

The Scottish National Mixed Pairs

Inverness Castle was the site of the annual Scottish National Mixed Pairs Championship. Players came from all over Scotland to enjoy the beauty of the highlands. The castle, of course, was the home of the defending champions, Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth.

The pair was newly arrived in Inverness, having left Macbeth's home in Dingwall two years earlier. Holding the Mixed Pairs Championships in Inverness had been Lady Macbeth's idea. She approached the Scottish Bridge Federation with the idea shortly after arriving at Inverness and had convinced the federation to move the championships north to Inverness from their traditional home in Edinburgh.

She saw this as a perfect opportunity to help her husband enhance his standing in the Scottish community. There wasn't anything she wouldn't do for him but she realized that motivating him could be quite a challenge. Often this was also true at the bridge table.

The field would be a strong one. Only one expert seemed to be missing. Macduff had had to leave unexpectedly for England to attend to an urgent family matter.

This irritated Lady Macduff because she had hoped to win back the Mixed Pairs title this year which she and her husband had lost the last two years to the Macbeths. She was fortunate, however, to have formed a partnership with Macbeth's best friend, Banquo. She grinned inwardly at the sting that their victory would inflict on the Macbeths.

The Weird sisters would return with new partners; their previous partners had all died in battle. Aileen was partnering Malcolm, King Duncan's elder son; Bridget would team up with Donalbain, the younger of Duncan's sons; and Catriona hoped to tutor the young Fleance, Banquo's only child.

When King Duncan and his wife were added to the mix, the event looked to be a strong one. Play would take place over three days, two sessions per day. Qualification was required for the next day's play with about one-third of the field being cut each day.

"Hail, Thane of Glamis. We meet again."

Macbeth was startled by this curt greeting from Aileen Weird as she and Malcolm sat down for the first round of play but he recovered quickly to say, "Greetings, Aileen. I see the Prince of Cumberland is your new playfellow."

"Ay, sir, that is so," Malcolm assenting, tossing a wink in Lady Macbeth's direction.

The first board of the event saw Aileen Weird declare three notrump and, after muttering an inaudible incantation, she successfully negotiated a backward finesse, handing the Macbeths a near bottom on their first board.

On the next board, the Macbeths hoped for a little revenge.

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

Macbeth opened the bidding one spade and Aileen intervened with two notrump, showing the minors. Lady Macbeth cue-bid three diamonds showing a limit raise or better in spades. Not to be silenced, Malcolm interposed a meddlesome four-diamond bid.

Ignoring the intervention, Macbeth bid four hearts. When Lady Macbeth signed off in four spades, he made one more slam try

by cue-bidding five diamonds. This was enough for his wife; she bid a confident six spades.

Aileen led the king of clubs and Macbeth paused to consider his options. In order to make the slam, he would need to discard a losing club on the fourth round of hearts. This required careful timing.

The bidding suggested that Aileen held only three cards in the majors. If she held three trumps, Macbeth was doomed because that meant she held a heart void and he would have two inevitable club losers. If she held two trumps, he could draw two rounds of trumps, play the hearts discarding a club, concede a club, and trump a club in dummy.

When Aileen held only one trump, however, this line would not work. If that were the case, he would have to score all the small trumps in his own hand. Since she might have led a singleton heart and since the odds favoured her holding a singleton spade because there were more hearts outstanding than spades, Macbeth devised a brilliant plan.

He won the ace of clubs, cashed the ace of diamonds, and trumped a diamond. A trump to the king was followed by another diamond ruff. Four rounds of hearts followed, Macbeth discarding a club from the table. Then he conceded a club.

Macbeth was left with the ace-queen of spades and a club; dummy held the jack-nine of spades and a diamond; Malcolm held the ten-eight-six of spades. Macbeth simply ruffed Aileen's exit with the jack of spades and scored the ace-queen at the end. Top board!

Lady Macbeth's pride in her husband's accomplishment was evident. A simple, "Well done" from Malcolm concluded the round and the next pair arrived at the table.

Despite this spectacular comeback, the Macbeths had little else to brag about and languished in the middle of the pack after the first session's play.

"Double, double toil and trouble"

The second day's play of the Scottish Mixed Pairs Championship began with the Macbeths squaring off against Lady Macduff and Macbeth's good friend Banquo. "Greetings, Macbeth," said Banquo. "I see the Weird sisters have returned to the fray." "I think not of them," was Macbeth's terse reply. He could scarcely ignore the angry scowl from Lady Macbeth as they removed their cards from the first board.

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

After two passes, Lady Macbeth in the East seat opened one diamond. Banquo overcalled one notrump, Macbeth passed, and Lady Macduff trotted out Stayman. When Banquo admitted to holding four spades, Lady Macduff raised directly to game.

Macbeth considered his opening lead. Normally, he would lead his partner's suit but holding the jack in this suit made the lead slightly dangerous. For example, if dummy held the queen and declarer the ten, the lead of a diamond might allow Banquo to escape with no losers in the suit. Instead, Macbeth chose to lead from his heart sequence.

Lady Macbeth topped the ten of hearts with her ace and returned the suit. Banquo won and considered his options. The opponents held only 14 high-card points between them. Almost certainly, Lady Macbeth would hold both pointed-suit kings

for her opening bid. This gave Banquo an idea about how to handle the trump suit.

At trick three, he led the six of spades toward dummy and played the deuce when Macbeth produced the three. Lady Macbeth won the king and persisted with the third round of hearts.

Banquo was convinced the spade jack lay with his friend. He won the heart, discarding a diamond, crossed to the ace of diamonds and led dummy's last diamond. Lady Macbeth won the king and exited with a diamond. Banquo rose with the queen, felling Macbeth's jack.

It was time to broach trumps again. Banquo could have attempted a cross-ruff, but he was sure that the jack of spades lay on his left. Up went his ace of spades and down went the contract.

Lady Macduff was the first to speak, "You want the natural touch, I'm afraid." Nobody was quite clear what she meant by this remark. Several quizzical looks were exchanged as the players settled into the next board.

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

Once again, Banquo was declarer, this time at three notrump. Lady Macduff had opened one diamond and, when Banquo responded one heart, she rebid two clubs. Banquo's three notrump ended the auction.

Macbeth decided to lead from his five-card suit, but he chose the seven, second highest from a bad suit. When Banquo played low

from the dummy, Lady Macbeth had to consider her play.

The seven could be consistent with a holding of Q-10-8-7 but that did not make much sense, given Banquo's precipitous leap to three notrump. No, she was more likely to place both the queen and jack of spades in declarer's hand.

That being the case, she decided, she would step up with the ace and shift to the queen of hearts. When this held the trick, she continued with jack. This time Banquo covered with the king and Macbeth won the ace. It was now his turn to consider his play.

Cashing the ten of hearts was the reflex action but he didn't want to establish Banquo's ninth trick for him. He could count four likely club tricks and three possible spade tricks. The diamond suit might be Banquo's weak spot. Maybe the defense could set up a trick in that suit before Banquo had set up his ninth trick. Macbeth shifted to the nine of diamonds.

For the third time on this deal, a player had to stop to consider the play. This time it was Banquo. He did not have a ninth trick yet and if he guessed wrong in diamonds he wouldn't have time to establish one either. Would Macbeth have led from the jack or from the king?

He knew that either was possible but he also knew that Macbeth was the only player in Scotland who would have led from the king. Other players would have led another suit. Paying his friend the greatest compliment, he called for the queen only to see it covered by the king. A moment later, Banquo was conceding down one.

This time, Lady Macduff simply rose from the table muttering, "Wisdom, to leave his wife, to leave his babes," and continued shaking her head until they reached the next table.

"The attempt and not the deed confounds us"

"Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor."

It took Macbeth a few seconds to realize that this scratchy greeting was meant for him. "Ah, Bridget," he said, when he recognized the speaker. "Always a kidder, eh?"

"If you think so," intoned Bridget Weird.

The second session of the Scottish Mixed Pairs Championship was well under way when Bridget and Donalbain, King Duncan's younger son, reached the Macbeths' table. The Macbeths' fortunes had perceptibly improved in this session and they felt sure that they would qualify for the next day's play. Still, it couldn't hurt to turn in two good boards against this new partnership.

On the first board, Lady Macbeth executed a dummy reversal to bring home an uncertain four-spade contract. This elicited effusive praise from her husband. "Thy undaunted mettle makes me proud to be your mate," he gushed.

Her only comment was to Donalbain, not to her husband. "Rumour has it that you are headed to Ireland, my young prince."

"Oh, no my lady," came the reply. "I have too much business to keep me here in my father's land."

On the next board, Macbeth had his turn as declarer.

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

After a pass from Lady Macbeth as North, Donalbain opened one diamond. Macbeth was not strong enough to overcall one notrump and had no option but to pass. Bridget consulted the floor, the ceiling, and the floor again but could find no reason to bid. She passed. This left the choice to Lady Macbeth.

With her paltry nine points, she was about to reach for the pass card but she paused to reconsider her action. She knew that it was not right to sell out cheaply to the opponents and this was certainly true when competing for a national championship. What was her best plan of attack?

She had no suit to bid so her choices were between double and one notrump. The latter bid seemed about right on balance but what if her partner had a substantial number of points with long diamonds? Wouldn't he hope to penalize the future monarch? With that thought in mind, she doubled.

Donalbain passed and now the choice was left to Macbeth himself. He knew that his wife had passed originally and that game was, therefore, unlikely but he also hearkened back to her remonstrations about his timid nature.

Remembering her advice to him at the start of the tournament, "Screw your courage to the sticking-place and we'll not fail," he placed the three-notrump card on the table. Everyone passed and Bridget produced the five of diamonds.

At least the contract didn't look hopeless. Macbeth counted three hearts, two diamonds, and possibly four clubs; that would be enough to see him home. He was about to call for a low diamond from dummy when he realized that might not be the best play.

What if Donalbain won the king and shifted to a spade? Even though the ace of spades rated to be onside, the opponents would have established enough defensive tricks before he had established his club suit.

No, rising with the ace was mandatory on this deal.

At trick two, Macbeth called for the ace of clubs. When no honour appeared, he had no choice but to lead another round, and to unblock the suit he called for the jack. When both opponents followed, his crusade was nearly over.

Donalbain won the king and shifted to the queen of spades. But Macbeth wasn't having any of that; he smartly rose with the king, winning the trick. When the hearts broke 3-3, he ended with 10 tricks in all.

The day continued to go well for Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. They qualified easily for the next day's play.

"Come, let me clutch thee"

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth had successfully reached the final day's play in the Scottish Mixed Pairs Championship. They felt that the title was almost within their grasp. Mid-way through the first final session a new partnership reached their table, Catriona Weir playing with Banquo's son, Fleance.

On the first board, Fleance, exhibiting the impetuosity of youth, pushed for a slam and landed at the five-level. When two finesses succeeded, he had achieved an average board but not without alarming his partner who was heard to mutter, "Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf," as the play progressed.

The last board of the set saw Macbeth on play.

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

Macbeth opened the South hand one spade and Catriona doubled. Lady Macbeth had several options but decided that a direct four-spade call was best. Everyone passed and Catriona led the ten of hearts.

Macbeth called for the jack, Fleance played the king, and Macbeth won with the ace. He led the six of spades, Catriona discarded the nine of diamonds, and won dummy's king. Next he led the queen of clubs, the three from Fleance, the two from his hand.

Catriona reluctantly won the ace, cashed the queen of hearts, and exited with a club. Fleance won the king and shifted to a diamond but the deal was over.

Macbeth won the ace, drew the remaining trumps and discarded his diamond losers on dummy's established club winners. Catriona abruptly left the table, muttering, "Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly."

Lady Macbeth thought this an odd remark, but when her husband explained that Fleance needed to rise with the king of clubs as second hand and shift to a diamond to defeat the contract, she understood Catriona's frustration.

The Macbeths continued to enjoy success as the day progressed and with only one round to play they were locked in a fight for the championship with King Duncan and his wife. As if the gods had decreed it, their last-round opponents would be that regal couple.

The first board was a straightforward one notrump-contract, held to eight tricks by Lady Macbeth's natural, fourth-best lead. The last deal would decide the championship.

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

Duncan opened the South hand one heart and Macbeth overcalled one spade. The queen chose to make a negative double, intending to support his majesty's hearts at her next turn to bid. Lady Macbeth, always ready for a battle, jumped the bidding to four spades.

This presented Duncan with a problem which he solved by bidding five clubs. What was the queen to do? She followed through with her original plan and bid five hearts.

Duncan was up to the challenge - he raised to six hearts.

Each of the Macbeths in turn considered bidding six spades, but eventually each passed and Macbeth led the king of spades. The play went very quickly.

Duncan won the ace of spades, discarding a diamond, and led a low heart to his nine and Macbeth's ten. Macbeth exited with a spade which Duncan ruffed and triumphantly placed the queen of hearts on the table. When Macbeth played low, Duncan called low from dummy and was rewarded with the fall of the jack from Lady Macbeth. Slam bid and made. Championship won at the last moment.

The Macbeths, of course, were disappointed at losing the championship but how could they resent losing to the king and queen. Lady Macbeth approached Duncan. "Your grace, stay with us tonight; celebrate your victory at our castle."

"This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself. Fair and noble hostess, we are your guest tonight. We depart hence tomorrow."

As they retired to the inner chambers, Macbeth was heard to whisper, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow...."