

# Squadra Red, White and Blue

Junior USBCs decide world championship contenders

BY SUE AND JIM MUNDAY

Twenty-nine Junior players have added a crash course in Italian to their curriculum in preparation for a trip to the World Youth Team Championships in August.

Every two years, bridge-playing youth compete for global bragging rights in an 11-day event staged by the World Bridge Federation. This year's championships will be held Aug. 3–13 in Salsomaggiore Terme, located near Parma in northern Italy.

The World Youth Team Championships consist of three separate series: the Jaime Ortiz-Patino Trophy, for Junior players under 26; the Jose Damiani Cup, for players under 21; and the Gianarrigo Rona Trophy, for young women under 26. Additionally, in 2014, the WBF put the Koc University Trophy into play, an invitational contest for kids under 16.

At the end of December, the U.S. Bridge Federation hosted the Junior U.S. Bridge Championships to qualify teams to play at the 2016 world championships. Four teams won the right to compete in Italy. Six more players, all of whom participated in the under-21 team contest, were invited to represent the U.S. in the under-16 kids' championship.

USBF Junior Program Coordinator Joe Stokes says that all of the participants are members of the organization's Junior program. "This structured mentoring and learning opportunity is overseen by Michael Rosenberg and Barry Goren. We are fortunate to have a number of world-class players serving as mentors."

Stokes explains that the championships, held in Atlanta, were funded entirely through private donations.

"The other USBCs that the USBF runs – open, Women's and Senior – are supported by substantial entry and session fees," he says. "The Junior championships, however, are free to the entrants. I am grateful we were able to raise enough privately to pay travel and lodging costs for the 15 participating teams and cover associated expenses."

In addition to the competition, Juniors received instruction in the use of screens.

Rosenberg says, "I am really impressed by the demeanor of these Juniors. Most of them already behave better behind screens than their adult counterparts. Also, the fun they have is contagious. Now if I can just instill a little discipline in some of their bidding ..."

## Under-26 USA1

Returning the majority of their Patino Cup under-26 squad from two years ago, the Kaplan team (Adam Kaplan, Zachary Brescoll, Adam Grossack, Zachary Grossack, Kevin Rosenberg and Ben Kristensen) was a pre-tournament favorite to repeat as USA1. Every player on this team is a seasoned international competitor.

Kaplan, 19, started playing bridge at the age of 6. The Stanford sophomore has multiple Junior world championship medals. Brescoll, 23, is studying finance and actuarial science at Queens University in Charlotte NC. Adam Grossack, 23, is a business analyst for TIAA-CREF in Boston. Both Adams are former ACBL Kings of Bridge.

Zach Grossack entered Tufts University in the fall. Kevin Rosenberg, 18, was first exposed to bridge while in child care at a summer NABC. He is a freshman at University of California at Berkeley and has been instrumental in mentoring younger players in the Silicon Valley Youth Program. Ben Kristensen, 17, is taking courses at the University of Minnesota-Duluth while still in high school.

KAPLAN had to survive a spirited semifinal challenge from DHIR (Arjun Dhir, William Zhu, Samuel Amer and Matthew Weingarten), with the outcome in doubt until the last board was played.

After the first half of the final, only 9 IMPs separated KAPLAN and BOMBER (Ben Bomber, Anant Rathi, Nathaniel Munger, Qucheng Gong, Sean Gannon and Blake Sanders). KAPLAN's 52–19 third quarter created enough breathing room to withstand a late BOMBER rally to win 157–131.

This deal from the first final session was key to the outcome.



The USA1 under-26 team: (standing) Zachary Brescoll, Adam Grossack, Adam Kaplan, Zachary Grossack; (seated) Kevin Rosenberg and Ben Kristensen.

Dlr: South ♠ 2  
 Vul: Both ♥ A K 7 6 4  
 ♦ J 10 9 7  
 ♣ Q 7 5

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

♠ K 9 8 7  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ A 4 2  
 ♣ A K 9 8 6 3

Dlr: East ♠ Q 8 5  
 Vul: Both ♥ Q 4  
 ♦ 9 8 5 3  
 ♣ A J 7 6

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

♠ A  
 ♥ A K J 9 8 7 5 2  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ K 8 4

| West          | North          | East         | South          |
|---------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| <i>Bomber</i> | <i>Adam G.</i> | <i>Rathi</i> | <i>Zach G.</i> |
|               |                |              | 1♣             |
| 1♠            | 2♥             | Pass         | 2♠             |
| Pass          | 3♣             | Pass         | 3♦             |
| Pass          | 3♠             | Dbl          | Pass           |
| Pass          | 4♣             | Pass         | 6♣             |
| All Pass      |                |              |                |

Opening lead: ♠ Q.

The Grossack brothers bid aggressively to the dicey club slam, which Zach justified with inspired play. The ♠ Q lead went to East's ace. Rathi shifted to the ♦ 8.

Looking at just the North-South hands, it would appear that declarer needs to ruff his two spade losers in dummy, pitch his diamonds on the ♥ A K and hope to draw trumps. This play is doomed to fail on the actual layout.

Zach won the ♦ A at trick two. He was wary of a 6-2 spade break given East's failure to raise holding the ♠ A. He led a crafty ♠ 8 from hand at trick three. When West innocently failed to cover, Zach backed his instincts and pitched the ♦ 9 from dummy! He still had to navigate a few hurdles, but he brought the slam home by cashing a top club, noting the fall of West's jack. He ruffed a spade in dummy with the ♣ Q, took his pitches on the ♥ A K and finessed the ♣ 10. Plus 1370 was good for 11 IMPs when North-South at the other table collected 800 versus a spade partscore.

Not to be outdone, teammate Kevin Rosenberg had an opportunity to shine on this deal from the key third segment, another slam.

| West           | North                | East              | South              |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| <i>Sanders</i> | <i>Kristensen</i>    | <i>Gannon</i>     | <i>R'berg</i>      |
|                |                      | 1♦                | 1♥                 |
| Dbl            | Redbl <sup>(1)</sup> | 2♠ <sup>(2)</sup> | 4♦ <sup>(3)</sup>  |
| Pass           | 4♠ <sup>(4)</sup>    | Pass              | 4NT <sup>(5)</sup> |
| Pass           | 5♣ <sup>(6)</sup>    | Pass              | 6♥                 |
| All Pass       |                      |                   |                    |

- (1) Values, doubleton in hearts.
- (2) Four spades, minimum hand.
- (3) Shortness in diamonds.
- (4) Forward going.
- (5) Roman Key Card Blackwood.
- (6) 1 or 4.

Opening lead: ♥ 3.

At first glance, it looks like 6♥ is on the club finesse, but with RHO expected to have most of the high cards, Kevin chose to keep his options open. He exercised the common and valid bridge aphorism: "When in doubt, run your long suit."

Michael Rosenberg adds, "Another even more important principle that Kevin followed – which seems to escape most players – is that if the club finesse is on now, it will still be on later. The cards do not magically change. So there is no rush to take this finesse."

After eight rounds of trumps, Kevin reached this position:

♠ Q 8  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ A J 7

♠ A  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ K 8 4

Based on the auction and discards,

he was certain that RHO held the ♣ Q. All was not lost, however, if the ♠ K is there as well. East must reduce to five cards. To keep spades protected, he must retain K-x and to keep clubs protected he must keep Q-x-x; therefore all the diamonds must be discarded.

Declarer can then cash the ♠ A, cross to the ♣ A and throw RHO in with the ♠ K (discarding his diamond) to lead away from the ♣ Q. There is no defense if declarer reads the position. Gannon opted to pitch a club early, trying to look like someone who started with ♣ Q-x-x-x, in which case the endplay would fail. That might have worked except the club spots gave the show away when he discarded the 9 early and followed with the 10 in the endgame. Declarer could lead a club with confidence, as the J-7 opposite K-8 was good for two tricks if RHO indeed had the queen as expected. Plus 1430 was good for 13 IMPs when the other table rested in game.

An initial club lead defeats 6♥, though who would find that? Both slams earned big pluses versus the double-digit losses KAPLAN would have incurred had they failed.

## Under-26 USA2

With the under-26 USA1 representative decided, the battle for USA2 would be a rematch of the semifinal between BOMBER and HERMAN (Greg Herman, Christian Jolly, Julie Arbit, Jordan Kaye, Anam Tebha and Oren Kriegel) in which BOMBER picked up 7 IMPs on the last board to win 115-111.

With the last berth for the under-26 category on the line, however, it was HERMAN with the victory, 197-117.

Herman, 22, is working on his doctorate in atmospheric science at Colorado State University. Jolly, from Huntsville AL, is studying computer science at Western Kentucky University. Kaye, who recently graduated from the University of Michigan, works for JPMorgan Chase & Co. in Chicago. Arbit, also a recent University of Michigan graduate, is working for



The USA2 under-26 team: Christian Jolly, Julie Arbit, Greg Herman, Anam Tebha, Jordan Kaye and Oren Kriegel.

emerging with a well-earned plus 420 and 7 IMPs for the Herman team.

## Under-21

In the Damiani Cup final, SOUKUP (David Soukup, Hakan Berk, Nolan Chang and Isaac Stephani) beat OLSEN (Jake Olsen, Cole Spencer, Julian Kurtzman and William Danielsen) 203–91.

Soukup, 18, is studying mathematics at the University of Rochester. Berk is a freshman at the University of Maryland studying electrical engineering. Chang, 19, is working toward a degree in computer science at California State Polytechnic University at Pomona. Stephani, 17, is a high school senior in Cincinnati.

The four-handed squad has added Cole Spencer. Spencer, who lives in Fayetteville AR, is a 17-year-old high school student.

Here is a winning effort from Berk in the team's earlier semifinal matchup versus HU (Michael Hu, Arthur Zhou, Brent Xiao and Suzanne Campbell).

Dlr: North ♠ A 10 3 2  
 Vul: E-W ♥ 8 7 5  
 ♦ K 10 6  
 ♣ A Q 3

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

| West     | North | East | South             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------------|
| Zhou     | Berk  | Hu   | Soukup            |
|          | 1♣    | 2♣   | 2♠ <sup>(1)</sup> |
| Pass     | 2NT   | Pass | 3NT               |
| All Pass |       |      |                   |

(1) Diamonds, at least invitational values.

Opening lead: ♥ 6.

This deal highlights one of the drawbacks of two-suited overcalls: They give declarer a lot of information if your side ends up on defense.

Berk opted for a confident 2NT ➤

the Maryland Forest Service through the AmeriCorps program.

Kriegel, 21, is a senior at the University of Chicago, where he is studying political science. An accomplished writer, Kriegel's articles have appeared in *The Bridge World* and the *Bridge Bulletin*. Tebha, 23, graduated from the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, and she plans to begin graduate studies in chemistry next year at New York University.

A common theme during the Junior USBCs was aggressive bidding backed by good card reading (and good luck). Here's a deal from the critical second segment when HERMAN opened up a lead they would not surrender.

Dlr: East ♠ K Q  
 Vul: None ♥ A K J 8 2  
 ♦ A Q 10 5 2  
 ♣ 10

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

| West              | North              | East              | South   |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Sanders           | Tebha              | Gannon            | Kriegel |
|                   |                    | 1♣ <sup>(1)</sup> | Pass    |
| 1♥ <sup>(2)</sup> | 2NT <sup>(3)</sup> | Pass              | 3♥      |
| Pass              | 4♥                 | All Pass          |         |

(1) At least two clubs.

(2) At least four spades.

(3) Hearts and diamonds.

Opening lead: ♥ 3.

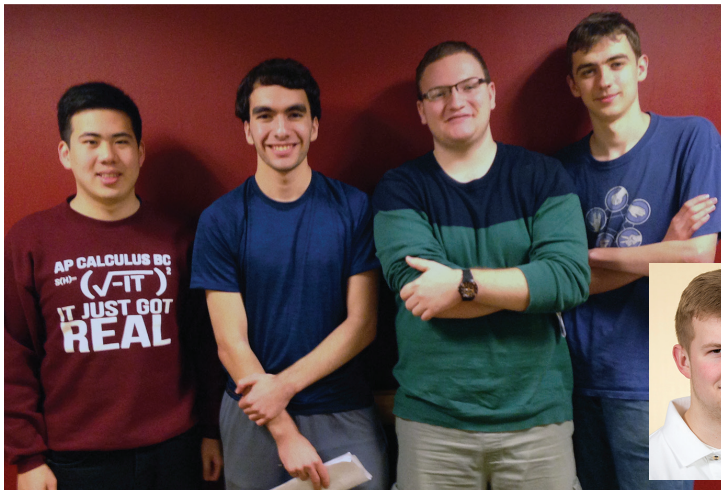
Kriegel may well have been thinking game on this hand after his RHO opened 1♣, but not for North–South and certainly not from his side. Tebha felt she did not need much from partner for game, so she bid it.

The defense started with a trump, giving nothing away. Declarer won the ♥ A and went about gathering information by leading a spade honor at trick two. East won, cashed a high club and locked declarer in dummy with a spade. With no entry to hand, declarer led a second high trump and was pleased to see the queen fall. He drew the last trump.

If he could navigate the diamonds, he could make his contract. The bidding and play suggested that East held three spades, and he was known to have three hearts. Because West did not raise clubs, declarer placed East with at least five and, therefore, at most two diamonds.

Still with no entry to hand, declarer has the choice of playing ♦ A and a low diamond, hoping for a singleton honor or doubleton king; or he could play ♦ A and ♦ Q, hoping for a singleton honor or the doubleton jack.

The play suggested that opener held the ♠ A and either ♣ A K or ♣ K Q. With the ♦ K, he might have had enough to open 1NT, which East–West play as 13–15. With nothing else to go on, declarer therefore opted to pin the jack in the East hand, where the expected diamond shortness was,



The USA under-21 team: Nolan Chang, Hakan Berk, Isaac Stephani and David Soukup. Inset: Added to the team, Cole Spencer.

segment, Thapa and Hunt demonstrate the aggressive bidding that served them well.

Dlr: West ♠ K 7 5 2  
 Vul: E-W ♥ A J 10 6 2  
 ♦ J 9  
 ♣ K 5

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| ♠ A Q 10 3<br>♥ K Q 8<br>♦ A 10 5 4<br>♣ Q 8 |  | ♠ J<br>♥ 4<br>♦ K 8 7 3 2<br>♣ A J 10 6 4 3 |
|--|--|---|

♠ 9 8 6 4  
 ♥ 9 7 5 3  
 ♦ Q 6  
 ♣ 9 7 2

with his balanced hand, despite a less-than-stellar heart holding. Soukup raised to 3NT.

Winning the second heart trick in dummy, Berk assessed his chances. If the diamonds ran, there were nine easy tricks. East did not figure to have four diamonds on the auction, but West might.

Ideally, declarer could start with a high honor in dummy and, if LHO showed out, finesse the 10 on the second round. But because dummy's entry was removed prematurely, this plan will not work. If West does have the ♦ J-x-x-x, the suit is blocked after leading an honor.

Recalling the bidding where LHO showed both majors, Berk made a bold play at trick three by leading a low diamond to the 10, the only way to make the hand on the lie of the cards.

Do the odds support this inspired guess? It depends. If RHO might have introduced a seven-card club suit, thus discounting that possibility, then yes. SOUKUP gained 12 IMPs when declarer did not take the early finesse in diamonds at the other table.

## Rona Cup

The Rona Cup featured two young women's teams in a two-day knockout. THAPA (Isha Thapa, Allison Hunt, Rebecca Wernis, Asya Ladyzhensky, Amber Lin and Kathleen Loeb) felled CHAI (Christine Chai, Ellie Fashingbauer, Lucy Zhang and Sophia Chang)

316–197.

Thapa, 21, is a senior at UC-Berkeley. Hunt, 19, is finishing up her second year at Davidson College in North Carolina. She shared ACBL King/Queen of Bridge honors with Kaplan in 2014. Ladyzhensky, 22, attends Wake Tech in Raleigh NC.

Wernis, 24, graduated from Caltech with a degree in physics. She is in graduate school at UC-Berkeley studying atmospheric chemistry. Lin, from Edison NJ, is a freshman at Princeton studying civil and environmental engineering. She is ACBL's 2015 Queen of Bridge. Loeb, 22, is working full time in Dallas while studying for her degree in political science.

On this deal from the penultimate

| West         | North              | East              | South        |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| <i>Thapa</i> | <i>Chang</i>       | <i>Hunt</i>       | <i>Zhang</i> |
| 1NT          | Dbl <sup>(1)</sup> | 2♠ <sup>(2)</sup> | Pass         |
| 3♣           | Pass               | 4NT               | Pass         |
| 5♠           | Pass               | 6♣                | All Pass     |

- (1) One minor or 5–4 in majors.  
 (2) Clubs.

Hunt's extreme shape and youthful exuberance propelled the partnership into slam. With diamonds 2–2 and clubs 3–2 with the king onside, Thapa duly recorded 12 tricks. Was it a good slam? Absolutely, according to Bob Hamman – it made, and plus 1370 sent 12 IMPs to THAPA to extend the team's commanding lead.

Later in the segment, the club suit played another key role in the Thapa



The women's Rona Cup team: (standing) Allison Hunt, Amber Lin, Kathleen Loeb, Rebecca Wernis; (seated) Isha Thapa and Asya Ladyzhensky.

team's aggressive bidding.

|                     |               |             |                   |
|---------------------|---------------|-------------|-------------------|
| Dlr: West ♠ K 10    |               |             |                   |
| Vul: None ♥ A J 6 2 |               |             |                   |
| ♦ A J 9 5           |               |             |                   |
| ♣ A 4 2             |               |             |                   |
| ♠ A Q J 6           |               | ♠ 9 8 7 5 3 |                   |
| ♥ Q 9 7 5           |               | ♥ K 4       |                   |
| ♦ 10 7 4            |               | ♦ K Q 3 2   |                   |
| ♣ J 10              |               | ♣ 6 5       |                   |
|                     | ♠ 4 2         |             |                   |
|                     | ♥ 10 8 3      |             |                   |
|                     | ♦ 8 6         |             |                   |
|                     | ♣ K Q 9 8 7 3 |             |                   |
| West                | North         | East        | South             |
| <i>F'bauer</i>      | <i>Lin</i>    | <i>Chai</i> | <i>Loeb</i>       |
| Pass                | 1NT           | Pass        | 2♠ <sup>(1)</sup> |
| Pass                | 3NT           | All Pass    |                   |

(1) Clubs.

Lin, looking at her prime controls and good club fit, took a reasonable shot at game. Partner's club suit didn't have to be that good, but a lesser holding might well have been good enough. With the ♠A onside, there was nothing to the play. Plus 400 sent another 7 IMPs THAPA's way when North at the other table opted to rebid 3♣ after the same start.

## Under-16

There wasn't a separate competition for an invitational under-16 Koc University Trophy team, but organizers saw plenty of promise among eligible players whose under-21 teams did not secure the one available berth.

The following comprise USA's first-ever under-16 squad to compete internationally: Suzanne Campbell, Rory Xiao, Michael Hu, Arthur Zhou, Cooper Smith and Kunal Vohra.

Cambell, 12; Xiao, 11; Hu, 12, and Zhou, 11, are part of Silicon Valley Youth Bridge. Smith, a high school freshman from Marquette MI was 9 when his grandmother took him to his first bridge class. Vohra, 14, learned and grew his game in the Atlanta Junior Bridge program.

Here are Smith and his partner, Reese Koppel, in their under-21 semi-final encounter against OLSEN.

|                  |                |              |              |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
| Dlr: South ♠ 7   |                |              |              |
| Vul: E-W ♥ 7 3 2 |                |              |              |
| ♦ A 7 3 2        |                |              |              |
| ♣ K 10 8 7 5     |                |              |              |
| ♠ K 10 6 3       |                | ♠ J 9 5 4    |              |
| ♥ K Q 9 6        |                | ♥ A J 4      |              |
| ♦ 6 4            |                | ♦ K J 8      |              |
| ♣ A J 3          |                | ♣ 9 4 2      |              |
|                  | ♠ A Q 8 2      |              |              |
|                  | ♥ 10 8 5       |              |              |
|                  | ♦ Q 10 9 5     |              |              |
|                  | ♣ Q 6          |              |              |
| West             | North          | East         | South        |
| <i>Koppel</i>    | <i>Spencer</i> | <i>Smith</i> | <i>Olsen</i> |
| 1♣               | Pass           | 1♠           | Pass         |
| 2♠               | Pass           | 2NT          | Pass         |
| 3♥               | Pass           | 3NT          | All Pass     |

Smith climbed out on a limb when he invited game with 2NT. With his balanced 4-3-3-3, he opted for the nine-trick notrump contract rather than 4♠. Koppel, with meager values, did well to pass on this layout.

The ♦9 lead (0 or 2 higher) went to the ace, and East's ♦J lost to the queen on the second round. Indications were that diamonds were 4-4. South cleared diamonds. A club shift would have been fatal as it happens, but there was no way to know that, and Smith won the third round, pitching a club from dummy.

Needing good fortune in the spade suit, Smith did well to start with the

jack. South won the ace and cashed a diamond — East and West pitched clubs. Smith won the club return, crossed to a heart and led the ♠9. Whether he covered the 9 or not, South could not hold the position. Declarer could cross to another heart and finesse against the ♠8. Plus 630 was good for 8 IMPs to the Koppel team. KOPPEL, after an early lead, fell to OLSEN in a decisive fourth segment.

## Training harder

Winning an opportunity to compete is just the beginning. The world championship-bound teams play on BBO at least once a week under the watchful eye of their USBF mentors.

Each partnership has also been assigned a partnership coach.

Rosenberg says, "It's exciting to be part of molding America's future bridge players. Let's wish our representatives success in Salsomaggiore!"

Stokes and Rosenberg thank the following donors, whose generous support made the Junior USBCs in Atlanta possible: Franco Baseggio, Drew Becker, Richie Coren, John Diamond, Mark Gordon, Vinita Gupta, John McAllister, Lou Ann O'Rourke, Alex Perlin, Warren Spector, Stan Tulin and Dan Zagorin.

More information about the Junior program and sponsorship opportunities can be found at usbf.org. ■

USA's under-16 team: (standing) Michael Hu, Suzanne Campbell; (seated) Arthur Zhou, Rory Xiao; (insets) Cooper Smith and Kunal Vohra.

