



Commentary for the CBAI Simultaneous Pairs

Monday 2nd March 2026

Dear Bridge Player,

Thank you very much for playing in the CBAI Simultaneous Pairs 2026, and for your continued support for the Association.

The funds that you contribute via these Simultaneous Pairs will help the CBAI in its ongoing development work – training new teachers and new TDs, promoting the game and trying to attract new members, developing junior bridge, and so on. Many of the input costs, like costs generally these days, are increasing significantly, so your support for this event, and for the various live competitions run during the season by the CBAI, is greatly appreciated.

I 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 whatsoever) provided plenty of difficult decisions. Many thanks to our expert commentators Jeannie Fitzgerald (Monday), Gay Keaveney (Tuesday), Brian Senior (Wednesday), Enda Glynn (Thursday), and Hilary D-L McDonagh (Friday) for their guidance through the fog. I hope that you have picked up some useful tips from their advice. Congratulations to anyone who ends up in the prizes; with over 1,000 pairs playing on most days, you've earned it!

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

John Phelan

President, Contract Bridge Association of Ireland

System:

1NT 15-17

5-card majors: 5-5-4-2. 1♣ opening can be made with two clubs but is non-forcing

2NT 20-22

2♣ Artificial, game-forcing

2♦/♥/♠ weak 6-10 HCP, 6-card suits

2/1 game-forcing

1NT semi-forcing over 1M. Forcing by non-passed hand, non-forcing by passed hand

An exciting set filled with lots of tough competitive matchpoint decisions.

Board 1 ♠ 107 Dealer N
 ♥ Q65 Vul: None
 ♦ AQ1053
 ♣ 972

♠ 63 ♠ Q9852
 ♥ 974 ♥ A82
 ♦ KJ9 ♦ 764
 ♣ KQ1043 ♣ 65

♠ AKJ4
 ♥ KJ103
 ♦ 82
 ♣ AJ8

Bidding

HCP : N=8 S=17 E=6 W=9

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

Many N/S pairs will reach 3NT which will be played by South after a strong NT opening or NT rebid by weak NT system bidders, if North chooses to invite with 8 HCP and a nice 5-card diamond suit.

Play

West will likely lead the ♣K. When defending against NT, this lead usually asks East to play the Jack on the trick if he has it, or to give count in the suit if he does not hold the Jack. This agreement helps West to know if he can safely continue the suit. Meanwhile, Declarer should duck the lead, hoping that West will continue the suit giving him a second undeserved club trick. However, when the Jack does not appear from East, West can avoid the trap, and switch to one of the major suits - either of which will help Declarer. On a heart switch East rises with the ♥A and continues clubs and now Declarer must trust East's count and play the ♣A if he's to make 11 tricks.

Looking at all four hands we can see that 11 tricks are available if South takes finesses in both spades and diamonds, knocking out the ♥A on the way – finessing twice in diamonds starting with a finesse of the ♦10. When East gets in with ♥A and continues with clubs South can win and poor West will never get in to enjoy his clubs.

If N/S are playing 4-card majors and weak NT, the contract may be played by North, where the natural spade lead allows Declarer to take 4 tricks in the suit and potentially 12 tricks in total!

Depending on whether North or South declares, the opening lead, and Declarer's choice of play in the diamond suit then 9, 10, 11 or 12 tricks may be achieved. In practice those making 11 or 12 will likely score very well.

Novice Tip: The play of ducking the ♣K is known as a 'Bath Coup'. It typically applies when Declarer holds Ajx(x) and K is lead - either at trick one, or later in the play. The duck allows Declarer to take a second trick in the suit if the suit is continued. It can also help Declarer to control the flow of the hand and limit the Defenders' ability to communicate later in the play.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 2 ♠ AQJ75 Dealer E
 ♥ A97 Vul: N-S
 ♦ 1063
 ♣ KQ

♠ 4 ♥ J1065 ♦ AKJ4 ♣ 9765	♠ 93 ♥ K43 ♦ Q95 ♣ 108432
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♠ K10862 ♥ Q82 ♦ 872 ♣ Aj	
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Bidding

HCP : N=16 S=10 E=5 W=9

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
Pass	INT*	Pass	2♥**
Pass	2NT***	Pass	3♥****
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

- * 15-17 HCP
- ** transfer to spades
- *** super-accept: 4 or 5 spades non-minimum
- **** re-transfer to spades

With a combined 26 HCP and a 10-card spade fit, N/S will likely end up in 4♠ – whether North opens 1♠ or INT.

Bidding Tip: Nowadays, most serious players play some version of ‘super-accept’ when responder transfers after a NT opening. If responder transfers to a major, opener can bid 2NT or 3 of the major to show 4 or 5 cards in partner’s major and distinguish between minimum or non-minimum opening NT values. Usually 2NT is used to show the non-minimum hand over the transfer. Then, Responder can re-transfer and pass or bid on – depending on hand strength.

If the partnership systemically opens INT with a 5-card major, a similar approach can be used over Responder’s 2♣ Stayman inquiry: Opener can bid 2NT to say ‘I have a 5-card major and a minimum NT opening (15)’, or bid 3 of their major to show a 5-card suit and a good 16-17 HCP.

This is a handy system tool that can help the partnership judge to bid some tight games when they have good trump fits.

Play

As both North and South have 5/3/3/2 hand shape, there are no discards available, so four unavoidable losers: three diamonds and a heart. On a diamond lead and continuation, Declarer loses the first three tricks. Eventually he can draw trumps and play a heart to the Queen hoping that the King is well placed. If diamonds are not continued, Declarer can draw trumps, cash clubs ending in Dummy and play a diamond to force the defence to play hearts or give a ruff and discard.

There is a real possibility of a flat board on this one!

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 3 ♠ 5 Dealer S
 ♥ QJ76 Vul: E-W
 ♦ KJ975
 ♣ 983

♠ 987 ♥ K95 ♦ Q106 ♣ AK105	♠ AQ432 ♥ 1083 ♦ 843 ♣ 72
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♠ KJ106
 ♥ A42
 ♦ A2
 ♣ QJ64

Bidding

HCP : N=7 S=15 E=6 W=12

West	North	East	South
			INT
All Pass			

If South opens INT 15-17 they are likely to play there. Weak No-Trumpers will open 1♣ and bid INT over their partner's 1♥ response – North will usually bypass diamonds unless the hand can take a second bid in the next round.

West has no good action over either a 1♣ or INT opening, and East's lack of HCP, balanced shape and the unfavourable vulnerability argue against bidding. If he bids 1♠, South will still bid his INT. If West competes to 2♠ or East passes initially but then balances with 2♠, South can happily pull out a penalty double.

Play

INT can make 8 tricks on any lead when the diamond finesse works, the red suits break kindly and the defenders cannot profitably attack any suit.

West has a difficult hand to lead from. A key point of matchpoint strategy is to make "normal" non-deceptive opening leads and not try for a "top" by choosing an unusual one – which will very often have the opposite effect: deceiving partner and helping Declarer! On this hand the unusual (and very unlikely) diamond lead is most effective, since it does not give anything away. A more standard option is to lead the ♣A to consult partner about that suit. On this lead, West will play a discouraging 2. Taking a look at Dummy now, West may switch to the ♠9. East will win this trick with the Ace and having seen his partner's 9 may not continue spades to avoid giving Declarer a second trick in the suit. With nothing else very appealing, he may play a club through for partner, South will cover with Q or J and West will win this trick. If West continues with the 10 it will set up a second club trick for Declarer - as the lowly 6♣ will be high.

On any lead but a diamond, it will be difficult for the defence to make more than 4 tricks ♣AK, ♥K and ♠A.

Declarer might be nervous of taking the diamond finesse, since communications are a little bit tricky and he does not have a quick entry to dummy if the finesse fails. On this occasion, all is well; the finesse works and the suit breaks 3-3.

Declarer also has the option to play hearts towards the QJ. Since the King is well placed and the suit again breaks favourably three tricks are available in hearts.

Indeed Declarer has possibilities to make extra tricks in hearts, clubs and spades depending on the defence.

They say bridge is a bidder's game. If E/W get into the auction and end up in 2♠ they will score very poorly – giving away at least 300 when N/S score three spades, two hearts and three diamonds ... 800 if doubled.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 4 ♠ K6 Dealer W
 ♥ 7652 Vul: Both
 ♦ 1076
 ♣ Q1043

♠ Q108752 ♥ K103 ♦ Q4 ♣ 75	♠ J943 ♥ QJ ♦ AJ52 ♣ KJ8
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♠ A ♥ A984 ♦ K983 ♣ A962	
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Bidding

HCP : N=5 S=15 E=13 W=7

West	North	East	South
2♠	Pass	3♠	Dble
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

Here the high card points are split 20/20 and both East and South are faced with difficult decisions.

Depending on agreements and style West may choose to open a weak 2♠, multi 2♦ or to pass in first seat. If West opens 2♠ then assuming a 10-card fit, East may choose to raise spades – hoping to either make or to make life difficult for South – though the East hand is balanced and 4 of the 13 HCP are Jacks. If East elects to go all the way to game, South will likely double and collect a good score.

If a 3♠ bid eventually comes around to South (directly or via a multi sequence), holding 15 HCP and a spade shortage he may feel compelled to double. If he does, North will bid 4♥ which will not be a success, as neither side can make more than 8 tricks.

Play

In 2♠, Declarer will lose two spades, a heart, a diamond and a club, if he guesses to put in the Jack or has time to set up a diamond for a club discard.

If N/S play in hearts, they can lose two hearts, two diamonds and a club, with the possibility of losing a second club also.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 5 ♠ KQ85 Dealer N
 ♥ K84 Vul: N-S
 ♦ AQ42
 ♣ A4

♠ 642 ♥ J10752 ♦ 65 ♣ J96	♠ A10973 ♥ 6 ♦ J108 ♣ Q872
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♠ J
 ♥ AQ93
 ♦ K973
 ♣ K1053

Bidding

HCP : N=18 S=13 E=7 W=2

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	2NT*	Pass	4♦**
Pass	4♥***	4NT****	
Pass	5♠*****	6♦	
All Pass			

- * 18-19 balanced
- ** agreeing diamonds, slam interest
- *** happy to co-operate, heart cue
- **** Keycard for diamonds
- ***** two keycards plus the Q of trumps

Board 5 brings the first potential slam of the set, with 12 tricks available in diamonds only - thanks to the extra trick available via a ruff. 3NT+2 is the limit in NT. Getting to 6♦ is not easy, especially if N/S's 1♦ opening may guarantee only three diamonds. At Declarers 3NT scores much better than 5♦ when the same number of tricks are available. Matchpoint strategy suggests playing in either 3NT or 6♦ and avoiding languishing in 5 of a minor unless absolutely necessary!

From South's point of view North has shown 18-19 HCP, a balanced hand, and at least four diamonds. He can count 31-32 high card points, knows the partnership has at least an 8-card fit and he has a ruffing value in spades. So slam is definitely a possibility. A useful agreement here is to play 4 of the minor as 'suit agreement' with slam interest. Another option is to play 4 of the minor as minorwood - keycard ask in the minor. Either way, South can find out that partner has two keycards and the Queen of trumps and will bid 6♦ with the singleton spade. Any making slam will score better than those in 3NT or 5♦, and 6♦ is likely to be safer than 6NT.

Those pairs playing inverted minors, whose system allows them to hold a 4-card major may also have an advantage that allows them to explore slam easily.

Anyone who successfully bids and makes the slam will score well.

Play

Against a NT contract East will likely lead his fourth highest spade. After that, the Defenders need to take care not to let the Declarer score a fourth trick in either spades or hearts or a third club trick, ensuring he does not make any more than the 11 to which he is entitled.

6♦ is straightforward: win the lead, draw trumps, and knock out the Ace of spades, later ruffing a spade in dummy for the 12th trick.

Makeable Contracts

	♣ =	♦ =	♥ =	♠ =	NT ==
N	4	6	5	3	5
S	4	6	5	4	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Board 6 ♠ AK10962 Dealer E
 ♥ K85 Vul: E-W
 ♦ Q76
 ♣ 4

♠ J743 ♠ 8
 ♥ AJ3 ♥ Q97
 ♦ J543 ♦ 1092
 ♣ A3 ♣ 1098652

♠ Q5
 ♥ 10642
 ♦ AK8
 ♣ KQJ7

Bidding

HCP : N=12 S=15 E=2 W=11

West	North	East	South
		Pass	INT*
Pass	2♥**	2♠	
Pass	4♠***	All Pass	

- * 15-17
- ** transfer to spades
- *** 6+ spades, mild slam interest

A normal 4♠ contract with 15 HCP opposite 12 and a 6-2 Spade fit. North, having good spades, an opening bid and a shortage, makes a mild slam try by transferring and jumping to game. A transfer to the 4-level (using 4♦ or 4♥ depending on partnership agreement) can be used to show 6+ spades and no slam ambition. South with minimum HCP for the INT and only 2 spades is happy to decline the suggestion.

Play

4♠ will make 10 tricks most of the time as South will have an opportunity to discard a heart on the ♣Q once the ♣A is knocked out. Unless West is known to hold four spades from the bidding, South is unlikely to take the spade finesse and will lose a spade trick, ♣A and ♥A. Should West find the unlikely play of the ♥A lead and heart continuation, the contract will fail unless the spade finesse is taken.

Though 10 tricks are also available in NT, the tenth trick depends on the spade finesse, so 9 tricks are more likely in practice.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 7 ♠ K5 Dealer S
 ♥ Q2 Vul: Both
 ♦ A8762
 ♣ 10862

♠ Q86 ♥ J6543 ♦ K3 ♣ 975	♠ J72 ♥ 1087 ♦ J1054 ♣ QJ3
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♠ A10943
 ♥ AK9
 ♦ Q9
 ♣ AK4

Bidding

HCP : N=9 S=20 E=5 W=6

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	All Pass	2NT

South will open 2NT (or their equivalent) and end up in 3NT.

Play

Double dummy 11 tricks are possible via four spades, three hearts, three clubs and a diamond, as both black suits break 3-3. But the hand presents a lot of options and the potential of playing on diamonds may seem attractive.

On a heart lead, North can win with the Queen and try a diamond to the Queen, hoping for the King to be well placed and a 3-3 break, planning to later cash the diamonds and then play on spades. However, if the Queen loses to the King with West and he returns a diamond, that will remove the ♦A entry to a possible third club trick.

More likely, Declarer will win the heart lead with the Queen and play ♠K and a spade to the 9 and Queen. On a heart return he can cash the spades and watch the discards carefully. If West discards a club, Declarer can test the clubs playing Ace and King, then cash the remaining heart and exit on a club with confidence. Even if West keeps clubs and discards hearts, the same sequence of plays is favourite to yield an 11th trick in clubs or diamonds.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 8 ♠ 73 Dealer W
 ♥ AJ Vul: None
 ♦ QJ1072
 ♣ AQJ8

♠ 52 ♥ 9764 ♦ K863 ♣ 1062	♠ AQJ109 ♥ K108 ♦ 94 ♣ 743
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♠ K864
 ♥ Q532
 ♦ A5
 ♣ K95

Bidding

HCP : N=15 S=12 E=10 W=3

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	1♠	Dble
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

Here with 15 HCP and 2-2-5-4 shape, some strong No-Trumpers will elect to open 1NT to get across the high card strength. Others, perhaps deterred by the small doubleton spade, will choose 1♦, similarly those playing weak NT. Over a 1NT opening N/S have a straight forward route to 3NT. If East bids to show his spade suit, South has to decide whether to penalise this, or to bid game for his own side. With nobody vulnerable, N/S will need to beat spades by three tricks (500) to do better than 3NT (400), so, given that South's spades are not that strong or long, 3NT rates to be safer this time.

When North opens 1♦ and rebids 2♣, South will choose either 2NT or 3NT depending on the pair's opening style: if N/S open a lot of 11 counts, then 2NT will fit the bill.

Play

Yet another NT hand for N/S. Declarer will need to duck a round of spades and avoid an early heart finesse to make his contract. He can count four club tricks, one diamond trick, one heart and one spade with chances to make three further tricks in diamonds even if a trick is lost to the King. He does not mind losing the diamond trick to West, but cannot afford to let East in, or the spades will be cashed and the contract defeated.

Declarer can win the second spade, go to dummy with the ♣J (in case the ♦K is doubleton with East) and run the ♦Q. West can duck this trick since he can see that if he wins it the Declarer will have 10 tricks as he is known to have the ♣K and is favourite to have ♣A. If he has doubleton ♣K, the duck may reduce his trick count, even if he decides to continue to knock out the ♦K. Now Declarer will play another diamond to the Ace, the 9 appearing from East. If West has ducked in tempo, who can blame South for falling back on the heart finesse for his 9th trick?

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 9 ♠ 432 Dealer N
 ♥ J1087 Vul: E-W
 ♦ J105
 ♣ K97

♠ 986 ♥ 653 ♦ AQ ♣ Q10853	♠ AQ1075 ♥ Q ♦ K97643 ♣ 4
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♠ KJ
 ♥ AK942
 ♦ 82
 ♣ AJ62

Bidding

HCP : N=5 S=16 E=11 W=8

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♦	1♥
Dble	3♥	3♠	4♥
All Pass			

With 11 HCP and 5-1-6-1 shape, East will open the bidding. With 6/5 when the 6-carder is lower ranked, it is traditionally recommended to open the 6-card suit, and many Easts will do that, rebidding 1♠ if partner bids 1♥ or 2♠ if partner bids 2♣ game-forcing; in all cases he'll hope to be able to bid spades twice later to show the shape.

With only 11 HCP, it is likely that the hand will become competitive, and showing spades later may be difficult. So, at matchpoints particularly, many players like to open these with 1 of the major suit to get it off their chest, especially holding 5 hearts with longer diamonds.

Over 1♦, South will overall 1♥ and it is over to West. Holding 8 HCP he wants to bid, but the limited values and poor club suit of only 5 cards rules out 2♣. He would prefer to have a heart stopper to bid INT or four spades to make a take out double. Nothing is perfect, but perhaps double is the best compromise.

North has a weak balanced hand with 4 trumps. The 4-3-3-3 shape suggests caution in competition. However, North knows that they have at least a 9-card fit and they are non-vulnerable versus vulnerable, so will likely bid 3♥ pre-emptive. Partner will know that he has other bids available to show values, so shouldn't get too excited with a good hand. When East bids 3♠, South may bid 4♥ hoping to either go off one or two and escape a double, or to make on a good day.

Some Easts will take the push to 4♠ with their 5-1-6-1 shape, perhaps believing they have a 9-card spade fit.

Play

N/S have a 9-card heart fit with which they can make only 9 tricks having unavoidable losers in the side suits. E/W have 8-card fits in both diamonds and spades and can make 10 tricks in either contract double dummy. Without intense competition, game is difficult to reach with a combined 19 HCP without knowing about West's diamond values, and in practice may not make unless the Declarer cashes the ♠A and discovers the spade position, avoiding the doubly losing double finesse.

We can expect to see a variety of plus and minus scores for both sides.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 10 ♠ J4 Dealer E
 ♥ 95 Vul: Both
 ♦ AKQ854
 ♣ A63

♠ AKQ1083 ♥ A42 ♦ J7 ♣ K7	♠ 9765 ♥ K1087 ♦ 3 ♣ Q982
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♠ 2 ♥ QJ63 ♦ 10962 ♣ J1054	
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Bidding

HCP : N=14 S=4 E=5 W=17

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♠	2♦	3♠*	4♦
4♠	5♦	Pass	Pass
Dble	All Pass		

Potential for another very competitive auction on board 10 with each side holding a 10-card fit and the ability to get into the auction easily. Both sides are vulnerable, so if N/S elect to save in 5♦ over 4♠ the 500 they lose will be a good score, with 650 available for the opponents in 4♠.

Play

In 4♠, 11 tricks can be made when South, who has to guard both clubs and hearts, is forced to discard on five rounds of spades. Any E/W who push on to 5♠ over 5♦ will need to find this line of play to avoid a very poor score indeed.

In 5♦ E/W will take a spade, two hearts and a club.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	3	-	-	-
S	-	3	-	-	-
E	1	-	2	5	-
W	1	-	2	5	-

Board 11 ♠ AKQ6542 Dealer S
 ♥ J92 Vul: None
 ♦ J10
 ♣ 3

♠ 10 ♥ KQ64 ♦ 9865 ♣ KJ82	♠ J973 ♥ 3 ♦ Q732 ♣ Q754
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♠ 8
 ♥ A10875
 ♦ AK4
 ♣ A1096

Bidding

HCP : N=11 S=15 E=5 W=9

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	1♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	2♣

Play

An unlucky lie of the cards rules out slam in either major with both ♥KQ wrong and spades breaking badly. Double-dummy spades scores better than hearts, since the diamond finesse can take care of one heart loser. Scoring 10 tricks will be popular in either major and with little opportunity to make more than 9 in NT, that contract will score badly.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 12 ♠ 962 Dealer W
 ♥ J72 Vul: N-S
 ♦ J4
 ♣ AKQ107

♠ 103 ♠ K
 ♥ 10 ♥ AQ965
 ♦ AK1098765 ♦ Q32
 ♣ 64 ♣ J952

♠ AQJ8754
 ♥ K843
 ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
 ♣ 83 ♣ 83

Bidding

HCP : N=11 S=10 E=12 W=7

West	North	East	South
4♦	Pass	5♦	All Pass

Non-vul versus vul, holding an 8-card diamond suit headed by the AKT9, if West has a 4♦ preemptive opening available that will be a great description of the hand. Then it is over to North to decide what, if anything, to do.

The North hand has a very good club suit and tolerance for both majors, but is lacking in HCP for a clearcut takeout double at this level. I expect that a few brave Norths will double but most will pass, hoping that partner will be able to act.

East knows more or less what his partner has and needs to decide whether to pass or bid game. The hand does have some defensive values, but the distribution and diamond fit make the 5♦ bid attractive. This pressures the opponents to guess whether to pass, double or push to a higher, potentially unmakeable, level themselves. If East chooses to pass, N/S have an easy route to the making 4♠. Similarly if West opens at the 3-level, it creates a tougher problem for East, as it is easier for North to get in a light double making it much more likely in general for N/S to find their game.

South, with nice spades and 7-4-0-2 shape, would like to bid over East's 5♦. In general, the strategy at matchpoints focuses on maximizing your score relative to the rest of the field, rather than aiming to reach the optimal contract. Unlike IMPs, where missing a vulnerable game may be a disaster, matchpoints rewards playing "with the room" to avoid zeroes that can be caused by unusual or extreme guesses. Here, 5♠ makes on the N/S cards, losing only two tricks if West leads his singleton heart. Choosing to bid to 5♠ is a high-risk move, which will earn a correspondingly high reward on this hand.

Play

There is nothing much in the play.

5♦ is down one, losing two clubs and a spade.

11 tricks are available in a spade contract on a heart lead, but Declarer can take 12 tricks if West leads a diamond honour.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	-	2	5	-
S	3	-	1	5	-
E	-	4	-	-	-
W	-	4	-	-	-

Board 13 ♠ A92 Dealer N
 ♥ AK98 Vul: Both
 ♦ 94
 ♣ Q972

♠ J86 ♠ 1053
 ♥ 103 ♥ J42
 ♦ J10763 ♦ KQ8
 ♣ 1053 ♣ AJ84

♠ KQ74
 ♥ Q765
 ♦ A52
 ♣ K6

Bidding

HCP : N=13 S14= E=11 W=2

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	4♥ All Pass

Here North and South both have balanced hands, so there may be a temptation to play the contract in 3NT in an attempt to maximize the matchpoint score on the board. This would not be a success on this occasion.

Play

With spades breaking 3-3 there are 10 tricks available in NT but 11 in either major suit thanks to a diamond ruff in dummy. The defence can take one club and one diamond trick only.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 14 ♠ J743 Dealer E
 ♥ 75 Vul: None
 ♦ AJ943
 ♣ K9

♠ 105 ♠ AQ86
 ♥ KJ10942 ♥ 63
 ♦ Q102 ♦ K7
 ♣ J6 ♣ AQ1082

♠ K92
 ♥ AQ8
 ♦ 865
 ♣ 7543

Bidding

HCP : N=9 S=9 E=15 W=7

West	North	East	South
		1♣	Pass
1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	All Pass		

With 15 HCP including two AQ combinations, many Easts will take another bid over partner's 2♥ rebid. Especially if they play that an immediate 2♥ response over 1♣ opening shows a weak hand – implying that this 2♥ bid shows at least some values. In any case, most Wests will decline any invitation and will play in 3♥.

Play

The favourable positions in clubs and hearts mean that 10 tricks are available in hearts. Declarer has entries to play twice towards the hearts in his hand to pick up the hearts for one loser and the ♣K will appear quickly solving any issues in that suit.

North would prefer not to be on lead with this hand. With the ♣K badly placed under a known 5-card club suit, she may be tempted to try a dangerous ♦A, for fear that diamond tricks might disappear. The diamond lead will solve most of the Declarer's problems and he may make 11 tricks as South cannot attack spades, so that loser will disappear on the clubs.

On the bidding, East may be short in trumps, so a heart lead is also likely to help Declarer – which it does in practice. Declarer can enter dummy with a spade after the losing spade finesse, to play another heart towards his hand if South plays low the first time. Unless the defence play a diamond, those will disappear on the long clubs.

One possible line on a spade lead is to finesse the ♠Q losing to South, win a small spade return (the 9 sets up Declarer's 8) with the ♠A and play a heart to the 9 and a diamond to the King. If Declarer plays another heart now, South can rise with his Ace and play another diamond to hold Declarer to 9 tricks. If he plays low, Declarer can win, finesse the club and discard the two losing diamonds. Declarer does better to play the ♣J overtaking with the ♣Q for the second heart play towards his hand. Now the best that the defence can do is to cash the ♦A.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 15 ♠ 42 Dealer S
 ♥ Q9862 Vul: N-S
 ♦ K94
 ♣ A95

♠ KQJ10875 ♥ ♦ 85 ♣ QJ73	♠ 3 ♥ AJ7543 ♦ J632 ♣ K10
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♠ A96
 ♥ K10
 ♦ AQ107
 ♣ 8642

Bidding

HCP : N=9 S=13 E=9 W=9

West	North	East	South
			1♣
1♠	Dble	Pass	INT
2♠	All Pass		

Play

A heart lead allows West to make 10 tricks in spades as he can discard a losing diamond. Otherwise, he loses the obvious 4 tricks. N/S can make 2NT double-dummy, but this seems a little unlikely in practice as Declarer needs to finesse both red tens to make it. Some pairs may get to 2NT if North bids 2♥ over 1♠ as a one-round force, and West decides not to risk the 3-level. 2♥ is dangerous at unfavourable vulnerability with 9HCP and only 5 weakish hearts. Most partnerships would prefer to have 10 HCP and a better heart suit, or 6 hearts. On the lie of the cards, 2♥ does okay as West can be kept off lead. But North is unlikely to be left to play there. 2♠ or 3♠ by West will be popular contracts, making 9 or 10 tricks depending on the lead.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 16 ♠ Dealer W
 ♥ KQ9862 Vul: E-W
 ♦ J6
 ♣ 107653

♠ AJ10864 ♥ 10 ♦ A10852 ♣ K	♠ 92 ♥ A754 ♦ K73 ♣ AQJ8
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♠ KQ753 ♥ J3 ♦ Q94 ♣ 942	
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Bidding

HCP : N=6 S=8 E=14 W=12

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♣*	Pass
2♦	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	All Pass

North would love to bid with his 0-6-2-5 shape and may do so if playing a gadget such as Michaels cue-bids or Ghestem. Alternatively, as the hearts are longer and much better than the clubs, he may risk a 2♥ overcall. E/W can take at least 7 tricks in defence against hearts and 8 against clubs, which will be expensive if doubled, unless the loss can be kept to 500 and most E/W pairs are making a vulnerable game the other way.

Play

North may lead the ♥K against 4♠ and West will win and set about drawing trumps. South will play low as it looks like two trump tricks can be guaranteed this way, and when North shows out, West will pause to re-plan. There are now two trump losers and at least one diamond, unless the ♦QJ fall doubleton. Is there any way to do better than three losers? Good technique now is to ruff a heart low. One option is to cash the ♣K and go to dummy with the ♦K (noting no sign of the Q or J). Now play on clubs discarding diamonds from hand; if South ruffs the 4th one, West can overruff, cash ♦A and exit on a diamond. Holding AJT against KQ7 in trumps, he cannot be prevented from taking two of the last three tricks, and 11 tricks overall. If South does not ruff in, Declarer discards his last losing diamond and loses only two spades.

Very nice! If North has bid Ghestem to show hearts and clubs, this line of play will fit the distribution and North's bid will have been a big help.

But what if North bids Michaels to show hearts and a minor? From West's point of view it could be either minor. If the minor is diamonds, then South is void in diamonds and taking the line just mentioned could be a disaster! If South is void in diamonds his shape is 5-2-0-6 or 5-3-0-5. Declarer can prevail against any likely distribution by taking the precaution of playing ♦A after ruffing the heart. If this is ruffed, Declarer can win the return, overtake the club, cashing 3 tricks in the suit before playing another spade from dummy. Then draw trumps, giving South his trick. From there on, North will be under pressure in diamonds and hearts and 11 tricks will come home.

If East ends up in 3NT, as spades and diamonds have been bid by Dummy and clubs by Declarer, it is clear to South that partner has some hearts. Accordingly, he may lead the ♥J.

On the heart lead, Declarer will suspect a doubleton, as the 10 is in dummy and North may play an encouraging 9. When Declarer ducks this trick and South leads the 3 to the next one East will be pretty sure the heart is from shortage. He can count 8 tricks on top and needs to develop at least one more from either diamonds or spades – ideally without leaving North in to cash heart tricks.

Communications are tricky once the ♥A has been knocked out. Declarer can see that he might only need 3 club tricks if 4 tricks can be made in diamonds or spades and, if North has competed in the auction to show a distributional hand with hearts and a minor, East will have a little more information, and can count North to have six hearts after the first two tricks. With diamonds 3-2 and both spades with South, Declarer can succeed by playing for either of these.

Novice Tip: The 'rule of 7' is a guideline for Declarers in no-trump contracts, which suggests that you duck to cut the defenders' communications when you hold the Ace in a suit led by an opponent. The specific number of times to duck is calculated by subtracting the total number of cards you and dummy have in that suit from 7. On this hand, once Declarer is sure that North has six hearts rather than five, he needs to duck only once, as South can have only two.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 17 ♠ 52 Dealer N
 ♥ 98 Vul: None
 ♦ KQ732
 ♣ 10763

♠ AKQ104 ♠ J97
 ♥ A753 ♥ KJ4
 ♦ A108 ♦ J96
 ♣ Q ♣ J954

♠ 863
 ♥ Q1062
 ♦ 54
 ♣ AK82

Bidding

HCP : N=5 S=9 E=7 W=19

West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
4♠	All Pass		

Most E/W pairs will get to 4♠ on this one, either by the auction shown or perhaps by West making a help suit trial bid in hearts which East accepts.

Play

Unfortunately for E/W, the lie of the cards is fairly unfriendly; the heart suit breaks 4-2 with ♥Q10 offside, and the ♦KQ both wrong. To make the game Declarer needs a lot of help from the opponents, including a helpful lead.

The ♦K lead gives Declarer a second diamond trick, but that still only brings the total to 9. However, if Declarer wins the ♦A, draws trumps and exits with a diamond, there are some chances. North may switch to the ♥9 now to prevent South being endplayed later - e.g. if North plays another diamond, West wins and can play a club to South who is now stuck. A heart back gives Declarer three tricks in the suit to go with the five trumps and two diamonds, if he plays the ♣K Declarer can discard a heart and the next card from South will give the contract also. Similarly, if North plays a club back instead. On the ♥9 switch, Declarer can prevail by playing small from dummy, winning in hand, and exiting on the club. The end-play is fine, looking at all the cards, but in practice, at the table it is very difficult to execute with any confidence of success, and the failing heart finesse looks like a normal play.

The ♥9 lead allows Declarer to score a third heart trick with the ♥7, since the ♥J will pick up the ♥Q and the ♥8 will appear when the next round of the suit is played. But that is still only 9 tricks. The contract has no hope on a spade or a low club lead.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 18 ♠ J103 Dealer E
 ♥ K94 Vul: N-S
 ♦ 986
 ♣ QJ106

♠ Q982 ♠ A65
 ♥ Q6532 ♥ 7
 ♦ Q7 ♦ AK532
 ♣ A9 ♣ 7532

♠ K74
 ♥ AJ108
 ♦ J104
 ♣ K84

HCP : N=7 S=12 E=11 W=10

Bidding

West	North	East	South
		1♦	Dble
1♥	Pass	2♣	Pass
2NT	All Pass		

West	North	East	South
		1♦	Dble
Rdbl*	Pass	Pass	1♥
Dble	All Pass		

* 10+ HCP, defence in two suits. Fewer than three diamonds.

Having two aces and a king, 11 HCP and 3-1-5-4 shape East may open the bidding with 1♦, regretting that the fillers in the suits are pretty mangy. The hand just about qualifies according to the 'rule of 20' which says you can open if your HCP added to the lengths of your two longest suits are greater than or equal to 20.

South, with 12 HCP and support for all suits, has a very flat takeout double. If West chooses to bid 1♥ now, the pair will likely end up in 2NT which should fail by one trick. N/S can take three clubs, three hearts and a spade, defending carefully.

West will be pleasantly surprised to hear South bidding 1♥ if he selects redouble instead of bidding 1♥ himself. If Opener passes the redouble and the double of the runout to 1♥, this will fail by one or two tricks, for a great score for E/W. He would normally need either a balanced hand or a better distributional hand for this, so some will rebid 2♦ or 2♣ and possibly play in 2♦, which will make 9 tricks when spades are kind.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 19 ♠ KJ1075 Dealer S
 ♥ J63 Vul: E-W
 ♦ 74
 ♣ AK8

♠ A96 ♥ 82 ♦ 9862 ♣ Q953	♠ 842 ♥ K975 ♦ KQ3 ♣ J72
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♠ Q3
 ♥ AQ104
 ♦ AJ105
 ♣ 1064

Bidding

HCP : N=12 S=13 E=9 W=6

West	North	East	South
			1♦
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♦*	Pass	2♥
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

* artificial, game forcing, 'check back' for 4 hearts or 3 spades

System tip: The 'X/Y NT' is a useful gadget that allows responder to invite or force to game while checking for a fit, opposite a 1NT rebid after the auction has started with one of a suit and responder has bid one of a higher suit. 2♣ is a relay to 2♦ which can be passed, all other bids are invitational. 2♦ is an artificial game force, over which opener bids 'up the line' to show 3-card support for partner's suit or four of the other suit. The 2♦ bid usually guarantees a 5-card suit, with 4/4 the responder can bid the new suit, forcing for one round, e.g. 1♦-1♥-1NT-2♠ = 4/4 major invite or better.

Play

A diamond lead gives Declarer tempo to gather an easy 11 tricks with the help of the heart finesse, losing only a diamond and a spade.

On a club lead 11 tricks will also come about if North runs the spades after knocking out the Ace and winning the second club. East is forced to discard his club so North can set up an 11th trick in whichever red suit East discards from next – but this is a lot easier to find looking at all four hands. At the table there will probably be a lot more 430s than 460s on the score sheet.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 20 ♠ Q Dealer W
 ♥ Q87 Vul: Both
 ♦ AK1076
 ♣ KQ87

♠ KJ1097 ♥ K32 ♦ 32 ♣ A32	♠ 8 ♥ AJ104 ♦ J54 ♣ 109654
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♠ A65432
 ♥ 965
 ♦ Q98
 ♣ J

Bidding

HCP : N=16 S=7 E=6 W=11

West	North	East	South
1♠	Dble	INT	All Pass

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West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
All Pass			

First in hand, West has to decide whether to open. On the negative side she has only 11 HCP and a semi-balanced 5-3-2-3 shape. On the other hand, the spade suit is respectable, the outside points are an Ace and a King, and a 1♠ opening has some pre-emptive value. If she opens the hand E/W may end up in INT.

If West passes, then North with 16 HCP 1-3-5-2 shape will probably open 1♦ and rebid 2♣ to show at least 5/4 in the minors over partner's 1♠ response. North would like to do more, but the hand is not quite good enough to jump to 3♣. I expect that most pairs will play in 2♦ or 3♦. Some folks may choose to open INT with the North hand to get the high card strength across to partner. If this is something the partnership allows, it must be alerted to the opponents. This hand shape is not usual for opening INT with a singleton, as it has a simple natural 2♣ rebid. 3-1-4-5, 1-4-5-3, 1-4-3-5, 1-4-4-4 and 1-3-4-5 shapes are more typical: too good to rebid INT and not good enough to reverse. Those playing weak NT may re-bid INT for the same reasons. In those cases, N/S will probably play in spades instead of diamonds – which won't be a success on the score sheet!

Play

INT by West is likely failing by one or two tricks depending on the defence. On the ♦A lead, asking for 'attitude', South will play an encouraging 9 allowing North to follow with a small one. At this point if South switches to the ♣J the contract should fail - since South will get in with ♠A to play another diamond to North, and the defence can cash five diamonds, two clubs and a spade. If South simply returns his third diamond, then West can win an eventual club return, finesse the ♥10 successfully and play a spade, guessing to play the King if South plays low, then setting up a second spade trick while still holding the ♥K as an entry. The lucky lie of the club suit means that South has no club to return to North.

Playing in diamonds, North will count on five diamond tricks on normal breaks, one spade trick and two club tricks – once the Ace is knocked out – with the possibility of a club ruff to bring the total to 9. If East leads his singleton spade, North can win and play ♣J. West can win the trick and play the ♠K, if North ruffs low East can score a trick with his ♦J and exit on a trump, and the defence will score their 3 heart tricks in due course. If North ruffs with ♦A or ♦K the hand becomes very unwieldy and he cannot now both ruff a club and draw trumps, and will likely lose a trump eventually

anyway. A club or trump lead gives Declarer tempo to take the club ruff and 9 tricks, for a good score.

If N/S should play 2♠, it won't be much fun for them, as the defence can take three heart tricks, a club, and four trumps as 2♠ is makeable by E/W!

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 21 ♠ J Dealer N
 ♠ KQ1097 Vul: N-S
 ♠ Q6
 ♠ KJ864

♠ AK83 ♥ A854 ♦ 984 ♣ Q5	♠ Q965 ♥ 62 ♦ J753 ♣ 1073
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♠ 10742
 ♥ J3
 ♦ AK102
 ♣ A92

Bidding

HCP : N=12 S=12 E=3 W=13

West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

The normal contract is 3NT played by South. 4♥ and 5♣ are also likely to make an appearance on the scoresheet here and there.

Play

Spotlight on West – any lead but a spade will let 3NT make.

A diamond lead sets up four diamonds and Declarer can also make five club tricks, happy to see the Queen appear when he plays ♣A and a club towards dummy. A heart lead also sets up Declarer's ninth trick. But, West will be understandably reluctant to lead either major on the bidding and will choose a diamond much of the time.

In 4♥, Declarer can be forced in spades, and the 4-2 trump break is a real nuisance, though not unexpected. If the defence starts with two rounds of spades, Declarer ruffs and plays ♥K to West's Ace and another spade comes back, reducing North to two trumps to West's three remaining. Now, Declarer must abandon trumps and switch to clubs, and West can ruff in if he likes and plays another spade for North to ruff. Declarer can now cash three diamonds and make the last two on a high cross-ruff. The defence can take only two hearts and a spade.

5♣ is a stroll in the park compared to 3NT or 4♥, and on this occasion those bidding and making 5♣ can expect a reasonable score as 3NT and 4♥ will fail at some tables, and there are no more than 9 tricks available in NT even on a non-spade lead.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	5	3	4	1	2
S	5	3	4	1	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Board 22 ♠ Q4 Dealer E
 ♥ AKJ953 Vul: E-W
 ♦ J75
 ♣ J6

♠ 107532 ♥ Q ♦ A2 ♣ KQ532	♠ AJ8 ♥ 1084 ♦ 10863 ♣ A87
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♠ K96
 ♥ 762
 ♦ KQ94
 ♣ 1094

Bidding

HCP : N=12 S=8 E=9 W=11

West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♠	2♥	3♥*	Dble
3♠	All Pass		

* 3 spades with invitational values

The West hand is no thing of beauty, 11 HCP, singleton ♥Q, with poor spades (he certainly does not want to suggest a spade lead) ... not to mention unfavourable vulnerability! On the other hand, the 5/5 shape is a plus and he is third in hand, in a position to disrupt North who may have a good hand. Many players will open 1♠ on the hand but those who have a tartan style 2♣ opening showing spades and a minor, may opt for that instead.

Many pairs who can make light third in hand openings, with possibly a good 4-card suit, have systems to mitigate the risk when it comes to responder's bids. The 'Drury' convention is popular, whereby responder to 1 of a major can bid 2♣ or 2♦ to show 3- or 4-card support respectively and invitational values 9-11. While East is contemplating his Drury response North will bid with his nice 6-card heart suit and East must reconsider. The East hand is very balanced, with no ruffing value, only 9 HCP, and partner is third in hand, so there is an argument for bidding only 2♠ over 2♥. As against that, the hand has two aces and a couple of tens. East may bid 3♥ to show a hand with 3-card spade support and 9-11 HCP. He can mention his 4 8s too if putting down the dummy 😊

Now it is South's turn to think. If East had bid only 2♠, South at favourable vulnerability will be tempted to bid 3♥, though he will probably downgrade the ♠K on the bidding so far. Now, over 3♥ he may put in a double if that shows 3-card heart support. Now West is forced to 3♠ and as North's values outside the heart suit may not be working, he will reluctantly pass.

If West passes in third seat, North will open 1♥, East will pass and South will bid 2♥. Now it is more difficult for West to get into the auction with such bad spades. He is vulnerable against not and North can have a strong hand and an easy penalty double. A takeout double is problematic holding spades and clubs, if his clubs were diamonds it would be less dangerous as he could correct clubs to diamonds.

Play

There is nothing much in the play.

10 tricks are available in either black suit for E/W, losing only a spade, a heart and a diamond.

If N/S play in hearts the defence can take a spade, a diamond and two clubs.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 23 ♠ 98762 Dealer S
 ♥ QJ532 Vul: Both
 ♦ J4
 ♣ 2

♠ AKQ103 ♥ K84 ♦ Q103 ♣ J10	♠ 54 ♥ 9 ♦ K8752 ♣ A8743
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♠ J
 ♥ A1076
 ♦ A96
 ♣ KQ965

Bidding

HCP : N=4 S=14 E=7 W=15

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	2♥	Pass	Dble*
Dble**	Pass	2♠	Pass
			All Pass

* takeout. Prepared for any action partner chooses to take: pass or bid a red suit.

** takeout. Good hand in context. Competitive.

Another exciting competitive part-score hand, where each side has enough HCP and distribution to get into the action. E/W can make 8 tricks in spades and 8 or 9 tricks in diamonds and N/S can make 8 or 9 tricks in hearts - depending on the lead each time. We can mostly expect to see these contracts succeeding or going one off. At IMP scoring, if each side gives away 50, the team loses only 3 IMPs, but at matchpoints these small margins can be the difference between scoring a top or a bottom. Losing 50 or 100 instead of allowing the opponents to make 110 or 140 can be a top.

Many of the hands in this set have been delicately balanced between both sides. Experienced matchpoint players try not to sell out too low, but are also ready to make tight penalty doubles if they feel their opponents have pushed a little too hard - especially when vulnerable. The 3-level is where the part-score battle is often won and lost. A guiding principle is that if you suspect you may want to go, or be pushed to, the 3-level in competition, it's a good idea to do it as quickly as possible. Here, over partner's double, North has shown nothing on the auction so far, but has a nice 5-card heart suit and outside distribution. While he is not sure that South has four hearts, he knows he will have at least three. This is the logic in bidding 3♥ which will likely win the auction.

Play

With long weak trumps, North may choose to lead is singleton club against 2♠ to try and score some ruffs.. There are several permutations in the play, most of which end up with E/W emerging with 8 tricks. A trump or heart lead will usually result in 8 tricks also. A diamond lead is the most friendly, giving Declarer chances to set up the suit.

If N/S are allowed to play in 2♥ or 3♥ they can make 9 tricks on a cross-ruff played by South as West cannot lead and continue trumps. In practice, East is much more likely to lead a spade than his singleton trump, so 9 tricks will be made when hearts are played by North also.

E/W can make 2NT by guessing to drop the ♦.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 24 ♠ A103 Dealer W
 ♥ 8 Vul: None
 ♦ K32
 ♣ K96532

♠ QJ6 ♥ J2 ♦ 875 ♣ A10874	♠ 742 ♥ K10975 ♦ AJ1094 ♣ ♠ K985 ♥ AQ643 ♦ Q6 ♣ QJ
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Bidding

HCP : N=10 S=14 E=8 W=8

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♥
Pass	INT	All Pass	

With 10 HCP and a 6-card club suit, some North players may opt to open either 1♣ or 3♣ at the vulnerability, but the poor club suit is a negative feature for either action. Over 1♣, East may roll out a two-suited gadget to show the lower two suits with 2NT. South will be warned not to mention his hearts and may double, and E/W can find their 8-card diamond fit, but that is not much of a success. If North opens 1♣, the ensuing auction may propel N/S into 3NT, where South, if Declarer, will be underwhelmed with dummy.

If North passes, East may bid if he has a bid such as a tartan 2♥ to show hearts and a minor, 6-10 HCP. South will pass and West may choose to play in the minor by bidding 2NT or 3♣, depending on what their agreement is, to ask partner to bid their minor or to pass or correct. Alternatively West may opt to pass 2♥ and hope for a better matchpoint score.

If neither North nor East opens the bidding, South will open with 1♥ and West will pass. Now if North can bid a non-forcing natural 2♣, N/S may get too high in NT. Those N/S players who play the 'Drury' convention won't have 2♣ available as a natural bid and will bid INT instead and likely play there.

Play

Against 3♦ by West, a N/S can take two spades, one diamond, two hearts and a heart overruff, for a score of 300 if doubled.

In INT, given time, South could take two clubs, one diamond, two hearts and three spades. However after a diamond lead, ducked to Declarer, when Declarer follows up the Q or J of clubs, East will win and continue diamonds, the defence cashing four more tricks. If East returns a spade, if West has won the first club played, then South needs to win the spade in hand to cash the other club honour, then play a spade towards dummy. When the ♠Q or ♠J appears he can cash the ♠A, ♣K and successfully finesse the heart.

The best scoring strain that can be played by N/S is spades played by South which can make 9 tricks. But 2♠ is an unlikely contract in practice.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 25 ♠ J7643 Dealer N
 ♥ J87 Vul: E-W
 ♦ A10
 ♣ KQ3

♠ K82 ♥ 92 ♦ KQ9764 ♣ A6	♠ A9 ♥ A10 ♦ J853 ♣ 109542
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♠ Q105
 ♥ KQ6543
 ♦ 2
 ♣ J87

Bidding

HCP : N=11 S=8 E=9 W=12

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	2♥*	3♦
3♥	5♦	All Pass	

Some pairs may open the bidding by North with 1♠. Opening with this hand definitely won't be everyone's cup of cocoa: the spades are poor, the shape is very flat, and it falls short of the rule of 20. Over this, East will pass, and South would like to bid 2.5♠ but will be happy with the result if allowed to play in 2♠, when he sees North's meagre 11-count.

West will think about bidding 3♦, a bid that carries some risk at adverse vulnerability, lacking good spot cards, and with the ♠K possibly badly placed. But with a 6-card diamond suit headed by KQ and an outside Ace, knowing that partner has at most two spades, some players will take the risk, accepting that you have to be prepared to compete for the part-score at matchpoints. East will likely pass 3♦ as the opponents are both bidding, and he won't want to undo the good work that partner has done by competing.

If North passes, the bidding will go to South who will probably open 2♥ or the equivalent, and some Souths will even try 3♥ third in hand non-vul. Opposite a passed hand, and holding only three spades, the 4-level will be a bit too rich for West who will pass a 3♥ opening, and South will play there, as neither North nor East have any reason to bid over that.

Over 2♥, West will bid 3♦ and North will give South a raise to 3♥. Over to East who has a difficult decision to make, the main choices being 3NT, 4♦ and 5♦. Pass is not an option with two aces and at least a 9- or 10-card diamond fit and a value showing double will not solve the problem either – we don't have spades, West is unlikely to have a heart stopper, and will simply bid 4♦. 3NT or 5♦ will make opposite a lot of possible West hands, and both of these bids are likely to be found at some tables. Those settling for a simple 4♦ will be happy when 10 tricks is the limit on a heart lead.

Play

In 2♠, the defence can take two spades a heart and a club and can organize a club ruff for West to take five tricks for the defence.

If West ventures 3♦ over 2♠, and is allowed to play there, it will pay off on the score sheet. The defence can take a diamond, a heart and a club, but if they do not attack hearts early, Declarer can discard a heart on a long club and make 11 tricks. Similarly if West overcalls diamonds over 2♥ opening and ends up in 4 or 5♦. Bidding and making 5♦ will gain a lot of matchpoints.

If N/S end up in hearts, which on the surface looks more attractive, the defence can take both a spade ruff, a club ruff making two spade tricks and a club trick and three heart tricks! Any pair who finds this defence will enjoy recounting the sequence of plays after the game.

Those Easts playing 3NT will feel a little sorry for themselves when a heart is led and dummy goes down. The contract will quickly go two off. Any other lead will allow it to make 9 tricks. South has no reason to lead anything else when hearts have been bid and supported by the partnership, but may lead a spade against a NT contract, to let it make, if North has opened the light 1♠.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 26 ♠ J109 Dealer E
 ♥ KJ1065 Vul: Both
 ♦ K8753
 ♣

♠ AQ876 ♥ AQ874 ♦ 4 ♣ 54	♠ 532 ♥ ♦ QJ10 ♣ A1098632
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♠ K4
 ♥ 932
 ♦ A962
 ♣ KQJ7

Bidding

HCP : N=8 S=13 E=7 W=12

West	North	East	South
		3♣	All Pass

A pre-emptive 3♣ opening seems normal from East. The club suit could be better, but it could be worse too! With everyone vulnerable, none of the other players would seem to have a clear action to take. South has too many clubs and not enough spades to double; West would love to bid with his nice 5/5 in the majors, but without a specific gadget there is no easy way to find the spade fit without getting into trouble.

North, with a void in clubs might be tempted to double, on the assumption that partner was not able to act over 3♣ holding clubs and insufficient points or outside stops to bid NT. The double is dangerous with so few points as partner might take it seriously and bid 3NT or pass for penalties given the vulnerability.

Play

If North does decide to double in the pass-out seat and his partner converts it to penalties, N/S may not be too happy with the outcome, as 3♣ will make by East, losing either three clubs and one diamond or two clubs and two diamonds – since South cannot attack trumps without giving up one of his own trump tricks. Declarer can take the successful spade finesse and discard the remaining losing spade on the ♥A.

If the double leads to 3NT by South, there will be a fierce battle for tricks, but so long as East does not part with his ♣A early, Declarer is unlikely to make more than 6 tricks as East can switch to a spade when in with the ♦Q and the suit can be set up, the defence taking four spades and one trick in each of the other suits.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 27 ♠ 762 Dealer S
 ♥ 4 Vul: None
 ♦ AJ7653
 ♣ AJ2

♠ A1054	♠ 93
♥ AJ96	♥ K10852
♦ 102	♦ Q4
♣ 1043	♣ K985

 ♠ KQJ8
 ♥ Q73
 ♦ K98
 ♣ Q76

Bidding

HCP : N=10 S=13 E=8 W=9

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♣*
INT**	All Pass		
*	2+ clubs non-forcing		
**	12-14 balanced		

Bidding

Weak No-Trumpers will open INT over which West may compete to show both majors if their system permits that with 4/4 holding. If there is room North can bid 2♦ natural and competitive. Then East has an easy option to bid 2♥.

Strong NT players will have a straightforward auction to INT. Again, at some tables E/W may get to 2♥, if West has a way to show both majors over the INT rebid or East chooses to balance over INT with an aggressive 2♥ in the pass-out position.

Disrupting opponents non-vul INT - especially when the opening or rebid shows 12-14 - is a well-known and successful matchpoint strategy. NT can be difficult to defend, where even a small slip in defence can lead to a terrible score, when there is often a more comfortable spot for the defenders to play in themselves.

Play

On a heart lead E/W can hold Declarer to 7 tricks in INT, scoring five hearts and the ♠A. If a small spade is led instead, then Declarer can take 8 tricks by dropping the doubleton ♦Q.

In 2♥, Declarer needs to find the ♥Q to make his contract and a good score. Even one off will score well against the making INT.

If East bids 2♥ over a balancing double by West (North bidding 2♦), then in this scenario South may push on to 3♦ with a good diamond fit and a known heart shortage with North. This will make 10 tricks, losing only one trick in each of the outside suits. If East is tempted to bid on to 3♥, North with two aces opposite a balanced opening bid, may make a penalty double rather than bid on. We can expect to see a range of scores on this one, perhaps mostly in the N/S column.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 28 ♠ J3 Dealer W
 ♥ 4 Vul: N-S
 ♦ Q7543
 ♣ AQ863

♠ 5 ♥ AKQJ532 ♦ K102 ♣ 54	♠ K62 ♥ 76 ♦ AJ9 ♣ KJ972
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♠ AQ109874
 ♥ 1098
 ♦ 86
 ♣ 10

Bidding

HCP : N=9 S=6 E=12 W=13

West	North	East	South
1♥	2NT	Dble*	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	All Pass

* values to DBL at least one of the minors for penalty

Option 2

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	2♣*	3♠
4♥	All Pass		

* Natural and Game Forcing

The final board of the set brings potential for another very competitive auction, with lots of different permutations and final contracts possible.

West, holding 13 HCP and a lovely solid 7-card heart suit has an obvious 1♥ opening, but more difficult decisions may come later! Over to North who has 5/5 in the minors and 9 HCP. On the plus side most of the points are in his suits, an essential quality that can tip the balance between bidding and passing this type of hand, and also really helps partner to judge correctly later in the auction. By the same logic, revealing the distribution in this way can also be a big help to the Declarer if the opponents win the auction. A huge minus on this occasion is the unfavourable vulnerability; doubled -2 will be a horrible 500 in the out column. For this reason most players will probably reluctantly pass. If North does decide to bid, the 'Unusual 2NT' will likely be chosen. This bid shows at least 5/5 in the minors and can be wide ranging. Many players play it as potentially very weak at favourable vulnerability but would need the ♦KJ and maybe the minor suit tens and nines at this vulnerability. But, as always, this comes down to your partnership style and agreements.

If North bids 2NT, without any agreement East will choose between double to show some values or 3NT to play. If the latter, West may well choose to pass, and the fate of the contract will depend on South's choice of lead.

Over a double by East South will likely pass for now, though some folks will find it impossible to resist bidding spades. Over East's double West must decide to bid or pass. In favour of passing is the vulnerability; we just need to beat it 2 to get a good score. Partner will usually have fewer than three hearts and will have some points in the minors. So we have a reasonable expectation of taking some tricks in defence. Against that, West hand is all about the hearts and those don't have an expected value of more than two tricks in defence. On balance, I would choose to bid on with 4♥. If West bids 3♥, then East may bid either 4♥ or 3NT.

Finally, if North decides to pass, East will bid 2♣ (game-forcing) and South may take the plunge and bid 2 or 3♠ over which E/W will reach game in hearts or NT. Any N/S pairs who push on to 4♠ should be doubled.

Play

A diamond lead against 3NT solves the diamond finesse and allows 10 quick tricks to be wrapped up which will score well against those making 4♥. If South leads a spade instead, 11 tricks can be taken with a successful diamond finesse – which will be marked if North has bid 2NT. Best of all, leading a small club may bring a big result if North wins this trick and switches to the ♠J, giving the defence 8 tricks.

In 4♥, the defence can take both black aces and a club ruff to hold the Declarer to 10 tricks if he finesses against North for the ♦Q. In the absence of the club ruff, West can take 11 tricks by getting the diamond finesse right and scoring the ♣K. In the absence of any bidding from North, the diamond finesse is a guess, small comfort to those who guess wrong.

Against 3♠ or 4♠ played by South, if the defence double and lead a trump they can hold Declarer to 8 tricks.

Almost certainly NOT a flat board!

Makeable Contracts

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