



EUROPEAN BRIDGE LEAGUE

The Never Ending Story

*Mark Horton recalls some of the highlights from the
European Teams Championships.*

Many of the current giants of European Bridge are familiar with the seaside resort of Scheveningen, having played there in recent years in one of Europe's outstanding tournaments, the Forbo, successor in title to the Hoechst.

In a world where mind sports have increasing relevance, you may be surprised to learn that the same town also played host to numerous chess tournaments. It gave its name to one of the most important variations of the Sicilian, one that is still amongst the most popular in use today, the Scheveningen Defence.

However, perhaps its most enduring claim to fame is that seventy years ago a small group of countries took part in the inaugural European Open Bridge Championships in the Dutch coastal resort. The prime mover was the President of the Dutch League, M. Anthonie Lucardie, and the 10th of June of 1932 witnessed the birth of a competition that has grown into perhaps the greatest Championship in the history of Bridge.

In those now far off years the Championships were dominated by Austria and Hungary, who between them won five of the seven contests between 1932 and 1939, only France and Sweden acting as interlopers. In 1935 the Women's Championship started and the following year Austria did the double, no doubt in part due to the performance of the legendary Rixi Markus. Born in Romania, she lived in Austria, but the war caused her to move to Great Britain, for

whom she won seven of her ten titles, the last 40 years after her first victory with the Austrian team.

The Second World War meant that the Championships went into hibernation, but after the formation of the European Bridge League in 1947 they resumed in 1948, stronger than ever. In the years after the war, Great Britain was the team to beat, as they won in 1948, 1949 and 1950. They could call upon such great names as Terence Reese, Maurice Harrison Gray, and Kenneth Konstam, the then Editor of Bridge Magazine who, with six victories, stands second on the all time list.

In 1951 a new name was added to the list of victorious countries, when Italy won for the first time. Two names stand out from that first victory, that of Pietro Forquet and the legendary Carlos Alberto Perroux, without question the greatest captain in the history of Bridge.

It was five years before Italy won again, victory in Stockholm marking the birth of the legendary Blue Team, which is to give Italy a matchless series of successes spanning twenty years. This time the team includes one Giorgio Belladonna, who went on to record no less than ten victories in the Championships. The team also included Walter Avarelli and Massimo d'Alelio, well known members of the *Squadra Azzura*. Eugenio Chiraradia must be mentioned, as he won the title five times, to stand third on the all time list, along with Forquet. This



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remarkable group of players were almost invincible, and they invented the famous 'Roman and Neapolitan Club' systems.

The Championships were marked by a dramatic conclusion. When Italy meet France in the final round they have 12 wins and two defeats. France, still undefeated, has conceded four draws. A draw will give Italy the title because they have more match points. At half time Italy leads by 7 points.

This sensational deal at the start of the second half has entered into legend.

Dealer North, North/South Vul

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

In the Open Room North passes and France bid and make Six Spades.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
<i>Siniscalco</i>	<i>Jais</i>	<i>Forquet</i>	<i>Trezel</i>
	1♥	4♠	Pass
4NT	Pass	6♦!	Pass
6♠	Pass	7♠	Double
7NT	Pass	Pass	Double
All Pass			

This is how the Daily Bulletin Editor (it was published in English and Swedish!) described events.

'When South doubled the bid of Seven Spades it gave East a chance to guess the position of the trumps. When the French made six tricks in hearts with a penalty of 1100 I thought the Italians would collapse and there were still 13 boards to play. Here Forquet did himself honour; he did not say a word, but continued to play calmly for the rest of the match. This excellent test of character allowed Siniscalco to recover.'

Italy goes on to draw the match 42-42 and take the title for the second time.

In the Women's series three countries dominated the Championships for almost twenty years, Denmark, Great Britain and France. It was not until 1967 that this tripartite monopoly was broken, when Sweden entered the winner's circle.

Although the Championships continue to grow in size, the sixties and seventies continue to be dominated by Italy, Great Britain and France, who between them collect twenty-five titles.

In 1961 in Torquay (the venue for the European Youth Championships later this year) the Congress of the EBL considers admission applications from England, Scotland and Wales. The proposal is rejected and it is almost forty years before there is a change of heart.

In 1965, in Ostend, Italy win for the fifth time, although Belladonna is the only regular member of the Blue Team taking part. The Championships feature this deal, which has passed into history:

North/South Game, Dealer North

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Collings</i>	<i>Chodziesner</i>	<i>Cansino</i>	<i>Deneile</i>
2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
4♠!	5NT	7♠	Pass
Pass	Dbl	All Pass	

After cashing the ace of diamonds North played the two of hearts. South took the ace and played back the nine of clubs, ruffed by North who switched to the nine of spades. Declarer put up the queen, ruffed a diamond and eventually scored a diamond trick. He proudly remarked afterwards 'Who else would have made three tricks?'

In 1966 Great Britain's Harrison-Gray plays for the last time, a fact recalled by Denmark's Steen Møller, who made his debut in those

same championships – and will be representing Denmark here in Salsomaggiore in the Senior's Championship.

In Dublin in 1967, the number of teams taking part in the Open series reaches twenty for the first time. Italy is the reigning Again Belladonna is the only player from Italy's World Championship team. His performance is so brilliant that one journalist is moved to suggest that he could win the Championships all by himself. When Italy met Sweden, Belladonna produces a dazzling defence on this deal:

Dealer: North, North/South Vul

		♠ A K	
		♥ 10 9 7 5 4	
		♦ Q J 6 4	
		♣ J 5	
♠ J 9 8 4 2			♠ Q 10 5
♥ Q			♥ A K 6
♦ A 9 3			♦ K 8 7 5 2
♣ Q 8 6 4			♣ 10 3
		♠ 7 6 3	
		♥ J 8 3 2	
		♦ 10	
		♣ A K 9 7 2	
West	North	East	South
	<i>Belladonna</i>		<i>Mondolfo</i>
	Pass	1♦	2♣
Double	All Pass		

Giorgio led the queen of hearts, and in the twinkle of an eye switched to the three of diamonds. His partner put up the king and played his top hearts, on which Belladonna discarded the nine and ace of diamonds! That was an essential move if the defence was to succeed. When East continued with a diamond, declarer ruffed with the nine of clubs, but West discarded a spade. Declarer made one last attempt by leading a low club, but our hero put up the queen and exited with a spade, ensuring that he would get another trump trick.

Sandra Landy, five times a winner, made her debut in the 1967 Championships in Dublin, playing with Dorothy Shanahan. She recalls that after a somewhat chequered start, the team managed to finish with the bronze medal and a crocodile handbag prize.

Her favourite story from the event occurred about half way through. The team had lost

points on a board where the bidding had gone:

1♥ 1♠
3♥ 3NT

the contract going one down. Four Hearts would have made and Sandra probably should have removed 3NT to 4♥. Fritzi Gordon strongly criticised Sandra's Three Heart rebid, clearly the hand was only worth two – had she no judgement? She listened to the voice of experience and resolved not to overbid so much.

The next day Sandra heard the auction go:

1♥ 1♠
3♥ 3NT
4♥

Remembering the hand from the day before, she led a diamond, the only lead to give the defence a chance. When dummy went down it looked very like Dorothy's hand from the previous match, so she wrote down what she thought the South hand was and called the director. Everybody thought she must be a witch when she had it card perfect (her memory was better in those days). The board had not been redealt and it had to be cancelled, but it had already been played in the other room. After the match Sandra asked Fritzi how she had bid to Four Hearts. It went:

1♥ 1♠
4♥!!!!

That was when she learned never to trust expert opinions and advice on bidding!

In 1969 Italy won again in Oslo, a victory that was marked by the debut of the legendary Benito Garozzo as a member of the team.

There was a sensational finish in the Women's series. At the start of the last round the French were in the lead and Great Britain was second. France had to play a very elderly team of Greek Ladies who took them to the cleaners.

Great Britain played Denmark and there was a huge crowd round the table. Apparently a Director tried to warn them they were running late but Alan Hiron, the Captain, never heard the warning. The Danish girls

were very young and nervous playing against Rixi Markus and Fritzi Gordon and were playing extra slowly.

Neither team had received any time penalties in previous matches. In those days the first overrun got a warning not a fine, so no one was worried.

The match did run late and Great Britain won and finished one VP ahead of France in the final table. But France appealed the result of a match they were not involved in. They knew the rules had been altered after the previous Championship when someone, realising he could not be penalised, played so slowly that they didn't finish till 03.00!

Great Britain went to their hotel thinking they had won and arrived at the final banquet next day to find they had been fined 2VP and was now in second place. You can imagine the fuss, with words flying everywhere, but it was France who got the Gold and Great Britain had a long wait until they won again.

In the seventies, the Italian Ladies, Marisa Bianchi, Rina Jabes, Maria Antonia Robaudo, Luciana Capodanno, Anna Valenti, Maria Venturini and Marisa d'Andrea win four titles in a row to match the achievement of their male counterparts in the fifties.

In Helsingor in 1977 Sweden win for the first time in 25 years and Lausanne 1979 is the end of the triumphs of two giants as Belladonna and Garozzo win what proves to be their last Open titles for Italy.

As the Championships enter a new decade, another name is added to the list of winners, as Poland take the crown in 1981. In 1983, Joel Tarlo, after being champion for Great Britain twenty years before in Baden-Baden, plays with the Spanish team at the age of 83. In 1985, after 49 years, Austria wins the Open in Salsomaggiore. In Brighton in 1987, the year that sees the addition of the Women's Pairs Championship, the French women's team wins consecutively for the third time, as José Damiani becomes President of the EBL. In 1989, Russia, where bridge was once banned, competes for the first time. As a contrast, so do San Marino, the oldest Republic in Europe established in 1293. A new name goes onto the Women's trophy, as Germany claim the title.

As we move into the nineties, two countries recall past glories as Great Britain, after almost thirty years, and Austria, more than fifty years on, win the Open and Women's events. In that year's Daily Bulletin, the German women present their profiles under assumed names – Mrs. Kat. Atastropy, Lady Di. Lemma, Mrs. Di. Saster, Mrs De. Bacle Miss Ery, Mrs. De. Terioration, together with their Captain, Mr De. Motivation.

In 1995, the year that sees the start of the Seniors, won by Poland, Italy, after an interval of eighteen years, begins a new Renaissance with victory in Vilamoura and they repeat the feat in Montecatini Terme in 1997, Malta in 1999 and Tenerife in 2001. At that tournament the creation of the European Open Championships sees the European Championships move to the even numbered years and as the EBL celebrates the 70th Anniversary of the Championships Italy continues to dominate, creating a new record of five consecutive victories at Salsomaggiore in 2002 and then increasing that total to seven with runaway wins in Malmo in 2004 and Warsaw in 2006.

In 2008, the Championships in Pau adds a new name to the Roll of Honour as Norway take the title.

In 2010 Italy wins again ~ that victory takes **Lorenzo Lauria's** personal tally to eight, placing him second on the all time list, just two behind the legendary Giorgio Belladonna while **Norberto Bocchi & Giorgio Duboin** win for the seventh time.

In 2012 a ninth name is added to the list of Champions as Monaco win ~ it is Geir Helgemo's second win in four years.

The nine victorious countries in the **Open Series** are **Austria, Hungary, France, Sweden, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Norway & Monaco.**

England's victory in 2001 adds a new name to the **Women's** trophy as does that of The Netherlands in 2002. After Sweden win (for the fourth time) at home in Malmo, France, after an interval of 11 years, add an eleventh title in Warsaw. Remarkably the only time that France topped the table during the Championship was after the last round. France make it hat trick by winning in 2008 & 2010 but in 2012 they lose out to England

after a nail biting last round. It was Nicola Smith's seventh title, moving her into third place on the all time list, a position she shares with France's Sylvie Willard.

The select band to win the Women's title stands at nine ~ **Austria, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Sweden, Italy, Germany, England and The Netherlands.**

In the Seniors Turkey's win in 2008 sees them join Poland France Denmark Germany as the only countries to have captured the **Seniors** title.