



Commentary
for the
IBU Autumn Simultaneous Pairs
Monday 3 November 2025

Dear Bridge Player,

Thank you very much for playing in the IBU Simultaneous Pairs 2025, and for supporting the Irish Bridge Union (IBU).

As you probably know, the IBU is the confederation of the Contract Bridge Association of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Bridge Union, and has responsibility, on an all-Ireland basis, for sending teams to represent Ireland at World and European competitions. Summer 2026 sees the European Championships in Riga, Latvia, to which the IBU intends to send four teams. The costs of such competitions, like most costs these days, are increasing significantly, so your support for this Simultaneous Pairs, and for the various live competitions run during the season by the IBU, is greatly appreciated.

We hope that you enjoyed the chance to test yourself against your fellow players across Ireland (and for those still playing online, maybe overseas as well). As always, the hands (which are randomly generated by computer with no manual intervention) provided plenty of difficult decisions. Many thanks to our expert commentators Brian Senior (Monday), James Heneghan (Tuesday), Fearghal O'Boyle (Wednesday), Paul Delaney (Thursday), and Enda Murphy (Friday) for their guidance through the maze. I hope that you have picked up some useful tips from their advice.

Don't forget to check your standing in the national results at www.ecatsbridge.com/sims. You'll find the daily commentaries there too.

Gordon Lessells

President, Irish Bridge Union

Board 1	♠ KQ1052	Dealer N
	♥ A52	Vul: None
	♦ QJ4	
	♣ 85	
♠ J8		♠ 643
♥ QJ64		♥ 7
♦ A5		♦ K10876
♣ AQ1094		♣ KJ73
	♠ A97	
	♥ K10983	
	♦ 932	
	♣ 62	

Those playing a strong NT will have an automatic 1♠ opening with the North hand and South will raise to 2♠. That is already one more than N/S can make if the defence finds its diamond ruff, but -50 would be just fine were 2♠ to end the auction.

However, West has 14 HCP and five-four distribution, and will normally come into the

auction. Some will overcall 3♣, afraid to make a take-out double when holding a doubleton in an unbid suit, while others will take that risk because they are keen to keep hearts in the picture.

Three Diamonds, the likely contract if West doubles, will be made if declarer is permitted to take a spade ruff, but can be defeated on repeated trump leads. If West overcalls, E/W get to a club partscore, scoring a useful +130. Should East raise to 4♣? Well, maybe, but he should always bear in mind that partner's first priority was simply to compete the partscore, not get to game. West should pass a raise to 4♣ anyway, having a lot of potential losers.

If playing weak NT, that is what some Norths will choose, though with decent spades my inclination would be to open 1♠, which once again is raised to 2♠, and there we are again.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	1	1	-
S	-	-	1	1	-
E	4	2	-	-	-
W	4	2	-	-	-

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Board 2	♠ K10 ♥ A3 ♦ 86 ♣ AQJ9743	Dealer E Vul: N-S
	♠ Q982 ♥ Q72 ♦ AQ942 ♣ K	♠ A763 ♥ J654 ♦ KJ10 ♣ 82
	♠ J54 ♥ K1098 ♦ 753 ♣ 1065	

West opens 1♦ in third seat and North overcalls 2♣. East has a classic negative double and West responds 2♠ to that. North has an easy 3♣ bid, and now East will probably compete with 3♠, liking his diamond side-suit fit. Now it is a question of whether either North or South will be willing to compete to the four level when vulnerable. If they do, 4♣ is on the spade guess.

Three Spades cannot be beaten, though if North does not get a heart ruff declarer will have to get the trumps right to come to nine tricks. Life is actually easier if North cashes the ace of clubs then switches to ace and another heart. He gets his ruff, but now the king of spades falls under the ace and declarer can finesse to pick up the remaining trumps without loss.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	4	-	-	-	1
S	4	-	-	-	1
E	-	2	1	3	-
W	-	2	1	3	-

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Board 3	♠ 1072 ♥ 4 ♦ K972 ♣ K10985	Dealer S Vul: E-W
	♠ KQ54 ♥ AKQ107 ♦ J43 ♣ A	♠ AJ83 ♥ J8 ♦ Q8 ♣ J7432
	♠ 96 ♥ 96532 ♦ A1065 ♣ Q6	

This one should be almost universally played in 4♠ by East. West will open 1♥ and East respond 1♠, being well short of the strength required to respond in clubs, his longest suit.

A simple soul will raise directly to game with the West cards and that will be that. However, the West hand is pretty strong, and this risks missing a good slam facing a slightly better East hand. Though a singleton ace is not ideal as partner will downgrade the ♠K should he hold that card, when it could actually be working to its full value, the bid to keep slam in the picture is a 4♣ splinter bid, showing club shortage, game values, and spade support. With nothing to cuebid, East will sign-off in 4♠, and 11 tricks will be the popular outcome.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	-	4	5	4
W	2	-	4	5	4

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Board 4	♠ 642 ♥ 1097 ♦ Q63 ♣ K942	Dealer W Vul: Both
	♠ A ♥ AKJ843 ♦ K854 ♣ A10	♠ Q103 ♥ 62 ♦ AJ92 ♣ QJ63
	♠ KJ9875 ♥ Q5 ♦ 107 ♣ 875	

The cards lie well for E/W, who can make either 7♦ or 6♥ (there are no discards

available in a heart contract). Not that either of those is a good contract; if slam is to be reached then 6♦ would be the place to play, preferably played by West to protect against a club lead.

West opens 1♥ and Acol players will respond 2♣ then raise the 2♦ rebid to 3♦. West will have to make all the running from here because East has nothing at all to spare.

Two-over-one players will respond INT with the East cards. Unless playing conventional methods, most Wests will jump to 3♦ now to force to game. If East raises to 4♦, West will often to drive to slam – for one thing, he will fear that 3NT might outscore 5♦, so stopping in the diamond game may score poorly. Alternatively, West will go back to 4♥, and probably play there.

Other East players will look at their soft values in the black suits and shortage of top cards and go back to 3NT over 3♦. I suspect that most Wests will bid 4♥ over that and play there.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	7	6	1	6
W	4	7	6	1	6

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Board 5 ♠ Q93 Dealer N
 ♥ J103 Vul: N-S
 ♦ 86
 ♣ A10842

♠ 1074	♠ AJ52
♥ 9876	♥ Q2
♦ Q1042	♦ AK53
♣ Q9	♣ KJ6

♠ K86
♥ AK54
♦ J97
♣ 753

Some Acol players may open the East hand with 1♠ and play there, probably coming to an overtrick.

Those playing five-card majors will often open 1♦. South is just shy of what is required to come in at adverse vulnerability, so it will be

down to West whether there is any further bidding.

If 1♦ only promised three diamonds, 1♦ may well end the auction. If 1♦ promised four but could be a balanced hand, West might raise to 2♦ if that would be weak, but if the options were to pass or to jump to 3♦, inverted, not everyone will be thrilled to raise to the three level so again may pass. However, the West hand is great for the style where 1♣ picks up almost all the weak NT types and 1♦ is almost always unbalanced. Now a pre-emptive jump to 3♦ looks much more attractive.

There are nine easy tricks in a diamond contract. N/S have no real way into the auction but are best out of it as they can make nothing higher than 1♣.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	-	-	-	-
S	1	-	-	-	-
E	-	3	1	2	1
W	-	3	1	2	1

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Board 6 ♠ 2 Dealer E
 ♥ K952 Vul: E-W
 ♦ K72
 ♣ AQ862

♠ KJ9865	♠ 103
♥ Q6	♥ A43
♦ J1086	♦ Q95
♣ 10	♣ K9743

♠ AQ74
♥ J1087
♦ A43
♣ J5

South has a weak NT and may open INT, 1♣, 1♦, or even 1♥. Despite the vulnerability, West is worth a weak jump overcall of 2♠ over one of any suit, with the six-four shape adding to the playing potential of the hand.

However, N/S have enough strength between them to brush aside the intervention and get to game.

As the cards lie, both 3NT and 4♥ can be made, though there is some play to both contracts. A key play in both games will be a low club towards the jack, rather than just running the jack. In the case of South declaring

4♥ on the singleton club lead, best is to run it and hope to survive. West gets a ruff but then has no more trumps left when East gets in with the ace of hearts and, though having lost to both the ♣K and the ruff, declarer still has the ace and queen established as winners. I expect 4♥ to fail as often as not, while 3NT will be easier after a spade lead round to the queen than otherwise, even if it can always be made.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	1	4	-	3
S	3	1	4	-	3
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

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Board 7	♠ 43 ♥ K1097 ♦ QJ1095 ♣ AK	Dealer S Vul: Both
♠ 1075 ♥ 82 ♦ 876 ♣ J8732	♠ Q98 ♥ AQ5 ♦ AK42 ♣ 965	
	♠ AKJ62 ♥ J643 ♦ 3 ♣ Q104	

South will open 1♠ and North respond 2♦. Whether or not that is game-forcing, East cannot come in with such a balanced hand, for all of its 15 HCP. South rebids 2♥ and North has an easy raise to game, or possibly the more encouraging 3♥ where that is played as forcing.

There are two inescapable heart losers and a diamond, so 10 tricks in 4♥ should be the universal result. I wonder how many pairs will prove me wrong.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	3	4	4	3
S	1	2	4	3	3
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

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Board 8	♠ 932 ♥ 963 ♦ 9642 ♣ AQ8	Dealer W Vul: None
♠ AJ10754 ♥ KJ ♦ KQ83 ♣ 4	♠ 86 ♥ AQ10742 ♦ J75 ♣ 106	♠ KQ ♥ 85 ♦ A10 ♣ KJ97532

This one too looks rather dull, but this time with E/W having the easy game.

West will open 1♠ and East respond 2♣. If South passes, West rebids 2♦ and East uses 2♥ FSF (Fourth-Suit Forcing). That sees West show the sixth spade, and East raises to game.

It makes little difference what South does. A double of the fourth-suit bid is ignored by E/W, while a 2♥ overcall at South's first turn just speeds things up as West rebids 2♠ instead of 2♦ and is raised to game. And a 3♥ overcall? Ignoring the fact that it could be doubled for -500, more than the opposing game, as nobody will actually play in 3♥ doubled, this again speeds things up, as West bids 3♠ and East raises to game.

There are two aces to be lost and the defence really should manage to take them both, so +450 should be a very common outcome.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	4	1	5	4
W	4	4	1	5	4

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Board 9 ♠ J83 Dealer N
 ♥ QJ104 Vul: E-W
 ♦ Q82
 ♣ KJ10

♠ A1076 ♠ Q
 ♥ K53 ♥ 982
 ♦ KJ53 ♦ A1076
 ♣ 94 ♣ AQ873

♠ K9542
 ♥ A76
 ♦ 94
 ♣ 652

Once upon a time, people used to downgrade singleton honours, other than the ace. Not many people seem to do it today, so I expect the vast majority of Easts to open 1♣ after a pass from North. Some Souths will overcall 1♠ – again, more so than would have been the case when I first started playing.

If South overcalls 1♠, West can jump to 2NT, natural and invitational, and that may be that. Where South passes, West will respond either 1♦ or 1♠, according to taste. One Diamond gets raised to 2♦ and West will try 2NT, 1♠ gets 2♣ from East and West, again, tries 2NT.

I would expect East to decline all these invitations and pass 2NT, with the exception that where a diamond fit has been established some Easts might judge to go back to 3♦.

Whether the opening lead is a spade or the queen of hearts, 3NT can be made, courtesy of the very favourable club position. Even then, the diamond needs to be found for the ninth trick – it is a thoroughly bad contract. Even 2NT could be hopeless on a slightly different lay-out.

Get the trumps right and even 5♦ can be made. However, I would guess that +150 will score very well, as both bidding and making either game is far from automatic.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	5	3	1	3
W	4	5	3	1	3

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Board 10 ♠ AQ652 Dealer E
 ♥ J109 Vul: Both
 ♦ A52
 ♣ A4

♠ 10 ♠ K93
 ♥ A6532 ♥ Q8
 ♦ Q3 ♦ K10964
 ♣ J6532 ♣ 987

♠ J874
 ♥ K74
 ♦ J87
 ♣ KQ10

Unless West has two-suited weak two bids available to him – and even then the two empty suits do not look very attractive when vulnerable, there should be three passes to North, who will open a strong NT, or 1♠ if 1NT would not be weak.

Facing a strong NT, I think that South should just raise to 3NT, not look for a spade fit. The hand has no ruffing value and has at least one honour in every suit. There could easily be the same nine tricks in either game even if there is a spade fit.

As it turns out, there are the same 10 tricks in NT as in spades, despite the five-four fit. However, things are not quite so simple as that.

In 3NT, if East leads the ten of diamonds declarer will have to play well to make the contract. Superficially, the diamond lead sets up two diamond tricks in a spade contract, and four in NT, to go with the ♠K and ♥A.

In 3NT, declarer must duck the diamond in dummy and, to make 10 tricks, losing only one diamond trick, win the ace immediately. That leaves the diamonds blocked and, when he wins the ♠K, West can only cash one diamond.

There is a second way to come to nine tricks – duck diamonds twice – but that will not score well if everybody is making 4♠ or 4NT.

Four Spades is easier, as a diamond can be discarded on the third club.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	1	1	4	4
S	1	1	1	4	4
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 11	♠ J1096	Dealer S
	♥ 2	Vul: None
	♦ QJ63	
	♣ AJ32	
♠ Q5		♠ A874
♥ AQ9753		♥ KJ6
♦ AK9		♦ 8754
♣ K6		♣ 109
	♠ K32	
	♥ 1084	
	♦ 102	
	♣ Q8754	

When West opens 1♥, only the most aggressive Norths will be willing to double with just 9 HCP, despite their perfect distribution.

North's decision whether to double is unlikely to affect the final contract. N/S can make 2♣, but that should be all, while E/W are making 4♥.

Even if East responds 1♠ to the 1♥ opening, most Norths will probably lead the jack of spades, as that looks to be a safe lead while the alternatives do not. Declarer will run this to South's king, and a club switch collects two more tricks for the defence. That, however, is all, as declarer can win the next trick and cash the queen of spades then, after drawing trumps, take a diamond pitch on the ace of spades.

On a diamond lead declarer will need to win, cross to the jack of hearts, and lead a spade towards the queen. That works out as hoped for and there are 10 tricks once more.

Three No Trump can also be made, but only a club lead, which is a poor choice, permits an overtrick.

It should be fairly easy to get to 4♥, whether East starts with a 1♠ response or a simple heart raise.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	2	-	-	-	-
S	2	-	-	-	-
E	-	2	4	-	2
W	-	2	4	1	3

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Board 12	♠ 104	Dealer W
	♥ J974	Vul: N-S
	♦ Q1076	
	♣ AKQ	
♠ K973		♠ A852
♥ 6		♥ A832
♦ K543		♦ 98
♣ J642		♣ 1093
	♠ QJ6	
	♥ KQ105	
	♦ AJ2	
	♣ 875	

North has a weak NT and South will use Stayman then raise the 2♥ response to game. Four Hearts has no chance as the cards lie. A diamond lead sets up a ruff for down two, while a club lead is better for declarer, but the contract is still one down. Sometimes, 25 HCP and a four-four major-suit fit does not a game make.

If playing a strong NT, North will open either 1♣ or 1♦ then raise the 1♥ response to 2♥. Four Hearts is again the likely outcome, North not fancying 3NT due to holding a weak doubleton in an unbid side-suit.

A spade lead and diamond switch still makes down two a possibility, but nine tricks may be made a little more often with West on lead.

Few will stop short of game, so any plus score for N/S should be huge, and even -50 comfortably above average.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	1	2	-	2
S	1	1	2	-	2
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

=====

Board 13	♠ AJ1072 ♥ AKQ3 ♦ A82 ♣ 2	Dealer N Vul: Both
	♠ 863 ♥ 1094 ♦ K6 ♣ AJ874	♠ 954 ♥ J6 ♦ J10754 ♣ 1065
	♠ KQ ♥ 8752 ♦ Q93 ♣ KQ93	

N/S have a good slam, with 6♥ essentially requiring little more than that hearts split three-two, about a 68% chance. On a non-diamond lead, even a five-one spade split is not enough to beat the contract.

North opens 1♠ and, even playing 2-over-1 game-forcing, most Souths will respond 2♣. North rebids 2♥ and South raises to game. All very simple and, although 4♥ would show a minimum in 2-over-1 style, South has also shown game values facing a minimum opener, and North has 18 HCP with useful shape and great controls. Four No Trump, or even a simple jump to 6♥, seems appropriate now and, though South will show zero key-cards, North can still bid slam as he only really bid 4NT in case Seven was a possibility.

The vast majority should get to slam on this one.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	2	3	6	5	5
S	2	3	6	5	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Board 14	♠ 54 ♥ 8632 ♦ A1095 ♣ J76	Dealer E Vul: None
	♠ J109632 ♥ A5 ♦ K83 ♣ 42	♠ Q87 ♥ J10 ♦ QJ7642 ♣ KQ
	♠ AK ♥ KQ974 ♦ ♣ A109853	

For all that the hand contains some doubleton honour combinations, either of which may not pull their full weight, the East hand does have a six-card suit and 11 HCP, so I would expect most to open 1♦.

I would overcall 2NT as South, showing at least five-five in the lowest two unbid suits. If West passes, North will respond 3♥ and South perhaps try 4♣ on the way to 4♥. That contract is an easy make, just losing one heart and one club, so 11 tricks for +450.

Over 2NT, West is not worth a forcing 3♠ bid, however, West is worth a spade bid that partner is allowed to pass. Fortunately, it is possible to have both options in our system. We can play that 3♠ shows long spades but is non-forcing – perfect for this hand – and that one or other of the two available cuebids, 3♣ and 3♦, by agreement, shows five+ spades and is game-forcing. The other cuebid shows a sound raise to 3+♦, so that an immediate 3♦ bid can be a bit weaker. Honestly, it doesn't matter all that much which cuebid you use for which hand-type, as long as partner thinks the same way, but this ability to make non-forcing bids in the fourth suit can come in quite handy once in a while.

And indeed, it comes in handy on this deal, because if West can bid 3♠, non-forcing, East might bid 4♠ over the opposing 4♥. Sure, N/S might go on to 5♥ to flatten the board, but if they settle for the penalty available in 4♠ doubled, that is only -300, so a big gain for E/W.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	5	-	5	-	2
S	5	-	5	-	2
E	-	1	-	2	-
W	-	1	-	2	-

Board 15	♠ A94 ♥ K7 ♦ K853 ♣ A1086	Dealer S Vul: N-S
	♠ KQ862 ♥ 10842 ♦ A6 ♣ Q5	♠ J75 ♥ QJ96 ♦ Q102 ♣ J73
	♠ 103 ♥ A53 ♦ J974 ♣ K942	

Most Wests will open 1♠ and now North, with only a doubleton heart, has no sensible call other than to pass. Double is very dangerous as partner will bid hearts whenever possible, while there is no justification at all for an upgrade to a 1NT overcall.

So North passes for now and East responds 1NT. West rebids 2♥ and now North can consider a take-out double, as partner will normally bid his longer minor in reply. That is what North wants to happen and nine tricks can be made with either minor as the trump suit.

East may compete to 3♥, but that should always be defeated as there are five top losers and potential for a sixth via either diamonds or a spade ruff. Maybe not a diamond very often, because North's most natural lead is probably a diamond and, as North will have shown more strength than South during the auction, declarer should go up with the queen from dummy.

Unless 3♥ is both doubled and down two, it should be a good save against -110 on defence to 3♣/♦.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	3	-	1	1
S	3	3	-	1	1
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-
=====					

Board 16	♠ J3 ♥ J10942 ♦ Q10652 ♣ 3	Dealer W Vul: E-W
	♠ A7 ♥ KQ87653 ♦ 87 ♣ 107	♠ Q1092 ♥ ♦ AK43 ♣ 98654
	♠ K8654 ♥ A ♦ J9 ♣ AKQJ2	

While 2-2-2 side-suit shape is not ideal, the majority will open 3♥ with the West hand and there will be two passes to South. The winning action would be to double, of course, as North will pass and collect a probable +500.

However, genuine two-suiters generally do best to describe themselves as such, even if doing so works badly on this occasion. South can show a two-suiter including spades by cuebidding 4♥, over which North will have to show preference for spades, or for some pairs by overcalling 4♣ as non-leaping Michaels, showing at least five-five in the black suits. Again, North has to bid a reluctant 4♠.

East should make a penalty double of 4♠, and that should be that. North's fate looks to be down three for -500.

If West opens only 2♥, South may still commit to the four level to show the two-suiter, and if so East can again double the final contract.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	1	-	1	1
S	-	-	-	1	-
E	-	-	1	-	-
W	-	-	1	-	-
=====					

Board 17	♠ 86 ♥ J432 ♦ J9875 ♣ A4	Dealer N Vul: None
	♠ Q104 ♥ K1076 ♦ A10 ♣ Q1096	♠ J92 ♥ Q9 ♦ K6432 ♣ K85
	♠ AK753 ♥ A85 ♦ Q ♣ J732	

N/S should have this not very exciting deal to themselves. South will open 1♠ and rebid 2♣ over the INT response. North will give an unenthusiastic preference to 2♠, and that will be that.

On this auction, West may lead a low heart, and it is important that East put in the nine, finessing against dummy's jack. Declarer can win the ace and play ace and another club to establish a ruff when he regains the lead. The even trump split is good news, but if the first trick did go as suggested it might still see only six tricks made.

After the ♥A and two rounds of clubs, East wins the king and cashes the queen of hearts, puts partner in to cash the king of hearts, and away goes East's last club. Declarer can no longer win a trick with a club ruff, as East over-ruffs, and declarer is held to four spades and two aces.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-				-
S	-			-	-
E	-	-	-	-	
W	-	-	-	-	

=====

Board 18	♠ 432 ♥ 1053 ♦ 932 ♣ AKJ10	Dealer E Vul: N-S
	♠ K87 ♥ 986 ♦ J6 ♣ 87543	♠ AQJ106 ♥ A742 ♦ Q5 ♣ Q9
	♠ 95 ♥ KQJ ♦ AK10874 ♣ 62	

East will open 1♠ and South overcall 2♦. If playing five-card majors, West might scrape up 2♠ now, though that is far from being compulsory. If he does so, that will surely see East compete to 3♠ over North's likely 3♦.

It is slightly less clear where West does not choose to bid 2♠. If North also passes, East should double and West respond 2♠. Unless scared off by the vulnerability, North will compete to 3♦, but will E/W compete further? Some Norths will raise to 3♦ immediately, giving East the decision whether to double or to go quietly – not a routine decision with a likely wasted ♦Q and empty heart suit.

There is nothing to the play in either a spade or a diamond contract. N/S have three top losers so can make +130 in diamonds, while E/W have two losers in each side-suit so are down two in 3♠. Minus 100 should score OK, but a double, if anyone can find one, nets +300 and a lot of matchpoints for N/S.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	2	4		-	
S	2	4		-	
E	-	-	-		-
W	-	-	-		-

=====

Board 19 ♠ A105 Dealer S
 ♥ 752 Vul: E-W
 ♦ QJ
 ♣ Q9863

♠ 732 ♠ KJ986
 ♥ Q96 ♥ AKJ43
 ♦ 98754 ♦ A10
 ♣ 42 ♣ 10

♠ Q4
 ♥ 108
 ♦ K632
 ♣ AKJ75

South will usually open 1♣, though a few weak no-trumpers might try INT instead. After a pass from West, North will presumably raise a natural 1♣ opener, but how will vary according to the agreed methods.

A direct raise to 3♣ is the potentially big winner, as it puts East on the spot. I've already mentioned my view on how to handle genuine two-suiters – they should describe themselves as such. Rather than start with a murky double and then convert 3♦ to 3♥, cuebid 4♣ immediately. West will choose 4♥ and that is one or two off according to declarer's play of the spade suit.

If North's initial bid as at a lower level than 3♣, East can cuebid at a lower level and E/W can stop at a makeable level. For example, if 1♣ promises only three, or even two, clubs, North may respond INT, and now East can cuebid 2♣. Sure, East will go on to 3♥, probably whether or not pushed by an opposing 3♣ bid, but there is no reason to go beyond the three level.

Plus 140 should score pretty well for E/W and +110 likewise for N/S, though there may be a few +200s if E/W are down two in 3♥/♠.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	-	-	-	-
S	3	-	-	-	-
E	-	1	3	3	-
W	-	1	3	3	-
	=====				

Board 20 ♠ 4 Dealer W
 ♥ Q95432 Vul: Both
 ♦ J10942
 ♣ J

♠ KQJ763 ♠ A9
 ♥ 6 ♥ AKJ10
 ♦ AQ863 ♦ 7
 ♣ Q ♣ A98642

♠ 10852
 ♥ 87
 ♦ K5
 ♣ K10753

As the cards lie, E/W can make all 13 tricks in either spades or NT. Of course, that requires a couple of finesses and, in the case of 7NT, a red-suit squeeze against North, and nobody should actually bid Seven.

I imagine that there will be a lot of different auctions on this one, some getting to slam and some stopping in game. Which game or which slam is also open to debate.

It will start quietly enough: 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♦. Now the most economical continuation is 2♥, fourth-suit forcing. West shows the fifth diamond and now comes perhaps the key point in the whole auction. East has spare high cards and excellent controls, but it looks like a misfit.

A lot of Easts may just settle for 3NT, but then perhaps re-evaluate their hand when West pulls it to 4♠. Now, a six-two fit may tempt East to bid on.

If playing 2-over-1 game-forcing, East may try 3♠ over 3♦, arguing that this shows only doubleton support because East could have bid a forcing 2♠ or 3♠ on the previous round had he held three cards. That could see 6♠ reached as West will like his sixth spade and good honours in the suit, and is not to know that the bare ♣Q in partner's suit is of no value, so may make a slam try which East will be happy to accept.

Acot players do not have the same inference available to them as neither 2♠ nor 3♠ would be forcing for them over 2♦ so they would have to go through 2♥ to set up a force even with three-card spade support..

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	5	4	2	7	7
W	5	4	2	7	7

=====

Board 21	♠ A8432	Dealer N
	♥ KQ	Vul: N-S
	♦ 1095	
	♣ Q63	
♠ Q1095		♠ J6
♥ 92		♥ A63
♦ Q743		♦ AKJ82
♣ J92		♣ A75
	♠ K7	
	♥ J108754	
	♦ 6	
	♣ K1084	

I would not open the North hand, with an empty main suit and half it's strength in a king-queen doubleton. East will therefore get to open, either 1♦ or a strong NT.

Vulnerable against not, South may not fancy coming in over INT with his long but weak hearts, in which case INT will usually end the auction. After a heart lead, declarer will have seven top tricks but little scope for an eighth on competent defence, so will score +90.

If South does come in over INT, there are nine tricks to be had for a useful +140.

Where East opens 1♦, South will surely bid, the only question being 1♥ or 2♥. With a stronger main suit, 2♥ would be clear as it takes bidding space away from the opposition, to whom the hand belongs more often than not after North's initial pass. Two Hearts would also be clear non-vulnerable.

Vulnerable, it's not quite so automatic, though the six-four distribution balances out the weak suit to some degree. I'd still bid 2♥, but be aware that I was taking a risk.

North might raise 2♥ to 3♥, which would surely silence East. If North does not raise, East has spare high-card strength, but is the wrong shape to double and not quite strong enough for 2NT. If I had to choose between those two actions I would opt for 2NT, but pass will be a popular choice. Eight tricks is the limit in a diamond contract.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	-	3	-	-
S	1	-	3	-	-
E	-	2	-	-	1
W	-	2	-	-	1

=====

Board 22	♠ QJ4	Dealer E
	♥ 8643	Vul: E-W
	♦ A102	
	♣ J108	
♠ K96		♠ A7532
♥ 1052		♥ KJ
♦ Q94		♦ J73
♣ AK95		♣ Q74
	♠ 108	
	♥ AQ97	
	♦ K865	
	♣ 632	

Another 5-3-3-2 11-count with an empty suit and, again, I would not open the East hand, particularly at this vulnerability.

West has a weak NT and will often open INT if that is his agreement. Don't mock anyone who chooses to pass this minimum and poorly-shaped opener when vulnerable – game is unlikely, and INT could easily get into trouble. Passing may not work out well on this deal as it is E/W who can make something, but it will beat all those who get too high and go minus.

Go minus as E/W? Well, if West opens INT might East not transfer to spades then continue with 2NT? Both 2NT and 3♠ can be defeated. Better for E/W would be the style where 2♣ followed by 2♠ shows an invitational hand with five spades, as then West can pass 2♠ with his minimum and chalk up +110.

If West is playing strong NT he will not have the worry of opening INT and being doubled, as this hand opens a much less risky 1♣. West could even pass the 1♠ response but, once again, it is possible to stop in 2♠ if West rebids INT and East uses Checkback then follows through with 2♠, invitational with five spades.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	1	1	2	1
W	2	1	1	2	1

=====

Board 23	♠ 2	Dealer S
	♥ AKJ10963	Vul: Both
	♦ 3	
	♣ 10654	
♠ AQJ105	♠ K963	
♥ 4	♥ 5	
♦ A876	♦ KJ1054	
♣ KQ7	♣ A92	
	♠ 874	
	♥ Q872	
	♦ Q92	
	♣ J83	

When West opens 1♠, North will overcall 3♥ (weak) or, my preference with powerful trumps and seven-four shape, 4♥.

If North contents himself with 3♥, East can bid 4♥ to show a hand better than a simple jump to 4♠. Looking at 16 HCP and a singleton heart (West won't know that East also has a heart control, as the 4♥ cuebid merely shows a good hand, not necessarily with a heart control), West will probably check on key cards then bid the small slam on finding only one missing.

Six Spades is a good spot and a majority of declarers will pick up the diamonds by delaying touching the suit until they have seen North turn up with seven hearts and at least three clubs, possibly being helped by the N/S spot cards played at trick two if that is the suit North switches to after cashing a top heart.

Maybe you don't care whether or not your opponents bid a slam that requires them to find a missing queen – fair enough, but change the hand slightly and slam could be cold. Better then not to make it so easy for them to get there.

Look at the difference if North overcalls 4♥. Now there is no room for East to show a better than 4♠ hand without going to the five level, which is far from secure. No, East will bid 4♠ and West will not know whether that

is a slight underbid or a slight overbid, so he too will be worried about going past game. Certainly, far fewer pairs will bid to slam than after a 3♥ overcall.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	2	-	-
S	-	-	2	-	-
E	3	6	-	6	-
W	3	6	-	6	-

=====

Board 24	♠ AQJ976	Dealer W
	♥ Q109	Vul: None
	♦ 65	
	♣ AJ	
♠ K10843	♠	
♥ K2	♥ 743	
♦ 73	♦ AKJ84	
♣ Q632	♣ K10754	
	♠ 52	
	♥ AJ865	
	♦ Q1092	
	♣ 98	

Unless playing weak two-suited openings, West will pass and will be glad to have done so when North opens 1♠ on his left. East has a genuine minor two-suiter so overcalls 2NT and that shuts South out of the auction.

While in a constructive sense West is worth only a 3♣ response, most of his high cards being in partner's short suits, tactically, it may be better to jump to 4♣ to shut out a possible opposing heart fit.

Four Clubs should end the auction and should make exactly – although there are only two top losers, there are only 10 tricks as declarer cannot get three ruffs in his hand.

A simple 3♣ from West may see North repeat the spades. East has no right to compete with 4♣ – from his perspective partner could be 5-5-1-2 or similar – so 3♠ runs round to West. He surely will fancy his chances sufficiently on defence not to compete with 4♣ but, facing quite a wide-range overcall, will he fancy his chances enough to double?

That decision will swing a whole load of matchpoints, as two down is the likely

outcome in 3♠, and –100 will be a good save for N/S while –300 will be terrible.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	2	1	-
S	-	-	2	1	-
E	4	2	-	-	-
W	4	2	-	-	-

=====

Board 25	♠ A9 ♥ K7642 ♦ 742 ♣ AJ8	Dealer N Vul: E-W	♠ 10543 ♥ 5 ♦ AJ10953 ♣ 54
	♠ Q862 ♥ AQJ ♦ 86 ♣ Q632		
	♠ KJ7 ♥ 10983 ♦ KQ ♣ K1097		

North has the sort of heart suit that would convince the weak no-trumpers to open 1NT rather than 1♥. Those playing strong NT will, of course, not have that option so will have to open 1♥.

The opening bid shouldn't matter, in that N/S have a nine-card heart fit and should have no problem in finding it and bidding to the heart game.

Will East bid with the six-card diamond suit and six-four shape, despite the adverse vulnerability? Probably not at most tables, and any intervention will be quickly brushed aside.

With two trump losers plus the ace of diamonds, success for declarer will depend on picking up the clubs without loss. A spade finesse is an alternative way of attempting to avoid a club loser but said finesse fails, and so does the contract.

Declarer should delay the decision in clubs until the end, when the six-two diamond split will be apparent, suggesting that West may have the club length and hence be the more likely to hold the queen. In fact, if declarer knew the exact distribution for sure, the odds would be two-to-one in favour of West holding the missing queen.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	-	4	-	1
S	3	-	4	-	1
E	-	1	-	1	-
W	-	1	-	1	-

=====

Board 26	♠ A43 ♥ K983 ♦ 54 ♣ KJ94	Dealer E Vul: Both	♠ J9762 ♥ A6 ♦ K108 ♣ Q65
	♠ KQ85 ♥ Q4 ♦ A762 ♣ 1073		
	♠ 10 ♥ J10752 ♦ QJ93 ♣ A82		

This board is likely to be passed out at a good number of tables, as nobody has a clear opening bid, particularly with both sides vulnerable so that going down could cost more than making a partscore would be worth.

If anyone opens, my money would be on West, if his methods allowed 1♠, when he could pass any new-suit response and know that it would be at least a seven-card fit. However, while that looks quite an attractive prospect non-vulnerable, it risks too many –200s, so I don't recommend it.

And after three passes, why should North gamble that he can make whatever contract his side gets to if he opens? No, Passed Out would be the action if my clones and I sat in all four seats.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	1	4	-	-
S	3	1	4	-	-
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

=====

Board 27	♠ KQ6	Dealer S
	♥ 62	Vul: None
	♦ AJ1084	
	♣ A42	
♠ J104		♠ A9872
♥ 1093		♥ 5
♦ K65		♦ Q973
♣ K1065		♣ Q87
	♠ 53	
	♥ AKQJ874	
	♦ 2	
	♣ J93	

One Heart, 3♥, 4♥? All will have their advocates with the South cards, though the hand looks way too good to me for a non-vulnerable 3♥ opening.

A 4♥ opening will be passed out, while a 3♥ opening should be raised to game if playing a traditional pre-emptive style. Facing a modern tournament 3♥ opening there is no guarantee that even that will make, let alone game, so facing an aggressive partner I would have sympathy for someone who passed, terrible result though that would be. The result perhaps confirms my view that the hand is not a three-level opening.

If South opens 1♥, North will respond 2♦ and South rebid hearts. How many hearts, you ask? That may depend on the methods, but 4♥ looks a good bet – big long heart suit but near minimum in terms of high cards.

Four Hearts should be held to 10 tricks, losing one spade and two clubs, or perhaps one trick in each side-suit if declarer gets cute after a non-club lead.

A club lead sets up the defensive tricks immediately so declarer can't try for any extra chances.

However, after a spade lead to king and ace and spade back to the queen, declarer could try drawing trumps then leading a diamond to the ten – the ace will then take care of a club loser, so this is a free shot. It gains a trick when West holds both diamond honours or, since he would probably split them more often than not, honour-doubleton. The first diamond loses but then the remaining honour falls under the ace and the jack takes care of a second club loser, making 11.

Given another side entry, and this play could also provide extra tricks when West held

♦Hxx, declarer leading to the ten, on regaining the lead crossing to dummy to play ace then ruff one, and finally cash the established winners. It's a suit combination which is almost never taken advantage of, by my observation.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	4	-	3
S	-	-	4	-	3
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-
=====					

Board 28	♠ Aj	Dealer W
	♥ AK2	Vul: N-S
	♦ A10854	
	♣ A65	
♠ Q62		♠ 753
♥ QJ98		♥ 107653
♦ Q92		♦ J73
♣ J43		♣ 102
	♠ K10984	
	♥ 4	
	♦ K6	
	♣ KQ987	

The session ends with a bang, with N/S able to make a grand slam in any of clubs, spades or NT, though 7♠ is only likely to make a trump lead.

Of course, N/S should not be in Seven of anything. A small slam is another matter and should be reached after a 2NT opening from North.

South transfers to spades and, playing simple methods, North completes the transfer and South bids his second suit. For many pairs this is where the confusion begins – is 4♣ a second suit or is it a cuebid for spades? It often seems to be a Humpty Dumpty bid, meaning whatever 13 cards the bidder happens to be looking at, and could have a different meaning next time he makes the same bid.

Of course, YOU know what the bid means, but does partner?

For this reason many tournament players agree that opener should only complete the transfer if holding three- or four-card support, and now a new suit will be a cuebid as an

eight-card fit has already been found. With only two spades, opener bids 3NT over the transfer. Now, a new suit is natural, still looking for a fit.

The above agreement is not a cure for all ills but, if your partner is in the habit of making Humpy Dumpty bids, it might be worth suggesting it – without being public about why you like it, of course.

Whichever slam is reached, 12 tricks will be the popular outcome, so making all 13 in 6NT or 6♠ should score very well – there will be very few bidding and making a grand slam. Six Clubs is a solid enough contract, capable of being made even if, on a different lay-out, there is a trump loser, but it may score poorly if most people get to slam – as they should.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	7	6	3	7	7
S	7	6	3	7	7
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-
=====					