Commentary
for the
IBU Autumn Simultaneous Pairs

Friday 6th 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	♠ AKJ72		Dealer N
	♥ 97654		Vul: None
	♦ A10		
	♣ 10		
♠ 653			♠ 9
♥ AQ			♥ K82
♦ 732			♦ J654
♣ KQJ76			♣ A9542
	♠ Q1084		
	♥ J103		
	♦ KQ98		
	♣ 83		

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	3♦	?

3♦ is reverse Bergen showing 6-9 and 4-card spade support. West is in an interesting position here. He knows East has one spade at most. So there is a very reasonable chance that East will have 3+ clubs out of his remaining 12 cards. Bidding 4♣ puts the pressure on the opponents. Even doubled -1 it beats 3♠. And if pushed, North will almost certainly bid on, although with no real conviction. On the other hand, East may be tempted to bid 5♣, which will not be great going for 300 and a probable bottom.

Let's assume North buys the contract in 4♠. East will lead the CAx. Now unless East switches to a heart at trick two the contract will make on an endplay forcing a ruff and discard. Play it out. Club ruff, ♦A and then running the ♦10. Three rounds of spades ending in dummy. Two more diamonds and ♥J. West can cash the ♥Q but East's ♥K is stranded. This is all of course double dummy as finessing the ♦10 could be a disaster. Regardless, in theory, it makes provided there is no heart switch at trick two.

So back to trick one. West must drop the ♣K suit preference for hearts. East switches a ♥, West cashes ♥AQ and exits a club. Down one for a very good score.

In reality. I cannot see many Wests wading into the auction with 4♣ and if they do Easts subsequently passing. So likely 3♠ will be the par contract. A few pushy 4♠-1s as declarers won't be finessing the ♦10. And a few 5♣-2s for zero points.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 2	♠ K	Dealer E
	♥ AKJ1098653	Vul: N-S
	♦ K	
	♣ 65	

♠ J743	♠ Q108652
♥ 2	♥ 7
♦ A2	♦ Q1073
♣ AKQJ82	♣ 97

	♠ A9
	♥ Q4
	♦ J98654
	♣ 1043

East	South	West	North
2♠!!	Pass	4♠	?

2♠ on a 4-count what!! Having recently played in the European Championships in Riga, I can confidently say the majority of pairs in that event would open this 2♠. Why? Firstly. the favourably vulnerability, non-vul v vul. Secondly, the attractive 6/4 shape. Thirdly, the spade suit is tolerable. If East does open 2♠, West has a difficult choice and may bid according to partnership history. Perhaps they play multi 2♦ and can distinguish between a rubbish weak 2 and a sound one. If partner has ♠AQxxxx, then slam is on a finesse. Poorer holdings and even the 5-level may be too high. 4♥ splinter is probably the best bid.

Now up to North. At the opposite 5♥ would probably be warranted. Maybe at equal vulnerability, Partner has a trick. But at unfavourable vulnerability, bidding doesn't seem a good idea … yet I am sure many Norths will bid 5♥. Fortunately this only goes off one, and proves a good sacrifice. It is not often a vulnerable sacrifice vs a non-vulnerable game is the winning action. East should leave the decision to Partner, who will double, but many will bid 5♠.

I suspect we will see plenty of 5♥-1 and 5♠-1, often doubled.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 3 ♠ K52 Dealer S
♥ AK72 Vul: E-W
♦ KJ1098
♣ 7

♠ J1097 ♠ AQ
♥ Q4 ♥ J83
♦ Q32 ♦ A76
♣ A853 ♣ K10964

♠ 8643
♥ 10965
♦ 54
♣ QJ2

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♦	1NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Overcalling 1NT on a 14 count? Well surely the 1-level is preferable to the 2-level and bidding 2♣, especially as the club suit is pretty poor. On to the play. South leads ♦5, small, ♦8 …. small!! This is crucial. North will continue ♥AK and another playing partner for the J. Declarer now plays ♣K (North clearly has diamond length and if anyone will be short it will be North). Watch the pips now. ♣10 to the ace and now a small club to South's ♣J. So the ♣8 is now an entry for the almost guaranteed spade finesse. The defence will cash the final heart and play a diamond, declarer winning with the ace. A small club now to the carefully preserved ♣8 in Dummy, and a spade finesse for 8 tricks and a score of 120. 2♣ depending on defence will make on the nose or +1 for 90 or 110. So the 1NT bid is a winner.

If declarer beats the ♦8 at trick one, they will go down or at best make 7 tricks by playing on spades. Should South get in, they will punch another diamond through the ♦Qx, and the defence will come to one club, four diamonds, and two hearts for an absolute bottom for E/W.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 4	♠ 98	Dealer W
	♥ A	Vul: Both
	♦ 9842	
	♣ J109762	

♠ KQJ2		♠ A5
♥ J873		♥ Q654
♦ Q106		♦ AKJ7
♣ K8		♣ A54
	♠ 107643	
	♥ K1092	
	♦ 53	
	♣ Q3	

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	?	

It looks totally normal to bid 4NT here … or is it? You need to remember that it is highly likely that opener has only four hearts. Even if they have Ace or King, the pips are going to be crucial. So unless they have two honours, a NT contract may well fare a lot better. In particular, if you run into a 4/1 heart split you will be in real trouble. One possible route is to bid fourth suit to instigate a game-force, subsequently agree hearts, and then bid 3NT offering partner a choice of contract.

I suspect many E/Ws will get to 5♥ and likely go down. Anyone in 3NT will get a very good score.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 5 ♠ AQJ1084 Dealer N
♥ 106 Vul: N-S
♦ AQ8
♣ A5

♠ ♠ K7653
♥ KJ984 ♥ AQ73
♦ 9632 ♦ 105
♣ QJ72 ♣ 109

♠ 92
♥ 52
♦ KJ74
♣ K8643

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	All Pass

Even with the 5/0 spade split 4♠ rolls home losing two hearts and one spade. Some brave souls may wander in 2♥ on the West cards a dubious action, but a winning one in this case as E/W may find a profitable 5♥*-2 save.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 6

	♠ 10982 ♥ 975 ♦ 92 ♣ AQ32	Dealer E Vul: E-W
♠ AK7 ♥ K64 ♦ 6543 ♣ K65		♠ Q543 ♥ J103 ♦ AQ8 ♣ J107
	♠ J6 ♥ AQ82 ♦ KJ107 ♣ 984	

East	South	West	North
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	All Pass	

South has a very dubious second-in-hand non-vulnerable 11-count opener. Not everyone's cup of tea. Due to the very fortuitous lie of the cards, the resulting 1NT contract will quite likely make. For the more conservative, passing will lead to E/W playing 1NT which will go 1 or 2 off for 100+. Hopefully the reckless Souths who open 1NT will go unrewarded here.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 7	♠ Q10972 ♥ K103 ♦ AK5 ♣ 86	Dealer S Vul: Both
♠ 64 ♥ Q984 ♦ 10872 ♣ K42		♠ 53 ♥ J762 ♦ QJ3 ♣ 10973
	♠ AKJ8 ♥ A5 ♦ 964 ♣ AQJ5	

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	1♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	?	

Some may open the South hand 2NT and will likely end up in the cold 6♠. On the auction above is North worth 4NT? I think so, but some will pass. So the room will be split between 4♠+2 and 6♠ with the appropriate scores.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 8 ♠ Q52 Dealer W
♥ Q752 Vul: None
♦ 843
♣ 1083

♠ AK84 ♠ 106
♥ KJ6 ♥ 1084
♦ KQ7 ♦ J962
♣ 974 ♣ AQ65

♠ J973
♥ A93
♦ A105
♣ KJ2

West	North	East	South
1NT	All Pass		

If playing 5-card majors and Weak NT West would open whichever minor is systemic, East will bid 1NT and West may feel obliged to bid 2NT, the only result of which is that they end up a level higher. 1NT will just about make but I think getting 8 tricks will be a real challenge requiring some help from the opponents which will probably not be forthcoming as the lie of the cards makes the defence fairly automatic.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 9

	♠ Q5 ♥ 87543 ♦ J1052 ♣ 98	Dealer N Vul: E-W
♠ 43 ♥ 96 ♦ AK74 ♣ K5432		♠ KJ1072 ♥ AQ ♦ 98 ♣ J1076
	♠ A986 ♥ KJ102 ♦ Q63 ♣ AQ	

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

2♦ transfer to ♥. Over double play system on. Over an overcall play Lebensohl.

Most of the room will be in 2♠. Note the clubs are blocked, making it very hard to pitch a heart on the fifth club, unless the diamond entries are somehow preserved. Of course, South may lead a heart solving declarer's problem. Anyone getting to the 9-card club fit will be unrewarded as 130 won't score well.

So double dummy South leads the ♦3. Declarer wins and leads a spade to the Jack. South should duck this. Now ♣J. South wins and plays another diamond. Declarer wins, plays a trump to the Queen, King, and Ace. ♠9 back. Declarer wins plays a club to the King, ruffs a diamond and exits on the last trump. South with only hearts left is forced to lead into the ♥AQ.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 10	♠ 9	Dealer E
	♥ J1072	Vul: Both
	♦ K9863	
	♣ A76	

♠ J85	♠ AKQ6
♥ 853	♥ Q64
♦ AQJ	♦ 1042
♣ J1094	♣ KQ8

	♠ 107432	
	♥ AK9	
	♦ 75	
	♣ 532	

East	South	West	North
1NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Yes, West has a 9-count yes but the 3334 shape, and three Jacks, at least some of which may be wasted, is bad news. South will likely start with a high heart and switch to a spade. Declarer will knock out the ♣A. North will continue with the ♥J. Declarer needs to duck his. The opponents will take the two heart tricks and switch to a diamond. Declarer has eight tricks if they play the Ace – three clubs, four spades and one diamond. An auto-finesse creates six tricks for the defence (one club, one diamond, and four hearts, and a poor score for Declarer. As it is matchpoints I suspect plenty will fall for the lure of the finesse.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 11	♠ 982	Dealer S
	♥ K654	Vul: None
	♦ 96	
	♣ 10984	

♠ A653	♠ KJ7
♥ 972	♥ AQJ3
♦ J32	♦ AQ8
♣ KQJ	♣ A62

	♠ Q104
	♥ 108
	♦ K10754
	♣ 753

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

11 HCP opposite 20–22 is **not** worth a quantitative 4NT. Moreover, the 4333 shape is a big negative, with the ♣KQJ potentially not pulling full value. And so it proves with only 11 tricks available. Some will plough on to slam and assuming South leads passively (i.e. a heart or a club) the slam will fail.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 12 ♠ 42 Dealer W
♥ K8 Vul: N-S
♦ KQ10
♣ QJ8764

♠ AQJ83 ♠ 9
♥ A93 ♥ QJ10754
♦ 975 ♦ J63
♣ AK ♣ 532

♠ K10765
♥ 62
♦ A842
♣ 109

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

East can't bid 2♥ over 2♣ as this is forcing for nearly everyone. Even if you play this as non-forcing, I don't think a 4-count qualifies. West will reopen with a double and the heart fit will be found. Nine tricks look likely. Some brave souls may bid on 3C allowing E/W to find a lucrative double for 200. In practice, most Easts will accept the push to 3♥.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 13	♠ A543	Dealer N
	♥ 93	Vul: Both
	♦ AKQJ6	
	♣ J10	

♠ KQJ8	♠ 109762
♥ 76	♥ Q842
♦ 97	♦ 32
♣ K8764	♣ 92

♠
♥ AKJ105
♦ 10854
♣ AQ53

North	East	South	West
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♥	Pass
4♠	Pass	4NT	Pass
5♦	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♦	All Pass		

If you decide to open 1♦ and then bid 1♠ over 1♥ the auction should go along similar lines and you find your diamond fit very quickly. 2♦ is a transfer. 3♦ is natural and game-forcing. Why diamonds and not clubs? You bid the higher one first allowing you to show your third suit at a lower level if necessary. If we bid 3♣ now we would then have to bid 4♦ later, which takes us higher in the auction. 3♠ agrees diamonds. To agree hearts we bid 3♥ over 3♦. Cue bids are first- or second-round controls. 4NT is 1430 RKCB. 5♥ asks for the trump Queen. 6♦ shows the Queen and no outside King.

7♦ is makeable, although after the likely club lead from East, it needs the double-dummy play of a first-round heart finesse. While 6NT makes it is lucky whereas 6♦ is cold. There will be some in 4H and 3NT.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	4	7	6	1	6
S	5	7	6	1	6
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

==========

Board 14 ♠ J54 Dealer E
♥ 863 Vul: None
♦ K32
♣ 9832

♠ K103 ♠ Q98
♥ A2 ♥ K754
♦ A98 ♦ QJ1074
♣ A10754 ♣ K

♠ A762
♥ QJ109
♦ 65
♣ QJ6

East	South	West	North
1♦	Pass	3NT	All Pass

Against an auction like this, lead a major suit. Auctions like 1m - 3NT rarely have the majors (otherwise they would bid them). Neither a diamond nor a club looks appealing here anyway – West surely has clubs for his bid - so it's either an aggressive spade lead or a passive heart lead. Either could work. As long as declarer watches their entries, they should get ten tricks. A heart lead may hold them to nine.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 15	♠ Q4	Dealer S
	♥ AKQ52	Vul: N-S
	♦ Q943	
	♣ 84	

♠ 52	♠ 10983
♥ 843	♥ 76
♦ J752	♦ 8
♣ A762	♣ KJ10953

	♠ AKJ76
	♥ J109
	♦ AK106
	♣ Q

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
?			

So North has managed to game force with no club cue and at best ♠Q and ♦Q. 4 points – indicating the remainder of their HCPs must be in hearts, so the trump suit should be solid. 4NT.(RKCB) will glean the response of 5♠ (2 keycards plus the trump Queen). 6♥ to land in the cold slam. East better lead a club or else it will be plus 1.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 16 ♠ 7 Dealer W
♥ A106 Vul: E-W
♦ A10764
♣ AK42

♠ KQ43 ♠ A985
♥ Q7542 ♥ 9
♦ Q9 ♦ KJ5
♣ 97 ♣ J10653

♠ J1062
♥ KJ83
♦ 832
♣ Q8

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
1♠*	Dbl	2♦**	Pass
2♠	Dbl	Pass	?
All Pass			

I am a great believer in making life easy for partner. Here I want a spade lead. With length in hearts over South a 1-level overcall having already passed is fairly safe. It also makes it harder for the opponents to reach a NT game. As it turns out 2♠ doubled vulnerable -1 will be a bottom, but it's hard to see South passing for penalties. Should East feel it necessary to bid their hand twice going to 3♠ after the unassuming cue 2♦ bid now South should double for a probable 100% score. As it turns out, keeping the opponents out of NT and into diamonds leads to a poor score on this hand. C'est la vie.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 17 ♠ AQJ Dealer N
♥ Vul: None
♦ J965
♣ AQ9732

♠ K73 ♠ 109854
♥ KJ6543 ♥ 10
♦ Q2 ♦ A104
♣ 86 ♣ KJ54

♠ 62
♥ AQ9872
♦ K873
♣ 10

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

Some Easts will no doubt overcall 1♠ on that excellent suit (!) arriving in 2♠ or higher and possibly allowing N/S to find their diamond fit. Sadly, such cavalier bidding may well pay off it they go off one or two undoubled. Should N/S find a double, best defence will see it off -2 for a top.

Assuming no bidding from E/W, 2♣ is not pretty (but note that North cannot bid 2♦ as this shows a reverse). 2♦ now by South is artificial in most partnerships, and in any event it is well against the odds to find a diamond fit, so South will pass. If West ducks the ♠10 lead (which is wrong as partner could have QT9x), then Declarer should win and then play ♠A and ruff a spade, ♥A pitching a diamond, then ruff a heart, over-ruffed. You should play ♦K if East switches low. Why? If you are forced to play them yourself you have to play up to the King. The only reason the opponents are switching to a diamond here is to give you a losing option. Eight or nine tricks will be normal.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 18 ♠ A5 Dealer E
♥ 1098 Vul: N-S
♦ J109864
♣ 85

♠ K109764 ♠ QJ3
♥ Q5 ♥ A2
♦ 75 ♦ AQ2
♣ KJ2 ♣ AQ964

♠ 82
♥ KJ7643
♦ K3
♣ 1073

East	South	West	North
Auction 1			
1♣	2♥?	2♠	Pass
3♥	Pass	4♣	?
Auction 2			
2NT	Pass	3♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
6♠	All Pass		

Auction 1 wrong-sides the spade contract; it leaves open 6♣ but this will score poorly against the 6♠ slam available. At pairs, the wrong-siding is a serious issue even if the slam is not bid often, which I think it will be. The result also depends on whether South overcalls. Again, I suspect most will and West will bid spades wrong-siding the contract.

Some Easts may open 2NT as per auction 2 and they will zoom into slam. It's not a great contract but makes this time as South is effectively end played at trick one. With the minor tenaces there is good case to open a light 2NT, right-siding the contract in many cases.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 19	♠ KQJ9	Dealer S
	♥ Q52	Vul: E-W
	♦ AK4	
	♣ 964	

♠ 106		♠ A5
♥ KJ97		♥ 10843
♦ Q85		♦ 10963
♣ 10872		♣ QJ5
	♠ 87432	
	♥ A6	
	♦ J72	
	♣ AK3	

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	?	

4333 shapes should be downgraded pretty much automatically. The lack of ruffing potential hugely devalues the hand effectively turning everything into a NT contract with a good suit. Over South's 1♠, North will probably bid 2NT in most systems – either an invitational+ (e.g. Stenberg) or game-forcing (e.g. Jacoby) raise in partner's major. If playing 2/1 you could also bid 2♣ game-forcing and agree spades the following round.

The one thing you don't do is bid 4♠. 4♠ shows a weaker distributional hand where you may not even make ten tricks. Clearly this does NOT describe the North hand. With a 4333 shape bidding 2NT also gives you the option of subsequently bidding 3NT choice of contracts which in pairs could (and in fact does on this hand) produce a total top.

I'll predict lots of 4♠ and a few big scoring 3NT+1. As a side note the North hand is nowhere near good enough to look for slam. The losing trick count evaluation (1 loser for every A, K or Q you miss in a suit) gives three clubs, one diamond, two hearts, one spade for 7 losers in all. This is nothing special, in fact poor for a 16-count.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 20 ♠ AJ103 Dealer W
♥ 543 Vul: Both
♦ 2
♣ Q8765

♠ K5 ♠ Q98
♥ AQ976 ♥ K2
♦ KQJ109 ♦ A876
♣ 3 ♣ K1042

♠ 7642
♥ J108
♦ 543
♣ AJ9

West	North	East	South
1♥	Pass	3NT	All Pass

You could take a slower route and end in 4♥. In teams 5♦ is the spot. In pairs, however, 5♦ will get you a zero. South will probably lead ♠6 or ♠7 (not ♠2 as this should promise an honour), declarer should play the K either winning (11 tricks) or encouraging North to continue (11 tricks).

Can North figure it out? Probably. The rule of eleven on the lead of ♠6 or ♠7 will not work, indicating declarer has the ♠Q. You can see the hearts are coming in even if a finesse is required. If partner has the ♣A you can count 11 tricks in a heart contract. If declarer has both minor aces you need not worry as slam is on. The crucial holding is when partner has ♣AJx(x). Now a club switch holds declarer to 10 tricks and a decent score.

You could also consider leading the ♣Q to try to retain the lead for another club through. But this removes the guess you say if declarer has ♣KJx. True but then declarer has a 50% chance to get 11 tricks anyway as opposed to you maybe beating the contract (South has say ♣AJ10x).

From a declarer point of view, a low club does present a problem. Declarer can play the ♣10 guaranteeing 10 tricks. At pairs, though if North has underled the ace going up the K gets 11 tricks. Having to endanger your contract or take dangerous lines in play or defence to maximize trick potential is one of the many reasons I dislike pairs.

Defence is the hardest part of the game, as you need to co-ordinate your efforts with partner who may have a different view on how to proceed. Consistent leads from various holdings, and agreed upon signals, both play an important part, but stopping to think is by far the most important aspect. Declarer has a huge advantage as it is, so make that effort in defence and you will start to see your results improve.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 21	♠ KQ1032		Dealer N
	♥ KJ75		Vul: N-S
	♦ Q9		
	♣ A3		
♠ 754			♠ J6
♥ 62			♥ A93
♦ 753			♦ A642
♣ Q10862			♣ J974
	♠ A98		
	♥ Q1084		
	♦ KJ108		
	♣ K5		

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

The North hand can cause issues if playing Standard American (SAYC). Over 2♦ (10+ HCPs), 2♥ could be passed by a complete minimum responder. Most partnerships agree that the 2/1 bidder has to reply to opener's rebid to avoid this situation. The alternative is to jump to 3♥ which is an overbid here and takes up room. Some would open 1NT to avoid such issues. This runs the risk of missing a major fit should partner be unable to respond to 1NT. Some play Gazilli (I do). I prefer to open 1S with both majors.

South also has many choices. They could use Stenberg 2NT or similar to immediately agree spades. In SAYC 3NT is choice of contract, and shows 3-card support and balanced. Unlike the previous hand there are 11 tricks in a major and only 10 in NT on a routine ♣ lead.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 22	♠ AK1086		Dealer E
	♥ 102		Vul: E-W
	♦ A1094		
	♣ 82		
♠ QJ5			♠ 73
♥ Q764			♥ AJ9
♦ J3			♦ K2
♣ AQ65			♣ KJ10973
	♠ 942		
	♥ K853		
	♦ Q8765		
	♣ 4		

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

East may also double to show 3-card heart support if playing support doubles. South has a very borderline 2♠ bid but should stretch to let partner know they have something. Indeed, double-dummy N/S can make 4♠ with via double spade finesse. West could raise clubs but in my view they should show the ♠ stop (always investigate NT). With 12 points opposite an opening bid, they should really bid 3NT. North will give this serious consideration, and some may double, but doing so might see E/W running to 4♣ which could easily make from North's point of view (although it's down one in actuality). The rule is don't double if you can't also double the runout (unless of course you want them to run!!).

Either a ♦ or ♠ lead beats 3NT. I would expect a fair splattering of contracts on this hand.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 23 ♠ J2 Dealer S
♥ J5 Vul: Both
♦ AJ95
♣ AQJ53

♠ KQ853 ♠ A106
♥ 1032 ♥ KQ84
♦ 10632 ♦ K7
♣ 9 ♣ 10742

♠ 974
♥ A976
♦ Q84
♣ K86

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♣	Pass
1♥	Pass	1NT	All Pass

E/W can make 2♠ but have no realistic opportunity to get into the bidding (1♠ over 1♥ on a 5-count ??). East has a tough lead. ♥K seems the best of a bad lot. 7 cold tricks on top. Depending on the lead and the subsequent play, some declarers may risk a diamond finesse scoring 8 tricks or going down depending on whether E/W belatedly find their spades.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 24 ♠ AQ109 Dealer W
♥ AKJ1053 Vul: None
♦ AK
♣ 6

♠ 54 ♠ 873
♥ Q964 ♥ 2
♦ 852 ♦ QJ643
♣ QJ103 ♣ K987

♠ KJ62
♥ 87
♦ 1097
♣ A542

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♥
Pass	7♠	All Pass	

7♠ is a superb contract but is very likely to go down. Declarer requires any 3/2 heart split (around 68%) or a 4/1 split with East (another 14%) as a ruffing finesse is available. This line is far superior to the finesse even after cashing one top heart. Anyone getting to 6♥ or 7♥ should make all the tricks as the correct play is to finesse on the first round catering for a 4/1 heart split with West. The odds of Qxxx are quite a bit higher than Q singleton offside.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 25 ♠ Q763 Dealer N
♥ AKQJ Vul: E-W
♦ 104
♣ 1073

♠ K4 ♠ AJ1082
♥ 53 ♥ 10862
♦ AKQ97 ♦ 5
♣ AJ96 ♣ 852

♠ 95
♥ 974
♦ J8632
♣ KQ4

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

Vulnerable, East is not worth a spade overcall. Non-vulnerable, it depends on style. West bids a natural 1NT. East uses garbage Stayman to check for a major fit and then signs off in 2♠. 2♠ can make nine tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 26 ♠ K4 Dealer E
♥ Q73 Vul: Both
♦ J9874
♣ KQ6

♠ QJ103 ♠ 9
♥ K1098 ♥ AJ42
♦ 106 ♦ AK52
♣ 1032 ♣ 8754

♠ A87652
♥ 65
♦ Q3
♣ AJ9

East	South	West	North
1♦	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West has a 6-count vulnerable. They have defence against spades. Any action in my opinion is unwarranted. It's not illegal to pass!! North has a good hand, and 1NT seems normal. Many Souths will bid 2♠. If you think about it this may not be a good move. North has two spades at best. Your spade pips are poor. Your cards are ok for NT. Seven tricks may be easier than eight.

Let's look at 1NT. East will probably lead a club. We have five tricks on top. Say we play for the spades to break 3/2. The defence would now get one spade, four hearts, and two diamonds for minus 1. Moreover if the spades are 3/2 2♠ is cold so making 1NT is useless. The odds are high that the diamond honours are with with East as they opened the bidding. If East has the ♦10 as well, we can't setup the diamond suit. If West has the ♦10, on the other hand, we are home. So play for the distribution that allows you to make AND beat those in 2♠. Spades to break 4/1 and ♦10 with West. Win the first club with the ♣J. Play the ♦Q. East returns say another club. Win with the Ace. Play a diamond and smile when the ♦10 appears. The opponents take two diamonds and four hearts, for 1NT making. Even if East ducks the first diamond you are still ok as you have two black suit entries.

The analysis below says N/S cannot make 1NT. This requires a spade lead, which is highly unlikely (we generally do not lead the opponent's suit) …. and yet if you think about it, it is potentially the correct lead. North has clearly no interest in spades and holds two cards in the suit at most. So partner is marked with at least four and frequently five sitting over dummy. A spade could be very effective.

I predict a lot of 2♠-1 contracts.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 27 ♠ K6 Dealer S
♥ Q10843 Vul: None
♦ AQ104
♣ 84

♠ 8743 ♠ QJ10
♥ J7 ♥ A6
♦ 8732 ♦ KJ9
♣ A93 ♣ KQJ76

♠ A952
♥ K952
♦ 65
♣ 1052

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♥	1NT
2♥	Pass	Pass	?

Third in hand even missing the ♠K I would open 1♥ as North. The bid in this situation is lead directing more often than not. East has a choice of double, 1NT or 2♣. You can make arguments for all of them. In my view 1NT conveys the most information: point-count range, stopper and denies four spades. South will raise to 2♥. West could make a takeout double, a pretty borderline action, but will normally pass. Back to East. They could bid an adventurous 3♣, they could double for takeout, but they will pass most likely.

2♥+1 will be the normal score. 3♣-1 for E/W will be a big score.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 28 ♠ A10874 Dealer W
♥ 10965 Vul: N-S
♦ AK94
♣

♠ QJ963 ♠ 52
♥ KQ2 ♥ 87
♦ J ♦ Q1075
♣ AQ52 ♣ J10874

♠ K
♥ AJ43
♦ 8632
♣ K963

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	?	All Pass	

North should certainly give some consideration to passing 1♠ doubled, which will probably go off. Zia in one of his books said you should usually run from a 1-level penalty double. So with the East hand, I'd bid 2♣. This will get cracked too, but 1 off at worst, perhaps even making on a good day, will provide a huge score.

North has a tough call but I feel 3♥ is probably right. It's doubtful that South will raise to 4♥. You need to be aware that South's double does not promise four hearts, and might not even be an opening bid in the balancing position, so your bids need to give the balancer some leeway; don't hang them for keeping the bidding open. As it turns out you make a lot of tricks in hearts, apparently ten with careful play. Cross-ruff the hand and lead the second diamond from the South hand.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========