

Club Stratified Sim Pairs



Wednesday
16th March 2016

Welcome to the fifth 'Club Stratified Sim Pairs'. Our commentator today is Michael Byrne, experienced bridge teacher and writer. You may wonder how stratification works and which strat you are in. There are four categories of strats. The main strat 'A' is open to everyone but if either member of the pair is a Tournament Master or above you will be in the 'A' strat and can only get master points from the overall ranking. If both of you are below the rank of Tournament Master you will be 'B' strat; both below Master means you will be in 'C' strat and both below District Master will make you 'D' strat. Blue points and local points will be awarded to the top third of the overall ranking list. In addition the top third of each strat will get blue points and local points. If you are entitled to overall points and points for your strat, you will only get the higher of the awards – you won't get two lots of points. Master points cannot be allocated until after the event is finalised, usually about three weeks. Please keep your scorecard for that period. If we find any unusual scores we may need to contact the club scorer and also the players. Full results can be found at www.ebu.co.uk/sims/

Jeremy Dhondy, Chairman EBU

<p>♠ 108 ♥ KQ96432 ♦ - ♣ Q1095</p> <p>♠ J9 ♠ AKQ4 ♥ A10 ♥ J87 ♦ Q8642 ♦ AJ73 ♣ A864 ♣ 72</p> <p>♠ 76532 ♥ 5 ♦ K1095 ♣ KJ3</p>	<p>Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all</p> <p>North starts the event with a bang, and indeed a pre-emptive 3♥ for those that vote conservative, 4♥ for the brave and the bold. Which will be successful this time?</p> <p>The 3♥ openers will set East a problem, he will choose between a flawed double, 3NT with a dubious heart stop and a craven pass. 3NT by East will go down on a heart lead providing one of N/S get their act together and find the club switch in time. Double will lead to 3NT by West which looks good on a heart lead (a simple avoidance play of ace of diamonds and a diamond towards the queen, South must duck and West reverts to hearts for his ninth trick) , while passing 3♥ leaves it to be the final contract. 3♥ should go one down, or two if E/W are on top form and find a club ruff and then trump promotion.</p> <p>Those that open 4♥ will either lose a few 50s or run into serious trouble if East finds a double and West elects to pass (a 4NT response would be a reasonable choice if the double is more take-out orientated).</p>																																																
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<p>♠ A92 ♥ K9753 ♦ Q ♣ K874</p> <p>♠ K ♠ Q8543 ♥ AQ2 ♥ J4 ♦ J7432 ♦ K86 ♣ AJ95 ♣ Q103</p> <p>♠ J1076 ♥ 1086 ♦ A1095 ♣ 62</p>	<p>Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable</p> <p>A slightly more sedate deal now with a gentle part-score that could go either way. West will open 1♦ after two passes (some might try an off centre strong no-trump which won't work today) and North should overcall 1♥ (the mythical “suit quality test” notwithstanding). East will introduce his spades and West rebid 2♣ if allowed. If E/W come to rest in 2♦ then North should double for take-out, South can then bid what he should have done at his first chance to bid which is to support partner to 2♥.</p> <p>Playing in hearts looks fairly straight forward: win the diamond lead and lead a club to the king planning to ruff two clubs. You will end up losing only one spade, one club and a number of trump tricks, at least two and possibly three.</p> <p>On a spade lead you might suffer a spade ruff, but as it's with the third trump this would end up helping you, allowing the precious overtrick.</p> <p>140 will score a lot here, as E/W going in 50s will be a common occurrence and some N/S pairs won't compete at all.</p>																																																
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♠ QJ84
♥ 104
♦ K986
♣ 865

♠ K53 ♠ 109
♥ K865 ♥ 973
♦ J10 ♦ AQ7432
♣ J974 ♣ Q3

♠ A762
♥ AQJ2
♦ 5
♣ AK102

HCP
6
8 8
18

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

Board 3 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable

4♠ will be a normal contract here, perhaps reached after a 1♥/1♣ opening, 1♠ response from North and splinter by South. (East would do well to keep his powder dry with a dull hand shape and poor suit).

4♠ will go down on a trump lead from East, as West can play two rounds and then another one when he gets in with the ♥K. (There is no use him waiting to over-ruff dummy as his trumps are too small!) In practice most defenders will beat 4♠ as North has a tough mountain to climb and has no reason to reject the heart finesse or the spade finesse (West could have 10-9 doubleton and East the ♠K and we'd all be saying how easy 12 tricks were).

Probably the only lead to leave North in control is the ♦A, now he can ruff two diamonds and go about his business in hearts, just losing the major suit kings. 420 will be a very good score here, and -50 about 30%.

♠ 73
♥ AK85
♦ J43
♣ 10642

♠ A8 ♠ K106
♥ 1042 ♥ Q73
♦ Q102 ♦ AK876
♣ AKJ75 ♣ Q9

♠ QJ9542
♥ J96
♦ 95
♣ 83

HCP
8
14 14
4

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

Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable

West has a good hand, probably too strong for a 12-14 no-trump opening, although all roads will lead to 3NT.

Where West does open 1NT (either 12-14, 13-15, 14-16 or even a cheeky upgrade to 15-17) East will blast game and the choice of lead will be North's. Cashing the ♥AK will be the best technical lead, as that holds declarer to 660. In practice the most effective lead will be the ♥5 as that lets the defenders cash four heart tricks when West plays low from dummy (correct against KJxx or AJxx) to hold declarer to 600. Any Souths that get spades into the game (1♣-Pass-1♦-2♠ anyone?) will get their just desserts when North leads the suit and concedes 690. No doubt they will blame their partner for not leading a heart!

The lead of a single card at trick one determines all the match points, as surely the world and his wife will be in 3NT making 600, 660 or 690. (I will be surprised if anyone makes exactly ten tricks I must confess).

♠ J754
♥ QJ10
♦ 1083
♣ K64

♠ K96 ♠ 10832
♥ 76 ♥ A852
♦ J974 ♦ Q62
♣ AQ32 ♣ 87

♠ AQ
♥ K943
♦ AK5
♣ J1095

HCP
7
10 6
17

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

Board 5 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable

Another very flat hand now, and no-trumps will surely be the destination once more. What your no-trump rebids show will determine how high you get here as those that play either a 1NT opening or 1NT rebid to show 15-17 will surely stop in 1NT by South. Those instead that play a 1NT rebid as 15-16 (and I would strongly suggest you abandon it if you still do) will bid 1♥-1♠-2NT and now North might dredge up 3NT. The play is interesting as well. On the best lead of a diamond (a club lead from AQxx is horrible) from West, South can win and knock out the ♥A to bring himself up to six tricks; he plays on clubs for two more and squeeze West in the black suits for the ninth. Will anyone find this? I daresay quite a few will stumble into it, as West will have to discard early on and might not know that South has a four-card club suit. +150 will be above average but the real prize goes to those that overbid and overplay and chalk up a lucky +600.

<p>♠ AKJ93 ♥ 82 ♦ J43 ♣ 1032</p> <p>♠ Q42 ♠ 10875 ♥ AJ ♥ K754 ♦ A852 ♦ K1096 ♣ KQ87 ♣ 5</p> <p>♠ 6 ♥ Q10963 ♦ Q7 ♣ AJ964</p>	<p>Board 6 : Dealer East : EW vulnerable</p> <p>A bit more shape on this hand but no-one can make that much, so again a sweaty part-score battle.</p> <p>After two passes to West he will open 1♣ or 1NT and that will determine whether or not North gets spades in. Where he does overcall there is less incentive for South to get his hearts in, as surely East will negative double. Where the bidding starts pass-pass- 1NT- pass-pass? South will be very well placed to overcall and show both his suits with a multi-Landy 2♥ or an Asptro 2♣.</p> <p>This won't work desperately well today as, even on a spade lead allowing South to discard both his diamonds, I can't see any route home in 2♥. A club contract is a little better, as the extra trump makes the play a lot more comfortable and now a soft defence (a spade lead with declarer finessing, and East never leading trumps) might let declarer scramble nine tricks.</p> <p>If E/W are left to play in diamonds then nine tricks are possible on the defence of spade, spade, spade ruff, otherwise it can be held to eight. The top spot of course is no-trumps making eight tricks, but it's no thing of beauty.</p>																																																		
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<p>♠ J43 ♥ J6 ♦ QJ7653 ♣ 98</p> <p>♠ K652 ♠ Q107 ♥ KQ95 ♥ 10743 ♦ K2 ♦ 984 ♣ 543 ♣ KQ7</p> <p>♠ A98 ♥ A82 ♦ A10 ♣ AJ1062</p>	<p>Board 7 : Dealer South : All vulnerable</p> <p>South has a balanced 17 count, but is far too strong for a strong no-trump opener or rebid (both being 15-17). A five card suit, good intermediates and 150 for honours make the hand a worthwhile upgrade. (My blood pressure rises when I hear the phrase "just four bare aces" as if somehow people want more than that!)</p> <p>Of course everyone is in for a disappointment since partner's hand is not quite up to scratch, any Souths that bid 1♣ – 1♦ – 2NT must respect partners sign off in 3♦.</p> <p>The play in no-trumps is not that pretty: six tricks are the limit unless West leads a low heart (as South will whack the jack up and play on clubs).</p> <p>Playing in a diamond contract North can be held to eight tricks, but a heart lead leaves the defenders needing to find an early spade switch before the clubs get set up, not that easy when so little is known about declarer's hand.</p> <p>If E/W enter the auction - perhaps West making a cute take-out double of the 1♣ opening (I confess I would be tempted at love all but game all is out of the question) - then they had better stop in 2♥ and make 110 which will be a fair score for them.</p>																																																		
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W	-	-	2	-	-																																														
<p>♠ 1062 ♥ J64 ♦ K7642 ♣ 54</p> <p>♠ A9 ♠ KQ3 ♥ A9872 ♥ Q103 ♦ 5 ♦ A83 ♣ KQJ108 ♣ A976</p> <p>♠ J8754 ♥ K5 ♦ QJ109 ♣ 32</p>	<p>Board 8 : Dealer West : Love all</p> <p>This is more the sort of hand we associate with a Sim pairs, a good fitting 29 count with slam cold if you guess the heart suit.</p> <p>How might the bidding go? A sensible start seems 1♥ -pass-2♣, and now West should do more than just a timid 3♣. A splinter bid of 3♦ seems right, but most of the country still plays that as strong (1♥ – 2♣ – 2♦ can't be passed, as a change of suit after a two level response is forcing for one round, so this should free up 3♦ to be a splinter).</p> <p>If West does show signs of life then East will power to a slam as he is very crisp in terms of controls and fitting honours in the partnership suits; he should make sure he attaches full weight to the ♥10.</p> <p>Playing in 6♣ there is a neat safety play, eliminate diamonds and spades and then lead a heart to the 9, it will lose to the jack but North is end-played for 1370.</p> <p>6♥ scores a bit more but is not nearly as secure, as you'll need a good guess in hearts. There are a few ways of playing this suit but I wouldn't expect anyone to take the losing line of low to the queen. Despite this, 1430 will rake in 85-90% comfortably I'd think.</p>																																																		
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♠ K52
♥ AJ43
♦ A7
♣ J983

♠ 876 ♠ AJ94
♥ Q9872 ♥ K105
♦ 1083 ♦ 652
♣ 54 ♣ AK6

♠ Q103
♥ 6
♦ KQJ94
♣ Q1072

HCP	
13	
2	15
10	

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

Board 12 : Dealer West : NS vulnerable

North will open an impeccable weak no-trump and East has what we call a “marginal double”. (This is code for “one that doesn’t work”). West should take it out to 2♥ (South might take it into diamonds, worried that the doubler has a cashing heart suit) and now N/S need to be on firm ground to compete effectively. If he can then South should make a take-out double, North might leave this in with better pips but with no guarantee of a second trump trick he is probably wiser to remove it. In practice West should make seven tricks in 2♥ but many will play the hearts in lazy-day fashion (low to the king) and go two down.

If N/S come to rest in diamonds they can make nine tricks comfortably enough, ten are available in clubs there is no ruff available.

The top score goes to those that manage to play in no-trumps, as played by North nine tricks can’t be stopped, West never gaining the lead to put a heart through. (East can set up either the thirteenth spade or his ♥K, but not both)

♠ AK96
♥ A65
♦ Q7
♣ AJ105

♠ J108 ♠ 7
♥ Q43 ♥ J10872
♦ J532 ♦ 10964
♣ K82 ♣ 976

♠ Q5432
♥ K9
♦ AK8
♣ Q43

HCP	
18	
7	1
14	

Makeable contracts						
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	
N	7	4	3	7	7	
S	7	4	3	7	7	
E	-	-	-	-	-	
W	-	-	-	-	-	

Board 13 : Dealer North : All vulnerable

A grand slam cold in spades or no-trumps! Yes, it’s true you need the club finesse and spades not 4-0 offside, which takes it down to the mid-forties in percentage terms, but look - it makes!

In practice the best spot is 6NT, which has the same tricks as 6♠ but scores the vital extra ten points. Hard to avoid a nine-card fit though, how might the bidding go? Playing Acoll North will start with 1♠ and South will employ whatever Jacoby style raise his side uses in order to show a game force with four spades, now North should be heading to slam based on his huge wealth of controls and useful club side suit. Those playing five-card majors (or old school Acoll) will have more of a chance of bidding 6NT as the start of 1♣ – 1♠ – 4♠ suggests a balanced hand or 4-2-2-5. Upon discovering all the key cards South can bid 5NT and then park the bus in 6NT upon realising the ♣K is missing.

Incidentally I hope everyone played the spade suit correctly by cashing the queen first – only a 4-0 break with West can be picked up.

♠ J97543
♥ A2
♦ 2
♣ KQ84

♠ AKQ ♠ 8
♥ 1096 ♥ KQJ543
♦ Q10986 ♦ KJ543
♣ 106 ♣ 7

♠ 1062
♥ 87
♦ A7
♣ AJ9532

HCP	
10	
11	10
9	

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

Board 14 : Dealer East : Love all

East has a shapely hand to start with, and there will be votes for 1♥, 2♥ (weak), 2♥ (intermediate), 2♥ (strong) 3♥ and 4♥ as opening bids.

I like a 4♥ opening if the suit is a little better (give me the ten of trumps) and third in seat, but first in its a bit much to be all out pre-empting with only a six card suit. 4♥ should be reached come what may and then the pressure is on N/S to get to spades, or at least find a good defence.

It’s not unreasonable for E/W to end in diamonds as a start of 1♥(2♣)2♦(2♠) might see East bounce high with his five trumps.

How many tricks will everyone make? If N/S play in spades then surely nine tricks are the limit, as E/W have three goes to get around to hearts before they disappear on the clubs.

If East is declarer in 4♥ though, it is very tempting for South to lead a spade, and now East will throw a club and make ten tricks even if North switches to a diamond for a ruff.

420 will score well here, and it is reasonable for N/S to save against the game they were no doubt about to let make.

♠ J6

♥ K10985

♦ Q2

♣ K943

♠ 1042

♠ K753

♥ A4

♥ J3

♦ AK108

♦ J643

♣ J862

♣ Q105

♠ AQ98

♥ Q762

♦ 975

♣ A7

HCP	
9	
12	7
12	

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

Board 15 : Dealer South : NS vulnerable

A simple weak no-trump opening for South and North will transfer to hearts. If South breaks the transfer (he should as, whilst he is minimum, he has four pleasant trumps and a doubleton, as well as aces which are useful in a suit contract) then 3♥ will be the final contract.

If he doesn't break then West might dredge up a take out double, East will bid 2♠ and one of N/S will have to bid 3♥ otherwise they will be playing for 50s, even holding East to five tricks for +150 won't be enough as there will be a fistful of 170s on the traveller.

Playing in hearts by South, West has an easy attack in diamonds and then can switch to a club. With trumps 2-2 and the spades lying well declarer can't go wrong and will make ten tricks.

Played by North, East might lead a spade (a diamond is safer) and now North can run that and repeat the finesse to ditch a diamond and make an impressive looking 11 tricks.

The top scores will be those that get something extreme, either a penalty from spades or fluking their way to 4♥.

♠ 62

♥ 965

♦ AK63

♣ J973

♠ AQ10

♠ K3

♥ Q10832

♥ 4

♦ 104

♦ Q9752

♣ A82

♣ K10654

♠ J98754

♥ AKJ7

♦ J8

♣ Q

HCP	
8	
12	8
12	

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

Board 16 : Dealer West : EW vulnerable

The points are split 20/20 but unusually the side with spades is outgunned. West will start with 1NT or 1♥, and East will face a competitive decision later on.

Where the auction starts 1♥- pass-1NT South will overcall 2♠ (6-4 bid one more!) and this will come back round to East. If playing weak no-trump he should bid 2NT for the minors (2NT would be natural if playing strong as a 1NT response is up to 11 points) and now West can try 3♣ and this will prove comfortable as North will be hard pressed to find the best lead of a trump.

Where the auction starts 1NT-pass, assuming that East does choose to pass (some will have a gadget to find the best minor suit). South has a choice between bidding spades and showing the majors, with hearts so much better he might well show the majors, North might bid 2♥- oops, double for take-out-pass-pass-pass and that's 300 to E/W (assuming East avoids the fatal diamond lead, not that clear!).

All in all a tricky competitive deal where both sides must try and play in their best fit – easier said than done!

♠ AJ84

♥ K9

♦ K95

♣ A1062

♠ K1097

♠ Q65

♥ AJ1076

♥ 52

♦ 8

♦ Q102

♣ 875

♣ KQ943

♠ 32

♥ Q843

♦ AJ7643

♣ J

HCP	
15	
8	9
8	

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

Board 17 : Dealer North : Love all

If North starts with a strong no-trump then South will bid Stayman (a 4-4 heart fit might easily produce game) and bid either 2NT, 3NT or 3♦ over the response. 2NT will end matters while the other two bids will reach game.

If North opens 1♠ South will probably respond 1NT and play there on the ♥J lead, and finally if North opens 1♣ then South will bid diamonds and play a diamond part-score on a spade lead.

So – how did everyone do?

Those playing 3NT by North will probably go down if they get a top club lead, (there isn't much reason to guess diamonds correctly) and might make it on a small club lead, the jack holding (best is to lead a heart off now; West's play will reveal his diamond holding: with no queen he will jump up with the ace, with the guarded queen he would duck).

Otherwise it's 150 or 130 for N/S and an average score. Should you push for thin games at pairs? This hand will tell us, but one thing is for sure, those that lose 100 in 3NT will not be getting rich.

♠ K7

♥ K10976

♦ KQ108

♣ A5

♠ 862

♠ AQJ5

♥ AJ83

♥ 42

♦ -

♦ 9652

♣ Q97632

♣ K104

♠ 10943

♥ Q5

♦ AJ743

♣ J8

Board 18 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

N/S have a combined 23 count and nine diamonds between them so it's a bit disappointing to find that the hand belongs to E/W in clubs.

After two passes West might consider opening 3♣ (it will be unthinkable in first or second position with a bad suit and four hearts on the side) but most will pass allowing North a free 1♥ bid. East might dredge up a double (only at pairs, mind you) but otherwise N/S will bid very simply 1♥ – 1♠ – 2♦ – 3♦, or perhaps 1♥ – 1♠ – 1NT – 2NT pass.

Diamonds looks to play simply with two spades, a club and a heart to lose, the trump position won't trouble North unduly.

No-trumps is a bit more sweaty but East will probably lead a diamond (in this reality no-one has bid the suit remember) and now playing West for the ♥J brings home the bacon.

Finally if E/W do get their act together in clubs then ten tricks are easy, either N/S draw trumps and stop the heart ruffs or declarer ruffs one with the ♣K and one with the ♣10.

HCP		Makeable contracts					
			♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
15		N	-	3	-	-	-
7	10	S	-	3	-	-	-
		E	4	-	-	1	-
8		W	4	-	-	1	-

♠ J10

♥ AJ842

♦ 4

♣ AQJ103

♠ Q75

♠ K98432

♥ Q

♥ K765

♦ AQ987

♦ 10

♣ 9875

♣ K2

♠ A6

♥ 1093

♦ KJ6532

♣ 64

Board 19 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable

Once more a strange deal as the side with the fewest points can make the most tricks, since with trumps 2-2, the diamond finesse right and ♣A in front of the king, 4♠ is cold. Will anyone reach it?

South might open a weak 2♦ ...well he will open a weak 2♦, but only if he is playing such a system. The auction will probably continue 2♦ -pass- 2♥ -2♠ -pass- 4♠, although slight variations are possible.

What about if South passes? Now West will pass (anyone applying the rule of 19 to that load of old rope needs locking up) and North open 1♥. East will bid 1♠ and West should bid 2♥ to show a good raise if South bids 2♦. If instead South raises to 2♥ (for anyone playing five-card majors or a strong no-trump where a two level response tends to be more chunky) then West will have to choose between 3♥ and 2♠, neither is ideal.

Since 4♠ is no bargain then those that stop in part score have won the battle but lost the war, and will no doubt consider themselves unlucky when their neighbours have rolled in 620, for all of the match-points.

HCP		Makeable contracts					
			♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
13		N	1	-	3	-	-
10	9	S	1	-	3	-	-
		E	-	-	-	4	1
8		W	-	-	-	4	1

♠ 1096

♥ 86

♦ J853

♣ AQ107

♠ A5

♠ Q82

♥ Q42

♥ AJ1097

♦ Q109

♦ AK742

♣ KJ843

♣ -

♠ KJ743

♥ K53

♦ 6

♣ 9652

Board 20 : Dealer West : All vulnerable

After West opens 1NT East will start getting excited. After transferring and showing his second suit he might even have visions of a (grand) slam facing something like AKx, KQx, xx, xxxxx. Then he will wake up and realise partner never has perfect cards, and after cue bidding 4♣ will call it a day in 4♥.

The play in hearts is actually quite messy. On a spade lead West does best to duck, then he can negotiate a spade ruff and draw trumps whilst maintaining his options in the diamond suit. In practice many declarers will win the spade lead (ten, queen, king) and start on trumps. They will be disappointed when dummy gets forced, and in fact it wouldn't be a surprise if some declarers lose their way and go down. At the other end of the spectrum some might come to 11 tricks if South switched to his singleton or North leads one on the go, carving up his jack.

Anyone trying 3NT (maybe West gets his clubs in) might go for 500 the hard way on a spade lead, heart finesse losing, club switch etc...now that would be painful.

HCP		Makeable contracts					
			♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
7		N	2	-	-	2	-
12	14	S	1	-	-	2	-
		E	-	4	4	-	1
7		W	-	4	4	-	1

♠AJ5
♥J643
♦A105
♣AJ7

♠932 ♠Q876
♥107 ♥A8
♦K63 ♦98742
♣Q9543 ♣K6

♠K104
♥KQ952
♦QJ
♣1082

HCP	
15	
5	9
11	

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

Board 21 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable

N/S have 26 points between them and a nine card fit, so I am going to go out on a limb and suggest that 4♥ will be the room contract. Possible routes include 1♥ – 3♥ – 4♥, 1NT–2♦–3♥–4♥, 1♥ – 4♥ or perhaps a Jacoby auction.

The opening lead will make some difference here, as a spade lead picks up the queen and makes 11 tricks trivial, declarer discarding the ♣2 on the third diamond. On a diamond lead West should avoid playing his king as this might convince declarer that the king is with East (perhaps the 8 led from K98?) and now he might not repeat the finesse.

Actually with careful play every declarer should make 11 tricks, as even on the best lead of ace and another trump declarer should play three rounds of diamonds pitching a spade from dummy, ruff out the spades and then lead the ♣10. Even if West covers he wins the ace and goes back to dummy with a trump to lead a club up. Even if he mis-guesses and plays the jack East will be end-played.

That sounds like hard work - better to get a spade lead and claim 11 on a finesse!

♠KQ10542
♥1052
♦Q864
♣-

♠J ♠876
♥Q743 ♥K6
♦AJ9 ♦K752
♣KQ953 ♣AJ86

♠A93
♥AJ98
♦103
♣10742

HCP	
7	
13	11
9	

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

Board 22 : Dealer East : EW vulnerable

E/W have a great fit and the golden holding of three small cards facing a singleton, but with the diamond finesse wrong and the tricky trump break they will find 5♣ one too high.

In the modern style some players open the East hand, but most playing 12-14 no-trump will (correctly) pass. West will open 1♣ in third seat and North should bid at least 2♠, although at favourable vulnerability and with a void, put me down for 3♠. East has little choice but to bid 4♣ (3♣ against the 2♠bidders) and South should raise the ante by supporting spades.

If we are now at the four level then West must pass to get a plus score, but even this requires accurate defence. (The defence against 4♠ need to get trumps in before declarer can ruff two diamonds in dummy)

If declarer is pushed higher in clubs then it's not just a matter of sneakily running the ♦J to pick up the queen. The fourth round of the suit is also a loser and with South having four trumps you can't cope even double dummy.

If either side is allowed to make a game then a top awaits them, otherwise the 130/140 people have done the best they can.

♠Q8
♥KJ953
♦K874
♣AJ

♠AJ64 ♠K10
♥10874 ♥-
♦963 ♦AQJ2
♣84 ♣KQ107653

♠97532
♥AQ62
♦105
♣92

HCP	
14	
5	15
6	

Makeable contracts						
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	
N	-	-	2	-	-	
S	-	-	2	-	-	
E	5	2	-	1	1	
W	5	2	-	1	1	

Board 23 : Dealer South : All vulnerable

This time East has a powerful hand but just for a change the cards lie well! With trumps 2-2 and diamonds coming in for one loser (doubleton ten dropping) 5♣ looks cold.

N/S meanwhile can make very little as despite their nine-card fit they have matching doubletons and a load of honours not pulling their weight (K♦, J♣, Q♠).

With South the dealer it will surely start pass-pass-1♥ and East should probably just bid 2♣ for now. South should bid 3♥ (pre-emptive after an overcall, 3♣ is used to indicate the old fashioned balanced ten count) and North pass. East is certainly worth 4♣ now (give no thought to the diamonds) but even with the void heart shown up by his four-card holding it is asking a lot for West to bid game.

I imagine any E/W pairs that do bid 5♣ will do so because they have been pushed there rather having bid it freely.

<p>♠ K10987 ♥ J864 ♦ J ♣ KQ9</p> <p>♠ AQ54 ♠ J6 ♥ A1095 ♥ K ♦ 73 ♦ AKQ108542 ♣ J104 ♣ 63</p> <p>♠ 32 ♥ Q732 ♦ 96 ♣ A8752</p>	<p>Board 24 : Dealer West : Love all</p> <p>There's a lot of scope here for strange results as everyone has marginal actions that may or may not work.</p> <p>Some Wests will open an (11) 12-14 NT. East should probably give up on slam and raise to game. That will be 12 tricks on a spade lead.</p> <p>If West passes then North should pass and East will open some number of diamonds, or even an off centre gambling 3NT. This last bid will have the unfortunate consequence of putting South on lead with his five-card suit, although if he chooses the text-book lead of the ♣ A the suit will be blocked and East will live to fight another day.</p> <p>After 1♦-1♥ North will surely come in with 1♠ and now East can bid 3♦ and West try 3NT. Might North go for the ♣K in surprise attack mode? Perhaps, and it will strike gold on this occasion.</p>																																																
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<p>♠ K864 ♥ Q986 ♦ A43 ♣ J5</p> <p>♠ J2 ♠ A97 ♥ J2 ♥ AK73 ♦ KJ985 ♦ 762 ♣ K643 ♣ A82</p> <p>♠ Q1053 ♥ 1054 ♦ Q10 ♣ Q1097</p>	<p>Board 25 : Dealer North : EW vulnerable</p> <p>This hand type demonstrates one of the key points in Acol, as after pass-1♥-pass to West he should respond 2♦ rather than 1NT. A two level response simply shows enough to raise a strong no-trump to game, whereas a 1NT response says "pass with 15-16 balanced".</p> <p>This is one of those lucky/unlucky hands. Any Wests that consider their hand too strong for a 1NT response will bid 2♦ and raise 2NT to 3NT and feel upset when partner blanches at the sight of dummy. Their evaluation might be right but 3NT is a pretty grim contract on a spade lead. However they will soon perk up once the diamonds come in for one loser and spades are 4-4!</p> <p>Likewise those that respond 1NT and get a spade lead will be nodding approvingly at the sight of dummy (on a spade lead). They won't be amused to see a row of 600s and 150s on the traveller.</p> <p>Those playing strong no-trump will bid 1NT – 3NT and South should remember to lead a major suit, as a spade lead is by far the best start for the defence, even if it comes to the same thing on this occasion.</p>																																																
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<p>♠ Q42 ♥ 643 ♦ J753 ♣ Q94</p> <p>♠ 1073 ♠ AJ985 ♥ KQ102 ♥ J98 ♦ K92 ♦ 64 ♣ K63 ♣ 1087</p> <p>♠ K6 ♥ A75 ♦ AQ108 ♣ AJ52</p>	<p>Board 26 : Dealer East : All vulnerable</p> <p>N/S will have a free run here and the match-points will go to those that stop as low as possible.</p> <p>I suppose the traditionalists have it right here, as they will no doubt bid 1♣-pass-pass-pass, make 90 and ask "what's the problem?".</p> <p>Other Acol players might start 1♦-pass-2♦. (There doesn't seem to be any consensus about whether to open 1♣ or 1♦ on these hands. I always favour 1♣ but it's not something I get worked up about). Now South will bid 2NT as a game try and North should hastily pass. Some Souths might fall in love with their controls and leap to 3NT, but dummy will be something of a disappointment!</p> <p>Both minors make eight tricks played by South, whilst no-trumps is in real trouble, and six tricks is the limit if both sides play well. Declarer might well make less as he might end up staking everything on either minor suit finesse being right – he will be disappointed by both the finesses losing and the score he gets at the end.</p>																																																
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W	-	-	1	2	-																																												

♠Q

♥AQ542

♦KJ105

♣1092

♠A6

♥J1063

♦A94

♣AJ54

♠K109875

♥K9

♦Q863

♣7

HCP

12

6

14

8

Makeable contracts

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

Board 27 : Dealer South : Love all

Both sides have “20 high” between them and the hand belongs to N/S who have the spades and more importantly on this hand the diamonds but it won’t be obvious for them to compete.

Where South opens 2♠ (the mainstream choice) this will go pass-pass to East who has a choice between double and a shaded 2NT (which should be about 13-16 in fourth seat).

Most will choose double and now West will either bid 3♣, or 2NT if playing Lebensohl to indicate a bad hand. If he does bid 3♣ will it be so obvious that either North or South need to bid again? I have every sympathy with a N/S pair that does pass out 3♣ and concede 110 (3♣ is easy by ruffing spades in dummy) but my sympathy comes with no match-points alas.

Perhaps North can double 2NT and South will compete with 3♦? Pretty unlikely I’d say. Any N/S pairs that do get to the 4-4 fit have done very well indeed and deserve their great score, as nine tricks are easy with only three top losers and one in the wash.

♠Q108

♥106

♦KQ85

♣8753

♠A65

♥AKQJ52

♦7

♣Q106

♠J93

♥4

♦A10962

♣KJ92

HCP

7

8

16

9

Makeable contracts

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

Board 28 : Dealer West : NS vulnerable

I feel quite confident that nearly every E/W pair will bid to 4♥ here, as the start of pass- pass-1♥-pass-2♥-pass-4♥ seems very likely. (Perhaps a conservative East might make a game try instead, but West will still accept.)

The only lead to give 11 tricks is a club, and I would regard it as a crime if South led one since when you hold nine points and the opponents are in game partner doesn’t rate to hold that much (as evidenced by this hand!).

Stick me down for a spade lead, which while not very dynamic is going to be the least costly most of the time.

There are various options in the play: East might try playing diamonds, eliminating them and then exiting with three rounds of spades, but the defence can arrange for North to win and a club switch through the Q10 gives nothing away.

There is one trap for the defence on a spade lead to the queen and ace. If East leads a diamond and North continues the suit East can eliminate and then exit with the third spade. North (having burnt his queen at trick one) will be unable to get the lead and East will make 11 tricks for a colossal score.

♠643

♥64

♦Q10987

♣A98

♠AQ82

♥KJ32

♦J3

♣J42

♠J109

♥AQ97

♦A54

♣Q106

HCP

6

9

12

13

Makeable contracts

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

Board 29 : Dealer North : All vulnerable

This time the auction will be even more sedate as East, in second seat, will open 1NT and it will be passed out.

South has an automatic lead – those that think it is the ♥7 need to read a good book on opening leads (note to self: write a book on opening leads) as the ♠J stands out a mile, it combines safety with aggression. Just to prove the point, on this hand you find partner with nothing in either major, and the heart lead gives a trick whilst the spade lead is neutral.

Actually that’s not entirely true, if South fails to lead the ♠J then a canny declarer might play ace, king and then finesse the eight, reasoning that South is much more likely to have a doubleton J9 (or whatever he has followed with) than J109.

This hand is actually very tricky for declarer to play and I would expect any number of tricks from five to eight to be made.

♠ A632

♥ 10754

♦ QJ4

♣ K10

♠ KQJ7

♥ J8

♦ 875

♣ J752

♠ 109

♥ KQ96

♦ 1093

♣ Q983

♠ 854

♥ A32

♦ AK62

♣ A64

HCP

10

8

15

7

Makeable contracts

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

Board 30 : Dealer East : Love all

This is the sort of hand that people hate, two flat hands and 25 points, and game goes down when neither major breaks 3-3. There is certainly a case for downgrading 4-3-3-3 hands, but I couldn't bring myself to open such a crisp collection a 12-14 no- trump whatever mood I was in.

I can't actually see any interest in the play at all, E/W have all of the pips and all of the majors, and have a good suit to lead as well.

I would be amazed if more than 10% of the field made a different number of tricks other than eight here, and those that have stopped in 2NT have lucked out and get all the match points...sorry I meant to say "have shown impeccable judgement and are rewarded with as good a score as they deserve".

♠ J

♥ 654

♦ AKQ10743

♣ K9

♠ K832

♥ A983

♦ 862

♣ A10

♠ Q1074

♥ KJ7

♦ 9

♣ J7632

♠ A965

♥ Q102

♦ J5

♣ Q854

HCP

13

11

9

7

Makeable contracts

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

Board 31 : Dealer South : NS vulnerable

This time West might upgrade to an opening bid, as one of my old mentors used to say "two and a half Culbertsons is worth an opening bid".

A second seat weak no-trump would certainly set North a problem. He might try a sneaky pass hoping to cash the suit against 3NT (well at least he will get to cash it against 1NT) or he might try a cute penalty double (sometimes these things work), or perhaps just some number of diamonds.

Since ten tricks in diamonds are quite simple (heart to the ten is the percentage as well as the winning play) N/S have to get their opponents three off if they defend undoubled.

This might be possible if E/W are in 1NT as after cashing the diamonds North can switch to the K♣ before the A♠ is dislodged. It won't be possible if E/W find their spade fit as eight tricks are straightforward even with the 4-1 break.

If North comes to play in 3NT then E/W will have to be on the ball, a club lead lets through nine tricks as does two rounds of hearts, but a spade lead blows it out of the water.

♠ A2

♥ J53

♦ J8

♣ AQ8642

♠ Q1094

♥ A10986

♦ 54

♣ KJ

♠ 8763

♥ K2

♦ Q10973

♣ 75

♠ KJ5

♥ Q74

♦ AK62

♣ 1093

HCP

12

10

13

5

Makeable contracts

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

Board 32 : Dealer West : EW vulnerable

N/S should get to 3NT here as even if West opens with 1♥ North can overcall and South can blast game, whether or not he shows a good raise via a 2♥ unassuming cue bid.

Someone has obviously decided that the cards should lie well for the last deal of the night (well, last deal if you sat N/S first and have hacked your way through no fewer than 32 boards!) as the clubs are placed in very friendly fashion.

In fact this is one of those deals where E/W have to defend passively in order to avoid giving up the 11 tricks, three rounds of hearts or any spade from West gives declarer eleven. A diamond from West (or a spade from East) is required to hold N/S to ten, since most tables will be in 3NT by South and make eleven tricks. I would think this will be worth a lot to the defence if they find it.