

Hurrah for VuGraph!

If you're a bridge player who's very interested in improving your game one of the best ways to do so is by watching experts play. My favorite place to watch is the VuGraph on the BBO website (Bridge Base Online or www.bridgebase.com) Thanks Fred Gittleman and friends! VuGraph is also available on a few other bridge websites.

I must warn you though that patience is very necessary; the pace is often slow. Sometimes the VuGraph operators make a mistake or two and the play of a hand gets lost. Usually there are some commentators telling you what's going on, hopefully explaining some obscure bids and providing other little tidbits of information. This is normally done in English but occasionally you can see commentary in the native tongue of the teams that are playing.

The normal setting is some type of team game so frequently you'll be able to peek at both tables and see the different styles and results. For the really bigggg show (ala Johnny Carson) you can sometimes tune into 10 or 12 tables all eventually playing the same boards. Switching between tables helps to make up for the slow play.

In case there are some bridge players reading this who don't understand VuGraph, I'll tell you this much.....it's like watching a table of bridge on TV but you'll be seeing it on your computer screen. Of course you do need a computer and the internet but not a whole lot else.

Now I must admit that I can't watch it for long periods of time. But I do tune in often enough to find some pearls. And BBO does have a VuGraph library so you could peruse it at almost any time to find some hands from past contests.

Recent events included two that were particularly exhilarating.....the US Team Trials and the European Championships. What fun! Watching Meckwell or Versace-Lauria or DuBoin-Bocchi or some of the other famous players is sort of like having a ring side seat at a Celtic's game or Centre Court at Wimbledon....the action is just not nearly as fast.

There's one other little drawback. Events that are being held outside of your home area (the United States in my case) are often at times really inconvenient for you. I know that I was either getting up in the middle of the night or staying up in order

to watch some of the recent European Championships held at Pau France. Their starting time was 3:30 am my time.

So far it seems I've not done much except discuss the downside of VuGraph. So it's best to look at the overall picture of how really neat it is to watch bridge being played somewhere far away and you're like a little spy checking things out. It's a terrific show!

The following two hands are from the recent European Championships held in Pau, France:

Hand 1: Italy vs Germany, Final Round, Board 1

Gromoeller (Germany)

♠ 632
♥ 7643
♦ A
♣ KJ972

Versace (Italy)

♠ A108
♥ AK109
♦ K973
♣ 83

Lauria (Italy)

♠ KQJ
♥ Q52
♦ Q8642
♣ A10

Kirmse (Germany)

♠ 9754
♥ J8
♦ J105
♣ Q654

The auction is unimportant except for the fact that the Italian Pair (Versace-Lauria) avoided the 3NT trap. Amazing you think! It is but they have some wonderful bidding system over NT openers (Lauria opened a 14-16 NT) that allowed them to identify the 2-2 club situation. Hence they got to 5D. Now 5D isn't exactly a laydown game but it was with Lauria on play. After the lead of the ♣4 he won the Ace and made the careful play of going to dummy with a spade to lead a diamond toward his hand thus getting the ♦A to fall on air. All the other tables played 3NT down 1.

The Italians had not really done so well up until this final round but it seemed they were out to kill as this round started.

Hand 2: Italy vs Germany, Final Round, Board 2

Bocchi (Italy)

♠
♥ A875
♦ 8752
♣ A7542

Smirnov (Germany)

♠ KQJ105
♥ 96
♦ A10964
♣ Q

Pierkarek (Germany)

♠ A
♥ KJ42
♦ QJ
♣ J109863

DuBoin (Italy)

♠ 9876432
♥ Q103
♦ K3
♣ K

Auction:

<u>Pierkarek</u>	<u>DuBoin</u>	<u>Smirnov</u>	<u>Bocchi</u>
Pass!	Pass	1♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♣*	Pass
3♥	Pass	3NT	All pass

*Some sort of checkback for three card spade support

DuBoin on lead against this 3NT contract put the ♦King of the table. Now try as he might the declarer Pierkarek couldn't find a way to gather in nine tricks. I think it's probably possible for 3NT to be made but you must remember that you only get one try when you're at the table. I suggest that you give yourself a couple of tries to see if you can make it.

Check out Vugraph....it's the place to gather to watch good bridge!

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