

11th
EUROPEAN CHAMPION'S CUP
Eilat, Israel 15th - 18th November 2012



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G.S. ALLEGRA'S THIRD CUP



The victorious Allegra team.

What already looked likely halfway the second segment of today's final, duly materialised when play continued. Gruppo Sportivo ALLEGRA from Turin, Italy, have won the 2012 Champions' Cup, making it their second consecutive victory and their third win overall. Our congratulations therefore go to Norberto BOCCHI, Giorgio DUBOIN, Agustin MADALA and Antonio SEMENTA. In the final, they were down 0-20 after 4 boards but they scored 111-4 over the next 22 boards to put the match well out of reach for their opponents. The six-times winners, team Angelini from Rome, Italy, therefore have to be content with the silver medal. Our congratulations go to them as well: Ercole BOVE (npc), Leonardo CIMA, Valerio GIUBILO, Lorenzo LAURIA, Federico PRIMAVERA and Alfredo VERSACE.

In the play-off for the bronze medal, Monaco FM beat Bridge Club Real from Russia. This match was much more evenly poised than the grand final, as neither team ever had a lead of more than 20 IMPs except in the first five boards of the second segment. Even then, the Russians came back quickly to within striking distance of their opponents. The score after one segment was 57-38 to Monaco and the final score became 81-63 to them. The difference was caused mainly by two good slams in the first segment, where the two Russian pairs involved both stayed in game to lose 28 IMPs in all.

So our congratulations also go to the bronze winners: Jean-Charles ALLAVENA (npc), Fulvio FANTONI, Geir HELGEMO, Tor HELNESS, Franck MULTON, Claudio NUNES and Pierre ZIMMERMANN.

RESULTS

FINALS

	c/o	1	Tot	2	Tot	3	Total
G.S. Allegra	0	55	55	58	113	46	159
Angelini Bridge Team	0	23	23	28	51	30	81
Monaco FM	0	57	57	24	81		81
Bridge Club Real	0	38	38	25	63		63
Israel Blue	0	39	39	44	83		83
Radkov Bridge Club	0	37	37	25	62		62
Consus Kalisz	0	52	52	39	91		91
Israel White	0	27	27	32	59		59

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The Semifinals, Third Segment

The third segment of the semi-finals did not provide much drama. Both Italian teams started with a healthy lead and increased it in the first half of the segment, leaving their opponents with little chance. The Russians did cut the lead to 11 at the penultimate board when Dubinin managed to find the killing lead against 6NT, but the last board was a flat game. Meanwhile Allegra defeated Monaco comprehensively by a margin of 51 IMPs.

I have chosen three of the more instructive deals, comparing the bidding and play at all four tables of the semi-finals. The same set of deals was also played at another eight tables involving the playoffs for places 5-8 and 9-12.

Board 1. Dealer North. None Vul.

<p>♠ 4 3 ♥ K Q 9 8 4 3 ♦ 10 7 5 4 ♣ 7</p>	<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <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	<p>♠ A 6 ♥ J 10 ♦ K ♣ A Q 10 8 6 5 4 3</p>	<p>♠ K 8 7 5 ♥ 7 6 5 2 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ K 2</p>
N						
W E						
S						
		<p>♠ Q J 10 9 2 ♥ A ♦ A Q 9 8 6 ♣ J 9</p>				

Here North-South's task was to reach the cold slam of 6♣. Fantoni-Nunes did this easily with the help of a special systemic bid.

West	North	East	South
<i>Madala</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Bocchi</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
	1♣	Pass	3♥
	4♣	Pass	4♦
	4♠	Pass	4NT
	6♣	All Pass	

3♥ probably showed a good hand with spades and diamonds, and 4♣ set the trump. Afterwards they exchanged cuebids, and 4NT showed an even number of keycards, just the information North needed to make the final decision. Fantoni won the heart lead, cashed the ♣A and the ♦K, ruffed a heart and dummy, discarded a spade on the ♦A and claimed.

The bidding went along similar lines in the Closed Room of the other match.

West	North	East	South
Dubinin	Lauria	Gromov	Versace
	1♣	Pass	1♠
	4♣	4♥	4NT
	6♣	All Pass	

Apparently the 3♥ weak jump only helped North-South reach their slam. At the other two tables the West players preferred a "normal" 2♥ overcall with 5 HCP – modern bridge – and it made their opponents' task harder.

West	North	East	South
<i>Helgemo</i>	<i>Sementa</i>	<i>Helness</i>	<i>Duboin</i>
	1♣	Pass	1♠
	2♥	3♥	Dbl
	Pass	All Pass	

3♣ certainly didn't describe an 8-card suit, and South's double just showed a good hand. Taking the bidding at face value, East-West seemed to have their share of the points. Sementa thought that a shot at game would be good enough. Despite having a good hand with absolute heart control, Duboin couldn't raise. His partner would have bid the same when holding an aceless hand with long clubs.

West	North	East	South
<i>Giubilo</i>	<i>Drijver</i>	<i>Cima</i>	<i>Brink</i>
	1♣	Pass	1♠
	2♥	3♥	Dbl
	Pass	Pass	4♣
	Pass	Pass	4♥
	Pass	Pass	5♥
	Pass	All Pass	

Sementa's 5♣ bid left something to be desired, and the Dutch pair showed how it should be done. The temporizing 3♠ bid allowed South to invite slam and show club agreement. North was anxious about his hearts, but after hearing 4♥ from South he asked for keycards and bid the slam.

Board 4. Dealer West. All Vul.

<p>♠ 4 3 ♥ Q 10 2 ♦ A ♣ K Q J 8 6 5 3</p>	<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <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	<p>♠ 10 5 ♥ K 8 7 6 ♦ Q 10 9 4 ♣ 10 9 4</p>	<p>♠ K Q 8 6 2 ♥ A 5 3 ♦ K 8 5 3 ♣ 7</p>
N						
W E						
S						
		<p>♠ A J 9 7 ♥ J 9 4 ♦ J 7 6 2 ♣ A 2</p>				

The likely contract is 3NT by East-West, failing after a diamond lead due to lack of communication. Let's see how it developed at our featured four tables.

West	North	East	South
Helgemo	Sementa	Helness	Duboin
1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	All Pass		

Helness decided to stop at 3♣ despite having an opening bid. Was it because they frequently open light, or maybe he was trying for a swing due to his team's desperate position? It was destined to create a swing one way or the other. 3NT was played at eight tables, making four times and going down four times.

West	North	East	South
Madala	Fantoni	Bocchi	Nunes
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

The swing didn't go Monaco's way. Bocchi's 1♥ showed spades, but his diamond bids indicated strength in the suit. Fantoni decided to lead "according to the bidding" instead of choosing his own best suit. His heart lead allowed the game to make, costing 10 IMPs.

West	North	East	South
Dubinín	Lauria	Gromov	Versace
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♠	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

Here 2♣ was Precision and 2♦ was artificial, so only the black suits were mentioned. One would have expected Lauria to choose a diamond lead, but he still preferred a heart. Minus 600.

West	North	East	South
Giubilo	Drijver	Cima	Brink
1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Dbf
All Pass			

The fourth table provided some "action". Here West showed a better hand by jumping to 3♣. Nevertheless Brink doubled to indicate a spade lead. Drijver led the ♠10, covered by the king and ace, and Brink had to decide what to do next. His spade continuation was an admission of defeat. Declarer was allowed to make an overtrick – minus 950 and 8 IMPs to Angelini.

It could be 13 the other way had he shifted to a diamond. Is it really possible to find that switch without seeing all four hands? Admittedly it is difficult, but not entirely impossible. In order to justify his bidding West should have excellent clubs together with the ♦A. In addition he should have a heart stopper. If South asks himself what kind of hand West can have that still allows the defenders to beat the contract, he may reach the correct answer: a stiff ♦A and hearts headed by the queen.

Board 5. Dealer North. N/S Vul.

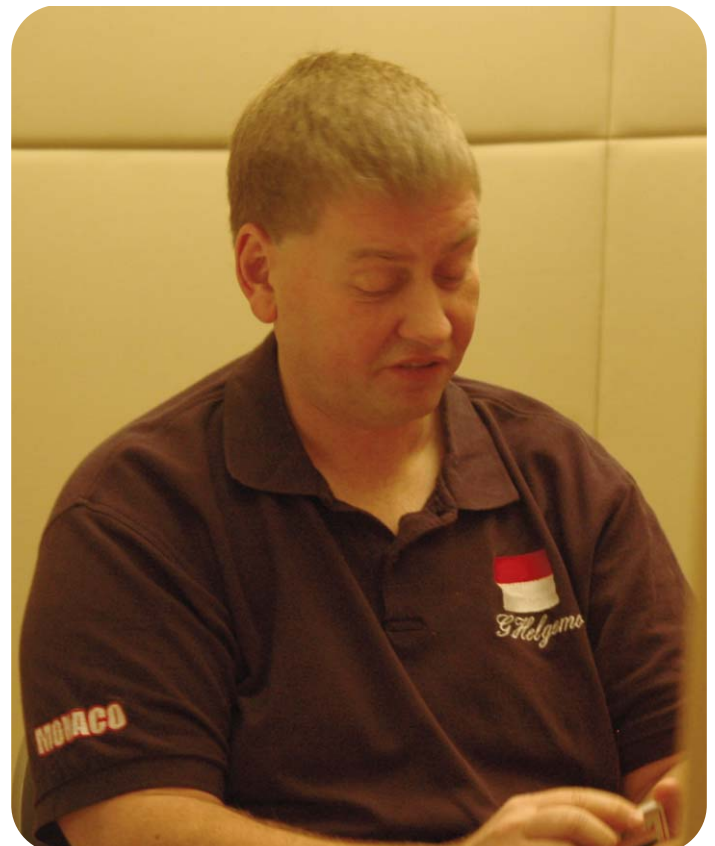
♠ A 9 3		♠ 8 6									
♥ J 6 4		♥ 9 6 5 3									
♦ Q 3		♦ J 10 7									
♣ A 10 9 7 3		♣ K Q 8 4									
♠ K 7 2											
♥ K Q 2											
♦ K 9 8 6 2											
♣ 6 2											
	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ Q J 10 5 4											
♥ A 10 7											
♦ A 5 4											
♣ J 5											

According to traditional standards, North-South are supposed to stop short of game with twelve HCP facing eleven. However, it has become slightly old-fashioned not to open a hand such as North's. Lauria did pass as dealer, and they played 3♠. We will follow the play at the three other tables, where South became the declarer in 4♠.

The top-of-sequence ♥K lead looks standard, although it greatly simplifies declarer's task. This was West's choice at both tables of the Monaco-Allegra match. Nevertheless this board produced a swing.

Nunes won Madala's ♥Q lead with the A and ran the ♣J to East's K. Bocchi's switch to a diamond solved all of declarer's problems. He had exactly one loser in each side suit. All that remained was to finesse trumps for plus 620.

Duboin won Helgemo's ♥K lead and continued with



Geir Helgemo, Monaco FM

three rounds of trumps before running the ♣J. The defenders continued patiently with two rounds of hearts, leaving declarer to his own devices. The following cards remained with dummy on lead.

♠ -	♠ -	♠ -				
♥ -	♥ -	♥ -				
♦ K 9 8 6 2	♦ Q 3	♦ J 10 7				
♣ 6	♣ A 10 9 7	♣ Q 8 4				
<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #336633; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>			N	W E	S	
N						
W E						
S						
<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♠ J 5</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♥ -</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♦ A 5 4</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♣ 5</td></tr> </table>			♠ J 5	♥ -	♦ A 5 4	♣ 5
♠ J 5						
♥ -						
♦ A 5 4						
♣ 5						

Of course Duboin could get home by ruffing a club and playing a diamond towards the queen, but he was entitled to form his own view of the hand. West has already showed the missing points in both major suits, so declarer placed East with all minor suit honours.

He played a diamond to the ace followed by both remaining trumps, preparing a strip-squeeze ending against East who was supposed to hold the ♦K, and going down in the actual layout.

The lesson is that even when the lead has turned out badly and there is no longer a legitimate way to defeat the contract, a passive defence may still be the best chance of success. Sometimes the declarer will find a way to defeat himself.

At the fourth table Giubilo avoided the heart lead, preferring a trump. Apparently declarer was doomed, but not so according to Deep Finesse. Brink won the ♠J and ran the ♣J to East's ♣K. A heart return was won by the queen, and West continued with another club. Brink tried the ♣9 which lost to the queen, and a club ruff settled the issue.

Interestingly, all was not lost when West led a club. There was a very nice winning line (admittedly a double-dummy one). North wins the ♣A, continues with the ♠A and follows by a ruffing finesse in clubs, discarding a diamond (not a heart) when East doesn't cover. West does best not to ruff, and the following ending is reached after ruffing the ♣Q:

♠ 9	♠ 9	♠ -				
♥ J 6	♥ K 2	♥ 9 6 3				
♦ Q 3	♦ K 9 8	♦ J 10 7				
♣ 9	♣ -	♣ -				
<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #336633; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>			N	W E	S	
N						
W E						
S						
<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♠ Q 10</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♥ A 10</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♦ A 5</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">♣ -</td></tr> </table>			♠ Q 10	♥ A 10	♦ A 5	♣ -
♠ Q 10						
♥ A 10						
♦ A 5						
♣ -						

Now West is endplayed with the ♠K, and he is forced to squander two tricks, as underleading one of the red kings gives up a trick in that suit and allows a dummy entry to discard the other red suit loser on the ♣9.

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Round 5, Monaco vs. Angelini

Before the final qualification round Angelini led group A with 73 VP ahead of Monaco 69. Israel Blue and England were on 64. The two leaders had to meet, each one knowing that a defeat may put its place in the semi-finals at risk.

The first significant swing occurred with Monaco leading 6-3 after five boards.

Board 6. Dealer East. E/W Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Giubilo</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Cima</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
Pass	1♣	Pass	Pass
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♥
Pass	4♠	All Pass	2♣

West	North	East	South
<i>Helgemo</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Helness</i>	<i>Versace</i>
Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass
Pass	4♠	All Pass	3♦

A natural bidding sequence starting with 1♦-1♠ would lead to 4♠ played by the weaker hand. 4♠ by South is easily defeated by a diamond lead followed by a club switch when in with the ♥A. However, both leading teams managed to right-side this contract: Monaco by using transfer responses to a 1♣ opening (which includes 15-18 HCP balanced hands), and Angelini by using a 2♦ opening to describe 18-19 HCP balanced hands.

At both tables East chose a passive lead of the ♠J. The winning play is to play hearts early in order to cut the communication between the defenders. But what is obvious when you see all four hands is not always so transparent at the table. Both Fantoni and Lauria won the first trick in dummy and immediately played a diamond toward the queen, giving the defence a chance.

At both tables West played the ♠2 at trick 1 and the ♦4 at trick 2. Perhaps Helness inferred a suit preference for clubs, which explains his unsuccessful switch to the ♣A at trick 3, but Leonardo Cima found the winning heart switch,

and Valerio Giubilo duly returned a club. Beating this contract was worth 10 IMPs to Angelini, and more followed in the very next board.

Board 7. Dealer South. All Vul.

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

West	North	East	South
<i>Giubilo</i>	<i>Fantoni</i>	<i>Cima</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
Pass	Pass	Dbl	2♦
2♥	Dbl	Pass	Pass
3♥	All Pass		3♦



Leonardo Cima, Angelini Bridge Team

West <i>Helgemo</i>	North <i>Lauria</i>	East <i>Helness</i>	South <i>Versace</i>
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♦
Pass	2♦	All Pass	2♣

Nunes' 10-13 HCP 2♦ opening led to a rather normal sequence in the Open Room. East-West happened to be cold for 4♥, but bidding the game was not easy. Plus 170 to Angelini.

In the Closed Room the Italians opened at the one level. Helgemo-Helness had several opportunities to enter the bidding, but they preferred to pass throughout. A double by East over 1♠ was an option with four good hearts and opening strength, even though the hand was not perfect. Of course, a balancing call of 2♥ by West also came into consideration. 2♦ made with an overtrick, and it was a "soft" way to lose 7 more IMPs. At this stage Angelini led 20-6.

The turning point came at the following board:

Board 10. Dealer East. All Vul.

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

West <i>Giubilo</i>	North <i>Fantoni</i>	East <i>Cima</i>	South <i>Nunes</i>
All Pass		Pass	2♥

West <i>Helgemo</i>	North <i>Lauria</i>	East <i>Helness</i>	South <i>Versace</i>
Dbl	INT	2♦	Dbl
All Pass			

The Open Room result (2♥ making three) may be classified as normal. A spade does set the contract, but after the normal ♣A lead declarer is safe.

The events in the Closed Room were much more interesting. Helgemo decided to double the 1♥ opening, despite being off-shape and vulnerable with only 11 HCP. Lauria bid INT – some artificial way of supporting hearts. Helness certainly had his "free bid" of 2♦. Versace doubled, presumably indicating shortness, and Lauria decided to leave it in – a serious misjudgement in my opinion. First of all, it is usually not profitable to seek a penalty at the two level with an eight card fit in a major. Furthermore, the quality of North's trumps left much to be desired.

In fact, 2♦ was cold, and beating 3♦ is very tricky. Helness was happy to see the ♦10 lead, and when the major suits were favourably placed he had no trouble making nine tricks – the ♦J at trick 1, two spades, a heart, two clubs, two ruffs in hand and eventually the ♦K. The unexpected plus 380 gave Monaco 11 IMPs.

After 15 boards the scores were even at 31:31, but then came a defensive tragedy for Lauria-Versace.

Board 16. Dealer West. E/W Vul.

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

West <i>Giubilo</i>	North <i>Fantoni</i>	East <i>Cima</i>	South <i>Nunes</i>
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
Dbl	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	3♣	All Pass	

West <i>Helgemo</i>	North <i>Lauria</i>	East <i>Helness</i>	South <i>Versace</i>
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
2♠	Pass	4♠	All Pass

The paths diverged at West's second bid. Giubilo chose a cautious double, and Cima felt too weak to introduce spades. Eventually N/S bought the contract at 3♣. The bidding of the Italian pair was somewhat timid, but they earned a plus score since declarer had to lose five tricks.

In the Closed Room Helgemo overbid a little with a reverse to 2♠ and Helness raised to game. This contract looks good at first sight, but it is beatable thanks to the defenders' trump spots if they find the trump promotion.

The bidding indicated the killing lead - ♣A. Lauria continued with a club to his partner's queen. At trick 3 Versace led the ♣K. Helgemo discarded the ♥6, and Lauria the ♥8. A fourth club would have led to declarer's demise. If he doesn't ruff in hand, the ♠8 forces out dummy's ace. If he ruffs high, North discards and a defensive trump trick is promoted.

However, at the table Versace chose the ♥K at trick 4. Helgemo won, finessed trumps, set up his diamonds and claimed. What happened?

Declarer was known to have at most two hearts, but South couldn't know for sure if his second heart was the ace (when the only chance is a trump promotion). It could also be the queen, when the task of the defence is simply cashing four top tricks. In this case a fourth club, giving

away a ruff and sluff, would have been fatal.

How could Versace know? By his partner's discard at trick 3. He probably expected Lauria to discard the ♠Q from his actual holding. This would certainly deny holding the ♠A and it would have made the defence easy. As the queen was not discarded, South probably inferred that West didn't hold the ace...

Monaco took the lead for good, and it increased to threatening dimensions in the final board.

Board 20. Dealer West. All Vul.

♠ Q 10 9 6 3 ♥ J 8 ♦ 10 9 2 ♣ A 6 4	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 10px; width: 80px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A 7 5 2 ♥ A K 9 4 ♦ A K ♣ K J 10	♠ J 8 ♥ 10 6 3 2 ♦ Q J 6 4 3 ♣ 9 7
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West	North	East	South
<i>Giubilo Fantoni</i>		<i>Cima</i>	<i>Nunes</i>
Pass	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
3♦	Pass	3♥	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

West	North	East	South
<i>Helgemo</i>	<i>Lauria</i>	<i>Helness</i>	<i>Versace</i>
Pass	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♠	Pass
3NT	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♦	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♠	All Pass		

Helgemo-Helness use an old-fashioned 2♠ positive response to a 2♣ opening to reach a thin slam missed by their Italian counterparts. Helness did not bother to make any cuebids, preferring key-card Blackwood followed by asking for the trump queen.

It was not a particularly good slam, but the trump suit behaved, and everything depended on finding the ♣Q. Geir guessed correctly, and 13 further IMPs swung Monaco's way.

The final score 65-31 or 22-8VP, put Angelini's place in the semi-finals in jeopardy, since the Israel Blue-Germany match was still running. The Israelis needed an 18-12 win to go through, but at the end they managed just 16-14 and finished one VP below Angelini in 3rd place. As for Monaco, they won the group convincingly, but a tough semifinal awaited them against the other Italian team Allegra.

A disguised birthday present

In Thursday's first qualifying round, there was a board on which Alfredo Versace offered his opponent, who was celebrating his 70th birthday far away from his family, a present in disguise. Look at the following board:

Board: 19. Dlr: South/EW

♠ 6 ♥ 6 5 ♦ 6 2 ♣ A K 9 8 6 5 4 2	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 10px; width: 80px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	♠ 9 ♥ Q J 10 9 ♦ K Q J 10 3 ♣ Q 10 3	♠ A K J 10 7 5 3 2 ♥ A 2 ♦ 7 5 ♣ J
--	--	---	---

The board comes from the Allegra v. Burghausen match. Versace had become the declarer in 5♠ against which Michael Elinescu, North, led a top club. At trick two, he shifted to the ♦2, low from a doubleton. Entschö Wladow took his ace and returned the suit to dummy's king.

The play of the hand is rather straightforward but even the good Homer is sleeping from time to time. From the auction, it should be clear that finessing the queen of spades offers the best chance. However, declarer also has to get rid of his heart loser. As the diamonds are known to be 4-2 after the return of the two, the losing heart cannot be discarded on a good diamond. If the ♥K is right, declarer will make his contract easily enough if he takes the heart finesse, followed by the marked (on the auction) spade finesse. Versace, however, decided to give his opponent a sporting chance by calling for dummy's ♠9 first. At this point, Dr. Wladow converted this into a nice birthday present for himself by covering this with the queen! Declarer was locked in his hand now and thus had to lose a trick to the ♥K in the end. One down. Well done, Entschö, and many happy returns!

The Italian comments after the board also were memorable. When Lauria raised an eyebrow, Versace complained: "He covered with the queen..."

The Final, First Segment

After yesterday's spectacular semifinals, both Italian participants qualified for today's final, though neither of them won their group. Still, both today's finalists have already won the Champions' Cup more than once – they are in fact the only two teams to have done so, Angelini winning six times and Allegra twice. The only teams to stop them from winning were the Germans in 2006 and the Dutch in 2010. So a well-fought final of high quality bridge was in prospect.

After two quiet warming-up boards, the match really got underway on board 3:

Board: 3. Dlr: South/EW

<p>♠ - ♥ 6 3 ♦ A K 9 7 6 4 3 2 ♣ Q 9 5</p>	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	<p>♠ J 9 4 ♥ A J 10 9 8 ♦ 10 ♣ K 10 7 2</p>
<p>♠ A Q 10 7 6 5 2 ♥ K 7 ♦ Q 8 ♣ 4 3</p>		<p>♠ K 8 3 ♥ Q 5 4 2 ♦ J 5 ♣ A J 8 6</p>

In both rooms, the auctions started in the same way: West opened 1♠ in 2nd position, North overcalled 5♦ and East doubled. When this came back to West, Versace judged to bid 5♠ but Madala passed. As you can see, East cannot come to a club trick if declarer takes the double finesse, as he has to. This way, declarer's losses are just the two heart tricks, so Cima chalked up a nice +550 for Angelini whereas Versace only went down one for a mere +100 to Allegra. Angelini thus got the first 10 IMPs of the match.

On the next board, we again saw two similar auctions until the decisive moment came.

Board: 4. Dlr: West/All

<p>♠ 9 7 ♥ 6 4 ♦ J 10 8 6 2 ♣ K Q 8 5</p>	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	<p>♠ 10 8 3 ♥ K 8 ♦ A K Q 7 ♣ A J 10 2</p>
<p>♠ J 5 4 2 ♥ 10 7 3 ♦ 5 4 3 ♣ 9 6 3</p>		<p>♠ A K Q 6 ♥ A Q J 9 5 2 ♦ 9 ♣ 7 4</p>

East opened INT in 3rd position and South showed his majors by bidding 2♣. When North enquired with 2♦, Duboin for Allegra expressed his strong 6-4 by jumping to 3♥ which became the final contract. Even on a trump lead, the layout is such that declarer should come to 11 tricks in comfort. Allegra +200.

Giubilo, after the same start of the auction, expressed his strong 6-4 by a direct jump to 4♥. He had no trouble either in finding the same route to 11 tricks. As his tricks were worth +650 to Angelini, the latter had doubled their lead to 20-0 after only four boards. Not a bad start at all.

On the next board, Allegra got on the scoreboard for the first time when Bocchi made a bold overcall:

Board: 5. Dlr: North/NS

<p>♠ Q 10 ♥ A 8 4 3 ♦ A K 10 6 4 3 ♣ 10</p>	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W E S </div>	<p>♠ 8 2 ♥ Q 10 5 ♦ 8 7 2 ♣ K Q J 9 3</p>
<p>♠ K 9 6 5 4 3 ♥ 6 ♦ Q 5 ♣ A 8 6 2</p>		<p>♠ A J 7 ♥ K J 9 7 2 ♦ J 9 ♣ 7 5 4</p>

Open Room

West	North	East	South
VERSACE	SEMENTA	LAURIA	DUBOIN
	1♦	Pass	1♥
1♠	3♥	Pass	4♥
All pass			

In the Open Room, NS played peacefully in 4♥ which made with an overtrick. Allegra +650.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
MADALA	CIMA	BOCCHI	GIUBILO
	1♦	3♣	Pass
5♣	Pass	Pass	Dbl
All pass			

When Bocchi launched his daring jump overcall, EW could no longer miss their profitable sacrifice. Even 6♣ is a good save v. 650 but when Giubilo could do little better than double 5♣, EW escaped for -300 and an 8-IMP gain. Please note that NS never mentioned their heart fit in which they can make a slam on a good trump guess without the help of the ♦Q doubleton in front.

A few boards later, Gruppo Sportivo Allegra (Torino)

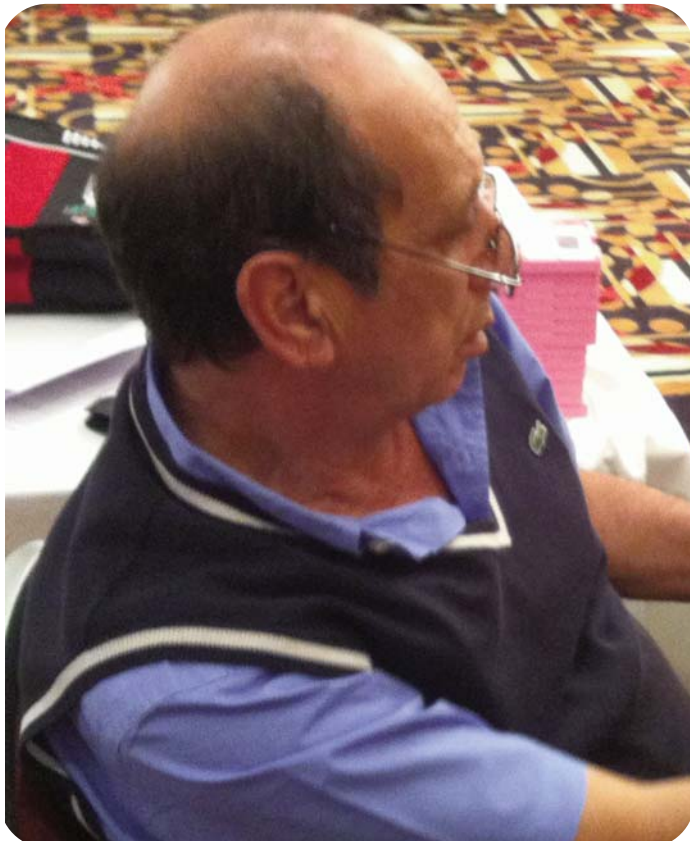
started a nice hat-trick:

Board: 8. Dir: West/None

<p>♠ 10 6 4 3 ♥ J 8 6 ♦ K Q J 9 2 ♣ 6</p>	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; margin: 0 auto; width: 80px; height: 80px; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 100%;"> S </div> </div>	<p>♠ K Q 9 ♥ 10 4 ♦ 10 7 6 4 ♣ K 7 4 3</p>	<p>♠ 7 ♥ K Q 7 5 2 ♦ 8 5 3 ♣ J 10 9 8</p> <p>♠ A J 8 5 2 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ A ♣ A Q 5 2</p>
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Open Room

West	North	East	South
VERSACE	SEMENTA	LAURIA	DUBOIN
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♥	Pass	4♥
All pass			



Lorenzo Lauria, Angelini Bridge Team

In an uncontested auction, Sementa and Duboin easily reached their routine 4♥, making 12 tricks when everything behaved nicely. GS Allegra +480.

In the Closed Room, NS had a major accident:

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
MADALA	CIMA	BOCCHI	GIUBILO
2♦	Pass	3♣	DbI
3♦	3♥	Pass	3♠
All pass			

When Madala opened an off-shape weak two, NS were already in trouble when Bocchi produced a preemptive raise. To me, South's 3♣ rebid looks forcing as it should confirm a strong hand but Cima had other ideas. One down, +50 to Allegra and 11 IMPs to reduce the deficit to 2 IMPs.

GS Allegra took the lead on the next board, when for once, Lauria and Versace were well overboard:

Board: 9. Dir: North/EW

<p>♠ A Q 10 6 5 ♥ K 5 2 ♦ - ♣ A J 7 5 3</p>	<div style="background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; margin: 0 auto; width: 80px; height: 80px; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 100%;"> S </div> </div>	<p>♠ 8 7 3 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ J 9 7 6 5 ♣ 9 4</p>	<p>♠ 4 ♥ J 7 6 4 ♦ A K Q 3 2 ♣ K Q 6</p> <p>♠ K J 9 2 ♥ Q 10 3 ♦ 10 8 4 ♣ 10 8 2</p>
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Open Room

West	North	East	South
VERSACE	SEMENTA	LAURIA	DUBOIN
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
DbI	2♦	Pass	3♦
4♣	Redbl	Pass	Pass
	DbI	All pass	

Versace could not act over Duboin's 1♠ but when next it was his turn, NS were already on the three-level. Lauria would probably have passed the double but when Sementa redoubled, the situation apparently was not clear for EW. With their spade fit taken away by Duboin's 1♠ response, EW could do no better than languish in 4♣ doubled which went three off on repeated diamond leads. GS Allegra +800.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
MADALA	CIMA	BOCCHI	GIUBILO
2♣	1♦	Pass	1♠
	All pass		

In the Closed Room, Madala did much better. He simply overcalled 1♠ with 2♣, thereby solving all problems as nobody had anything to add to that. North led a top diamond on which Madala discarded a heart and when North then shifted to a heart rather than underled his diamonds (to dummy's nine and South's ten, as they did at the other table), Madala was in a position to make his contract in some comfort for another +90 and 13 IMPs to GS Allegra who now led by 11.

The next board was a slam, and a big one too:

Board: 10. Dlr: East/All

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

Open Room

West	North	East	South
VERSACE	SEMENTA	LAURIA	DUBOIN
		2♦	Pass
2♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♦	Pass
4NT	Pass	6♥	All pass

2♠ showed hearts, 2NT confirmed a balanced 18-19 and after that, there was no way to find out about the good club fit. In fact, the presence of the ♣J is the key to the success of the grand.

Angelini +1460.

Closed Room

West	North	East	South
MADALA	CIMA	BOCCHI	GIUBILO
		2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♠	Pass
5♣	Pass	7♥	All pass

At the other table, too, we saw a balanced 18-19 opening bid followed by a transfer to hearts. 3♣ and 3♠ were relays, 4♦ a cuebid and 4♠ RKCB. Three keycards were enough for Bocchi to call the grand which proved a lay-down. GS Allegra +2210 and another 13 IMPs to increase their lead to 24.

The only sizeable swing in the last six boards of the segment was on board 15, and it was quite amusing for the kibitzers:

Board: 15. Dlr: South/NS

♠ Q 8		♠ A 9 5 4 2									
♥ 8 7 4 2		♥ 10									
♦ J 9 5		♦ K Q 7 4									
♣ J 6 5 3		♣ A 9 7									
♠ K J 7											
♥ A J											
♦ 10 6 2											
♣ Q 10 8 4 2											
	<table border="1" style="width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <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>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ 10 6 3											
♥ K Q 9 6 5 3											
♦ A 8 3											
♣ K											

The auctions were the same in both rooms, neither side coming anywhere near their good spade fit:

West	North	East	South
VERSACE	SEMENTA	LAURIA	DUBOIN
MADALA	CIMA	BOCCHI	GIUBILO
			1♥
Pass	3♥	Dbl	Pass
4♣	All pass		

The lead made all the difference. In the Closed Room, Cima led a heart to declarer's ace. Madala then went on to ruff a heart and lay down the ♣A, getting the good news and the bad news. He continued the ♦K to South's ace but when South returned a spade, declarer's problems in that suit were solved when he played low from his hand. Dummy's ace took North's queen and a trump was played to declarer's ten and North's jack. Whether or not North returned the ♦J to kill dummy's entry, Madala now had an overtrick: +150 to GS Allegra.

In the Open Room, Sementa led a trump which Versace ducked in dummy, Duboin winning his blank king. A heart came back to declarer's ace and the last heart was ruffed. Versace went on to cash the ♣A and then led a spade to his jack and North's queen. On the subsequent heart return, his trumps were fatally shortened so he had to concede down two on a perfectly normally played board...

Another +100 and 6 IMPs to GS Allegra who finished the first segment with a 32-IMP lead: 55-23.

Would Angelini be able to launch a serious fight-back? They would certainly need it but it quickly turned out that in reality, they were not.

EBL President's Closing Speech

Mr Meir Yitzchak Halevi – Mayor of Eilat

Mr Amir Naftaly, CEO of the Tourism Corporation of Eilat

Mr Eitan Levy, President of the Israeli Bridge Federation

Mr Modi Kenigsberg – Chairman of the Israeli Bridge Federation

Dear Bridge Friends,

The 11th edition of the European Bridge Champions' Cup is nearly ending and this EBL competition is now one of the major events of the international calendar with the participation of all top European players. I want to thank the authorities of Israel and the city of Eilat for their great support.

All my congratulations to the Israeli Bridge Federation, its President Eitan Levy, its Chairman Modi Kenigsberg and all the organising committee for the great job they have done to organise this 11th Champions Cup in Israel.

To celebrate this event, I will ask Alon Birman, Venue Facility Manager, to come to the stage to receive a plaque from EBL.

I will ask Ilan Shezifi, Organising Committee, to come to the stage to receive a plaque from EBL.

I will ask Oryah Meir, Manager of the IBF, to come to the stage to receive a plaque from EBL.

I will ask my good friend David Birman, Organiser of this event, to come to the stage to receive a plaque from EBL. Without him this event would have not taken place in Eilat.

I will ask Modi Kenigsberg, Chairman of the IBF, to come to the stage to receive a plaque from EBL. Thanks to his enthusiasm, his money, the EBL could come back to Israel for a Championship.

I now have a very pleasurable task to perform. We have with us a person who has given outstanding service for the game of Bridge; a person who has not pushed his way to the front for the limelight but has always been there to

help, support and encourage others to do their best. And so I ask Eitan Levy to come to the podium to receive the EBL Silver medal in recognition of his contribution to Bridge and to the EBL.

I would like to thank all the staff members who have contributed to the perfect organisation of this competition.

Thank you to the organising committee: Eitan Levy – David Birman – Alon Birman – David Harris – Oryah Meir – Gilad Ofir – Maurizio di Sacco and Catherine Vitry.

Thank you to the TDs, IT System & Scoring: Maurizio Di Sacco – Yariv Braude - Shavit Mass - Ilan Shezifi and Fotis Skoularikis.

Thank you for the Hospitality-Registration Desk: Oryah Meir – Adi Azulin.

Thank you for the Daily Bulletin: Jos Jacobs – Ram Soffer.

Thank you for the logistic team: Alon Lazar – Moshiko Meyuhas.

Thank you to the Key-Board Operators: Harold Joels - Klara Levy – Lior Orman – Matan Segal – Gal Vax.

Thank you to our local organiser: David Birman

Thank you also to all my colleagues of the EBL Executive Committee and the work done during the 3 days' meetings.

But I would above all thank you, the players, thanks to you this competition became an EBL major competition.

You have given, through those four days, a nice image of the bridge, a high level of play, a sporting spirit and friendships.

I am confident that the 11th Champions' Cup will be for all of you, players, officers, journalists and guests a great moment in the bridge.

Next year, we will hold this event in Opatija, Croatia in November.

Still one more thanks to you all and have a safe return home tomorrow.



Angelini Bridge Team, Silver Medal



Monaco FM, Bronze Medal