins dummy's ace, and reads the trump position correctly. He calls for the ♦Q, and Nunes wins to switch to the ♥3 (queen, king, ace). A club goes to the king and ace, and Fantoni cashes the ♦K before exiting with a second club. That picks up the suit for declarer, who wins with the nine, passes the ♠10, and claims, +170. Rodwell would rely on the bidding to play clubs correctly if it were to come to that. That looks like a good result for USA, but Italy gains 10 IMPs and takes the lead for the first time in the match, 28-25.

Board 13. Both Vul.

	♠ Q 4											
	♥ K 6											
	♦ K J 6 5 3 2											
	♣ 9 7 3											
♠ 10 8 7 6	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="text-align: center;"> </td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A 9 5 2	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ 7 3		♥ Q J 9										
♦ A Q 10		♦ 8 7 4										
♣ A J 10 5		♣ Q 8 4										
	♠ K J 3											
	♥ A 10 8 5 4 2											
	♦ 9											
	♣ K 6 2											

Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
	pass	pass	1♥
dbl	2♦	2♠	all pass

Nickell shows his diamonds directly, his suit quality limited by his failure to open a weak 2♦. He has no reason to act over Lauria's 2♠, but that contract can't be beaten legitimately, and Lauria has a shrewd idea about the lie of the red suits. He wins the opening lead of the ♦9 with dummy's ace and plays two rounds of trumps. Nickell wins, and plays the ♥K, then a heart to the ace. With the ♣K onside, the defense has only the high trump and a late diamond trick to come. Freeman actually switches to the ♣K, but nothing matters: +110.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Rodwell</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Meckstroth</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
	pass	pass	2♥ ¹
dbl	pass	2♠	all pass

1. 9-13, 5+ hearts, unbalanced.

It is merely happenstance that Nunes has a sixth heart for his two-level opening (the partnership approach with unbalanced hands not quite strong enough for a 'usually 14+' one-bid). Rodwell risks a takeout double and Meckstroth devalues his heart holding to settle for 2♠. Randomly deprived by the bulky opening of the information about the diamond suit, Meckstroth puts in the ♦Q at Trick 1. Fantoni has reason to assume that 'unbalanced' means that the diamond lead is a singleton, and so returns the suit-preference ♦J. Nunes ruffs, plays the ♥A and a heart to the king, gets another diamond ruff, and gives Fantoni an overruff in hearts. Now a fourth round of diamonds promotes the ♠K for two down before Meckstroth can catch his breath: -200. That's 7 more IMPs to Italy, extending the lead to 12, 37-25.

Board 14. Neither Vul.

<p>♠ 10 8 7 6 5 ♥ 9 7 5 3 ♦ J 7 ♣ 8 7</p>	<p>♠ A K Q J 4 ♥ A 6 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ J 6</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <table style="width: 100%; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 2 ♥ 10 2 ♦ K 9 8 4 3 ♣ K 9 5 3 2</p>
	N											
W		E										
	S											
	<p>♠ 9 3 ♥ K Q J 8 4 ♦ A Q ♣ A Q 10 4</p>											

Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
pass	1♠	1NT	1♥
rdbl ¹	pass	2♣	dbl
all pass			

1. Equal length in the minors.

Nickell-Freeman would surely reach 6NT, but when Lauria comes into the live auction with his minor two-suiter, the Americans seize the opportunity to extract a significant penalty. Against 2♣ doubled, Freeman leads the ♥K, which holds, then continues the ♥4 to the ace. Two rounds of spades force Lauria to ruff, and a low diamond goes to the queen. Freeman continues with the ♥8 to emphasize his interest in an uppercut, and Nickell duly ruffs with the jack. Lauria accurately discards a diamond, but then ruffs the high-spade continuation with the ♣3, overruffed with the four. Now Freeman can drive out the ♣K, and when he wins the ♦A, he draws the last trump and claims, down six, -1400. Although it is not easy to see, Lauria could have saved a 7-IMP trick by ruffing with the ♣5 rather than the ♣3.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Rodwell</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Meckstroth</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
		pass	1♥
pass	2♠ ¹	pass	3♣
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
pass	4NT	pass	6NT
all pass			

- 5+ spades, forcing to game.

Although Fantoni-Nunes reach the par contract, the auction is not comfortable for them: North is obliged to go past 3NT with a good 15-16 HCP because South's range for his sequence is 14-18 HCP. That would have propelled them to 4NT with a combined 29-count on a different deal, but here everything goes smoothly. Nunes takes the lead of the ♠7 with the ace and leads the ♣J, which Meckstroth covers: +1020.

That is 9 IMPs to USA, within 3 now at 34-37.

Board 16. E-W Vul.

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

Open Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Versace</i>	<i>Nickell</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Freeman</i>
pass	pass	1♥	2♦
pass	5♦	all pass	

Despite the ominous-looking heart lead, 5♦ proves unbeatable, thanks to the layout of the trump suit: West can't ruff the third round of hearts.