

Brian's Brighton – Part Three

Swiss Pairs Slams

We all like to bid slams and the Swiss Pairs weekend offered several opportunities to do so.

Round 3. Board 22. Dealer East. N/S Vul.

	♠	3					
	♥	8 6 5 4		West	North	East	South
	♦	7 4 3 2		Wolfarth		Senior	
	♣	8 7 5 4		–	–	1♦	Pass
♠		A 5	♠	2♣	Pass	2♠	Pass
♥		K Q 2	♥	3♦	Pass	4NT	Pass
♦		A 9 6	♦	5♥	Pass	5NT	Pass
♣		K Q J 8 2	♣	7NT	All Pass		
	♠	J 9 8 6 4 2					
	♥	J 10 7 3					
	♦	10					
	♣	6 3					

Our two-over-one GF auction reached the top spot in double-quick time. Two Clubs was natural and game-forcing, and 2♠ showed reversing values, just as in Acol. When Geoff Wolfarth showed diamond support I simply asked for key cards. On hearing that Geoffrey held the two missing aces, I bid 5NT to invite him to bid seven or, if he was not able to do that, to show a specific king. If I could bid 5NT, I must have all the other key cards, so Geoffrey could count 13 tricks and jumped to 7NT - very simple.

Round 4. Board 8. Dealer West. None Vul.

	♠	A 9 7 5 4					
	♥	8 6 2		West	North	East	South
	♦	8		Pass	Pass	2♣	Pass
	♣	9 8 4 2		2NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
♠		Q 8	♠	4♥	Pass	6NT	All Pass
♥		J 10 9 5 4	♥				
♦		A 10 2	♦				
♣		A 10 5	♣				
	♠	J 6 3 2					
	♥	3					
	♦	Q J 9 6 5 4					
	♣	J 7					

Slam is fair on these east/West cards - essentially, declarer needs to have four club winners or, somewhat less likely, a successful minor-suit squeeze, requiring the same opponent to hold four or more clubs and both diamond honours.

Our opponents had an unusual auction. Two Clubs was Benjamin and 2NT 10-12 with any distribution. Now East used Gerber and bid 6NT on finding that she was facing two aces. I don't recommend the methods, but they had reached a sensible contract.

I heard of other tables where East became declarer in 6♥ or 6NT and received the lead of the queen of diamonds. That made life very easy for declarer, though the contract should make on any lead.

Against the auction above, I led ace and another spade. This had the merit of letting us both know

immediately that we could afford to discard our remaining spades. Declarer rattled of his winners but, fatally, left the clubs to the end. Now he could not take advantage of the fall of the doubleton jack, as there was no longer any outside entry to untangle the club winners, and the contract was one down.

Declarer should have cashed the king and ace of clubs early. When the jack falls he can cash the ten then cross to dummy to cash the fourth club. This line of play also allows any squeeze to operate if required.

Round 7. Board 27. Dealer South. None Vul.

	♠	5 4 3			
	♥	8 7 5 2		West	North
	♦	J 4		Senior	East
	♣	J 9 7 3			Wolfarth
♠	A K J 10 9 2		♠	8	
♥	9		♥	K Q J 10 4 3	
♦	K 10 9 7 2		♦	A Q 8	
♣	5		♣	A Q 4	
	♠	Q 7 6			South
	♥	A 6			Pass
	♦	6 5 3			1♠
	♣	K 10 8 6 2			Pass
					2♣
					Pass
					3♣
					Pass
					3NT
					Pass
					4♦
					Pass
					4♠
					All Pass

This was not one of our good boards. Two Hearts was natural and game-forcing. One of the benefits of the game-forcing initial response is that one does not often have to invent a suit to keep the bidding going. The obvious second bid on the east hand is 3♥, stressing the excellent suit, but 2NT is also a very attractive option, getting an eventual NT slam played the right way around, while also leaving plenty of space for partner to continue to describe his shape. On this occasion, West would have bid 4♦ over 2NT. However, over 3♣, I could not bid 3♦ as that would have been fourth-suit-forcing, so I bid the spades for a third time. Now 3NT looks to be a huge underbid, but it did at least offer me the opportunity to introduce my diamonds. It achieved nothing. Geoffrey continued to bid like a man looking at 13 HCP, and 4♠ ended the auction. Twelve tricks meant +480 but a poor matchpoint score.

In Acol, East might start with an old-fashioned strong jump shift to 3♥ over the 1♠ opening. West would repeat the spades and now East can jump to 4NT. In theory, a jump shift followed by 4NT asks for key cards with the bidder's own suit as trumps, not the usual last suit bid naturally. On discovering that only one key card is missing, and with both minor-suit holdings protected from the opening lead, East bids 6♥. Yes, I know that 6NT is just as good a contract and scores better, but 6♥ scored well in practice. If you found a way to bid 6NT with confidence, well done.

Round 8. Board 8. Dealer West. None Vul.

	♠	9 5			
	♥	K 6 5 4		West	North
	♦	4 3		Wolfarth	East
	♣	A Q 7 3 2			Senior
♠	A Q 7 3 2		♠	K J 10 4	
♥	9		♥	A Q 3	
♦	K 7 6		♦	A J 10 8 2	
♣	K J 8 4		♣	6	
	♠	8 6			South
	♥	J 10 8 7 2			Pass
	♦	Q 9 5			1♠
	♣	10 9 5			Pass
					3♣
					Pass
					4NT
					Pass
					6♠
					All Pass

The East hand is too strong for a normal splinter bid, so 2NT was the only option, game-forcing with four-card spade support. Three Clubs was natural and 3♠ marked time, showing slam interest. Four No Trump was a bit aggressive at this point - a cuebid looks more appropriate - but the eventual contract was a good one.

North led a trump and Geoffrey won and drew a second round. Now, how to play it?

At Teams, the correct play is to cash the ace and king of diamonds, making if the queen puts in an appearance, and, if there is no good news in diamonds, take the heart finesse, which provides a discard for the diamond loser if it succeeds. The combination play brings the odds on success over 70%, while a simple diamond guess is only 50% plus an extra bit for a singleton queen falling.

Is this Teams line still correct at Pairs? The downside is that on a bad day you go two off instead of one, which is no big deal at Teams scoring but could be bad news at matchpoints.

What one should do in this kind of situation is to evaluate one's contract. Will almost the entire field bid to the same spot, or will a significant proportion miss the slam? If everyone will be in slam, you should only risk two down if the odds are at least 50-50 that this will make the contract. In other words, you will gain at least as often as you lose. But, if you judge that you have reached a contract which will be missed at many tables, then you should be willing to take greater risks/play more safely, as appropriate, to give yourself the best chance to make the contract, not being so worried about an overtrick or extra undertrick. On the deal above, Geoffrey judged, quite correctly, that many pairs would stop short of slam. He therefore followed the combination play, as described above, and the successful heart finesse made the contract; +980 and a lot of matchpoints.

Round 12. Board 9. Dealer North. E/W Vul.

	♠	10 7 4		West	North	East	South
	♥	K 9 4		Wolfarth		Senior	
	♦	K 5 4		–	Pass	Pass	2♦
	♣	K 8 4 2		Dble	2♥	Pass	2♠
♠	A K Q 6		♠	Dble	Pass	4♥	Pass
♥	A Q 6		♥	4♠	Pass	5♣	Pass
♦	A Q 10 3		♦	6♥	All Pass		
♣	Q 5		♣				
		♠	J 9 8 5 3 2				
		♥	8 3				
		♦	9 6				
		♣	J 9 6				

Two Diamonds was a multi and double showed either around 13-15 balanced or an Acol Two type or 19+ balanced. After South unwound to show his weak 2♠ opener, the second double showed 19+ balanced, so I bid the heart game. Geoffrey had a spare high card for his second double so went on with a spade cuebid and, facing an unlimited partner, I in turn showed my club control. Now 5♦ might perhaps be the sounder approach with the West cards, which would have seen me sign-off in 5♠ to end the auction. However, the final contract of 6♥ was a decent-enough contract.

South led the nine of diamonds, but not so quickly that the lead screamed singleton. Accordingly, I ducked - it has been known for players to make cunning leads away from the king when they know that the ace must be in dummy, and this also gave me an entry to hand with the jack of diamonds.

Peter Clinch won the diamond king and returned the eight of clubs. Of course, I was never going to run this as it would risk going down in a cold contract if the heart king was onside. I went up with the ace and took the heart finesse and the club king meant down two for a horrible score. Yes, I could have crossed to dummy with a diamond to take three club pitches on the top spades, but that would still have been down two when the heart finesse lost as I would now have suffered a diamond ruff.

Round 14. Board 25. Dealer North. E/W Vul.

	♠	J		West	North	East	South
	♥	Q J 9 8 7 6 3		W. Hamilton	Senior	I. Hamilton	Wolfarth
	♦	J		—	4♥	4♠	Pass
	♣	K Q 6 5		4NT	5♣	Pass	Pass
♠	Q 10 8 3 2		♠ A K 7 6 5 4	5♥	Pass	6♣	Pass
♥	A 10		♥ K 2	6♦	Pass	7♠	All Pass
♦	K Q 9 7 3		♦ A 2				
♣	8		♣ A 10 3				
	♠	9					
	♥	5 4					
	♦	10 8 6 5 4					
	♣	J 8 7 4 2					

Four Hearts looked to be the completely normal action on the North cards and Northern Ireland's Ian Hamilton overcalled 4♠ - also completely normal. Ian's brother, Willy (Willie?) had a great hand in support of spades so asked for key cards. Now I thought it worth testing their partnership agreements - Willy lives in England so they only have the occasional outing together - by bidding 5♣. The pass from East came slowly as he double-checked the agreed methods, and West made another forward-going move. A couple of cuebids now saw Ian jump to the cold grand slam - well done in the face of the four-level opening. Yes, they were on the same wavelength, with the pass over 5♣ showing one or four key cards.