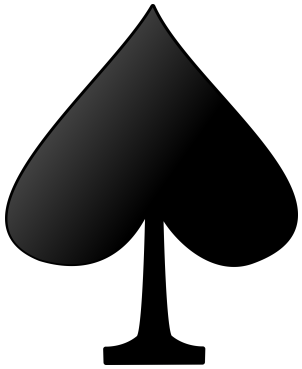
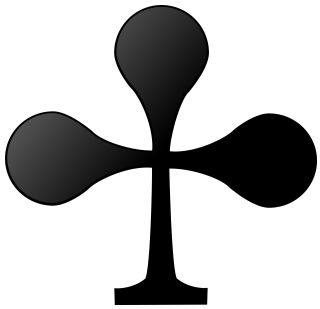
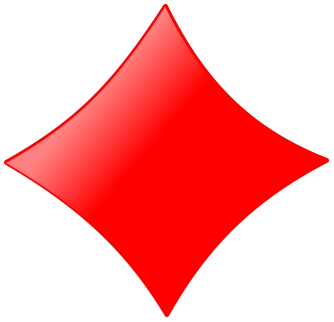
Club Stratified Sim Pairs

Tuesday

8th March 2022

Welcome to the eleventh 'Club Stratified Simultaneous Pairs'. Our commentator today is Brian Senior, experienced bridge teacher and writer.

How stratification works (and which stratum you should be in):
There are four strata.
1. Stratum 'A' is open to everyone but if either member of the pair is a Tournament Master or above you will be in this stratum and can only get master points from the overall ranking.
2. If both of you are below the rank of Tournament Master you will be 'B' stratum;
3. both below Master means you will be in 'C' stratum and
4. both below District Master will make you 'D' stratum.

Blue points and local points will be awarded to the top third of the overall ranking list. In addition the top third of each stratum will get blue points and local points. If you are entitled to overall points and points for your stratum, you will only get the higher of the awards – you won't get two lots of points! You will appreciate that Master Points cannot be allocated until after the event is finalised, which usually takes 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 the players.
Full results may be found at www.ebu.co.uk/sims/
Whichever stratum you find yourself in, I hope you find this set of hands enjoyable and challenging.

Ian Payn, Chairman EBU

	♠A642 ♥AJ6 ♦KQ52 ♣74	
♠K ♥9432 ♦J4 ♣KJ10863		♠J53 ♥K107 ♦108763 ♣A9
	♠Q10987 ♥Q85 ♦A9 ♣Q52	

HCP	
14	
8	8
10	

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

Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all

We start the session with a borderline game on the N/S cards.
Those playing a weak NT will open 1NT as dealer and South respond with a transfer to spades. If North simply completes the transfer, that will usually be that but, with decent four-card support, a ruffing value, and a maximum, North may well break the transfer. If North jumps to 3♠, South may well go on to game.
If the methods require North to open either 1♣ or 1♦, South will respond 1♠ and North raise to 2♠. Again South will have a borderline decision. North will accept any game try.
In simple terms, 4♠ requires either a successful heart finesse and only one trump loser, or an unsuccessful heart finesse and no trump loser. On the actual layout, spades are such that they can be played without loss by simply laying down the ace, though there is an equally likely layout – bare jack with East – where leading the queen is the winning option.
But what if East leads ace and another club and West continues with a third round? That promotes a trump trick for the defence. Does it beat the contract? Well, maybe, but there is a red-suit squeeze against East for anyone clever enough to spot it.

♠J3
♥AKQ3
♦Q84
♣Q865

♠1076
♥J87
♦AK9
♣A943

♠AQ
♥1052
♦J10753
♣J102

♠K98542
♥964
♦62
♣K7

HCP	
14	
12	8
6	

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

Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

Whether you are willing to open with a weak two bid on empty suits like the one in South's hand when vulnerable is very much a matter of personal philosophy, and you will find experts on both sides of the argument.
If South does open 2♠, it should end the auction. There are two spades, two diamonds and one club to be lost, so the popular outcome will be +110.
If South passes, West may open a weak NT. It would be aggressive for North to double, but he does at least have a good lead. One No Trump should be defeated, but perhaps South will bid 2♠ anyway?
If West opens 1♣, North cannot really double when holding a doubleton spade – what will he do if South responds 1♠ or, worse, 2♠, when a bid of NT would imply a much stronger hand? Not that I am generally a big fan of four-card overcalls, but I think that 1♥ is a lesser evil with this chunky suit. Things are a little murkier after this start, but 2♠ will still be as likely a contract as any.

♠A9
♥J104
♦AK9
♣K10964

♠1063
♥AK982
♦J6
♣AJ7

♠QJ72
♥63
♦Q752
♣853

♠K854
♥Q75
♦10843
♣Q2

HCP	
15	
13	5
7	

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

Board 3 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable

If EW are playing a strong NT, West has an easy 1♥ opening. A two-level overcall on that club suit is not ideal, but North's only alternative is to pass, and that is far from being ideal either. East does not have enough for a negative double, and neither does South have a reason to bid. When 2♣ comes round to West his own club holding tells him that partner cannot have a penalty double of clubs so, as he also has denied a negative double of 2♣, EW are probably outgunned and will do best to pass out 2♣.
Three rounds of hearts is good for the defence, East collecting a ruff, but the jack of clubs is in the slot, so declarer can come to four clubs and two ace-kings – eight tricks in all.
If EW are playing a weak NT, West can choose to open either 1♥ or 1NT – a matter of style, perhaps. One Hearts leads to the same auction as already discussed. One No Trump sees a double from North. A club lead should see that well beaten for an excellent NS result. Can East wriggle out into a better spot? Well, 2♠ looks to be a trick better, it should be doubled and down a couple will again be pretty horrible for EW.

♠109
♥QJ8
♦Q764
♣AK85

♠QJ
♥K3
♦A1032
♣QJ942

♠A65
♥A107652
♦J95
♣3

♠K87432
♥94
♦K8
♣1076

HCP	
12	
13	9
6	

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

Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable

If playing a weak NT, that is what I would open with the West hand – with 6 HCP in the short suits, this looks more like a balanced hand than a club one-suiter. East will transfer to hearts and South will not get involved at this stage, vulnerable.
East has a close decision whether to invite game by raising to 3♥, but matchpoints is not the time to bid thin games and the long-term winner is to settle for the partscore. Now South can balance with 2♠. That will come back to East, who should certainly bid again, the question being, double or 3♥? On this deal, 3♥ should be made exactly, but the winner is the double – if West leaves it in.
Say that West leads the queen of clubs against 2♠ doubled. Declarer wins the ace and leads a spade off the table. Wanting ruffs, East rises with the ace and returns a diamond. West wins the ace and plays the jack of clubs to the king and ruff. Ace and another heart puts West in to give a second club ruff, and now the third heart promotes a trump trick for West – down two for –500.

♠AQJ107
♥J7
♦J74
♣K64

♠942
♥K9642
♦K862
♣7

♠5
♥Q108
♦Q1095
♣AQ982

♠K863
♥A53
♦A3
♣J1053

HCP	
12	
6	10
12	

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

Board 5 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable

North's choice of opening bid is a matter of personal, or partnership, style. Some will open 1NT because the hand is essentially balanced, while others will open 1♠ because the suit is so strong. Nobody is right or wrong – you do what you are comfortable with and what you believe in.
Either South will raise a 1♠ opening to game, possibly via a GF 2NT artificial game raise, or South will use Stayman then raise the 2♠ response to game. If left to themselves, then, NS should pretty much always get to the spade game. Alas, as the cards lie there should be four unavoidable losers, and anyone who is permitted to make 4♠ should score very well indeed.
But perhaps East will come in over a 1♠ opening. A 2♣ overcall will not affect the final contract, as West has no interest in clubs, but what about a double? Is it possible that West, looking at the favourable vulnerability, will save in five of a red suit over the opposing 4♠? Were 4♠ making, that would be an excellent save, costing a probably –300. That being the case, West might reasonably feel that he was a little unlucky to find that 4♠ was going down.

♠972
♥984
♦QJ103
♣985

♠A10
♥103
♦K8652
♣AQ64

♠KJ63
♥KJ5
♦94
♣J1072

♠Q854
♥AQ762
♦A7
♣K3

HCP	
3	
13	9
15	

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

Board 6 : Dealer East : EW vulnerable

This is a funny little board, with a number of decisions for various players and no clear outcome.
If South opens 1♥, West has 13 HCP but, with only a doubleton spade, cannot sensibly double, while a vulnerable 2♦ overcall is quite scary on that weak suit. Perhaps West will pass, as will North. Now, will East balance? It could be right to do so, as is the case today, or could be very wrong.
If 1♥ is passed out, it should be defeated, though a diamond lead not only costs the defensive diamond trick but also puts declarer in dummy to take the heart finesse.
But if East balances, his side can make at least eight tricks in any other denomination they choose to play, and East can even make 3NT, double dummy, though I'd prefer not to have to try. Balancing, then, given that West will bid cautiously as he is aware that East is a passed hand, is the winning action.
What if NS play a strong NT? What should South open now? One Heart is the obvious answer, and will often work out just fine, but what will South rebid facing a wide-range 1NT response? There is no good bid. Were South 2-4-5-2, instead of 4-5-2-2, he would surely opt for 1NT, and perhaps that is also the correct choice on the actual hand?

♠A5
♥109854
♦A1087
♣109

♠QJ106
♥J2
♦J9
♣Q8765

♠K9874
♥Q76
♦Q54
♣A3

♠32
♥AK3
♦K632
♣KJ42

HCP	
8	
7	11
14	

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

Board 7 : Dealer South : All vulnerable

If South opens 1NT, North will transfer to hearts then pass South's completion. Now East may balance with 2♠, though this is by no means a safe and secure action.
If left to play in 2♠, East will love dummy's spade support. There should still be six losers, but –100 will be just fine with the opposition cold for nine tricks in a heart contract – a wrong club guess doesn't hurt as two club winners can be established to get rid of declarer's diamond loser.
But East will rarely be allowed to play in 2♠. Many Souths will take the push to 3♥ with their maximum, three good hearts, and spade shortage, while if South passes North may double to show competitive values. South's winning call now is to pass out the double and collect the magic +200 on a partscore deal, but it is normal to take out into 3♥.
Should West now compete to 3♠ on the strength of his spade support, ignoring the lack of a single top card, that should be down two for a horrible EW score.

♠AQ8653
♥AQJ3
♦43
♣Q

♠J1097
♥-
♦KQ82
♣KJ1053

♠-
♥98542
♦AJ976
♣742

♠K42
♥K1076
♦105
♣A986

HCP	
15	
10	5
10	

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

Board 8 : Dealer West : Love all

The auction could go in many different ways on this one.
Some Wests will open 1♣, liking their three-suited hand with its useful intermediate cards. North may overcall 1♠ and East make a negative double. Now South is too good for a simple 2♠ so should cuebid 2♣ to show at least a constructive raise to 2♠. West may pass because of the minimum, but taking what may be the only opportunity to introduce diamonds to the auction is an attractive proposition, given the likelihood of finding a fit in the suit as East must be very short in spades.
I would jump to 4♠ now as North, and that will shut East out unless West has bid the diamonds. If he has bid the suit, East will surely save in 5♦, which can even be made, though that requires an unlikely guess in clubs, without which declarer rates to be a trick short.
Four Spades looks easy, doesn't it, despite the four-nil trump break – and it is, unless East leads a heart.
A heart lead and two diamond entries back to the East hand allows the defence to come to three hearts ruffs and 4♠ is down two.

♠K105
♥A1093
♦976
♣Q95

♠9642
♥-
♦QJ852
♣J1064

♠Q73
♥KQ754
♦K43
♣K7

♠AJ8
♥J862
♦A10
♣A832

HCP	
9	
4	13
14	

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

Board 9 : Dealer North : EW vulnerable

The theme of this session appears to be what to open when holding a balanced hand with a five-card major and within the NT range. For me, this East hand is an easy one; with high cards in every suit I would open 1NT every time and twice on Sundays. South does not have quite enough to double so 1NT will usually end the auction.
If South leads the two of hearts, which would be my choice, North will know that declarer has five hearts. Nonetheless, putting in the nine could easily cost a trick on a slightly different layout, so he will probably win the ace and, with no attractive switch, return the ♥10. Declarer wins and plays on diamonds, and South clears the hearts, establishing the seventh defensive trick.
A club lead to the jack, queen and king is no better for the defence.
If East opens 1♥, South might double, but the hand is far from ideal with its four-card heart holding and some will surely pass. Where South does double, it will be North who declares 1NT, normally on a heart lead unless West scarped up a 1♠ bid, and so easily making at least seven tricks.
If South passes over 1♥, West will try 1♠ in hope of improving the contract, and East will rebid 1NT if that shows 11-14, but raise to 2♠ rather than repeat the hearts if 1NT would show 15-17. Two Spades should be down two, double dummy, but may escape for down one.

♠9
♥KJ98
♦AJ654
♣942

♠KQ854
♥AQ752
♦Q3
♣8

♠J107632
♥6
♦982
♣QJ3

♠A
♥1043
♦K107
♣AK10765

HCP	
9	
13	4
14	

Makeable contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	5	5	4	-	6
S	5	5	4	-	6
E	-	-	-	3	-
W	-	-	-	3	-

Board 10 : Dealer East : All vulnerable

I doubt that many will open the East hand with a weak two bid at this vulnerability. If they do, West will raise to game over South's 3♣ overcall.
Where East passes, South opens 1♣ and West can make a two-suited overcall, perhaps Michaels, where 2♣ shows at least five-five in the majors. Perhaps North will double to show some values, or he may bid a non-forcing 2♦. Either way, East has an easy jump to 4♠.
There is a double dummy 6NT available to NS on their combined 23 HCP, but that is pure fantasy. More realistically, 5♣ is an easy make – if the defence starts with a heart ruff trumps can then be drawn and the marked heart finesse provides a pitch for South's third diamond.
Can NS get to 5♣? Where East opens 2♠ and South overcalls 3♣, yes, because North may bid 5♣ over West's 4♠ as a two-way shot, working when either black game is making. If South opens 1♣ and the bidding is at 4♠ when it comes back to him, one of North and South will have to make a good decision to get there and I would guess that there will only be a minority who do so.

♠5
♥3
♦KJ953
♣KQ10932

♠J1097 ♠8632
♥A10972 ♥KJ8
♦Q84 ♦2
♣5 ♣A8764

♠AKQ4
♥Q654
♦A1076
♣J

HCP	
9	
7	8
16	

Makeable contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	5	-	-	1
S	4	5	-	-	1
E	-	-	1	1	-
W	-	-	1	1	-

Board 11 : Dealer South : Love all

The classic Acol opening with the South cards is 1♥, the middle of three touching four-card suits. North responds 2♣ and South rebids 2NT as the lesser of two evils – bidding a second suit would strongly imply a fifth heart, while the shortage is in partner's suit, so the hand is 'nearly' balanced.
Over 2NT, North might bid 3♦ and South 3NT. It is possible to let that through after West's automatic lead of the ♠J – to beat it, East will have to switch to a heart honour upon winning the ace of clubs, and that is not an automatic play as the spade lead could be from ♠AJ10x(x).
North may commit to a minor-suit contract – after all, slam is a distinct possibility if partner has aces. A heart lead may beat 5♦, as declarer will have no good reason to get the diamonds right, but few will lead a heart from the East hand after dummy has opened 1♥. On a spade lead, the heart loser goes away and now the game is cold.
If East listens to the bidding and, knowing that North has long clubs and that South claims to be balanced, leads ace and another club, declarer succeeds by ruffing with the ace and running the ten to pick up the queen.

♠J10
♥AQ105
♦62
♣AQJ105

♠A94 ♠87632
♥862 ♥43
♦AJ109 ♦KQ3
♣K74 ♣832

♠KQ5
♥KJ97
♦8754
♣96

HCP	
14	
12	5
9	

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

Board 12 : Dealer West : NS vulnerable

West has a weak NT and, if the methods say to open 1NT, that is what will happen. North has an easy club lead so should double, and East is likely to run to 2♠. South has a good enough spade holding that the likely outcome from here is that 2♠ will be doubled and will be down two for –300.
NS will do well to get to the cold 4♥ after West has opened 1NT. However, what about tables at which West opens 1♣? That may leave North with no sensible call other than to pass. East responds 1♠, West rebids 1NT, and now North can double, showing a decent hand which includes some club length – though the clubs hardly needs to be quite so long or strong as this.
Having already shown the spades, East is likely to pass over 1NT doubled and, knowing that his partner has sound values and clubs, so should South. Will West guess to run to 2♠? If so, that is again likely to be doubled for down two. He does better to stick it out in 1NT doubled. North is likely to lead the queen of clubs, and that is declarer's sixth trick. A more successful lead is the ♠J, which should see declarer held to his five top tricks. A heart could mean down three, but that is a less likely choice, I think.
As for getting to 4♥ – that should score very well as, as we have seen, it is far from obvious to find the heart fit at all.

♠102
♥642
♦K10962
♣Q106

♠AJ843 ♠KQ6
♥QJ9 ♥K5
♦- ♦AJ7543
♣A9853 ♣72

♠975
♥A10873
♦Q8
♣KJ4

HCP	
5	
12	13
10	

Makeable contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	2	1	5	3
W	4	2	1	5	3

Board 13 : Dealer North : All vulnerable

East opens 1♦, South overcalls 1♥, and West bids 1♠.
An aggressive North may raise to 2♥ now, just to make life a little more awkward for the opposition, but this is dangerous when vulnerable and on both a weak hand and weak hearts, so the majority may pass. A popular style is for the 1♠ bid to promise five cards in this situation, in which case East will raise to 2♠ rather than repeat the diamonds. West now has an easy raise to game and may even make a slam try along the way. Four Spades, however, rates to be the popular spot.
A heart lead is good news for declarer, who can get rid of dummy's club loser on the third heart then ruff out the clubs and come to 12 tricks. A club lead would, of course, set up a second defensive trick, but why should North lead a club when South has overcalled 1♥?
It is true that the line for 12 tricks requires that both black suits divide in a kindly fashion, but ruffing out the clubs is also the safest way to make 4♠, so declarer is not taking any extra risk in pursuit of the maximum.

♠K862
♥KQ
♦109854
♣Q6

♠J75
♥976432
♦7
♣AK10

♠3
♥J108
♦KQ32
♣J9743

♠AQ1094
♥A5
♦AJ6
♣852

HCP	
10	
8	7
15	

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

Board 14 : Dealer East : Love all

If South opens 1♠, will West overcall 2♥ on that nine-high suit? Well, maybe, as this is the best vulnerability at which to declare if it is a competitive partscore deal, and 2♥ has some pre-emptive benefit if the hand belongs to the opposition.
North will show an invitational raise to the three level and East may raise hearts, but the final contract should almost always be 4♠. There is little to the play of the spade game, declarer drawing trumps and playing for the double diamond finesse – making exactly.
If South opens a strong NT, the 2♥ overcall becomes a little more likely – it is usually a good idea to disturb a strong NT if you can find a sensible way to do so as it will so often be making. North can make a take-out double of hearts and that should find the spade fit. North then has sufficient strength to raise to 4♠.
If West's way to overcall in hearts is to bid 2♦ to show one major, as in Multi-Landy, North can pass over that then make his take-out double after West has unwound. I can't see a great deal of point in doubling 2♦ to show diamonds, even if that is your agreed method – you are, after all, never going to play in diamonds, nor do you want the suit led.

♠K984
♥-
♦A9842
♣AQ92

♠AJ7
♥A9752
♦Q5
♣K104

♠532
♥643
♦J10
♣J8653

♠Q106
♥KQJ108
♦K763
♣7

HCP	
13	
14	2
11	

Makeable contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	6	4	6	4
S	3	6	4	6	4
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Board 15 : Dealer South : NS vulnerable

South opens 1♥ and, though West has 14 HCP, the heart length leaves him with no good action other than to pass – just as well given the weakness of the East hand.
Some will respond 1♠ with the North hand, and South rebids 2♦. Some Norths will commit to diamonds now, with the scent of a possible slam in their nostrils, while a few will go for a crude jump to 3NT. The third option is to go a little more slowly to see if anything interesting materialises, probing with 2♠. South, who has already denied four spades, should raise to 3♠, and North has a pretty good idea of partner's shape. Is he much better off than at his previous turn? Probably not, but at least he can now bid 3NT, if he so desires, having hinted that he is not convinced that this is the place to play. South will not move over 3NT, neither will he co-operate should North go on a diamond slam hunt.
Other Norths will respond 2♦ and get a raise from South. Again, the decision is whether to opt for the matchpoint hog's 3NT or to look for slam. Either could be right. Today, 6♦ is the spot (6♠ is also makeable, but…), as trumps are two-two and ♥A is onside, but that combination is a 20% shot so not to be recommended. There are10 tricks in NT and a possible 12 in spades. As 3NT is not quite secure on an uneven diamond split, it's not clear where we want to play the hand.

♠QJ10
♥4
♦AJ10653
♣J85

♠65
♥QJ6
♦K972
♣10762

♠A9732
♥K10875
♦8
♣A3

♠K84
♥A932
♦Q4
♣KQ94

HCP	
9	
6	11
14	

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

Board 16 : Dealer West : EW vulnerable

If NS play a weak 2♦ opening, that is what North will choose, giving East an awkward problem. It is easy enough to show five-five in the majors – just cuebid 3♦ – but will partner expect a bit more? Meanwhile, a 2♠ overcall leaves half the hand unbid, and double is just plain wrong with a limited genuine two-suiter. Real men, and all that – East duly makes the cuebid and West responds 3♥.
As 2♦ was going to make a couple of overtricks, 3♥-1 is just fine for EW – unless South makes a matchpoint double and the contract is down one, which is its theoretical fate on perfect play and defence. Minus 200 is, of course, known as the kiss of death on a competitive partscore deal.
If North does not have a weak 2♦ in his bag, the modern style is to open 3♦ instead. Now East is in an even worse position, having to cuebid 4♦ to get the two-suiter across. West opts for 4♥, of course, but this time South really should double. It isn't that 4] is guaranteed to fail, but the odds are pretty good that it will do so and boosting the penalty 80% of the time while conceding –790 20% of the time is a big win for the doubler.

♠KQ9
♥976
♦A7
♣AQ1063

♠1064
♥AK84
♦J984
♣J8

♠J732
♥QJ53
♦Q632
♣9

♠A85
♥102
♦K105
♣K7542

HCP	
15	
9	6
10	

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

Board 17 : Dealer North : Love all

If playing a weak NT, North will open 1♣ and South raise invitationally to 3♣. While he may be a little concerned at the heart weakness, North is too balanced to want to commit to 5♣ and, after all, this is matchpoints, where +430 will beat +400 every time. He therefore bids 3NT and that concludes the auction. East's heart lead gives North a few worried moments, but the suit splits evenly and he chalks up +400.

If playing a strong NT, the auction will be even quicker, 1NT from North and 3NT from South. Again, nine tricks will be the outcome.

With 5♣ also making exactly for +400, it seems that this should be the almost universal result. The only variety will come from the handful of pairs who stop short of game, and they should score very poorly indeed.

♠K42
♥AJ73
♦QJ
♣A653

♠10863
♥942
♦A93
♣K84

♠975
♥108
♦K10862
♣1097

♠AQJ
♥KQ65
♦754
♣QJ2

HCP	
15	
7	3
15	

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

Board 18 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable

NS have a flat 15 HCP facing a flat 15 HCP so, with the opposition having no reason to get involved, they will have a free run to the game of their choice.

If South opens a strong NT, it would be entirely reasonable for North to just raise to 3NT, imagining that even if there is a heart fit there could be the same tricks in NT as in hearts. That will attract a spade lead from West, and declarer will eventually put his faith in the club finesse, which will provide his ninth trick; +600.

Some Norths will, of course, use Stayman, and that will see South declare 4♥, which also makes exactly.

If, however, NS are playing a weak NT, South will open 1♥ and North show a constructive game raise. There may be a slam try or two, but the partnership should be able to stop in game easily enough when the lack of a diamond control comes to light.

♠106
♥K86
♦AQ985
♣532

♠J9543
♥A4
♦KJ107
♣106

♠Q2
♥QJ97
♦643
♣KQJ7

♠AK87
♥10532
♦2
♣A984

HCP	
9	
9	11
11	

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

Board 19 : Dealer South : EW vulnerable

It isn't compulsory to open with 11 HCP but the overwhelming majority of Souths will do so. To make sure that South has a sensible rebid whatever the response, the opening bid must, of course, be 1♣, a suit below the singleton. If West passes, North will respond 1♦ and South rebid 1♥. North has no ideal bid now but 2♣ would be normal, as South will usually have a five-card suit.

West may overcall 1♠ and now North is not strong enough to bid the diamonds. He may double, though that owes partner a fourth heart for most people, or just compete with 2♣. It's not very clear where the bidding will end.

The cards lie kindly for NS, with both the ♥A and ♦K onside. That makes it possible for NS to come to seven tricks in any of clubs, hearts or spades, while even eight tricks are available double dummy in a diamond contract. The key to a decent result for either side may simply be to go plus on this messy little deal.

♠K94
♥Q1064
♦AQ73
♣AJ

♠2
♥98753
♦KJ108
♣974

♠A1086
♥AKJ
♦6
♣106532

♠QJ753
♥2
♦9542
♣KQ8

HCP	
16	
4	12
8	

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

Board 20 : Dealer West : All vulnerable

In theory, NS can make 3NT on this deal. However, they are very unlikely to get there, and coming to nine tricks requires declarer to play for the actual spade layout.
The limit in a spade contract is also nine tricks, but that too is far from being secure.
If North opens 1NT, few Easts will play methods which permit them to come into the auction. They will pass and South will transfer to spades. The big winner is for South to then pass North's completion, and that is far from being a silly option at matchpoints, where there is no premium on bidding thin games. The alternative, given that a 3♦ bid would not be played as game-forcing by most, would be for South to rebid 2NT, over which North has a borderline call, with 3♠ perhaps the best choice. South should pass that.
If North opens 1♥, East may again pass as there is no ideal alternative with this distribution. A 1♦ opening, however, will see east making a take-out double and EW will find the five-three heart fit, where seven tricks are possible. NS, however, will outbid them and perhaps declare a spade partscore.

♠AQ1097
♥QJ6
♦753
♣85

♠J3
♥A109
♦10962
♣K732

♠K52
♥K542
♦KJ
♣AQJ6

♠864
♥873
♦AQ84
♣1094

HCP	
9	
8	17
6	

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

Board 21 : Dealer North : NS vulnerable

If East opens a strong NT, there is definitely a case for passing with the West hand. However, the two ten-nines make the hand worth more than just a bare eight-count, so many will invite game, and East will accept the invitation.
If East opens 1♥, West's best response is a raise to 2♥. East may look for game, going on with 2NT, and West raises that to 3NT, clearly showing that the heart raise was based on only three-card support.
Both those routes end in 3NT. What if East opens 1♣ and West responds 2♣? Again, East may try 2NT and be raised to game, though if 1♣ – 1NT is played as 8-10 with four-card support, making 1♣ –2♣ weaker than that, there is a case for passing out 2♣. Which brings us to 1♣ – 1NT, which will see East raise to game.
It's unclear which suit South will lead against 3NT, but a spade to the jack and queen is the killer. Anything other than a diamond should be good enough to beat the contract, but the spade means at least down two.
If West is declarer, North will lead a spade. Now the ♠Q is the killer, while a lower spade lead gives declarer two spade tricks and now the contract can be made if he guesses to try to split the hearts rather than guess diamonds.

♠KQ74
♥KQJ
♦A104
♣K74

♠A103
♥52
♦K8732
♣J65

♠J9862
♥A94
♦Q6
♣Q109

♠5
♥108763
♦J95
♣A832

HCP	
18	
8	9
5	

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

Board 22 : Dealer East : EW vulnerable

There should be three passes to North. If North opens 1♠, South will scrape up a 1NT response in hope of improving the contract. With a flat 18 HCP, North has an easy raise to 2NT, but South is not interested and passes.
West will lead a diamond, ducked to the queen. If East continues the diamond attack, declarer wins in dummy and plays on hearts, and soon has eight tricks, with an overtrick likely.
Things are a little more challenging if the defence attacks clubs, as the late entry to the long hearts gets knocked out. However, declarer ducks the first club so gets a third club trick when the suit divides evenly, and still comes to eight tricks as the defence cannot attack either spades or diamonds to good effect.
If North opens 1♣, South may respond 1♥ and North rebid 2NT. That will end the auction, and now the lead will be a spade. If West defends normally, winning the ace and continuing with the ten, that will be nine tricks for declarer.

♠J75
♥J106
♦AJ73
♣AJ9

♠10964
♥3
♦Q94
♣Q7532

♠2
♥AK975
♦1085
♣K1086

♠AKQ83
♥Q842
♦K62
♣4

HCP	
12	
4	10
14	

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

Board 23 : Dealer South : All vulnerable

South opens 1♠ and rebids 2♥ over the 2♦ response. I expect most Norths to jump to 4♠ now, though North has a 10-loser hand and to only invite game would be far from ridiculous. Not that it matters, as South will go on to game anyway. Of course, if playing a two-over-one response as game-forcing, North will jump to 4♠ at his second turn as being the weakest bid available to him – he had a borderline two-over-one response in the first place.
If West leads the singleton heart, he will get a ruff but that will be the end of the play; +620.
West may, however, decide that his four-card trump holding lends itself to a forcing game, in which case he will lead a low club. Declarer will have to be careful now, as just drawing trumps leads to defeat – if East is alert and doesn't discard a club.
The winning play is to follow a basic principle of good declarer play – look after the side-suit before drawing trumps. If declarer sets about the hearts immediately upon winning the ace of clubs, he can retain control and bring home his contract.

♠A72
♥J104
♦752
♣Q862

♠KJ1083
♥AK753
♦9
♣K10

♠Q96
♥Q82
♦KQJ
♣AJ94

♠54
♥96
♦A108643
♣753

HCP	
7	
14	15
4	

Makeable contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	2	5	5	5
W	4	2	5	5	5

Board 24 : Dealer West : Love all

Almost everyone will start 1♠–2♣–2♥. This is a good hand for two-over-one game-force, as East can agree spades at whatever level he chooses. Two Spades, for example, leaves room for West to rebid the hearts at a comfortable level. East can make one slam try but, with such a balanced hand and so much of the high-card strength in the minors, where partner must be short, most of the running has to be left to West. An experienced partnership should be able to stop at the four level but, as long as they remember to check on key cards, the five level is safe enough on the actual layout.
Playing Acol, East has no good bid over the 2♥ rebid if he wants to keep slam in the picture, because neither 2♠ nor 3♠ is forcing. His options are to jump to 4♠, to use fourth-suit forcing to set up a force – here he can then bid 3♠ over West's 3♥ response to FSF, or the very attractive third option of jumping to 3NT. Although many pairs will get locked into spades, I think 3NT is the best option, particularly at matchpoints. Will West pass the jump to 3NT? He probably should, trusting partner to have a double stopper in diamonds for the jump when he could have bid 3♦ to check if needing help.
With the same 11 tricks available in NT as in spades, getting to 3NT is the big winner on the deal.

♠64
♥KJ962
♦109
♣8762

♠KJ8732
♥A4
♦AQ3
♣Q10

♠A10
♥10853
♦J82
♣AJ94

♠Q95
♥Q7
♦K7654
♣K53

HCP	
4	
16	10
10	

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

Board 25 : Dealer North : EW vulnerable

There will be three passes to West, who opens 1♠. If playing Acol, East will respond 2♣ and West will usually rebid a forcing 3♠, raised to game by East.
Holding a moderate spade suit and values outside, the occasional West may opt for a 2NT rebid instead of 3♠, and that too will be raised to game.
If playing two-over-one GF, East will respond 1NT and West jump to 3♠, raised to game by East.
As the cards lie, there are the same 11 tricks to be had in NT as in spades. However, that fails to take into account the different styles of opening lead one can expect against 3NT and against 4♠.
Against 3NT by West, North will lead a heart. Declarer needs to duck one and then has 11 tricks by getting spades right.
Against 3NT by East, South will lead a diamond, which declarer will run to his jack. He can run six rounds of spades then take the club finesse, and can come to 12 tricks.
Against 4♠ by West, the best lead for the defence is a heart, but will that be North's choice, round to a strong hand, or is North more likely to lead a 'safe' diamond? A heart holds the contract to 11, while a diamond concedes 12 tricks.

♠A1075
♥AK72
♦AQ7
♣Q4

♠Q63 ♠K9
♥J ♥10854
♦10932 ♦J54
♣A10986 ♣J532

♠J842
♥Q963
♦K86
♣K7

HCP	
19	
7	5
9	

Makeable contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	3	5	4	3
S	-	3	5	4	3
E	1	-	-	-	-
W	1	-	-	-	-

Board 26 : Dealer East : All vulnerable

Once again an auction will commence with three passes. If playing Acol, North will open 1♥, South will raise to 2♥, and North may try 2NT to offer a choice in case of a three-card raise. Yes, some will jump to 3NT over 2♥, but 2NT will usually be plenty if partner passes it out. Holding a complete maximum South will, of course, bid 4♥ over whatever North's choice of action.
If playing five-card majors, North will open either 1♣ or 1♦ – there is no reason to upgrade this hand to a 2NT opening – and raise the 1♥ response to game.
All roads, then, appear to lead to 4♥. Declarer must start hearts by cashing the ace and king, as he can pick up ten-to-four with East but not with West, and that care will be rewarded on the actual layout.
Ten tricks should be secure, with the eleventh depending on how declarer tackles the spade suit. There are a number of ways to come to three tricks, but not everyone will find one of them.

♠Q876432
♥K652
♦5
♣3

♠109 ♠KJ
♥AJ87 ♥94
♦AJ3 ♦Q10862
♣10862 ♣A974

♠A5
♥Q103
♦K974
♣KQJ5

HCP	
5	
10	10
15	

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

Board 27 : Dealer South : Love all

If South opens a strong NT, North should not get distracted by the four-card heart suit. With seven-four the contract almost always belongs in the seven-card suit, the only question being at what level.
Simply jumping to 4♠, or transferring at the four level, could easily be the winning approach. Certainly, a simple transfer at the two level then passing the completion looks unduly cautious. Perhaps transfer and then raise to 3♠ to invite game is the best compromise?
If system dictates that South open 1♣ or 1♦, North will respond 1♠ then come to the same decision-point when South rebids to show a strong NT. The only difference is who becomes declarer.
I suspect that few will find the perfect double dummy defence to hold a spade contract to only seven tricks. If played by South, that requires a spade lead to knock out the only sure entry to the clubs, else winners can be set up for red-suit discards. Played by North, it takes a diamond lead and spade switch to effect the same outcome, and there is still plenty of careful defence required after that to hold the contract to the minimum number of tricks.

♠A104
♥J7632
♦AQ2
♣86

♠K95 ♠873
♥98 ♥AKQ105
♦865 ♦K103
♣AKJ103 ♣Q4

♠QJ62
♥4
♦J974
♣9752

HCP	
11	
11	14
4	

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

Board 28 : Dealer West : NS vulnerable
And so to our final deal. If playing a weak NT, I would open one on the West cards. The powerful club suit justifies an upgrade, and 1NT not only describes a 5-3-3-2 hand well but also has some useful pre-emptive effect should the hand belong to the opposition. East will transfer to hearts then jump to 3NT to offer a choice of games, and West will, of course, choose to play in 3NT.
North does not have a nice opening lead. If he leads the two or queen of diamonds, declarer has to go up with the king, as he is afraid of a spade switch if South gains the lead, while if North leads a spade, West has to win the king, of course. Declarer cashes the clubs and has to decide what to do with the hearts. North will have had to find three discards, at most one of which can be a heart. Can declarer convince himself to finesse in hearts and make overtricks?
Or perhaps North will lead the eight of clubs. When that proves to be from a doubleton, will declarer take the inference that the opening leader has length in the only suit shown by declarer or dummy? That would be a sound inference to take, I think, but will declarer be brave enough to finesse in hearts, again having seen North discard three times?
I think declarer should be brave. He wouldn't risk his contract at Teams scoring, but at matchpoints, yes! And if he is going to finesse in hearts, he should start by trying to sneak through the eight, as North can block the suit by covering the first heart.

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