

## A glance at the 2016 European Championships broadcast on BridgeBase Online (BBO)

David R. Green

The 2016 European Teams Championships took place this month in the beautiful city of Budapest, Hungary, and attracted a record 37 nations from Georgia to Finland and Russia to the Faroe Islands, an island nation in the N. Atlantic with the population of Timaru and known for a notable win in the 2014 early qualifying rounds for this year's Euro 2016 football championships in France over the 2004 champions, Greece. The championships were brilliantly organised, and provided countless opportunities for average players to improve their game by watching world stars in action and listening to the witty and sometimes argumentative voice coverage provided by BridgeBase Online (BBO) commentators and analysts, Roland Wald, David Bird, Peter Lund, Bill Jacobs and Mark Horton.

The Hungarian Bridge Association had organised a voice channel on BBO in Hungarian, and interest through the country was reported as enormous, as their open team came close to qualifying for next year's Bermuda Bowl in Lyons, France. They finished 9<sup>th</sup>, just 5 VPs below the last qualifier, Bulgaria.

Like, no doubt, many kibitzers worldwide, I watched the Monaco-domiciled Norwegian pair of Helgemo and Helness, Italian stars Lauria and Versace and long-serving English internationals, Forrester and Robson in the two evening sessions (our time). Although one can see all four hands and generally work out what the optimum contract would be, it is nevertheless very interesting and educational to hear the expert comments on the bidding, particularly in competitive sequences, where the the board is often won or lost as all the players play and defend well 90% of the time.

I was particularly taken by this hand late in the competition (Round 36 of 37 rounds of a complete round robin of 16 board matches) in a crucial match between Italy and England.

Session 36 Board 25

Italy vs England

EW Vul

Dlr. N

	<b>Gold (Eng)</b>		<u>Bidding</u>			
	Q432		<b>W</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>S</b>
	KQ5				1C	1S
	Q754		2S	3S	X	P
	54		4S	P	5C	P
<b>Versace (Ita)</b>		<b>Lauria (Ita)</b>	5NT	P	6C	P
AT7		8				
A76		JT43				
AK83		J2				
T62		AKQJ83				

### **Bakshi (Eng)**

KJ965

982

T96

97

In the Open Room Giovanni Donati, a 17 yr-old rising Italian star, the youngest player in the tournament, found the lead of the H2, probably reasoning that the defence was unlikely to have a spade trick and that it would be more attacking to lead through dummy's strength. Against a slam his small heart lead would not promise an honour and, as can be seen, gave Tony Forrester no chance onf making the slam. In the closed room Lorenzo Lauria, the 69 yr-old six-times world champion received a small spade lead. No doubt he didn't like his chances of making 12 tricks but won dummy's SA, ruffed a spade, played CA and a club to dummy's CT, drawing the trumps, and ruffed the last spade in hand. He now led HJ hoping for a miracle end-play against North who won the HK leaving this 7-card ending:

**Gold (Eng)**

Q  
Q5  
Q754

-

**Versace (Ita)**

-  
A7  
AK83  
6

**Lauria (Ita)**

-  
T43  
J2  
KQ

**Bakshi (Eng)**

KJ  
98  
T96

-

David Gold, an excellent defender and a member of England's semi-final team in the last Bermuda Bowl, had a full count of the hand as East's double of 3S showed 4 hearts. He realised a heart return would give declarer his contract unless partner held HT. He may have considered playing the SQ but a disinclination to give declarer a ruff & sluff is often ingrained so he settled for finding partner with the DJ. If his diamond pips had been more robust QTxx (or even Q9xx) he may well have led the DQ breaking up the entries for a future heart/diamond squeeze but he realised that the D8 in dummy was likely to win the fourth round in dummy. So he settled for a small diamond. Lauria won the DJ played a heart to dummy's HA (Vienna Coup) and returned to the CQ. His last club then squeezed North from holding three diamonds and the HQ. 6C making was worth 16 imps to the Italians and in the end was a major factor for Italy qualifying in 6<sup>th</sup> place for next year's Bermuda Bowl. However, Gold, perhaps weary after 569 of the 592 boards, should have reasoned that the ruff and sluff, although giving Lauria a free trick, would still leave him a trick short for his slam and with the entries no longer suitable for a squeeze. Such is often the thin line between success and failure in any sport, and certainly bridge is no exception.