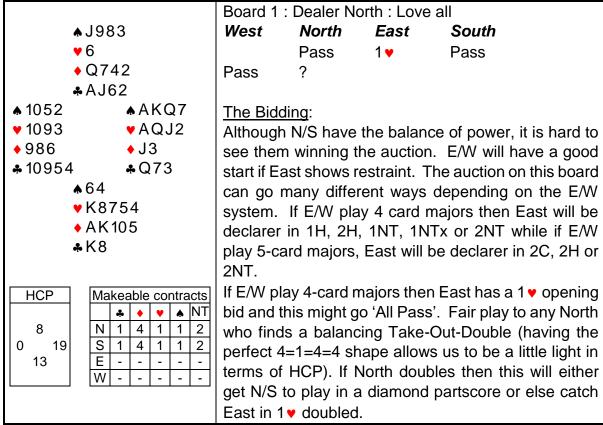
Food For Thought Wednesday 22nd May 2024

(Commentary on the Hands - Fearghal O'Boyle)

For the purposes of our discussion, let us assume that we are playing simple ACOL '4-card majors, weak No-Trump, Stayman, Transfers, Weak 2's in 3 suits, RKCB and natural signals (High Encouraging)'. We will mention other variations where relevant but as is often the case, the bidding system used will make little or no difference.



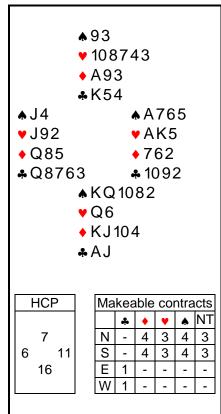
If E/W play 5-card majors then East will open 1♣ and South will either overcall 1♥ or double. Some North players might find a 1NT response to South's 1♥ overcall and if they do they will probably set N/S up for a good board.

The Play:

While N/S can make 10 tricks in a diamond contract, it is unlikely that N/S will find their diamond fit much less make more than 9 tricks if they do. To make 4♦ requires very careful play as we need to setup a heart trick and also ruff 2 hearts. However, making 3♦ will still score well - East cashing ♠AKQ will help declarer and even cashing just two top spades might allow a cunning declarer to setup a spade trick by leading the ♠J himself on the third round to pin West's ♠10.

Plus 110 or better will be a good score for N/S while minus 50 will be good for E/W.

Tip: We tend to overbid good hands. So when we have a very strong hand we need to learn to be patient - partner might be trying hard to tell us that he has a very very weak hand.



Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠	All Pass	

There will be a few N/S pairs in 3NT or 4 and if their card play can match their 'rosy' bidding they will score very well.

South will open 1♠ and North should respond 1NT. For sure North is not worth a 2♥ response (10-15) but if he does then N/S will end in 3NT or 4♠ both of which have chances of making.

As an aside, the East hand is very very close to an opening bid – there is good advice that a hand with AK and an A is worth an opening bid but ideally we would like the AK to be in a 4-card suit or better still in a 5-card or longer suit....so for sure if ♥K were the ♠K we should be taking some action with the East hand.

The Play

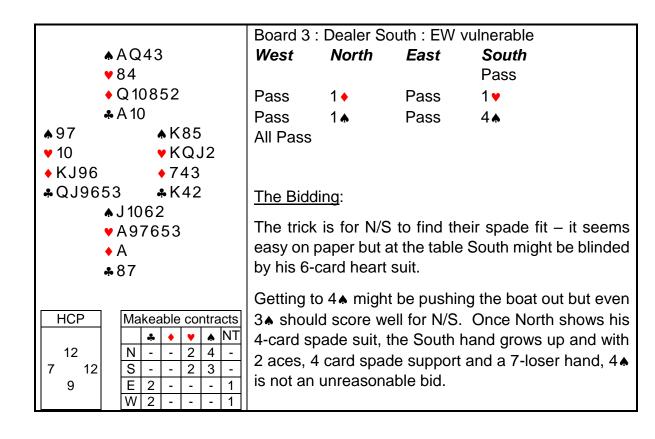
As the cards lie, declarer can make 3NT or 4S - the defence seem to be powerless – they can only defeat these contracts if declarer mis-guesses the location of the \bullet Q or the \bullet J ...and if East does not open the bidding then there is no reason for declarer to guess correctly.

When South plays in a spade contract, he might get a club lead and make 11 tricks allowing him to discard one of his heart losers on the third round of spades, guesses to play West for ◆Q and then either, plays trumps from the top or leads towards the ♠KQ.

Neither guess is easy – the first guess is tough but when one guess works, the second guess is a bit easier because you have learned a little bit more about the hand ... but as ever when we think too much, we over-think and get it wrong.

Any North managing to land in a heart part score will do well – making 8 tricks and 9 if he guesses the location of the ◆Q.

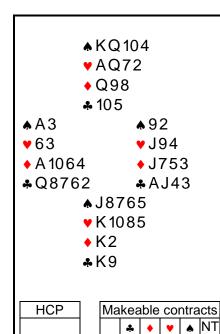
TIP: If you ever get a chance to watch or listen to Tom Hanlon in action - take it - he is one of the best declarers in the world at 'Finding the Lady'.



With North as declarer, East will be tempted to lead a heart even though South has bid hearts. While it doesn't seem to matter which card East leads, it is still hard to see many declarers making 10 tricks.

One successful line is to win the heart lead in dummy and exit on a heart – the plan being to crossruff the red suits. If West ruffs in at any point it seems we need to revert to Plan B where we attempt to setup dummy's heart suit – Still respect to any North player making 10 tricks.

TIP: The Losing Trick Count (LTC) is worth reading up on – counting HCP works well with balanced hands but with unbalanced hands we need another method and LTC is one such method.



- 4 4 1

1

S - - 4 4

E 2 2 -

W 2 2

Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	2*
Pass	2♥	Pass	4♥

The Bidding:

All Pass

Although this is the easiest hand to play in either 4♥ or 4♠ there will be quite a few who decide to play in a partscore.

A lot will depend on how South values his hand – if he treats it as 10 points then he might not invite game. The only thing that could improve that South hand would be for one of the minor suit Kings to swap places with the Spade Jack.

If North opens a 'weak' NT then some Souths will use Stayman and some will 'Transfer' (first showing the spades and then showing the 4-card heart suit on the next round.

When the major suit fit comes to light, that South hand becomes mighty good i.e. 2 minor suit kings, 2 doubletons and a 7-loser hand.

Those playing 'Strong' No-Trump might bid it as follows: 1♣ - 1♠ - 3♠ - 4♠?

However it is hard to fault those who do not bid game – after all it is only a 50-50 shot – put the Ace of clubs in West's hand and it's 'Adios Amigos'.

The Play:

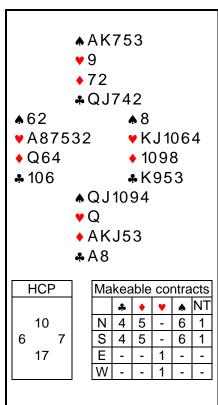
13

10

10

In the play there are 10 easy tricks in a Heart or Spade contract - losing three tricks to the opponent's 3 aces. It is pretty much impossible to make anything other than 10 tricks in either contract....but 'there's always one'!

TIP: When most of your points are in Aces and Kings you should be tempted to accept any game invitations that might come your way.



Board 5 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2.	Pass	2♦
Pass	4 •	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♠	Pass	6♠
All Pass			

Although there are 12 easy tricks for N/S here, bidding slam will be worth a bundle of matchpoints.

The Bidding:

If North decides to open the bidding with his 10 count there will be no stopping South but even if N/S do stop in 4♠, North will probably escape the heart lead and make all 13 tricks thereby earning his side a nice score too.

It is very tempting to open with the North hand and if North were not vulnerable I imagine most would be 'in like Flynn'.

If North passes then South will open 1♠. Some West players might bid 2♥ or 3♥ and North might try to play 'catch-up' by bidding 4♥ to show a good raise and maybe heart shortage.

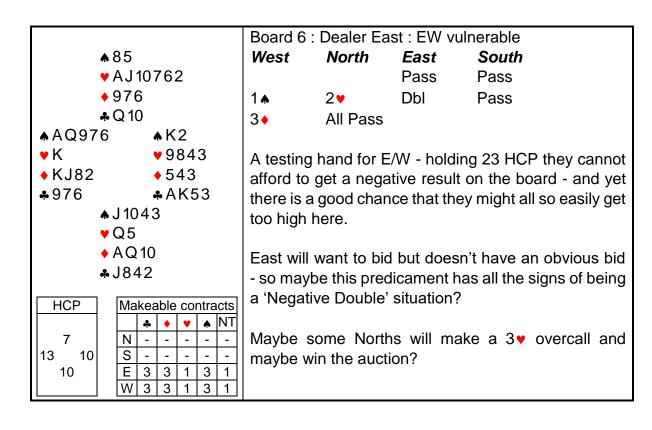
The strange thing is that while both North and South will be delighted with their heart shortages, their delight would be quenched if they were to discover that their partner also held the same heart shortage – in general hands that are 'shape-mirrored' do not fit well together. So 'not' bidding this slam, should not keep you awake all night.

As an aside, it is worth noting that a 2 → rebid after 1 ♠ - 2 ♣ should be forcing for one round – this means that we can release 3 → and 3 ▼ to become 'splinter bids' showing 4+ card club support and shortness in the suit bid.

The Play:

With the club finesse working, there is nothing to the play – declarer has 5 spade tricks, 2 club tricks, 4 diamond tricks, 1 diamond ruff and a heart ruff for 13 tricks if the defence do not lead a heart.

TIP: A 2 level rebid by opener in a new suit, after a 2-level 'Acol' response, should be forcing for 1 round.



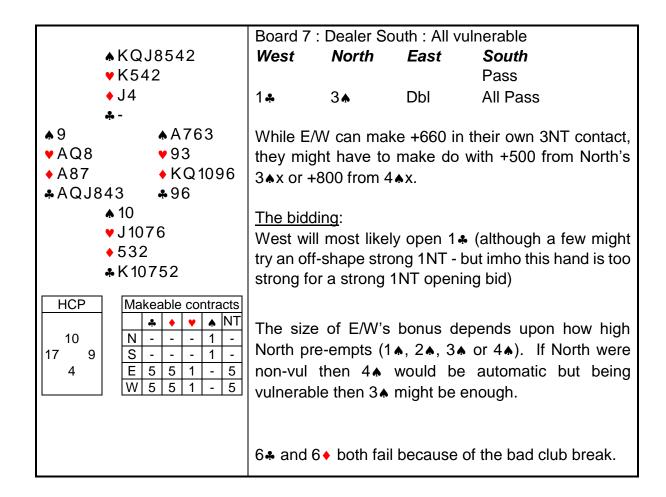
The play:

Playing in a heart contract, North can make only 6 tricks (5 hearts and the ◆A) but maybe the defence will gift South a club trick at some point?

If East decides to take a shot at 3NT he will probably make it more often than not because the defence is not at all obvious. The ♥Q is obvious but then North needs to either allow dummy's ♥K to win trick 1 or play the ♥A and switch to a black suit - top marks to any North player finding that excellent defence.

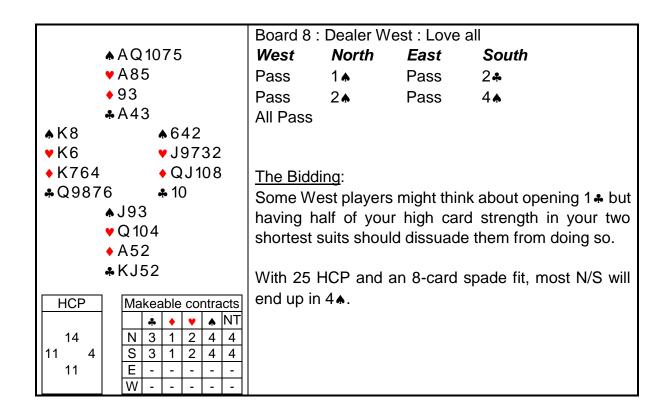
If West wants to try his hand at 3NT, he will most likely make it too as most Norths will lead either the ♥J or the ♥10 – the only two cards to allow the contract to make.

TIP: It is worth researching 'Negative' doubles – saying 'I want to bid but I do not have an obvious bid'.



Declarer has 6 spade tricks after losing one to East's ace. On paper he can lose 2 heart tricks and make 2 heart tricks to win 8 tricks but in real life if the opponents have the patience to keep playing diamonds or clubs and making declarer ruff in his hand then declarer will be held to only 7 tricks.

TIP: The 'Forcing' defence, where the defenders force declarer to ruff in his hand, is often the 'killer' defence.



The play:

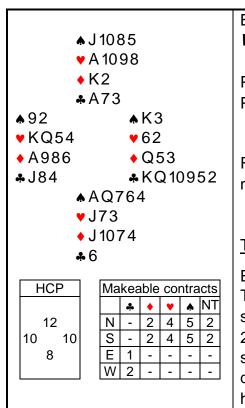
There will be a few declarers who end up with only 9 tricks in 4.

North has a guess in the heart suit when he cashes the ace of hearts and leads towards the Q and 10 of hearts in dummy – does he play the Queen and make only 9 tricks or play the 10 and make 10 tricks?

A lot will depend on who East is - but I guess the simplest advice is - if East plays small smoothly you should believe him (he doesn't have anything to think about i.e. he does not have the ♥K) and play the 10.

If you are declarer in 3NT then you need to avoid the club finesse and instead find the cute play of exiting on a diamond after cashing your spade winners and one top club to endplay your opponents into opening the clubs or the hearts for you.

Tip: Avoid giving declarer any information - play your cards in an even tempo.



Board 9 : Dealer North : EW vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	2♥ (T)
Pass	3 ♦ (♥ Fit)	Pass	3♥ (T)
Pass	3♠	All Pass	

Respect to any N/S pair who manage to bid and make 4 here.

The Bidding:

Even if you and your partner agree to 'Break the Transfer' with 4-card support and a good hand, it is still difficult to bid on to 4♠. In the above auction, 2♥ was a transfer, 3♦ showed 4-card spade support, a maximum hand and a doubleton diamond but still South could not manage to go higher than 3♠.

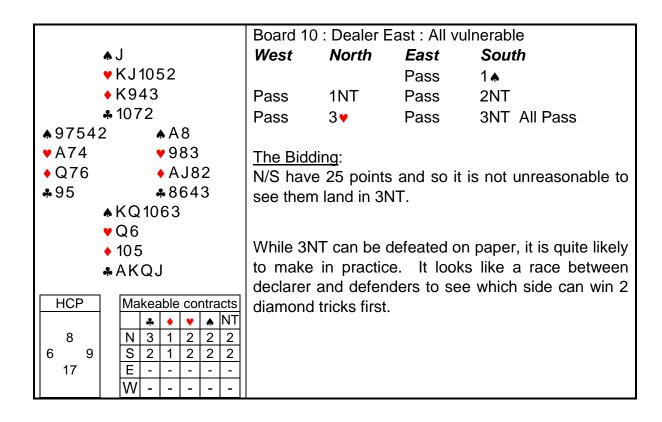
The Play:

The play is relatively straightforward – declarer has 5 spade tricks, 3 heart tricks, 1 club trick, 1 diamond trick and a diamond ruff. The only issue is whether he loses 2 diamond tricks or just one. If South did not have the ◆J10 then declarer would only lose diamond trick because he would play a diamond towards the king in the North hand.

However having the ◆J10 in the South hand gives declarer a losing option of running the ◆J and now he loses 2 diamond tricks and 1 heart trick – just making 10 tricks.

Making 11 tricks, whether or not you are in 4♠ will score above average.

TIP: When we move to the 'advanced class' we will learn that when partner makes a 'Transfer' bid, we are not duty-bound to 'complete' the transfer. Sometimes it can be helpful to tell partner that you have 4-card support for partner's major suit by 'Breaking' the transfer e.g. North's 3 • in auction above.



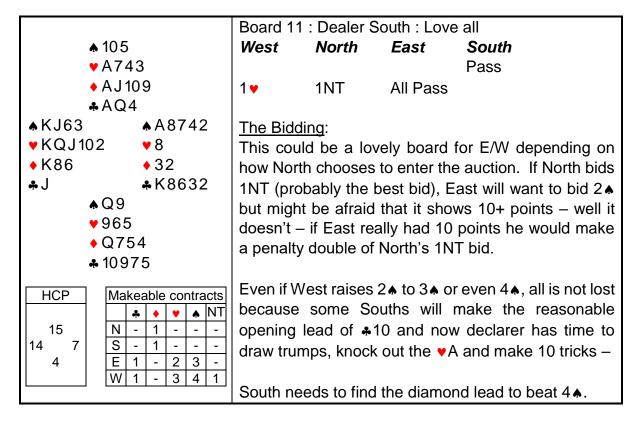
4♥ and 4♠ go down naturally without much effort from the defence – even a helpful
◆A lead still leaves declarer with 2 diamond losers that cannot be disposed of.

3NT on the other hand is not so easy to defeat. In theory as long as East does not lead ◆8 or ♠8 the contract goes down. But in real life I can see 3NT making at almost every table. It seems that to beat the contract, E/W have to find a rare 'defensive intrafinesse' in the diamond suit.

If and when East decides to attack diamonds, and decides to lead the ◆2 then West must keep his ◆Q sitting over dummy's ◆10. On the next round of diamonds, West leads ◆Q to pin dummy's ◆10. A brilliancy prize for any defenders who find this defence!

The N/S players who carefully avoid game might have to let 'virtue be its own reward'.

Tip: 'Temperament' is just as important as 'Technique' in Bridge - you won't be a good winner at Bridge until you know how to be a good loser. Inevitably, you will get some bad scores that will be completely outside of your control – the really good players know how to instantly sweep these bad boards under the carpet.



Some North players might make a take-out-double of the 1 ♥ opening bid (not an ideal call holding 4 cards in hearts) and now E/W will play the hand in 2♠, 3♠ or 4♠.

The best E/W scores would seem to come from those who defend 1NT – declarer might not make more than 3 tricks and +200 to E/W will beat all the spade partscore results.

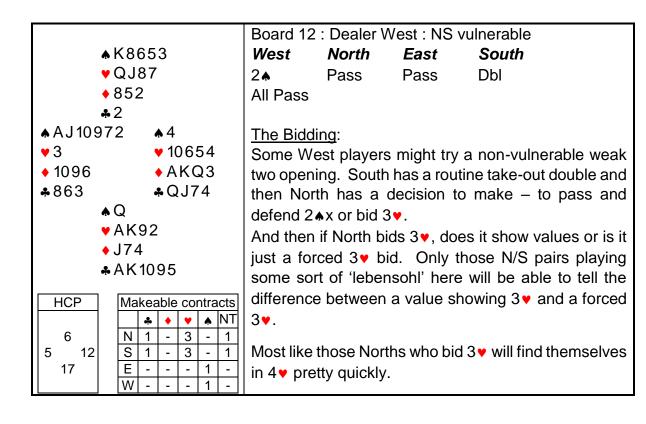
Will any East players find a penalty double of North's 1NT? Highly unlikely. This hand also gives Gay Keaveney and his Galway friends another opportunity to deploy their famous 'Flannery 2*' opening bid showing 5 hearts and 4 spades and 11-15 points.

The Play:

If North is declarer in 1NT he should make 3 tricks only i.e. his 3 aces. If East leads a club then declarer will make 4 tricks.

If East plays 4♠ it takes a diamond lead from South through West's ♠K to beat the contract.

TIP: When partner opens the bidding and the next opponent overcalls 1NT, a double by you is a penalty double showing 9+ HCP, which means that other responses by you tend to show 'shapely' hands with less than 9 HCP.



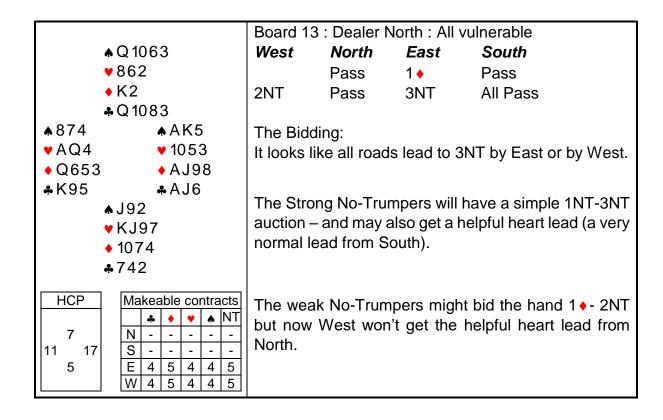
The play:

2♠x looks like it will go down one on most defences. One such defence is for South to win the club lead, cash his second club winner, give North a club ruff, win the heart return and lead a 4th round of clubs – this will promote North ♠8 into the setting trick.

The North players in 4♥ have to lose 4 tricks off the top i.e. ♦ AKQ and ♠ A.

The North players in 3♥ will also lose 4 tricks off the top but then they need to be careful to draw at most 1 round of trumps, cash at least one top club and then start 'cross-ruffing' the remaining tricks.

TIP: Keep an eye out for 'Cross-Ruffing' opportunities and then remember to cash your side suit winners before embarking on such a plan.



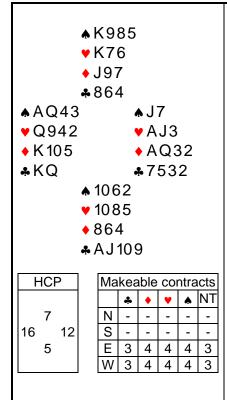
This hand is all about the number of tricks that declarer can make i.e. 9 will not be good, 10 will be average, 11 above average while 12 tricks will be a huge score for E/W.

To start with declarer has a guess in the diamond suit – the best line in a pairs game is to start by playing small from the West hand and finessing the jack. Now declarer has to guess whether North the doubleton king or South has the doubleton 10. If declarer thinks the king is doubleton he cashes the ace next while if declarer thinks the 10 is doubleton he goes to the West hand to run the ◆Q.

If declarer guesses well in diamonds he will make all 4 diamond tricks. There are no guiding clues to help declarer and I suspect that East's •98 might lure a few declarers into quite reasonably playing to drop the •10 in one or two rounds.

Those EW who can arrange for East to play the hand have a great chance of making 12 tricks on a small heart lead from South – as long as they play small from dummy at trick 1 and then guess to play North for ◆K2.

TIP: In general, when taking a finesse we lead a small card rather than an honour towards the high picture cards.



Board 14 : Dealer East : Love all			
West	North	East	South
		1NT	Pass
2*	Pass	2♦	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

It is difficult to see how any table can land in any contract other than 3NT played by East?

The Weak No-Trumpers will open 1NT while the Strong No-Trumpers will rebid 1NT with the East hand.

The only point of discussion is whether or not West should use Stayman? There is a lot to be said for simply bidding 3NT with the West hand because in general with 28+ HCP we want to play in 3NT in matchpoint scoring even if we do find a major suit fit.

However, tonight, any E/W pair who accidentally find themselves in 4 vill earn themselves the 'top of the night' because 9 tricks seems to be the absolute limit for those playing in 3NT.

The Play:

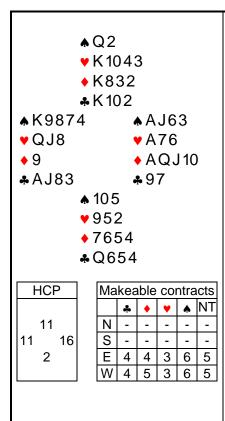
The club lead from South seems to be automatic and now the defence look set to win 3 club tricks and either a spade or a heart.

Declarer needs to count his tricks at various points during the hand to make sure that he is not giving the defenders a 5th trick. For starters declarer needs to hope that the opposing clubs are divided 4-3 so that he can afford to lose the lead once and only once and then hope that he has 9 tricks after the defenders have taken their 4m tricks.

One sensible line is to win the club lead and play a heart to the jack, cash the heart ace and concede a heart to North. Now the 3-3 diamond break gives declarer 9 tricks – unless he tries the spade finesse and ends up with 3NT-1.

A cunning declarer might lead the \vee Q from the West hand at trick 2 and now North needs to cover with the King - otherwise N/S do not get their heart trick and declarer makes 3NT+1.

TIP: With a combined 28+ HCP it is a good idea to play your game contracts in 3NT.



Board 15 : Dealer South : NS vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
			Pass
1 ♠	Pass	2NT (Spades 13+) Pass
3♦ (short)	Pass	4 ♦ (♦A)	Pass
4 •	All Pass		

This will be a make or break board for some E/W pairs – do we or don't we bid slam?

Those who bid slam probably started off with West finding a 1♠ opening bid − I suspect most West players will open the bidding if only for the simple reason that they are not vulnerable. In today's modern game, more and more players are looking for excuses to open with 11 counts (11 is the new 13).

This West hand is worth an opening bid in my opinion - the only bad thing about the hand is that we have 3 points in one of our short suits but this is off-set by the fact that the Queen and Jack of hearts are supporting one another – rather than being in separate suits.

For sure if East gets excited and starts using 'Blackwood' then West's two keycards will propel him to bid 6♠ i.e. the auction might go: 1♠ - 2♠ - 4NT - 5♠ - 6♠

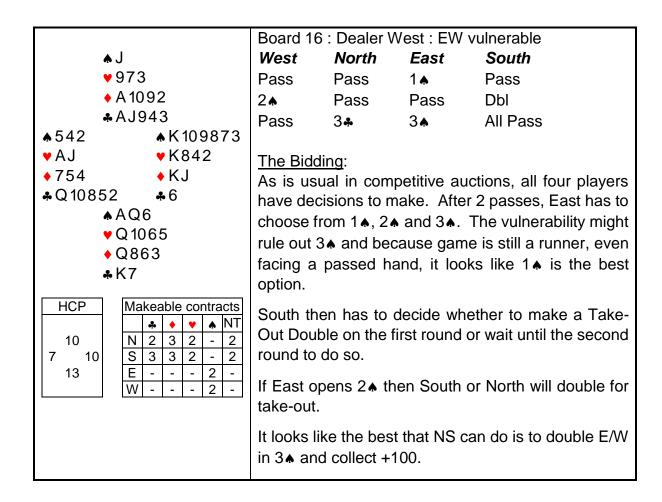
The Play:

This is not a 'good' slam to be in - you have a club loser, a heart loser and a potential trump loser to take care of. I can very easily see some good declarers going down in this slam because declarer has a choice of taking a simple diamond finesse (playing North to have ◆K or taking a ruffing diamond finesse playing South the have ◆K). The ruffing diamond finesse is very attractive because if South has ◆K then you won't need the heart finesse.

This is a hand where the Tom Hanlons of this world really shine – they can divine from table presence which opponent has the •K and play accordingly. The rest of us will have to rely on believing that when North leads a small diamond at trick 1 that he really has •K, take the simple diamond finesse, followed shortly afterwards by the heart finesse and make our 12 tricks.

As ever in a matchpoint pairs event, making 12 tricks will yield you a great score whether you are in $4 \spadesuit$ or $6 \spadesuit$.

TIP: Good declarer play often scores just as well as good bidding.



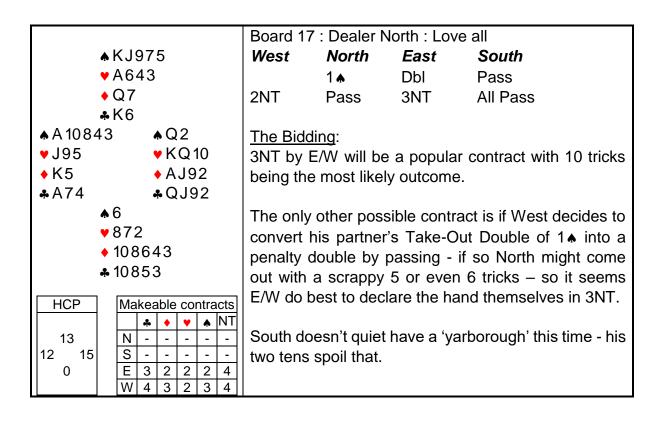
2♠ by East is an easy make - just losing 3 spades, a diamond and a club.

Those N/S who play in a diamond partscore must lose 2 hearts and a diamond and might even lose 2 diamonds if they finesse twice into East – however if East opens 1 heart that should point declarer towards the simpler line of playing ace and another diamond towards the queen.

Sadly 3NT by South has no chance - declarer just can't seem to find his 9th trick (2 spades, 3 diamonds and 3 clubs).

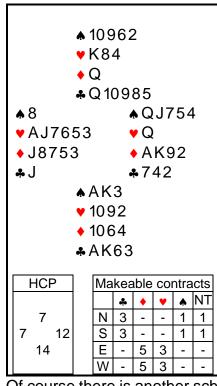
If by some chance N/S can arrange to have North declare 3NT then they will probably make it because it takes the inspired $\bigstar K$ lead to beat it.

TIP: Listening to our opponent's bidding (or lack of) can often offer us vital clues to help us in the bidding and play.



In 3NT, West seems to have 10 tricks, 2 spades, 2 hearts, 3 diamonds and 3 clubs (by playing a low club towards the QJ). The defence win 3 tricks, 1 heart, 1 diamond and 1 club – any defenders that manage to win 4 tricks will earn themselves a huge score.

TIP: Converting Take-Out Doubles to penalty doubles at the 1-level requires GOOD trumps.



Board 18 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable					
West	North	East	South		
		1 ♠	Dbl		
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass		
3♦	All Pass				
The Bide	The Bidding:				

This could take any number of twists and turns and it all depends on what West bids over South's Take-Out double.

If South had passed the 1 (and indeed Pass is a good call here) then West would have been forced to respond an off-centre 1NT but when South doubles, a 2 response is not as crazy as it looks.

If West really had 10+ points he would have redoubled so there is a school of thought that says Wests 2 must therefore show 5-9 points.

Of course there is another school of thought that says West should only 'Redouble' on hands that have an interest in penalising N/S and that otherwise West should ignore South's double. Do you know your own partnership style in this area? It is important to know this in order to decipher what partner means by 3 ♦ - but I suppose a 'courtesy' raise to 4 ♦ by East won't hurt?

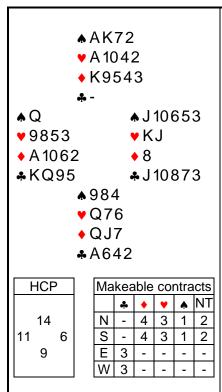
At some tables N/S might bid as far as 3♣ - nonetheless E/W will still win the auction. If East gets a chance to rebid 2♦ then West's gut will tell him to jump to 5♦ but his heart will tell him to explore a possible heart fit – always listen to your 'gut'. Any E/W pair bidding 5♦ or even getting to a diamond or a heart partscore has done very well.

The Play:

4♥ has no play, going down when North leads any non-trump card - so long as N/S engineer a diamond ruff for North. Declarer needs to play carefully to avoid going 2 down – the trick in hands like this when you know the opening lead is a singleton is to just play ace and another trump as soon as you can so that you can get as many 'children' off the street as you can. By playing ace and another trump you will make sure that North only gets one diamond ruff instead of 2.

5♦ on the other hand is an easy make, declarer losing one spade and one club trick.

After partner opens 1 of a suit and the next player doubles remember to 'Redouble' to show a hand with 9+ points and no fit for partner.



Board 19 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
			Pass
Pass	1 ♦	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♦	All Pass	

North's 1 ◆ opening is routine. Some Easts might be tempted to either overcall 1 ♠ or wheel out some of their favourite '2-suiter' gadgets. However there are a number of factors that should deter East from taking any action – he is vulnerable and both of his suits are 'minging'. Remember we like to have our high card points in our long suits.

South's 1NT response is pretty routine too but it's when we come to North's rebid that our paths may diverge? Our choices are: Pass, 2♦, 2♥, 2♠?

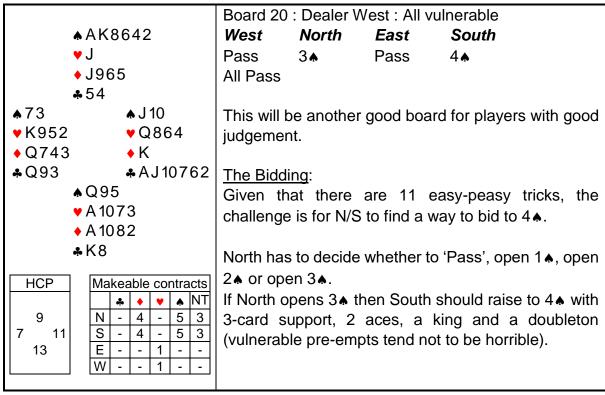
Partner's 1NT response denied 4 hearts or 4 spades so there is little point in us rebidding 2♥ or 2♠ especially since both bids are 'reverses' (above the 2♦ barrier) showing much stronger hand types – typically 17+. I am afraid all we can do is rebid 2♦.

However there will be some pairs who will find themselves in 3NT played by South.

The Play:

The only lead to give away the contract is a diamond lead - on any other lead the defence will come to 5 tricks. Even if West blocks the club suit, his side must still come to 3 club tricks, 1 diamond and 1 heart trick.

Tip: Put the brakes on if most of your points are in your short suits.



If North opens 1 ♠ then all roads lead to 4 ♠.

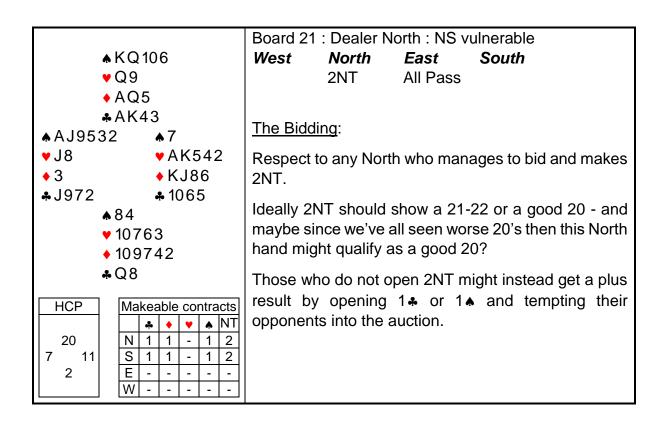
I think even North passes they will still get to 4♠ (maybe P-1NT-2♥-2♠-3♠-4♠).

So the problems only arise if North decides, quite reasonably, to open 2. In that case, South needs to take a very rosy view of his hand but will have to be forgiven if he decides to pass.

The Play:

There is nothing to the play, the defence win one diamond trick and one club trick and declarer makes the remaining 11. The diamond pips are so good that declarer cannot go wrong no matter what card he leads from hand on the first round of the suit.

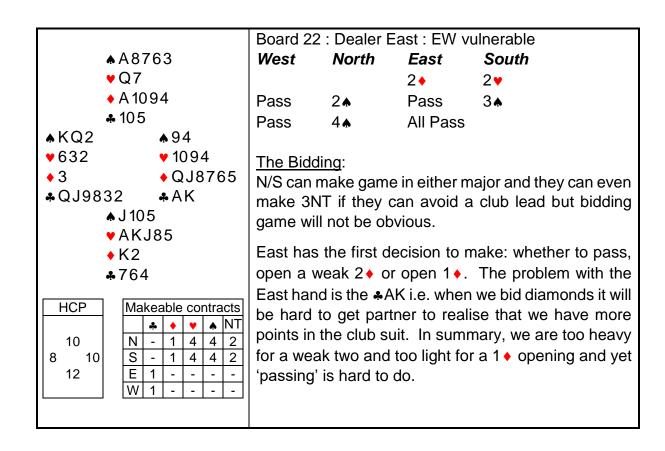
Tip: 6-4-2-1 shapes have great playing strength and are therefore worth more than their point count might suggest.



Making 2NTwill be a great score for N/S. There are 8 tricks available if declarer is prepared to be patient. The heart suit is very favourable for declarer and should provide 2 tricks − especially if declarer realises the value of his ♥9. These 2 tricks, along with 2 spades, 3 clubs and a diamond trick will yield 8 tricks for declarer.

Those modern North players who open 1♠ might find themselves in 1♠x and as the cards lie this contract cannot be defeated – declarer making 3 club tricks, 1 club ruff, the ace of diamonds and 2 spade tricks.

TIP: Learn to notice big spot cards i.e. 7's, 8's and 9's – sometimes these become winners after 2 rounds of the suit.

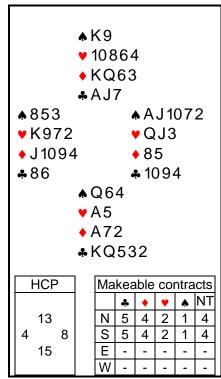


Paradoxically, opening 2 → might make it easier for N/S to get to game than opening 1 → or even passing. A 2 ♥ overcall over a weak 2 → opening will show opening values at least and help to get North excited about her 2 aces, ♥Q and ◆A10. A simple 1 ♥ opening or 1 ♥ overcall won't excite North as much.

The Play:

Declarer in 4♥ or 4♠ can make 10 tricks because of the lucky spade position i.e. by running the ♠J on the first round of spades declarer can escape with only one spade loser because the ♠9 drops in 2 rounds. Next week the E/W hands will be reversed and 4♥/4♠ will go down – another indication that staying in partscore on this deal is sensible bridge.

TIP: When the opponents open 'weak' – our overcalls are 'strong'.



Board 23 : Dealer South : All vulnerable				
West	North	East	South	
			1♣	
Pass	1 ♦	1 ♠	1NT	
Pass	3NT	All Pass		

It is hard to imagine any contract other than 3NT by South on this board. I suppose there might be someone in 5* or even 6* and maybe there will be an East-West pair or two in 2*x.

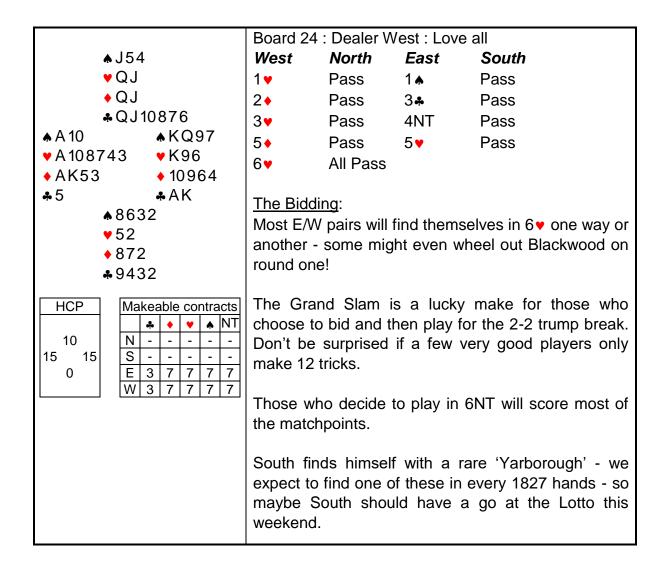
While a 2♠ raise is not the worst bid in the world, it often pays to keep an eye on the vulnerability when bidding. For sure, West would have an easy raise to 2♠ if non-vul.

The Play:

If N/S are playing Weak No-Trump then East will get a chance to bid his spade suit and now a spade lead gives South no chance of making more than his 10 top tricks (1 spade, 1 heart, 3 diamonds and 5 clubs)...as long as West is careful to keep his 4 diamonds intact.

However if N/S play Strong NT then East will probably not be able to show his spade suit and now some Wests will lead ◆J. This normal looking lead will give a champion South a glimmer of hope of winning all 4 diamond tricks - declarer wins ◆A and leads ◆7 towards dummy's KQ6 - if West plays the ◆10 or ◆9 then South will be able to win this trick, return to hand and finesse ◆6 on the third round of the suit....3NT+2.

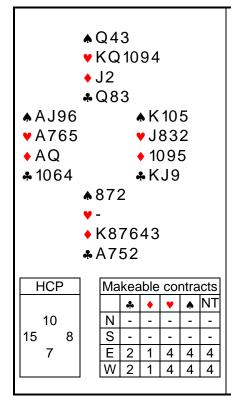
TIP: Don't be afraid to give partner's overcall a single raise with 3 trumps with 5+ points.



This hand is all about whether or not you make all 13 tricks or just 12. If declarer simply cashes his ace and king of hearts then he makes all 13 tricks.

Spare a thought for those declarers who receive the ♥Q lead or even a cunning ♥J lead. These declarer's might be inclined to place the remaining heart honour in the South hand and they will win the lead with dummy's ♥K and then run the ♥9 losing to North. I know I would only make 12 tricks - so I will be looking at the results later to see how many good players do likewise.

TIP: With 9 cards missing the Queen, play for the drop unless you can see a singleton in your hand or in dummy in another suit in which case you take a finesse.



Board 25	: Dealer	North : EW	vulnerable
West	North	East	South
	Pass	Pass	2♦
Dbl	Pass	2♥	All Pass

This board could go in many different directions ending in many different contracts such as E/W in hearts or No-Trumps and N/S in hearts or diamonds.

Some Norths might chance a non-vulnerable 1♥ opening – not my cup of tea (5332 shapes are not very attractive) but each to his own.

If North does not open the bidding then South has to decide whether or not to open a weak 2 → - but if you do not open a weak 2 → third in hand non-vul with this hand, then when will you ever open 2 →?

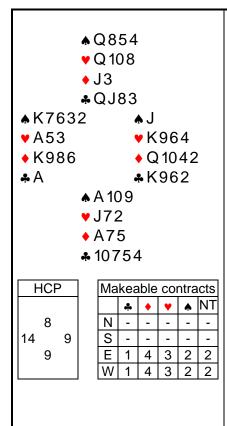
If South opens 2 then West has to choose between a take-out-double to get both majors into the picture or 2NT to show his strong balanced hand and diamond stoppers. Both calls are good and if I had a third diamond then 2NT would be 100% correct because it shows a balanced hand with stoppers while still keeping alive the possibility that partner can always use Stayman if he has a 4-card major.

But with AQ tight in diamonds, I think double is a slightly more preferable call. Tonight the 2NT bidders will score better especially if they can divine that North is more likely to have the AQ than South – because we already know that South has 6 cards in diamonds i.e. there is more room in North's hand to have the AQ than in South's (Theory of Vacant Spaces).

Although, the computer tells us that E/W can make 4 ♥ and even 4NT, very few pairs will manage to bid game and even fewer will make 10 tricks. To get to game, East would need to make a jump response of 3 ♥ to his partner's take-out-double of 2 ♦ but that East hand with its 4-3-3-3 shape does not look like it is worth a full 8 HCP?

If there are 3 passes to West then he either opens 1NT if playing 15-17 and either plays there or in $3 \checkmark$ if East uses Stayman, or West opens $1 \checkmark$ if playing a 12-14 No-Trump and ends in $2 \checkmark$.

2♥ or 2NT both making 9 tricks will be common results.



Board 26 : Dealer East : All vulnerable			
West	North	East	South
		Pass	Pass
1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♦	Pass	3♦	All Pass

This is another board that could end up anywhere. E/W can make a part-score contract in diamonds, hearts, spades or No-Trumps.

Some will get to game – most likely 3NT or 5 ◆. Sadly these contracts lack that final contract making trick.

Those E/W pairs who can 'get off the bus' early will be happiest.

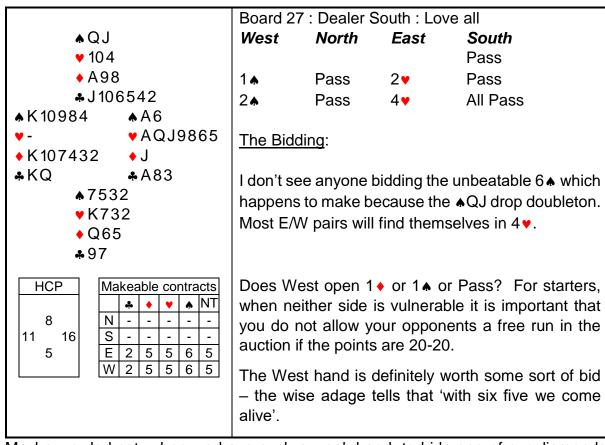
While it might be a bit 'chicken' to pass 3 → in the above auction, the only other bid available is 3 v showing the 5-3-4-1 shape but such a move commits us to 3NT, 4 → or 4 v. At the end of the day, the West hand is not that great especially since partner bid a 1NT response showing 6-9 on the first round.

The Play:

In No-Trump, there does not seem to be any way to make more than 8 tricks in No-Trump i.e. 1 spade, 2 hearts, 3 diamonds and 2 clubs. Even if there are more tricks it seems the defence always to get to 5 before declarer gets to 9.

The hand seems to play easier in a diamond contract, with declarer losing 1 spade trick, 1 heart trick and 1 diamond trick. Declarer could lose 2 diamond tricks if he has to guess the location of •J himself.

TIP: Listen to all of your partner's bids and piece them together to complete the jigsaw puzzle.



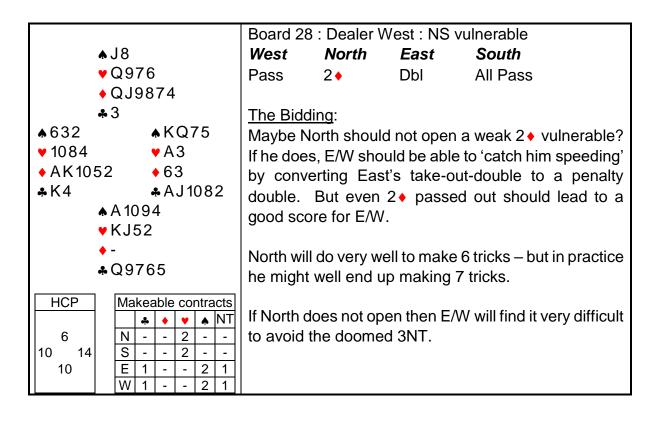
Maybe we do best, when we have such a weak hand, to hide one of our diamonds and pretend we we 5 spades and 5 diamonds and then open 1♠. On this hand it doesn't really matter whether we open 1♠ or 1♠, the contract will be 4♥ regardless.

The Play:

This hand is all about making 11 or 12 tricks. In the unlikely event that declarer is playing in a spade contract, he will make 12 tricks while the rest of us will make 11 or 12 in a heart contract.

The normal way to play the hand is to come to hand and start drawing trumps by playing the Ace and then the Queen. This loses to South's King but with the ♥10 dropping at the same time, declarer will win the remaining tricks if South does not find the diamond switch.- and South probably should find it – if North has a spade trick it can't run away, while if North has a diamond trick it might disappear on dummy's spade suit.

TIP: Defence is difficult but it becomes much easier if you are prepared to give it some extra thought – and the rewards in terms of satisfaction and scores are well worth developing the skill.



If E/W end up playing the hand, there just doesn't seem to be any suit where they can establish any tricks. 7 tricks seem to be their limit in No-Trump (1 spade, 1 heart, 2 diamonds and 3 clubs).

TIP: Sometimes it is ok to leave your vulnerable opponents play in a contract.