



The 2024 Charity Challenge Pairs Monday 11th March

We are raising funds for two support Charities again this year -[Mind](#), that wonderful charity supporting people with mental health problems, and [Macmillan Cancer Support](#) ... the work they do is just amazing. Please help us raise lots of lovely funds for them.

Last year you managed to raise over £5,000 each for them which was just amazing and incredibly generous of everyone. If you haven't already done so, please [click here to go to the page](#) that gives you all the information. And if you want to send a cheque or pay by bank transfer please note the change of bank account !

July sees our [Summer Charity pairs](#) for Kidney Research UK and the British Heart Foundation and then of course there will be the [Children in Need Pairs](#) in November – well we couldn't NOT run that could we !

Do join us for some of these events if you can – it's lovely to see lots of people joining in and we love to have your company.

We do hope you have enjoyed yourselves, and you will know by now whether the commentator has got it right! We are very grateful to Mark Horton for writing the Wednesday and Thursday commentaries, to Julian Pottage who penned the one for Tuesday and to Brian Senior for starting and ending the event with the Monday and Friday commentaries.

Thank you so much for joining us and please do so again in future !

Anna and Mark

Board 1	♠ A9653	Dealer N
	♥ 93	Vul: None
	♦ Q1093	
	♣ K10	
♠ 1042		♠ Q8
♥ Q852		♥ A10764
♦ 6		♦ AJ5
♣ AQJ98		♣ 642
	♠ KJ7	
	♥ KJ	
	♦ K8742	
	♣ 753	

contract, its fate may be decided initially by the defence – they can take two diamond ruffs to hold declarer to eight tricks. That won't happen very often, and if the diamond ruffs are not taken declarer is back to the same two guesses as in a diamond contract. Again, any of eight, nine or 10 tricks may be made.

Of course, having said all of that, it is possible that the hand will be passed out! Either East or South may open the bidding, but neither has an automatic opening bid, and if they both pass that will be that.

E/W make 3♥ pretty much routinely, while it is less clear how many tricks will be made if N/S buy it in a spade or diamond contract.

Playing in diamonds, there are guesses in both red suits. Get them both right and declarer has 10 tricks, get them both wrong, and that number reduces to eight. As for a spade

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 2	♠	A9852	Dealer E
	♥	K1083	Vul: N-S
	♦	KQ	
	♣	73	
♠	3		♠ J106
♥	Q76		♥ J9
♦	A54		♦ J10832
♣	J109654		♣ Q82
	♠	KQ74	
	♥	A542	
	♦	976	
	♣	AK	

South has a strong NT and, if that is the opening dictated by system, North will use Stayman then raise the 2♥ response to game. The play is as quick as the bidding, with one loser in each red suit, so making plus one.

If playing Acol with a weak NT, South will open 1♥ and North can use whatever constructive game raise is in the system. Most commonly, that will be some variety of Jacoby 2NT. South rebids 3NT to show the strong NT type and, with a minimum for the 2NT response, North signs off in 4♥, leaving any further move to South. Also being minimum for the auction to date, South will pass, and that will be that.

If South has to open 1♣ or 1♦, North will respond 1♠ and the final contract will be 4♠. It makes no difference, with the same two tricks to be lost. This board should be very flat, with virtually every N/S chalking up +650.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 3	♠	93	Dealer S
	♥	AQ1063	Vul: E-W
	♦	AKQ	
	♣	K54	
♠	52		♠ KQJ10764
♥	K852		♥ 74
♦	985		♦ 1074
♣	J1073		♣ 6
	♠	A8	
	♥	J9	
	♦	J632	

♣ AQ982

N/S can make slam in any denomination other than spades, all of those slams requiring that the king of hearts be onside on the assumption that the opening lead will be a spade after East has bid the suit.

Most Souths will open 1♣ and North respond 1♥. Now East has a book example of a pre-emptive 3♠ overcall, which silences South, temporarily. When 3♠ comes round to North he will double for take-out and South, always with an eye on everyone's favourite contract, will respond 3NT.

Looking at 18 good points, North should not be content with 3NT, and the most likely continuation is an invitational raise to 4NT. Will South accept the invitation? Some will, but probably only a minority. There will be a fair number of +490s, but also +400s where declarer doesn't risk the heart finesse. The big winners will be those who go on to slam, with +990 scoring very well.

If South opens a weak NT, a perfectly reasonable effort, North will transfer to hearts, planning perhaps an invitational jump to 4NT on the next round. Things may become a little murky when East now overcalls 3♠ and that comes back to North. Four No Trump is no longer an option with a small doubleton spades, but a double collects +800 if South leaves it in, while if South takes it out into 3NT North can then raise to 4NT without fear of misunderstanding.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 4	♠	AJ654	Dealer W
	♥	Q98	Vul: Both
	♦	10642	
	♣	J	
♠	Q102	♠	73
♥	J76	♥	K10542
♦	KJ3	♦	75
♣	A1073	♣	Q985
	♠	K98	
	♥	A3	
	♦	AQ98	
	♣	K642	

West is just short of having a weak NT opener, though some will no doubt point to the two tens as justification to open 1NT. I would point at the 4-3-3-3 distribution and uninspiring honour combinations as a balance to the two tens, and suggest that Game All is not the time to stretch to open the bidding.

If West does open 1NT, East will transfer to hearts and there will be a test of N/S's methods – does double show diamonds or a penalty double of 1NT? Either is fine, as long as both partners are on the same wavelength.

It will be hard to take a penalty out of 2♥, which should be down one, but as long as North and South are on the same page, it should be easy enough for them to compete in spades, where nine tricks are comfortable, even with both diamond honours offside. Indeed, some will get to 4♠, and it is not impossible that some will be allowed to make it.

Where West opens 1♣, North can overcall 1♠ and will often get to game.

If West passes, South will open in fourth seat, either a strong NT or 1♣/♦, in the latter case rebidding 1NT. If North tries for game by checking back for a five-three spade fit, it will often be reached.

Plus 620 will score very well as the game should be defeated, and +170 should also be good. With a fair number going down in game, even +140 may score OK for N/S.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 5	♠	AKQ87	Dealer N
	♥	KQJ73	Vul: N-S
	♦	97	
	♣	4	
♠	4	♠	J9532
♥	A9854	♥	10
♦	Q	♦	A1043
♣	987532	♣	KJ6
	♠	106	
	♥	62	
	♦	KJ8652	
	♣	AQ10	

North has a nice concentrated five-five in the majors and will open 1♠. Playing Acol, South responds 2♦ and, in modern style, most Norths will rebid a simple 2♥, forcing for one round. Some will no doubt bid 2NT now on the South cards, but there will still be time to move into NT if North has the extra values required to game, while 2♠ will often be the easier partscore. On this occasion, South bids 2♠, North goes on with 3♥, and South ends the auction with 3NT.

Three No Trump is by no means a trivial make, with none of the suits which offer declarer a source of tricks dividing evenly. However, at double dummy declarer can come to 10 tricks on any lead. Declarer can also do substantially worse than that.

Say that West leads a club to the king and ace. Declarer leads a heart up, which West should duck, followed by the nine of diamonds, which he runs, losing to the bare queen. Back comes a club because, what else is West to do? Declarer wins and crosses to a spade to lead the seven of diamonds to the eight, after which the diamonds can be cleared. East is a bit stuck on winning the ace of diamonds, and this is the counter-balance to all the bad breaks in declarer's suits – there is no good suit for the defence to play on.

While the first couple of tricks look pretty automatic, after that the play can spin off in many different ways, but what we can say is that +630 will be a huge score for N/S, +600 good, and there will be plenty of minus scores, and no other game than 3NT should be successful.

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

=====

Board 6	♠ J109	Dealer E
	♥ 73	Vul: E-W
	♦ KJ3	
	♣ J10964	
♠ 63		♠ AK842
♥ A65		♥ KQJ984
♦ AQ10		♦ 52
♣ AK873		♣
	♠ Q75	
	♥ 102	
	♦ 98764	
	♣ Q52	

It is East's turn to hold a major two-suiter, though not five-five but five-six. East opens 1♥ and rebids 2♠ over West's 2♣ response. That is a reverse and is forcing in all systems, and showing extra values in most. So West can give simple preference to 3♥ to set the suit, and East starts the cuebidding with 3♠.

That is probably all it will take to see West take control and bid 4NT to ask for key-cards. On finding partner with the two missing key-cards and the queen of trumps, West can continue with 5NT, confirming that all the key-cards are present and inviting East to bid the grand slam or, if not confident enough to do that, show any side-suit kings he might have.

Knowing that West has both minor-suit aces to take care of the two low diamonds, and looking at his extra distribution and top spades, East should jump to 7♥, which will end the auction.

The play is simple enough, and declarer soon has all 13 tricks for a handy +2210.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	3	3	7	6	5
W	3	3	7	6	6

=====

Board 7	♠ J109863	Dealer S
	♥ J43	Vul: Both
	♦ AQ	
	♣ 53	
♠ KQ2		♠ 7
♥ 982		♥ KQ6
♦ K107		♦ J98652
♣ J1062		♣ Q98
	♠ A54	
	♥ A1075	
	♦ 43	
	♣ AK74	

South has a strong NT and, if that is what he opens, North can transfer to spades then raise to invite game. Though minimum in high-card terms, South has three-card trump support, all top cards, and a potential ruffing value, so accepts the invitation and bids game.

The bad news regarding the missing trump honours is balanced by the good news in hearts, so 4♠ should be just made for +620.

If playing weak NT, South will open 1♣ or 1♥ and rebid 1NT over the 1♠ response. North can again follow an invitational sequence and South should accept for the same reasons as previously mentioned.

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

=====

Board 8	♠ K8	Dealer W
	♥ J105	Vul: None
	♦ AQ952	
	♣ 962	
♠ J632		♠ Q7
♥ 963		♥ KQ742
♦ 87		♦ K643
♣ 10873		♣ Q4
	♠ A10954	
	♥ A8	
	♦ J10	
	♣ AKJ5	

East opens 1♥ after two passes and South can overcall 1♠. If North responds 2♦ to that,

South can cuebid 2♥ then cuebid again over North's 2♠ response. The second cuebid should really imply something in hearts, so North's jack-ten-other is enough on which to bid 3NT. That gets 3NT played the better way up when East has both heart honours, as is likely given how few high cards are missing, but if South prefers to bid 3NT himself rather than make the second cuebid that is OK as well, with 11 tricks possible from either side of the table.

Four Spades is also made for those who are not sufficiently confident that the hearts are well enough covered, but +620 should score quite poorly with even 10 tricks in 3NT scoring better.

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

=====

Board 9	♠ K106	Dealer N
	♥ 64	Vul: E-W
	♦ 872	
	♣ KJ1072	
♠ 8543		♠ QJ97
♥ 2		♥ AKQ973
♦ AQJ94		♦ K
♣ Q53		♣ A6
	♠ A2	
	♥ J1085	
	♦ 10653	
	♣ 984	

East opens 1♥ and West, not being strong enough to respond 2♦, instead bids 1♠. The East hand has too much potential for a simple raise to game. While a splinter bid on stiff king is not ideal, there really is no sensible alternative to a jump to 4♦ – inventing a club suit and instead jumping to 3♣ will only confuse matters, while 4♣ should also show shortage, not merely a control.

It is not too challenging for West to decline any interest in slam. Four low spades is not a good start, and the expectation that some of the diamond values will be wasted facing shortage seals the deal.

Of course, facing the king, West's diamond values are not as wasted as he might imagine, but there are still only 10 tricks to be had unless North leads a club away from the king, in which case there will be 11.

Plus 650 should score very well, while any negative scores will score very poorly for E/W.

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

=====

Board 10	♠ QJ102	Dealer E
	♥ K62	Vul: Both
	♦ AK98	
	♣ J2	
♠ 7643		♠ AK8
♥ AQJ5		♥ 874
♦ 3		♦ Q762
♣ K1085		♣ A76
	♠ 95	
	♥ 1093	
	♦ J1054	
	♣ Q943	

If East opens a weak NT, West will use Stayman then follow through with 2NT when no major-suit fit comes to light.

The East hand is borderline, containing 13 HCP, but I would see two negative features which would discourage me from going on to game. The first is the 4-3-3-3 distribution, meaning that there is only one possible length trick in the hand, and the second is the complete lack of intermediate cards – a few tens and nines can do wonders for an otherwise mediocre contract.

With the ♥K offside, there are seven east tricks, but the good news is that both high diamonds are onside. If the defence attacks diamonds declarer will usually get a diamond trick to bring the total to eight, while a club lead also costs the defence a trick. After a major-suit lead, things are less comfortable for declarer but, if he is prepared to be brave and play for this friendly diamond layout, he can survive with eight tricks.

Plus 120 should score OK, with minus scores comfortably below average.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 11	♠ J10643	Dealer S
	♥ K9	Vul: None
	♦ 93	
	♣ 6542	
♠ A85		♠ 92
♥ Q87		♥ AJ52
♦ Q84		♦ AKJ105
♣ AJ97		♣ Q8
	♠ KQ7	
	♥ 10643	
	♦ 762	
	♣ K103	

Whether west opens 1NT or opens 1♣ then rebids 1NT, the final contract should always be 3NT played by West. Look carefully at the heart and club positions and we see that declarer in a NT, club or diamond contract can actually make all 13 tricks.

Making all 13 tricks of course requires a lot of luck, including the heart finesse and double club finesse. After the normal spade lead, how many of the finesses will declarer be willing to risk?

Many declarers will duck the spade lead and probably also the continuation, only winning the third round. Now they can imagine that South is out of spades so that the heart finesse is a safe play. When the jack holds, continue with the queen of clubs, a purely psychological play. Most Souths will cover when they hold the king, so if they play low without a flicker declarer goes up with the ace and settles for the 10 tricks he now has – the tenth coming courtesy of the fall of the ♥K under the ace. If South covers the club, declarer has 11 tricks.

So, 13 tricks are possible but not often made, with 11 and 10 the more likely outcomes.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 12	♠ K65	Dealer W
	♥ K965	Vul: N-S
	♦ K1084	
	♣ QJ	
♠ 872		♠ J9
♥ QJ3		♥ A
♦ Q9763		♦ AJ52
♣ 82		♣ K109643
	♠ AQ1043	
	♥ 108742	
	♦ A75	
	♣ A75	

North has a weak NT, though it would be entirely understandable were someone to pass at this vulnerability, downgrading the doubleton queen-jack.

If North opens 1NT, East can overcall 3♣, and that will bully South into a slight overbid of 4♣ to launch his two-suiter. North will respond 4♥ to that and will play there, making a comfortable 11 tricks as both the important missing cards are onside.

If North opens 1♣, East will overcall 2/3♣ if the methods allow it – they should, as a natural club overcall is quite common over a potentially two-card 1♣ opener. That will force South to start showing the two-suiter at the two level, via a 2♠ bid, after which natural momentum will see the heart game reached.

If North's opening bid is 1♦, East will always have a natural club bid available, and once again this will force South to start with 2♠ then follow up with 3♥, North once again going on to the heart game.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 13	♠ J972	Dealer N
	♥ 107	Vul: Both
	♦ J754	
	♣ J32	
♠ AQ8	♠ K3	
♥ KQ62	♥ A985	
♦ K963	♦ Q102	
♣ K4	♣ 9865	
	♠ 10654	
	♥ J43	
	♦ A8	
	♣ AQ107	

At many tables there will be three passes to West, who has a strong NT. If West opens 1NT, East will use Stayman then raise to 3/4 ♥ according to how optimistic he is feeling. Do remember that there is no premium on reaching thin games at matchpoints – we only want to bid the ones that are at least 50% to make. On this occasion it won't matter, as West will accept the invitation and go on to game.

I wouldn't recommend a weak NT opening, third in hand and vulnerable, with the South hand. I don't mind 1♣, however, which has the merit of suggesting a good opening lead. Some Wests will now overcall 1NT and a Stayman auction should once again see the heart game reached. My personal preference is for a take-out double, which should attract a jump to 2♥ from East – no, this does not promise a five-card suit, merely the necessary high-card values – and West raises to game.

Eleven tricks cannot be prevented in a heart contract, though a minority will hold themselves to 10.

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

Board 14	♠ AQ97	Dealer E
	♥ 92	Vul: None
	♦ K10	
	♣ KQJ74	
♠ 10	♠ J	
♥ QJ1054	♥ K8763	
♦ AJ3	♦ Q8764	
♣ A983	♣ 62	
	♠ K865432	
	♥ A	
	♦ 952	
	♣ 105	

Unless playing weak two-suited openings, East will pass, and South open with a spade preempt. Some will, understandably, dislike the emptiness of the spade suit, but I would still open 3♠ to put the maximum pressure on the opposition. South is, after all, not vulnerable, so a two-level opening would be quite unusual on a seven-card suit.

Whether South opens 2♠ or 3♠, West will come in, perhaps with a double of 3♠, but an overcall over 2♠? That's a close decision. In either case, North will raise to 4♠ and, if left to play there, South will come to an overtrick.

However, East is five-five, and that amount of playing strength strongly suggests competing, even at the five level. Rather than commit to one of the suits, East should bid 4NT. Initially, that will be taken as showing both minors but, when West responds 5♣, East will convert to 5♦ to show the red suits, and West will correct to 5♥.

Played by West, it is impossible to come to more than four defensive tricks, even at double dummy, and –300 should be an excellent result for E/W. It follows that N/S have to go on to 5♠ to salvage the board. Well, if South opened at the two level he has a spare spade to justify a further bid, while if South opened 3♠ perhaps North will take the push, not quite sure whether 5♠ is making or if 5♥ might be a possible make if there are no defensive major-suit tricks to be had.

Plus 450 for N/S is likely to be the most popular outcome, but there is sure to be some variety.

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

=====

Board 15	♠ 8632	Dealer S
	♥ K6	Vul: N-S
	♦ A93	
	♣ J976	
♠ AJ5	♠ 1094	
♥ AQJ102	♥ 8543	
♦ 6	♦ J854	
♣ AKQ8	♣ 42	
	♠ KQ7	
	♥ 97	
	♦ KQ1072	
	♣ 1053	

If West opens 2♣ and East responds 2♦, waiting/negative, South may double to show diamonds. West will ignore that and rebid 2♥, as always planned, and East has to support heart without doing anything to encourage partner to go on looking for slam.

For some, the solution is to use a bid that shows a second negative, usually by agreement either 2NT or 3♣, then bid 4♥ at East's third turn. Many, however, will not play a second negative so the best they can do is to jump to 4♥, leaving no room for cuebidding. As usual in a game-forcing situation, the faster we get to game the weaker we are, a raise to 3♥, which does leave room to explore, being more encouraging than a direct jump to game.

While opening 2♣ works well on this deal, big three-suited hands are generally easier to handle by starting at the one level, and some Wests will therefore open 1♥. East is too weak for a raise, so West will be reliant on South's balancing to give him another chance. I suspect that most Souths in this position will reopen the bidding, and now West can either make a take-out double of a 2♦ overcall or redouble a take-out double. Once the heart fit comes to light, West can catch up for lost time and drive to game.

Ten tricks are cold as the card lie.

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

=====

Board 16	♠ AK97	Dealer W
	♥ AJ	Vul: E-W
	♦ K42	
	♣ Q743	
♠ 52	♠ J43	
♥ 9652	♥ K873	
♦ AJ963	♦ 75	
♣ A6	♣ KJ52	
	♠ Q1086	
	♥ Q104	
	♦ Q108	
	♣ 1098	

North has a strong NT and, if that is his opening bid it will often end the auction.

A diamond is the best lead for the defence, and actually beats the contract if the subsequent defence is accurate. After the more likely club or heart lead, the contract is likely to make exactly.

West might compete, but will need to be playing the right methods to allow his handtype to be shown. A good defence is to play that, by a passed hand, double shows a four-card major with a longer minor, as this is a type not otherwise covered by the most popular defences used today. That would get E/W to 2♥, which is a fairly comfortable make for an excellent +110. Of course, West may well be put off getting involved by the vulnerability and the weakness of his major.

If North opens 1♠, that will be raised to 2♠ and North may go on with a natural and invitational 2NT. Whether South passes that because of the 4-3-3-3 shape, or goes back to 3♠, the contract should be defeated on this lie of the cards.

Similarly, a 1♣ opening will see a 1♠ response and North raise to 3♠. Playing from the South hand is a little better as diamonds cannot be attacked immediately, but 3♠ is still doomed to defeat.

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

Board 17	♠ 54 ♥ J75 ♦ AQ ♣ Q87643	Dealer N Vul: None
♠ J9 ♥ Q ♦ J9652 ♣ AK1052		♠ Q873 ♥ A10942 ♦ 843 ♣ J
	♠ AK1062 ♥ K863 ♦ K107 ♣ 9	

Much as I approve of aggressive pre-empting, North's club suit is really not the type to encourage me to open at the three level. I would pass as both North and East, leaving South to open 1♠.

I expect a lot of unusual 2NT overcalls as E/W are not vulnerable, and North may go quietly, not wishing to encourage South to bid again. When East's 3♦ preference comes back round to North, he will probably pass again.

Three Diamonds should be down three for –150, so this is a chance missed for N/S – but is there an obvious way for them to get to double the final contract? Well, it will require North to double 2NT and South to double 3♦. Both are plausible actions, but I'm betting that the majority will not find them.

Unless 3♦ does get doubled a fair number of times, +1560 could be OK for N/S. At any table where West does not overcall 2NT and N/S are left to their own devices, +110 in two of a major looks to be the limit.

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

Board 18	♠ K87 ♥ AQ6 ♦ Q7 ♣ J6543	Dealer E Vul: N-S
♠ A103 ♥ 43 ♦ 865432 ♣ A9	♠ J96 ♥ KJ10985 ♦ KJ ♣ Q8	♠ Q542 ♥ 72 ♦ A109 ♣ K1072

I would expect almost all Souths to open 1♥ and North respond 2♣ then raise the 2♥ rebid to game.

Alas, all those soft values in both hands, particularly South, prove to largely wasted and the contract is off on top with it not being too taxing to take a second spade trick for down two and –200.

Three No Trump is, of course, no better, so the only way to reach a contract that has a chance of making would appear to be for South to either not open at all, or open with a heavy weak two bid, downgrading the poor holdings in the three side-suits. Well, I could understand such a valuation, but on a different layout it could workout badly, and I don't expect many to do it.

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

Board 19	♠ A10982 ♥ 102 ♦ Q1042 ♣ 103	Dealer S Vul: E-W
♠ KQJ64 ♥ Q86 ♦ A97 ♣ 92	♠ 73 ♥ K54 ♦ KJ85 ♣ QJ76	♠ 5 ♥ AJ973 ♦ 63 ♣ AK854

West opens 1♠ and raises East's 2♥ response to 3♥ if playing Acol, or 4♥ if playing two-over-one GF. Either way, the final contract is 4♥ played by East.

On a non-diamond lead, 4♥ can be made. Say the lead is the queen of clubs; declarer will win and play a spade to the king and ace, and when in dummy with the ace of diamonds will be able to discard the diamond loser on a winning spade. There will be a club to lose, because even if he ruffs the third club with the queen, declarer will then be over-ruffed by the ♥10 when he ruffs the fourth club in dummy. However, with no diamond loser and just one in each of the other three suits, the contract is home with 10 tricks.

An opening diamond lead, however, is too much for declarer to overcome. The difference is, of course, that now there is a diamond loser, while the ♠A and ♥K must also be lost. The discard available on an established spade winner is of no real value, and the four-two club break means that that pesky ten of hearts means that there is also an unavoidable club loser.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 20	♠ J954	Dealer W
	♥ Vul: Both	
	♦ 854	
	♣ KQJ1052	
♠ 3	♠ AK1076	
♥ A98754	♥ KQJ62	
♦ 973	♦ AQ	
♣ 843	♣ A	
	♠ Q82	
	♥ 103	
	♦ KJ1062	
	♣ 976	

Most will not open a weak two bid with the West cards due to the combination of vulnerability and empty main suit. Equally, not

many will open the North hand with a 3♣ preempt, this time partly because of the four-card major side-suit – for me the solidity of the club suit makes up for the missing seventh card, and I might well open 3♣ with the hand.

Say that West and North both pass, now East must open 2♣ and rebid 2♠ over the 2♦ response. If West now bids 3♥, East will be thrilled and may just ask for key-cards and, on finding West with the ♥A, may just bid 7♥ – at worst the grand slam will be on the diamond finesse, and could be cold.

On the likely club lead, declarer will be able to try to ruff out the spades and, if they do not co-operate, fall back on the diamond finesse.

On a diamond lead, declarer will have to decide immediately whether to rely on spades to be four-three or the diamond to be onside. The finesse is 50%, if we assume that North will be willing to lead from the king, but is actually substantially worse than that, as many players would not lead from a king against a grand slam. Meanwhile, a four-three split is over 62% so declarer should spurn the finesse and play to have a third spade trick – which is, of course, the winning line on this layout.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 21	♠ J86	Dealer N
	♥ J86	Vul: N-S
	♦ 872	
	♣ J843	
♠ KQ1094	♠ A3	
♥ 1095	♥ Q7432	
♦ AK53	♦ Q	
♣ 5	♣ KQ1092	
	♠ 752	
	♥ AK	
	♦ J10964	
	♣ A76	

East will open 1♥ and South should pass, as that diamond suit hardly justifies a two-level vulnerable overcall. West will respond 1♠, East

rebid 2♣ and, at most tables, West raise to 4♥, ending the auction.

The two hands do not combine all that well so that, though each bid is perfectly sensible, the final contract is a poor one, with declarer pretty much having to play for the actual heart position to get home with only two heart losers and therefore 10 winners.

Of course, the best thing from declarer's perspective would be if South were to cash the two top hearts before switching to a diamond, and some will surely do just that. Even cashing one top heart should be fatal to the defence.

On an opening diamond lead, I guess we win the bare queen and play the queen of clubs. Of course, that doesn't sneak past the ace, but South is quite likely now to return a diamond, giving us an extra entry to dummy with which to lead a heart up. However, if we run the ten to the king and a spade comes back, how do we untangle our entries? We probably have to win the ace and play a low heart from hand to succeed. It's all very awkward and 4♥ may well fail more often than it is successful.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 22	♠ KJ6542	Dealer E
	♥ 96	Vul: E-W
	♦ 108	
	♣ 1095	
♠ A83	♠ Q7	
♥ A75	♥ 83	
♦ AKQ32	♦ 964	
♣ A4	♣ KQJ832	
	♠ 109	
	♥ KQJ1042	
	♦ J75	
	♣ 76	

E/W can make a grand slam in any of three different denominations, but many will fail to get past game.

Say that East opens a frisky 3♣. With beautiful controls and a useful side-suit, West might just

blast 6♣ or, if available, take a slower exploratory route ending in his asking about key cards. It is East's diamond length that makes the grand slam good, as it means that five diamond tricks are odds on, but I don't see Seven being bid very often.

Where East passes – the big majority of tables – South opens 2♥ (or an aggressive 3♥ in today's all-action pre-empting world), and many Wests will just overcall 3NT and play there. The alternative of a take-out double will discover that East has clubs and, if playing Lebensohl, reasonable values. However, facing a passed hand, West will not imagine a running six-card suit, and is likely once again to bid 3NT.

The problem is West's holding only doubleton club support, so that even if given a free run, which should never happen, West will do very well to co-operate facing a club slam try.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	7	7	1	2	7
W	7	7	1	2	7

=====

Board 23	♠ 872	Dealer S
	♥ 10432	Vul: Both
	♦ 52	
	♣ KJ107	
♠ A103	♠ K95	
♥ K9	♥ Q86	
♦ Q103	♦ KJ986	
♣ A9654	♣ Q3	
	♠ QJ64	
	♥ AJ75	
	♦ A74	
	♣ 82	

If South opens a weak NT, nobody has a good reason to bid so it should end the auction. After a low club lead to the ten and queen, East switches to a diamond and that may be good enough for down three and +300 to E/W.

If South opens 1♣, that will silence West and, if facing a potentially short suit, North may respond 1♥, which South raises to 2♥. If that ends the auction some good guessing leads to

down one for -100, but down two is possibly more likely.

West doesn't really have a good bid over a 1♦ opening either, so again North might respond 1♥ and be raised to 2♥.

If E/W find a way into the auction, they can make 10 tricks if east declares a diamond contract, or eight tricks in NT from either side of the table. How either of those will score will depend on how many +200s and +300s E/W are collecting on defence.

The top score for E/W will go to those who bid and make 3NT. The defence will be tricky, and a spade opening lead from South would give the ninth trick immediately, so +600 is an entirely plausible outcome, though at double dummy the defence prevails and holds declarer to eight tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 24	♠ A32	Dealer W
	♥ Q53	Vul: None
	♦ 1084	
	♣ AJ108	
♠ Q86		♠ K754
♥ J108		♥ K9764
♦ K5		♦ 962
♣ KQ943		♣ 6
	♠ J109	
	♥ A2	
	♦ AQJ73	
	♣ 752	

The five-card suit may well tempt West to open the bidding, whether with 1♣ or with a weak NT according to agreements.

One No Trump will see East use Stayman then bid 2♥ over the 2♦ response, scrambling Stayman. Had West longer spades than hearts, he would convert to 2♠, but on the actual hand he will pass out 2♥, which should be made exactly. N/S can make 3♦, but is there a way into this auction for them?

A 1♣ opening and 1♥ response may see South overcall 2♦. Whether West passes or can make a support double to show three hearts, North has three-card diamond support and ample values to compete to the three level, where nine tricks can be made on any defence. If West has shown heart support, however, East might compete to 3♥ courtesy of his fifth heart. Even if that gets doubled, it is a paying action at this vulnerability, conceding -100 instead of -110.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 25	♠ 962	Dealer N
	♥ 1092	Vul: E-W
	♦ AK98	
	♣ J86	
♠ A1074		♠ K3
♥ AQJ8		♥ K7643
♦ J742		♦ 3
♣ 9		♣ 107532
	♠ QJ85	
	♥ 5	
	♦ Q1065	
	♣ AKQ4	

South opens 1♣, better for finding all possible fits than the old suit-below-the-singleton 1 was taught in my youth, and West has a classic take-out double. North bids 1♦ and East 1♠ or 2♠. The latter may look a little pushy, but the five-five shape and two good kings make this hand worth quite a bit more than its raw point-count.

South can compete to 3♦, which would be down one for -50 if the defence is accurate, but West is likely to compete to 3♥ if East bid 2♥, while East may compete to 3♥ if he only bid 1♥ at his first turn. Three Hearts cannot be defeated, and +140 will score quite well for E/W.

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

Board 26	♠ KJ106	Dealer E
	♥ KQJ842	Vul: Both
	♦ 5	
	♣ 74	
♠ Q98	♠ A54	
♥ A1096	♥ 73	
♦ 62	♦ AK1097	
♣ QJ85	♣ 632	
	♠ 732	
	♥ 5	
	♦ QJ843	
	♣ AK109	

East may like the diamond suit just enough to open the bidding, being considerably more comfortable if opening 1♦ than opening a weak NT.

One No Trump would be passed round to North, who may overcall 2♥, or may use a bid to show both majors. My personal preference, with a good main suit and two-card disparity in the suit lengths, is to just show a heart one-suiter. Despite the four-two trump split, the kindly spade layout means that there are nine tricks in a heart contract. Meanwhile, there are only eight tricks if spades are trumps, illustrating the benefit of showing only hearts and not offering South a choice between the majors.

If East opens 1♦, West will respond 1♥. Some Norths will be able to make a natural 2♥ overcall and, if so, some will make the bid and probably play there. The majority, however, will either have to pass because of their systemic agreements, or will do so anyway as a matter of judgement. The latter group can think again when East's INT or 2♦ rebid comes around. I would certainly favour a 2♥ bid now.

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

Board 27	♠ J6543	Dealer S
	♥ AJ104	Vul: None
	♦ KQ5	
	♣ 2	
♠ Q8	♠ 10	
♥ 987	♥ Q532	
♦ 32	♦ 10864	
♣ KQJ875	♣ 10643	
	♠ AK972	
	♥ K6	
	♦ AJ97	
	♣ A9	

South opens 1♠ and North holds a good example of a splinter bid, 4♣ showing a sound game raise with a club shortage.

Most Souths will ask for key-cards now, which is the easy route to Six. North shows the missing key-card so South goes on with the next step bid to ask about the trump queen. With extra length, North can pretend to hold that card, and also show the king of diamonds by bidding 6♦. But now there is no room to discover the ♦Q, so South is guessing whether to go to Seven or settle for Six. The odds bid is 7♠, which is correct when North has the ♦Q, and also when he holds ♥AQJx, failing which the diamond finesse may be required.

Alternatively, South could cuebid 4♦ over 4♣, then follow up with 5♣ over North's 4♥ cuebid. North cuebids the king of diamonds, and now South can continue with a clever bid which not everyone knows about, namely the bid of a side-suit at the six level to ask for third-round control of the suit. Six Diamonds duly gets the job done and, looking at the queen, North should jump to 7♥.

The cuebidding sequence only runs the risk of North holding only four trumps without the queen, when an even split will be required, a roughly 40% shot.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 28	♠ J85	Dealer W
	♥ 94	Vul: N-S
	♦ KQ7	
	♣ A10985	
♠ Q9		♠ K1043
♥ AQ65		♥ K72
♦ A102		♦ 943
♣ 7432		♣ KQJ
	♠ A762	
	♥ J1083	
	♦ J865	
	♣ 6	

West has a weak NT and East an invitational hand in response. West shows the wrong major in reply to East's Stayman bid so East bids 2NT and West, with a minimum, passes.

With both majors shown by an opponent, South will often find the best lead of a diamond. That immediately brings the defensive winner count up to eight, and declarer will have to get the spades right to create an eighth trick without providing a sixth for the defence. Probably, declarer will get the spade right at the majority of tables simply because it is more convenient to play for North to hold the jack.

If West opens 1♣, he will then rebid 1NT over East's 1♠ response, and East will invite game with a raise to 2NT, which West will once again decline.

Two No Trump, then, will be the most popular resting place, making exactly or down one.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====