

Board 2 ♠ AKJ42 Dealer E
 ♥ K86 Vul: N-S
 ♦ K9652
 ♣

♠ 986 ♠ 53
 ♥ 1095 ♥ Q432
 ♦ A4 ♦ J1073
 ♣ KJ765 ♣ AQ3

 ♠ Q107
 ♥ AJ7
 ♦ Q8
 ♣ 109842

At the majority of tables there will be three passes to North, who will open 1♠. If playing Acol, South might just scrape up a 2♣ response, but the majority will be happy to make a simple spade raise or, if playing Drury by a passed hand, bid 2♣ as an artificial way to show a good 2/3♠ raise.

It's easy to say that North should make a game try facing a spade raise, and South accept the invitation, because we can see that the two hands fit very well together and 11 tricks can be made, but the N/S hands don't have to fit together so well and, if South has wasted club values facing the void, 4♠ could be quite challenging. I would certainly expect North to go on facing a Drury bid, but if a direct raise to 2♠ could deliver three low spades and 6 HCP, on another day passing out 2♠ could be the big winner. As has been said many times, unlike at teams scoring, there is no premium to bidding thin games at matchpoints.

If West, trading on the favourable vulnerability, opens a light 1♣ in third seat, North should make a simple 1♠ overcall rather than commit to one of his two suits by making a two-suited overcall, or trying to show all three suits in one go via a double. That will see South showing spade support, and we are back to much the same situation as if North had been allowed to open the bidding.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	4	2	5	2
S	1	4	2	5	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 3 ♠ 10742 Dealer S
 ♥ Q53 Vul: E-W
 ♦ QJ7
 ♣ Q32

♠ AKQJ ♠ 9863
 ♥ AK1094 ♥ 82
 ♦ 1085 ♦ A63
 ♣ 6 ♣ AJ84

 ♠ 5
 ♥ J76
 ♦ K942
 ♣ K10975

West will open 1♥ and East respond 1♠. West will probably think his hand too strong for a simple raise to game, so instead make a 4♣ splinter bid, showing the shortage plus game values and four-card support.

There is some danger of getting too high if East cuebids 4♦, West cuebids 4♥, and East, thinking that it is obligatory for a hand with an unshown ace to show it, goes on with 5♣.

Despite holding two aces, which up to a point makes the hand suitable for a slam hunt, East has only four low spades, no fitting heart honour, and nothing worthwhile apart from the two aces. His judgement might well tell him not to get involved in a slam auction and to sign-off in 4♠ over the 4♣ splinter. Or perhaps, in a well-oiled partnership East might be able to cuebid 4♦ but then sign-off in 4♠ over 4♥ and expect West to go on most of the time that slam is good. Add the queen of hearts or a sixth heart to the West hand, and he might make a second try on this deal.

With hearts three-three, there is not too much to the play. Declarer will win the

opening lead, whatever it may be, and play three rounds of hearts, ruffing. With the hearts established, declarer draws trumps and cashes out his 11 tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 4	♠ A9	Dealer W
	♥ K84	Vul: Both
	♦ J8652	
	♣ AJ8	
♠ Q108632		♠ KJ
♥ A653		♥ Q1092
♦		♦ AK9743
♣ 1074		♣ 6
	♠ 754	
	♥ J7	
	♦ Q10	
	♣ KQ9532	

We have another possible pre-empt where there is a four-card major side-suit to take into consideration.

Some will open with a weak 2♠ bid, though the spades are quite weak and there is a biddable four-card heart suit on the side. My judgement would be that this is not the time for an off-shape weak two bid.

If West passes, North will open either a weak NT or one of a minor according to the agreed methods. A 1♦ opening would really put the cat amongst the pigeons as it would silence East for now. South would respond either 1NT or 2♣ and West might overcall 2♠, though that is far from being compulsory with 6 HCP and when vulnerable. Two Spades could end the auction, though if South's first call was 1NT he might now compete with 3♣, and it is not at all clear what East will do when that comes round to him.

Neither is it completely clear what East will do if North opens a weak NT. Some

member of the Asptro family would work well here, as it allows a 2♣ competition based on four-card hearts and longer minor, where the currently more trendy Multi-Landy requires that the major be at least five cards in length, with 2♦ showing one major, and so a jump to 3♦ being the only option on this East hand (other than pass, of course).

E/W can make eight tricks in a diamond contract, despite the five-two split, but that is hardly good enough when game is possible in either major – not that game is likely to be bid very often, but +170 should be useful. Meanwhile, N/S make 3♣, but how often will they be allowed to play there?

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 5	♠ 863	Dealer N
	♥ KQ852	Vul: N-S
	♦ K5	
	♣ Q83	
♠ 954		♠ 72
♥ A974		♥ J103
♦ QJ63		♦ A10742
♣ J7		♣ K109
	♠ AKQJ10	
	♥ 6	
	♦ 98	
	♣ A6542	

It is easy to see N/S getting too high on this one. South will open 1♠ in third seat and North perhaps respond 2♥. If South has fallen in love with his two-suiter he will rebid 3♣ and that will get the partnership to 4♠, which is down two on accurate defence.

A less optimistic South will think to himself that he is facing a passed hand and that partner has just responded in his shortage,

which is rarely good news, so will settle for a quiet 2♠ rebid. North has a near maximum for his initial pass and also has three-card spade support. If he raises to 3♠ to invite game, South will go on and two down should again be the outcome. But should North invite game? Yes, it is possible that 4♠ is making, and it may even be a good contract, but more often than not it will not be either of those things. For the thousandth time I must say that there is no premium on bidding thin games at matchpoints; we should only want to be in those games that are at least 50% shots to make. The equation is quite different at teams scoring, where the difference between +620 and +170 is 10 IMPs, while the difference between +140 and -100 is only 6 IMPs. Now game can be a far less than 50% shot yet still be a long-term winner.

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

=====

Board 6	♠ K8653	Dealer E
	♥ K	Vul: E-W
	♦ 1043	
	♣ K843	
♠ 107		♠ A94
♥ Q7642		♥ 95
♦ 962		♦ QJ75
♣ Q92		♣ J1076
	♠ QJ2	
	♥ AJ1083	
	♦ AK8	
	♣ A5	

Some Souths will upgrade their hand and open 2NT. If they do so, North will transfer to spades and 4♠ should be easily reached.

A majority of Souths is likely to open 1♥ and rebid 2NT over the 1♠ response. Yes,

2NT, not 3NT. If a balanced hand isn't worth a 2NT opening it should not be worth a 3NT rebid. Over 2NT, there is room for North to check for a five-three spade fit, either via an artificial 3♣ checkback, or by rebidding the spades either directly or via a transfer according to partnership agreement. That, of course, once again gets to the spade game.

If it cannot be based on a balanced hand, it follows that a 3NT rebid must be based on an unbalanced hand. Some play it as showing six-three in the majors and game values, some merely a good six-card hearts suit and too good a hand for a 3♥ rebid – much as is the popular style after opening one of a minor. It's just a matter of partnership agreement, but it improves the chance of choosing sensibly between playing 3NT and four of a major.

Declarer in 4♠ can win the opening lead, unblock the king of hearts, and play on spades. Winning the return, he completes the drawing of trumps, then cashes the ace of hearts and continues with a ruffing heart finesse. The kindly heart layout results in 12 tricks, while 11 are the limit in 3NT.

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

=====

Board 7	♠ KQ8	Dealer S
	♥ K85	Vul: Both
	♦ J654	
	♣ QJ2	
♠ 10973		♠ AJ54
♥ J9		♥ A64
♦ A		♦ 873
♣ K108543		♣ A96
	♠ 62	
	♥ Q10732	
	♦ KQ1092	
	♣ 7	

Unless playing two-suited weak twos, South will pass, as will West. If North opens a weak NT, South will transfer to hearts and pass the completion. However, when West now competes with 3♣, South can introduce the diamonds and North may pass or give preference to 3♥.

Three Hearts can be made via a good guess in the trump suit, but only if the defence doesn't negotiate its diamond ruffs. If they do so, 3♥ can be down two for a disastrous -200. Three Diamonds, however, is made with a winning heart play and never more than down one. With E/W making 10 tricks in either black suit, even -100 is just fine for N/S.

It is hard for E/W to get to a spade contract, but East might certainly take the push to 4♣ over three of a red suit, as West's 3♣ balancing action must be based on a long suit and East's three aces will fit nicely opposite that.

If North opens 1♣, East may double – hardly classical distribution, but so easy to come in with the whole of the one level available for partner to respond. If South responds 1♥, a 2/3♣ bid from West should be natural, 2♥ being the cuebid for when one is required. With so many pairs playing three- and even two-card club openings these days, it's important to sort out which of our club bids are natural and which cuebids.

In all these scenarios, the auction could get quite competitive, though the vulnerability, everyone vul, should add a certain degree of caution to proceedings.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 8	♠ 95	Dealer W
	♥ AQ6	Vul: None
	♦ KJ73	
	♣ KJ43	
♠ J8		♠ Q742
♥ K98754		♥ J103
♦ 62		♦ Q1054
♣ 986		♣ A5
	♠ AK1063	
	♥ 2	
	♦ A98	
	♣ Q1072	

When I started out in this game weak two bids were mostly played as 6-10 HCP with a six-card suit. Nowadays a weak two bid may be based on a moderate five-card suit and in high-card terms can be as weak as the stomach of the bidder can tolerate. Which is my way of saying that I would open 2♥ on these West cards and expect to have a fair amount of company in so doing.

North is not quite strong enough to overcall 2NT, and has the wrong shape to do anything else, so will have to pass. East may raise pre-emptively to 3♥ and South overcall 3♠ – better than a double as the latter will tend to lose the fifth spade. North has a comfortable 3NT over that, and will play there. It is easy to see how 3NT will also be the popular contract at tables where West passes as dealer.

Declarer can win the heart lead and knock out the ace of clubs. While that establishes nine winners, this is matchpoints so declarer will want an overtrick if one is possible. He can get greedy, and rely on the diamond finesse, but that is odds against to be working after this auction. Best is to duck the second heart, win the third, and cash the clubs. When West turns up with three clubs to go with the probably six-card heart suit, the odds on the diamond finesse working get worse. However, East has been squeezed out of his fourth spade and fourth diamond, while dummy has pitched two spades. If declarer has ducked a heart, he can now either play three rounds of spades, leaving East endplayed to

lead round to the $\heartsuit KJ$, or can play ace of diamonds then finesse the jack. That loses but declarer wins the spade or diamond return and has the rest, so 10 tricks in all.

Makeable Contracts

	\clubsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
	=	=	=	==
N	6	4	1	4
S	6	4	2	4
E	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 9 \spadesuit KJ1052 Dealer N
 \heartsuit 1083 Vul: E-W
 \heartsuit 9754
 \clubsuit Q

\spadesuit Q \spadesuit 9
 \heartsuit KQ97 \heartsuit A64
 \heartsuit J1032 \heartsuit AKQ86
 \clubsuit K972 \clubsuit A843

\spadesuit A87643
 \heartsuit J52
 \heartsuit
 \clubsuit J1065

At this vulnerability there will be those who see a weak two bid in the North cards. East will double and South raise to at least $4\spadesuit$, my preference being an advance save in $5\spadesuit$ and leave the opposition to sort that out with no space at all. Five Spades doubled should be down two for -300, which is a good save against the opposing $5\heartsuit$ – but will E/W be convinced that they are being talked out of something bid a slam and go minus?

Ok, I confess, the majority of North will pass as dealer and East open $1\heartsuit$. South makes a weak jump overcall and West probably doubles to keep hearts in the game. Again, I like a jump to $5\spadesuit$ and let the opposition pick the bones out of that, but I guess that $4\spadesuit$ will be the more popular choice. East will double to show extra values and West respond $5\heartsuit$. The problem now for N/S is that if they save in $5\spadesuit$ it is much easier for E/W to judge correctly to defend than after an immediate $5\spadesuit$ raise.

There will be plenty of variety on this one, with N/S scoring very well when they go plus, and -300 not being too bad either with $5\heartsuit$ an easy make.

Makeable Contracts

	\clubsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	3
S	-	-	-	3
E	4	5	4	-
W	4	5	3	-

=====

Board 10 \spadesuit K9 Dealer E
 \heartsuit 87542 Vul: Both
 \heartsuit K73
 \clubsuit A85

\spadesuit Q875 \spadesuit J10643
 \heartsuit AJ10 \heartsuit Q
 \heartsuit 1094 \heartsuit AQ6
 \clubsuit Q72 \clubsuit KJ93

\spadesuit A2
 \heartsuit K963
 \heartsuit J852
 \clubsuit 1064

East opens $1\spadesuit$ and West raises. With 4-3-3-3 shape and only limited honour combinations, that raise should be a simple $2\spadesuit$ if just playing natural methods, and $2\spadesuit$ should end the auction. If West sees a stronger invitational raise of $3\spadesuit$ in the hand East may go on to game, though that too is a borderline action.

It takes a diamond lead and moderately careful subsequent defence to beat $4\spadesuit$, so there will be some +620s. There will also be a number of -100s, with the majority stopping in partscore and scoring either +140 or +170.

Makeable Contracts

	\clubsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-
E	3	2	1	3
W	3	2	1	3

=====

Board 11 ♠ 9 Dealer S
 ♡ 874 Vul: None
 ♢ AQ632
 ♣ K954

♠ AQ874 ♠ J1062
 ♡ KJ103 ♡ 2
 ♢ J10 ♢ 8754
 ♣ Q7 ♣ A863

♠ K53
 ♡ AQ965
 ♢ K9
 ♣ J102

If South opens 1♥, West has a 1♠ overcall and North may double. Whatever North's action, East has a classic example of a preemptive jump raise to 3♠. If that ends the auction, 3♠ cannot be beaten, which is not to say that it will always be made. Declarer will have to play on hearts before trumps, planning to get one heart trick, two heart ruffs and the ace of clubs to go with five spade tricks.

South has no reason to bid for a second time, but perhaps North will be tempted. If so eight tricks can be made in any suit other than spades, but 4♥, the most likely landing spot, should be doubled and -300 will not score well for N/S.

Everything changes if South opens a weak NT. Now West can use his bid to show both majors, and there will no longer be any danger of N/S getting too high in a heart contract. East will be happy to bid spades and, should North compete, will take the push to 3♠ which, as we have already seen, can be just made.

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

=====

Board 12 ♠ AQ62 Dealer W
 ♡ 107 Vul: N-S
 ♢ A83
 ♣ AQ83

♠ 984 ♠ K753
 ♡ K9863 ♡ AJ54
 ♢ Q92 ♢ 10
 ♣ J6 ♣ K974

♠ J10
 ♡ Q2
 ♢ KJ7654
 ♣ 1052

North may open a strong NT, and East has both majors but only four cards in each, which will dissuade most from coming into the auction. Those who do come in to show both majors will hit West with five-card heart support, and West will compete to 3♥ over South's 3♦. Three Hearts cannot be beaten, while 3♦ played by South can be beaten double dummy but rates to make far more often than not in practice.

If East does not come in, South should transfer to diamonds, and that will often see N/S declare 3♦, though East might consider a take-out double once 3♦ is reached, and will be richly rewarded for his enterprise.

If North opens either 1♣ or 1♠, East will pass, as he has the wrong shortage to double and no long suit in which to overcall. South will bid and rebid diamonds and, once again, it will be up to East to decide the board, everything depending on whether he makes a balancing double or opts to go quietly.

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

=====

Board 13	♠ 976	Dealer N
	♥ Q107	Vul: Both
	♦ Q1064	
	♣ Q97	
♠ 3		♠ A1054
♥ 843		♥ AK652
♦ AKJ952		♦
♣ 1063		♣ A854
	♠ KQJ82	
	♥ J9	
	♦ 873	
	♣ KJ2	

East opens 1♥ and South overcalls 1♠. If playing five-card majors, some Wests may raise to 2♥, but the majority are more likely to bid 2♦. Will North compete to 2♠ with three queens, three small spades and no semblance of a ruffing value? He probably shouldn't when vulnerable, but I imagine that some will.

A 2♠ bid from North sees East bullied into bidding 3♣ as he wants to do something and can no longer repeat the hearts. Well, perhaps he would have bid 3♣ anyway with his 15 HCP all in top cards even had North passed. Having already bid the diamonds, West will now give preference to hearts, and East go on to game. And if West raised to 2♥ at his first turn? East will either bid game or bid 3♣ as a game try, with West in the latter case bidding game on the strength of the two top diamonds and spade ruffing potential.

Four Hearts is a comfortable contract. Two club losers will go away on the top diamonds and declarer will have at least two spade ruffs in the dummy. If he is permitted to ruff all three small spades in dummy, North will be able to over-ruff, but that is with the long trump, and declarer will still be able to take the four heart tricks he needs to bring his total to 10.

Should South buy the contract in spades, he can be held to six tricks.

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

=====

Board 14	♠ J5	Dealer E
	♥ A10974	Vul: None
	♦ A862	
	♣ Q10	
♠ 1084		♠ A762
♥ K2		♥ J86
♦ J543		♦ KQ1097
♣ J643		♣ A
	♠ KQ93	
	♥ Q53	
	♦	
	♣ K98752	

When East opens 1♦, South may double or may prefer to overcall 2♣ but, non-vulnerable, he will surely want to do something. West can raise diamonds in either case. The hand is worth a simple raise to 2♦ but some may prefer a pre-emptive 3♦.

If South has doubled the 1♦ opening, North is worth a 4♥ bid. He will need to be careful, but taking diamond ruffs in the dummy kind of endplays him into getting the hearts right by leading the queen off dummy and picking up the king, so 10 tricks should be made. It will be important to play on spades early to set up a discard for the fourth diamond.

If South overcalled 2♣, things are less clearcut. North will be happy to bid 2♥ over West's 2♦, and South should then raise hearts and North go on to game as he can visualise the diamond shortage in dummy. It will take slightly more courage for North to bid 3♥ over a pre-emptive 3♦ on his right but, once again, he has little choice but to make the bid, and South will have an easy raise to game.

E/W cannot afford to save in 5♦, as that can be down four. Indeed, even 4♦ doubled will cost too much if South leads a black suit (a heart lead costs a heart trick).

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 15 ♠ Q73 Dealer S
 ♥ 9432 Vul: N-S
 ♦ K65
 ♣ A75

♠ 108	♠ 96542
♥ AKQJ5	♥ 10876
♦ QJ	♦ 432
♣ KQJ6	♣ 10

 ♠ AKJ
 ♥
 ♦ A10987
 ♣ 98432

When South opens 1♦, most Wests will consider that 19 HCP is too many for a simple overcall so will start with a double. If North responds 1♥, West's future plans may need to be rethought, though in fact E/W do have a solid nine-card heart fit despite the four-nil split of the suit.

East will be happy not to have to bid and South will rebid 2♣, which will also cause west to reassess the matter, as now both his suits have been bid against him. Perhaps he should still bid 2♥, but he will be a little more nervous than was originally the case.

If West passes over 2♣, North can give simple preference to 2♦. If West bids 2♥, North will like his fitting cards in both of partner's suits and the fact that he has nothing in hearts, sufficiently that he can compete with 3♦. That may end the auction, as West's hand is getting steadily worse as the auction progresses and, while East has four-card heart support, will he be willing to say so with a ten-high hand?

With diamonds playable for no loser, 10 tricks can be made in either minor despite the unpleasant club situation. Meanwhile, if West is permitted to declare a heart contract, there are a comfortable eight tricks.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 16 ♠ K54 Dealer W
 ♥ J7 Vul: E-W
 ♦ J873
 ♣ Q764

♠ QJ2	♠ A10876
♥ AQ8	♥ 5432
♦ AKQ92	♦
♣ K8	♣ AJ52

 ♠ 93
 ♥ K1096
 ♦ 10654
 ♣ 1093

Everything lies so well for E/W that 13 tricks are available in either a spade or a NT contract. Of course, firstly both major-suit kings are onside and spades split three-two. Then in a spade contract diamonds can be ruffed out to provide the thirteenth trick, while in NT that trick can come from a successful club finesse.

West has a 2NT opener. How East handles this combination will be a matter of system as much as judgement. Say that E/W are playing simple four-card Stayman. East responds 3♣ and West bids 3♦ to deny a major. Now a very good method is Smolen, in which a five-four in the majors hand now bids the four-card suit, so East bids 3♥.

West knows there is an eight-card spade fit and has no reason to do other than play with spades as trumps. The auction is forcing to game so, with a poor hand, West would jump to 4♠ now, leaving no room

for exploration. With a good hand, as this one is, West bids a quiet 3♠, which leaves room for cuebidding so implies a better hand.

If West has a good hand, East should be interested in slam, having two ace and a third first-round control. If playing straightforward methods, he cuebids 4♣ then has to sign-off in 4♠ over West's return cuebid of 4♦ as he doesn't have a heart control so can't afford to go beyond game. No matter, West has the missing control and will go on, perhaps by simply asking for key-cards, settling for the small slam on finding that one is missing. Note that the transfer element in the Smolen bid has made West declarer in 6♠ so that the heart position is protected from the opening lead.

I mentioned straightforward methods in passing. Over West's 3♠, by agreement 4♣/♦ could promise a shortage, with 3NT saying that West is interested in slam but has no shortage, i.e., having already promised five-four in the majors, is 5-4-2-2.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	6	5	7	7
W	6	6	5	7	7

Board 17		Dealer N	
		Vul: None	
	♠ 5		
	♥ AK93		
	♦ 63		
	♣ K107543		
♠	K3	♠	QJ10982
♥	1074	♥	862
♦	AK92	♦	J85
♣	AJ82	♣	9
	♠ A764		
	♥ QJ5		
	♦ Q1074		
	♣ Q6		

I would not be surprised to see a good number of Norths open the 10-point hand. If North does open 1♣, East has an clearcut weak jump overcall of 2♠, and South's best action is probably a natural and non-forcing 2NT. Holding a long suit and low point-count, North will correct to 3♣ whether West doubles or passes. If West instead competes with 3♠, nobody will have anything to add so that will often end the auction.

If North does not open the bidding East will open 2♠ and South pass. With good top cards, West is worth a game try so responds 2NT, asking, and East shows a minimum in whatever manner his methods require. It is possible that North will overcall 3♣, but this will probably not affect the final contract.

Three Spades can be made by taking the double finesse in diamonds, but not everyone will find that play, some preferring to play for the queen to fall under the ace-king, so there will be some +140s but also some -50s.

As for 3♣, only a greedy declarer who tries to drop doubleton jack-nine of trumps will go down as that will mean three trump losers. Finessing against the jack on the second round of the suit guards against the actual four-one break and ensures the contract.

N/S can also make 2NT, as East's long spades can be shut out by ducking the first spade.

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

Board 18 ♠ Q3 Dealer E
 ♥ AQ96 Vul: N-S
 ♦ 5
 ♣ KQ10975

♠ 8542 ♠ K1097
 ♥ K32 ♥ 10875
 ♦ 109864 ♦ KQ2
 ♣ 4 ♣ AJ

♠ AJ6
 ♥ J4
 ♦ AJ73
 ♣ 8632

If East opens a weak NT, the West hand looks suitable for the use of Stayman, passing whatever the response. In this case, that would lead to a four-four spade fit being found. Two Spades can be beaten by two or three tricks, but that is a big improvement on declaring INT, which can be as many as five down.

In practice, E/W are unlikely to have to worry about how many down their various contracts might go, because North can double the Stayman bid to show clubs and South will now compete with 3♣ over East's 2♠.

The board will be decided by whether N/S convert their competitive auction into a constructive one and get to either 5♣ or, even better, 3NT. With both major-suit finesses winning, even 6♣ is unbeatable, while there are also 11 tricks to be had in NT.

If East's system requires a 1♣ opening, will there be a few tables where it goes All Pass? South can lead a trump and the ace of trumps is declarer's only trick, down six for an unusual way of scoring -300.

But perhaps West will respond 1♦ or 1♠, again according to system, in the hope of finding a better trump suit. A 2♣ overcall from North should now be natural, bidding the suit shown by West being the only cuebid, and if North does overcall 2♣ South is well worth a 2NT response, over which North will probably raise to 3NT.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	6	1	3	2	5
S	6	1	2	1	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 19 ♠ 42 Dealer S
 ♥ AQ Vul: E-W
 ♦ KJ10932
 ♣ 632

♠ 10985 ♠ AJ763
 ♥ 10963 ♥ 7
 ♦ 7 ♦ Q64
 ♣ Q954 ♣ AKJ10

♠ KQ
 ♥ KJ8542
 ♦ A85
 ♣ 87

South opens 1♥ and, if playing Acol, North will respond 2♦ and East probably double. When South rebids 2♥, North may raise invitationally to 3♥. I am guessing that a majority of Souths will accept the invitation and go on to game, though in reality it is at best a borderline decision, as South should have promised six hearts for the free rebid over East's double of 2♦, and the doubleton king-queen is a bit of a negative feature.

Four Hearts can be made, but this requires some inspiration on declarer's part to pick up the diamonds and also to get back to hand to draw the third and fourth rounds of trumps – having cashed the ace and queen he will need to take a first-round finesse of the eight to get back to hand without incurring a ruff, which is not an easy play to find.

But N/S may not be permitted to declare the contract at all, as E/W have a double fit in the black suits and playing ace and another spade at some point brings home 10 tricks in a spade contract. East is surely worth a double of the 2♦ response; the question being, how enthusiastic will West be with just one queen and when vulnerable?

If N/S are playing two-over-one game-forcing, North is not strong enough to respond 2♦, but his methods may permit a jump to 3♦ to be natural, invitational, and promising at least six diamonds, though this has the disadvantage of sometimes losing the semi-heart fit. Will that make much difference? Well, East is still worth a take-out double but now South has the option of supporting diamonds rather than repeating the broken heart suit. It also adds momentum to the auction, making it a little more likely that West will take an optimistic view of his hand.

There will be +620s and perhaps even the odd +790 for E/W, and a very small number of +420s to N/S. More likely, N/S will be making nine tricks in a red-suit contract, conceding -50, -100, or just possibly -300 in 5♦ doubled.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	3	3	-	2
S	-	3	3	-	2
E	4	-	-	4	-
W	4	-	-	4	-

=====

Board 20 Dealer W
Vul: Both

♠ J32	♠ K10987
♥ QJ52	♥ A104
♦ Q2	♦ K96
♣ K1095	♣ 74

♠ AQ	♠ 654
♥ K76	♥ 983
♦ A10753	♦ J84
♣ AJ2	♣ Q863

West will usually open 1♦ and rebid 2NT over east's 1♠ response. East may, thinking that there are a lot of points between the two hands, choose to simply raise to 3NT, which will end the auction, or may check for a five-three spade fit before settling for 3NT when none comes to light.

Six Diamonds is unbeatable as the cards lie, but that requires that both spades and diamonds lie kindly, so is a contract we would only want to be in after we saw that it was making. On this friendly lie, there are 11 tricks in a spade contract or in NT if played by West – a club lead from South would hold NT to 10.

There is no reason not to play in NT, nor for it to be played by East, so +660 should be a very popular result.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 21 Dealer N
Vul: N-S

♠ Q3	♠ AJ65
♥ A984	♥ K103
♦ J1065	♦ KQ73
♣ AQJ	♣ 105

♠ 9842	♠ K107
♥ J52	♥ Q76
♦ A4	♦ 982
♣ K963	♣ 8742

If North opens with a weak NT he will play there. Double dummy, there are only seven tricks, despite the opposing cards being as kind as kind could be.

Say that East leads a spade. Declarer puts in the ten, which wins, takes the club finesse then leads a heart towards the queen. If East wins the king and clears the spades, declarer can come to three clubs, three hearts and two spades. But what if East ducks the first heart and dummy's queen scores? Declarer has to take the club finesse then give up a heart, and West can be allowed to win that heart trick and play a club to set up his king. If declarer now tries to establish a second spade

winner, the defence can take three diamonds and a club to go with the ♠A and ♥K, meaning only seven tricks for declarer.

If North opens 1♦, East will pass and South maybe scrape up a INT response and play there, play following similar lines. But, if North opens 1♣, East can double. Holding eight cards in the highest-ranking suit, E/W should win the auction and declare 2♠. That can be made with careful play but will sometimes go down. Declarer will have to get the hearts right and take a heart pitch on the queen of diamonds to succeed.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 22 ♠ 5 Dealer E
 ♥ KQ2 Vul: E-W
 ♦ AJ10753
 ♣ 542

♠ KQ976	♠ 8432
♥ 965	♥ A1087
♦ KQ9	♦ 8
♣ AQ	♣ 9863

 ♠ AJ10
 ♥ J43
 ♦ 642
 ♣ KJ107

If West opens 1♠ in third seat, North can overcall 2♦ and East make a pre-emptive raise to 3♠. South may double that to show values, feeling that 4♦ is too committal, and West will have to be disciplined to not go on to game with 16 good points.

Declarer in 3♠ will need to be careful. Unless he is able to use the thirteenth heart as a discard for the queen of clubs, he will need three dummy entries to lead twice towards the top spades and also to take the club finesse. This may require that he ruff his own diamond winner to create the extra entry.

Not everyone will make the pre-emptive raise, particularly if playing four-card major-suit openings. If East raises only to 2♠, South may compete with 3♦, having no particular interest in any other suit, and West may make a game try by doubling or bidding 3♥ according to his agreements. East will, of course, decline any such invitation.

If West opens a strong NT, North may overcall 3♦, 2♦ not being a natural bid for most these days, and that could end the auction. Three Diamonds can be made after a spade lead, but can be beaten by a club lead as this sets up a club ruff for West for the fifth defensive trick. If North passes over INT, East may use Stayman, intending to play or be dummy in two of a major even if that has to be a four-three fit. He will hit paydirt when West turns up with five spades, but maybe now North will compete with 3♦.

Makeable Contracts

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

=====

Board 23 ♠ 52 Dealer S
 ♥ KQ42 Vul: Both
 ♦ 74
 ♣ AJ854

♠ AJ1074	♠ 963
♥ J5	♥ 9876
♦ J62	♦ K1083
♣ K96	♣ Q7

 ♠ KQ8
 ♥ A103
 ♦ AQ95
 ♣ 1032

South will either open a strong NT or open 1♣/♦ and rebid INT. Either way, and whether or not West overcalls in spades, as he presumably will over one of a minor,

North will raise to game, via either Stayman or a negative double.

Even if declarer manages to untangle four heart winners, he cannot bring the total up to nine without playing on clubs, and he cannot play on clubs without allowing East to gain the lead. Assuming that West has led a spade at trick one, as is normal, the defence is in control and the contract is one down.

Double dummy, 5♣ can be made, but it is hard to see why anyone should get to play that contract.

Makeable Contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	5	2	4	1	2
S	5	2	4	1	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

=====

Board 24	♠ Dealer W	
	♥ AQ1096	Vul: None
	♦ J103	
	♣ AQ643	
♠ QJ9652		♠ K1043
♥ 74		♥ 852
♦ A65		♦ K4
♣ 95		♣ KJ87
	♠ A87	
	♥ KJ3	
	♦ Q9872	
	♣ 102	

West has a weak two opener, and that gives North a problem. North can double, getting all three suits into the game but potentially losing the fifth heart and/or club, can make a simple overcall, presumably in hearts, or can jump to 4♣, Leaping Michaels and showing at least five-five in hearts and clubs. None of these options is ideal.

Double, as already mentioned, often loses fifth cards in suits, 3♥ is very committal to one suit, and 4♣ usually delivers a better hand than this – say turn a small heart and club into the two jacks. I think that the

popular choice for those playing the method will be to overcall 4♣. If East goes quietly, that gets 4♥ from South.

Four Hearts has to fail on accurate defence, because declarer cannot set up diamonds until after drawing trumps, else he runs into a defensive ruff, but if he draws all the trumps he can no longer do all the work he requires to get rid of his minor-suit losers. There can be no diamond ruff if diamonds are trumps, so 4♦ would make, but that can only be reached if North makes a take-out double of 2♠.

But all this talk of the outcome in 4♥ may prove to be academic, as many Easts will save in 4♠, fearing that 4♥ is making and suspecting that 4♠ will be very cheap. They will be correct, up to a point, as there are just two hearts and two black aces to be lost, so 4♠ will be down only one. However, even down one is expensive if the sacrifice proves to be a phantom. For 4♠ to prove to be a good save, 4♥ will need to be let through at quite a lot of tables.

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

=====

Board 25	♠ 103	Dealer N
	♥ 1052	Vul: E-W
	♦ AK32	
	♣ AQ72	
♠ K86		♠ A542
♥ 974		♥ AKJ
♦ 6		♦ J874
♣ KJ10943		♣ 65
	♠ QJ97	
	♥ Q863	
	♦ Q1095	
	♣ 8	

If North opens a weak NT, East will not have enough to come in with such a balanced hand, and South may use

Scrambling Stayman – to respond 2♣ then pass a 2♦ response is risky, though it works this time. Imagine if partner was 3-3-2-5! So South may bid 2♣ and convert 2♦ to 2♥, promising both majors. With longer hearts than spades, North will pass and 2♥ will conclude the auction. Where nine tricks are possible in a diamond contract and eight in NT, 2♥ is not a success and can be beaten by a trick, West getting two ruffs if a diamond is led. Even if 2♥ makes on a non-diamond attack, +110 will score less well than just passing out the INT opening and scoring +120.

If North opens 1♦, East will again pass having the wrong shortage for a double, and N/S will probably play a diamond partscore, but a 1♣ opening would allow East to make a take-out double. West will only be interested if he can get into the auction at a point where he can bid clubs naturally. He can make eight tricks with clubs as trumps, and -100 in 3♣ may score OK if N/S are making various partscores at other tables.

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

=====

Board 26	♠ K765	Dealer E
	♥ 975	Vul: Both
	♦ AK98	
	♣ J4	
♠ Q42		♠ J108
♥ A1032		♥ KQ84
♦ Q7		♦ 64
♣ K632		♣ 10875
	♠ A93	
	♥ J6	
	♦ J10532	
	♣ AQ9	

This deal features yet another possible weak NT opening, this time for South.

North will use Stayman then continue with 2NT to invite game, an invitation which South, with a minimum and poor main suit, should decline. The five-four diamond fit produces five tricks so declarer has eight on top and, should West opt for a club lead, that will be nine. On a heart lead, however, the defenders can cash the first four tricks, after which West should know not to lead away from the ♣K if he was the one to win the last heart.

If South opens 1♦, West will be just short of making a take-out double, particularly when vulnerable. North will respond 1♠ but will then have to decide whether to raise a INT rebid to 2NT or jump to 3♦ as his way of inviting game. Either will end the auction, with 2NT, as we have seen, making at least +120, while 3♦ can be held to +110 but, with spades and diamonds bid, may get a club lead for a priceless tenth trick.

There is one more possibility, namely that South will open 1♦ but then raise the 1♠ response to 2♠. Holding three reasonable spades and a weak doubleton in a side-suit, this will appeal to a fair number of players. If North declares a spade contract, he can come to nine tricks by clearing spades immediately. However, facing a 2♠ raise North might bid 3♦ as his game try and, unless that is played as forcing, it is likely to end the auction.

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

=====

Board 27	♠ 8543	Dealer S
	♥ Q	Vul: None
	♦ 10865	
	♣ 10532	
♠ Q10		♠ AJ62
♥ A2		♥ K109864
♦ AJ943		♦ Q2
♣ KJ76		♣ Q
	♠ K97	
	♥ J753	
	♦ K7	
	♣ A984	

South is just shy of weak NT opener and, with no honour combinations, has no plus features to encourage an upgrade. West will therefore get the opportunity to open 1♦ at most tables and can rebid either 2♣ or INT over the 1♥ response.

If West rebids INT, 15-17, East may simply jump to 4♥, ending the auction. South has no attractive opening lead. A diamond gives declarer a third diamond trick and also a third minor-suit discard for the spades, and away goes declarer's spade loser. A spade lead is obviously fatal in this regard. A heart is risky – partner does not have to have a heart honour for his singleton – so perhaps ace and another club is the safest option. North's spots are good enough to cover the long diamonds, so there are just two discards on the clubs and South comes to the king of spades for the third defensive trick.

If West rebids 2♣, East may use fourth-suit-forcing, 2♠ being usually played as game-forcing in the modern game. When West now admits to heart tolerance, East can bid the heart game. Once again, 10 tricks are easy, with the opening lead deciding whether there is a valuable overtrick to be had.

With that spade help in dummy, East can also make 10 or 11 tricks in NT depending on the opening lead. Both +460 and +450 should score well.

Makeable Contracts	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	3	4	3	4
W	2	3	4	3	3
	=====				

Board 28	♠ Q54	Dealer W
	♥ 93	Vul: N-S
	♦ 6	
	♣ KQ95432	
♠ A972		♠ K106
♥ AJ108		♥ Q642
♦ KQ972		♦ A10543
♣		♣ 10
	♠ J83	
	♥ K75	
	♦ J8	
	♣ AJ876	

When West opens 1♦, North would make a pre-emptive jump overcall without even thinking about alternatives were he not vulnerable against not. I think he should do so anyway – 3♣ takes a lot of space away from opponents who rate to own the deal.

And indeed, E/W do own the deal, being able to make 12 tricks in any of their three suits, though 6♠ would be a little scary.

If E/W are basically left to themselves, they will discover a big diamond fit and that they both have decent values and shapely hands. If East's initial response is 1♥, I would back a competent pair to get to 6♥ more often than not and 6♦ much of the rest of the time, possibly starting with a 4♣ splinter in response to the 1♥ bid.

Now, what difference will a 3♣ overcall make? Well, firstly, not all Easts will make a negative double, some preferring to give partner the good news about the diamond fit. That may lock them out of the higher-scoring heart slam. Bear in mind also that West has both four-card majors, so it is not completely certain that hearts will be found even if East does start with a double.

Now look at the South hand. If North does not bid, South will pass throughout. If North overcalls 2♣, how high will South, with all those prospective losers in his 3-3-2-5 hand, be willing to go in support of a simple overcall? But if North has overcalled 3♣, showing a seven-card suit at this vulnerability and not much defence, surely South should raise to 5♣.

That will scare some Wests, who will fail to bid what their hand is worth. I agree, it shouldn't, but it always does, and now E/W may stop in game. West should cuebid 6♣ and commit to slam, but the slam reached rates to be 6♦, not 6♥, and that will be good for N/S.

Now you are going to tell me that 5♣ doubled costs –1100, more than the value of the E/W slam – and you will be right! But who is going to stop off to take a penalty when they have a club shortage and know there is at least one big trump fit? Pairs holding 12 cards in a suit don't get doubled and have to play there, or very rarely. Speculate to accumulate, as they say in other areas of life. Not only does it make life very hard for the opposition, who have no room to explore, but it's a fun way to play.

Makeable Contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
	=	=	=	=	==
N	1	-	-	-	-
S	1	-	-	-	-
E	-	6	6	6	-
W	-	6	6	6	-

=====