



Commentary
for the
IBU Autumn Simultaneous Pairs
Monday 4th November 2024

Dear Bridge Player,

Thank you very much for playing in the IBU Simultaneous Pairs 2024, and for supporting the Irish Bridge Union (IBU).

As you probably know, the IBU is the confederation of the Contract Bridge Association of Ireland and the Northern Ireland Bridge Union, and has responsibility, on an all-Ireland basis, for sending teams to represent Ireland at World and European competitions. Within the past twelve months there have been two such competitions, and the IBU sent four teams to the European Championships in Denmark, and three to the World Bridge Games in Argentina. The costs of such competitions, like most costs these days, are increasing significantly, so your support for this Simultaneous Pairs, and for the various live competitions run during the season by the IBU, is greatly appreciated.

We hope that you enjoyed the chance to test yourself against your fellow players across Ireland (and for those still playing online, maybe overseas as well). As always, the hands (which are randomly generated by computer with no manual intervention whatsoever) provided plenty of difficult decisions. Many thanks to our expert commentators Randal Milne (Monday), Thomas MacCormac (Tuesday), Paul Delaney (Wednesday), Brian Senior (Thursday), and Enda Murphy (Friday) for their guidance through the maze. I hope that you have picked up some useful tips from their advice. For Tuesday night, Thomas has done his commentary in a series of videos rather than as a written commentary, which is a new departure for us; we hope you'll like it, and would welcome your feedback.

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

Heather Hill

President, Irish Bridge Union

Introduction from Randal Milne

My recommended auctions are based on weak no-trump and 4 card majors. Apart from it being my preferred system, it's the one that almost everyone in Ireland has cut their bridge teeth on. I'll also assume 4th highest leads and leading 2nd highest from 3+ small cards.

Board 1	♠ K107 ♥ Q85 ♦ J965 ♣ AK9	Dealer N Vul: None
	♠ J532 ♥ AK7 ♦ 84 ♣ J762	♠ 984 ♥ 1063 ♦ AQ10732 ♣ Q
	♠ AQ6 ♥ J942 ♦ K ♣ 108543	

North	East	South	West
INT (12-14)	Pass	Pass	Pass

Thoughts on the bidding

Strong no-trumpers will keep East out of the auction by opening 1♦ and many Easts won't venture into the auction over a weak no-trump opening, so most will play this in INT by North. Some players, however, cannot leave weak no-trump bids alone and South may simply pass the 2♦ overcall or double for take-out which North may convert into a penalty since diamonds is the only 4-card suit they have.

Thoughts on the play

Against INT, East's diamonds are too good to ignore, so it's likely to be the suit led. Declarer has 1 diamond trick, 3 spade tricks and needs to make 3 club tricks or 2 clubs and 1 heart. At trick two a club is led to a top honour and the queen falls. With just 3 cards remaining in the suit the principle of restricted choice should be applied. This states that when a queen or jack is played and only three cards remain in the suit, then it's 2 to 1 on that that honour was singleton. North should therefore cross to dummy's ♠K to lead a second club and insert the nine when West plays low. 7 tricks made. N-S: 90

Against 2♦(X), South will probably lead their 4th highest club (I treat the ten as an honour). North must switch at trick two and it doesn't much matter which suit they choose. Unless East leads the ♦A when first in (and there's no reason why they should) then they're booked for minus two and a bad score when North-South are getting 90 at best. N-S: 100 (300)

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

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Board 2	♠ K8752 ♥ J8 ♦ AK964 ♣ 7	Dealer E Vul: N-S
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♠ AJ10 ♥ KQ10 ♦ J8 ♣ A10864	♠ 93 ♥ A6432 ♦ Q1032 ♣ K5	♠ Q64 ♥ 975 ♦ 75 ♣ QJ932
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North	East	South	West
2♦ (Ghestem)	Pass	Pass	1♣ (4+)
	Pass	3♦	All Pass

Thoughts on the bidding

If West opens a natural 1♣ then players who've agreed a two-suited overcall convention such as Ghestem or Michaels and don't play it weak or strong can roll it out here. But first I have an opinion on two-suited overcalls: if your side doesn't win the auction then you've given away a lot of information about your distribution which could well allow declarer to make an otherwise difficult contract. So, my advice is to keep your two-suited overcalls sound (i.e. opening values) unless you're at favourable vulnerability and hold 5 spades (the boss suit). So, North's hand is ideal. In Ghestem, a cue-bid shows the higher-ranking suits, 2NT shows the lower-ranking suits and 2♦ over 1♣ or 3♣ over anything else shows the extremes.

Without such a convention North must decide on what overcall to make. Spades is a major and worth more but doesn't pass the suit-quality test (number of cards in the suit (5) plus the number of honours in the suit (1) must equal or exceed the number of tricks you're bidding for (7)). The diamond suit does pass the test, so that is what North should bid (see also Board 28).

If West opens a strong no-trump, then life become much harder for North to show both

suits and they're likely to show their spades or, at best, spades and a minor. In either event 2♠ by North is the likely contract.

Thoughts on the play

Against 3♦ East will lead the ♣Q trapping South's king but with the ♠A onside and both trumps and spades breaking evenly, 10 tricks should be made with ease. N-S: 130

Against 2♠ East will again trap the ♣K but this time when West continues the suit, North will have to shorten their trump holding. Because of the danger of a 4-2 trump break, North should play a small spade next – thus keeping a trump on the table. The defence cannot play another club now until dummy's last trump is removed and so West plays the ♠A followed by another club. North must now guess when to ruff in with their last low spade. If they do so immediately and cash the ♠K (which draws both remaining trumps) then 9 tricks and a top, if lucky, result. N-S: 140

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 3	♠ K976 ♥ KQ942 ♦ 4 ♣ A108	Dealer S Vul: E-W	♠ A10843 ♥ A105 ♦ 102 ♣ 965
	♠ QJ52 ♥ 7 ♦ AKJ5 ♣ KJ73		
	♠ J863 ♥ Q98763 ♣ Q42		

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

Thoughts on the bidding

First, I'd like to offer my advice on opening 4-4-4-1 hands. I suggest that you always open 1♦

unless that's your singleton, in which case open 1♣. The alternative method of opening the suit below the singleton means that, when you hold a singleton spade, you could mislead partner as to your major suit length or your shape.

i.e. 1♥ - P - 1♠ - P - ? (2 of a minor promises 5 hearts and INT promises a balanced hand).

If any misleading is forced upon you, it's much better to mislead partner about your length in the minors.

The final contract turns on whether or not East decides to wander into the auction with their 5-card spade suit. There are two reasons why they shouldn't: firstly, partner has a right to expect at least 10 points from a 1-level vulnerable overcall and secondly both the opposition are in an ongoing auction. If East elects to bid 1♠ then North-South will either extract a large penalty or will play in no-trumps. If East passes then South will bid 1♠ which North will raise to 4♠.

Thoughts on the play

Against 4♠ West should lead a heart (through dummy) and East should beat whatever is played from dummy and switch to a diamond. Declarer wins and plays a top trump, West showing out and East winning. If East continues with diamonds, then declarer must do two things in order make the contract (1) stop playing trumps, and (2) play West for the ♣Q. The only clue to play the suit this way is that West, being void in spades, is likely to hold more clubs and therefore more likely to hold any particular card in that suit. N-S: 420

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 4 ♠ QJ92 Dealer W
 ♥ A4 Vul: Both
 ♦ QJ74
 ♣ A97

♠ AK10 ♠ 7643
 ♥ Q85 ♥ J1097
 ♦ A10 ♦ 962
 ♣ J8653 ♣ 102

♠ 85
 ♥ K632
 ♦ K853
 ♣ KQ4

North	East	South	West
			INT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Thoughts on the bidding

It isn't standard for either the North or South hands to compete over the opening INT bid, even when it's a weak one. A double from North or South would generally show 16+ and neither hand has a suitable shape to compete. So, on the face of it, it looks as though East-West have pre-empted their opponents out of their 25-point game. More on that below, however.

If West plays a strong no-trump, however, they'll open 1♣ which North, not quite holding the points for a INT overcall, should pass and South should protect with a bid of INT which generally shows 10-14 points in the pass-out seat. North will wheel out Stayman and raise to 3NT when South shows their hearts.

Thoughts on the play

Against INT by West, North should lead ♠Q (promising the ♠J and either the ace, ten or nine). Declarer wins and, knowing that they don't have enough stoppers to set up the club suit should attack hearts. If West starts with a small heart, North is likely to play small, which will cost the defence a trick as, assuming West's next heart is the queen, will allow declarer to make 2 heart tricks, 2 spade tricks and 1 diamond trick and 5 tricks in all: N/S: 200

3NT by South is doomed on a club lead, provided the defence play on clubs at every chance: E-W: 100

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

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Board 5 ♠ Q1082 Dealer N
 ♥ K7653 Vul: N-S
 ♦ K2
 ♣ Q9

♠ A7543 ♠ KJ
 ♥ 92 ♥ AJ
 ♦ AQ ♦ J6
 ♣ KJ103 ♣ A876542

♠ 96
 ♥ Q1084
 ♦ 10987543
 ♣

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

Thoughts on the bidding

East's choice of rebid is likely to dictate the final contract. It's a choice between 2♣ (showing 12-15 points and 5+ clubs) and 3♣ (showing 15-18 HCP and 6 clubs). It's the seventh club that might sway East to make the more aggressive bid. If they do then West will probably bid to the excellent small slam in clubs. If, instead, East shows the weaker hand then West has a problem: bid 5♣ direct or try for no-trumps. No-trumps is always worth investigating in pairs and the way forward is for West to bid their stopper knowing that they can always revert to game in clubs if East supports diamonds. West could rebid clubs now but that would deny a heart stopper, so instead jumps to 3NT to show top of their range plus a heart stopper.

Thoughts on the play

South is likely to kick-off with ♦10 lead against both a club contract and 3NT. Let's look at club contracts first.

Declarer can see a certain 7 club tricks, 2 spades and 2 red suit aces, so 11 tricks are guaranteed. A diamond finesse might provide a twelfth with the spade suit also offering the

prospect of 1 or 2 extra tricks depending on how the suit breaks. The chances of a 3-3 break are 36% whereas the chances of the diamond finesse are 50%, so that would be a reasonable choice – unlucky. Now back comes a heart. Declarer should win this, draw trumps in two rounds and then play to set up dummy’s fifth spade for a heart discard – 12 tricks and 620 scored. But what if you’d bid 7♣? Now you must choose between the diamond finesse and the spade finesse and so must assess the likelihood of South leading away from the ♦K against a grand slam. If you guess correctly then you’re booked for a top – a bottom otherwise.

The situation is different in no-trumps. The spades cannot be ruffed good and so extra tricks can only come from finessing. Once the diamond finesse loses and the heart is returned, East must simply take their 11 tricks and score of 660

Well done if you bid and made either club slam!

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	2	2	-	-
S	-	2	2	-	-
E	7	-	-	4	6
W	7	-	-	3	6

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Board 6	♠ 987	Dealer E
	♥ A985	Vul: E-W
	♦ Q64	
	♣ K63	
♠ AKJ2	♠ Q106543	
♥ K7	♥ J10	
♦ J98732	♦ 105	
♣ 2	♣ 1075	
	♠	
	♥ Q6432	
	♦ AK	
	♣ AQJ984	

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

3♠ = Splinter (singleton or void spade), agreeing hearts

Thoughts on the bidding

I’m going to assume that the vast majority of Easts will not be opening a weak two on this hand, vulnerable against not. With reversing values it’s clear to open South’s 6-5 hand with 1♣ - a weaker hand should prefer to treat it as a 5-5 hand to show the 5-card major first, as they’d be stumped if they opened 1♣ first and partner made the likely response of 1♠.

West’s diamond suit is definitely not good enough to bid at this vulnerability. If, however, you can’t bear to pass an opening hand with a singleton in the opener’s suit, I can see merit in a 1♠ overcall, which will certainly get partner’s attention and may allow East-West to preempt their opponents out of bidding the slam.

After North shows their heart suit, South’s attention should focus on slam possibilities and the splinter tells partner that they hold the values for game, at least four-card support and no more than one card in the splinter suit. You can always tell a splinter as it’s a jump in a new suit, after partner has shown a suit of their own, one level higher than that needed to force to game (see also Board 8)

South has just 9 points but has only promised 6 and they hold two very important cards – the ♥A and the ♣K – that’s 3 controls in partner’s suits (aces are two, kings are one). North should therefore cue-bid their ♣K.

Cue-bidding partner’s first bid suit always shows the ace or king and never shortage, so now, all that South needs to hear about is the quality of North’s heart suit. 4NT is the ace ask and North shows their ace (the response will vary depending on the version you play). South must now decide on (a) whether to bid slam (b) which suit to make trumps. Given that North could have more than 4 hearts and could hold ♥J then not bidding slam is against the odds. Choosing the known 9-card major fit over the probable 8-card minor fit is also pretty automatic.

Thoughts on the play

If West had overcalled in diamonds they’d be regretting it now as they really don’t want that suit led (which is one of the main reasons for not overcalling poor suits). As it happens, it’s of no consequence what lead East makes here. It all comes down to the heart position and there is simply no sensible option for declarer

other than to play the ace followed by low to the queen. N-S: 980

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 7 ♠ 9873 Dealer S
 ♥ AQ9 Vul: Both
 ♦ AJ82
 ♣ A5

♠ K6542	♠ AQ10
♥ 6	♥ K1087
♦ 1054	♦ KQ7
♣ KQ103	♣ 972

♠ J
 ♥ J5432
 ♦ 963
 ♣ J864

North	East	South	West
1♠	INT	Pass	Pass
Pass	Pass	Pass	2NT

Thoughts on the bidding

Assuming a weak no-trump, North must decide which suit to open. Some would say the spade suit is too weak and that a 1♦ opening here is better. I disagree for two reasons. First, partner may have 4 spades and 4+ hearts and when you rebid INT over the 1♥ response you deny 4 spades. The alternative of bidding 1♠ over 1♥ is almost worse as it shows a non-balanced hand, usually 5+ diamonds and 4+ spades but possibly 4-1-4-4. Second, you may well deter spade leads for a few rounds.

Unlike North's hand in Board 4, East's 14-count is worth an overcall. You can always add value when your honour cards are sitting over a bidder of the suit. In addition, you hold a couple of tens that were missing from the hand in Board 4. Now a INT overcall (15-17) is a reasonable action. Unfortunately for East/West, 1♠ is likely to go down at least two and possibly four down, so 120 or even 150 won't be a good score.

If, however, North opens 1♦ and East bids INT then West will transfer and then invite with

2NT and West may well like their shape enough to push to 4♠ even when East subsequently shows a minimum with 3 spades by moving 2NT out to 3♠.

If North opens with a strong INT, that is likely to be the contract

Thoughts on the play

By far the most interesting play problem is INT by North. The general rule of thumb is 4th highest of your longest and strongest but with such a balanced hand with no 5-card suit there's much to be said for leading from a small 3+ card holding (a passive defence). On the ♣7 lead dummy covers with the ♣8 and West plays the ♣10 which forces the Ace (it costs a trick in clubs to duck). The best hope for tricks is the heart suit, so the ace and queen of hearts follow. Taking the queen guarantees East two heart tricks but will give declarer an entry to dummy. I suspect that the first consideration will outweigh the second for most. Now what? Well, what did partner discard? If it was a discouraging small diamond then East is in a dilemma. The worry is: did North start with ♥A-Q-x and ♣A-K-x-x? With that holding, North still has room for either the ♦A or ♠K. Nothing looks attractive. For those unfamiliar with Italian discards (aka odds and evens) this is a most suitable candidate. It works like this: if you throw an odd card, you'd like a switch to the suit discarded; if you throw a low, even card you wish the lower of the other two suits and if a high, even card then the higher. Playing this method, West should play the ♦4 to ask for a switch to clubs. If East switches to a ♣9, as requested, West wins with the queen and returns their 4th highest spade. The fourth highest promises an honour, so East should play their two top spades but mustn't play the ten yet. If they do, then this will be the 4-card ending:

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

West leads their last spade and North discards a diamond. What is East to discard? If they let go a heart, then dummy's hearts become winners and if they let go a diamond then declarer's diamonds are good.

The solution is to break up the squeeze by playing a top heart when in with the ♠Q.

I suspect that many Norths will escape with more than the 4 tricks they are entitled to, as the hand is a defensive minefield for East-West.

After an opening by North, the play in both spades and no-trumps is clear-cut and with South fortunately holding the only cards that on the bidding they could hold that matter (i.e. the two black jacks), ten tricks are likely in spades, with nine in no-trumps.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 8

	♠ 7	Dealer W
	♥ KQ9853	Vul: None
	♦ Q	
	♣ A10765	
♠	KJ5	♠ AQ62
♥	KI0432	♥ J107
♦	KQ984	♦ A9765
♣		♣ J
	♠ 109843	
	♥ A642	
	♦ J8	
	♣ 32	

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

*2NT = Ghestem/Michaels showing the lower two suits, clubs and hearts plus, I suggest, opening values

*4♣ = Splinter, forcing to game in diamonds and showing shortage in clubs

Thoughts on the bidding

North's bid over West's opening will depend on their methods. If playing Ghestem or

Michaels cue bids, they bid as above. Otherwise, North simply overcalls 1♥.

East's mind should turn immediately to a possible slam – don't forget that, by not opening INT, we know partner will either be non-balanced or 15+ (just one of the many reasons why I prefer weak and four). The best way forward to is make a splinter bid (see also Board 6). Many online sources describe a splinter as a double jump in a new suit and while that's often the case, it isn't entirely accurate. More precisely, as shown here, it's a jump one level higher than necessary to create a game force. Here it's only a single jump because a bid of 3♣ over 2NT (showing a club stopper and asking if partner can bid no-trumps with a heart stopper) is game forcing. Another example would be 1♠-2♥(overcall)-4♣/4♦.

With 4-card support, South should show it. If they simply pass, then West should bid 4♥, showing a heart control and slam interest. Otherwise, West bids 4♠ to show their spade control. This bid is only available to those that play Italian cue bids which initially show either first (ace or void) or second round (king or singleton) control. Otherwise, West must pass. Either way, with a 6-5 shape, North should bid again, simply to take bidding space away from East (whom they know to be investigating slam and prepared to go to game in diamonds). This will make it really difficult for East to bid the slam. If North passes, however, East should make another try with a control showing bid of 4♠ and now it's West who should bid the slam. It'll be a matter of whether or not North believes their opponents or not as to whether they make the sacrifice in 6♥.

Thoughts on the play

6♥ by South provides opportunities for brilliance. If West leads a diamond, East should win and, brilliance one, switch to a heart, without cashing the ♠A first. This is to cut down on ruffs (a small one in case partner holds the queen). This should be won by dummy and a heart led to the ace. Now for the declarer's chance to shine. South plays the ♦J and when West covers, they throw dummy's spade. West cannot lead another trump and so South can cross-ruff and goes only 3 light. This will be better than losing a slam score but may equal those who weren't pushed that high. The same contract by North will go 4 off if East

leads trumps whenever they have the lead or if declarer draws trumps. E-W: 500

6♦ by West shouldn't cause declarer any problem because the trump suit behaves. E-W: 920

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 9 ♠ K54 Dealer N
 ♥ A76 Vul: E-W
 ♦ J1084
 ♣ K108

♠ Q10	♠ 873
♥ 1082	♥ QJ4
♦ AK32	♦ Q765
♣ 9643	♣ Q75

♠ AJ962
 ♥ K953
 ♦ 9
 ♣ AJ2

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

Thoughts on the bidding

The above is an auction for 4-card major bidders only. 5-card major bidders will have other methods for making a 3-card invitational raise. North's response to the opening could just as well be 2NT, if you play that as natural. The sequence then remains the same, only one level higher. Note that a two-of-a-minor response doesn't promise a 5-card suit; simply enough strength to go to game opposite a 16+ balanced hand.

Thoughts on the play

West is likely to start with one of their top diamonds. Depending on their methods, East will either show count or attitude. Firstly, what should their attitude be? If West started with either three or four diamonds then you want to discourage a top-card continuation for fear of setting up a diamond trick in dummy. If West started with only two then your queen isn't of

any value now. In any event, discourage. West will view a standard count signal as a warning; particularly when the nine falls from South. The only switch that keeps all the defenders' chances alive is a heart and actually, it's the safest, simply because West holds the ♥10-x-x. This means that partner can have, at most, three hearts and, by extension, that declarer can't have a two-way guess in the suit. If they hold ♥K-J-x-x then they'll be finessing your partner for the queen whatever you do.

If West finds this defence, then declarer needs to have their guessing boots on! They have lost a diamond and will certainly lose a heart and maybe two, they'll need to find the ♣Q and try to avoid a spade loser. A daunting hand. What can be done to improve the chances?

The best line is to duck the heart switch, win the second round in dummy, cash the ♠K and take the spade finesse. If this loses then you've given yourself the extra chance that East holds both the 3rd spade and the 4th heart. In which case, declarer wins the return, cashes their remaining top heart and, if West shows out, can ruff the last heart. Notice that you're no worse off even if the last top heart is ruffed, because dummy still has a trump left to deal with the remaining losing heart.

Once the heart suit breaks, however, declarer draws the last trump and may well decide to play West for the ♣Q simply because they have fewer spades are therefore more clubs and therefore more likely to hold any particular card in that suit. Bad luck! E-W: 50

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 10 ♠ Q5 Dealer E
 ♥ K9843 Vul: Both
 ♦ 984
 ♣ J98

♠ J1097 ♠ 8432
 ♥ Q2 ♥ AJ1075
 ♦ Q ♦ 1072
 ♣ AK10543 ♣ 6

♠ AK6
 ♥ 6
 ♦ AKJ653
 ♣ Q72

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

Thoughts on the bidding

Despite West's ♦Q looking like waste-paper, it's a 7-loser hand and just worth a vulnerable 2-level overcall. Neither North nor East know enough to try to improve things but South is clearly worth a rebid; which should end the auction.

Thoughts on the play

I suspect that play won't last long! Two top clubs followed by a club ruff and a certain heart trick is all anyone can/should make. N-S: 110

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 11 ♠ 10 Dealer S
 ♥ K632 Vul: None
 ♦ AQ8752
 ♣ J3

♠ A9 ♠ K87642
 ♥ 8 ♥ A975
 ♦ KJ1043 ♦ 6
 ♣ AK1095 ♣ Q7

♠ QJ53
 ♥ QJ104
 ♦ 9
 ♣ 8642

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

Thoughts on the bidding

East's 2♠ shows a 6-9 point hand with 6+ spades. West's singleton heart makes the hand worth an invitational raise and East is maximum, so should accept.

Thoughts on the play

South has the choice of leading their singleton diamond or a top heart. As they're not guaranteed two trump tricks, leading the singleton is very reasonable. North will beat whichever card is played from dummy and, knowing that both East and South are now void should return a low diamond to try for a trump promotion, choosing the ♦8 to suggest a heart switch (suit-preference).

As it's possible South was being tricky and underled their ♦A, declarer will probably ruff and be over-ruffed. Now a heart switch and things are looking dicey for declarer.

The best line now is to ruff a heart in dummy, cash the ♠A and cross to hand the ♣Q in order to play the ♠K. Unfortunately, this fails to draw trumps, so the club suit must provide two discards. Luckily, the ♣J falls on the 2nd round and 10 tricks are made. The same 10 tricks are made if East fails to ruff a heart but that's a much riskier line as it only works because South holds four clubs. E-W: 420

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

following the transfer with a bid of 4♦ is 100% forcing.

Thoughts on the play

3NT has little chance, even on a heart lead. 2NT should always make with declarer winning 1 spade, 2 hearts, 4 diamonds and a club.

If West plays in 3♠ then Deep Finesse says that goes two off. This requires a club lead, which is probable. Declarer runs this to their K-Q (discarding a heart from dummy), South winning and switching to heart which declarer wins and discards dummy's last heart on a top club. Now a trump is led and North must find an inspired defence. They must rise with the ace and, rather than try to give partner a trump promotion by playing the ♥K, they must switch to a diamond. This allows South to win and push through another club, which North ruffs with the jack, promoting three more trumps for partner. I suspect not many will find this defence at the table.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 14 ♠ QJ982 Dealer E
 ♥ Q Vul: None
 ♦ 105
 ♣ K10965

♠ AK74	♠ 1053
♥ A97	♥ J5
♦ AJ84	♦ 632
♣ 42	♣ AJ873

♠ 6
 ♥ K1086432
 ♦ KQ97
 ♣ Q

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

Thoughts on the bidding

South should apply the Rule of 20 when deciding what to open. This rule states that you should add the number of high-card points

(HCPs) to the number of cards in your two longest suits. If the total comes to at least twenty you can open the bidding at the 1-level. South has 11 cards in the red suits plus 10 points, so passes the test.

West has a choice: they can show their shape and count by overcalling INT. Notice that you don't need a stopper in every suit to make this overcall - you just need a stopper in the suit opened - or they can make a takeout double, which is particularly attractive holding 4 of the other major. The trouble with this is that you'd rather play in INT if partner responds with 2♣.

Whatever West does, South has far too much playing strength to defend, so rebids hearts, which should buy the contract.

If North wanders into the auction at any stage they'll almost certainly push South still higher in hearts. It's worth pointing out that, if North bids a new suit at the 2-level over the INT overcall, then it shows a weak hand with a 6+ suit. This is based on reasonable assumption that they'd double with 9+ points and wouldn't go to the 2-level with just a 5-card suit knowing there's a big hand against them.

If South elects to pre-empt instead of opening 1♥ then West should bid 2NT over 2♥ and, with some trepidation, 3NT over 3♥, which North should double for penalties.

Thoughts on the play

West may well choose a top spade as their lead against 2♥ and East will discourage. No switch looks very appealing, so many will opt for the ♣4. East will need to be on the ball now. A low card lead usually suggests an honour but East must not play the jack when dummy plays low. Instead, they should inspect the pips carefully. There are two low cards missing and partner has led the highest one – this denies an honour, so East should rise with the ace. Partner overcalled INT, so they hold two clubs and East should return a diamond.

The only way the declarer can fail to make 8 tricks is if they don't use dummy's ♦10 to guarantee 2 diamond tricks. In other words, the first two diamonds that they play are the king and queen. It's fine to play one of those on the first round but they must play a small one on the second round – deliberately losing to the jack but setting up the nine. N-S: 110

If West plays in no-trumps, then they should duck the ♥Q lead, win the likely ♠Q switch, lead a spade to the ten and subsequently use dummy's ♣A to get access to dummy in order to lead a diamond. After which North can be thrown in whenever necessary in order to garner 8 tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 15 ♠ AK103 Dealer S
 ♥ A104 Vul: N-S
 ♦ J832
 ♣ 106

♠ 854		♠ Q92
♥ 76		♥ J853
♦ Q107		♦ A9
♣ QJ984		♣ 7532
	♠ J76	
	♥ KQ92	
	♦ K654	
	♣ AK	

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

Thoughts on the bidding

Playing weak and four, South opens with their 4-card major and rebids no-trumps. North, with enough to push to game bids 3♥ to show 3-card support and South denies 5 hearts but shows 3 spades and North bids 3NT to deny 5 spades.

Strong no-trumpers will go through a Stayman sequence before ending in 3NT.

Thoughts on the play

The ♣Q seems a normal choice of lead and declarer is immediately under pressure. They can see that they must make 9 tricks whilst only losing the lead once. There are 2 spades, 3 hearts, 0 diamonds and 2 clubs on top – 7 tricks only. Happily, there are chances in both majors and it looks right to take an immediate spade

finesse. Don't lead the jack as West may hold a singleton or doubleton queen; small to the ♠10 is best. East wins and back comes the dreaded club.

South wins and must decide how best to play the heart suit. It's too risky to take a finesse, after all, the suit may be 3-3. If, however, you simply play the ace followed by the king and queen then you'll be kicking yourself if West shows out on the second round because you could have taken the finesse against East. To give yourself this extra chance, the correct play is to lead a top heart from hand, dropping dummy's ten. Now small to the ace. If West shows out then the marked finesse is taken.

Unfortunately, nothing good happens – unless, that is, both opponents showed an even number of cards on the first two heart tricks. If so, I'd believe them and finesse – it's unusual for defenders to deliberately lie in their carding and doubly so for both to do so.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 16 ♠ 9 Dealer W
 ♥ KQJ972 Vul: E-W
 ♦ A104
 ♣ J72

♠ 1083		♠ AQ74
♥ 543		♥ 6
♦ 65		♦ QJ932
♣ AQ984		♣ K105
	♠ KJ652	
	♥ A108	
	♦ K87	
	♣ 63	

North	East	South	West
1♥	Dbf	Redbl	2♣
2♥	Pass	3♥	Pass
4♥	All Pass		

Thoughts on the bidding

The excellent heart suit makes the North hand a clear-cut 1-level opening and East has an equally clear-cut takeout double. South's

redouble promises two things: one, at least 10 points and two, that they'll make another bid if partner's next bid is pass.

West bids their five-card club suit. I recommend that, without a five-card suit, West should pass and allow partner to show theirs, if they hold one. By not passing now, North shows a distributional hand that's weak in high-card points.

This sequence increases the value of South's hand as their two kings are now both likely to be tricks, so should invite game.

North should accept, because partner already knows they're weak, the trumps are excellent and none of the hand's high value cards are vulnerable to being beaten by East.

Thoughts on the play

Just because West bid clubs doesn't mean that they hold an honour in the suit, so East should prefer a top diamond lead.

Declarer needs to take just a little bit of care now. Firstly, they mustn't draw trumps! They have two jobs to do first (1) get rid of their losing diamond (2) ruff their losing club. As the latter requires them to lose the lead twice, they must deal with the losing diamond first by leading a spade at trick two.

East hops up with the ace and, although unlikely at pairs, the best they can do is to switch to a trump. Declarer wins in dummy and leads a club. If West wins and continues hearts then declarer wins in dummy and leads another club. Best defence would seem to be for West to play their ♣Q and draw dummy's last trump but South can ruff a spade and play all their trumps to squeeze East in three suits. N-S: 620

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 17 ♠ A96 Dealer N
 ♥ 974 Vul: None
 ♦ J1054
 ♣ J84

♠ 10875	♠ KQ3
♥ Q1053	♥ J862
♦ Q	♦ AK987
♣ AKQ5	♣ 10

♠ J42
 ♥ AK
 ♦ 632
 ♣ 97632

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

Thoughts on the bidding

The above is pretty standard Acoll sequence. East only has the high cards for a 2♥ raise but should add an extra 2 points for the singleton.

Thoughts on the play

Holding 4 cards in dummy's first bid suit suggests that a trump lead by North is best. South wins and seeing the singleton club in dummy will probably see the merit in drawing another round of trumps before exiting with a club.

Because declarer holds the ♦Q, this line of defence isn't worrying (but then no defence is). Declarer can now see 3 trump tricks (that includes two ruffs), 3 diamond tricks, 3 club tricks and, eventually, 1 spade trick. The only realistic hope for overtricks is if the ♦J and ♦10 fall on the first three diamond tricks. This is actually a 10% chance and well worth risking the 0.5% chance that the diamonds are 7-0. So, win the club and cash the ♦Q then use dummy's ♥J to draw the last trump and to get the lead into dummy to play the diamonds. When the suit doesn't behave as hoped, force out the ♠A and claim. E-W: 420

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 18 ♠ 102 Dealer E
 ♥ Q7 Vul: N-S
 ♦ AK5
 ♣ AQ6542

♠ J43 ♠ KQ987
 ♥ J8654 ♥ 109
 ♦ Q4 ♦ 1076
 ♣ J73 ♣ 1098

♠ A65
 ♥ AK32
 ♦ J9832
 ♣ K

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

*2♠ = fourth suit forcing

Thoughts on the bidding

The first three bids are pretty standard and whether or not you play two over one as game forcing, North-South are in a game-forcing auction at this stage. North has several choices over 2♥: they could a) bid 3♣ to show their 6-card club suit, b) support partner's diamonds, or c) bid the fourth suit to discover more about partner's hand.

My choice is the fourth suit, simply because the more information you get, the better. When partner bids 2NT, showing a spade stopper, 4-card major players will know partner has 5 diamonds, as the only time opener will prefer to open a minor when 4-4 major-minor is when they have a 4-4-4-1 shape. By not raising 2♠ to 3♠, South denies that hand.

Now North can show their diamond support and slam interest.

South's diamond suit is woeful and their club support isn't great either so I can't see South doing anything other than reverting to 3NT.

North is strong enough to make one more try and so shows their 6-card club suit. With ♣K-x South would bid 6♣ in a heartbeat but should show restraint with this holding and simply rebid 4NT. Whenever a player has suggested 3NT as the game contract and partner makes

a stab at a minor suit slam, like this, then bidding 4NT is a sign-off.

Thoughts on the play

With the ♦Q falling in two rounds, no possible losing finesse options and with clubs splitting no worse than 4-2, declarer is going to make 13 tricks in either no-trumps or a minor suit contract.

The small slam is a much better bet, though by no means a certainty. Well done if you bid one.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	7	7	4	3	7
S	7	7	4	3	7
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 19 ♠ KJ643 Dealer S
 ♥ 97 Vul: E-W
 ♦ A1074
 ♣ 65

♠ 10 ♠ A92
 ♥ AK2 ♥ QJ108
 ♦ KQ86 ♦ 2
 ♣ J9874 ♣ KQ1032

♠ Q875
 ♥ 6543
 ♦ J953
 ♣ A

North	East	South	West
1♠	Dbf	Pass	1♣
Pass	5♣	3♠	Pass
		All Pass	

Thoughts on the bidding

A non-vulnerable overcall at the 1-level only promises 8 points, so North's is sound.

Those Easts playing 4-card suits won't want to go straight to 5♣ - it's much better to go slowly; the takeout double promises 4 hearts and enough points to go to the 2-level. Of course, those playing short club systems have little choice but to make the takeout double.

The modern method is for a weak, non-vulnerable, partner of an overcaller to pre-

empt with 4-card support. If they have the values to invite, they cue-bid instead.

Neither West nor North has anything to spare, so pass and so it's down to East to pick a contract. Firstly, a word for short club system players. The bidding so far strongly suggests that partner holds a singleton spade, which means that they aren't a balanced hand which means that they really do have a club suit. So, all players are faced with the same problem. As the spade suit isn't their only concern, I think most will look to play in clubs rather than a risky 3NT. The bidding strongly suggests that West has a singleton spade and with your singleton diamond, slam could well be on (swap West's \heartsuit K-Q for the ace and it is). Unfortunately, for bidders of this hand, most players only play standard Blackwood or standard Roman Keycard Blackwood as their ace-asking convention, which means that if West only holds one of the aces which you need then partner's response of \heartsuit 5 takes you too high. Also unfortunately, bidding \clubsuit 4 next is non-forcing as you could simply be competing against \spadesuit 3. The only players who get to make an ace-asking enquiry are those who play 1430 Roman Keycard Blackwood (unless, that is, partner has no aces!) as they're able to pass the \clubsuit 5 response. I'm not recommending 1430 RKCB in the minors by the way – it just happens to work well when you're looking for two or three keycards in clubs but not if you're looking for just one. I prefer to play 1430 for the majors but 3041 for the minors.

Thoughts on the play

Unless North underleads the \heartsuit A or holds it up for some improbable reason, all normal leads and plays seem to lead to precisely 11 tricks. E-W: 600

Makeable Contracts

	\clubsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
	=	=	=	=
N	-	1	-	-
S	-	1	-	-
E	5	-	4	1
W	5	-	4	1

=====

Board 20 \spadesuit KQ104 Dealer W
 \heartsuit J103 Vul: Both
 \diamondsuit 10962
 \clubsuit 54

\spadesuit 653	\spadesuit J2
\heartsuit K954	\heartsuit Q7
\diamondsuit 5	\diamondsuit AK84
\clubsuit AK1076	\clubsuit QJ983
\spadesuit A987	
\heartsuit A862	
\diamondsuit QJ73	
\clubsuit 2	

North	East	South	West
Pass	1 \clubsuit	Dbl	Pass
1 \spadesuit	Pass	2 \spadesuit	1 \heartsuit
All Pass			3 \clubsuit

Thoughts on the bidding

It's important within any partnership to have a reasonable idea what's the minimum that partner holds when they bid. Fortunately, in the modern game, there is an almost universal agreement on what constitutes a takeout double. The bidder is either too strong to make an immediate overall (16+, or more by agreement) or they'll have

- shortage in the suit opened
- at least one 4- card major
- at least one other 4- card suit
- if only two 4- card suits then at least three cards in the third suit
- at least 13 points. These points can be a mixture of high-card points and shortage points.

Here South has 11 HCP but can add shortage points as follows: 1 for a doubleton, 2 for a singleton and 3 for a void

West may well elect to bid 1 \heartsuit now. Those playing a short club system almost certainly will; those who know they have a club fit may feel torn but partner may also have 4 hearts, which is worth exploring in pairs but only because you have the values to compete to 3 \clubsuit , otherwise you might be letting North in with a cheap bid. As indeed is the case as North can now bid 1 \spadesuit to show their 6-7 points and spade suit, which East should pass. But why?

The guiding principle for weak no-trump openers in these situations is that to bid again either shows extra length or extra strength. Weak no-trumpers know that to pass here suggests that opener isn't strong and so isn't balanced or else why not open 1NT. Thus a 5-card club suit doesn't qualify as extra length. Strong no-trump players have no such inference and so must rebid their clubs.

South may well elect to create a barrage and raise partner's spades and West can now make the invitational bid of 3♣ which East passes.

Thoughts on the play

As with Board 19, unless players think they're playing Misère I cannot imagine any declarer making more or fewer than 10 tricks. E-W: 130

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 21	♠ K863	Dealer N	
	♥ Q1063	Vul: N-S	
	♦ 10987		
	♣ 6		
♠ 972		♠ AQJ	
♥ A975		♥ K	
♦ AJ65		♦ KQ42	
♣ J8		♣ A5432	
	♠ 1054		
	♥ J842		
	♦ 3		
	♣ KQ1097		
North	East	South	West
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	2♠	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

Thoughts on the bidding

The 1♦ response is what I expect 4-card major players to make as they play a natural 1♣ opening and so responder bids their suits up the line. Short club openers are taught to bid their major first because opener's next rebid, when 12-14, should be 1NT, irrespective of their major suit holding.

As it happens, responding 1♥ simplifies East's rebid considerably and I imagine most pairs will bid 3NT.

Those East's facing a 1♦ response will feel most uncomfortable. They can't support diamonds below 3NT without allowing partner to pass (it's not forcing); they don't want bid past 3NT for fear of missing the best game; and they don't want to bid 3NT with a singleton heart.

One way out is to show your strength and spade stoppers by making a jump-shift in spades. This is game forcing but carries the risk that partner may raise you to game in spades. If that happens, of course, you go back to diamonds. Partner will wonder what's going on but they'll respect your decision.

Thoughts on the play

If East is the declarer, South is likely to lead the ♣K and note dummy's doubleton jack with delight. Declarer will duck and South continues with the queen. North will want to keep four cards in both red suits in order to match dummy's holding and so will throw a spade.

Despite the combined holding of 29 points, declarer can only count 8 tricks - 1 spade trick, 2 hearts, 4 diamonds and 1 club. This means they're going to need the ♠K to be with North. If it needs to be so, they should play for it to be so and make sure that they make the 10 tricks that will follow if it is so.

Declarer wins the club, crosses to one of dummy's diamond honours, finesses the spade and holds their breath. It holds. So, cash the ♥K, cross back to dummy with the other diamond honour, cash the ♥A before taking the spade finesse again. Having created so many heart tricks for the opposition, East may feel a moment of doubt taking the spade finesse again - what if South had ducked before? But it's so extremely unlikely that South would refuse to beat the contract when they had the chance that the extra trick is definitely worth the risk.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 22	♠ A952	Dealer E	
	♥ J64	Vul: E-W	
	♦ K105		
	♣ Q92		
♠ 1083		♠ KQ6	
♥ 1075		♥	
♦ QJ63		♦ A872	
♣ J85		♣ AK10743	
	♠ J74		
	♥ AKQ9832		
	♦ 94		
	♣ 6		
North	East	South	West
	1♣	4♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	5♦
All Pass			

Thoughts on the bidding

When non-vulnerable vs vulnerable one can afford to pre-empt to a level 3 tricks more than you hold in your hand (Rule of 500 – see Board 13). South can reasonably expect to make 7 tricks, so can bid for 10.

West has four options: (1) Pass, (2) Double for takeout, (3) bid 4NT for the minors, or (4) bid 5♣. And any of those could be best. My choice would be double, simply because I play negative doubles and partner isn't able to double for penalties, so with short hearts I must, enabling partner to convert when holding a natural penalty double.

West won't like this development at all but has little choice but to do as asked and so bids their only 4-card suit.

Thoughts on the play

Let's look at 5♦ first. North will doubtless lead a heart, which is ruffed in dummy. The contract looks to have chances if the trumps are 3-2 and the club suit can be brought in without loss. First the trump suit must be tackled. If declarer plays the ace and another, North should win and play another heart, forcing dummy to ruff with their last trump and putting the lead in dummy. Now, not only does declarer have to lose the ♣Q but they're going to suffer a two trick loss when South gets in with the third round of hearts and promotes North's ♦10 when they lead a 4th round.

As long as North keeps leading hearts whenever they're in, the contract is doomed to fail and the only way to go just one off is to give up on any chance of making (play a small trump

off dummy at trick two and ruff the second heart with the ace in order to come to dummy to take the club finesse) – N-S: 200

4♥ by South has 8 tricks on top and there are chances in spades and diamonds and endplays for more. The 5♣ lead gives East a problem. It's the lowest of the missing clubs, so is it from J-x-x-(x) or a singleton. If the former than going in with the ten allows them to exit with a second top club. But what if East decides not to take any risk and plays the ♣K? What now? Unless they underlead their ♦A next, 4♥ can/should make! Let's say they try cashing the other top club. That gets ruffed, declarer draws trumps and leads a small diamond to the ♦K10x covering West's honour card. East can exit with a club but declarer discards a spade and then plays a small diamond off table towards their nine; giving them another spade discard. A spade switch at trick two is no better as now declarer's ♠J becomes a trick, 'en passant', as does dummy's 4th spade.

East's only hope, on a club lead is to play declarer to be short in clubs and to play the ten.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 23	♠ 8	Dealer S	
	♥ 109	Vul: Both	
	♦ AJ976542		
	♣ K2		
♠ 96532		♠ QJ4	
♥ AQJ8763		♥ K4	
♦ 8		♦ 8	
♣ 8		♣ AQJ7654	
	♠ AK107		
	♥ 52		
	♦ KQ103		
	♣ 1093		
North	East	South	West
		INT	2♥
2NT*	3♣	Pass	3♥
4♦	4♥	All Pass	

2NT – Lebensohl, asking partner to bid 3♣ over which North intends to bid 3♦ to play

Thoughts on the bidding

Theoretically, if they have the methods, West could show both majors but there is such a disparity between the quality of the two suits that they're better off just showing hearts.

Lebensohl is a useful and very popular convention. It mainly applies over partner's INT opening or overcall and, amongst other things, helps differentiate between a game forcing 3♦ and a competitive one. An immediate 3♦ bid would be game-forcing but by going via 2NT it's simply competitive. There's much more to the system but too much to go into here.

With partner making a vulnerable overcall at the 2-level, East clearly must bid. West has only promised 5 hearts, so a new suit, which is forcing, should help uncover the best contract.

South has no idea which suit North has and so will pass.

West hearts are clearly worth rebidding.

Holding an 8-card suit and a possible trick, though now less likely, in clubs, North will probably bid again. Firstly because, with the right cards opposite, 5♦ might make; second because it might be a profitable sacrifice against 4♥ and third, because it might buy the contract. The downside is that you might push the opponents to 4♥ and you won't know, without partner's support, whether to sacrifice or not.

The auction will be entirely different for those playing strong and five. South will open 1♦, West will probably bid 3♥ as they can reasonably count 6 heart tricks plus 1 spade trick and, when vulnerable can bid for two tricks more that they can make themselves (Rule of 500 – see Board 13). Knowing that the opponents are very short of diamonds tells North that their hand will offer very little in defence. There's no point bidding 4♦ as that's forcing, so jump to 5♦ and pass the problem to the opposition. On this auction, there's a good chance that North will get to play here undoubled.

Thoughts on the play

If North leads their singleton spade against 4♥, South will most likely win and switch to a

diamond. South will make their 3 spade tricks but that's it. E-W: 620

In the unlikely event that South gives partner a ruff, declarer has to take care to use dummy's ♥K to ruff the 4th round of spades.

Against 5♦, West should lead the singleton club. East should take their two club tricks before switching to hearts – two down. E-W: 200 or 500 if doubled

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 24 ♠ Q985 Dealer W
 ♥ A54 Vul: None
 ♦ 654
 ♣ 1073

♠ 632	♠ K4
♥ K963	♥ QJ108
♦ 93	♦ 10872
♣ K852	♣ J64

♠ AJ107
♥ 72
♦ AKQJ
♣ AQ9

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

Thoughts on the bidding

South's second bid will vary depending on what North-South play. If it's Stayman, it'll go as above. If it's either Puppet or Muppet Stayman, South will rebid 3♦ to deny a five-card major but promise a four-card major. North will then bid 3♥ to show four spades, allowing the big hand to play the contract.

Thoughts on the play

West should choose to lead a pointy suit rather than lead away from either of their unsupported kings in the roundy suits. My preference would be a trump lead, as leading from doubletons is more likely to help declarer in that suit.

That said, if West doesn't instigate the finesse in trumps for declarer there's an interesting position that's worth mentioning. Let's say West leads a diamond. South wins and crosses to dummy with the ♥A. Which spade should declarer play from dummy? If they play the queen then the correct card to play from hand is the jack. This allows the lead to be kept in dummy just in case the spades are 4-1. Alternatively, lead one of the lower value spades and finesse, then lead the queen.

With the trumps breaking and the club finesse wrong that's 11 tricks. 12 if West made an aggressive club lead.

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

=====

Board 25	♠ QJ106	Dealer N
	♥ A75	Vul: E-W
	♦ 84	
	♣ AJ83	
♠ 9732		♠ K8
♥ 4		♥ KQ10832
♦ KQ9		♦ 7632
♣ KQ942		♣ 6
	♠ A54	
	♥ J96	
	♦ AJ105	
	♣ 1075	

North	East	South	West
INT	2♥	All Pass	

Thoughts on the bidding

The final contract will, of course, depend on the system being played and the players' attitude to risk.

Firstly, if North opens a weak no-trump, not all Easts will overcall because a 2-level vulnerable overcall promises partner 13+ points. But the 6-4 shape and the major suit are very tempting.

Now it's South's turn. What would you bid with a flat 10 count with no stopper, knowing that partner has at most 14 points. If double would just show points then that'd be great but

most now use that bid as takeout. 2NT is an option, hoping that partner has something in hearts but you won't be happy if partner raises you to game. I'd probably pass with the South hand and hope that we can collect 200 – a bad result for me.

If, however, North opens 1♣ East will overcall either 1♥ or, if playing weak jump overcalls, 2♥ and South is in the same boat. Over a 1♥ overcall, then a takeout double seems reasonable but what to bid when partner responds 1♠, showing a minimum hand with 4 spades? Again, probably pass.

So, the final contracts will be a mixture of hearts, spades and no-trumps, at differing levels.

Thoughts on the play

Against 2♥, the best defence is double-dummy and won't be found (leading the ♦J and thus enabling North to ruff the 3rd round of the suit). Otherwise, 6 tricks are the best that North-South can do. N-S: 100

Against no-trumps, East will doubtless lead a top heart, thus donating an extra trick. Nine tricks are available but only if declarer plays on clubs when in dummy, having beaten East's ♠K. This is the correct play because declarer wants to exhaust East of winners before tackling the diamond suit, as the finesses in that suit go into the safe hand. N-S: 150

Nine tricks are also likely to come to North-Souths playing in spades. Even if North takes the diamond finesse first, West is endplayed. Their best hope is to play a small club away from the K-Q. Declarer should make use of dummy's ♣10 by playing small. N-S: 140

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

=====

Board 26 ♠ AKQ7 Dealer E
 ♥ AQ4 Vul: Both
 ♦ 10954
 ♣ Q8

♠ 1082 ♠ 53
 ♥ K3 ♥ J98752
 ♦ KQJ ♦ A72
 ♣ AKJ54 ♣ 76

♠ J964
 ♥ 106
 ♦ 863
 ♣ 10932

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

Thoughts on the bidding

Again, we can expect to see different auctions depending on the system being played. Weak no-trumpers will open 1♣ and North will want to get into the auction. Even over a potentially short club opening a 1NT overcall should show at least one club stopper, so most will select a takeout double.

East has only five points but can add two more for a 6-card suit and so bids 1♥. What should West rebid? They have enough points to bid 2NT but they don't have a spade stopper. Jumping in clubs would give partner a distorted picture of the hand. My choice would be between 2NT and a 2♦ reverse to show my stoppers and strength. I think I'd prefer 2NT as it correctly shows my point range and my shape. It's also likely that West only has 4 spades, because with five it's more usual to bid them. So losing the first four tricks won't necessarily be a problem.

Over either bid from West, North should back off and East will rebid their hearts, at the lowest level available, to show their 6-card suit and weakness.

Over a strong 1NT opening, North will probably double, if that shows their strength, otherwise they should pass. Whatever North does, East will take-out into hearts.

Thoughts on the play

North will have no problem leading spades against 2♥, if played by West. If played by East, South's choices will be between a club lead or with the above auction, a spade lead.

Let's say that the defence take the first 2 spade tricks and try to take a third. Declarer ruffs and plays a heart to the king and ace. North exits in diamonds and declarer wins in dummy and plays a second heart. North, of course, plays small without hesitation. What does declarer play? Firstly, look at the possibilities. North could have started with A-Q-10-4 but then there's no escaping 3 heart losers. They could have started with A-4 but that would also mean 3 losers. So, the choice is between North starting with A-Q-4 and A-10-4. North has shown up with 13 points already so far. If they doubled 1NT for penalties then playing the jack is clearcut, otherwise this looks like a straight 50-50 guess. Bad luck if you guessed wrong.

On a club lead, declarer can improve their chances. Win the lead and play off the other top club. When the queen falls, play the jack. North must ruff or you'll discard a spade. Now there'll be no guess on the second round of hearts.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 27 ♠ 986 Dealer S
 ♥ 962 Vul: None
 ♦ A532
 ♣ J94

♠ 754 ♠ AQ103
 ♥ AQJ7 ♥ 853
 ♦ 109764 ♦ KJ
 ♣ K ♣ A752

♠ KJ2
 ♥ K104
 ♦ Q8
 ♣ Q10863

North	East	South	West
		Pass	Pass
Pass	1NT	All Pass	

Thoughts on the bidding

South doesn't have enough high-card points (HCP) to open but they could add extra value for the 5th club and a bit more for the extra 10.

Against that, they should deduct value for the unsupported $\heartsuit Q$.

Opening INT (weak no-trump) or $1\clubsuit$ (strong no-trump) with this, when non-vulnerable, won't be the worst decision you'll ever make but it'll probably be costly.

That'll be passed around to East, whose hand is very suitable for defending against a no-trump contract and may also just pass.

If South decides to pass, however, it'll be East who plays in INT; either using the auction above or, if strong no-trump, via $1\clubsuit - 1\heartsuit - INT$ (bidding $1\spadesuit$ in this sequence would promise an unbalanced hand with at least 5 clubs).

Thoughts on the play

INT by South: West will lead their 4th highest diamond. South will play low from dummy and East will play the king. Seeing the 8 played by South should encourage West to persist with diamonds and South wins with the queen. A small club follows and West wins with the king and plays a third diamond in order to set up two winners. South has to discard on this trick and, I think I'd discard a small heart in the hope that West has to win the next club too. Unfortunately, it's East who wins the next club. What should East switch to?

Hopefully, West has been able to send a signal. If playing attitude signals, then the $\spadesuit 4$ should discourage a spade switch. If playing odds and evens then the $\spadesuit 4$ asks for a switch to the lower ranking of the other suits. In this case, being an even card, it simply denies interest in spades. If East finds the heart switch, then West can win with the jack and cash their two winning diamonds. This time it's East's turn to signal and if they successfully indicate a spade switch, they can win with the ace and push through another spade for 4 off. E-W: 200

If, however, East doesn't get a signal on the $\clubsuit A$ or doesn't read it correctly and switches to a spade then declarer goes just one light! E-W: 50

INT by East: South will lead their 4th highest club, which is won in dummy. With no bidding to guide them, they may well start by finessing the $\spadesuit 10$, losing to South. With no other suit looking more attractive, I suspect South will persist with their lowest club and East should duck North's jack but win the next club.

A heart finesse follows and wins. Declarer has 2 club tricks, 2 heart tricks and a spade trick, for certain. With the onside and the heart suit breaking, declarer is guaranteed 7 tricks but unless they choose to lead a diamond to the king next then 7 tricks is all they'll make. E-W: 90

So, here's the tip: when faced with two suits, both requiring finesses, go after the one which will give you more tricks if all finesses fail. At trick two, declarer should play a diamond off dummy and, as the cards lie, declarer is likely to get an extra overtrick if they play the king but they'll still do well if they play the jack, which South wins and continues clubs. North plays the jack and, using the rule of 7¹, South refuses to win. North can hold declarer to 9 tricks now back by switching to a spade but is more likely to play another club. This time declarer wins and, running low on entries, tries the heart finesse. Then another diamond off dummy to their king and another heart finesse. The ace of diamonds is now knocked out and declarer ends up with 1 spade, 4 hearts, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs – 10 tricks E-W: 180

¹ The Rule of 7: Subtract from 7 the total number of cards that declarer and dummy hold in the defenders' suit and hold off using your final stopper for that number of rounds. Here declarer has 5 clubs between the two hands. Subtracting 5 from 7 tells declarer not to take their ace on the first two rounds.

¹ The Rule of 7: Subtract from seven the total number of cards that declarer and dummy hold in the defenders' suit and hold off using your final stopper for that number of rounds. Here declarer

has 5 clubs between the two hands. Subtracting from 7 tells declarer not to take their ace on the first two rounds.

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

=====

Board 28	♠ K63	Dealer W
	♥ A7	Vul: N-S
	♦ KJ643	
	♣ Q92	
♠ AQ98742	♠ 5	
♥ KJ53	♥ Q842	
♦	♦ A10972	
♣ A8	♣ J65	
	♠ J10	
	♥ 1096	
	♦ Q85	

	♣ K10743		
North	East	South	West
Pass	INT	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♥	Pass	2♥
All Pass			4♥

Thoughts on the bidding

The first bid of interest is North's pass. They have enough points for a vulnerable 2-level overcall but the diamond suit-quality (see Board 2) isn't up to scratch.

There's another consideration too. The suit is a minor. It's much more attractive to the opponents to make a thin double of two of a minor for penalties because they don't risk giving a game bonus if it makes (two of a major doubled and made costs an extra 500 points, vulnerable).

East should respond INT. This is what I've always taught my students is a slop-bucket bid. All 6+-point hands that aren't strong enough to bid at the 2-level must respond INT – irrespective of their shape. East may even have a void spade.

Which is why West's next bid should be 2♥. Holding 2 spades and 3 hearts, East is expected to give false preference by bidding 2♠. As it happens, East's hand improves with the 2♥ bid and, although the hand is minimum in points, partner knows your range so a raise allows for

partner to have a hand that is strong but wasn't strong enough to force you to game without a fit.

If West simply rebids 2♠ then that is likely to be the final contract.

Thoughts on the play

Against 4♥, North has unsupported honours in every suit. In these circumstances I suggest leading from your longest suit as you're less likely to give away more than one trick, so here, a diamond.

Declarer takes dummy's ace and finesses the spade – this is best hope of setting up the suit without loss because dummy's trumps aren't good enough to take care of the third round. North wins and will probably try a club. West wins and leads a small heart to the queen and a heart back. North wins but with the J10 doubleton the spades are set up and 11 tricks come rolling home.

The play is a little trickier if North continues diamonds when in with the ♠K. Declarer must ruff and, this time, lead a top heart from hand. This allows them, when North wins and plays one of their top diamonds, to ruff with a small trump, play their remaining high trump, ruff a spade in dummy to draw the last trump then return to hand with a club and claim. E-W: 450

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

=====