ECatsBridge Simultaneous Pairs for BBC Children in Need

Thursday 12th November 2026

Together we can …

… and by competing in this Simultaneous Pairs you have once again certainly shown that **together we can indeed do something to help make a difference** to children who really need our help. Over the past years we (well you) have helped raise an amazing **£1,474,766.47 …** we are so close to one and half million -will we make it this year ? We are keeping our fingers crossed!

Thank you so so much for coming along and joining in, playing and donating – please don't forget the donating bit though, will you – just go to :

https://www.ecatsbridge.com/sims/currentdonations.asp

and you will see how you can do it – if you haven't already done so of course!

Our thanks, as always, go to our commentators: Brian Senior for his words of wisdom on Tuesday and Thursday, Julian Pottage did the analysis for the Monday session, Mark Horton for the Wednesday session and Rob Miller completes the crew, writing up Friday event. It's always interesting to see if they got it right but you will have discovered that by now of course !

With very best wishes

Anna & Mark – the ECatsBridge Team

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Board 1	♠ Q73 ♥ K10875 ♦ 1032 ♣ 65	Dealer N Vul: None
♠ KJ62 ♥ A632 ♦ ♣ QJ1094		♠ A1085 ♥ 94 ♦ AK954 ♣ 73
	♠ 94 ♥ QJ ♦ QJ876 ♣ AK82	

With ace, king, ace, East is well worth an opening bid of 1♦, and that will silence South, who would also of course have opened 1♦ given the opportunity to do so.

The most efficient way to explore all possible trump suits is for west to respond 1♥ rather than 2♣ and, when West does so, East rebids 1♠. Taking into account the ruffing potential of the hand, West is worth a raise to game, concluding the auction.

South will usually lead a top club, but the sight of dummy should see a swift switch to the queen of hearts. That establishes the third defensive winner, and the contract's fate will therefore hang on declarer's play of the trump suit.

Declarer wants to draw trumps, cash the top diamonds for heart discards, then set up the clubs. It is perfectly plausible to play spades either way around, but it just looks more natural to win the ace of hearts, cash the ♠K, and continue with a low spade to the ten. That is the winning play on this layout, and I would expect a majority to play this way.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 2	♠ 974 ♥ 10864 ♦ K9 ♣ 8432	Dealer E Vul: N-S
♠ AQJ105 ♥ J ♦ A642 ♣ AK7		♠ 62 ♥ KQ972 ♦ 108 ♣ QJ109
	♠ K83 ♥ A53 ♦ QJ753 ♣ 65	

After two passes, West opens 1♠. The majority of Easts will respond 1NT, though a few Acol players may prefer 2♥. The rule here for whether to respond two over one when playing Acol weak NT is to pretend that partner has 15-16 balanced then decide whether, in that case, you would rather play in 1NT or in 3NT/4♥. It is easy to see how a good game could be missed by responding 1NT and partner passing with 15 or 16 HCP, so a 1NT response is by no means automatic – though of course it is equally easy to see how the game that a 2♥ response reaches could be going down.

If East responds 2♥, West rebids 3♦, and East bids 3NT and plays there.

It's less straightforward after a 1NT response. Should West rebid 3♦ to force to game, 2♦ to leave the option of stopping in partscore but planning a third bid if 2♦ does not end the auction, or 2NT, a not ideal compromise action to get the strength of the hand across whilst distorting its shape somewhat?

One way or another, the most likely outcome is 3NT. If that is played by West and hearts are unbid, a heart is the most likely opening lead. If South wins the ace, there are two hearts tricks to be had and the spade finesse provides a ninth.

If East is declarer, South will often lead a low diamond. If declarer ducks, North wins the king and continues with the nine. The diamonds are established and the contract is defeated.

And if declarer wins the ace at trick one?

The simple way to beat the contract is for North to unblock the king. When South gets in with the ♥A or ♠K, he can then cash four diamond tricks. If North retains the ♦K, declarer plays the ♥J and South must duck, as otherwise declarer has two heart winners, four clubs, two spades and a diamond, and the diamonds are still blocked. Now declarer has only one heart winner so needs three spades. South wins the ♠K and leads a diamond to partner's king, and the ♥A is the entry to cash the rest of the diamonds.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 3	♠ AK852 ♥ J ♦ K1097 ♣ A65	Dealer S Vul: E-W
♠ 9764 ♥ A43 ♦ 832 ♣ K104		♠ QJ ♥ KQ1082 ♦ Q65 ♣ QJ7
	♠ 103 ♥ 9765 ♦ AJ4 ♣ 9832	

E/W do best to stay out of the auction on this deal.

North opens 1♠ and, if East passes, so may South. If South does respond, that will be 1NT, and he will next give preference over North's 2♦ rebid. Nine tricks can be made in either a spade or a diamond partscore.

But, though the East hand is full of queens and jacks, not a positive indicator for a vulnerable two-level overcall, many Easts will overcall 2hx, and some Wests will raise to 3♥, either immediately or in competition after North's reopening double.

Three Hearts, or even 2♥ at this vulnerability should not be a success. A spade lead and diamond switch enables the defence to come to six side-suit tricks then play a third spade, and that promotes a trump trick for South for down three, comfortably beating any score N/S can achieve on offence.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 4	♠ 74 ♥ K87 ♦ QJ8732 ♣ J4	Dealer W Vul: Both
♠ AKQ862 ♥ Q6542 ♦ K4 ♣		♠ J953 ♥ AJ3 ♦ A96 ♣ AQ10
	♠ 10 ♥ 109 ♦ 105 ♣ K9876532	

West opens 1♠ and East bids whatever the system requires to show a hand too good for a mere raise to game. How does the auction progress from here? That will vary from one partnership to the next – does opener show a second suit or does he show a shortage? Does he differentiate with his rebid between a minimum opener and one with extra values?

What is clear is that West has a lot of extra playing strength and East has the necessary red-suit controls to make slam a huge proposition. To fail to reach 6♠, then, should score very poorly.

The double dummy programme tells us that 7♠ can be made. That is not immediately obvious but, with a little investigation, we see that it is indeed possible – at double dummy.

Win the passive trump lead and draw the missing trump, then play ace then queen of clubs to pin the jack. That creates a second club trick, so two heart losers go away. Now run all the black-suit winners and North, with sole guard of diamonds, is squeezed between that suit and his third heart. If he comes down to a doubleton heart, away goes dummy's third diamond. Now a heart to the jack followed by the ace fells the king, and the ♥Q wins trick 13.

The club play is seriously double dummy, but if North were to lead the jack of clubs, perhaps because of a 3♣ overcall from South, that would do that part of the job for declarer, who would merely need to recognise the potential of the red-suit squeeze to bring home the grand slam.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	3	6	7	6
W	1	3	6	7	6

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Board 5	♠ J5 ♥ J9 ♦ A832 ♣ 87643	Dealer N Vul: N-S
♠ A10862 ♥ K32 ♦ 54 ♣ A109		♠ Q3 ♥ A10 ♦ KQ109 ♣ KQJ52
	♠ K974 ♥ Q87654 ♦ J76 ♣	

E/W can make 6♣ – we wouldn't expect them to bid it, but if they do they cannot be beaten. If declarer leads up to the diamonds twice North must win the ace or lose it. Declarer therefore has three diamond winners, bringing his total up to 11. There is now a positional major-suit squeeze on South.

In practice, the majority will get to 3NT, which is just a matter of overtricks. Even a heart lead is not a serious threat, as South can be kept off lead easily enough if the suit gets established.

If South passes, West has a borderline opening bid. A weak NT would be quickly raised to game, while 1♠ would see East respond 2♣ and West rebid whatever his methods required of him. However, there is no good reason why 3NT should not again be the final contract. Eleven tricks are possible, but by no means all will manage so many, and +460 should be an excellent result for E/W.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	5	2	4	5
W	6	4	1	3	5

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Board 6	♠ AKQ ♥ 7542 ♦ Q2 ♣ 10742	Dealer E Vul: E-W
♠ 854 ♥ 1093 ♦ 109765 ♣ A6		♠ 1032 ♥ Q86 ♦ A83 ♣ KQ83
	♠ J976 ♥ AKJ ♦ KJ4 ♣ J95	

Assuming a pass from East – there is no reason to upgrade this average 11-count to opening status, particularly when vulnerable against not – South will open either a weak NT or, probably, 1♣.

I would not be too critical of a North who passed out a weak NT – there is no premium on bidding to thin games at matchpoints, and inviting game will lead to 2/3NT going down at least as often as to 3NT making. This, of course, applies equally to North's decision over South's 1NT rebid.

Today, however, is not the day to follow what I believe to be the odds choice of settling for 1NT. After the likely diamond lead, game is simply on the heart finesse, and that wins. Those who do not invite game – which South would of course accept with his maximum 14 HCP – will score badly, because the majority will be in 3NT and would not even consider not being there.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 7	♠ K6 ♥ J6 ♦ Q1042 ♣ KQ852	Dealer S Vul: Both
♠ 54 ♥ 10432 ♦ J53 ♣ A943		♠ AQJ87 ♥ 97 ♦ 976 ♣ 1076
	♠ 10932 ♥ AKQ85 ♦ AK8 ♣ J	

Acol players will bid to 3NT via 1♥ – 2♣ – 2♠ - 3NT. Two-over-one players will start 1♥ – 1NT, as North is not worth a force to game. Facing the wide-range 1NT response, South will reverse into 2♠, showing not only five-four or better shape, but also significant extra values – maybe and ace or more above minimum opening strength. Again, that gives North an easy jump to 3NT, concluding the auction.

With spades bid over him, most Easts will look elsewhere for their opening lead, the obvious choice being diamonds, the unbid suit. Declarer wins and plays a club and, if West wins and plays a spade, the defence comes to four tricks. If East leads a spade at trick one, or West fails to return a spade when in with the ♣A, declarer will come to at least one overtrick and a strong result.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 8	♠ K107 ♥ J87643 ♦ ♣ K954	Dealer W Vul: None
♠ 985432 ♥ 92 ♦ 964 ♣ Q6		♠ AQ6 ♥ AQ5 ♦ AK5 ♣ J1087
	♠ J ♥ K10 ♦ QJ108732 ♣ A32	

Even I would probably not open the West hand, and I do like to pre-empt as aggressively as possible. Were N/S vulnerable, so that an opposing vulnerable game bonus was in the picture, yes, I might open 2♠, but maybe that is a little too much at equal vulnerability.

North also has a possible weak two bid. Playable in two other suits, with a weak main suit, and with one opponent having already passed, there are plenty of reasons not to open the North hand, but plenty of Norths will open the hand.

If North opens 2♥, East is a bit good for a 2NT overcall so may double then bid 2NT over West's 2♠ response. If West now rebids 3♠, that should be read as a weak bid and East should pass.

Where North does not open, East gets to open 2NT and West transfers to spades then passes East's 3♠ completion.

If West does open 2♠, East is likely to bid game and be underwhelmed on sight of partner's 'opening bid'.

Four Spades is hopeless and must go down at least one trick, but what about the popular contract of 3♠?

If West is declarer, North will often lead a heart to the queen and king. A diamond back could see North ruff and play a club. A second diamond ruff and second club trick means down one.

If East is declarer the opening lead will surely be a diamond. A ruff and heart through again ensures five defensive tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 9	♠ 10 ♥ 53 ♦ Q1043 ♣ K98742	Dealer N Vul: E-W
♠ A542 ♥ 972 ♦ A86 ♣ AQ5		♠ KJ983 ♥ AK1084 ♦ 92 ♣ 10
	♠ Q76 ♥ QJ6 ♦ KJ75 ♣ J63	

There will be Norths who open 3♣ – yes, I know, but pre-emption has become more and more aggressive in recent years, at least at tournament level, and it does often cause problems for the opposition.

On this deal a 3♣ opening bullies East into overcalling 4♣ to show the genuine two-suiter. West will be tempted to do more, but the three low hearts is a serious negative feature if partner has the majors, and he will eventually settle for a cautious preference to 4♠, ending the auction.

Four Spades is an easy make, but the pre-empt may prove costly if declarer, knowing of long clubs with North, decides to start trumps by cashing the king then plays South for queen to three. The overtrick will be worth a lot of matchpoints.

Where North does not pre-empt, East will open 1♠, West show a game-force with spade support, and the partnership follow its methods to the natural conclusion of 4♠. Now, however, there will be no clue to allow declarer to bring in spades without loss.

Sure, there is a safety play, starting with the king, to cater to a four-nil spade split, but that would be a misplay at this form of scoring when in a normal contract as it costs the overtrick more often than it is necessary to make the contract.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 10	♠ 1096 ♥ A83 ♦ K10532 ♣ 102	Dealer E Vul: Both
♠ 853 ♥ K2 ♦ 987 ♣ J9653		♠ AQJ2 ♥ J1074 ♦ 4 ♣ KQ74
	♠ K74 ♥ Q965 ♦ AQJ6 ♣ A8	

East opens 1♣, creating an easy rebid of 1♥ should partner's response come in East's short suit. This time, however, South comes in with either a 1NT overcall or take-out double.

Which is the better choice? 1NT describes the shape and strength in one go, but clubs is South's shortest suit and double could easily find a better partscore than 1NT. A matter of personal style perhaps, with some insisting that 1NT is obviously correct, others insisting on double.

If 1♣ promises clubs, West may compete with 2♣ over 1NT, or make a pre-emptive jump to 3♣ over a double. The former probably sees North compete with 2♦, which South may raise, 3♦ becoming the final contract. The latter may see North make a take-out double. If North does so, South can make 3♦, possibly with an overtrick, and can also make the slightly more challenging 3♥.

If the 1♣ opening did not promise genuine clubs, N/S may have the subsequent auction to themselves. Where that means playing in 1NT, a club lead holds declarer to eight tricks, and +120 is inferior to what is available in a red-suit partscore.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 11	♠ K6 ♥ A109872 ♦ 96 ♣ A107	Dealer S Vul: None
♠ 92 ♥ J6543 ♦ A73 ♣ J64		♠ J1043 ♥ Q ♦ K84 ♣ KQ853
	♠ AQ875 ♥ K ♦ QJ1052 ♣ 92	

Tough South's 12 HCP include a bare king, most will open the hand with 1♠, North will respond 2♥, probably whether or not that is played as game-forcing, and South rebid 2♠.

Nine tricks are the limit in either a heart or a spade contract, assuming that the defence gets its club winner established and then cashed in time.

Most Norths will rebid the hearts to show the sixth card, not wishing to commit to spades as they appreciate that South would frequently be obliged to rebid a moderate five-card suit. Now will come the parting of the ways. If playing Acol, or any other method in which 3♥ is non-forcing, South can pass and chalk up a useful +140. If playing 2-over-1 GF, South may introduce the diamonds, but more likely will simply raise to 4♥ where, as already mentioned, an early club lead should see the contract go down one for a poor score. Either way, North will be grateful for his chunky heart spots when the five-one trump break comes to light.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 12	♠ 984 ♥ J8763 ♦ A ♣ K732	Dealer W Vul: N-S
♠ QJ1076 ♥ AK4 ♦ Q5 ♣ 1095		♠ K52 ♥ 52 ♦ 1087432 ♣ AQ
	♠ A3 ♥ Q109 ♦ KJ96 ♣ J864	

Those playing strong NT will have an easy decision with the West cards, being obliged to open 1♠. East will make a simple raise to 2♠ - the hand is maximum for the bid, but there is nothing wrong with being maximum once in a while.

Particularly being vulnerable, N/S are unlikely to get involved and West will declare 2♠. The club finesse works, and either a heart or club ruff brings the total to nine fairly painless tricks for +140.

Those playing a weak NT have a decision to make, whether to open 1♠ or 1NT. If they open 1♠ East, with honour to three spades and a weak doubleton in hearts, should raise to 2♠, which will again end the auction. If West opts for 1NT, that will often end the auction and, after the likely heart lead, should come to eight tricks for +120.

Any East who decides to transfer to the six-card diamond suit will regret it, as there are four trump losers in a diamond contract so 3♦ is down a trick for a very poor score. My view would be that East should pass out a weak NT as E/W have the majority of the points and can hope to make 1NT, so why go two levels higher to play in a minor suit?

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 13	♠ J43 ♥ Q84 ♦ 97 ♣ AJ763	Dealer N Vul: Both
♠ AK10975 ♥ K5 ♦ KQ652 ♣		♠ 6 ♥ J1032 ♦ 84 ♣ KQ9542
	♠ Q82 ♥ A976 ♦ AJ103 ♣ 108	

If we ignore the handful of Easts who will open 3♣, the first decision on the board falls to South, whether or not top open.

I would not dream of opening a weak NT in third position, vulnerable, while 1♦/♥ create potential rebid problems. One Club, if played as two+ cards, is a possibility, planning to pass and response – we really don't want to commit to rebidding 1NT – and do we want to bid our short and weak suit anyway? So, I vote strongly for passing.

If West opens 1♠, East will respond 1NT and West have a range of possible rebids – 2♠, 2♦, 3♠, 3♦, 4♠.

Two Spades, whilst being the big winner on the actual deal, is a serious underbid and should be discounted. Four Spades is just a wild shot in the dark. Three Diamonds is fine if there is a fit, but it is GF and, if there is no fit, will get the partnership way too high, as is the case on the actual layout. Two Diamonds might get passed out when game is on, or mean a lower-scoring partscore, but it has a high upper range, and looks wiser than 3♦. Three Spades is about right for spades but ignores diamonds completely – it I possible that there is even a slam available in diamonds but no spade game.

So, I vote for 2♦, with 3♠ the second best option.

East will not enjoy offering preference, but simple preference at the two level is the only way to go plus, 2♠ earning the top score of +110. Those who introduce their own club suit will just give West a choice of ways to go minus.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 14	♠ 7 ♥ Q94 ♦ A10975 ♣ AK94	Dealer E Vul: None
♠ K8653 ♥ AJ107 ♦ K83 ♣ 3		♠ QJ92 ♥ 86532 ♦ 6 ♣ 852
	♠ A104 ♥ K ♦ QJ42 ♣ QJ1076	

When South opens 1♣, the modern approach to a hand like West's is to overcall 1♠ rather than double, despite having support for all three unbid suits. The point is to avoid losing the fifth spade, which a double is likely to do. West then plans to double at his second turn to bring the other suits into the game – if that still looks to be appropriate when the auction comes back around.

If 1♣ promised genuine clubs, North might support them immediately, perhaps via a 3♠ splinter bid, showing game+ values, four+ clubs, and spade shortage. South can then decide whether to play 3NT, 5♣, or explore slam possibilities.

At matchpoints, some Souths will gamble out 3NT, perhaps seduced by their ♠10 into hoping for a second spade stopper should one be required. Five Clubs will usually be safer, but it takes someone to be optimistic for the small slam to be reached – it's on a finesse anyway, so it is a bit random that it happens to make.

If 1♣ could be short, North is more likely to start with 2♦ over the opposing 1♠ bid. South will raise to 3♦ and now it will be down to North's next call whether 3NT is reached – if North cuebid 3♠ over 3♦ as an asking bid – or if North will like the possible double fit and look for a diamond contract.

If facing an overcall, East may well make a pre-emptive jump raise in spades, which may make N/S's decision for them. Even 4♠ is only down two, so is a good save against 3NT, costing as it would, only –300. I suppose, by extension, even 6♠ only costs –800 so is a good save against slam. The trouble with that is that not many will be in slam, so –800 still rates to be a poor score.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 15	♠ QJ5 ♥ 109 ♦ AK92 ♣ AKQ8	Dealer S Vul: N-S
♠ 109742 ♥ K865 ♦ J763 ♣		♠ K8 ♥ AQJ7 ♦ 85 ♣ J10654
	♠ A63 ♥ 432 ♦ Q104 ♣ 9732	

There will be two passes to North, who opens 1♣, or maybe 1♦. he could upgrade to 2NT, but if 1♣/♦ is passed out it is unlikely that game will be missed.

Playing Acol, South raises 1♣ to 2♣ and North bids 2 or 3NT, depending on his level of optimism. South has no reason to go on over 2NT.

Playing five-card majors, so that a 1♣ opening does not promise four cards, South is likely to respond 1NT, and again North decides how high to go.

The 1♣ opening will often dissuade East from leading the suit, as even where North didn't promise the suit South will be known to have some club length. A passive diamond lead will pick up partner's jack and the winning spade finesse then bring the total to nine, despite clubs not behaving. A spade lead is really wild and gifts declarer a third spade trick. A heart runs the risk of giving a trick to declarer's king but, on this occasion, works well in that it enables the defence to cash four heart tricks.

It's a bit tricky for declarer if four hearts are cashed against him. What is he to discard? A club from hand and one spade from each hand leaves him able to test both minors before taking the spade finesse, and nine tricks eventually come in. I say that on the assumption that declarer will pick up four diamond tricks. Once clubs prove to be four-nil, it is surely right to play West for jack to four diamonds.

Makeable Contracts

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

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Board 16	♠ J863 ♥ A9864 ♦ 108 ♣ 103	Dealer W Vul: E-W
♠ A9 ♥ J52 ♦ A9654 ♣ K62		♠ K1072 ♥ Q10 ♦ QJ7 ♣ 8754
	♠ Q54 ♥ K73 ♦ K32 ♣ AQJ9	

Holding a weak NT, West will open 1♣, 1♦, or 1NT, as his agreements demand. North is too weak to overcall, so East passes out 1NT or responds 1♠ to 1♣/♦, and would then pass out the 1NT rebid.

With diamonds playable for five tricks, there are eight tricks in 1NT for a solid +120.

Will South come into the bidding?

I guess South will double a 1NT opening and North run to 2♥. East can double that for take-out and West reply with 3♦, playing there for +110.

It is unclear that South ever has a good way into the auction after West's opening in a suit. South never has the right shape for a take-out double, and the empty 15 HCP with 3-3-3-4 shape is not really worth a 1NT overcall. Best then, to stay quiet.

With only seven tricks available in a heart contract, N/S should only go plus if E/W play in the wrong contract, so going plus should score very well for them.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 17	♠ 10732 ♥ AJ3 ♦ Q8 ♣ A754	Dealer N Vul: None
♠ AJ ♥ Q4 ♦ K10932 ♣ Q862		♠ 6 ♥ K10985 ♦ A76 ♣ K1093
	♠ KQ9854 ♥ 762 ♦ J54 ♣ J	

Some will open the North hand, some will not. It is an empty 11-count with no good honour combinations, and the percentage of players who would open the hand has, I'm sure, gone up in the last 10 or 15 years. What I will say is that I would be a lot more comfortable if my methods require that I open 1♣ than if they required a 1NT opening.

Say that North opens 1NT, East should overcall. It would be better if 2♥ showed five hearts plus a second suit, rather than only hearts, as such a method – Multi Landy, for example – offers the possibility of finding a fit even facing heart shortage.

On the actual hand, South will compete with 2♠ and West in turn competes with 3♣, please pass with clubs but correct to diamonds with diamonds. North, with four-card support, should support spades, and 3♠ will often conclude the bidding.

Three Spades can be taken down two, but that will be OK for N/S unless someone can find a double, –100 scoring well for N/S, but –300 being horrible.

If North opens 1♣, East will overcall 1♥ and South bid 1♠. A take-out double is ideal on the West cards but East may have a tough decision when North raises to 2♠. If N/S are allowed to play 2♠ they should score very well, even if the contract is defeated.

And finally, what if North does not open. East is also just shy of a sound opening bid, so South will usually get to open with a weak two bid. North will surely compete to 3♠, and we are back to someone needing to find a double for E/W to score well.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 18	♠ 10632 ♥ J9852 ♦ K7 ♣ 94	Dealer E Vul: N-S
♠ K974 ♥ 76 ♦ AQJ1083 ♣ 6		♠ ♥ 1043 ♦ 64 ♣ AQ1087532
	♠ AQJ85 ♥ AKQ ♦ 952 ♣ KJ	

East has an easy pre-emptive opening, the only decision being – how high?

Three Clubs is a serious underbid, particularly in today's world where many people open at the three level with only six cards, while 5♣ is maybe one too many, part of the problem being that it makes it easy for the opposition to go plus if they have good strength, simply by doubling and passing it out. Four Clubs is not only what the East hand is actually worth, it also leaves room for the opposition to go wrong.

If East opens 4♣, South has a number of options. Three No Trump or 4♠ is too committal, while 3♠ is a big underbid, leaving a take-out double as the most flexible option.

North will respond 4♥ to the double, and South has a close decision, 4♠ or pass. Both contracts should be defeated, so the pre-empt has done its work. Four Spades will usually score better, as there is a vicious crossruff in a heart contract, such that 4♥ can be as many as three down, while there are always nine tricks in a spade contract.

If East opens 5♣, South will double and North leave it in, while a 3♣ opening is doubled, North responding 3♥. Now South can go on with 3♠, showing a hand that was too good for an initial 3♠ overcall but not suitable for a jump to 4♠. Will North go on with four-card support and a useful diamond holding? Passing sees N/S go plus for a lot of matchpoints, while raising sees an immediate club ruff to beat the game.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 19	♠ J652 ♥ Q876 ♦ 1043 ♣ K9	Dealer S Vul: E-W
♠ A10874 ♥ A ♦ KQJ ♣ A753		♠ K3 ♥ KJ32 ♦ 852 ♣ QJ86
	♠ Q9 ♥ 10954 ♦ A976 ♣ 1042	

E/W have game in three different denominations, though some are easier to make than others.

Five Clubs may require that declarer take a third-round ruffing spade finesse, while 4♠ would need inspired play in the unlikely event that East was declarer on a club lead. However, the popular spot will surely be 3NT.

Acol Players will have to find a way for West to show his hand below 3NT after the 1♠ - 2♣ start. It would be wrong to jump to 4♣ with so much of the strength in the unbid suits, while 3♣ is a big underbid. A distortion with 2NT may be hard to recover from on a different layout, so perhaps 2♦ is the least bad option. That will get 2♠ from East, 3♣ from West (or 3♥ if West is scared that this is not forcing (it should be), and 3NT from East.

Those playing 2-over-1 GF will start 1♠ – 1NT, and take it from there. Some will overbid with a jump to 3♣, others risk 2♣ ending the auction (its OK this time as East raises to 3♣), or distort slightly with a raise to 2NT, which gets the strength across nicely.

Superficially, a low diamond lead and later continuation nets the defence four tricks. That is right if declarer plays on spades first – second diamond ducked, and when North wins the ♣K he plays a third diamond to South.

But if declarer plays first on clubs and a diamond comes back and is ducked. Declarer can play the third diamond himself to force South to take the long card now or lose it. On this lie of the cards, if South does not cash the 13th diamond declarer can concede a spade to North and has 10 tricks, while if South does cash the 13th diamond North can be squeezed in the majors to give the tenth trick. That would be a nice play.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 20	♠ AQ93 ♥ J1075 ♦ 97 ♣ 862	Dealer W Vul: Both
♠ 62 ♥ A96 ♦ KJ52 ♣ AQ75		♠ 875 ♥ K8432 ♦ A103 ♣ J9
	♠ KJ104 ♥ Q ♦ Q864 ♣ K1043	

West has a maximum weak NT. If he opens 1NT East will transfer to hearts. South will pass for now but, when West's 2♥ completion comes round will make a take-out double, to which North has an easy 2♠ response. If that ends the auction, declarer is likely to come to seven tricks.

Looking at a maximum with three hearts and only two low spades, West might compete with 3♥. If he gets the diamonds right, as he should do on the auction and the fact that South turns up with a singleton heart, 3♥ should be made exactly.

Elsewhere, West will open 1♣/♦ and East respond 1♥. South might double to suggest the other two suits, but it may be wiser to pass for now and only come in with a double if the opposition find a heart fit.

Some Wests will rebid 1NT to show their weak NT and, if they play there, can come to an overtrick. However, with ace to three hearts and a weak doubleton, a raise to 2♥ looks like the long term winner, and so it proves on this deal.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 21	♠ A98542 ♥ 76 ♦ Q ♣ A942	Dealer N Vul: N-S
♠ Q1063 ♥ K9 ♦ J743 ♣ KJ6		♠ 7 ♥ AJ10532 ♦ A109 ♣ Q73
	♠ KJ ♥ Q84 ♦ K8652 ♣ 1085	

The North hand contains a six-card major and is within the normal range for a weak two opener. However, North is vulnerable against not, has an empty main suit, and two aces – all of which are flaws when considering a 2♠ opening. Nonetheless, I would expect a majority to open with a weak two.

If North does not open, East will open 1♥ and West respond 1♠, which will silence North. East rebids 2♥ and there are two passes to North – should he balance with 2♠, the suit bid on his right? If he does, he can get out for one down as spades play for one loser. How good –100 will be depends on how many E/Ws go plus (there is also the possibility of 2♠ being doubled, and –200 may be significantly worse.

If North does open 2♠, East will overcall 3♥, and West has a big decision to make. Pass would not be ridiculous, and rates to score OK on the actual deal with many going down in game. Four Hearts is also a sound option but declarer will have to pick up the hearts without loss and without conceding a diamond ruff.

What about 3NT, another perfectly sensible choice? On a spade lead to the king and jack continuation, declarer must duck, else North can clear the spades whilst still having the ace of clubs with which to get in. I wonder how many declarers will miss that play? Having found the necessary duck, declarer will still need to get the hearts right.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 22	♠ 109 ♥ Q10 ♦ AK10542 ♣ K95	Dealer E Vul: E-W
♠ Q64 ♥ J8752 ♦ 98 ♣ J107		♠ AKJ832 ♥ 93 ♦ J73 ♣ 84
	♠ 75 ♥ AK64 ♦ Q6 ♣ AQ632	

East has a classic weak two opener and South, while being a little worried about getting a response in diamonds, has a clear take-out double. At this vulnerability, few Wests will make the single raise that would be normal were the vulnerability reversed. North is too strong not to drive to game and may start with a cuebid to say so – assuming that the version of Lebensohl in use does not require 2NT for now.

With no spade stopper, South will just bid his longest suit, clubs, over which North can bid a forcing 4♦, South 4♥, and North maybe preference to 5♣, but more likely repeat the diamonds, expecting partner to have at least tolerance for the suit, and play there.

There are two top spades to be lost, but whichever minor becomes the trump suit it breaks three-two and 11 tricks roll in.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 23	♠ KJ43 ♥ K74 ♦ 92 ♣ KQ74	Dealer S Vul: Both
♠ 109 ♥ AQJ106 ♦ QJ4 ♣ 963		♠ Q8 ♥ 983 ♦ AK876 ♣ J108
	♠ A7652 ♥ 52 ♦ 1053 ♣ A52	

The cards lie very kindly for N/S who, with two balanced hands and a combined 20 HCP, are cold for 4♠. Will they get there? Surely not.

There will normally be two passes to North, who will open either 1♣ or 1NT as per system. If 1NT, East will pass and South transfer to spades. West can double 2♥ but North may then jump to 3♠, ending the auction.

If North opens 1♦, East can overcall before South bids 1♠. West can support diamonds or, perhaps better, bid 2♥, prepared to go to 3♦ if necessary. None of this is likely to matter. N/S have the spade suit, and should always be able to buy the contract in 2/3♠.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 24	♠ KQ64 ♥ 3 ♦ 9854 ♣ AJ76	Dealer W Vul: None
♠ J83 ♥ K764 ♦ AQ62 ♣ KQ		♠ A952 ♥ A82 ♦ J10 ♣ 10954
	♠ 107 ♥ QJ1095 ♦ K73 ♣ 832	

West has a minimum strong NT and, after a pass from North, East will use Stayman and follow through with an invitational 2NT over the 2♥ response. Looking at a complete minimum, West will decline the invitation.

If West opens 1♦ or 1♥, East will respond 1♠ and West rebid 1NT. East can again bid an invitational 2NT and West say 'no thanks'.

There will be those who bid to 3NT and, at first glance, there is no way to come to nine tricks. Indeed, if declarer plays on hearts he may struggle to find an eighth trick. There are three diamond winners, two hearts and one spade. Add a second club and that makes eight, but straightforward play means that dummy entries are at a premium.

Now take a look at the spade suit, and this is the solution for anyone looking for nine tricks. Lead the two of spades to the seven, eight and queen. Get back to the West hand lead the jack of spades to the king, ace and ten. Later, the three of spades towards the nine-five, and North's six-four can be picked up. Three spade tricks almost as if by magic.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 25	♠ K10983 ♥ 106 ♦ 1074 ♣ Q85	Dealer N Vul: E-W
♠ Q762 ♥ AQ ♦ KJ8 ♣ AJ92		♠ A4 ♥ K87432 ♦ 63 ♣ 764
	♠ J5 ♥ J95 ♦ AQ952 ♣ K103	

There are those who will not open a weak two bid on that East hand due to the weakness of the heart suit and vulnerability. OK, passing could prove to be a wise choice and, indeed, it may keep East out of a poor contract. However, if the deal belongs to the opposition and they cannot take a big penalty, opening 2♥ will make life more difficult for them.

Say that East opens 2♥, South will pass and West may well just raise to 4♥ or jump to 3NT, expecting a reasonable six-card suit and 6+ HCP. If West is less optimistic he can respond 2NT then, on finding partner with a minimum, settle for 3♥.

The hands do not fit together particularly well, making 4♥ dependent on a favourable lead. It is beaten by a spade lead, which establishes an extra defensive trick, and there is no safe way to hand to draw the third trump.

Three No Trump, however, presumably on a spade lead, makes easily enough, as declarer unblocks the hearts crosses to the ace of spades, and cashes the hearts, the ♣A being the ninth trick. A diamond lead and spade switch would knock out the ace of spades while hearts were still blocked, and that would defeat the contract.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 26	♠ A10 ♥ 985 ♦ KQ102 ♣ QJ98	Dealer E Vul: Both
♠ Q7632 ♥ K7 ♦ A96 ♣ 1072		♠ K954 ♥ Q43 ♦ J83 ♣ AK3
	♠ J8 ♥ AJ1062 ♦ 754 ♣ 654	

N/S can make 2♥ but it is hard to see how they can ever win the auction against an E/W who have a nine-card spade fit and combined 22 HCP.

East may open a weak NT and West transfer to spades. East has four-card support but an otherwise uninspiring hand so I would not recommend a transfer break. A simple 2♠ conversion will often win the auction, and eight tricks are cold, possibly nine via an endplay on North depending on the opening lead.

If East opens 1♣, will South scrape up an overcall? It looks a bit too aggressive when vulnerable, but some will no doubt get involved. A 1♥ overcall would make West's 1♠ show five as he would double with only four. More importantly, West becomes declarer and with North on lead nine tricks cannot be prevented so E/W score a handy +140.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 27	♠ Q95 ♥ KJ9 ♦ AQ72 ♣ 973	Dealer S Vul: None
♠ A7 ♥ 654 ♦ 9843 ♣ J862		♠ J106432 ♥ AQ83 ♦ ♣ KQ4
	♠ K8 ♥ 1072 ♦ KJ1065 ♣ A105	

South has the sort of 11 HCP hand that is worth an upgrade to weak NT status, with three tens, including one in a KJ10xx suit. That is not to say that opening either 1NT or 1♦ will necessarily be a success. On this deal, it will be impossible for N/S to stop at a safe level if left to themselves. North will raise 1NT to 2NT, and that can be beaten in a number of ways if East doesn't get involved.

East should bid against an opposing invitational auction, but whether 3♠ or a take-out double is better is not clear. I would opt for 3♠, there being a two-card difference between spades and hearts, and that can be made easily enough and rates to end the auction. A take-out double sees a 3♣ response and East has to correct to spades anyway.

If South opens 1♦, North may also respond 2NT, natural and invitational, if playing limit raises and thinking himself too good for 3♦, which tends to have a little more shape but fewer HCP. An inverted raise to 2♦, invitational plus, is much more comfortable. East will overcall 2♠ and, when his opponents stop in 3♦, can double for take-out to get hearts and clubs into the game.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 28	♠ QJ97 ♥ K104 ♦ 742 ♣ 1073	Dealer W Vul: N-S
♠ A102 ♥ Q97 ♦ A106 ♣ AKQ6		♠ K8653 ♥ 8653 ♦ Q8 ♣ J5
	♠ 4 ♥ AJ2 ♦ KJ953 ♣ 9842	

West is just shy of a 2NT opening, so must open 1♣, and East responds 1♠. A jump to 2NT now shows 18-19 and allows a partnership to stop short of game if responder has only done so on a borderline hand. The corollary of this is that to jump to 3NT should be based on a long strong club suit, a hand that is too good to rebid 3♣.

On this deal those who stop in 2NT will score very well because of the four-one spade break – if spades were three-two, as they would be over 68% of the time, stopping in 2NT might score very badly, with the bulk of the field in a making game. Then again, that presupposes that the game reached was 3NT, because a heart lead might beat 4♠ even with trumps three-two.

It is a borderline decision whether to go on over 2NT, and there is also the question of with what. A simple raise to 3NT gives away as little as possible to the defence and makes some sense. Three Spades or some kind of checkback would find an eight-card spade fit should one exist, but would 4♠ necessarily be better than 3NT? As for the hearts, they can be discounted by many as most four-card majorites would have opened 1♥ with four-four in hearts and clubs so there can be no fit to find.

Eight tricks are the limit in either NT or spades – at least at double dummy. A none-heart lead allows a better outcome for E/W in a spade contract.

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 29

	♠ K43 ♥ QJ97 ♦ 53 ♣ AQJ7	Dealer N Vul: Both
♠ AJ9 ♥ K10852 ♦ 10 ♣ K1084		♠ 76 ♥ A643 ♦ AQJ4 ♣ 653
	♠ Q10852 ♥ ♦ K98762 ♣ 92	

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 30

	♠ Q42 ♥ A94 ♦ AKQ9 ♣ QJ10	Dealer E Vul: None
♠ 109873 ♥ KQ2 ♦ 843 ♣ 93		♠ J ♥ J865 ♦ 752 ♣ K8642
	♠ AK65 ♥ 1073 ♦ J106 ♣ A75	

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 31 ♠ AJ83 Dealer S
♥ A4 Vul: N-S
♦ 74
♣ 98763

♠ Q5		♠ K10962
♥ KJ9		♥ Q852
♦ K10632		♦ QJ5
♣ 542		♣ J
	♠ 74	
	♥ 10763	
	♦ A98	
	♣ AKQ10	

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 32 ♠ 862 Dealer W
♥ 98654 Vul: E-W
♦ KJ10
♣ 96

♠ KQ10954		♠ A7
♥ AQ2		♥ 3
♦ Q8		♦ 763
♣ 82		♣ AKQJ743
	♠ J3	
	♥ KJ107	
	♦ A9542	
	♣ 105	

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 33 ♠ 65 Dealer N
♥ 98 Vul: None
♦ A54
♣ KQJ864

♠ Q10943 ♠ AK872
♥ AJ ♥ KQ752
♦ J9876 ♦ 32
♣ A ♣ 7

♠ J
♥ 10643
♦ KQ10
♣ 109532

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 34 ♠ J108 Dealer E
♥ KQ1076 Vul: N-S
♦ 2
♣ A1032

♠ A74 ♠ 9532
♥ 843 ♥ A92
♦ AK ♦ J1075
♣ KJ987 ♣ Q5

♠ KQ6
♥ J5
♦ Q98643
♣ 64

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 35 ♠ AQ873 Dealer S
♥ K952 Vul: E-W
♦ 752
♣ 6

♠ K6542		♠ J
♥ 8		♥ AQJ1063
♦ AK103		♦ Q8
♣ AJ5		♣ Q874
	♠ 109	
	♥ 74	
	♦ J964	
	♣ K10932	

Makeable Contracts

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

==========

Board 36 ♠ 6 Dealer W
♥ K97542 Vul: Both
♦ Q
♣ K8643

♠ QJ872		♠ K10
♥ J863		♥ Q
♦ A2		♦ J108643
♣ J2		♣ A1097
	♠ A9543	
	♥ A10	
	♦ K975	
	♣ Q5	

Makeable Contracts

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

==========