

## Bidding Challenge – Board 25 from Wednesday 4 September

Some ways of bidding the board.



Assuming NS stay out of the auction, here are some possibilities:

East	West	
2H	P	(P = because of the misfit, I don't like 4H or 3NT)
2H	3C	(3C = maybe clubs will be better than hearts or NT)
P		(P = trusting partner (but, rather doubting it))
2H	2NT	(2NT = strong enquiry)
4H	P	(4H = maximum weak heart bid)
2H	2NT	(2NT = strong enquiry)
3NT	4H	(3NT = AKQxxx in hearts, no outside points) (4H = hearts looks safer, given the entry problem)
2D	2NT	(2D = multi 2 i.e., 6 card major or strong balanced)
3C	3NT	(2NT = strong enquiry; 3C = hearts, maximum)
P		(3NT = taking a punt on an entry to the hearts) (P = partner will have a heart!)
2D	2NT	(2D = multi 2 i.e., 6 card major or strong balanced)
3C	3H	(2NT = strong enquiry; 3C = hearts, maximum)
P		(3H = hearts preferred to NT, but with misfit, signoff)
2D	2NT	(2D = multi 2 i.e., 6 card major or strong balanced)
3C	4H	(2NT = strong enquiry; 3C = hearts, maximum)
P		(4H = hearts preferred to NT, taking a punt)
2D	2NT	(2D = multi 2 i.e., 6 card major or strong balanced)
3NT	P	(2NT = strong enquiry; 3NT = AKQxxx in hearts) (P = hoping against hope for an entry to the hearts!)
2D	2NT	(2D = multi 2 i.e., 6 card major or strong balanced)
3NT	4H	(2NT = strong enquiry; 3NT = AKQxxx in hearts)
P		(4H = hearts preferred, given the entry problem)

## What is the optimal contract?

You have 25 HCP, so you normally want to be in game. But which game? Against 4H is the fact that that you only have 6. Against 3NT is the problematic entry to the East hand to cash the valuable hearts. Against 4S is 4-3 fit and the difficulty of getting 2 entries to East to finesse the spades twice.



To test the situation, I ran 100 simulations, with E and W always having the cards shown but with the remaining cards randomized between N and S in each simulation.

Here is the double dummy % for making a game:

Game in hearts by E:	21%
Game in hearts by W:	22%
Game in NT by E:	61%
Game in NT by W:	74%

It is easy to see (when you know all 26 cards held by EW) that game in hearts will be very difficult. There are 2 diamond losers. You will probably lose a heart (and maybe 2, if hearts split 5-2 or worse (37%)). In addition, a loser in the black suits is very likely.

However, in NT, there are (surprisingly ?) reasonable chances for an entry in diamonds to East (to cash heart winners). If that succeeds, you can make 3 (or 4 ) heart tricks, 2 diamonds, 2 clubs and a spade. Especially when the lead comes from North, there are good chances of making another trick somewhere.

So, with full knowledge of the cards, 3NT by W is distinctly the best contract.

## Is the optimal contract (3NT) an oddity?

I was surprised by 3NT being so successful. The good result seems to depend on the ability to get an entry to East in the diamonds (which, without the aid of double dummy, requires a good lay of the diamonds **and a good guess** of how they lay). So I re-ran the simulations, after replacing the TD in East by 7D. This seemingly minor change radically affected the results. Now 4H made only 12% of the time and 3NT only 8%.

## What did people actually bid?

	N/S		E/W	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W
	▼		▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼	▼
6	Charles Case Tony Matthews	13	Eileen De Lapp Sue Emmett	3♣	W	♦K	6	300		14	0	100	0
2	Joan Russell Michael Loader	14	Betty Lyon Therese Simmons	3NT	W	♥2	8	100		12	2	86	14
4	Yvonne Devlin Barbara Matterson	18	Roy Hammond Monalyn Afflick	3♥	E	♦A	9		140	10	4	71	29
5	Michael Kefford Margaret Kefford	11	Pam Mikl Les Tyson	3NT	W	♣6	9		600	8	6	57	43
9	Elizabeth Northcott Helen Munro	19	Joe Camilleri Sandra Kelly	4♥	E	♠Q	10		620	6	8	43	57
8	Mark Madison John Price	17	Ken Hubbell Debra Cohen	3NT	W	♠3	10		630	3	11	21	79
12	Loukia Zinopoulos Steve Reiher	1	Sue Exton Richard Waszyrowski	3NT	W	♠3	10		630	3	11	21	79
3	Dusan Bakija Helen Huthnance	16	Frank Hardiman Andrew Grace	3NT	W	♠3	11		660	0	14	0	100

People bid to game (6 of 8 boards). Game was made 5 times. The distinct preference was NT (5 times; making 4 times).

It is often good to be “with the crowd” (i.e., in game) on hands like this. If it doesn’t make, you will be in good company and your score won’t be too bad. But if you stop short of game and it makes, you will score poorly. On the other hand, if game is only making about 10% of the time (replacing TD with 7D suggests this), then it is better in the long run to stay out of game on a board like this.

## What would you bid?

It is a difficult board to bid, but you do have to make a choice!

If you are playing “weak 2s”, how would you rank the alternatives?

If you are playing “multi-2s”, how would you rank the alternatives?

Why do you think so many played in 3NT?

## My Recommendation.

**Why NT is usually a bad idea.** If there is an entry to East outside of the hearts, you cannot realistically expect East’s weak hand to have AKQ of hearts. Therefore, to get much value out of partner’s hand, you will need 2 entries to East – one to setup

whatever heart tricks are available and one to return to East to cash them. This is an optimistic dream.

**Therefore, it will very usually be better to play the hand in hearts** – West’s high cards in other suits will win tricks, and East’s trumps will win some tricks, because they are trumps. Also, because you can get to East’s hand in trumps, you will be able finesse West’s broken suits, Spades and/or Clubs – so that will help you get better value out of West’s hand. (This is the same sort of logic which justifies transfer bids after a 1NT opening.)

Therefore, playing a simple “weak 2” system, I recommend 2H, 2NT (strong enquiry); 4H (maximum).

Playing “multi 2’s”, I recommend 2D, 2NT (strong enquiry); 3C (hearts, maximum weak hand); 4H.

**A similar board from Saturday 14 Sept f2f.**

This board also illustrates the benefits of sticking with partner’s long suit, rather than running to NT when you have a strong hand but a void in partner’s suit. Nonetheless, again, most players did run to NT.

Dir: North  
Vul: None

♠ - -  
♥ A K Q J 4 3  
♦ 6 2  
♣ 10 7 6 5 3

♠ J 6 5 2  
♥ 9 7 6  
♦ K 7 4  
♣ 8 4 2

10  
4  
17

9

Optimum  
NS 980  
NS 6H=

NORTH  
WEST  
17  
EAST  
SOUTH

♠ Q 9 7 4  
♥ 10 8 5 2  
♦ Q 5  
♣ K Q 9

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

♣♦♥♠N  
N 6 5 6 2 3  
S 6 6 6 2 3  
E - - - -  
W - - - -

Board: 17 - Dealer: North - Vul: None

Pairs		Contract		Score		Points		%	
N/S	E/W	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	N/SE/W	N/SE/W	N/SE/W	N/SE/W
2NS Dori Wisniewski Norma Christian	5EW Judith Bruce Michael Loader	3NT S	♣4	9	400		8 0	100	0
1NS Barbara Genner Noela Tazewell	3EW Michael Box Maurice Ripley	3NT S	♣8	8		50	5 3	63	37
3NS Steve Browning Debra Cohen	2EW Max Gilbert Kathy Gilbert	3NT S	♣4	8		50	5 3	63	37
4NS Anna Lanza Les Tyson	4EW Joy Ulbricht Roy Hammond	6NT S	♣2	10		100	2 6	25	75
5NS Joan Russell Laurie Budden	1EW Rowena Evans Margaret Nichols	4♣ S	♣8	7		150	0 8	0	100

**Max Gilbert**

**14 Sept 2024, updated 18 Sept 2024.**