CBAI Simultaneous Pairs

Monday 5th February 2023

(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 makes little or no difference

Some of tonight's hands are quite fascinating and as unbelievable as it may be, I can assure you that the hands are truly 100% random - there has been no human tampering with any hand whatsoever.

Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all ▲A4 West North East South **y** -1 🔶 Pass 1 🗸 AQ9743 Pass 3* Pass 3NT **♣**KQ954 Pass All Pass 5* ▲QJ92 ▲763 ♥AKJ53 **v**Q1064 • K2 ♦ J 105 Respect to any North player who rebids 6.4 on the *****76 ♣J82 third round of the auction. **▲**K1085 ♥9872 An interesting board to begin with - although N/S can ♦86 make a Grand Slam in clubs, it is hard to see many A 103 pairs getting past $5 \blacklozenge$, so much so that $5 \blacklozenge +1$ will probably be an above average score for N/S and for HCP Makeable contracts sure 5++2 will be a huge score for them. * 🔸 🖌 🕷 NT N 7 6 15 2 2 Some N/S pairs might try 3NT especially if South S 7 6 -14 4 2 2 manages to respond 1H on the first round of the Е --1 7 auction. If North ends up playing then West might W double the final contract to ask East to lead a heart. If E/W do not cash their 5 heart tricks then declarer can win 9 tricks if he has the courage to take the diamond finesse. Sadly, even if N/S are allowed to make 3NT it will still be a poor result for them.

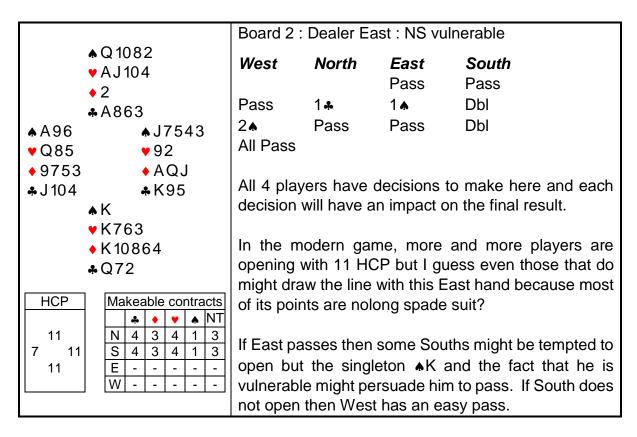
If South responds 1♠ on the first round then West is worth a bid - either double or 2♥ - but even if West bids it is difficult to see E/W having any further involvement in the auction. Furthermore if West bids it might give those declarers who reach 3NT that bit of extra confidence to expect the diamond finesse to be a success.

Normally we avoid contracts like 5 + and 5 + in matchpoint games so we have sympathy for those brave souls who end up in 3NT - but maybe being in 3NT with a 2-0-5-6 shape is a bit much? Of course there is no reason to end up in 3NT if E/W bid hearts or indeed if West doubles 3NT to ask for a heart lead (first suit bid by dummy).

6-5 shapes like North's are all about tricks and not 'points'. The good North players will not be counting 'points' when they pick up this hand. Instead they will only be interested in finding out if partner has the three magic cards i.e. AK. AK. A. If South has all three then we should be in a grand slam. If South has only two of those cards then we should be in a small slam. If South has only one of those cards we should stay at the 5-level. Since we are never going to be able to find out exactly, I have a lot of admiration for a 'middle of the road' practical 6* rebid by North after 3NT - offering a choice of 6* or 6* to partner.

As an aside, it is worth observing why it is that N/S can make a Grand Slam despite having only 22 points between them. Three points to note are that the N/S points are all in aces and kings, their two queens are supported by either an ace or a king and also the fact that North's void is opposite zero points i.e. South has no points in hearts.

TIP: When your partner tells you he has a singleton or void in a suit, you should get excited if you have an ace or zero points in his short suit. Conversely, if you have a king, queen or a jack in his short suit you should curb your enthusiasm and discount these points.



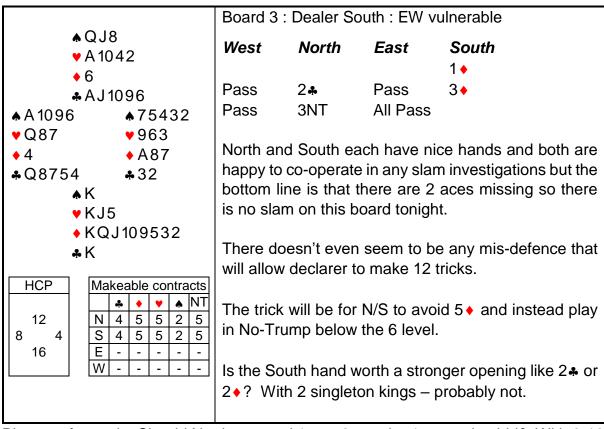
If the bidding is passed around to North then the text books tell him that he is worth an opening bid given that he passes the 'Rule of 15' i.e. his HCP plus the number of spades he holds totals 15.

Nonetheless, there will be a few 'pass out' results.

If E/W decide not to open the bidding then they need to be careful not to offer themselves on a plate to N/S e.g. by overcalling and getting too high in a spade contract.

If N/S play the hand, the fact that East has the bare AQJ, will mean declarer can make a lot of tricks – provided declarer can guess the location of the Q.

TIP: It worthwhile spending some time focussing on your card play skills. You will often score well simply by making a lot of tricks in the play despite the fact that may feel that you have underbid or find yourself in some strange contract.

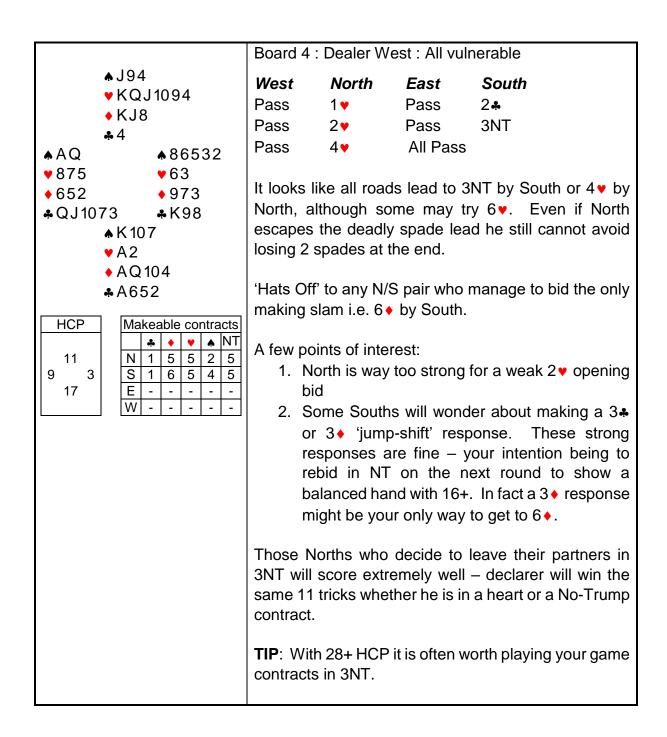


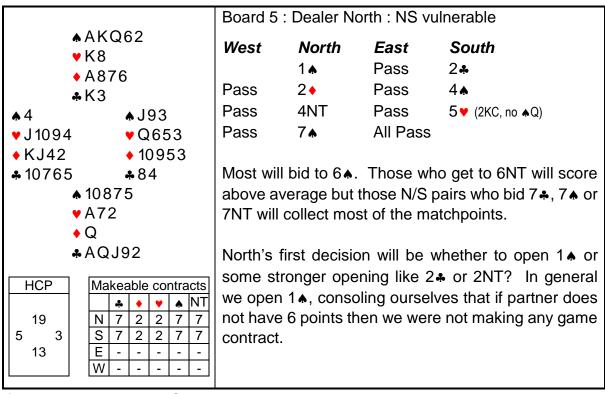
Players often ask: Should North respond 1♥ or 2♣ to the 1♦ opening bid? With 6-10 points responder should respond 1♥ rather than 2♣ i.e. when responder is weak then he is worth just one bid and he should use his one and only bid to show his 4-card major.

But when responder has 11 or more points, he is worth two bids and now he can afford the luxury of bidding his longest suit first (2*) followed by his 4 card major on the next round if he is still inclined to show his 4-card major at that point.

Maybe North should rebid $3 \checkmark$ over $3 \blacklozenge$ but he is minimum for his initial $2 \clubsuit$ and if he bids $3 \checkmark$ he might endplay his partner into bidding past their most likely resting spot of 3NT.

TIP: In matchpoint games (normal club scoring), we try to avoid playing in contracts of 5* or 5* because most other pairs will be in 3NT, most likely making it +1 or +2. We only play in 5* or 5* after we have ruled out the possibility of playing in 3NT or 4NT.





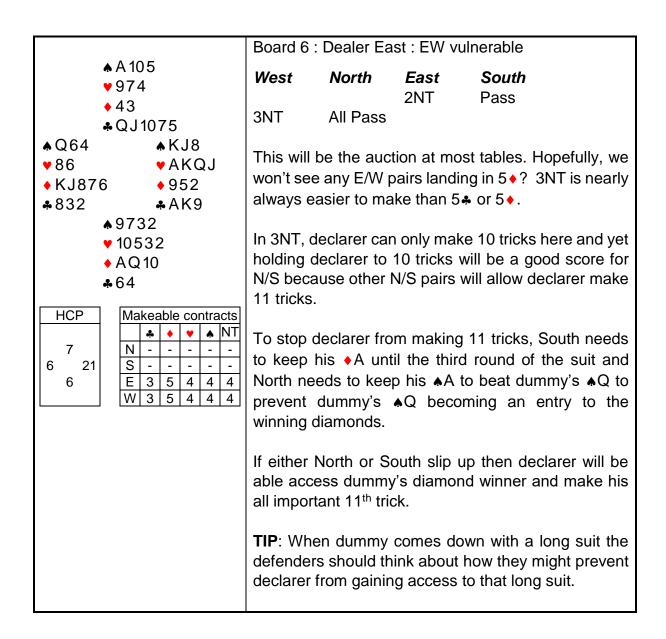
If North opens 1 then South will have to decide how to show his good spade raise. Does he show his good club suit first and then raise to 4 (Delayed Game Raise) or does he make a splinter bid response of 4 (showing 4-card spade support, 12-15 points and a singleton or void in diamonds). South might also be contemplating a Jacoby 2NT response - if playing that. However 'Jacoby 2NT' should not be used when you can make a delayed game raise or a splinter bid instead.

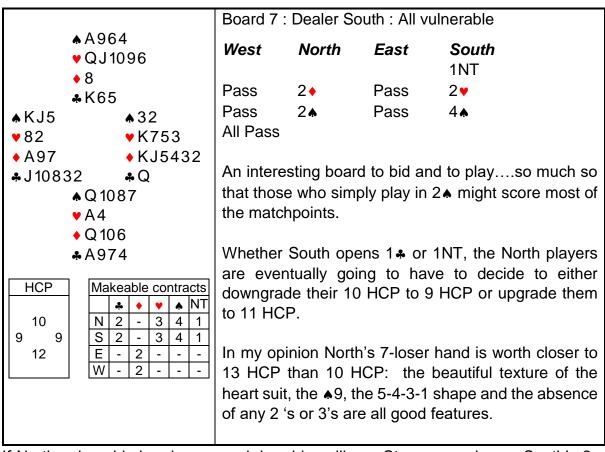
The sound advice here is that we show partner the best important feature of our hand and in this case the best feature of the South hand is the beautiful club suit – so we show our hand by giving a delayed game raise i.e. 2 + 100 then 4 + 000 on the next round.

Then after $1 \ge 2$, North will have to decide on a rebid i.e. does he make a simple rebid of 2 or should he jump to 3? It is good to have the agreement with partner that a 2 of a new suit rebid after a 2 level response is forcing for one round so $1 \ge 2$.

When North finds out that South has VA and A then that information coupled with the fact that South showed a good 5 card club suit and extra points with his first response means that there must a good play for all 13 tricks. In fact, some partnerships will be so confident that they will claim their Grand Slam before the opening lead is made.

TIP: When you have more than one thing to tell your partner, show your best feature first.





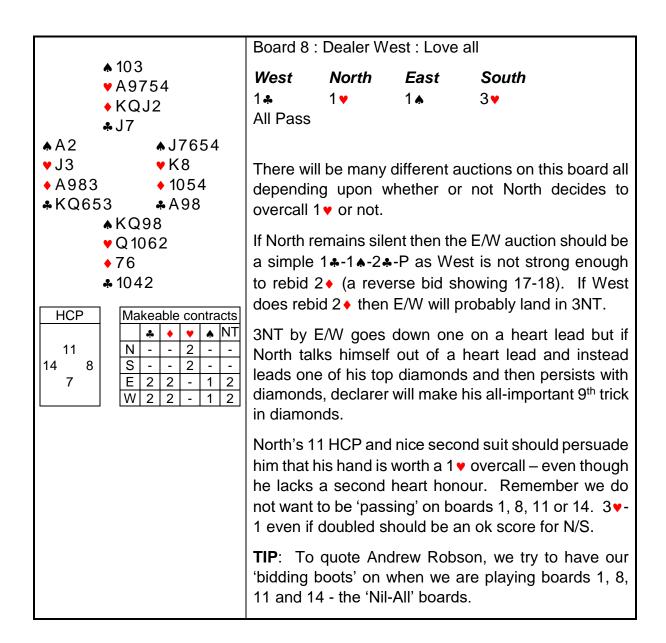
If North values his hand as a weak hand he will use Stayman and pass South's 2 response.

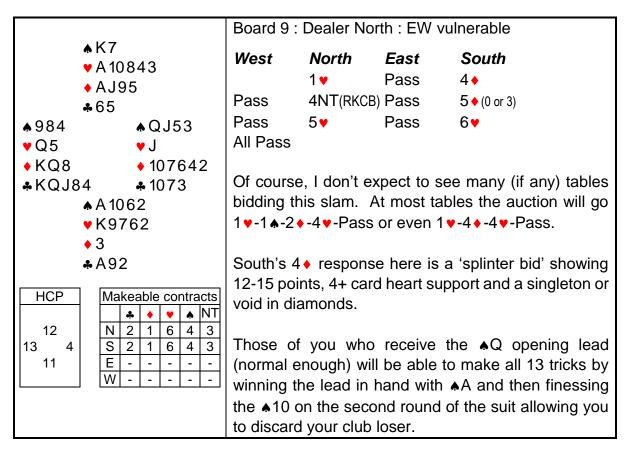
If North thinks he has good hand he will use Stayman and rebid 3 A or 4 A or maybe he will transfer to hearts as in the auction above and then show his 4-card spade suit on the next round.

South will also a decision to make if he is invited to $4 \bigstar$. As is often the case, simply making 10 tricks in a $3 \bigstar$ contract might be nearly as good as bidding and making $4 \bigstar$ as quite a few declarers will not make 10 tricks in $4 \bigstar$.

It seems that the success (or not) of this contract boils down to how you play this particular trump combination. Those who play a spade to the ace will go down while those who run the 7 on the first round (running the queen also works tonight) will succeed. Then after 2 rounds of trumps, one winning line is simply to play ace and another heart to set up 4 heart tricks.

TIP: Any time spent learning how to handle various 'suit combinations' is time well spent. For instance, on this hand, there is a difference between how we play Q432 opposite A765 and how we play Q1098 opposite A765.



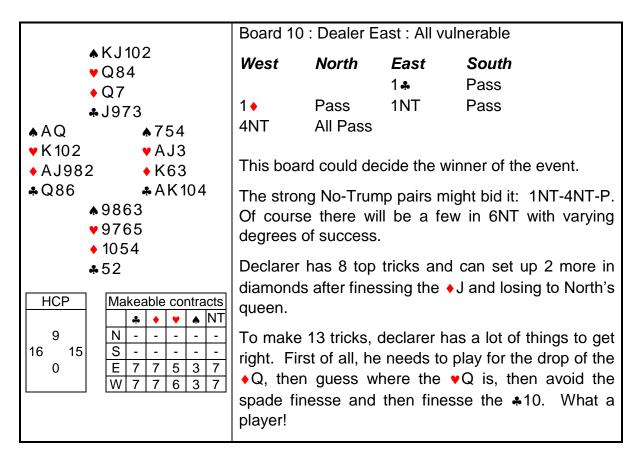


Again it's worth noting why this 23 point slam is making:

All of N/S's points are in aces and kings, we have a 10 card trump fit, South's singleton diamond is opposite an ace – the only wasted point in North's hand is the \blacklozenge J. The fact that West's \blacklozenge KQ come down in 3 rounds is a help too.

A nice agreement to have, when hearts are trumps, is to play that North's $5 \lor$ bid is to be taken as a 'sign-off' if South has zero keycards but it is to be taken as the 'queen ask' if South has 3 keycards. South's $6 \lor$ then shows 3 keycards without the $\lor Q$.

TIP: Splinter responses to partner's 1♥ or 1♠ opening are worth researching.



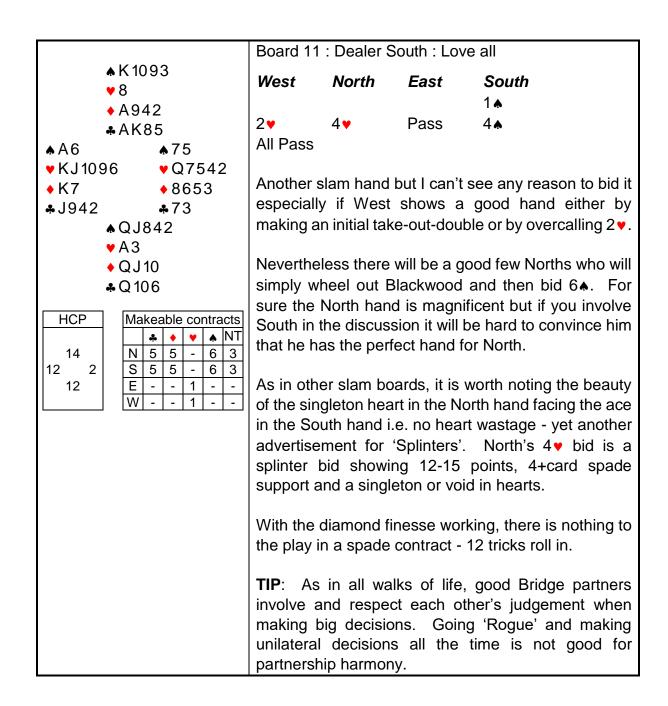
Needless to say, those declarers who make 11, 12 or 13 tricks will be well rewarded with buckets of matchpoints.

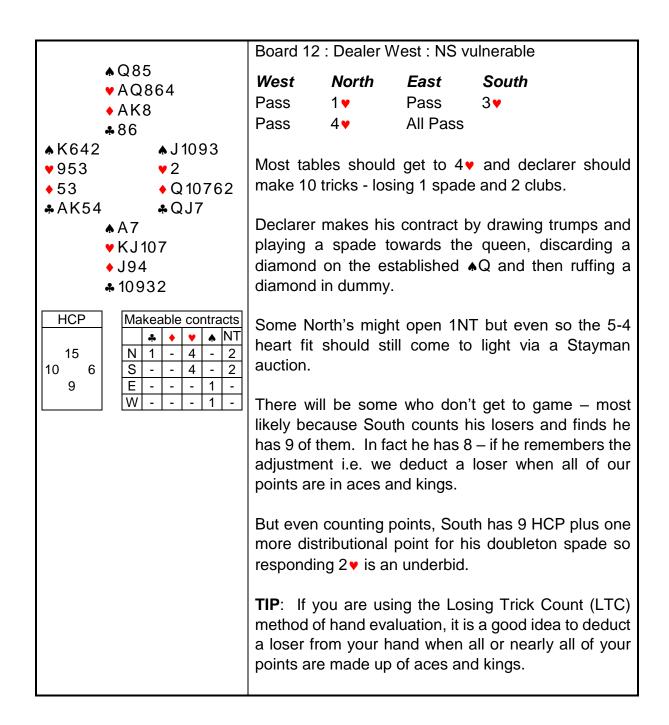
South has a near 'yarborough' - only the \diamond 10 spoils it - and yet this near yarborough could be the defence's strongest asset because declarer won't expect the missing 9 HCP to be divided 9-0. Those E/W pairs who bid slam will feel very hard done by when they find out that North has everything. However there's many 'a slip between cup and lip'.

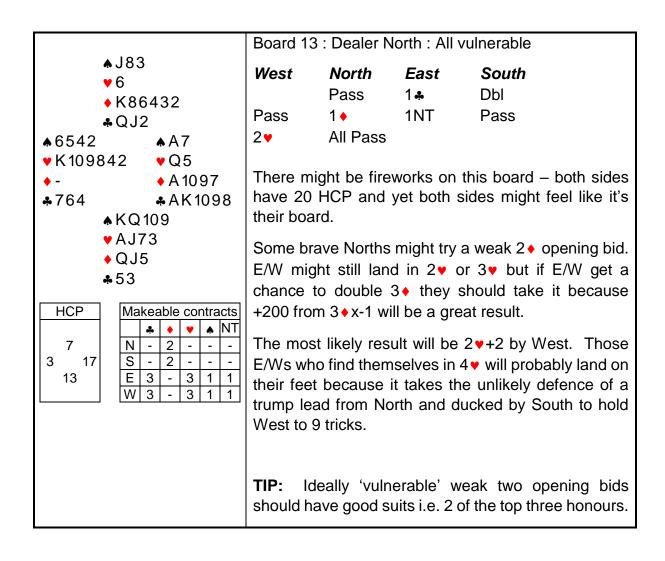
If South starts off with a spade lead declarer will be under a lot of pressure. On the other hand, if South chooses a heart lead that will solve declarer's heart problem but still leave him with the diamond and club problems to solve.

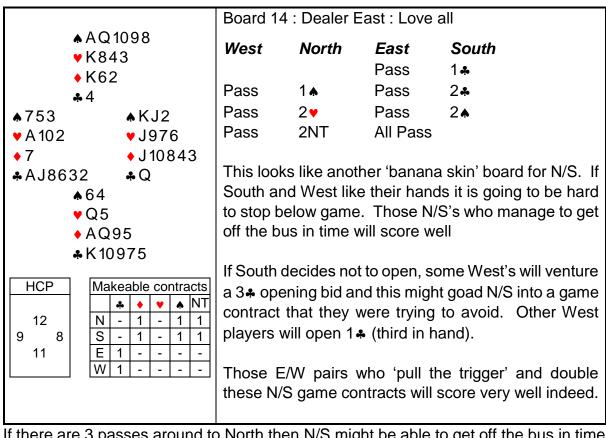
On the face of it, there is no reason for declarer to do anything other than take the losing diamond finesse. Even when this loses declarer can still make 12 tricks if he can divine the 4-2 club break. Perhaps after 5 rounds of diamonds, declarer will have deduced that spades are 4-4 and that as a consequence South can only have a doubleton club?

TIP: A raise of 1NT to 4NT is a 'quantitative' raise, asking opener to pass with a minimum opener and to bid 6NT with a maximum.





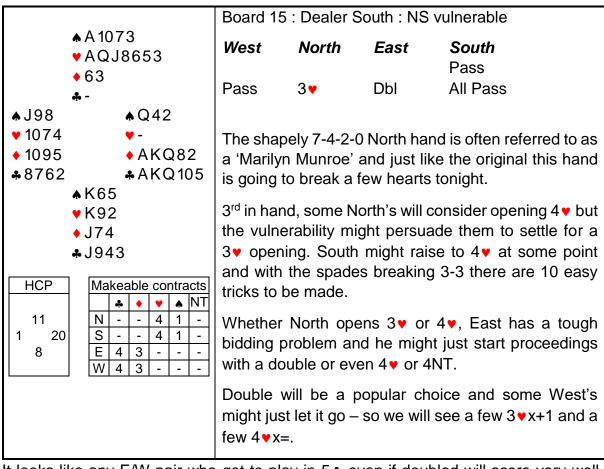




If there are 3 passes around to North then N/S might be able to get off the bus in time e.g. 1▲-2♣-2♥-2NT-Pass. Unless West leads his singleton diamond (the unbid suit) or a spade, South will make 8 tricks and a great score. Most likely minus 1 will be a good board for N/S also.

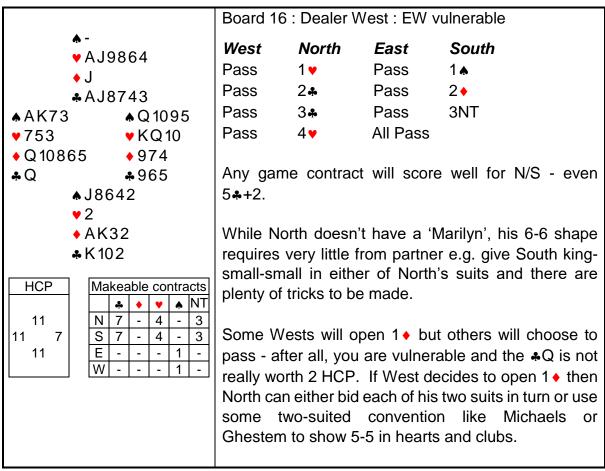
Those N/S pairs who were able to conceal their club suit (e.g. using a forcing 1NT response instead) will most likely receive a club lead from West and a huge score.

TIP: In matchpoint games (ordinary club scoring), there is no need to stretch ourselves to bid thin games. Most of the time these thin games will be difficult to make and quite a few declarers will go down in their contracts. So simply making your partscore might be a good result.



It looks like any E/W pair who get to play in 5.4 even if doubled will score very well. Any N/S pair who take the push to 5.4 should score badly – unless E/W take the plunge to 6.4. Sadly the 4-1 club break means that 6.4 has no chance even if declarer does not get a spade lead.

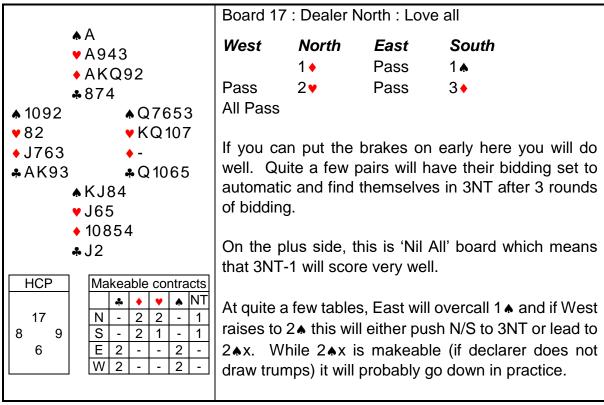
TIP: 5-level decisions are tricky but it is amazing how often the adage 'The 5-level belongs to the opponents' proves to be the winning advice.



Either way, when South shows 11+ points, North is worth a stab at game. 6-6 shapes don't come up all that often and so they are not covered in the text books so when you get one you just 'shoot first and beg forgiveness later' if things go 'belly up'.

North will make 4 • +1 unless East finds a club lead (to set up a later club ruff for West). Maybe East can visualise from the auction that N/S have a club fit and that therefore West is short in clubs?

TIP: With 6-5 'Come Alive' and with 6-6 'there are plenty of tricks'.



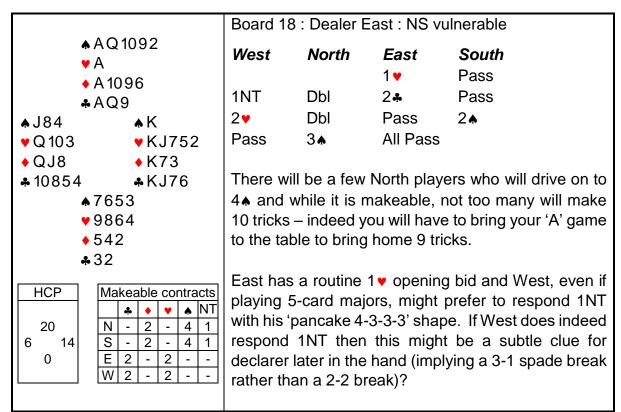
If E/W stay quiet, then some partnerships will have cute agreements here e.g. lebensohl or Blackout to help them decipher the strength of South's 3 • bid. If 3 • might be weak then North might decide to bail out in 3 • whereas if 3 • might not be weak there will be a few who will have a punt at 3NT hoping to find the golden club stopper in dummy.

Given that North's reverse is only a one round force there might be a few inspired South's who decide to pass North's 2♥ rebid (perhaps sorry that they responded on the first round).

In NT, the defence seem to have 6 tricks if they can wait patiently to collect them (4 clubs and 2 hearts) - which means that the attractive \mathbf{v} K lead will certainly help declarer win an extra trick.

Then there is the impossible 4-0 diamond break to contend with so overall you should be a very happy N/S pair if you only went down one on this board.

TIP: If you can keep your concentration until trick 13 you will surprised how often one more trick falls into your lap and that one trick could be the one that turns a rotten score into a good score. 'It's never over 'til the fat lady sings' – this is especially apt in Bridge.



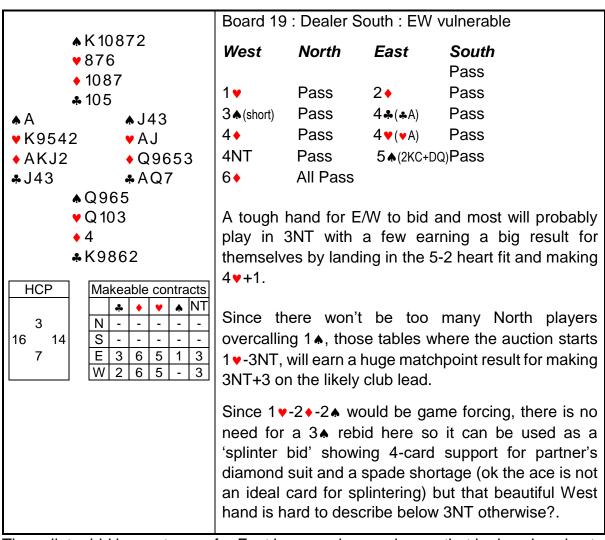
North with his 20 points does best to start off with a double (which most likely shows a take-out-double of a $1 \lor$ opening bid). With both opponents bidding, there is a good chance that South has very little, so North should not make a unilateral decision to bid $4 \blacklozenge$ - his $3 \blacklozenge$ should be asking South to bid game with 4-7 points.

To make 10 tricks, declarer needs to cash the spade ace to drop the king and if he does that then he will have no difficulty in finessing the $\clubsuit9$ on the second round of the suit.

Those declarer's who take the normal spade finesse of the queen on the first round, can salvage quite a few matchpoints by recalling West's earlier 1NT response and this might lead these declarers to finesse the ♠9 on the second round of trumps.

As an aside, the South players should try their luck with the LOTTO tomorrow night – they have just been dealt a perfect yarborough with odds of 1827 to 1.

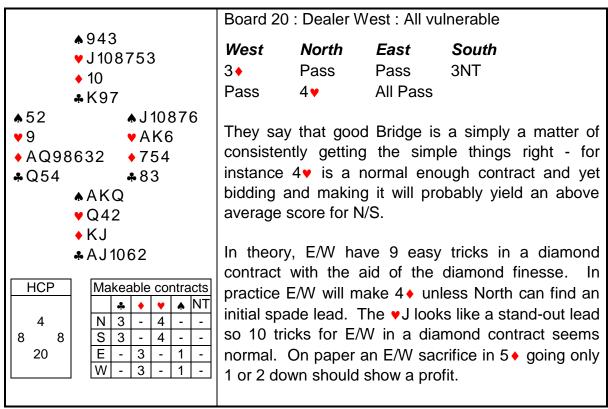
TIP: There are often subtle clues available from your opponent's bidding (or lack of) to help you as declarer (or defender) in the play of the hand.



The splinter bid is great news for East because he now knows that he is only going to lose 1 spade trick at most and he also knows that his partner's points will be in hearts, diamonds and clubs. Once East decides that West's spade shortness is good news he can cue bid (bid the suits where has aces). West checks for keycards and might even roll out 5NT to see if partner has the *****K just in case they have a Grand Slam.

Of course, if E/W give too much information away and decide to stop in 3NT or 4NT, then they might pinpoint the spade lead for the defenders.

TIP: An opener's reverse (rebidding a new suit above 2 of the suit opened) after a 2 level response from responder is forcing to game showing 15+HCP, 5+ cards in the first suit and 4+ cards in the second suit. Therefore a jump in the 'reverse suit' e.g. $1 \lor -2 \diamond -3 \diamond$ is our new best friend the 'Splinter Bid'.



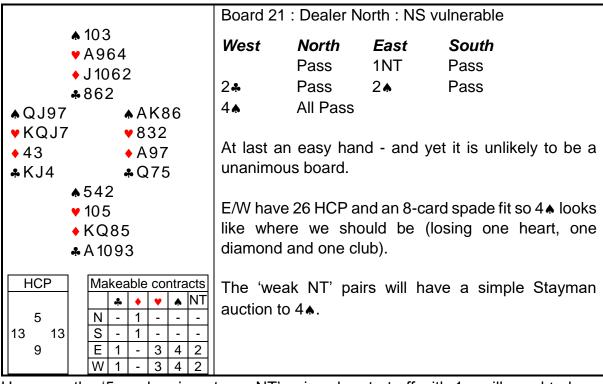
However, $4 \checkmark$ is not a gimme'. Declarer in $4 \checkmark$ is has to find the $\clubsuit Q$. He has a twoway finesse in clubs and if the opponents don't give him any help he will probably guess wrong. With nothing else to go on, it is logical for declarer to place the $\clubsuit Q$ in the East hand because there is more room for it to be there given that West has advertised a long diamond suit (the theory of vacant spaces).

On the other hand when East turns up with the ♥AK, declarer might wonder if West really was brave enough to open a vulnerable pre-empt with only 6 HCP?

It is knife-edge decisions like this that make Bridge such a great game. Hands like this help us understand why our top players like Tom Hanlon love the face-to-face game - they have in-built radar that can sniff out these missing queens with amazing accuracy.

Some Souths might decide to double instead of bidding 3NT and now N/S might not get to 4 vespecially if East raises the anti to 4 . It looks like 3NT might be a better initial choice for South rather than double.

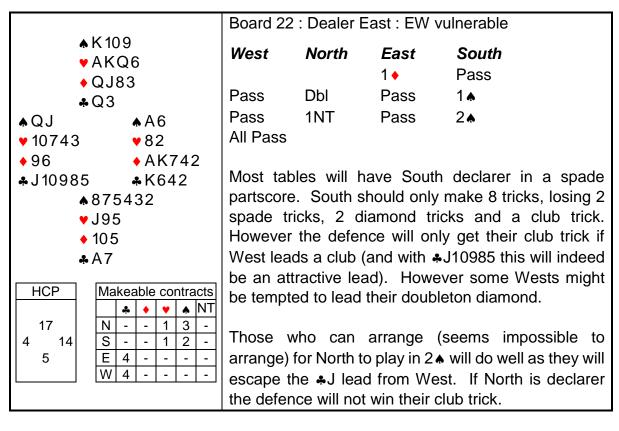
TIP: Remember 'Hamman's Rule': When 3NT is one of your options - choose 3NT.



However, the '5-card major, strong NT' pairs who start off with 1♣ will need to have some sort of 'Checkback' agreement should East (quite reasonably) decide to rebid 1NT rather than 1♠ - otherwise E/W will land in 3NT or 4♥ both of which can be defeated.

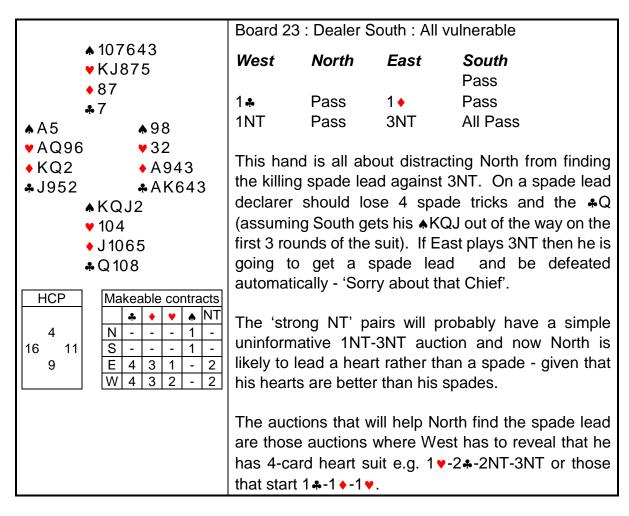
TIP: It is a good idea when we have a balanced hand to either open with a No-Trump bid or else rebid in No-Trumps. However, before we adopt this sound policy we need some method of checking to ask opener if he has bypassed a 4-card major. One simple 'Checkback' method after 1♣-1♥-1NT, would have responder use 2♣ as 'Checkback'.

Opener would then rebid as follows: 2 (I do not have 3 hearts or 4 spades), 2 (I have 3 hearts and may have 4 spades) and 2 (I have 4 spades and do not have 3 hearts).



If the defence play 3 rounds of diamonds, declarer should see the futility of ruffing the third diamond with a small trump. Instead he should discard his losing club from the South hand to make his 9 tricks.

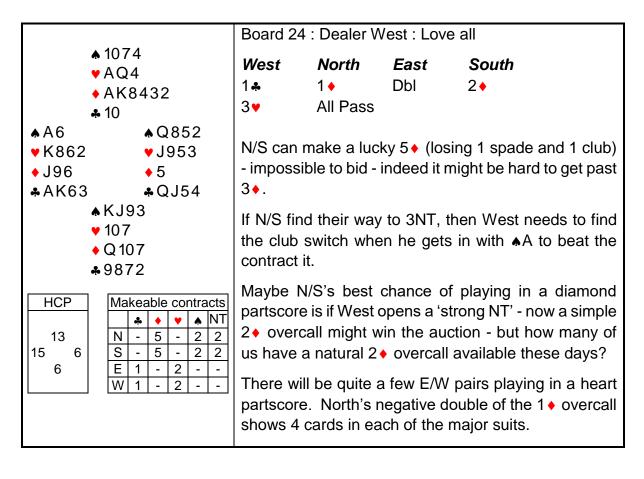
TIP: If you know you are going to be over-ruffed it is often a winning tactic to discard a known loser instead of ruffing.



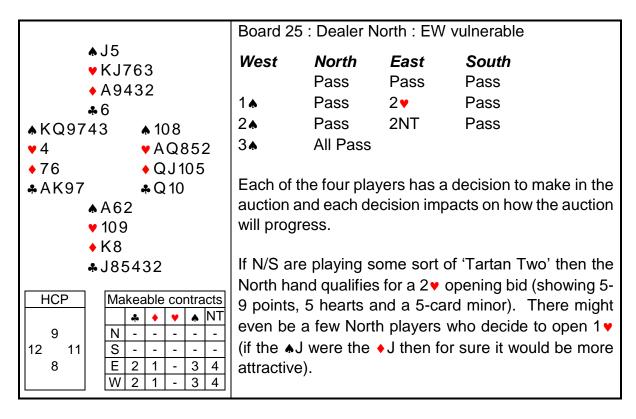
Those 'weak NT' pairs who play some form of 'checkback' (see tip on board 21) will be able to conceal West's heart suit from N/S by using the auction given above. If the 'weak NT' pairs are not playing 'Checkback' then West will probably have to rebid 1 v on the second round of the auction and now North will know not to lead a heart.

This is another hand where North should not be making a vulnerable overall. If North decides to bid, he might find himself in $3 \pm x-2$ pretty quickly.

TIP: The 'Suit Quality Test' is a useful guide when we are considering whether or not to overcall. The number of honours in our suit added to the number of cards in our suit should come to at least the number of tricks we are bidding for e.g. for a 1-level overcall (7 tricks) we should have a 5-card suit with 2 honours or a 6-card suit with 1 honour.



TIP: A negative double after 1.4 opening bid and a 1.4 overcall shows 4 hearts and 4 spades.

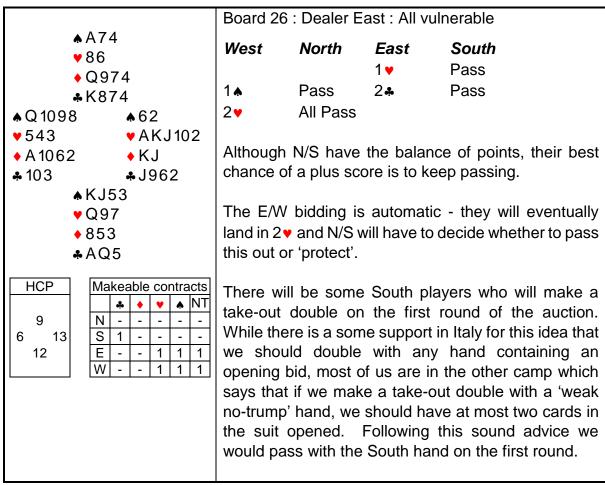


However if N/S become too annoying they might find themselves at the 2 or 3 level going down in a doubled contract. If North passes then East too has a decision to make - does he open with his good 11 points or not? If he opens then E/W are going to end up in game (most likely $4 \ge 0$) - and even if East does not open the bidding it will be hard for E/W to stop short of $4 \ge 0$.

4 ▲ is not a bad contract and it is only the horrible 6-1 club break that beats it. North leads his singleton club and South needs to rise with the ▲A on the first round of trumps to give North his club ruff. However even if South plays low on the first round of trumps, declarer may still guess wrong in trumps (especially if North has opened the bidding).

If neither North nor East open the bidding then South might be tempted to try an offcentre 3. opening - it should be doubled and go 4 off but E/W might reasonably try 4. instead. Any E/W pair who wake up at the end of the auction and find themselves in a 3NT contract will be pleasantly surprised to find that it cannot be defeated. The 3 tens in the East hand proving to be very important cards – maybe this is further evidence that the East hand is indeed worth an opening bid?

TIP: Good temperament is just as important as technical skills. The really good players can quickly put bad results behind them and refocus on the next board. If you're going to let bad luck (like the abominable 6-1 club break on this board) bother you then you are going to struggle at this game.



However South still has another big decision to make when E/W subside in $2 \checkmark$. It is rarely right to allow the opponents play undoubled in their fit at the 2 level. This hand has some factors that might suggest to South that he should not re-open the auction.

Firstly, South is vulnerable so he won't want to get too high and find himself doubled. Secondly, South has the dreaded 'pancake' 4-3-3-3 shape. Thirdly, there is no guarantee that E/W have a heart fit i.e. it could be the case that West is merely showing preference to 2 v with a small doubleton.

This will be a 'cat and mouse' board. It looks like the winning line in $2 \cdot i$ is to refrain from drawing trumps. On the other hand, declarer has no chance at all if South leads a spade and North switches to a trump.

TIP: 4-3-3-3 shapes are not attractive and are certainly not attractive when you are considering whether to re-open the bidding or not.

