



**Commentary
for the
SBU Bobby Allan / Easter Pairs 2024**

Thursday 21st March 2024

Dear Bridge player

Thank you for supporting the Bobby Allan / Easter Pairs 2024. We do hope you enjoyed the hands, found them interesting, challenging and fun whatever result you ended up with! The overall winner will be awarded the Bobby Allan Trophy. There are generous masterpoint awards and red points for those who do well.

So now you can relax and enjoy the commentary - did you see the hands in the same way I wonder. We would like to thank our commentators – Liz McGowan for the Monday, Iain Sime for the Tuesday, Derek Sanders for the Wednesday and Brian Short for the Thursday.

Do have a look on the [SBU web site](#) and [Facebook page](#) for all the SBU news and also for information about forthcoming tournaments.

SBU UPCOMING NATIONAL TOURNAMENTS

16th to 22nd April	SBU Overseas Congress	Side, Turkey
Saturday 27th April	BAM for BAMSA Fundraiser	RealBridge
Sunday 5th May	Ranked Individuals	BBO
Saturday 25th May	Mens Pairs & Womens Pairs	RealBridge

Board 1	♠ 32	Dealer N
	♥ AK	Vul: None
	♦ J1075	
	♣ A8653	
♠ 75		♠ KJ10964
♥ QJ10854		♥ 763
♦ Q9		♦ A86
♣ K92		♣ 4
	♠ AQ8	
	♥ 92	
	♦ K432	
	♣ QJ107	

If N opens a weak NT, E is likely to bid or show spades and S will not be hard pressed to press on. The good clubs and well placed ♠AQ suggest 3NT, as in many cases 2NT will be conventional, being some sort of Lebensohl treatment. Strong no-trumpers will open 1♣ and after, say, 2♠ from E, S has something of a problem. Double would suggest ♥s and the hand is a point or 2 strong for 3♣. I suspect that many will bid 3♣ and play there but shutting your eyes and trying 3NT works well. The brave will win!

Declarer will win the ♠Q and finesse clubs successfully. There is no risk in trying for an overtrick (important here to beat ant pairs in 5♣) by playing a ♦ after running clubs, and if E has bid and W shown up with the ♣K, rising ♦K is the best, and here successful, shot.

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

Board 2	♠ K104	Dealer E
	♥ AKQ95	Vul: N-S
	♦ 9873	
	♣ J	
♠ Q75		♠ A32
♥ 10874		♥ 2
♦ AQ		♦ KJ1065
♣ A1043		♣ 9862
	♠ J986	
	♥ J63	
	♦ 42	
	♣ KQ75	

A partscore battle. A weak NT might silence N but at pairs many will show ♥s according to their methods. Although DeepFinesse can hold this to 7 tricks, in practice most will make 8 I think..

If W is allowed to play 1NT, the textbook lead is the ♥Q (showing at least ♥KQ), which should ask for attitude from S. Happy to encourage – most play reverse attitude now, where a small card is encouraging – S will play the 3 and N should now underlead. Only a risky ♠ will allow any more than 7 tricks now, but some will slip and allow +120.

But all hands are equal at pairs, so sound defence will be rewarded and -90 will be better than those who go -110 from 2♥ making the other way..

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

Board 3	♠ AKJ5	Dealer S
	♥ 982	Vul: E-W
	♦ J109	
	♣ A73	
♠ 8643		♠
♥ 5		♥ 1076
♦ 5432		♦ AK876
♣ QJ95		♣ K10864
	♠ Q10972	
	♥ AKQJ43	
	♦ Q	
	♣ 2	

Ok, it's slam time – or is it? A few will open 1♠ with S (“Gives me an easy rebid, partner”) but this is not recommended with longer and much more powerful ♥s. After 1♥- 1♠ from N, many E's will try an “unusual” 2NT I think. Have you discussed your methods over this? Both 3♣ and 3♦ can be artificial now as you don't usually want to play in their 5-card suit. Also 4♣ or 4♦ can be a splinter – a singleton or void -but you've got 2!. Which to show?

I guess many will jump to 4♠ and will W bid? The vulnerability is wrong for a sacrifice but that won't deter some and although 5♣ will

usually go -2, 5♦ should only be -1 – a good save - unless N/S manage to find their ♣ ruff. Not easy.

But surely N will bid on over 5♣? Six makes, but is hard to reach over 5♣ as the key is S's singleton ♦. Well done if you got there and no play commentary is required – just cash your winners, trumps first.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 4 ♠ AQJ765 Dealer W
 ♥ J65 Vul: Both
 ♦ J10
 ♣ 75

♠ 8	♠ K942
♥ A974	♥ K102
♦ K654	♦ A2
♣ A962	♣ KQJ3
♠ 103	
♥ Q83	
♦ Q9873	
♣ 1084	

Many will open W nowadays, according to their methods, probably 1♣. N will bid 1♠ or 2♠ and E will ponder and probably just dump the 3NT card on the table,

It looks as though 10 tricks (4♣, 2♦, 3♥ - after a ♥ duck into a safe hand - and 1♠) but the defence can do better than that. Let's consider if N ducks the ♠10. Declarer may win the first ♠ and now must cash the 9 top tricks, but it would be good play to duck. Now if ♠s are continued, E can win the 2nd or even the 3rd ♠ and duck a ♥ safely into the S hand. With ♥s 3-3 that comes to 10 tricks.

But the defence can do better by switching to, say, a ♦ at trick 2 if declarer ducks. The bottom line is that E cannot now make a ♠ under his or her own steam and so 9 tricks are the limit. If you found that defence, you deserve your good score.

Overtricks are very valuable at pairs so it's well worth the effort to score them or prevent them when defending.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 5 ♠ A9832 Dealer N
 ♥ 1063 Vul: N-S
 ♦ 52
 ♣ K106

♠ Q	♠ 106
♥	♥ AKJ98
♦ KQ109764	♦ J83
♣ Q9732	♣ 854
♠ KJ754	
♥ Q7542	
♦ A	
♣ AJ	

S opens 1♠ and what will W do? There is no "correct" answer as it depends upon your style, but one thing is certain, that at this vulnerability W can be more rather than less aggressive. Personally I don't like 2NT as the ♦s are so much better than ♣s. On this hand, the more ♦s W bids, the better. Would you bid 5♠ over 5♦?

5♠ (by S) is a make if S plays ♥s correctly, but there is a strong case for playing W for a singleton A or K if E ducks the first ♥ from dummy. But will most E hands have the nerve to duck? Many N/S pairs will be allowed to play 4♠, an easy make but those bold enough to save in 5♦ should only go for -500, a good save against -620 or -650.

Moral of the story? Be bold when non-vul against vul.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 6 ♠ AK654 Dealer E
 ♥ 43 Vul: E-W
 ♦ A752
 ♣ A8

♠ 92 ♠ J3
 ♥ A1076 ♥ J98
 ♦ J104 ♦ Q983
 ♣ J643 ♣ KQ109

 ♠ Q1087
 ♥ KQ52
 ♦ K6
 ♣ 752

Virtually all will reach 4♠ and with ♠s 2-2 the play for 11 tricks is trivial.

The only differences will be some sort of misunderstanding or one or other of N/S taking a very conservative course of action in the bidding. Could be the flattest board of the set.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 7 ♠ AK32 Dealer S
 ♥ K6 Vul: Both
 ♦ AK975
 ♣ 87

♠ 96 ♠ 5
 ♥ 9742 ♥ AQJ10853
 ♦ Q82 ♦ 64
 ♣ K652 ♣ Q103

 ♠ QJ10874
 ♥ J103
 ♦ AJ94

Only a total of 26 points between the hands but 6♠ is just on the ♦ finesse. I expect very few to get there though. Many S's will open a weak 2♠ but I'll offer the view that this hand is too strong in the context of the hands that some open a weak 2 on. With "7 losers" in Courtney language, this has at least as much playing strength in ♠s as most 5332 13 counts., if not a tad more and a 1♠ opening would certainly make N perk up! No slam ever if S opens a weak 2.

The moral of this is that partnerships can have whatever style they like with pre-empts - aggressive, sound or position and vulnerability dependant – but they should NOT have a wide range in similar situations. How can partner ever make the right decision if you would open 2♠ with either the above S hand or QJ10765, xx, J4, J97? You will see that 6♠ is decent on the hand above and 4♠ will go off on the ♥Q lead with the weak hand above.. Have some consistency in your pre-empts..

By the way, you will see that 7♦ makes on the 5-3 fit but only 6♠ with a 6-4 fit! Both need the ♦ finesse, but in ♦s you can get rid of your ♣ loser on a spade. Please don't worry about missing that!

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	2	7	-	6	6
S	1	7	-	6	-
E	-	-	2	-	-
W	-	-	2	-	-

=====

Board 8 ♠ 864 Dealer W
 ♥ J52 Vul: None
 ♦ QJ42
 ♣ AQ4

♠ KQ97532 ♠ J
 ♥ 9 ♥ AK10876
 ♦ K6 ♦ 975
 ♣ 1063 ♣ J72

 ♠ A10
 ♥ Q43
 ♦ A1083
 ♣ K985

Most W players will open 3♠ I guess and neither N nor S really have enough to enter the bidding, with their flat hands. If N leads a ♥ – not impossible - 3♠ should make as a ♣ goes away, though declarer must remember to lead a ♦ to the K whilst in dummy for the last time.

If N/S do somehow play the hand in some number of ♦s, they will in practice only make 8 tricks after a ♥ lead and 3rd round ruff, as declarer will not drop the now singleton ♦K I don't think. Remember that DeepFinesse has had a peek, so knows to do that!!

So whoever “wins” the auction will often end up minus. Compete at pairs they say, but all bridge rules have exceptions.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 9	♠ A52	Dealer N
	♥ 974	Vul: E-W
	♦ K8764	
	♣ 72	
♠ KQ8643		♠ 10
♥ Q532		♥ J86
♦ 5		♦ Q932
♣ A4		♣ QJ865
	♠ J97	
	♥ AK10	
	♦ AJ10	
	♣ K1093	

There will be a range of contracts on this part-score deal. Strong no-trumpers may play there, though 6-4 in the majors will be too tempting for some W players even over 15-17. E/W should go light in any contract they play higher than the 1-level. For N/S, although the infallible DeepFinesse can make 2NT, some humans may find that too difficult.

If S plays 1NT or 2NT and W leads a high ♠, declarer will duck and E's ♠10 falls. The best continuation for W now is the second high ♠ and if E had ♠109, the J will fall. If not W has removed a vital entry to dummy. Sensible play from now on will allow S to scramble 7 tricks, but 8 will need very careful play indeed.

As with the previous board, a plus score is good.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 10	♠ 6	Dealer E
	♥ 10984	Vul: Both
	♦ 93	
	♣ QJ6542	
♠ AK1095		♠ J742
♥ KQJ3		♥ 2
♦ KJ		♦ AQ1076
♣ 83		♣ A109
	♠ Q83	
	♥ A765	
	♦ 8542	
	♣ K7	

If E opens the bidding, as many will, reaching 6♠ is not impossible, but making it may be. Oh if only we could bring DeepFinesse in “off the bench” to play these sort of hands. Win the lead, finesse in spades, take some pitches, including a ♣, on ♦s and lose only the ♥A. Simple!

But why take the ♠ finesse? There is no reason on this hand (there sometimes is if the hand on the right of the ♠AK has shown length somewhere). If you bid and make 6♠ here that will be a 90+% score, I promise.

If the bidding includes a “splinter” showing shortage in ♥s in the E hand, W should backpedal. KQJx is a very inefficient use of points opposite a shortage.

And finally, in 4♠, on any lead declarer will play ♠AK then 3 rounds of ♦s. S can ruff but W will throw a ♣ from the W hand anyway and the ♥A will be only the second trick for the defence. Many scores of +650 E/W on this board. Very few indeed of +1430.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	1	5	3	6	5
W	1	5	3	6	5

Board 11 ♠ AJ986 Dealer S
 ♥ Q7 Vul: None
 ♦ Q93
 ♣ 873

♠ 52 ♠ K104
 ♥ J9652 ♥ K108
 ♦ AKJ62 ♦ 87
 ♣ 5 ♣ J10642

 ♠ Q73
 ♥ A43
 ♦ 1054
 ♣ AKQ9

24 points for N/S but no game. A lot will go off in 3 or 4 ♠s as most E/W pairs will find their ♦ ruff, if not immediately, after a ♠ finesse is lost to E. Very few E/W pairs will be allowed to play in ♥s which has a lucky layout allowing 10 tricks, as long as N does not lead a ♣.

3♠ can be made in some situations. Let's say E leads a ♦ and gets a ruff on the 3rd round. E will return a ♣ and it is asking too much of N to finesse the 9. Win ♣A, play ♠A and a second ♠ to the Q (yes, under E's A.) E must again lead a ♣. when you win the A, and run ♠s, squeezing E in the rounded suits. No need even to cash the ♥A, "Vienna coup" style! Neat.

To get a good board as N/S, you must stop short of 4♠ and any pair making +140 will score well.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 12 ♠ K108 Dealer W
 ♥ Q43 Vul: N-S
 ♦ AJ943
 ♣ Q5

♠ QJ654 ♠ 32
 ♥ KJ65 ♥ 10987
 ♦ 106 ♦ K752
 ♣ 76 ♣ K42

 ♠ A97
 ♥ A2
 ♦ Q8
 ♣ AJ10983

After a weak NT opening by N, virtually all S players will add 15 to about 13 points and just bid 3NT. Similarly after strong NT players bid 1♦- 2♣- 2NT, they are in the same position. Now you don't really want to be in slam on this hand, although it is not too bad and makes as the cards lie, but the lesson is that a good 6-card suit opposite a NT hand means that fewer points are required to make a lot of tricks than with a flat hand. The 5th and 6th cards in a running suit are worth close to 2 points each.

So assuming you don't reach 6♣ (as few will) the number of tricks in 3NT by N will depend on the lead. The 10 (or 9) of ♥ is the safest lead in pairs as you don't want to allow an overtrick if a ♦ lead costs a trick. This will hold the contract to 11 tricks.

If somehow S can play NT, 12 tricks are available, with the lucky position of the ♥K, and the probability of a ♠ lead in addition. 3NT +2 or +3 will be the large majority of scores.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 13 ♠ Q1052 Dealer N
 ♥ 4 Vul: Both
 ♦ QJ872
 ♣ 742

♠ 83 ♠ AK94
 ♥ KQ1052 ♥ A96
 ♦ K106 ♦ 4
 ♣ J96 ♣ KQ1085

 ♠ J76
 ♥ J873
 ♦ A953
 ♣ A3

The recommended bidding here is –

N	E	S	W
P	1♣	P	1♥
P	1♠	P	INT
P	2♥	P

...which shows about 15-16(17) points and exactly 4315 (4306 is just possible) down the suits.

Although the $\heartsuit K$ is a dubious value, the 5th \heartsuit and even the $\clubsuit J$ are useful and W should consider making a try, perhaps even just 3 \heartsuit . E, with a very crisp hand should raise to game.

4 \heartsuit is an excellent contract that will make 11 tricks, where 3NT should fail on a \heartsuit lead.

If you and your partner have not discussed this sequence, I recommend that now do!

Makeable Contracts

	\clubsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
	=	=	=	==
N	-	1	-	-
S	-	1	-	-
E	3	-	5	2
W	3	-	5	2

Board 14 \spadesuit AK54 Dealer E
 \heartsuit AQ873 Vul: None
 \heartsuit Q92
 \clubsuit 2

\spadesuit J932	\spadesuit Q1087
\heartsuit 4	\heartsuit K652
\heartsuit K753	\heartsuit 108
\clubsuit J1063	\clubsuit Q87

\spadesuit 6
 \heartsuit J109
 \heartsuit AJ64
 \clubsuit AK954

The second hand in a row where it is important to get to the 5-3 fit and not 3NT. After 1 \clubsuit from S and 1 \heartsuit by N, S must show \heartsuit support now (or possibly after a 2 \clubsuit rebid if your partnership style is not to support immediately with only 3.)

In the latter case, N may make a “responder’s reverse (game forcing) of 2 \spadesuit and S should not make the error of bidding 3NT. There’s plenty time! Bid 3 \heartsuit , and the 5-3 fit will be found,

Still no tricky play problems yet in this set and although S will be disappointed that both red suit finesses fail, I guess that this will happen at all tables.

Makeable Contracts

	\clubsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
	=	=	=	==
N	4	4	5	3
S	4	5	5	3
E	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-

Board 15 \spadesuit 87 Dealer S
 \heartsuit 9654 Vul: N-S
 \heartsuit KJ6
 \clubsuit KQ104

\spadesuit AKJ1043	\spadesuit Q96
\heartsuit K2	\heartsuit AQJ10
\heartsuit 104	\heartsuit A85
\clubsuit A86	\clubsuit J92

\spadesuit 52
 \heartsuit 873
 \heartsuit Q9732
 \clubsuit 753

A slam is laydown here either in \spadesuit s or NT (and even in a 4-2 \heartsuit fit!) but if you rely on point count, 29 between the hands may leave you languishing in game.

The auction will be very system dependant. After W’s 1 \spadesuit , N/S will not bid and many E players will not be able to bid 2 \heartsuit with only 4. Easy for 5-card major pairs, as E will have a method to show values in a raise to game, perhaps a “pudding” 3NT to show a flat, high card raise to 4 \spadesuit . Without this method available, a few E’s may invent a bid, such as 2 \clubsuit , in which case W is worth 3 \spadesuit with such a good 6-card suit and that might be a route to slam.

It is not 100% clearcut to try for more now, but the 6th trump and the control-heavy cards make the W hand worth more than 15 points. Over the pudding raise, W can at least cue 4 \clubsuit under the level of game, and E should cooperate with 4 \heartsuit . 4 \heartsuit now is pushy, but is just what E wants to hear,, and slam should now be reached.

Good score if you bid slam though as many will only reach game. Not a trace of a problem with the play.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	3	1	6	6	6
W	4	1	6	6	6
	=====				

Board 16	♠ J1095	Dealer W
	♥ K82	Vul: E-W
	♦ K6	
	♣ AQ85	
♠ AKQ4		♠ 832
♥ QJ105		♥ 7643
♦ 872		♦ A4
♣ 42		♣ J976
	♠ 76	
	♥ A9	
	♦ QJ10953	
	♣ K103	

Most Ws will open something, perhaps a weak NT or 1♦ if they play 5-card majors. Hard for N/S now to get into the bidding though some N players will double 1♦, and if E passes this, S may convert to penalty with a pass. If this happens, W should realise that all is not well and rescue, either with 1♥ or a redouble which will extract 1♥ from partner. N/S have no reason to double hearts, but S should compete over this, knowing their side has the balance of the points.

That will probably be in INT, which plays well for a certain 9 tricks. Really hard to get to game, but this hand again shows the power of a good 6-card suit. This is the main lesson from the hands in this set so far.

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

Board 17	♠ AK9875	Dealer N
	♥ AQJ65	Vul: None
	♣ 53	
♠ Q		♠ 62
♥ KQ8643		♥ J92
♦ 1072		♦ K4
♣ KJ6		♣ A109872
	♠ J1043	
	♥ A1075	
	♦ 983	
	♣ Q4	

Surely a routine sequence to 4♠? Perhaps simply 1♠- 2♠- 4♠. But E can throw the cat among the pigeons (perhaps the expression should be "the clubs among the spades") with a frisky weak 3♣ bid. West should now sacrifice in 5♣ over 4♠ and that will be a good result for E/W, only -100 unless S leads A and another ♥ when careful ace cashing will produce +300.

N may, of course, misjudge and bid 5♠ which will be a very good score for E/W, as long as they lead a ♣! I'm not a great fan of weak jump overcalls on 6322 hands as you usually have too many side suit losers, but it sure works well here with west's control in the majors and nice trump support. So well done this time if you came in, but look out for bigger losses on other occasions.

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

Board 18	♠ K1042	Dealer E
	♥ A72	Vul: N-S
	♦ KQ10	
	♣ KJ4	
♠ AJ653		♠ Q
♥ Q3		♥ K9865
♦ 95		♦ AJ843
♣ 9532		♣ A6
	♠ 987	
	♥ J104	
	♦ 762	
	♣ Q1087	

After –

N E S W
 - I♥ p I♠
 ?

How strong do you play INT in this position in your partnership? It used to be fashion to play this “sandwich” INT as about 18-19 points, as the opponents have shown approaching half of the points or more between them. Modern thinking is that players open and respond on such light values now, that it is a risk to pass in the sandwich position with an upper range strong NT.

I play INT here as about 16-18, so I avoid 15 point hands unless opponents are known to me to be very light bidders, and this seems to work ok. Remember that there is an opening bid sitting over you and partner may have very few cards and entries.

This time, the right answer **is** to bid INT, which should make in comfort on any lead. Partner’s ♥J10x is very welcome as are the ♣s. The play is (again) pretty straightforward as you can reach your clubs easily with E holding ♣Ax. Just be sure to lead up to the ♠K before touching ♦s. Why? Well, E can duck the ♦K and W can win the ♠A later and lead a second ♦ to applause from partner.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 19 ♠ K10 Dealer S
 ♥ AJ983 Vul: E-W
 ♦ K6
 ♣ A974

♠ Q	♠ A9754
♥ KQ107	♥ 542
♦ Q1074	♦ A8
♣ J1065	♣ KQ8

♠ J8632
♥ 6
♦ J9532
♣ 32

After 2 passes, the bidding will either go a strong NT - all pass, or I♥ - (I♠) - P - INT,

depending on opening NT style, so many contracts will be INT by either N or W. N will go a couple off (at least) and west should make, possibly with an overtrick.

Top score for E/W will be INT by N, -3 (for +150) and for N/S probably INT -1 for -50 via a mis-defence, allowing 6 tricks. This could happen if, on a spade lead, E either ducks the ♠10 at trick 2, or switches to a ♥ instead of a ♣ when first in. This is not an easy defence, so don’t worry too much if you get it wrong. So e/w scores will vary from +50 to +150, via +90 and +120.

A positive score N/S will be very close to a top.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 20 ♠ J764 Dealer W
 ♥ A4 Vul: Both
 ♦ 1074
 ♣ A1087

♠ A982	♠ KQ10
♥ 5	♥ QJ832
♦ AK853	♦ QJ2
♣ K32	♣ J4

♠ 53
♥ K10976
♦ 96
♣ Q965

Most E/W pairs should reach 3NT safely and as ♠s may well have been bid by W (I♦- I♥- I♠- from W/E) if W plays 3NT, N will probably lead a ♣. Declarer will now run swiftly for the line, with 1♣, 5♦s, and 3♠s. Far too risky to finesse the ♠10 and it is slight odds-on to drop anyway.

In the event of ♠s not being bid and a ♠ lead, declarer can cash 4 ♠s and 5♦s then exit with a ♥ towards the Q and the defence will inevitably have to give declarer either a ♥ or a ♣ towards the end, for an overtrick. 9 or 10 is simply dependant on the lead.

And if E plays 3NT, unless S leads a most unlikely ♠, 9 tricks will likely be the limit whichever of the rounded suits S leads.

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

Board 21	♠ J	Dealer N
	♥ KQ9863	Vul: N-S
	♦ 72	
	♣ Q843	
♠ 986		♠ A105432
♥ J5		♥ A7
♦ AQJ954		♦ 1086
♣ 76		♣ 95
	♠ KQ7	
	♥ 1042	
	♦ K3	
	♣ AKJ102	

With quite a nice weak 2♥ opening, I think that most S players will be tempted to invite game, which N should accept. 6421 is a nice shape.. This is, however, a thin contract, needing the ♦A onside and ♥s to play for 1 loser. The second happens, but not the first. At teams, the lure of a vulnerable game should tempt S to at least enquire, and bid game opposite a maximum weak 2. At pairs however, the vulnerability issue does not apply to bidding thin games. If anything, it works the other way as minus 200 (from 4♥x minus 1) will be a very bad score.

There is therefore usually a case for being a touch conservative at pairs compared to teams when stretching for game, and here playing 2♥ or 3♥ will pay off big time. .

Over 2♥ did you bid a wafer thin 2♠? I don't really recommend it, largely because you are likely to get too high and go for -300 if partner has some cards, though if you get to play in 2♠ or 3♠s, you'll be ok this time.

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

Board 22	♠ K952	Dealer E
	♥ 5	Vul: E-W
	♦ A10873	
	♣ A62	
♠ Q7		♠ 3
♥ KQ8732		♥ A10964
♦ KQ4		♦ 52
♣ 108		♣ KQJ75
	♠ AJ10864	
	♥ J	
	♦ J96	
	♣ 943	

Whether E opens or not, it is likely that N/S will get into the bidding with their spades. S should open 2♠ if E passes and may even bid a weak 2♠ over a 1♥ opening. And if it goes 1♥-p- unless W bids an immediate 4♥, N should make a take-out double. Some will even double over 4♥.

4♥ can't be beaten and to beat 4♠, a ♣ must be led initially, not a ♥. This is because declarer will duck a ♣ switch once and, with the very lucky ♦ position, the defence has no entry to the 3rd ♣ if ♥s have already been played.

Tough to lead a ♣ as west, but if you managed this against 4♠ you will score very well indeed.

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

Board 23	♠ 6	Dealer S
	♥ Q984	Vul: Both
	♦ Q872	
	♣ K543	
♠ K10853		♠ AJ74
♥ A		♥ K1053
♦ AK1095		♦ J64
♣ J9		♣ 62
	♠ Q92	
	♥ J762	
	♦ 3	
	♣ AQ1087	

A thin 4♠ for E/W that most should probably reach. E is a little heavy for a 2♠ response to

partner's 1♠ opening, but light for a 3♠ response, particularly with a "loose" J (though in fact it has a potential value in this hand opposite AK10). But with playing values in excess of a 15 count - those lovely ♦s may well turn out to be a source of tricks - W should make some sort of try, which E will accept.

The lead is critical. A ♠ or a ♦ will immediately give the contract. I can't tell you how greatly I disapprove of a trump lead with a singleton, by the way! A ♣ lead is best, and partner will win the A. Defenders should always consider how best they can help partner and after ♣A, a small ♣ is a bad idea as it puts pressure on partner, who can only lead a ♥ now to avoid giving the contract

So S should play ♣A, ♣Q, then a ♦. Declarer now must win ♦A, then play S for the ♠Q in order to succeed. On this defence, most declarers will go off.

Some will get help with the lead, though so game will be made fairly often. Don't worry too much if you miss game, because you will beat all who bid and fail to make game.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 24

♠	K103	Dealer W
♥	K108	Vul: None
♦	AQ5	
♣	K1098	
♠	4	♠ AQJ98
♥	AJ72	♥ 654
♦	98643	♦ KJ10
♣	J43	♣ 75
♠	7652	
♥	Q93	
♦	72	
♣	AQ62	

After a pass from W, strong NT from N, or 1♣ for weak no-trumpers. E will probably not bid over INT (though competing at pairs - particularly with ♠s - is often a good idea, so a few will. All will bid 1♠ over 1♣ though, and N/S may now settle in a sound 2♣ contract..

This will make +90 or +110 for a solid middle score.

Those playing in INT will get the ♠Q led and need to play well to score the 8th trick that DeepFinesse can find. This can only legitimately be done by finding the ♥J, though a muddled defence might find E endplayed to lead into N's ♦AQ I suppose. If you manage +120 you will get an excellent score..

To touch on the bidding, it is often wrong with a flat hand to advance with values that require the opener to be maximum. So here, to have the guideline 25 points, N must have 17 and this occurs less than one third of the time as higher point counts are progressively slightly less likely that lower ones in any 3 point range. Yat pairs you don't want to go negative with a good balance of the points. The same principle applies obviously, with a scattered 11 points opposite a weak NT. Shape and long suits overrides this of course.

So here you will be rewarded by passing a 15-17 NT. You can always make 7 tricks at least.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 25

♠	A98762	Dealer N
♥	4	Vul: E-W
♦	A10	
♣	A1043	
♠	Q5	♠ KJ3
♥	KJ10975	♥ AQ832
♦	K8	♦ QJ32
♣	Q75	♣ J
♠	104	
♥	6	
♦	97654	
♣	K9862	

2♥ is a slightly dangerous overcall of N's 1♠ opening, but I suspect that most will make it at pairs. W will like their ♥s but perhaps not the loose Qs, but will raise according to the partnership methods.

The E hand is something of an oxymoron. The ♠s are well placed, but could be a liability if S is short, but the ♦s could supply a couple of tricks and the ♣ singleton is excellent, so an invite will probably be accepted. Again the play is straightforward, and the defence can only score N's 3 aces.

Good on you if you reached this thin, but excellent game .

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 26	♠	K108632	Dealer E
	♥	J73	Vul: Both
	♦	7	
	♣	1094	
	♠	A94	♠ J7
	♥	AQ1096	♥ 52
	♦	KJ2	♦ A953
	♣	85	♣ AK632
	♠	Q5	
	♥	K84	
	♦	Q10864	
	♣	QJ7	

Despite their 26 points, if W plays the hand, he/she will have to play well to make 3NT on a ♠ lead. At least one ♠ must be ducked (probably 2 unless N has produced a filthy weak jump of 2♠ in the auction). Alarming that all finesses must be taken into the danger hand, but declarer has no option.

The simplest way to play the hand is to play S for the ♥K. So, having won the ♠A, a ♣ to the K is followed by a ♥ to the Q. Then return to dummy, probably with the ♦A and now another ♥. If S plays the ♥K at any stage, you duck and if not you win the ♥A and exit with a 3rd ♥, knowing that S has the K, though possibly the J also. In practice all is well as ♥s are 3-3.

You'll need a lot of courage to finesse the ♦J for an overtrick, but don't rule it out 100% at pairs. Had E played the contract (and N not bid) there would be a different lead, and you need to pull up alongside them to score really well.

And finally, note that if you are defending as S, you should at least consider unblocking your ♣ honours if declarer plays 3 rounds of ♣s.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 27	♠	Q6543	Dealer S
	♥	Q10874	Vul: None
	♦	10	
	♣	105	
	♠	AJ	♠ K1082
	♥	6	♥ 95
	♦	AJ82	♦ K975
	♣	KQJ984	♣ 632
	♠	97	
	♥	AKJ32	
	♦	Q643	
	♣	A7	

A competitive part-score hand. I don't like a weak NT from S, as I think the hand is both a touch strong and more suitable for play in a suit. If INT is opened and W doubles, N should have a method to show 2 suits (I play that 2♥ shows ♥s and a higher suit, which most partners will be able to identify as ♠s!). E/W better not try to penalise this or this will be -570.

After a 1♥ opening, W will try 2♣, and N will bid at least 3♥, perhaps four. 5♣ can only be beaten if the defence finds their ♦ ruff (or declarer misplays the ♦s) so they should save in 5♥ if they plan to mis-defend 5♣!

It is frequently correct to "bid up" with big fits, so a 4♥ call from N over 2♣ will put E/W under the most pressure. 4♥x will only score +100 for E/W and 4♣ will be either +130 or +150.

Makeable Contracts

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

Board 28 ♠ 1087 Dealer W
 ♥ A10 Vul: N-S
 ♦ Q653
 ♣ K1032

♠ KJ3 ♠ 6542
 ♥ K4 ♥ 9865
 ♦ J942 ♦ AK8
 ♣ A754 ♣ Q9

♠ AQ9
 ♥ QJ732
 ♦ 107
 ♣ J86

And a pretty tame finish, I'm afraid. The hand might just be thrown in, though few pass 12 points nowadays and W will usually open. E/W are likely to finish in INT, either opened or after 1♣- 1♥(!)- INT- .

Any lead (and N must lead something!) will help declarer and a ♣ lead is best for the defence as it sets up a couple of winners eventually. Declarer should try a ♠ now and they are well placed for E/W. That is 6 tricks (2x♣, 2x♦, 2x♠) and a 7th trick is very likely to appear in the late play.

The reason to play ♠s when in dummy with the ♣Q is that you need entries to dummy to play toward your major holdings and playing ♦s early removes these.

So if you make INT, you will score above average, as some will definitely go off.

Makeable Contracts

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

I hope you have enjoyed these hands. There were certainly some bidding challenges,

Brian Short