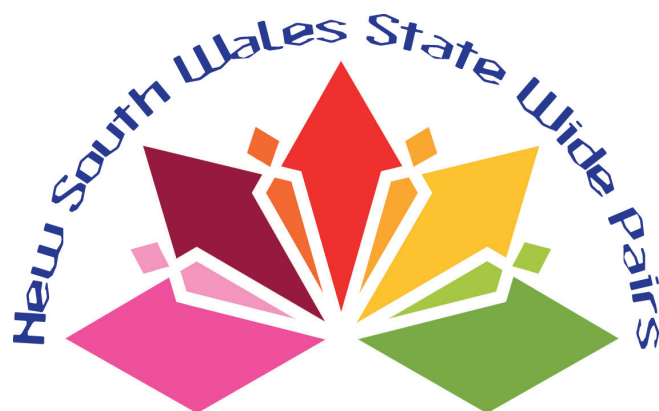




NSW State-Wide Pairs

1-7 August 2026

Souvenir Booklet
by Brad Coles

Results will be published in early August at
<https://australianbridge.com/SWP>



Welcome to the 2026 Bridge NSW State-Wide Pairs.

The boards in this booklet will be played in over 30 clubs throughout NSW, in the week of 1-7 August. Once all of the clubs have finished play, you will be able to view the final results and prize details at the event web site, <https://australianbridge.com/SWP>.

The results will appear on the web site gradually from 8 August, as each club submits its scores, so you will be able to watch your score change each day as new clubs are added to the results.

The web site will also have links to the travelling scoreslip for each board, as well as your own personal scoreslip. This page will give you an interesting opportunity to see the differences between your local percentage score on each board and your state-wide percentage on each board.

After the event is completed, successful pairs will be awarded red masterpoints at Congress B4 level.



Brad Coles

2026 State-Wide Pairs Tournament Organiser

Email: swp@australianbridge.com

Web site: <https://australianbridge.com/SWP>

2026 NSW State-Wide Pairs

Board 1

♠ 7 6 2
♥ Q 6 5
♦ A K 6 3
♣ Q 10 2

Dlr: North
Vul: Nil

♠ A K 10 8 4
♥ 10 4 3
♦ J 10 7 4
♣ J

♠ —
♥ A 9 8 7
♦ Q 5 2
♣ A K 8 7 5 3

♠ Q J 9 5 3
♥ K J 2
♦ 9 8
♣ 9 6 4

After East opens 1♣ and West bids 1♠, East's best rebid is probably a quiet 2♣, ignoring the hearts. If East instead chooses 2♥, the bidding will get too high. Bidding 2♥ in this position is called a **reverse**, and it requires 16 points, because it almost always forces you to at least the three-level. Some people would bid 2♥ anyway, telling you that this powerful hand is better than many 16-counts – that's fine if you find a fit, but with no fit you'll end up with a minus score.

Even 2♣ can be beaten if South finds a diamond ruff, so well done if you found a diamond lead. However, if South leads a spade, declarer can throw two hearts on the ♠AK and make an overtrick.

Board 2

♠ K
♥ J 10 7 6 2
♦ 9 7 5 4
♣ A K 2

Dlr: East
Vul: NS

♠ J 6
♥ A 5 4 3
♦ A J 8 6
♣ 9 4 3

♠ Q 8 7 5 4
♥ K 9
♦ K Q
♣ Q J 8 7

♠ A 10 9 3 2
♥ Q 8
♦ 10 3 2
♣ 10 6 5

East opens 1♠, and some Wests will respond 2♦, which a lot of old textbooks describe as 10+ HCP. If you have a more modern textbook, your 2♦ responses will need to be a bit stronger than this, and you'll respond 1NT with this hand.

If West does bid 1NT, East might pass, and that's an excellent contract. However, some Easts will try 2♣, and now West should go back to spades. Both black suits are seven-card fits, and you'd rather be in the 5-2 fit in the major suit.

If West responds 2♦, you obviously won't get to play in 1NT, and you may end up much higher.

Board 3

♠ 9 3
♥ 6 3
♦ Q 10 7 3
♣ A J 10 7 3

Dlr: South
Vul: EW

♠ A K 10 6 4
♥ 7 5
♦ 5 4
♣ K Q 6 5

♠ J 7 5
♥ 9 4 2
♦ J 9 6 2
♣ 9 8 2

♠ Q 8 2
♥ A K Q J 10 8
♦ A K 8
♣ 4

Is South's hand good enough for a strong 2♣ opening? I don't think so, but many will disagree. I'd be happy to open 1♥, and play there if everyone passes. The alternative is to open a strong 2♣, rebid hearts (probably at the three-level by the time you get another bid). Either way, you'll probably end up in 4♥, making an overtrick if they let you ruff a spade.

If West overcalls a vulnerable 2♠ over 2♣, he is theoretically exposing himself to a disastrous 500 penalty, but in reality no one is ever going to double it, so 2♠ escapes unharmed.

In theory, 3NT is the highest-scoring contract, but I can't recommend a sensible way for South to get there.

Board 4

♠ 10 8 4
♥ Q 6 3
♦ J 10
♣ K Q 8 4 3

Dlr: West
Vul: All

♠ Q 9 6 3
♥ A K 8 7
♦ 6 5
♣ A 10 9

♠ K 5 2
♥ J 10 9 4
♦ A Q 8 7 3
♣ 5

♠ A J 7
♥ 5 2
♦ K 9 4 2
♣ J 7 6 2

None of the hands in the set so far have had one obvious auction, so there is a lot of scope for tops and bottoms. Here, West will open 1♣, and East can respond either 1♦ or 1♥. If East chooses 1♦, then West can choose either 1♥ or 1NT. Hopefully someone will mention the hearts at some point.

Once the heart fit is found, it's a close call whether to bid game with 23 HCP. I'll be honest: I think the singleton club is enough reason to bid the game, and I would bid it. Sadly, with the ♥Q and ♦K offside, it will probably be one off unless North-South give up a trick by leading a spade. That's the way it goes sometimes: if all of your finesses lose, you'll be penalised for optimistic bidding.

Board 5

♠ Q J 8 6 5
♥ Q 7 6
♦ 6 4 3
♣ K 4

Dlr: North
Vul: NS

♠ K 10 4
♥ 8
♦ A 9 7 2
♣ A Q 6 5 3

♠ 9 7 2
♥ K J 10 9 3 2
♦ J 5
♣ 9 2

♠ A 3
♥ A 5 4
♦ K Q 10 8
♣ J 10 8 7

East has a normal 2♥ opening. Each of the other players will think about bidding over that, but anyone who bids over 2♥ will regret it. West has a misfit, and NS have too many hearts.

If East **doesn't** open 2♥, there are many ways the bidding might go. The perfect auction for NS is 1♦-1♠-1NT, and that is the best contract. West might get in the way with a 2♣ overcall, and then there's no guessing what might happen.

If NS do get to 1NT, East still does well to bid 2♥, but obviously it is much safer to bid 2♥ on the first round than on the third round. 2♥ will go one off, which is a good result because -50 in a non-vul 2♥ is better than -90 defending 1NT.

Board 6

♠ 8
♥ A Q J 7 5 4
♦ A 7 5
♣ K 10 8

Dlr: East
Vul: EW

♠ K 10 5 2
♥ 10 9 6
♦ 10 9 8
♣ 6 5 4

♠ A Q J 9 4
♥ K 8 3
♦ K Q J 2
♣ 2

♠ 7 6 3
♥ 2
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A Q J 9 7 3

After East's 1♠ opening, South has an opportunity for a non-vulnerable weak jump overcall of 3♣. This will certainly simplify the NS auction – without the 3♣ overcall, I can't even think of an intelligent auction to reach 5♣.

Even after the 3♣ overcall, North doesn't have an easy decision. 3♥ is probably the smart choice; South will either rebid 4♣ or 3♠ (the cue of the opponent's suit leaves room for North to bid 3NT if he has a spade stopper). Ultimately, when hearts are not supported, North will raise to 5♣.

By ruffing two hearts in hand, you can make 11 tricks easily (six clubs, four hearts and the ♦A) but 12 tricks are possible.

Board 7

♠ K Q J 4 3
♥ Q 5
♦ Q
♣ A Q 7 3 2

Dlr: South
Vul: All

♠ 10
♥ 10 7 4
♦ K 10 7 5 4 3
♣ 9 6 4

♠ 9 7 6 2
♥ 9 6 3
♦ A 9
♣ K J 10 8

♠ A 8 5
♥ A K J 8 2
♦ J 8 6 2
♣ 5

South opens 1♥ and North responds 1♠. Your own partnership's philosophy will determine whether South rebids diamonds or makes a three-card spade raise, but either way you should be able to get to 4♠ eventually. After 1♥-1♠-2♦, North will probably rebid 3♣ (regardless of whether you play this as natural or the more common fourth-suit forcing convention) and reaching 4♠ should not be a problem.

It is convenient for declarer to take a club ruff, leading to twelve tricks in total (five spades, five hearts, ♣A and a ruff). If East leads a club (a poor decision if North has bid them) then there will be thirteen tricks.

Board 8

♠ 2
♥ A K 10 9 7 6
♦ 9 8 7
♣ 10 4 2

Dlr: West
Vul: Nil

♠ A J 10 7 5
♥ J 8
♦ 10
♣ K 9 8 6 3

♠ Q
♥ 5 4 3 2
♦ K Q 6 5 3
♣ A Q 5

♠ K 9 8 6 4 3
♥ Q
♦ A J 4 2
♣ J 7

If West's system includes two-suited openings (such as RCO twos, or 2♠ showing spades and a minor) then EW will get to 3♣ quickly. At most tables, North will get the first bid, with a good weak two in hearts, and that will make things much harder for East-West. I don't expect East-West to find a plus score if North opens 2♥, or even if North bids 2♥ on the second round.

North can make 2♥ with six hearts and the ♦AJ. West can make 3♣ with five clubs, the ♦K, and three spades (after giving up one trick to the ♠K).

2026 NSW State-Wide Pairs

Board 9

♠ K 8 7 5
♥ J 7 5 2
♦ 10 8 2
♣ Q 6

♠ A 9 4 2
♥ A K 9 3
♦ J 7
♣ A 5 4

♠ 10 6
♥ Q 10
♦ Q 9 6 5
♣ K J 10 8 2

Dlr: North
Vul: EW

♠ Q J 3
♥ 8 6 4
♦ A K 4 3
♣ 9 7 3

West opens 1NT in fourth seat, and East raises to 3NT.

A simple auction, but a tough hand to play, as there are only six tricks on top. One trick is available in hearts: if declarer plays hearts from the top, the Q10 falls, and the ♥8 can force out the ♥J, setting up the nine. With the ♠QJ sitting over North's king, you can also take tricks with both of those cards by leading through the king.

In practice, North's opening lead might simplify things. On a spade lead, declarer can make three spade tricks no matter what card he plays from dummy. Alternatively, an opening diamond lead will set up a trick for the ♦J.

Board 10

♠ K 4 3
♥ K 7 6
♦ A K Q 5
♣ Q J 2

♠ A 10 8 6 2
♥ J 4
♦ 7 6 3
♣ 10 6 4

♠ 7
♥ 10 9 8 3
♦ 9 8 4 2
♣ A 7 5 3

Dlr: East
Vul: All

♠ Q J 9 5
♥ A Q 5 2
♦ J 10
♣ K 9 8

With a 4-4-2-3 shape, East's correct opening bid in most systems will be 1♣. West has only 5 HCP, but the fine spade suit makes the hand strong enough for a 1♠ response, and East has an easy raise to 2♠.

North's hand is strong enough to bid 1NT over West's 1♠, and if that happens, South is strong enough for a takeout double of 2♠ (with North's 1NT showing about 16 HCP, South's ace ensures that NS have half the points in the deck). This will allow NS to find their 3♦ contract to win the board.

If NS reach 3♦, EW may be tempted to compete to 3♠, but that contract is easily beaten.

Board 11

♠ Q 8 7
♥ 10 5 3 2
♦ Q 10
♣ 10 5 3 2

♠ 6 5 4 2
♥ K Q J 6
♦ J 8 3
♣ 9 4

♠ K 3
♥ 7
♦ A K 9 7 5 4
♣ A K J 8

Dlr: South
Vul: Nil

♠ A J 10 9
♥ A 9 8 4
♦ 6 2
♣ Q 7 6

South has an excellent hand, but not good enough to open anything other than 1♦. This will probably be passed around to East, who now has to decide whether to reopen with a takeout double. I think the double is absolutely automatic, as you don't want to defend 1♦ when you could easily be making 2♥ and/or 2♠.

Unfortunately, on this deal, all East's double achieves is to give NS a second chance to reach their making 5♣ or 5♦ contract. Whether they are able to take advantage of that opportunity is another question, and I suspect the NS auction will end in a diamond partscore whatever East does.

Board 12

♠ 6
♥ 4 3 2
♦ A Q 9 3 2
♣ K 7 5 4

♠ A Q 7
♥ A J 6
♦ K J 10 8
♣ J 10 9

♠ K J 9 5 2
♥ K Q 5
♦ 7 6 5
♣ 6 2

Dlr: West
Vul: NS

♠ 10 8 4 3
♥ 10 9 8 7
♦ 4
♣ A Q 8 3

West opens 1NT, and there is no strong reason for anyone else to bid. East will be aware that there is a decent chance of making 4♥ or 4♠ (if West has AK52-A2-A532-J109, for example) but if East bids Stayman and fails to find a major-suit fit, he may struggle to find a safe landing spot.

Even without the major-suit fit, it turns out that EW can actually make a game here. The excellent suit quality in clubs produces four tricks there, and the ♥KQ and ♠K onside allow you to make quite a few tricks in the majors to make 3NT.

In fact, the pressure is on NS to get just four tricks. Only the ♦AQ and ♥Q are obvious, and some EW pairs will make 180.

Board 13

♠ 8 6 4	Dlr: North
♥ K Q 9 5	Vul: All
♦ K Q 5	
♣ J 10 3	
♠ Q J 9 7 5	♠ A 10
♥ A 6	♥ 10 7 4 2
♦ A J	♦ 10 9 7 3 2
♣ K Q 8 4	♣ 7 2
♠ K 3 2	
♥ J 8 3	
♦ 8 6 4	
♣ A 9 6 5	

Another quiet board, with West once again opening the bidding and watching all the other players pass.

In fact, this is a very unusual board: the only makeable contracts for West are 1♣, 1♠ and 2♦, and NS cannot make anything at all. Neither side can make 1NT on best defence.

In practice, West will make an overtrick in 1♠, taking four trumps, two red aces, and the ♣K and a club ruff. North could have prevented the club ruff by leading a trump, but that's not likely to happen.

Board 14

♠ A K J	Dlr: East
♥ K 6 3	Vul: Nil
♦ K 10 8 4 2	
♣ 8 5	
♠ 9 7	♠ 8 6 3 2
♥ Q 10 8 4	♥ A J
♦ 6	♦ Q J 7 5 3
♣ A Q 10 9 7 2	♣ K J
♠ Q 10 5 4	
♥ 9 7 5 2	
♦ A 9	
♣ 6 4 3	

East opens 1♦, and West is not strong enough to bid the clubs, so the correct response is 1♥. Now East rebids 1♠, and West's next call will determine their result on the deal.

Playing in 2♣ is not really an option, no matter what methods you play. For advanced pairs, 2♣ is an artificial forcing bid, called fourth-suit forcing. Even if you don't play that convention, and you play 2♣ as natural, one of the basic rules of bidding is that a new suit by responder is always forcing. So even if West can bid a natural 2♣, East can't pass.

Strangely, the best compromise is 1NT, which makes easily. The defenders have six top tricks, and declarer has seven.

Board 15

♠ Q 7 3	Dlr: South
♥ K	Vul: NS
♦ 10 9 8 7 3	
♣ 10 9 8 3	
♠ A J 10 8 5 4	♠ 9 6 2
♥ Q 10 7 3	♥ A J 9 8 2
♦ 2	♦ K J 6
♣ 6 2	♣ K 4
♠ K	
♥ 6 5 4	
♦ A Q 5 4	
♣ A Q J 7 5	

After three one-level contracts in a row, we now have a highly competitive board. The points are split evenly, but **both** sides have not one, but **two** nine-card fits. When this rare event happens, any pair who is permitted to play at the three-level is almost guaranteed to get a good score.

South starts with 1♣, and West can overcall 1♠ or 2♠. It's tough for North to find a bid over either of those (I would raise to 2♣ if possible). If North passes, it's likely that EW will eventually buy the contract, possibly in 3♠.

EW will make at least 3♠, unless North gets a heart ruff, which is quite challenging. NS will make at least 4♣ or 4♦ if they can find a way to get into the auction.

Board 16

♠ Q 6	Dlr: West
♥ A J 10 9	Vul: EW
♦ 5 4 2	
♣ A K 10 2	
♠ J 10	♠ K 3 2
♥ Q 8 7 3	♥ 5 4 2
♦ 9 8 3	♦ J 7 6
♣ Q 9 4 3	♣ J 8 7 5
♠ A 9 8 7 5 4	
♥ K 6	
♦ A K Q 10	
♣ 6	

NS have 30 HCP here, but the 10 HCP they are missing include important cards in every suit. Still, the long spade suit is the only suit that really counts, and if you can hold that suit to one loser, you'll have an easy twelve tricks without even worrying about petty problems like the ♦J or ♥Q.

There are several ways to play the spade suit, and only one line will fail: a low spade to the queen, losing to the king, and then finesse the nine, losing to the jack. This is **not** a recommended line. Playing low to the queen is fine, but when the ten appears on the first round, you should play for the jack to drop. If the ten is singleton (leaving East with ♠KJ32), you'd still lose a trick to the jack even after a winning finesse.

2026 NSW State-Wide Pairs

Board 17

♠ J 8 5 4 2	Dlr: North
♥ 10 5 4	Vul: Nil
♦ Q 7 5 4 2	
♣ —	
♠ K 10 3	♠ 7 6
♥ A K Q 8 6 3	♥ J 7
♦ 3	♦ A J 9 6
♣ J 9 7	♣ A Q 10 8 4
♠ A Q 9	
♥ 9 2	
♦ K 10 8	
♣ K 6 5 3 2	

East opens 1♣ and West responds 1♥. East is not strong enough to bid the diamonds now; bidding 2♦ is likely to force the auction to at least the three-level, and East does not want that. Also, it is a poor idea to rebid the five-card club suit, as partner might not be strong enough to bid again, and you could get left to play in a 5-1 fit. The best rebid for East is a simple 1NT, showing 12-14 balanced.

The balanced 1NT rebid also has the benefit of promising at least two hearts, giving West an easy 4♥ rebid.

NS could take three tricks (♠A, club ruff, and eventually ♣K) but it's literally impossible to find that defence in real life.

Board 18

♠ 8	Dlr: East
♥ Q 10 6 3	Vul: NS
♦ A 10 4 3	
♣ K Q 5 3	
♠ K 10 4 3	♠ A Q 9 6 5 2
♥ J 7 4	♥ A K 8 2
♦ K J 7	♦ 9
♣ A 9 7	♣ 10 8
♠ J 7	
♥ 9 5	
♦ Q 8 6 5 2	
♣ J 6 4 2	

East opens 1♠, and West's bid will depend upon your methods for showing an invitational raise. Some pairs play Bergen raises, some play 2NT as a 10+ four-card raise, and some play the simple Acol-style 3♠ limit raise.

Whatever your method, West will invite game, and East has more than enough to accept the invitation (but not quite enough for a slam try).

South needs to find the club lead to guarantee a trick in that suit. On any other lead, declarer might guess to lead a diamond to the jack, setting up the ♦K for a club discard and scoring a valuable overtrick.

Board 19

♠ 10 8 3	Dlr: South
♥ A	Vul: EW
♦ A Q 8 6 5	
♣ A K 8 7	
♠ Q 7 2	♠ A K 6 4
♥ Q J 10 9 4 2	♥ 8 7 5
♦ K 4 3	♦ 10 7
♣ 6	♣ Q 9 5 4
♠ J 9 5	
♥ K 6 3	
♦ J 9 2	
♣ J 10 3 2	

West has an easy weak two opening in hearts, giving North a problem. The only making contracts for NS at that level are 2NT and 3♣, and it's tricky to reach either of them now, and they are also tough to make. Whether North overcalls with 3♦ or makes a takeout double, I don't expect NS to end with a plus score, but -50 or -100 are better than defending 2♥.

If West does not open 2♥, NS will bid something like 1♦-1NT-2♣, which is an easy plus score for NS. At that point, West should wake up and finally bid 2♥, although it's obviously safer and more effective to make that bid on the first round rather than the third round (I think I already mentioned that on Board 5).

Board 20

♠ 7 5 2	Dlr: West
♥ K 5 2	Vul: All
♦ K 8 7 4	
♣ J 8 6	
♠ A J 6 4 3	♠ Q 9 8
♥ A Q 9 3	♥ 10 6
♦ J 9 6 5	♦ Q
♣ —	♣ A 10 9 7 5 3 2
♠ K 10	
♥ J 8 7 4	
♦ A 10 3 2	
♣ K Q 4	

After a 1♠ opening from West, I don't think East is strong enough to bid 2♣, and I think a simple 2♠ raise will suffice. It's not usually a good idea to bid a three-card suit ahead of a seven-card suit, but if East responds 2♣ the bidding is likely to get too high, probably as high as 4♠.

2♠ is a nice safe contract. If the defenders never lead trumps, then declarer has plenty of things to ruff, and might end with as many as ten tricks. If all of the trumps are drawn, and declarer doesn't get any ruffs at all, then eight tricks should be the limit (five spades, the ♣A and the ♥A9).

Board 21

♠ J 8 5 4
♥ 5
♦ K Q 10 8 3
♣ 8 5 2

Dlr: North
Vul: NS

♠ K Q 9
♥ A K 10 9 4
♦ 6 4 2
♣ 9 6

♠ A 6 2
♥ Q 6
♦ 9 7
♣ A Q 10 7 4 3

♠ 10 7 3
♥ J 8 7 3 2
♦ A J 5
♣ K J

In the modern game, it is completely normal to open most 12-counts, and this East hand is quite a good 12-count. Unfortunately, it is also common practice for responder to force to game with 12 HCP, which means we see a lot of poor 24-point games. If you have a decent fit, 24 is often more than enough, but with no fit, it's a losing strategy.

After 1♣-1♥-2♣ (or less likely, 1♣-1♥-1NT) I think West is only worth an invitation, and I'd like to see the bidding stop in 2NT or 3♣. In 2NT, North should start with five rounds of diamonds, and only the very best declarers will take the last eight tricks. In 3♣, declarer will make nine or ten, depending on the club guess and whether North gets a heart ruff.

Board 22

♠ Q 2
♥ A K 5
♦ 9 7 4 2
♣ A 7 5 3

Dlr: East
Vul: EW

♠ A K 6 4
♥ Q J 10 2
♦ Q 10 5
♣ K 10

♠ 10 9 8 3
♥ 8 6 3
♦ K
♣ Q J 8 6 4

♠ J 7 5
♥ 9 7 4
♦ A J 8 6 3
♣ 9 2

If West opens 1NT, North and South are too balanced to get into the auction. Ironically, this is a poor contract for everybody, as NS want to be in 2♦ and EW want to be in 2♠. 1NT openings can often be a double-edged sword: they don't let you find your fit, but they also keep the opponents quiet.

There's not much to the play in either suit contract. 2♠ by EW has five obvious losers, while 2♦ by NS has six (which is one off, but -50 is better than any other possible NS result).

1NT, as always, is trickier. EW have a surplus of tricks, and the responsibility is on NS to get whatever they can. Key moments for North are finding a diamond lead at trick one or trick two, and holding up the ♣A when West leads the king.

Board 23

♠ 9 8 7 6 4
♥ A 9 8 7
♦ K J 8
♣ K

Dlr: South
Vul: All

♠ Q J
♥ Q 10 6 5 4 3
♦ Q 9 4 2
♣ 3

♠ K
♥ K J 2
♦ 7 6 3
♣ A Q 9 8 5 4

♠ A 10 5 3 2
♥ —
♦ A 10 5
♣ J 10 7 6 2

Every player has a borderline opening bid on this board, so I expect many different auctions. South is a bit light to open, but in the modern game many experts would. West has a reasonable weak two opening, although I like to have a much better suit for a vulnerable weak two.

If South and West both pass, North should open 1♠. The singleton king is a poor value, but there are nine cards in the majors, and it pays to be aggressive in third seat.

Despite a wide range of auctions, the outcome is predestined. With a huge spade fit and lots of distribution, NS should reach the laydown 4♠ no matter what happens.

Board 24

♠ Q 8 6
♥ 10 7 4
♦ A 7 6 4
♣ 10 8 7

Dlr: West
Vul: Nil

♠ 10 9 7 5 4
♥ 6 3
♦ K 9
♣ A Q 9 3

♠ A K 3 2
♥ 9 5 2
♦ Q 2
♣ 6 5 4 2

♠ J
♥ A K Q J 8
♦ J 10 8 5 3
♣ K J

Another hand with both sides holding a nine-card fit (just one this time, unlike Board 15) so anyone who buys the hand at the three-level will get a great score.

The first three players will pass, and South gets the first shot. Incredibly, the hand belongs to EW, so (theoretically) South's best choice on the actual deal is to pass, but obviously that's impossible with 16 HCP. South bids 1♥, West overcalls 1♠, North raises to 2♥, and after that it's anyone's guess.

The last making spot is 3♠ EW, so NS will do well to push on to the four-level and accept -50 in 4♥. I predict there will be a lot of EW pairs going too far, reaching 4♠ for a poor score.

2026 NSW State-Wide Pairs

Board 25

♠ J 5	Dlr: North
♥ J 6 4	Vul: EW
♦ J 9	
♣ K J 10 9 5 2	
♠ Q 10 6 4	♠ A 2
♥ Q 10 9 8 2	♥ A K 7 3
♦ K Q 10 5	♦ A 7 4
♣ —	♣ A 8 6 4
	♠ K 9 8 7 3
	♥ 5
	♦ 8 6 3 2
	♣ Q 7 3

Only 28 HCP here, but an excellent slam available for EW. It looks like there are actually 13 tricks available (four diamonds, ♣A, ♠A, three club ruffs and East's four trumps) but there are actually not enough entries to ruff all of the clubs.

However, if North leads a club, which is quite likely, then declarer has a head start ruffing the clubs, and should make 13. Similarly, a trump lead (also quite likely) will give you the chance to win the first trick in dummy with the seven, again giving you an early chance to ruff a club and make 13 tricks.

As for bidding the slam, that's a bit harder. Both players will need to take an aggressive view for the pair to get to 6♥.

Board 26

♠ Q 7	Dlr: East
♥ Q 10 9 8 4 2	Vul: All
♦ Q 6	
♣ A J 3	
♠ A K 5 3 2	♠ J 10 9 8 6 4
♥ J 7	♥ 6 3
♦ K 10 8 4	♦ A J 5
♣ Q 7	♣ 5 4
	♠ —
	♥ A K 5
	♦ 9 7 3 2
	♣ K 10 9 8 6 2

Another huge-fit hand, with two nine-card fits for NS, and an eleven-card fit for EW. NS have the more distributional hands, so the deal belongs to them with just two top losers in 5♥ or 5♣. EW have more balanced hands, giving them four top losers in the opponents' suits, but that still leaves them with nine tricks – good enough for a profitable 500-point sacrifice over any vulnerable five-level contract by NS.

EW will surely bid to at least 4♠, so NS will have to be assertive if they don't want to be robbed. Especially if East opens 2♠ (very aggressive), South needs to take his one opportunity to get into the auction. To get the best score, you want to be in 5♥, but North may have to settle for 5♣ if West bids 4♠.

Board 27

♠ K 9 7 6	Dlr: South
♥ Q 8	Vul: Nil
♦ A 10 6 5	
♣ A 6 2	
♠ J 10 3	♠ A 4
♥ 10 7	♥ 9 6 3 2
♦ K 8 3	♦ 9 4 2
♣ Q J 8 7 4	♣ K 10 9 3
	♠ Q 8 5 2
	♥ A K J 5 4
	♦ Q J 7
	♣ 5

South opens 1♥, North responds 1♠, and South raises the spades. If South adds three points for the singleton, he might decide to raise to 3♠ instead of 2♠ – I think either bid is a fine choice, and North will bid 4♠ over either of them.

With the diamond finesse working, the only losers are in spades, and you'll want to hold those losers to one if you want a good score. The winning play is to cross to the ♥Q and play a low spade. If East rises with the ace in second seat, that will be his last trick, so obviously he will play second hand low. Your queen wins, and next you play a low spade from both hands. East's ace falls on air, and North's king is high to draw West's last trump.

Board 28

♠ A K Q	Dlr: West
♥ K 5 3	Vul: NS
♦ A 7 6	
♣ Q 10 6 2	
♠ 9 7 3	♠ 10 8 5 4
♥ J 10 7	♥ A 2
♦ Q 5 4 3	♦ 10 8
♣ 9 5 4	♣ A K J 8 7
	♠ J 6 2
	♥ Q 9 8 6 4
	♦ K J 9 2
	♣ 3

There are a few pairs who play a 16-18 opening 1NT, but as opening bids have shifted from 13 to 12, most modern pairs play 1NT as 15-17. As 11-point openings become more popular, we will see an increase in the 14-16 1NT, already played by many expert pairs. So, with 18 HCP, North will need to jump-rebid in notrumps, with the auction 1♣-1♥-2NT.

Some pairs will have the methods to find a 5-3 heart fit after that start, while others will play in 3NT. As it happens, 3NT can score better than 4♥, because both can make ten tricks. The winning play is the same as on the previous board: lead a low heart through East's ace, then drop the bare ace. On both deals, you need to guess who has the doubleton ace.

Board 29

♠ 10 9 8 5 3
♥ 8 7 6 3
♦ K 8 3
♣ 2

Dlr: North
Vul: All

♠ J 2
♥ K Q 9 4
♦ 9 2
♣ A J 10 5 3

♠ 7
♥ A J 5
♦ J 10 5
♣ K Q 9 8 6 4

♠ A K Q 6 4
♥ 10 2
♦ A Q 7 6 4
♣ 7

Another big-fit hand, with a ten-card fit and an eleven-card fit. EW have the bigger fit and a few more high-card points, but NS have the major, and that's a decisive advantage.

After passing as dealer, and with the three other players all holding big hands, North three-count has improved a lot by the time he faces his second-round decision. With a king, a singleton, and five-card support, North is actually too good for a simple 2♠ raise – I'd be fine with a preemptive raise to either 3♠ or 4♠, to put maximum pressure on EW.

EW will do very well if they find the 5♣ sacrifice over 4♠, and even better if they aren't doubled (or if South bids on to 5♠).

Board 30

♠ J 7 4
♥ K 5 4
♦ J 8 6 3
♣ A J 4

Dlr: East
Vul: Nil

♠ A K Q 10 3
♥ J
♦ Q 10 2
♣ Q 6 3 2

♠ 9 8 6 5 2
♥ A 10 3 2
♦ A 7 4
♣ 10

♠ —
♥ Q 9 8 7 6
♦ K 9 5
♣ K 9 8 7 5

After passing as dealer and hearing partner open 1♠, East has the best hand possible. You could make an invitational raise, but how will you feel if partner doesn't accept the invitation? For example, if partner holds AJ743-2-KQ2-5432, barely enough to even justify the 1♠ bid, would he accept an invitation from a passed hand?

I think East is too good for an invitation, and my choice would be a 4♣ splinter. This may even give you a chance to reach slam if partner has something like AKJ43-K2-KQ2-432.

With the 3-0 spade break, declarer is limited to ten tricks, as he can't ruff three clubs without North ruffing in with the ♠J.

Board 31

♠ A 8 5 2
♥ K J 3
♦ Q 6
♣ A 8 7 5

Dlr: South
Vul: NS

♠ Q 10 7 4
♥ Q 7 2
♦ A K J 10 9 8
♣ —

♠ K J 9 6
♥ A 10 9 6
♦ 5 2
♣ J 10 9

♠ 3
♥ 8 5 4
♦ 7 4 3
♣ K Q 6 4 3 2

Looking at all four hands, it seems obvious to reach 4♠ on these cards, but look what happened when I asked a random pair at my club to bid them. West opened 1♦, North made the obvious takeout double, East bid 1♥, and South bid 2♣ (knowing from the takeout double that he had at least a nine-card fit there). With only 12 HCP, can you really expect West to bid 2♠ now – especially when you consider that North's takeout double implies four spades sitting over him?

West settled for 2♦, no one ever bid the spades, and EW eventually stopped in 3♦. The moral: takeout doubles are important. North's takeout double won the board, and West's failure to make a takeout double of 2♣ cost him the board.

Board 32

♠ A 8 4
♥ Q 9 4
♦ K 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 6

Dlr: West
Vul: EW

♠ 5
♥ J 8 5 3
♦ A 9 3
♣ Q J 10 5 4

♠ K Q 10 3 2
♥ K 10 7 2
♦ Q 4
♣ K 2

♠ J 9 7 6
♥ A 6
♦ J 10
♣ A 9 8 7 3

Left to their own devices, EW will bid 1♠-1NT-2♥. This should be an easy make, as long as West resists the temptation to keep bidding.

However, it's not North's job to make things easy for EW, so North should open 2♦. The diamond suit is not great – you might even say it is extremely poor – but it's good enough for a bid at favourable vulnerability. Don't let opponents bid at the one level if you have a reasonably safe way to stop them.

If EW can get to 2♥ after that, they'll deserve the win. More likely, East will overcall 2♠, and after that it's unlikely that EW will find a making contract.

2026 NSW State-Wide Pairs

Board 33

♠ 7 5 3
♥ K Q
♦ 8 7 4
♣ 10 6 5 4 3

Dlr: North
Vul: Nil

♠ 4 2
♥ 10 9 6 5
♦ K 9 2
♣ A J 9 7

♠ K 9 6
♥ J 4 3
♦ J 10 6 3
♣ K Q 2

♠ A Q J 10 8
♥ A 8 7 2
♦ A Q 5
♣ 8

One of the simplest auctions of the day: 1♠-2♠-4♠. South has only 17 HCP, but they are all useful points, and the club shortage is also worth something, so the hand is certainly strong enough to go straight to game.

North turns up with a pretty awful hand, and the diamond finesse loses, but there are still ten tricks, which shows you how strong South's hand really is. One line of play is to use dummy's three entries (♥Q, ♥K, heart ruff) to take the three finesses (♦Q, ♠Q, ♠J). You'll take five spades, three hearts, one ruff and the ♦A.

There are more sophisticated lines of play that slightly improve your chances, but most lines will work.

Board 34

♠ K 10 4
♥ A 10
♦ A 7 6 4 3
♣ 9 8 4

Dlr: East
Vul: NS

♠ Q 8 5
♥ J 8 4 3 2
♦ J 9 5
♣ K Q

♠ A 7 6 3
♥ K 7 5
♦ K Q 10
♣ A J 10

♠ J 9 2
♥ Q 9 6
♦ 8 2
♣ 7 6 5 3 2

With a combined 26 HCP and an eight-card heart fit, there's no way to avoid game here. After East opens 1NT, West transfers to hearts and then rebids 2NT. This asks East to choose between 2NT, 3♥, 3NT or 4♥. I'd probably choose 3NT, because there are no ruffing values and all the suits are well stopped. With 3532 opposite 4333, 3NT and 4♥ often make the same number of tricks.

It turns out I was wrong, as 4♥ can make more tricks than 3NT on this deal. Luckily for me, both contracts fail, so instead of getting a bottom board with 400 while everyone else gets 420, today all of us are scoring -50 for a flat board. But 3NT has a better chance of making on imperfect defence.

Board 35

♠ J 9 7 4 2
♥ Q J 8 6
♦ J 10 7
♣ 10

Dlr: South
Vul: EW

♠ A K 8 6 5
♥ 7 2
♦ A
♣ J 8 6 4 3

♠ 10 3
♥ A 10 9 3
♦ 5 3
♣ A Q 7 5 2

♠ Q
♥ K 5 4
♦ K Q 9 8 6 4 2
♣ K 9

Yet another deal with both sides having a ten-card fit, which usually means that both sides are safe at the four level. Here, EW can easily make 5♣, and the non-vulnerable NS have a suitable sacrifice in 5♦, which costs just 300.

Of course, bidding five-over-five is always risky, and here it depends on whether the other pairs in the field are bidding game. Losing 300 in 5♦ is fine in theory, but it's a poor result if everyone else is scoring just 150 in 3♣.

Can EW get to 5♣? If West overcalls 1♠ and East responds 2♣, it shouldn't be a problem. However, with 22 HCP, I won't be too surprised if most pairs stop in a partscore.

Board 36

♠ A K Q J
♥ 9 3
♦ K 8
♣ K 8 7 6 3

Dlr: West
Vul: All

♠ 9 8
♥ K 10 8
♦ Q 10 4
♣ Q 10 5 4 2

♠ 7
♥ Q J 7 6 5 2
♦ J 6 5 2
♣ J 9

♠ 10 6 5 4 3 2
♥ A 4
♦ A 9 7 3
♣ A

Today's set of boards produced an unusually high number of slams, so the experienced bidders will have a big advantage. We finish with another grand slam, once again with only 28 HCP. Assuming the bidding starts 1♣-1♠-3♠, South will need to use a bit of imagination to work out that North does not need more than ♠AK and ♦K to make a slam. In fact, with North bidding both black suits, he's quite likely to be short in diamonds, so even as little as AK87-532-2-KQ432 is enough for a grand slam, and that's just 12 HCP!

With the actual hand, there are eleven top tricks in high cards, so you'll just need two diamond ruffs to get to thirteen.

Winners of the 2025 State-Wide Pairs

1 Noel & Annemarie Athea	<i>Goulburn</i>	70.6
2 Julie Rollinson & Marilyn Wright	<i>Kiama</i>	70.1
3 Mary Francis & Margaret Lawrence	<i>Yamba</i>	69.8
4 June McCormack & Ann Hudson	<i>Monaro</i>	69.6
5 Henry Wellsmore & Ted Tait	<i>Belmont</i>	69.3
6 Isabel Harrington & Edith Flanagan	<i>Monaro</i>	68.9
7 Jenny McDowell & Ange Bettess	<i>Ballina</i>	67.9
8 Andrew & Karen Creet	<i>Batemans Bay</i>	67.2
9 Helen Loveday & Margaret Findlay	<i>Inverell Delvyn</i>	66.8
10 Ian Price & Tony Sorensen	<i>Armidale</i>	66.7
11 Lois Nicholson & Pat Maginnity	<i>Albury</i>	66.3
12 Bas Bolt & Gary Riddell	<i>Sapphire Coast</i>	65.8
13 Carolyn Seymour & Dennis Ford	<i>Grafton</i>	65.4
14 Bronwyn Neal & Simon Hunter	<i>Peninsula</i>	65.3
15 Janet Strzelecki & Sue West	<i>Monaro</i>	65.2
16 Tony Lye & David Weatherall	<i>Southern Highlands</i>	65.0
17 Paul Lavings & Jeff Carberry	<i>Illawarra</i>	64.9
18 Helen Clift & Elisabeth Heath	<i>Gunnedah</i>	64.7
19 Peter Dearden & John Quin	<i>Parkes</i>	64.7
20 Jan Durham & Maureen Williams	<i>Hunters Hill</i>	64.1
21 Steve Szatmary & Grant Cowen	<i>Illawarra</i>	64.0
22 Alan & Tammy Schwarz	<i>Blue Mountains</i>	63.9
23 Dave Mahadevan & Henry Chu	<i>Hunters Hill</i>	63.6
24 Jeff Lassman & Adrian Riepsamen	<i>Nowra</i>	63.4
25 Janet Rowlatt & Mattie Baljet	<i>Blue Mountains</i>	63.2
26 Margaret Dunlop & Nancy de Ville	<i>Camden Haven</i>	62.8
27 Jennette Rosetta & Valerie Cook	<i>Wagga</i>	62.8
28 Ross Milbourne & Lauri Perino	<i>Mollymook</i>	62.8
29 John & Svetlana Hedge	<i>Kiama</i>	62.5
30 Sam Kebby & Peter Briscoe	<i>Port Macquarie Hastings</i>	62.4
31 Margaret Munson & Wendy Strachan	<i>Orange</i>	62.4
32 Jennifer & Alan Maher	<i>Southern Highlands</i>	62.0
33 Colin Macdonald & Chris Bauer	<i>Ballina</i>	61.9
34 Ken & Susan McMahon	<i>Wagga</i>	61.8
35 Carol Budd & Karen Newby	<i>Goulburn</i>	61.6
36 Kristina Gillies & Annette Fisher	<i>Kiama</i>	61.5
37 Brian Jacobson & Michael Jackson	<i>Sydney</i>	61.2
38 Margaret Patton & Anne Gowing	<i>Orange</i>	61.2
39 Diana Whiteley & Julie Barker	<i>Camden Haven</i>	61.1
40 Carl Phillips & Jim Forbes	<i>Camden Haven</i>	61.1
41 Mick McAuliffe & Wing Roberts	<i>Sydney</i>	61.0
42 Margaret Hartley & Frank Gooley	<i>Tamworth</i>	60.9
43 Jane North & Tom Carr	<i>Dubbo</i>	60.8
43 Carmel Murphy & Les Geczy	<i>Maitland</i>	60.8
43 Jane Storey & Judy Harris	<i>Cootamundra</i>	60.8
46 Jamie Thompson & Frances Garrick	<i>Trumps</i>	60.6
47 Helen Gillam & Micki Summers	<i>Blue Mountains</i>	60.5
48 John Friesen & Richard Harman	<i>Albury</i>	60.5
49 Eta Rogoyska & Kathy Reaney	<i>Great Lakes</i>	60.4
50 Philip & Cathy Hocking	<i>Ballina</i>	60.4