

## The ECatsBridge Summer Pairs Tuesday 2nd July 2024



Thank you so much for joining us for our Summer Charity Pairs in aid of Kidney Research UK and the British Heart Foundation both of which are charities that need as much funding as possible in order to continue their work.

Our thanks go to the commentators for the event – Julian Pottage for the Wednesday commentaries, Mark Horton did the ones for Monday and Friday and Brian Senior for the Tuesday and Thursday ... and by now you will know if they got it right!

We hope you enjoyed the hands and that they weren't too challenging – and whether or not you did well at least you can at least rest assured that you are helping to support two great charities.

The results are at <https://www.ecatsbridge.com/sims/default.asp> and the link to make donations to the charities is : <https://www.ecatsbridge.com/sims/donations.asp> - they are done through JustGiving and you will be able to see how much is raised there.

Board 1	♠ 982	Dealer N
	♥ J	Vul: None
	♦ K98643	
	♣ Q84	
♠ AQ65		♠ KT
♥ T72		♥ AQ9843
♦ Q7		♦ AJ
♣ AKJ2		♣ 763
	♠ J743	
	♥ K65	
	♦ T52	
	♣ T95	

The session begins with a borderline slam for E/W. I would expect a fair number of pairs to get to 6♥, and a smaller number to get to the inferior 6NT. Why is 6NT inferior? Well, for one thing slam is better played by East, when anything other than a club lead is helpful to declarer; the same is not the case if West is declarer, which he would be in a NT contract.

If West opens a strong NT and East responds 3♥, West should cuebid 3♠ then go on over East's 4♦ cue. On finding that only one key-card is missing, and that one or other partner has a control in every suit, whoever takes control should bid the heart slam.

In 6NT, declarer has to decide which finesse to take, other than in hearts, which is unavoidable. In 6♥, there may be extra chances even if South finds a club lead – win the ace, take the losing heart finesse, win the club return and play three rounds of spades for a club pitch, ruff a club, and the three-three split provides a discard for the jack of diamonds. If clubs are not three-three, then there is still the diamond finesse to fall back on.

Makeable Contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	5	2	6	4	6
W	5	2	6	4	6
=====					

Board 2	♠ AKQJ2	Dealer E
	♥ KQ	Vul: N-S
	♦ JT93	
	♣ Q6	
♠ 65		♠ T74
♥ T763		♥ AJ84
♦ AQ875		♦ K6
♣ 87		♣ AKJ5
	♠ 983	
	♥ 952	
	♦ 42	
	♣ T9432	

If East opens a strong NT there will be two passes to North, who may double. South won't like that so will run to 2♣, and West may compete with 2♦ and North, in turn, with 2♠. That may conclude the auction as it isn't clear that anyone has a further bid to make, and 2♠ should be down one.

Minus 100 should be OK for N/S as, while making an eighth trick in NT is slightly double dummy, requiring that declarer cash the clubs to squeeze North before touching diamonds, coming to 10 tricks in a heart contract is a much more straightforward affair.

Where East opens 1♥, E/W should compete to the three level and chalk up a comfortable

+140 when North's heart holding proves to be so helpful.

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

=====

Board 3		♠ A32	Dealer S
		♥ JT864	Vul: E-W
		♦ KT82	
		♣ A	
♠ J6		♠ Q9754	
♥ K92		♥ Q753	
♦ QJ		♦ 7	
♣ 986543		♣ KJT	
		♠ KT8	
		♥ A	
		♦ A96543	
		♣ Q72	

A good slam, this time for N/S. Six Diamonds makes even if there is a trump loser if a second heart trick can be established, and the actual combination of hearts four-three and diamonds two-one means that all 13 tricks can be made.

Generally, pairs find it harder to get to minor-suit slams than those in a major suit, largely because they have less well defined methods than when facing a 1♥/♠ opening, plus they are always afraid of going past everyone's favourite contract of 3NT in case slam is not on.

On this deal, South will open 1♦ and rebid 2♦ over the 1♥ response. If North held, say, ♠AKx and ♣x, he would have an easy 4♣ splinter now, and some may still choose that call, but splinters on top-honours are not ideal and many may prefer to grope with 2♠. If South bids 2NT over that, North may visualise wasted values opposite his own shortage and that will discourage a slam hunt. However, if South instead uses fourth-suit-forcing, that will encourage North, as it would imply less club strength in the South hand. Or what if South, who has already denied holding four spades, raises 2♠ to 3♠? That should certainly excite North. It will normally be up to North to show the necessary enthusiasm for slam to be reached.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	7	4	3	5
S	1	7	4	3	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 4		♠ Dealer W	
		♥ J952	Vul: Both
		♦ AT62	
		♣ AQ632	
♠ 542		♠ K976	
♥ AQT86		♥ K7	
♦ J54		♦ K973	
♣ 75		♣ KJ4	
		♠ AQJT83	
		♥ 43	
		♦ Q8	
		♣ T98	

I would guess that most Norths will open 1♣ and have to rebid 2♣ over South's 1♠ response. Will that end the auction? Probably not, which is a pity for N/S as 2♣ is the limit of what they can make at double dummy. More likely, however, is that South will repeat the strong six-card spade suit and declare 2♠. Now the defence will be put to the test, with a lot of matchpoints swinging on whether 2♠ is just made or down one.

East would like to come in over the 1♣ opening, but doubling when holding a doubleton in an unbid major is a risky business, and there is no suit worthy of an overcall, so pass is the wiser option. And if North, disliking the prospect of bidding and rebidding the clubs, prefers to open 1♦ and rebid 2♣? I think that is more of a North American style of bidding than a British style. Because South is going to repeat the spades anyway, it won't make much difference except that it makes a club lead a little more likely against the final contract. On a different layout, it risks partner giving preference to the wrong minor as, of course, it is misleading as to the relative lengths of North's two suits.

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

=====

Board 5	♠ QJ92	Dealer N
	♥ 53	Vul: N-S
	♦ 942	
	♣ A983	
♠ T74		♠ AK83
♥ KJ92		♥ T64
♦ Q5		♦ JT8
♣ 7642		♣ QT5
	♠ 65	
	♥ AQ87	
	♦ AK763	
	♣ KJ	

South will usually open 1♦ and North respond 1♠. South could reverse into 2♥, but my preference is to rebid 1NT if that is played as strong. If North has four hearts he will bid them now, while if he does not have four hearts there is no benefit to South showing the suit, to say nothing of the fact that bidding after a reverse can sometimes get a little murky. One No Trump will end the auction and eight tricks should be the most common outcome.

If a 1NT rebid would be weak, South will have to choose between the 2♥ reverse and a jump to 2NT. It's a close call between these two bids, with the lower end of the range for a reverse being slightly weaker than for a jump to 2NT. As we are unlikely to be able to stop below 2NT anyway, I'd incline to favour that over 2♥ as it ensures that the stronger hand becomes declarer in a NT contract.

A jump to 2NT will see North raise to game, and now the opening lead is likely to be decisive – the contract likely to make on a heart lead but not on a club lead. The 2♥ reverse could see North bid 2NT and, if played as natural, play there. A heart lead is the most threatening, but eight tricks can always be made.

And finally, those who think ahead and don't fancy either a 2NT rebid nor getting involved in a reverse sequence, could simply open a strong NT if available to them. The South hand

is at the top end of the range for the bid, but it is not a crime to play the odd thin game in partscore at matchpoints.

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

=====

Board 6	♠ J6	Dealer E
	♥ KQ632	Vul: E-W
	♦ T875	
	♣ 63	
♠ QT832		♠ A954
♥ A4		♥ J5
♦ A		♦ Q643
♣ AT752		♣ K98
	♠ K7	
	♥ T987	
	♦ KJ92	
	♣ QJ4	

West will open 1♠ after two passes and East raise invitationally to 3♠. With five-five shape and good top cards, West has a routine acceptance of the invitation so goes on to 4♠, which ends the auction.

This should be flat around the room, though I'm sure someone will create some variety. The defence has two chances to set up their heart winner to hold the contract to 10 tricks. If they fail to do so, the heart can go away on the long clubs, but it would be pretty poor defence to allow that to him.

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

=====

Board 7      ♠ T92      Dealer S  
                  ♥ Q87      Vul: Both  
                  ♦ 74  
                  ♣ KQT54

♠ 754      ♠ KQJ86  
 ♥ T965      ♥ J42  
 ♦ AT8      ♦ 96  
 ♣ 976      ♣ AJ8

♠ A3  
 ♥ AK3  
 ♦ KQJ532  
 ♣ 32

There will be some variety on this one, with decisions by East and South being the decisive ones.

South opens 1♦ and North responds 1NT. At Love All, everybody would overcall 2♠ now but, at Game All, some Easts may prefer to pass and hope to be on lead against a NT contract, which they can hope to defeat.

Say that East overcalls 2♠, most Souths may rebid 3♦ and play there for +130 after a spade lead. Those who think that they have the spades covered so rebid 2NT will be disappointed as there are six losers after the marked spade lead, and North may well raise to game. Of course, it is all North's fault – if only he'd held the ace of diamonds there would have been nine top tricks.

Where East does not overcall, South has a choice of rebids, either an invitational jump to 3♦, which probably ends the auction, or a raise to 2NT, over which North may go on to game.

The lack of a spade overcall makes a difference to the opening lead as West no longer has an obvious choice and may choose a heart more often than not. Three No Trump makes on a heart lead, while on a club lead East must win and switch to spades. Three Diamonds is cold for an overtrick on any lead, and after a non-spade lead East must be careful to duck the first club, otherwise declarer can set up the clubs to avoid a spade losers, making 11.

So, results should range from 3NT just making to 3NT down two, with plenty of partscores in between.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 8      ♠ Q9      Dealer W  
                  ♥ T9      Vul: None  
                  ♦ KQ986  
                  ♣ 6543

♠ J53      ♠ A2  
 ♥ J85      ♥ K7643  
 ♦ T54      ♦ AJ72  
 ♣ AKT9      ♣ J8

♠ KT8764  
 ♥ AQ2  
 ♦ 3  
 ♣ Q72

E/W can make 4♥, though that is due to a lot of good fortune, and I would not expect anyone to get so high. Meanwhile, N/S can be held to seven tricks in a spade contract.

East opens 1♥, South overcalls 1♠, and West may raise to 2♥. If that comes back round to South he may compete with 2♠ and that push East to 3♥, which will end the auction.

The vulnerability may tempt North to make a take-out double of the 2♥ raise – North's shape is very suitable for a double, though he is a little light in high-card terms for such an action. Well, matchpoints is a bidder's game, and the opposition won't often be in a position to double whatever South responds. In practice, that will be 2♠ and, once again, East is pushed up to the three level.

I would expect a lot of +140s and slightly fewer +170s on the E/W cards, plus a sprinkling of +50s and +100s.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 9                      ♠                      Dealer N  
                                  ♡ JT76                      Vul: E-W  
                                  ♢ AK874  
                                  ♣ AKQ4

♠ QJ76                      ♠ A95432  
 ♡ AQ2                      ♡ K8  
 ♢ T962                      ♢ Q53  
 ♣ 97                      ♣ J8

♠ KT8  
 ♡ 9543  
 ♢ J  
 ♣ T6532

Board 10                      ♠ K7                      Dealer E  
                                  ♡ A9652                      Vul: Both  
                                  ♢ 9  
                                  ♣ AJ632

♠ T42                      ♠ J53  
 ♡ 87                      ♡ KJ4  
 ♢ K7643                      ♢ AQJT5  
 ♣ T98                      ♣ KQ

♠ AQ986  
 ♡ QT3  
 ♢ 82  
 ♣ 754

North opens 1♦ and East has the options of overcalling a simple 1♠ or making a weak jump overcall of 2♠. I favour the simple overcall as I would prefer more of the high-card strength to be in the long suit to make a weak jump, particularly when vulnerable against not.

Whether east overcalls 1♠ or 2♠, South will be silenced and West raise a level – he might raise all the way to game were the vulnerabilities reversed – and North double for take-out. Greedy Souths will respond in hearts to the double, while the more cautious will see how little their hand has to contribute to the play and so will bid clubs, their longest suit. There is a third option if the opposition have bid only to the two level, namely a 2NT bid to show two places to play, a scramble to make sure of getting to a sensible trump suit. On this occasion, North will take that out into 3♣.

There are ten tricks available in a club contract for a solid +130. Four Hearts can be beaten, but not if East leads the ace of spades, while E/W can be held to seven tricks in a spade contract, and –200 will be bad for them unless a lot of pairs bid and make 4♥.

Makeable Contracts

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

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East has 17 HCP with a good five-card suit, which might suggest an upgrade, but the club holding is a poor one and that balances things out so that treating the hand as its actual 17 and as a strong NT looks right to me.

Say that East opens INT and there are two passes to North. Even at this vulnerability, it is right to compete with the North hand. It would be nice to be able to show hearts and a minor, as in, for example, Multi-Landy, rather than have a 2♥ overcall merely show hearts, but either way 2♥ it has to be. Normally, that will end the auction and, with the bulk of the high-card strength marked with East, declarer should get the play right to make 10 tricks.

Where East opens 1♦, South can overcall 1♠ and West raise diamonds. I would opt for a pre-emptive raise to 3♦, which will see North make a take-out double and South, who has already shown five spades, bid 3♥. North may raise that to game, which is a lucky make.

Perhaps the 3♦ raise is a little rich for some, who will content themselves with a quiet 2♦. North should again double and, if South responds 2♥, again raise, though perhaps only to 3♥, which will end the auction. But, of course, East has a fifth diamond and 17 HCP, so is likely to bid again, maybe just a gentle 3♦ over North's double. South will pass, North double again, and South bid 3♥ – a little more comfortably in this auction as the previous pass may give North a clue that the 3♥ bid is based on only a three-card suit.

There are eight tricks in a diamond contract, given a successful heart guess.

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

=====

Board 11	♠ 92	Dealer S
	♥ AJ54	Vul: None
	♦ KT96	
	♣ K76	
♠ A875		♠ KT63
♥ T987		♥ Q63
♦ Q4		♦ A32
♣ A93		♣ QJT
	♠ QJ4	
	♥ K2	
	♦ J875	
	♣ 8542	

There will often be three passes to East. If he opens a weak NT, that will usually end the auction and the lead of either minor should see the defence in control for a minimum of down one.

Where system dictates that East open one of a suit, usually 1♣, West will respond 1♥ and partnership style will decide the board. If East has to rebid 1NT because he doesn't have genuine clubs, he will play there, and again a club or diamond lead puts the defence in control. However, those whose style is to rebid 1♠ despite being 4-3-3-3 will find a spade fit and have a chance to win the board as 2♠ is cold. West is top-weight for a simple raise, and those who overbid to 3♠ will go minus, and deservedly so. If playing this style, West must assume that he is facing a weak NT until proven otherwise, and a 3♠ raise would be an overbid facing that hand-type.

Although holding a minority of the points, it is N/S who can make 1NT, should North open a point light in third seat. If he opens a weak NT, he will play there and score well, but if he opens 1♣/♦ that may see East double and West respond 2♠, which will be very good for E/W.

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

=====

Board 12	♠ 87	Dealer W
	♥ KJ4	Vul: N-S
	♦ A53	
	♣ A5432	
♠ 954		♠ JT63
♥ AT8753		♥ 9
♦ Q2		♦ T9864
♣ QJ		♣ 876
	♠ AKQ2	
	♥ Q62	
	♦ KJ7	
	♣ KT9	

West can open with a weak two bid and there will be two passes to South, who would like to have a more secure heart holding but will, nonetheless, see a 2NT overcall as the best option on a 4-3-3-3 18-count. North will raise that to game.

Say that West leads a low heart. Declarer wins in hand and plays on clubs. If he starts with the king, he will have five club tricks, but if he leads the ten to the ace and sees an honour on his left he might finesse on the way back, playing for the pre-emptor to have a singleton honour.

If declarer gets to clubs wrong, West will win the second round and may play ace and another hearts. Declarer has the rest now for +660. How will that score? Well, it depends on how many get the clubs right in 3NT, when they will have 12 secure tricks without needing to worry about the diamond finesse. I would expect there to be a fair number of +690s.

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

=====

Board 13      ♠ 7643      Dealer N  
                  ♥ T                      Vul: Both  
                  ♦ T83  
                  ♣ AKQ98

♠ AK9                      ♠ QT5  
 ♥ AQ854                  ♥ KJ9732  
 ♦ KJ4                      ♦ A95  
 ♣ J7                        ♣ 6

♠ J82  
 ♥ 6  
 ♦ Q762  
 ♣ T5432

Short of a ruff at trick one or two, 6♥ is flat out on the diamond finesse. Will E/W bid the borderline slam? My guess is that if East opens 1♥ West will drive to slam, while if East opens 2♥ West will settle for game.

Which should East open? Even vulnerable, 10 HCP is a maximum for those playing standard weak two bids. I would open 2♥ without any qualms with 10 HCP and a 6-3-2-2 shape, but 3-6-3-1 with no bad honour holdings and three cards in the other major looks like a one-level opening to me. There is just too much risk of missing a good game by opening with a weak two bid.

And if I have opened 1♥ as East and West responds with a game-forcing 2NT, promising heart support, I would re-evaluate my hand and be happy to co-operate if partner went off on a slam hunt. My personal style is to play that a new suit at the three level is natural, and a jump shows a shortage, while also denying a second four-card or longer suit. This East hand rebids 4♣, and that is exactly what West wants to hear. He will continue with Key-card and bid the small slam.

In the long term it doesn't matter whether or not you bid these slams, as you gain or lose the same amount. In the short term, those who bid it score well, those who stop in game score badly – blind luck. We should feel sorry for those N/Ss who have the slam bid against them.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 14      ♠ 6                      Dealer E  
                  ♥ JT865                      Vul: None  
                  ♦ 765  
                  ♣ KT93

♠ Q752                      ♠ T9843  
 ♥ 43                        ♥ AK  
 ♦ KQJ                      ♦ 82  
 ♣ QJ84                      ♣ A762

♠ AKJ  
 ♥ Q972  
 ♦ AT943  
 ♣ 5

Firstly, let me say that it would not be ridiculous to pass the East hand as dealer – do you really feel good about having to rebid those spades in some auctions? I expect that most, however, will open 1♠.

Does your style permit you to double with the South hand then convert a club response to diamonds without promising a big hand – equal level conversion that's called? If so, double is perfect on this deal, but your style won't matter all that much because West has an invitational raise to 3♠, which is normally shown via an artificial 2NT response. That will silence all but the most aggressive Norths, and East will quickly sign-off in 3♠.

If 3♠ ends the auction, it is merely a matter of leading twice towards the ♠Q to restrict the spade losers to two, and the overall losers to four, chalking up a solid +140.

Of course, once East shows a minimum by signing off in 3♠, and West passes that to confirm that he did not have a game raise, North could take a bit of a flyer and bid 4♥ when 3♠ comes round to him. That could look silly if partner turns up with only three hearts but, against that, South doesn't have to have so much of his high-card strength in spades, where it is not pulling its weight as much as it might be elsewhere. With hearts two-two and one diamond loser going away on the second spade, 4♥ is down only one and, while East will no doubt double, -100 should be a very good result, scoring up against a string of -140s.



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

=====

Board 15	♠ AQ65	Dealer S
	♥ T93	Vul: N-S
	♦ 4	
	♣ KQT82	
♠ T98		♠ KJ32
♥ A862		♥ 7
♦ JT95		♦ A32
♣ J5		♣ 97643
	♠ 74	
	♥ KQJ54	
	♦ KQ876	
	♣ A	

When South opens 1♥, some Norths will respond 1♠ and some 2♣ – I don't think that an immediate heart raise is best even if playing five-card majors, as it would lock N/S into hearts when there might be a more secure fit available elsewhere.

A 1♠ response checks for the four-four fit but South, of course, rebids 2♦. Now North has another decision – 4♥ or 2/3NT. It will be tempting to jump to 3NT as all North's strength is in partner's short suits, but 4♥ is the better, and more successful, contract. If North starts with 2♣, the spades will become the fourth suit when South rebids 2♦. North may bid 2♠ anyway at his second turn then jump to 4♥ over South's 3♦, or may simply bid either 3NT or 4♥.

An immediate heart raise just doesn't feel right with ♥1093, does it? North is worth a game bid in support of hearts, but 4♥ normally shows a totally different hand-type, while a 4♦ splinter isn't right either with only three weakish hearts. Perhaps North can respond 2NT, game-forcing heart raise, if playing five-card majors, then jump to 4♥ over South's 3♦ rebid, thereby showing a minimum game raise, but this runs the risk that partner will expect four-card heart support. No, it is better to start with a 1♠ or 2♣ response and take it from there.

Four Hearts cannot be beaten, while 3NT can be held to nine tricks, though 10 may sometimes be made.

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

=====

Board 16	♠ T97652	Dealer W
	♥ Q4	Vul: E-W
	♦ K96	
	♣ Q7	
♠ 8		♠ KQJ3
♥ J63		♥ KT987
♦ J8732		♦ 54
♣ T985		♣ K6
	♠ A4	
	♥ A52	
	♦ AQT	
	♣ AJ432	

Can your stomach tolerate a weak 2♠ opening on North's ten-high suit? I know a few people who would happily open any six-card suit with a weak two bid, including this one. If North does open 2♠, South may simply raise to game as slam looks quite unlikely.

Despite the trump position – declarer can hold his losers to two but is more likely to lose three spade tricks in practice, the contract cannot be defeated as the ♣K is onside and West can never get in to lead a heart through the queen. Declarer may establish the fifth club for a discard, or East may get endplayed, forced to lead a heart away from the king.

And if North does not open the bidding? Then East will open 1♥, South double, and North jump to 2♠. South needs to be careful now, as it is tempting to just jump to 3NT, which would get that contract played the wrong way up. Should anyone be foolish enough to declare 3NT from the South seat, a heart lead should doom it to defeat. South does better to cuebid 3♥, looking for help in the heart suit for NT purposes. When North chooses to repeat the long spades rather than bid NT, South has to settle for raising to 4♠, which is also what



North should probably bid if South bids 3NT over 2♠.

So, all roads appear to lead to 4♠, played by North, and usually three trump losers but no more.

#### Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 17	♠ 5	Dealer N
	♥ KT8732	Vul: None
	♦ K854	
	♣ 97	
♠ 743		♠ T962
♥ Q96		♥ 5
♦ QJT973		♦ 62
♣ 3		♣ AQT652
	♠ AKQJ8	
	♥ AJ4	
	♦ A	
	♣ KJ84	

South has a nice hand and will presumably open with a strong and artificial 2♣. The majority of Norths will respond 2♦, negative/waiting, though a few will opt for a natural positive of 2♥. I would bid 2♦ myself, but I have some sympathy with 2♥, holding two kings and a six-card suit, as the order of the suits suggests that this may save bidding space on a deal where that could be an important consideration.

Anyway, after a 2♦ response South will bid 2♠ and North 3♥. That must be an at least five-card suit as North has bypassed all the other suits and NT, so South should be happy to agree hearts and not worry about his own second suit. If South bids 4♣/♦ now that is natural, showing a second suit, at least until proven otherwise; he doesn't have a cuebid available to him. Not to worry, as South's first two bids have shown a game hand facing nothing, so he can quietly raise 3♥ to 4♥ and trust that North will bid again if slam is in the picture.

Should North bid again over 4♥? It is very tempting – two kings and a sixth heart are

nothing to be sneezed at. Change South's club holding to ♣Axxx and 6♥ would be almost a sure thing, while on the actual layout 6NT is on a good heart guess and 6♥ likewise unless East finds ace and another club lead.

It's very close. If North does bid on, the scientific approach is to cuebid 5♦, denying a club control so requiring that South have one to consider bidding slam. The downside of that, of course, is that it pinpoints the lead for the defence, and the more agricultural approach of bidding 4NT to ask for key-cards, while it may get the partnership to slam off ace-king of clubs, does so without pinpointing the weakness.

#### Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	4	2	5	5	6
S	4	2	5	5	6
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 18	♠ KJ8	Dealer E
	♥ AQT3	Vul: N-S
	♦ 72	
	♣ QT52	
♠ 9753		♠ T2
♥ 7		♥ 9854
♦ K854		♦ AQJ
♣ J983		♣ AK64
	♠ AQ64	
	♥ KJ62	
	♦ T963	
	♣ 7	

If East opens a weak NT, he may play there and should be held to his five top tricks, the diamonds being blocked when the suit proves to be divided four-two.

If East opens 1♣, I'm betting that a good number of Souths will fall in love with their classic take-out double shape and double despite having only 10 HCP. West can make a pre-emptive raise to 3♣ and, despite the four-one trump split, eight tricks can be made in that contract. But, of course, E/W will not be left to play in 3♣ once South has made the take-out double. North will make a responsive double and, perhaps after a little wriggling around, N/S

should find their heart fit and get to the heart game.

Four Hearts requires that declarer take either two club ruffs in the South hand or, less likely, two diamond ruffs in the North hand. On a club lead, this should be possible, and +620 should score well as not everyone will be able to both get to game and to make it. The winning defence to 4♥ is not about leading trumps to prevent declarer getting his ruffs, but rather is about leading spades to threaten a defensive ruff while West still has a diamond entry to give that ruff. If the defence does lead spades, declarer is unable to get his two ruffs without also conceding one to the defence and the contract is defeated.

I would expect 4♥ to be beaten only rarely, so +100 to E/W being a very good result.

If South passes over the 1♣ opening, West may raise clubs and that come round to South, who should now double. Whether North will drive to game facing a hand that appears to be merely competing the partscore is another matter.

#### Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 19	♠ 82	Dealer S
	♥ AQT8	Vul: E-W
	♦ QT32	
	♣ 752	
♠ AK96		♠ QJT
♥ K743		♥ 965
♦ K86		♦ J975
♣ AJ		♣ K64
	♠ 7543	
	♥ J2	
	♦ A4	
	♣ QT983	

Playing Acoll, West will open 1♥ and raise the INT response to 2NT. East has a close decision now whether to accept the game invitation, and it is not clear whether passing or going on to 3NT will be the long-term winner. One thing worth bearing in mind is that there

is no premium on being in a borderline game at matchpoints – we should only want to bid game if it is at least a 50% shot. Here, the ♠10 is a plus feature, the lack of a fitting heart honour a minus feature.

On the actual layout, passing out 2NT is the winner, with even that contract a long way from being secure.

Those playing strong NT and five-card majors, a style which is growing in popularity among the more serious partnerships in recent years, will open either 1♣ or 1♦ on the West cards. East will once again respond INT and West raise to 2NT. The decision is much the same as the one we have already seen, though this time East will have a fitting honour in partner's suit, which improves things slightly. Of course, that is balanced by the fact that the opener may not hold a genuine suit – as in real life.

There will be a few +600s in 3NT but surely more –100s –200s, so I would expect making partscores to score well above average.

#### Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 20	♠ JT53	Dealer W
	♥ Q8543	Vul: Both
	♦ 73	
	♣ AJ	
♠ KQ76		♠ A92
♥ A6		♥ KT72
♦ K5		♦ Q98
♣ KQ632		♣ 754
	♠ 84	
	♥ J9	
	♦ AJT642	
	♣ T98	

Whatever the methods, West will normally open 1♣. If East responds 1♥ and West rebids 1♠, most Easts will now bid INT. There is no reason to distort the hand by either opening or rebidding INT when having five-four shape, just to show the point-count. It is better in the

long term to treat balanced hands as balanced, and unbalanced hands as unbalanced.

West can now raise to 2NT to invite game and East, with a sound nine-count goes on to game.

If South leads the jack of diamonds, most declarers will win the king, cross to hand with a spade, and lead a club to the king, hoping to find South with the ace. That will lead to a quick two down when North turns up with the ♣A and returns a diamond through the queen.

To succeed, declarer has to duck in both hands at trick one. South can clear the diamonds but then has no entry to allow him to cash them. This is rather a double dummy line, which for one thing will look pretty silly if South does indeed have the ace of clubs, and anyone who finds it has done remarkably well.

It is possible that South will come into the auction with his long suit, but most will pass. Non-vulnerable, the South hand would justify a 3♦ weak jump overcall, but that looks a little scary when vulnerable, and indeed could cost more than the value of the E/W game if West doubles to show extra values and East leaves it in. With only 6 HCP, the South hand is also not worth a simple 2♦ overcall which, when vulnerable, should deliver opening values.

#### Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 21	♠ K42	Dealer N
	♥ J52	Vul: N-S
	♦ J652	
	♣ 986	
♠ 963		♠ AQJ87
♥ T8		♥ 63
♦ 84		♦ K97
♣ KQT742		♣ AJ5
	♠ T5	
	♥ AKQ974	
	♦ AQT3	
	♣ 3	

If East opens 1♠, South may think his hand too good for a simple overcall, so starts with a

double. West may raise to 2♠ or, if able to do so in the agreed methods without overstating his strength, bid 2♣. Either way, North will pass.

At whatever level the auction comes back to South, it will be time to introduce the hearts, thereby showing a hand too good for an initial overcall and with a minimum of five hearts.

Should North raise to 3♥ or 4♥ as necessary? The king of spades looks to be badly placed, leaving only the two red jacks of any value, and no potential ruffing value. As it turns out, those two jacks are just what is required to bring home the heart game, the ♥J being the necessary entry to pick up four diamond tricks, but it would be hard to criticise any North who did not bid on. In fact, game is as likely to be reached by South just crossing his fingers and bidding it in hope of finding a little something of use in dummy, as it is by North bidding the game.

#### Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 22	♠ A732	Dealer E
	♥ KQ765	Vul: E-W
	♦ 63	
	♣ K5	
♠ T96		♠ 8
♥ T4		♥ J93
♦ KQJ2		♦ T85
♣ Q632		♣ JT9874
	♠ KQJ54	
	♥ A82	
	♦ A974	
	♣ A	

There are 13 top tricks in NT, spades or hearts, courtesy of the three-two heart split

South will open 1♠ so that the spade fit should come to light immediately. The N/S methods will vary from one pair to the next, but let's look at one slightly agricultural approach.

Say that North responds 2NT, game-plus spade raise, and South asks for key-cards. North

shows one, of course, and South continues with 5NT.

Many players think that 5NT here asks for kings, either the number held or for specific kings, by agreement. This is not quite true. Five No Trump actually says that all the key-cards are present and invites partner to bid Seven if he thinks he has what it takes to produce 13 tricks. North is therefore expected to bid 7♠ if he thinks it should be on, and only show kings if he cannot bid Seven himself.

On this deal, North has the king of clubs, which South does not know about, and he also has king-queen-to-five hearts. Not only does that mean that there are no heart losers, but there is also a source of side-suit tricks. If South has got his 4NT then 5NT combination, then 7♠ should have a very good chance of being successful, and North should bid it over 5NT.

It is slightly unlucky that 7♠ requires hearts to be three-two – swap South's minor suits around and that would more often than not be unnecessary. However, a three-two break is a little over a 68% chance, so with almost everyone getting to at least the six level the grand slam is well worth bidding.

To get to 7NT with confidence would require a slower approach in which it became clear that there was an at least five-three fit in hearts.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	3	7	7	7
S	-	3	7	7	7
E	1	-	-	-	-
W	1	-	-	-	-

Board 23		Dealer S Vul: Both	
♠ QJ8	♠ 94	♠ A75	
♥ Q872	♥ T96	♥ KJ543	
♦ KJ4	♦ A876	♦ Q	
♣ A73	♣ JT82	♣ KQ96	
	♠ KT632		
	♥ A		
	♦ T9532		
	♣ 54		

Unless playing two-suited weak twos, South will pass and West open the bidding.

If West opens a weak NT, East will transfer to hearts. Though holding four-card heart support, the West hand should not break the transfer, as its sterile shape and number of minor honours means that it contains a lot of losers. So West simply completes the transfer and East either jumps to 3NT or introduces the clubs. Either way, West can bid 4♥ and that is that.

This could be an unlucky board for E/W, as the transfer has got the normal contract played the wrong way up. While a club or heart lead is harmless, a spade lead by North beats the contract as not only does South win the king but also North gets a ruff. That is one downside of East showing the clubs at his second turn as without that information North might well lead a harmless club, after which declarer can play on diamonds to establish two discards for dummy's low spades.

Where West has to open 1♣, East will respond 1♥, West raise to 2♥, and East go on to game, possibly making one slam try along the way. Played by East, there is no lead to threaten the contract, and declarer should come to 11 tricks without too much difficulty.

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

Board 24		Dealer W Vul: None	
♠ J6	♠ 9543	♠ T87	
♥ AQT8752	♥ 3	♥ AKQ954	
♦ JT72	♦ J3	♦ K4	
	♣ AQ9543	♣ K6	
	♠ AKQ2		
	♥ JT8762		
	♦ 96		
	♣ 8		

West has a pre-emptive opener. Whether that should be 3♦ or 4♦ is a matter of personal style. My own would be to go for the bigger pre-empt of 4♦ because I like the extra potential offered by the seven-four shape, but perhaps I would settle for the more conservative 3♦ if vulnerable.

So, what happens if West opens 3♦? Most likely, East responds 3♥, somewhat to South's surprise, and West goes back to 4♦ and plays there. A spade lead and club switch should see South collect a club ruff for down one.

If West opens 4♦, once again East will bid the hearts. South should not double. This is a case of not spooking the horses. South knows that he can defeat 4♥, but can he defeat 5♦? Don't give E/W any reason to run from hearts to a better spot. As it happens, 5♦ is hopeless, but switch the ace and king of clubs around and it is cold, with the club losers going away on the top hearts after trumps have been drawn.

It is just possible that South will get to declare 4♥ if West opens 4♦ and East judges to pass. South will surely either overcall 4♥ or double for take-out in this scenario. What fun, East will think, 'Is it Christmas already?' And even if South guesses to double instead of overcalling, thereby keeping spades and defending against 4♦ doubled in the game, will North pass or bid spades? No, he will surely bid the long clubs, and that will be even worse than playing in hearts.

All that can go horribly wrong for N/S if 4♦ is passed round to South can also go wrong if it is 3♦ that comes round to South – just a level lower so slightly less painful.

#### Makeable Contracts

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

Board 25	♠ T76	Dealer N
	♥ Q9852	Vul: E-W
	♦ KJ53	
	♣ 5	
♠ AKQ982		♠ J43
♥ T4		♥ AKJ76
♦ 86		♦ A
♣ J93		♣ AT62
	♠ 5	
	♥ 3	
	♦ QT9742	
	♣ KQ874	

When East opens 1♥, the vulnerability will convince South that his hand is worth an Unusual 2NT overcall.

It is normal, when defending against the Unusual 2NT, for E/W to play one of the two cuebids as a constructive heart raise, and the other as a forcing bid in the fourth suit, in this case spades. That means that it is possible to bid 3♠ directly to show five-plus spades but less than game-forcing strength. This West hand looks to be top weight for a direct 3♠ bid and North should jump to 5♦, an advance sacrifice against the expected game bid and taking away E/W's bidding space for a slam hunt.

Now, does East have to guess whether to bid 5♠ or 6♠, or is this a forcing pass situation which offers extra options? The vast majority of the time the 5♦ bid will be a sacrifice rather than bid to make, so the odds favour playing forcing passes, and that works well for East on this deal. He can pass and, if West doubles for penalties, take it out into 5♠ as a slam try – without slam interest he could have bid 5♠ a round earlier without letting West have his say – or if West instead bids 5♠, showing a very suitable hand to declare the contract, East can go on to slam. On this deal, the excellent spades mean that West should bid 5♠ when 5♦ comes around and East will raise to Six.

The bidding tells West that North's club lead is a singleton, so he rises with dummy's ace and can organise to take a diamond ruff in dummy and take the heart finesse to create a parking place for a club loser, and so make his contract. Of course, the heart finesse is the percentage play as the 2NT overcall marks South with heart shortage.

If West rates his hand worth a forcing spade bid at his first turn, it should be even easier for East to commit to slam.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 26

♠ 85	Dealer E
♥ AQJT	Vul: Both
♦ KT6	
♣ Q842	
♠ A62	♠ QJT3
♥ K543	♥ 9876
♦ 8	♦ AQJ32
♣ KJ976	♣
♠ K974	
♥ 2	
♦ 9754	
♣ AT53	

System will have a significant bearing on the outcome on this deal.

East is just short of having an opening bid, and a few Easts will no doubt open 1♦. If they do so and West responds 1♥, East will raise to 2♥ and the eventual contract is likely to be 4♥. With the trumps as they are, the heart game should never be successful.

Where East passes, West will open 1♣ and North has the wrong shortage to double so will usually pass. Those who think it wise to overcall 1♥ on a four-card suit should live to regret it, as they have just kept their opponents out of a doomed contract.

Do E/W bypass diamonds to show a four-card major? If so, East will respond 1♥ and East raise to 2♥. East should settle for a 2♠ game try rather than just bidding game, as 4♥ will not be a pleasant spot if West has raised with only three-card support. However, if West confirms possession of a fourth heart, East may then bid the heart game.

If E/W bid suits up the line, East will respond 1♦ and West rebid 1♥. East will now raise to 3/4♥. If only 3♥, West should pass with his misfitting minimum, and that will be a very

winning judgement, as a lot of pairs are going to get to 4♥, which is likely to be doubled by North.

Double dummy, West can scramble home in 3♥, but 4♥ is hopeless and East can be held to eight tricks. North should double 4♥, not worrying about tipping declarer off as to the trump situation, and those who fail to double will score significantly less well than those who do.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 27

♠ Q87652	Dealer S
♥ 743	Vul: None
♦ KT	
♣ A9	
♠ AKJT9	♠
♥ Q98	♥ AKJT5
♦ 963	♦ QJ754
♣ 73	♣ QJ6
♠ 43	
♥ 62	
♦ A82	
♣ KT8542	

There will often be two passes to North, who can make a weak 2♠ opening. East can make a take-out double, or can use Leaping Michaels, where a 4♣/♦ bid shows at least five-five in the bid minors and the unbid major. Here, that would mean a 4♦ overcall and West would convert to 4♥.

Theoretically, 4♥ is way too high, with two ace-kings to be lost, to say nothing of a possible diamond ruff. But suppose that North leads a spade or a heart. Declarer can take two club discards, draw three rounds of trumps ending in hand, and lead a diamond up, losing just two diamonds and one club.

Even better, on a spade lead declarer can take three rounds of trumps and three club discards on the spades before playing on diamonds and come to an overtrick.

Would you blame North for failing to find a minor-suit lead? No, neither would I.

Where East prefers a take-out double, West will leave it in. If West can gain the lead soon enough to prevent a heart ruff in the dummy, which should be possible with the queen of hearts, the defence comes to four spades and three hearts for down two and +300.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 28

♠ 6  
♥ AK75  
♦ AJT52  
♣ 986

Dealer W  
Vul: N-S

♠ A87532  
♥ 8  
♦ 9864  
♣ T4

♠ J9  
♥ T64  
♦ KQ7  
♣ AKQ73

♠ KQT4  
♥ QJ932  
♦ 3  
♣ J52

If he isn't dissuaded by the empty suit, West might open 2♠ – the six-four shape is some compensation for the weak spades. North has an easy double and East, with the best hand at the table, may pass to see what is happening.

South will give a passing thought to leaving in the double, but the five-card heart suit should dissuade him from such a gamble and he instead responds 3♥. If playing Lebensohl, that show some values and North will be close to bidding game. However, as has previously been mentioned, there is no premium for bidding thin games at matchpoints, and if South could not bid game himself 4♥ could prove to be challenging, so North should take the wiser course and pass 3♥.

And now we come back to East, who sees that his opponents have found a heart fit. If West has good spades and the expected heart shortage, 3♠ should be a comfortable contract, so East bids it, promptly doubled by South to conclude the auction.

As we can see, N/S would have had four top losers in 3♥, but no more, so would have scored a easy +140. Meanwhile, the spades are marked with South on the auction so declarer will have no difficulty in holding the spade losers to two, at least by force. However, South can get a diamond ruff with his little spade and that is the setting trick – down one for -100, but better than conceding -140.

If West does not open the weak two bid, North opens 1♦, East overcalls 1NT, and the auction can go in a number of ways according to South's actions. West, of course, will show the spades, but will N/S find hearts? Maybe.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====