Commentary
for the
IBU Autumn Simultaneous Pairs

Monday 2 November 2026

Dear Bridge Player,

Thank you very much for participating in the Irish Bridge Union (IBU) Simultaneous Pairs. This will be the last ever IBU Sims, as the IBU will no longer exist after the formation of a new 32-county Irish bridge body next January. Who knows, perhaps these commentaries will end up for sale on eBay as collectors' items!

The funds raised from these tournaments will be handed over to the new body by the IBU, so you are continuing to contribute to the development of Irish bridge, and your support is greatly appreciated.

We hope that you enjoyed the opportunity to test yourself against your fellow players across Ireland (and indeed overseas as well). As always, the deals, prepared randomly with no manual intervention whatsoever, provided plenty of tricky decisions. Thanks to the experts who have provided their commentary to help us to deal with the problems: Brian Senior (Monday), Enda Glynn (Tuesday), Paul Delaney (Wednesday), Enda Muphy (Thursday), and Karel De Raeymaeker (Friday).

Don't forget you check your standings in the overall results on the ECatsBridge Website. You'll find the daily commentaries there too.

We'll be back with the first ever Bridge Ireland Simultaneous Pairs in the first week of March. If your club hasn't played before and would like to sign up, please contact Head Office on 353-1-4929666.

Gordon Lessells,

President, Irish Bridge Union

Board 1	♠ 983 ♥ K1094 ♦ AJ8 ♣ 1083	Dealer N Vul: None
♠ 754 ♥ J7632 ♦ 5432 ♣ Q		♠ A102 ♥ 85 ♦ K1097 ♣ J762
	♠ KQJ6 ♥ AQ ♦ Q6 ♣ AK954	

There will be two passes to South, who opens 2NT. With two weak suits, most Norths will respond 3♣, whichever version of Stayman the partnership uses. However, there is no major-suit fit so North will soon sign-off in 3NT.

West is very weak and, with dummy having hinted at having at least one major, may well try a diamond rather than the traditional fourth-best heart. The diamond works like a charm, declarer running it to East's king and a diamond continuation taking the entry out of dummy before declarer is ready to use it. He now has the problem that his only remaining sure entry to dummy is overtaking the ♥Q with the king.

Double dummy, declarer wins the second diamond and knocks out the ace of spades. He wins the diamond return and leads a club to the ace followed by the ♥Q to the king, and runs the ten of clubs. Playing this way there are five club tricks, three spades and three red tricks, 11 in all.

In practice, when the queen of clubs falls on the first round, a lot of declarers will continue with the second top club, and will lose a trick to the jack, holding themselves to 10 tricks.

A heart lead is more comfortable for declarer, but it comes down to the same thing in the end, take the second-round club finesse or play them from the top. Double dummy, 12 tricks are now possible if the clubs are picked up without loss, declarer never losing a diamond, but that requires an unlikely line of play.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 2	♠ K97 ♥ A2 ♦ AK6 ♣ J10643	Dealer E Vul: N-S
♠ Q52 ♥ K1064 ♦ Q974 ♣ Q7		♠ J3 ♥ J73 ♦ 1053 ♣ AK985
	♠ A10864 ♥ Q985 ♦ J82 ♣ 2	

There will usually be three passes to North. If playing strong NT, that is what North will open, South using weak Stayman to get to 2♠.

Declarer can hold himself to one loser in each suit, but may often do better than that, as a red-suit lead from West costs a trick in that suit. There is still work to be done as declarer has to do something with the fourth heart, but 10 tricks are now possible.

If North opens 1♣, South will respond 1♠ and North rebid 1NT, 15-17. A 2♥ rebid from South gets spade preference from North, and the same contract has been reached as after a 1NT opening.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 3	♠ 8752	Dealer S
	♥ 876	Vul: E-W
	♦ 952	
	♣ 984	

♠ 43		♠ Q1096
♥ AJ105		♥ K32
♦ AKJ		♦ 10743
♣ A1073		♣ Q5
	♠ AKJ	
	♥ Q94	
	♦ Q86	
	♣ KJ62	

If South opens 1♣, West will overcall 1NT and play there, probably on a club lead to the five, jack and ace. It's a messy hand, with only one dummy entry. Declarer may play three rounds of diamonds, ensuring a third diamond winner. South wins the third diamond and can simplify things by cashing out – two spades and a club – so leaving declarer with nine tricks.

This is the best the defence can do, If South fails to cash out, instead playing king and another club, declarer may come to 10 tricks – three clubs, three diamonds, and four hearts.

If South opens a strong NT, West may be able to double – not everyone plays penalty doubles of a strong NT. If so, there is nowhere for N/S to run to. West leads a top diamond and if East encourages continues with two more rounds of diamonds. If East discourages diamonds, the jack of hearts is the obvious switch and picks that suit up for the defence. Declarer is likely to come to four tricks, maybe three or five according to the opening lead and subsequent defence. The number of tricks will make a difference to the number of matchpoints, of course, but with a significant proportion of the field playing 1NT by West, any penalty suffered by N/S could score poorly.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 4	♠ AQJ98		Dealer W
	♥ KQ6		Vul: Both
	♦ Q9		
	♣ K83		
♠ 43			♠ K1062
♥ AJ9732			♥ 1085
♦ 10			♦ J654
♣ AJ76			♣ 105
	♠ 75		
	♥ 4		
	♦ AK8732		
	♣ Q942		

West may have only 10 HCP but the hand is too good for a weak two bid, so will open 1♥. Will North overcall 1♠ or double? When I began playing the game there would have been a big majority for double, 1♠ being deemed an underbid. As time has passed, the upper limit for an overcall has gradually been raised so that I would expect a big majority, certainly amongst the expert community, to overcall 1♠.

East will pass and South respond 2♦, over which North will simply jump to 3NT and play there.

The cards lie very badly for North, whose contract is a perfectly decent one. Diamonds are four-one and blocked, and spades are four-two and offside. Even at double dummy the best that declarer can manage is eight tricks and, in practice, he will often make only seven.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 5	♠ KJ9763 ♥ K3 ♦ 3 ♣ K854	Dealer N Vul: N-S
♠ A10 ♥ Q109 ♦ KJ1084 ♣ 763		♠ Q82 ♥ 87652 ♦ Q9 ♣ QJ9
	♠ 54 ♥ AJ4 ♦ A7652 ♣ A102	

Another 10 HCP hand that is worth a one-level opening. North opens 1♠ and South responds 2♦. North rebids 2♠ and many players will jump to 3NT and play there.

A diamond lead beats the contract very easily, but perhaps South's 2♦ response will make West look elsewhere. On a club lead, declarer will win in hand and play a spade. A spade to the king followed by a second spade makes the contract, but most will lead to the jack. If East now returns a diamond the contract is again down.

The problem comes for those whose 2♦ response is not game-forcing. They have to commit to either 3NT or 4♠, or invent a second suit that they do not have. Playing 2-over-1 game-forcing, which is becoming more and more popular, South's second bid could be 2NT, leaving room to discover that North has a sixth spade, which makes 4♠ look the more attractive game. Four Spades can always be made however declarer plays the spades.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 6	♠ 974	Dealer E
	♥ 9752	Vul: E-W
	♦ 109543	
	♣ 10	

♠ 10	♠ KQ62
♥ J43	♥ AQ10
♦ J6	♦ KQ8
♣ KQ98642	♣ A53

♠ AJ853
♥ K86
♦ A72
♣ J7

When East opens 2NT, the winning action on this lay-out is for West to raise quietly to 3NT. Played by East, there are 11 cold tricks.

However, with a good seven-card suit, can West be blamed if he makes a club slam try? I like two-under transfers at the four level. Starting with 4♣ showing hearts, 4♦ shows spades, and this hand is dealt with starting with 4♥, showing clubs.

Opener now bids 4NT to play, 5♣ also to play but with some willingness to consider slam, and 4♠ to show definite slam interest. Some partnerships would play 4♠ here as key-card for clubs.

Particularly given the form of scoring, I would rebid 4NT as East, as this is not such a great hand for slam when we consider that we have already promised 20-22 HCP, and West should respect that decision and pass.

The more optimistic rebids by East are OK for teams scoring, where playing in 5♣ is relatively harmless, but at matchpoints to play 5♣ is a disaster.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 7	♠ AQ62		Dealer S
	♥ 5		Vul: Both
	♦ A862		
	♣ 6543		
♠ 103			♠ J874
♥ AQ1032			♥ 764
♦ KJ7			♦ Q93
♣ K72			♣ QJ9
	♠ K95		
	♥ KJ98		
	♦ 1054		
	♣ A108		

South should not upgrade a moderate 11-count to weak NT opening status. At Game All it isn't clear that he should open 1♣ either if playing a strong NT.

If South passes, West will often open 1♥ and North may double, despite being vulnerable and facing a passed hand. If he does, South may respond 2NT, whether or not East raises to 2♥. North won't like that, but he can do nothing, so 2NT it will be. After a low heart lead, East can lead hearts through whenever he has the lead, and 2NT should be down two for a horrible score to N/S.

If North does not double, West will declare either 1NT or, if playing five-card majors, probably 2♥, both of which can be made.

If South does open 1NT, that may end the auction or, if West overcalls 2♥, a very dubious action with this distribution and vulnerability, North can make a take-out double and South, with no suit to bid, may pass that out and concede –670.

That disaster is less likely to occur if South opens 1♣, though West will overcall 1♥, North doubles to show four spades, and East may raise to 2♥. If North reopens with a double to show his extra values, South will again have a big decision to make, which he will probably resolve by bidding 2♠, which is down one.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 8	♠ AKJ962		Dealer W
	♥		Vul: None
	♦ 9765		
	♣ A82		
♠ 1053			♠ Q4
♥ 962			♥ KQ10854
♦ KQ10			♦ AJ4
♣ KJ105			♣ 74
	♠ 87		
	♥ AJ73		
	♦ 832		
	♣ Q963		

North opens 1♠, East overcalls 2♥, and South passes. If West also passes, North will reopen. If with a double, South will leave it in, which will not be a success. Declarer will get the club right far more often than not, and that means eight tricks and +470.

North may, however, not like to defend 2♥ doubled when holding a powerful six-card spade suit and heart void. That may convince him to simply rebid 2♠. Now West may compete with 3♥ and South may make a penalty double of that, collecting +100 for down one.

And if West raises to 3♥ at his first opportunity? North may compete with 3♠ and play there for down one or just made, depending on his play in trumps after the normal heart lead.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 9	♠ A3	Dealer N
	♥ A1096	Vul: E-W
	♦ QJ2	
	♣ AJ97	
♠ 9752		♠ 84
♥ QJ2		♥ K87
♦ AK53		♦ 986
♣ Q4		♣ K8653
	♠ KQJ106	
	♥ 543	
	♦ 1074	
	♣ 102	

If North opens a strong NT, South will transfer to spades and that will be that. Nine tricks can be made against any defence with 10 not impossible if the defence leaves it too late to attack hearts.

If North opens 1♥ or 1♣, South will respond 1♠ and North rebid 1NT (15-17). If this ends the auction, a club lead offers declarer the possibility of three tricks in that suit and nine in all. A red-suit lead may hold declarer to just one overtrick.

Of course, South may go back to 2♠ over 1NT, and indeed should do so. The spades are easily strong enough to play facing a possible weak doubleton, while any time that North doesn't hold the ace playing in NT may see him limited to one or two spade tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 10	♠ J10972		Dealer E
	♥ K		Vul: Both
	♦ KJ853		
	♣ KJ		
♠ 43			♠ K85
♥ 109			♥ A876
♦ A962			♦ 107
♣ Q8732			♣ A1095
	♠ AQ6		
	♥ QJ5432		
	♦ Q4		
	♣ 64		

Some will open the East hand, vulnerability and having only 11 HCP notwithstanding, as the intermediates and top cards make the hand a little better than the previous example we saw.

If that opening is a weak NT, South will overcall 2♥ and that may end the auction. There are two heart losers, but the spade is onside and it is natural to get the clubs right after East's opening bid. So nine tricks would be the normal outcome.

If East opens 1♣, South will overcall 1♥. What West will do depends on how many clubs the 1♣ opening promised. If four, West can jump pre-emptively to 3♣, while if fewer than four perhaps he can bid only 2♣.

Either way, North can double for take-out. Four Spades can be made, but it may not be easy to get to spades except in an auction where North can bid them at the one level. Bidding at the two or three level, South is likely to repeat the six-card heart suit and play there.

When East passes as dealer, South will open 1♥ and North respond 1♠. Though South may rebid the hearts, North will bid diamonds and now South can admit to some spade support. Whether N/S bid 4♠ or stop a level lower, they should score well. Plus 620 will be excellent, but even +170 is likely to be above average if enough N/Ss are playing in a heart contract.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 11	♠ AKJ5		Dealer S
	♥ KJ43		Vul: None
	♦ AQ93		
	♣ 6		
♠ 732			♠ 10986
♥ 8			♥ 1096
♦ 10875			♦ J6
♣ KQJ53			♣ 10942
	♠ Q4		
	♥ AQ752		
	♦ K42		
	♣ A87		

If South opens 1♥, North can respond 2NT, game-forcing raise, and South rebid whatever his agreements require. Let's say 3NT, 15+ balanced. North cuebids 4♣, South bids 4♦, and knowing that South has the king of diamonds improves North's hand as now the queen is a known winner. It's time to ask for key-cards and, when South shows two plus the trump queen, North can jump to 7♥.

It's a relatively easy grand slam to reach. Getting to 7NT for a few extra matchpoints is tough playing simple methods, the queen of spades being the crucial card.

If South opens a strong NT, North will use Stayman and may splinter with 4♣ over the 2♥ response. Four Clubs actually improves the South hand as it contains no wasted honour cards. A 4♦ cuebid allows North to take control with key-card, and he is again well placed to bid the grand on receiving the two plus queen of trumps response.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	2	7	7	7	7
S	2	7	7	7	7
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

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Board 12	♠ 872		Dealer W
	♥ 10732		Vul: N-S
	♦ K4		
	♣ KQJ2		
♠ A109654			♠ KJ3
♥ J5			♥ K
♦ Q1062			♦ AJ9873
♣ 7			♣ A106
	♠ Q		
	♥ AQ9864		
	♦ 5		
	♣ 98543		

E/W can make a spade or diamond slam on this board, but that requires that both spades and diamond play without loss.

When West opens with a weak two bid, East is likely to simply raise to game, slam not really entering most players' minds. While it makes no difference on the actual deal, on any lay-out where the chosen line of defence affects the outcome, going straight to game, thereby giving away as little information to the defence as possible, could be an effective approach.

I wouldn't expect many pairs to play in anything other than 4♠. On a heart lead that makes 12 tricks, but a non-heart lead permits declarer to draw trumps then take the diamond finesse and make all 13 tricks.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	3	-	2	-	-
S	3	-	2	-	-
E	-	6	-	6	1
W	-	6	-	6	1

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Board 13	♠ 97	Dealer N
	♥ KQJ106	Vul: Both
	♦ A10	
	♣ A753	

♠ AK6		♠ J43
♥ 9842		♥ A3
♦ J43		♦ KQ92
♣ Q109		♣ J864
	♠ Q10852	
	♥ 75	
	♦ 8765	
	♣ K2	

It rather looks as though almost all tables will see the same auction: 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥ – Pass, uncontested, with North becoming declarer in an easy partscore.

On any lead other than two rounds of hearts, declarer will see four heart tricks and three top tricks in the side-suits, so will play for a club ruff in the dummy for the eighth trick, a quick and painless +110.

If East leads two rounds of hearts, there will of course be no ruff. Not to worry, as declarer's Plan B works out very nicely. He wins the seond heart and draws the outstanding trumps then leads the nine of spades and runs it to West's king. Say that West plays back a diamond, declarer wins the ace and again finesses against the jack of spades. West wins and the defence can cash a diamond, but that is that, with three spade winners taking care of all declarer's remaining losers; nine tricks for +140.

It does West no good to play a club rather than a diamond after winning the first spade, in fact it costs a tenth trick. West can prevent the spades becoming established by ducking the first round. That costs a spade trick but means that declarer has to lose three minor-suit tricks so is held to eight.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 14	♠ K104	Dealer E
	♥ KJ10	Vul: None
	♦ K62	
	♣ A1082	

♠ 8		♠ QJ972
♥ 7		♥ A9853
♦ AJ9754		♦ 10
♣ J7543		♣ K9
	♠ A653	
	♥ Q642	
	♦ Q83	
	♣ Q6	

Most will like the five-five distribution sufficiently to open the East hand with 1♠ and West will respond 1NT. North may double, take-out of spades, but the shape hardly makes it a classic example of the call. Whether or not North doubles, East will rebid 2♥, and West will feel ill.

If North has not doubled, South will pass and West may give oh so ugly preference to 2♠, or may introduce his own suit with 3♦. I think the latter has to be the right action, even though it involves going up a level. West knows that 2♥/♠ are likely to be horrible, while 3♦ at least might be OK. What is clear is that if West does bid 3♦ East should pass, not show the fifth heart.

I would guess that, if North does double 1NT, South will double 2♥, and that may convince N/S to double whatever contract E/W try.

N/S can make 3NT if played by North – the singleton spade lead traps dummy's ten if played by South – though they shouldn't really get there. As for E/W, they can make nothing apart from 1♣ or 1♦. Neither side can make even 1♠, and it is N/S who can make 1♥. Three Diamonds rates to be down two.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 15	♠ 96		Dealer S
	♥ J10		Vul: N-S
	♦ AK10984		
	♣ 652		
♠ AQ1082			♠ K43
♥ A62			♥ KQ8753
♦ 52			♦ Q
♣ 973			♣ K84
	♠ J75		
	♥ 94		
	♦ J763		
	♣ AQJ10		

There will be two passes to North, who can open a weak 2♦ if that is in his system. East will overcall 2♥ and South may raise diamonds before West bids 4♥.

If not playing a weak 2♦ opening, North might open 1♦ for the lead. The alternative of 3♦ would be more attractive were North not at adverse vulnerability.

If North passes at his first turn, East will open 1♥ and West respond 1♠. Now North will often overcall 2♦ and East rebid 2♥. If South passes, West may raise invitationally to 3♥ and East will have a decision to make. If South raises to 3♦, 3♥ might now sound more competitive than invitational. If so, West may instead jump to game.

After a diamond lead to the king, North will firstly have to read the position, that South has four diamonds so that declarer's queen is not a falsecard. If he tries a second diamond declarer will ruff and has 11 tricks.

North needs to switch to a club. If declarer puts up the king he is a quick one down. He needs to duck, but if North won the first trick with the king that is an easy one, as North will not hold AAK and a long suit. It's tougher if North wins the ace at trick one, as now declarer could get greedy, playing him for the ♣A and trying for 12 tricks.

If declarer ducks the club switch, South has to cash the ace to hold the contract to 10 tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 16	♠ 4	Dealer W
	♥ QJ9763	Vul: E-W
	♦ KQ9	
	♣ A72	

♠ Q862		♠ K53
♥ AK52		♥
♦ 2		♦ A76543
♣ Q864		♣ KJ53
	♠ AJ1097	
	♥ 1084	
	♦ J108	
	♣ 109	

West opens 1♣ and North overcalls 1♥. If 1♣ promised four cards, East might commit to clubs now with a jump cuebid of 3♥, showing club support and heart shortage. That sees West bid 3NT, but East is unlikely to leave it there. Just as well, in a sense, as 3NT can be down a couple of tricks, but 5♣ is also down, courtesy of a spade ruff.

Alternatively, East may introduce the diamonds, however many clubs he expects from partner. West may bid 2♠ but, if partner's 2♦ bid denied spades, might prefer 2NT. East will bid 3♣ either way. If that is forcing the auction will inevitably wend it's way to a hopeless game, while if West is allowed to pass 3♣ he will do so, and the resultant plus score should be pretty useful.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 17	♠ AKQJ		Dealer N
	♥ 62		Vul: None
	♦ J94		
	♣ A854		
♠ 72			♠ 1093
♥ K54			♥ QJ3
♦ 10853			♦ AKQ72
♣ Q1097			♣ J6
	♠ 8654		
	♥ A10987		
	♦ 6		
	♣ K32		

A strong NT will see South use Stayman and raise the 2♠ response invitationally to 3♠. Looking at a minimum, North should decline the invitation. Remember, there is no premium on bidding thin games at matchpoints.

However, the N/S hands fit well together, with North having only a jack wasted facing South's shortage, and with both majors dividing favourably, 10 tricks can be made.

If North opens 1♠, playing weak NT and four-card majors, South will have a close decision whether to raise to 2♠ or make a constructive three-level raise after East's likely 2♦ overcall. The three-level raise sees North go on to game, while game will be out of the picture if South only makes a simple raise, even though it will be South who competes to the three level if West bids 3♦.

A 1♣ opening sees East overcall 1♦, South bid 1♥, and West raise diamonds. North doesn't have enough to bid again, but South can double for take-out when 2/3♦ comes around but, unless North jumps, a spade partscore will be the limit.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 18	♠ Q72	Dealer E
	♥ Q7	Vul: N-S
	♦ 97	
	♣ AKJ1075	

♠ K1043	♠ A85
♥ A2	♥ J9543
♦ AK10652	♦ 4
♣ 4	♣ Q632

♠ J96
♥ K1086
♦ QJ83
♣ 98

West opens 1♦ and North overcalls 2♣. With a singleton diamond and only 7 HCP, East will pass, as will South.

There are quite a lot of points unaccounted for and this, combined with West's club shortage, will make him think that partner might well have a penalty double of clubs. Though a heart response is a worry, West may make a reopening double, though a simple 2♦, giving up on the prospective penalty, is a realistic option.

And now it is East's turn to have a close decision. With better club spots, Q10xx, for example, a pass would be very attractive, but queen and three small cards is much less so. Nonetheless, many will pass out the double, the vulnerability meaning that just one down for +200 should be a good result. There are five top tricks plus the queen of clubs for an easy down one, but the defence can do better. If East throws a spade on the second diamond winner, West can then switch to spades and a ruff is the second undertrick for a very handy +500.

If East doesn't fancy defending, he will respond 2♥ to the double, and West convert to 2♠. East won't be thrilled about that, but will pass, and 2♠ can be just made.

If West rebids 2♦ and plays there, the contract should make exactly, but maybe not for a great score.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 19	♠ AK10		Dealer S
	♥ A85		Vul: E-W
	♦ A		
	♣ A108654		
♠ 753			♠ Q92
♥ QJ106			♥ K72
♦ J932			♦ Q654
♣ 32			♣ QJ9
	♠ J864		
	♥ 943		
	♦ K1087		
	♣ K7		

North opens 1♣ and most Souths respond 1♠, giving North an awkward rebid problem.

The hand looks a little good for an invitational 3♣ rebid, while most people would prefer better clubs to rebid 3NT. Even if the latter is played as just being too good for a 3♣ rebid with no promises about suit quality, 3NT could be completely the wrong contract when the second best suit is spades, the one just bid by partner. 3NT would be a more attractive rebid if South had responded 1♦.

A compromise might be to rebid 2NT, leaving room for partner to check for a five-three spade fit should he wish to do so, but this is quite a serious distortion of the hand. Invent a suit and reverse into 2♥? Yes, that may be the least bad option, and it works a treat here, with South showing some diamond strength and 3NT eventually being reached.

3NT can be made very easily, declarer just playing three rounds of clubs as soon as he gains the lead to set up nine tricks. However 10 tricks are possible. Do you see the simple way to a tenth trick?

The problem is, how to cash the second diamond winner without setting up too many tricks for the defenders to cash when they get in, and the solution?

Assume South declares and West leads the queen of hearts. Declarer ducks twice then wins the third round. He can cash the ace of diamonds then play a club, but not to the king, cash the ♦K then go back to clubs. Instead, he ducks the club. East can do nothing, so declarer can win any return, play the ♣K then ♦K, and come to hand to cash the black-suit winners – five clubs, two diamonds, two spades and one heart.

That is a bit double dummy, I guess, but it shows that a bit of flexible thinking can work wonders.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 20	♠ 10	Dealer W
	♥ 872	Vul: Both
	♦ K972	
	♣ AQ765	

♠ K53		♠ QJ642
♥ J1064		♥ AK3
♦ Q653		♦ A108
♣ J2		♣ 84
	♠ A987	
	♥ Q95	
	♦ J4	
	♣ K1093	

Most Easts will open 1♠ in third seat and West raise to 2♠. At the prevailing vulnerability, that might be enough to buy the contract. Unless South blows the whole defence by leading the jack of diamonds, the combination of spades four-one and the queen of hearts offside should mean that the contract is defeated.

Some Easts may open a weak NT. If so, they will normally play there. A club lead will put the defence well on top for a minimum of down one. A spade lead gives declarer a little more chance, but not much, as the clubs are still there to be cashed.

Can either North or South compete the partscore? Well, it is hard to see how South could ever do anything other than pass. North? If a weak NT comes round to him, he might try 2NT, showing both minors. That worked very well, collecting a 3♣ preference from South and nine easy tricks.

North could also try 2NT after 1♠ – (Pass) – 2♠ – ?, but this is quite dangerous with an unlimited hand sitting over him. Maybe it's right to get involved, but I'm sure it will be too rich for many.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 21	♠ QJ9		Dealer N
	♥ 632		Vul: N-S
	♦ 973		
	♣ KQ65		
♠ 10			♠ K832
♥ K108			♥ AJ74
♦ AKQ4			♦ 865
♣ AJ1083			♣ 97
	♠ A7654		
	♥ Q95		
	♦ J102		
	♣ 42		

There will be three passes to West, who opens 1♣. East responds 1♥ and at this vulnerability most Souths will pass. If South does scrape up an overcall, West can make a take-out double.

Where South passes, West will reverse into 2♦, a one-round force. If playing natural methods after a reverse, East will bid either 2 or 3NT, depending on the expected strength for a reverse in this partnership. If East opts for 2NT, West should pass as 2NT is consistent with a minimum initial response. Some pairs play Lebensohl opposite a reverse, either 2NT being artificial or, for others, the lower of fourth suit and 2NT being the artificial bid.

The point of Lebensohl is to differentiate between very weak responses and hands that are strong enough to go on to game but may not yet be sure which game that should be. It's use on this deal would eliminate the possibility of playing in 2NT as to bid 2NT at East's second turn requests 3♣ from partner. As East does not wish to play in 3♣/♦, Lebensohl just gets in the way of natural bidding, and effectively forces the partnership to play 3NT.

South will lead a low spade against a NT contract, declarer winning the king. It looks natural to play on clubs, but actually taking a heart finesse is the safer way to ensure eight tricks for those playing 2NT, and a reasonable way of trying for nine tricks in 3NT as, even if the finesse loses it sets up a third heart winner and eight in all even if the defence can cash four spade tricks when they get in. In practice, they cannot as, though spades are five-three, the suit is blocked, and with diamonds three-three there are actually nine tricks even with a losing heart finesse, or 10 with a winning guess.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 22	♠ 1094		Dealer E
	♥ A10952		Vul: E-W
	♦ 109		
	♣ K87		
♠ KQJ8			♠ 7652
♥ QJ6			♥ 7
♦ 65			♦ AK74
♣ J965			♣ AQ102
	♠ A3		
	♥ K843		
	♦ QJ832		
	♣ 43		

If East opens 1♣, South can overcall 1♦ and West bid 1♠. North will usually pass and East raise spades, probably just to the two level. Two Spades will end the auction. If East makes a mildly aggressive raise to 3♠, West will of course go on to game.

A 1♦ opening by East will silence South and West will respond 1♠. Once again, the majority are likely to raise to 2♠, ending the auction, while those who jump to 3♠ will get to game.

With spades three-two and the clubs coming in without loss, 4♠ is a comfortable make.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 23	♠ AJ103 ♥ K ♦ K983 ♣ KQ98	Dealer S Vul: Both
♠ 874 ♥ A73 ♦ AJ652 ♣ 54		♠ K965 ♥ QJ852 ♦ ♣ AJ107
	♠ Q2 ♥ 10964 ♦ Q1074 ♣ 632	

I know someone who would open a strong NT with the North hand, but I can't see what is wrong with the more natural approach of opening 1♣ with the intention of rebidding 1♠ over a 1♥ response. The only time I would consider opening 1NT with a 4-4-4-(1) shape would be with a singleton spade, where the rebid could be a problem after opening one of a suit.

Anyway, supposing North to open 1♣, East will overcall 1♥ and West respond 2♣ to show better than a simple raise to 2♥ hand. North should know that his side is outgunned so stay quiet from this point on, and East will just rebid 2♥, where he will often play, coming to nine tricks more often than not.

If North is tempted by his singleton heart to compete, so makes a reopening double, South has nowhere to go that doesn't cost at least –200, even undoubled, and that is what is known as the kiss of death on a competitive partscore deal.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 24	♠ 75	Dealer W
	♥ J76	Vul: None
	♦ 1084	
	♣ A10984	

♠ AQ106	♠ KJ42
♥ 10954	♥ AK
♦ A7	♦ Q952
♣ 753	♣ QJ6

♠ 983
♥ Q832
♦ KJ63
♣ K2

If East opens a strong NT, West will use Stayman and raise the 2♠ response to game. If East opens 1♠, that will be raised to 3♠ and East will go on to game, and if East opens 1♦ West will respond 1♥. According to style, East may rebid 1♠, raised to 3♠ and game then bid, or 1NT, which will see West use Checkback to find the four-four fit.

All roads then lead to 4♠, but making this contract is not as straightforward as bidding it. Indeed, it is not clear that it can be made unless the defence lends a hand.

The problem is that, if trumps are not drawn immediately, a club ruff will set the hand – even supposing that an unlikely king and another club has not been led at the start.

So declarer wins the, let's say passive trump lead, and draws all the outstanding trumps. That leaves him with either one heart ruff in the East hand or one diamond ruff in the West hand. There are three other minor-suit losers, so where does the fourth heart/diamond go? In practice, declarer is likely to play on diamonds, hoping for the king to be onside and, when it is not, the contract will be one down.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 25	♠ 854	Dealer N
	♥ A5	Vul: E-W
	♦ K8753	
	♣ J86	
♠ KJ2		♠ 10763
♥ 10876		♥ J4
♦ A42		♦ J109
♣ 1075		♣ KQ94
	♠ AQ9	
	♥ KQ932	
	♦ Q6	
	♣ A32	

With a reasonable five-card major and 17 HCP, South is just too strong for a strong NT opening, so most should open 1♥ and raise the 1NT response to 2NT, giving North an easy reraise to game.

25 HCP and two five-card suits as potential sources of tricks or not, on this lie of the cards 3NT is some distance away from making – unless the defence lends a big helping hand.

If East leads a spade, or the ♣K then switches to a spade when declarer ducks, the defence is in complete control and down two looks the likely outcome. But what about the jack of diamonds, a safe lead in an unbid suit? That will appeal to a lot of players, and it allows declarer to establish three tricks in the suit by covering with the queen. West has to win or declarer can get four diamond tricks, enough for his contract. Winning the ♦A and switching to a club gets the defence back on track. Declarer can escape for down one by playing on diamonds, but probably won't.

If South opens 1NT, some will pass the North hand and 1NT can be made for quite a lot of matchpoints.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 26	♠ KQ9	Dealer E
	♥ 76	Vul: Both
	♦ Q65	
	♣ AKQ93	

♠ 6542		♠ AJ1073
♥ AK2		♥ Q104
♦ AKJ1083		♦ 92
♣		♣ 864

	♠ 8	
	♥ J9853	
	♦ 74	
	♣ J10752	

When West opens 1♦, North will overcall 1NT. East cannot really bid 2♠ at this vulnerability and with a potential misfit, so South will get to transfer to hearts.

The 2♦ transfer gives West an easy way to stress the diamonds via a double and North may pass to deny heart support. It is still not all that safe for East to bid the spades, as partner's double was more about diamonds than all-around strength. However, when N/S now get to 2♥, having already shown the extra diamond length/strength, West can double to get spades into the game. Now East may jump to 3♠, finally realising that West has a good hand, and West has an easy raise to game.

Declarer in 4♠ ruffs the club lead and plays a spade. Life is too easy if North plays the nine and the ten scores, so North will split and declarer win the ace. Now declarer has to play for the actual spade position to make 12 tricks – if he plays a second spade he comes to only 11. Perhaps not such a big deal when the board was more about getting to game than overtricks, but the twelve trick will be worth having.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	2	-	-	-	-
S	2	-	-	-	-
E	-	5	1	6	1
W	-	5	1	6	1

==========

Board 27	♠ Q10752		Dealer S
	♥ A862		Vul: None
	♦ A5		
	♣ 32		
♠ J83			♠ K6
♥ K4			♥ Q10973
♦ K7632			♦ 98
♣ KJ4			♣ 10986
	♠ A94		
	♥ J5		
	♦ QJ104		
	♣ AQ75		

If South opens a weak NT, North will use Stayman then bid 2♠ over the 2♦ response, and that will end the auction as the sequence could be followed by a far weaker hand.

If South opens 1♣/♦, North will respond 1♠ and South often raise to 2♠, though some will prefer 1NT. By one route or another, North will now become declarer in a spade contract, but it is possible, the sequence where South raises to 2♠ might tempt North to make a game try. The difference here is that South has not limited his hand to quite the same extent as by opening a weak NT. On this latter auction South could have four spades, and/or a ruffing value.

It is much better for the defence for a spade contract to be played by North, as East has an easy lead of the ten of clubs, giving nothing. Conversely, if the contract is played by South, West has a very difficult lead.

Would you blame West if, not wanting to lead any of the side-suits, he led a low spade? That costs the contract immediately as it loses the defensive trump trick. Though it is not as clearcut as that, any other lead also gives declarer an opportunity to make 10 tricks, while the club lead from East means only nine tricks if the defence is accurate from that point on.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 28	♠ Q6		Dealer W
	♥ AKJ97		Vul: N-S
	♦ Q107		
	♣ Q52		
♠ K8			♠ J97532
♥ Q64			♥ 85
♦ A9842			♦ 6
♣ A93			♣ KJ84
	♠ A104		
	♥ 1032		
	♦ KJ53		
	♣ 1076		

If West opens a weak NT, North may double. 14 HCP is borderline, but the strong five-card suit means that North has a good opening lead, and that tips the balance in favour of a double.

East will, of course run to 2♠, either directly or via some escape mechanism. South will double at some point to get his general values across, but there is no denomination in which N/S can make a two-level contract without help from the defence. Meanwhile, E/W can make 3♠.

Though East ran from 1NT doubled, that doesn't mean he should never bid again. With six-four shape he should be comfortable competing to the three level in spades should that prove to be necessary. With the ♠A onside and clubs coming in, there are just two losers in each major.

If West opens 1♦, North will bid 1♥, East 1♠, and South 2♥. East will rebid the spades when 2♥ comes back around, and that may be that if North judges his hand to be better suited to defence. I suspect that a majority of Norths who find themselves in this position will, however, compete to 3♥. Now East has already bid twice, so it will be down to West to take the push to 3♠, trusting that partner has a six-card suit, and many will fail to do so.

If there are a lot of E/Ws playing in a spade partscore, down one in 3♥ could score very well for N/S.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========