



**Commentary
for the
SBU Bobby Allan / Easter Pairs 2023**

Monday 20th March 2023

Dear Bridge player

Thank you for supporting the Bobby Allan / Easter Pairs 2023. We do hope you enjoyed the hands, found them interesting, challenging and fun whatever result you ended up with! The overall winner will be awarded the Easter Pairs Trophy and the best mixed pair will be awarded the Bobby Allan Trophy. There is a generous masterpoint award and red points for those who do well.

So now you can relax and enjoy the commentary - did you see the hands in the same way I wonder. We would like to thank our commentators – Liz McGowan for the Monday, Iain Sime for the Tuesday, Brian Short for the Wednesday and Derek Sanders for the Thursday.

You will be able to enjoy many events now that we are returning to a normal way of life, so do have a look on the [SBU web site](#) and [Facebook page](#) for all the SBU news and also for information about forthcoming tournaments.

SBU Spring Mixed Pairs and Teams

*Saturday 27th & Sunday 28th May at the
New Melville Bridge Club Edinburgh*

This is a revamp of the popular competition that used to run in Hutchesons School in Glasgow. It will be run face to face for the first time since the lockdowns. We felt that May was a better time to travel than February.

There will be a Pairs competition on the Saturday starting at 12 noon and a Teams competition on Sunday starting at 11.00 am and finishing at 5.15 pm.

We have volunteers who will be hosting an evening meal on Saturday evening at their favourite restaurant. This will be an opportunity for socialising for those who want it.

Keep an eye on the [SBU web site](#) and [Facebook page](#) for further details.

Board 1. None. Dealer North

♠ 10 9 4	
♥ Q 8 3	
♦ K Q 5	
♣ Q 8 7 2	
♠ A K Q 7 6 3	♠ 2
♥ K 9 7	♥ A J 10 4 2
♦ 10	♦ A J 7 4 2
♣ A J 3	♣ 9 4
♠ J 8 5	
♥ 6 5	
♦ 9 8 6 3	
♣ K 10 6 5	

I doubt many of you will bid this hand to slam, though you might if East opens the bidding. When you wrap up 13 tricks do not worry about missing the Grand Slam advertised by Deep Finesse. Your Grand Slams should be better than 60% – going down in a Grand is a sure route to a bad score at any form of scoring. To make 7♠ or 7NT you need a 3=3 spade break and a successful heart guess; in 7♥ you might survive a 4-2 spade break, but the entry position is fraught; none of these contracts come close to 60%. On a club lead anyone in 6♥ will find this a sweaty enough spot.

Board 2. N/S. Dealer East

♠ A Q 7 5	
♥ K 8	
♦ 7 6 4	
♣ A 5 4 3	
♠ J 10 6 4 3	♠ K 2
♥ Q 10 4	♥ A 6 3
♦ A 9 8 5	♦ K 2
♣ K	♣ Q J 10 9 8 2
♠ 9 8	
♥ J 9 7 5 2	
♦ Q J 10 3	
♣ 7 6	

Some may open this East hand with a weak 1NT. West will probably transfer into spades and East will struggle to make that contract. I think the hand is a little strong for a weak NT with such a solid good suit, but if you open 1♣ a 2♣ rebid seems a little feeble, and a 1NT rebid showing 15-17 might be an upgrade too far. This is a good time to overbid: there are enough entries to establish and cash clubs and opponents cannot organise 5 tricks in time to beat 3NT by East. North can beat 3NT by West with a diamond lead, which might appeal if both black suits have been bid.

Board 3. E/W. Dealer South

♠ 6 5 4	
♥ 2	
♦ 10 8	
♣ A J 9 7 6 4 2	
♠ K 9 2	♠ A 10 7 3
♥ K J 10 6	♥ A Q 9 8 7 4 3
♦ A K 6 4 3	♦ 5
♣ K	♣ 3
♠ Q J 8	
♥ 5	
♦ Q J 9 7 2	
♣ Q 10 8 5	

This is a better slam for EW, though it may not be easy to bid. On a non-club lead you can draw trump, discard the club loser on a top diamond and concede a spade. If North has stuck in a weak jump overcall you will get a club lead, but that is not terminal. He might give a ruff and discard at trick two. Assuming that does not happen, you can try for a 4=3 diamond break to discard two spades. When that does not work, you will have to squeeze South, hoping they have ♠QJ as well as the long diamonds. Success at last!

Board 4. All. Dealer West

♠ A J 9	
♥ A	
♦ A 10	
♣ A J 10 8 6 5 4	
♠ Q 10 7	♠ K 8 5 4
♥ Q 8 7 5 4	♥ K 10 2
♦ K Q 8	♦ J 9 6 3
♣ Q 7	♣ 9 2
♠ 6 3 2	
♥ J 9 6 3	
♦ 7 5 4 2	
♣ K 3	

I suspect most Wests will open this collection, though it is not my idea of an opening bid. 5=3=3=2 is not a great distribution, and you have to add a loser when all those Queens are not balanced out with an Ace. As it happens the opener does not cost this time: East can negotiate 7 tricks with North on lead, so playing in 2♥ undoubled might score very well, and a double is unlikely. Of course North will not sell out to 2♥. Followers of Bob Hamman may punt 3NT and find a pleasing dummy and a lucky break. Those who play in clubs can test opponents' discards by reeling off the entire suit – you might get lucky.

Board 5. N/S. Dealer North

<p>♠ K Q J 5 4 2 ♥ 8 ♦ K Q 7 ♣ Q J 9</p> <p>♠ A 9 3 ♥ Q J 9 7 3 ♦ A J 5 ♣ K 4</p>	<p>♠ 7 ♥ 6 5 4 2 ♦ 9 8 6 4 3 2 ♣ 3 2</p> <p>♠ 10 8 6 ♥ A K 10 ♦ 10 ♣ A 10 8 7 6 5</p>
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This may be a flattish board. North-South have all the advantages: they get to open the bidding and they hold the boss suit. Some may make an overtrick if West fails to cash the ♦A, but this is pairs where every trick counts so I predict a line of +620. East-West have a save of sorts in diamonds, where they can make 8 tricks, but it is hard to see how they might get diamonds into the auction. An intrepid West might overcall 2♥ after 1♠ – Pass – 2♣, and an intrepid East might support as far as the 5-level, but South will surely double 5♥ rather than bid on to 5♠. Deep Finesse takes 800 from 5♥ but that is not so easy in practice – West might well escape for an intrepid -500.

Board 6. E/W. Dealer East

<p>♠ Q 9 7 ♥ A Q 4 2 ♦ A 9 7 ♣ A Q J</p> <p>♠ K 4 ♥ K 10 5 ♦ 5 3 2 ♣ 9 6 4 3 2</p>	<p>♠ A 6 5 2 ♥ 9 8 6 ♦ Q J 8 4 ♣ 8 7</p> <p>♠ J 10 8 3 ♥ J 7 3 ♦ K 10 6 ♣ K 10 5</p>
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All roads here seem to lead to 3NT by North. Some may speed up the auction by opening 2NT in fourth seat. South should simply raise that to 3NT, there is little point in looking for a 4=4 major suit fit with a 4=3=3=3 distribution and this is a really no-trumpy hand. North makes 10 tricks with ease by establishing spades. South might make only 9 tricks if West were on lead and chose a diamond, but neither of these things seem likely to happen. Dare one predict a flat board?

Board 7. All. Dealer South

<p>♠ Q 9 7 ♥ A Q 5 4 ♦ Q J 6 4 ♣ A 10</p> <p>♠ 8 6 3 2 ♥ 10 6 ♦ A 8 2 ♣ J 9 4 3</p>	<p>♠ K J 10 5 ♥ K J 7 3 ♦ K 10 9 3 ♣ 7</p> <p>♠ A 4 ♥ 9 8 2 ♦ 7 5 ♣ K Q 8 6 5 2</p>
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North-South have 24 HCP between them, and a nice 6-card suit to run. This combination often makes 3NT, but not on this deal. Some Souths may open a modern 3♣ (a bit much at this vulnerability) and a trusting North might punt 3NT. Other Souths may raise a strong NT to game. East has an unenviable choice of lead and will almost certainly concede the 8th trick. DF of course chooses the ♠K, but if a flesh and blood East finds that lead questions may be asked. Some Norths will be lucky if the defence is not accurate: East is in some danger of being endplayed to concede another trick. Those who play in clubs will find it just as hard to make 9 tricks, so you might as well go for the higher-scoring contract.

Board 8. None. Dealer West

<p>♠ A K ♥ 10 5 2 ♦ 10 8 7 5 ♣ Q 5 4 2</p> <p>♠ J 5 4 2 ♥ Q J 9 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ A J 6</p>	<p>♠ 8 7 ♥ K 8 6 4 ♦ Q J 9 2 ♣ 9 7 3</p> <p>♠ Q 10 9 6 3 ♥ A 7 3 ♦ K 6 ♣ K 10 8</p>
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A weak no-trump from West may be passed out. If North leads a club to the King and Ace the suit is frozen – if either defender leads another club declarer makes a second trick in the suit. Declarer knocks out the ♥A and South is fixed. He might hold up till the third round and lead a spade so North can cash the ♠AK and exit with a low club. A wily declarer counters by exiting with the third club, endplaying North to lead a diamond. North avoids the endplay by playing ♣Q and another, but now declarer can afford to give up a

diamond to create an entry to dummy. A diamond lead is no better, giving declarer three diamond tricks. The winning defence is for North to cash the ♠AK and exit with a heart! Now South can open up clubs by leading the Ten, stylishly surrounding the nine. Who said INT contracts were dull?

Board 9. E/W. Dealer North

<p>♠ J 9 3 ♥ A 10 ♦ A 8 6 5 ♣ A J 6 3</p>	<p>♠ K 8 6 2 ♥ K 8 4 2 ♦ Q J 3 ♣ 7 5</p>
<p>♠ A Q 10 4 ♥ J 7 6 5 ♦ 10 7 ♣ Q 9 2</p>	<p>♠ 7 5 ♥ Q 9 3 ♦ K 9 4 2 ♣ K 10 8 4</p>

Another nip and tuck INT contract for West. North has an unenviable lead. Jxxx might actually work quite well here: declarer can make a third heart trick by playing South for Q93 but is unlikely to find that. The 'clever' lead is the ♠Q – which might work well if dummy had Kxx and partner three small. As things lie it costs nothing – declarer can always make 2 spade tricks – but it may confuse partner into thinking that declarer has the ♠A. A simple fourth highest of your longest and strongest will probably see declarer scramble 7 tricks one way or another.

Board 10. All. Dealer East

<p>♠ K J 7 5 ♥ Q 10 8 4 ♦ J ♣ K 10 8 7</p>	<p>♠ Q 8 3 2 ♥ K 2 ♦ 10 6 4 3 ♣ J 4 2</p>
<p>♠ 10 9 6 ♥ A 9 6 ♦ K 9 8 7 2 ♣ A Q</p>	<p>♠ A 4 ♥ J 7 5 3 ♦ A Q 5 ♣ 9 6 5 3</p>

This time a combined 24HCP and a long suit make 9 tricks in 3NT when the club finesse works. Strong no-trumpers will get there when South opens 1♣ – seems any old 11 count is an opening bid these days. Weak no-trumpers may miss this game. Some 11 counts can be upgraded, but this one looks too risky,

especially when vulnerable. When North opens INT it would be quite reasonable for South to take the sure plus by passing. Even if South raises to 2NT North may turn down the invitation at Pairs – and he would be right to do so if the club finesse failed.

Board 11. None. Dealer South

<p>♠ 7 ♥ Q 10 9 8 4 3 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ J 8 6</p>	<p>♠ Q 6 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ A 8 5 3 ♣ 5 4 3 2</p>
<p>♠ A J 9 8 5 3 2 ♥ K ♦ Q 2 ♣ A K 10</p>	<p>♠ K 10 4 ♥ J 6 5 ♦ K 10 9 7 ♣ Q 9 7</p>

Hard to see any outcome here but 4♠+1 by North. If West elects to open a weak 2 – unlikely to be a big success in second seat – the auction will be brief. If West makes a more sensible pass North will open 1♠ and South has a bit of a problem. With 9 points but very few tricks a simple raise to 2♠ looks best. Anything else (eg Drury) may excite North into indiscretion, but provided he discovers that two Aces are missing all will be well.

Board 12. N/S. Dealer West

<p>♠ K 10 8 ♥ J 8 4 2 ♦ Q 9 2 ♣ J 7 5</p>	<p>♠ 9 6 ♥ A 10 9 ♦ 8 6 ♣ A K 10 8 6 3</p>
<p>♠ A Q 7 4 ♥ K Q 7 ♦ A 10 5 ♣ 9 4 2</p>	<p>♠ J 5 3 2 ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ K J 7 4 3 ♣ Q</p>

Over a strong INT East may pass hopefully, but South will surely employ Stayman, planning to pass any response from partner. 2♠ is good news, and if East bids 3♣ now South may find a raise. Best for North not to bid on to 4♠ unless he plans to use his early dummy entry to finesse diamonds... Old-fashioned weak no-trumpers will open 1♠ as North – you can happily pass if partner responds INT. New-fangled weak no-trumpers, playing a 5-card spade suit, will open 1♣, which may silence

East, but only temporarily. I expect 3♣-1 to be a popular result.

(Of course if South does pass INT and East leads a low club there might be an interesting post mortem.)

Board 13. All. Dealer North

<p>♠ A K Q 10 9 6 4 ♥ — ♦ A 7 5 ♣ 9 5 3</p> <p>♠ J 2 ♥ K J 10 8 7 ♦ Q 10 ♣ 10 8 7 4</p> <p>♠ 8 7 ♥ A 5 4 2 ♦ 9 6 ♣ K Q J 6 2</p>	<p>♠ 5 3 ♥ Q 9 6 3 ♦ K J 8 4 3 2 ♣ A</p>
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On this board East wants to get involved in the auction over 1♠ – preferably with a double to unearth the heart fit. That is how to find a sacrifice against 4♠, and perhaps push North-South over the top. I suspect most will prefer not to risk a large vulnerable penalty. The big match point gains and losses will come from the opening lead. If East cashes the ♣A, hoping to get a ruff, disappointment ensues: North draws trump and claims the rest, discarding diamonds on clubs. A major suit lead fares no better when East cannot hold up the ♣A. The only lead to hold declarer to ten tricks is a diamond. North may duck and try to reach dummy with a diamond ruff, but West overruffs and the ♣A makes later.

Board 14. None. Dealer East

<p>♠ A Q 5 ♥ 9 3 2 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ Q 9 4 2</p> <p>♠ K 10 2 ♥ J 10 7 6 ♦ Q 9 7 5 4 ♣ 5</p> <p>♠ J 7 6 4 ♥ A 4 ♦ K 8 6 ♣ 10 8 7 3</p>	<p>♠ 9 8 3 ♥ K Q 8 5 ♦ A 10 ♣ A K J 6</p>
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East-West should get an uninterrupted auction here, preferably to a heart part score where 9 tricks look normal. If East opens a strong no-trump West should employ Stayman (compare board 12) since it is likely that a suit contract at the 2-level will bring in more tricks. If you

do find yourself in INT you will need to make 9 tricks to score well – perhaps South might duck an early diamond.

Board 15. N/S. Dealer South

<p>♠ Q J 4 ♥ J ♦ 9 6 5 3 ♣ 10 7 5 4 2</p> <p>♠ A 9 7 ♥ A 10 6 2 ♦ A J 8 ♣ Q J 8</p> <p>♠ 8 5 ♥ 7 5 4 3 ♦ K Q 10 7 2 ♣ K 9</p>	<p>♠ K 10 6 3 2 ♥ K Q 9 8 ♦ 4 ♣ A 6 3</p>
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East-West should make 11 tricks in either major. Here the 5=3 fit is easier than the 4=4 because of the 4=1 heart break. If a diamond is led declarer needs to establish spades before drawing all the trump. If North leads a second diamond a club is thrown from the East hand, loser-on-loser, establishing the ♦J as a discard for the other losing club.

Board 16. E/W. Dealer West

<p>♠ 9 8 6 4 2 ♥ A K J 6 5 ♦ Q ♣ 10 3</p> <p>♠ A K Q J 3 ♥ 10 4 ♦ K J 10 6 ♣ A 5</p> <p>♠ — ♥ 9 8 7 3 ♦ 8 7 5 2 ♣ K Q 8 7 4</p>	<p>♠ 10 7 5 ♥ Q 2 ♦ A 9 4 3 ♣ J 9 6 2</p>
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This time the spades break badly. North might solve all problems by leading his diamond – now declarer can simply draw trump and cash winners. With trump length it is often better to attack declarer's control by leading a long suit, but here declarer cannot be forced to ruff – a third round of hearts can be ruffed in dummy and a club discarded for the overtrick. The only thing that might go wrong is that declarer diagnoses the 4-1 diamond break and loses a first round finesse to the singleton Queen – that would be necessary if South had ♦Q8xx, small consolation for a poor score.

Board 17. None. Dealer North

<p>♠ A Q 10 3 ♥ A K J 6 3 ♦ 6 ♣ K 9 6</p> <p>♠ 7 6 5 2 ♥ 10 9 8 7 2 ♦ K ♣ 4 3 2</p> <p>♠ K ♥ 5 4 ♦ Q 8 7 5 2 ♣ A Q J 10 8</p>	<p>♠ J 9 8 4 ♥ Q ♦ A J 10 9 4 3 ♣ 7 5</p>
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North-South will probably find it too difficult to reach 6♣, particularly if South responds 2♦ to the 1♥ opening bid. There is quite a good case for bidding the stronger minor when it is likely you will only manage to bid one of them. But 2♣ does not necessarily promise 5 cards, so North will be reluctant to go past 3NT. Which is where most will play, making 11 tricks if they avoid the trap of finessing into the singleton ♥Q. Top score will likely go to those who have the chance to defend 2♦ doubled for 500. Even better if East is tempted to make a weak jump: South should pass 3♦ and be delighted to hear the re-opening double.

Board 18. N/S. Dealer East

<p>♠ 7 6 5 ♥ A 10 8 7 ♦ K 9 8 6 ♣ A 9</p> <p>♠ K Q 4 2 ♥ K 4 3 ♦ 7 2 ♣ K J 6 5</p> <p>♠ A 10 9 8 3 ♥ Q 9 5 ♦ Q 10 4 3 ♣ 7</p>	<p>♠ J ♥ J 6 2 ♦ A J 5 ♣ Q 10 8 4 3 2</p>
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West might do well to pass this particular 12-count since North lacks the Pearson points for a fourth seat opener (HCP + spade length = 15). Most will open, and likely find themselves in 3♣, either after an inverted raise, or a transfer response to a weak NT. 3♣ can be beaten, but not trivially. North leads a diamond. If declarer ducks that South switches to hearts to establish two winners to go with the two black Aces. If declarer wins and plays a black card the defence win and switch to hearts before declarer can establish his spade winners or negotiate an entry to cash them. All

very unlikely. Perhaps a better question is: can East-West find the diamond ruff that beats 3♠?

Board 19. E/W. Dealer South

<p>♠ K J 10 9 6 ♥ Q 9 ♦ A 6 ♣ K 10 8 5</p> <p>♠ A Q 7 4 ♥ 8 5 4 ♦ J 10 4 2 ♣ J 3</p> <p>♠ 3 ♥ K 10 7 6 2 ♦ K Q 5 ♣ 9 7 6 4</p>	<p>♠ 8 5 2 ♥ A J 3 ♦ 9 8 7 3 ♣ A Q 2</p>
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According to DF North-South can make at least seven tricks in every denomination. But can they stop low enough to make a plus score? An old-fashioned 1♠ – INT – 2♣ looks a normal start, with South passing or raising to 3♣ according to temperament. Perhaps not so easy for those playing Gazilli, where 2♣ may be an artificial strength-showing call. South responds 2♦ showing 8+HCP, and North bids 2♠ to show the limited 5=4. South should convert to 3♣ with this distribution.

Board 20. All. Dealer West

<p>♠ Q 4 ♥ K Q 9 7 3 ♦ J 9 6 3 ♣ K 7</p> <p>♠ J 9 7 6 3 ♥ A J ♦ K 2 ♣ J 10 6 3</p> <p>♠ A 2 ♥ 10 8 6 5 4 ♦ 10 7 ♣ 9 8 5 2</p>	<p>♠ K 10 8 5 ♥ 2 ♦ A Q 8 5 4 ♣ A Q 4</p>
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East-West can make 12 tricks in spades with the aid of a couple of finesses, but it is hard to imagine anyone bidding slam on these cards. I guess most Norths will open 1♥, though there is little upside in second seat, vulnerable, when the black honour cards are not pulling their weight. East will double 1♥, and South might be tempted into an indiscreet pre-emptive raise. DF takes 4♥ doubled for 1100: low diamond to the King, spade back, win the ♥A and make a diamond ruff with the ♥J before leading a club through. Normal players settle for 800, but West will probably not appreciate the situation and rescue opponents by bidding 4♠.

Board 21. N/S. Dealer North

<p>♠ Q J 7 ♥ 6 ♦ K 10 9 8 6 5 3 ♣ 10 5</p> <p>♠ K 9 2 ♥ K 3 ♦ J 7 4 ♣ A J 6 4 3</p>	<p>♠ 10 8 6 5 4 3 ♥ Q 9 7 ♦ — ♣ Q 9 7 2</p>
<p>♠ A ♥ A J 10 8 5 4 2 ♦ A Q 2 ♣ K 8</p>	

An interesting problem for South if North opens 3♦. Optimists might blast 6♦, leaving East to guess the winning lead. Scientists will try 3♥ to see if partner has any support. Over 3♥ North should probably bid 3♠ to show a high card feature but no support. With a singleton heart marked in the North hand 6♦ is quite tempting – but this approach should make it easier for East to find the winning lead. Since you do not want to play in 5♦ at Pairs realists may simply bid 3NT for a sure plus score. A club lead lets you make ten tricks, others hold you to 9. (The pesky ♦jxx limits your entries to dummy so you cannot establish and cash a spade. If you try to lead low to the ten on the second round West can play the ♦J. A rare but very satisfying entry-destroying play.)

Board 22. E/W. Dealer East

<p>♠ 9 4 ♥ 8 7 6 5 ♦ J 7 4 ♣ J 10 8 5</p> <p>♠ J 10 5 2 ♥ A 10 ♦ Q 10 2 ♣ K 6 4 3</p>	<p>♠ A Q 8 6 3 ♥ 9 3 2 ♦ K 9 5 ♣ A 2</p>
<p>♠ K 7 ♥ K Q J 4 ♦ A 8 6 3 ♣ Q 9 7</p>	

If East opens 1♠ should they bid on to game opposite a limit raise? Crisp high cards, but the 5=3=3=2 distribution means 7 losers. At pairs 3♠ looks the best spot – a diamond guess for the overtrick is much less pressured than a diamond guess to make game. Over 1♠ South may make a takeout double, perhaps making the diamond guess harder.

Weak no-trumpers may find themselves in INT. An easy contract to play. When hearts break 4=4 there are just 5 losers and 8 tricks. This will be a worrying outcome at pairs since more tricks are available in spades. Less worrying if South has doubled INT: 380 should score well, and if North runs there is a useful penalty on offer.

Board 23. All. Dealer South

<p>♠ A 9 7 5 ♥ 2 ♦ A K 10 6 ♣ 10 8 7 2</p> <p>♠ K 10 4 ♥ 9 8 7 5 ♦ J ♣ A Q J 9 3</p>	<p>♠ 6 ♥ K 10 6 3 ♦ 9 8 5 3 2 ♣ K 5 4</p> <p>♠ Q J 8 3 2 ♥ A Q J 4 ♦ Q 7 4 ♣ 6</p>
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At last – an 11 count that is a sound opening bid: only 6 losers, no rebid problems. When North makes a limit raise it is easy to bid game in the known 9-card fit. There is an inevitable spade loser, so you make 10 or 11 tricks depending on the view you take in hearts. West may stick in an overcall, but that just makes it easier to bid game. If East raises clubs declarer may infer the location of the ♥K – or not.

Board 24. None. Dealer West

<p>♠ 8 ♥ 9 6 ♦ A 10 9 6 3 ♣ A J 9 8 3</p> <p>♠ K J 7 4 ♥ K 10 8 ♦ Q J 8 7 4 2 ♣ —</p>	<p>♠ Q 10 6 ♥ A Q J 7 5 3 2 ♦ 5 ♣ 6 2</p> <p>♠ A 9 5 3 2 ♥ 4 ♦ K ♣ K Q 10 7 5 4</p>
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No system is geared to handle freak hands like this – they are too infrequent. With no rebid problems West may open 1♦ – and why not with 28 Zar points? (A=6; K=4; Q=2, J=1 if working as here; add length of your 2 longest suits + difference in length between your longest and shortest suits) In that case East will respond 1♥. Does South have a way to show a big 2-suiter in the unbid suits now? If he does

North will likely leap to 5♣, but will anyone bid on to slam? If West does not open East may pre-empt, giving South a more familiar problem. The pairs mantra that you should never play in five of a minor may persuade some to bid slam, but it does not really apply when 3NT is not an option.

Board 25. E/W. Dealer North

<p>♠ 8 5 3 ♥ J 8 3 2 ♦ Q 7 6 3 2 ♣ 4</p>	<p>♠ 10 9 4 2 ♥ Q 5 ♦ A 10 4 ♣ A 8 7 3</p>
<p>♠ A K J ♥ A K 4 ♦ J 9 ♣ K J 10 6 5</p>	<p>♠ Q 7 6 ♥ 10 9 7 6 ♦ K 8 5 ♣ Q 9 2</p>

Hard to imagine many of you reaching a small slam. never mind the Grand that only DF can make. Probably just as well. If West leads a diamond you have to bring in the club suit for no losers, and there is no particular reason to depart from 'nine never'. Many play a 2NT opener as 20-21 these days, but even opposite 20-22 North has no reason to think of slam unless he can locate a 4=4 fit. 6♣ is a better spot: you can win the second club with the ♣A and finesse spades, finding a parking spot for the losing diamond when spades break 3=3. I expect most of you will play in a pedestrian 3NT, making 11 tricks.

Board 26. All. Dealer East

<p>♠ K J 7 6 4 ♥ J 8 2 ♦ 7 ♣ J 6 5 4</p>	<p>♠ 9 8 3 ♥ 10 9 7 ♦ 10 9 8 6 ♣ 9 8 3</p>
<p>♠ 10 2 ♥ A K Q 6 ♦ J 5 3 2 ♣ A K Q</p>	<p>♠ A Q 5 ♥ 5 4 3 ♦ A K Q 4 ♣ 10 7 2</p>

Not much fun for anyone here. If East opens a strong no-trump that may silence South unless they have a penalty double in the bag. West will transfer to spades and now South may stick in a takeout double. This situation may be undiscussed, but North should be able to bid

2NT, two places to play (or none as here) – he does not want to become declarer. South will respond 3♦ which does not look too bad a spot but has 5 top losers. When nobody can make anything much it is best to let opponents play the hand – but bridge players are mainly optimists so there will be some big minus scores.

Board 27. None. Dealer South

<p>♠ A K ♥ Q 8 7 3 2 ♦ K 7 ♣ Q 10 6 3</p>	<p>♠ 10 5 2 ♥ A J ♦ A 8 5 3 2 ♣ A 4 2</p>
<p>♠ Q J 9 8 ♥ K 5 4 ♦ Q J ♣ K J 8 7</p>	<p>♠ 7 6 4 3 ♥ 10 9 6 ♦ 10 9 6 4 ♣ 9 5</p>

North-South will likely reach 3NT, win the heart lead and play on spades to make just 9 tricks. Weak no-trumpers might reach game in two bids, but West will almost certainly overcall 2♥ to prolong the auction. This offers a 500 penalty, but that will not be obvious to North and South who will simply go after their own game. Strong no-trumpers open 1♣ and West will be persuaded by the HCP to overcall on an inadequate suit. If West believes in raising on any old 3-card support this deal may cause a re-think.

Board 28. N/S. Dealer West

<p>♠ A Q J 9 4 3 ♥ K 9 3 ♦ K 4 ♣ 7 6</p>	<p>♠ 7 6 5 2 ♥ Q 10 7 2 ♦ 10 8 2 ♣ 10 8</p>
<p>♠ K ♥ 8 5 ♦ A Q 7 3 ♣ J 9 5 4 3 2</p>	<p>♠ 10 8 ♥ A J 6 4 ♦ J 9 6 5 ♣ A K Q</p>

Yet another slam that only Deep Finesse can bid. This one does not require clever play – just take every finesse in sight and 12 effortless tricks appear. Top score to those who choose to play in no-trump, as they should when West has no singletons. 1♠-2♦-2♠-3NT seems a reasonable auction to the top spot.