

We had 17 pairs plus a robot pair last night. Congratulations to Annabel and Jemma, who came first with 65.28%, followed by Sandra & Krys in second, and Erica & Chris in third place.

Today I'm going to take a closer look at hand 5, where the "Curse of Scotland" plays a key role.

	♠ K3	
	♥ 87	
	♦ K1042	
	♣ J10963	
♠ A654		♠ J72
♥ A642		♥ KQJ
♦ Q876		♦ AJ53
♣ K		♣ Q85
	♠ Q1098	
	♥ 10953	
	♦ 9	
	♣ A742	

This was played in 3NT by East at all tables, usually after a Stayman auction in which East denied a 4 card major. Anything from 6 to 9 tricks were made.

Usually a Spade was led, and in the remaining cases a Heart. Declarer seems to have several problems. The Hearts are blocked, and if the opening lead was a Spade, knocking out one of dummy's entries, declarer may not be able to unblock them easily. Secondly, if declarer tries to establish a Club trick the defence may win their Ace and return another Club, setting up 3 more winners in the suit. Thirdly, it is unclear how to play the Diamonds. Unsurprisingly, on the night there were many different lines taken – and many defensive errors.

Suppose a Spade has been led, ducked once or twice, and then won in dummy. If declarer can only take 3 Diamond tricks, giving up one to the King, then they will need a Club trick as well, in order to bring the total to 9. The danger with this is that, unless ♦ K and ♣ A are both with North, the defence will take 5 tricks (3 spades, ♦ K and ♣ A) before declarer can take 9. Thus one line is to win ♠ A, finesse ♦ J, cash declarer's top hearts and concede a trick to ♣ A. All will be well if North started with ♦ K doubleton, or with ♦ K trebleton and ♣ A. This is less than a 25% chance, but may be the best option.

At one table a heart was led. Declarer won in hand and played a Diamond to the Queen. North won and returned a Heart. Declarer won in hand and cashed the remaining top Heart. The ♦ A then revealed the bad Diamond split, leaving the position at the top of the next page.

	♠ K3	
	♥ -	
	♦ 104	
	♣ J1096	
♠ A654		♠ J72
♥ A		♥ -
♦ 87		♦ J5
♣ K		♣ Q85
	♠ Q1098	
	♥ 10	
	♦ -	
	♣ A74	

At this point declarer sadly went wrong. There are 5 more tricks needed, and if declarer concedes a trick to ♣ A all that is required is to ensure two more Diamond tricks. Did you notice the fall of ♦ 9 on the first round of the suit? South showed out on the second round of Diamonds, so declarer can guarantee two Diamond tricks by running ♦ 8.

Another neat play occurred when one of the robots was declarer. This position was reached, with the lead in dummy and 4 more tricks needed.

	♠ -	
	♥ -	
	♦ K1042	
	♣ 109	
♠ 6		♠ J
♥ 6		♥ -
♦ Q876		♦ AJ53
♣ -		♣ 8
	♠ Q9	
	♥ 10	
	♦ 9	
	♣ 72	

Can you spot the winning play?

Dummy must lead ♦ Q, pinning South's 9. North has no escape. For example, if he covers with ♦ K, declarer wins, and throws him in with a Club to lead from the ♦ 10. In fact the robot got it wrong and played a small Diamond to the Jack, but still threw North in to finish up one down.

For those who don't know, the "Curse of Scotland" is ♦ 9. There are several competing theories for the origin of the name, one being that the Duke of Cumberland wrote orders for the Battle of Culloden on a playing card, namely ♦ 9.