

Staffs and Shrops Simultaneous Pairs, January 2025

Auctions assume Acol with a weak no trump and weak twos in the majors.

Hand 1

N	E	S	W
1♥	X	1♠	P
2♣	P	3♥	AP

South is a little too good to give simple preference to hearts, but a conservative 2♥ would not be wrong. With a good holding in North's second suit East should lead ace and another heart to cut club ruffs. This should keep North to eight tricks.

Hand 2

E	S	W	N
P	2♥	X	P
2♠	AP		

South has a model weak two opening, and West a slightly off-shape takeout double which leaves East with a difficult decision. Two spades (bid in tempo without any hesitation or tell-tale squirming!) is probably best to keep the auction low, but this lands EW in a 3-3 fit. If South leads ♥K and switches to a trump, they can draw three rounds, leaving East to try to scramble as many tricks as they can. They should escape for two-off, which shouldn't be too bad as NS can make +110 in two hearts.

Hand 3

S	W	N	E
P	P	P	2NT
P	3♣	P	3♦
P	3NT	AP	

A club lead will hold East to nine tricks, but it's not a good idea to lead from strength round to a strong balanced hand, so South may try a more passive lead such as a heart. The ♥Q is well-placed for declarer so they should be able to make eleven tricks.

Hand 4

W	N	E	S
P	1♥	P	1♠
P	2♠	AP	

East has almost got an overcall at the first round, but really needs a six-card suit or an exceptional hand. When NS find a fit they should consider competing with 2NT to ask partner to bid their better minor. It's not a good idea to leave the opponents in a comfortable fit at the two level. However, at this vulnerability it might be wiser to

pass. Both 2♠ and 3♦ should be one off, so getting a plus score should be OK. Anyone sticking their neck out too far can expect to be doubled for a bottom score.

Hand 5

N	E	S	W
P	P	P	2NT
P	3♣	P	3♠
P	3NT	AP	

If North leads a diamond West can come to eleven tricks by knocking out ♥A, but a passive club lead is better round to the strong hand. This should hold West to ten tricks. A speculative major suit lead should be avoided after a Stayman enquiry.

Hand 6

E	S	W	N
1♠	P	1NT	P
2♥	AP		

West has an uncomfortable choice when their partner opens in their void suit. It could be right to pass so the auction doesn't get too high. The alternative of bidding 1NT risks being left to play there, or of getting a rebid of 2♠. This time those who bid are rewarded when East rebids 2♥. It's tempting to raise this with a good fit, but at pairs it's probably wiser to pass. Ten tricks can be made by setting up clubs, but only because the suits split favourably.

Hand 7

S	W	N	E
P	1♥	P	1NT
P	2NT	AP	

West has a pretty-much borderline hand for inviting game. It will only be good if East is at the top of their range. As it is, EW have a combined 22-count but even 1NT is uncomfortably high. On ♠J lead you have six tricks, and your sights should be set on avoiding a two-trick defeat (-200) rather than making the contract. A finesse of the ♣J looks as good as anything, but your luck's out. At least you will have company, and there won't be many NS pairs making a part score.

Hand 8

W	N	E	S
1♠	P	2♥	P
2♠	P	3♥	AP

East is not really strong enough to bid 2♥, but I can't bring myself to bid 1NT and possibly play there. West then cannot force to game with 3♦, so has to rebid spades. When East rebids hearts it's time to shut up. (If East responds 1NT, West can bid 2♦ and pass East's sign-off in 2♥, but East is really too good for this.) On a club lead,

East wants to lead a trump from dummy to finesse the nine (good outcome if the ten's onside) but with only one entry there's other work to do first. Overtake the $\diamond J$ and discard clubs on the top diamonds. When the ten falls continue with the nine to throw your last club loser. South can ruff, but East loses only three trumps and a spade to make the contract.

Hand 9

N	E	S	W
1♥	P	1♠	P
2♥	P	4♥	AP

North has too much slam potential to open 4♥ in the first seat. South has a great supporting hand, but after finding South with a minimum opener should be satisfied with game. On the lead of $\diamond 10$ North should win, unblock the clubs and lead $\heartsuit Q$ (a sleepy or foolish East might cover) to the ace to take discards on the clubs. When the king drops, the eight draws the last trump and two losers go on the clubs for twelve tricks.

Hand 10

E	S	W	N
P	P	P	1NT
P	2♣	P	2♦
P	2NT	P	3NT
AP			

After three passes North may open 1NT or consider the hand too good and open 1♦. On the given auction, East should lead $\clubsuit 6$ (fourth highest) and West will take the ace and return their own original fourth highest, $\clubsuit 5$. I've seen defences go wrong here, but in this case they shouldn't. East doesn't have an entry, and ducking cannot help (it's not possible for North to have QJx anyway) so they should take the first five tricks. If North starts with 1♦ and rebids 1NT, South might jump-raise to 3♦, stop there or in 3♥ if North takes another bid, alerted to the weakness in clubs. Anyone taking this route should be in for a good score.

Hand 11

S	W	N	E
P	P	2♥	X
P	2NT*	P	4♠
AP			

South might open a weak 2♦ if available, or even 3♦, but the hand isn't a classic preempt (it has too much defensive potential) and so it's better to pass. North opens 2♥, and East is a shade too strong for a strong jump overcall in spades. After a double, West bids a Lebensohl 2NT to ask East to bid 3♣ with any normal-strength double, intending to pass. East now bids the most likely game. On the $\diamond K$ lead, East needs to find a tenth trick, and the best option is to lead out two rounds of hearts, hoping the third round can't be overruffed. The only alternative is to run $\clubsuit Q$, hoping to pin a

singleton jack with North, or to find South with KJx (duck if it's covered and take a later finesse against the jack). As it happens either play works.

Hand 12

W	N	E	S
2NT	P	3♦	P
3♥	P	5♥	P
6♥	AP		

When West shows 20-22 points in a balanced hand, East is certainly worth a slam try. My choice is to transfer and then jump to 5♥, asking partner to bid slam with either good trumps or good outside controls. There's a slight risk of finding West with two small hearts, but that's unlikely. If East had a way to show hearts and ask for keycards (some play 4♣ as a good heart suit, with a follow-up 4NT as RKCB rather than quantitative) it's not as useful as it won't guarantee there aren't two losers in any suit. On the obvious ♠J lead there's a double-dummy line for twelve tricks, but no one will finesse the ♣9. With both minor-suit cards offside, the slam goes down, but any EW failing in this slam can hold their heads held high.

Hand 13

N	E	S	W
P	P	1♣	P
1♠	P	3♣	P
3♦	P	3NT	AP

Three no trump by South won't make on a diamond lead. East will win, put West in with a heart to lead diamonds through dummy. If West doesn't start on diamonds until in with the ♥A, EW have to play their cards exactly the way a declarer would: lead the nine so East can follow with the six, and then lead the jack if North doesn't cover, so East can underplay the ten, leaving West on lead. It's not so easy when you can't see partner's cards. Five clubs makes, but that's rarely the right contract at pairs.

Hand 14

E	S	W	N
1NT	2♥	P	2♠
P	3♣	P	3♠
P	4♠	AP	

North might pass 2♥, and that ought to make for a good score. Four spades might make, but it's not easy. East has a horrible choice of leads, and my try a trump to cut down ruffs (a good idea if you're strong in the side suits). If North takes the ace, plays ace and a heart, ruffing, ruffs a diamond and ruffs another heart, the suit is set up with a club entry intact. A club lead turns out to be more damaging, but that's not likely to be found.

Hand 15

S	W	N	E
1NT	P	2♥	P
2♠	P	3NT	AP

South has an awkward opening bid. It's not a crime to pass, but the hand is really too good. Opening 1♣ leaves you with a difficult rebid, so I think it's best to upgrade the hand to twelve points for the good club suit. After a transfer you find yourself in 3NT. A heart lead would leave you two off, but a diamond lead looks better with good entries to set up the suit. Now South can run for home with nine tricks.

Hand 16

W	N	E	S
P	1♥	1♠	2♥
AP			

EW should not be keen to let the opponents play in a fit at the two level, but they are vulnerable and don't have a spade fit. Three diamonds might make, or might go one off, depending on the view West takes in trumps. If South judges that 2♥ will make (as it should), they might be tempted to double 3♦ to protect their plus score. If it makes, minus 670 won't be a much worse score than -110, and +200 should be a top. I wouldn't like to judge how this will go. NS might do best to cash their three major suit winners and continue hearts, forcing West to ruff in one hand or the other.

Hand 17

N	E	S	W
1NT	P	P	2♥
AP			

I can't see the auction going any other way. North has a difficult choice of lead. In this situation, a system of elimination can work. They cannot lead a trump, nor a spade or a club away from the ace, so that leaves a black ace or a small diamond. I would try a diamond, but it wouldn't be a happy choice. South can win and switch to a spade, but after taking two rounds North is stuck again. Ace and another club bag them two more tricks, and with a trump to come that holds West to seven tricks.

Hand 18

E	S	W	N
1♦	1♠	2♦	3♦*
4♦	AP		

The first two bids are pretty normal. West has an awkward bid, being over-strength for a simple raise but lacking the shape for a double or jump raise. North could just raise to 4♠ with five-card support and leave EW to sort it out from there, but might better make an unassuming cue-bid to show spade support and ask South how good their overcall was. East has enough shape to compete further, and South is not

interested with their minimum overcall. If North leads a spade West can ruff in dummy, cross to hand in hearts and run diamonds through North. They should come to twelve tricks on the fortunate lie of the cards. Any North who does bid 4♠ and is allowed to play there should lose three hearts, a diamond and a club for a worse score of -200.

Hand 19

S	W	N	E
P	1♠	P	2♣
P	2♦	P	3NT
AP			

East should not look for a fit in the fourth suit, and just settle on 3NT, which is likely to be a good bet with that club suit. South will probably lead a small heart, and East will win and start on spades to guarantee ten tricks, losing only the top cards in hearts and the spade ace. All roads seem to lead to +630, and I predict a flat board.

Hand 20

W	N	E	S
1♥	2♣	2♥	X
P	3♣	P	3NT
AP			

The first two bids are routine, and East isn't quite strong enough to bid 2♦, so should at least show partner their heart support. South has too much to pass but no clear bid, so a takeout double is probably the best call. With two aces and three-card support for the suit of partner's vulnerable overcall they should have an eye on 3NT. West can make it awkward by raising to 3♥, but will probably pass. When North repeats their long suit, South can take a chance on 3NT. They should emerge with ten tricks if they take the right view in clubs.

Hand 21

N	E	S	W
P	P	1♦	P
1NT	AP		

East doesn't have a pre-emptive sort of hand, even if playing Lucas twos or similar. South opens 1♦, and West's suit isn't suitable for an overcall. North has an interesting choice. One spade will attract some votes, but I'd go for 1NT, as the spade suit is weak and the hand is otherwise ideal, if perhaps a shade strong. It's a hand you want the lead to come round to. If East leads ♥3 North will win and run the diamonds (if they guess right). Assuming EW keep enough winners at the end, North should be content with cashing eight tricks.

Hand 22

E	S	W	N
P	1♠	X	XX
2♦	2♥	P	3♠
4♣	4♠	AP	

This auction could develop in a number of ways. South has a clear opening bid, and West a clear, if minimum, double. North's redouble suggests 9+ points, no good fit for partner's spades and an interest in defending the opponents' doubled contract, although they will probably show their invitational three-card spade raise on the next round. With a good hand in this position, the standard ploy for East is to pass and bid on the next round, but with two suits to get in I think I would start bidding them now. South rebids hearts to show no interest in a penalty, North makes an invitational raise and South bids game over East's second suit on the strength of their distribution. As they are vulnerable, EW should stop bidding now and hope they have pushed NS too high. If South starts trumps with the king they have the option of finessing the nine when West drops an honour. The bidding will point to this line, and also experienced players know this position: West is more likely to have been dealt a singleton honour and been forced to play it than to have been dealt QJ and have chosen to play the one they played. Some Souths will play with the odds and go down.

Hand 23

S	W	N	E
1♠	P	2♣	P
2♥	P	4♥	P
4NT	P	5♥	P
6♥	AP		

North responds in their longest suit and just raises South's rebid to game. South has too many controls to pass, with a good source of tricks in spades, so will go for slam unless missing both key cards. When North shows them both (denying ♥Q as well) South could make a grand-slam try if they have sophisticated methods, but settling for six will probably be enough. You may notice they would struggle in six if the trumps split 4-1, even though North is providing two unpromised high cards in spades and diamonds.

Hand 24

W	N	E	S
P	P	P	1♠
2♥	4♠	AP	

Both West and North have almost got opening bids, and some will certainly open one or other of these hands. South is the first with a clear opening bid. Although light on high cards, they have shape and the spade suit. West's hand is no one's idea of a two-level overcall, but at love all it pays to compete the part score aggressively. North, who may have been regretting not opening, jumps to game. How many tricks

they make depends on how good South's guesses are. On a heart lead to the ace, East may find the tricky return of a small diamond and put South to the test immediately. South may put the overcaller with the ace (it's a thin clue, but better than nothing) and lose two diamond tricks, a heart and a trump if they take the finesse.

Hand 25

N	E	S	W
P	P	P	1♥
P	1♠	P	2♣
P	2♥	AP	

South might try opening 1♠ non-vulnerable in third seat, intending to pass partner's response (2♥ would be a five-card suit, of course), to put the opponents off their stride, but the spade suit isn't ideal for this action. If West opens the bidding East will respond in spades and then give simple preference for hearts. West might consider themselves worth a game try (2NT?), but East won't be interested, and will either sign off in 3♥ or pass 2NT. Three hearts should make for the loss of two diamonds and two clubs. How 2NT fares depends on how West plays the spades. If they run the queen or play ace and small to an honour they should get eight tricks. If they play ace and try to finesse the ten they will go down.

Hand 26

E	S	W	N
P	P	2NT	P
3♣	P	3♠	P
4♠	AP		

When West opens 2NT East may be tempted just to raise to three, but is more likely to bid Stayman to try to find a spade fit. As North I would lead a club to either contract, but it doesn't look to make any difference, as eleven tricks looks certain in both cases. That'll be a good score for anyone who chose no trumps.

Hand 27

S	W	N	E
P	2♣*	P	2♦*
P	2NT	P	3NT
AP			

West picks up an even stronger balanced hand this time, and opens 2♣, rebidding 2NT to show 23-24 points. East should raise to game with any useful cards, and it's not worth using Stayman with such a flat hand. North's best lead is probably a heart, trying to give nothing away and maybe find partner's long suit. At no trumps "top of nothing" is probably easiest to read from three small cards, as there is less importance of distinguishing it from a doubleton. If West puts up dummy's jack to tempt a cover, South should resist in case the layout is as shown. If West starts the clubs with a high card from hand, the fall of the ten gives them a chance to finesse

the nine and bring in the suit. (It's more likely that South had been dealt a singleton honour than both honours doubleton and chosen which one to play – see hand 22.) They can use dummy's club entry to try the diamond finesse without cost, and make nine tricks.

Hand 28

W	N	E	S
1NT	P	2♣	P
2♥	3♣	X	4♣
4♠	AP		

I don't know how the auction would go here. West will open a weak no trump, and North could overcall 3♣ directly to take away bidding space, but they'd quite like to be on lead against a no trump contract, so may pass at their first turn. After Stayman, West shows four hearts and now North may come in with 3♣. East is now in an awkward spot, and I'll bet many pairs don't have agreements here. A pass may be taken as "garbage Stayman", discouraging West from bidding again. A double should at least show values. West may take the view that East must have spades as they didn't raise hearts. Note how South's raise makes life harder for NS. NS can be held to seven tricks in clubs, but East has to lead a trump and West continue the suit at every opportunity to prevent a diamond ruff.) EW should make four spades, and eleven tricks if they run hearts through South.

Hand 29

N	E	S	W
P	P	1♣	P
1♥	P	2♦	P
2♠*	P	3NT	AP

This will be a difficult hand for those who don't have firm agreements about continuations after a reverse bid. A popular agreement is for a rebid of North's suit to be forcing, but possibly minimum, and for the lower of the fourth suit and 2NT to show weakness. Without such agreements North should be reluctant to introduce no trumps and so make a waiting bid in the fourth suit. South jumps to 3NT to show extras, and North might make a slam try with 4NT or 4♣, as they are also about an ace stronger than they might have been. South may stop in 4NT, but if they go on to 6♣ they should get a very good score. Anyone who finishes in 6NT can count themselves unlucky.

Hand 30

E	S	W	N
1♠	2♦	3♣	P
3♠	P	4♠	AP

South could double 1♠ if playing "equal-level conversion", that is, if a correction of partner's 2♣ to 2♦ would not promise extra values, but they don't really have the

high-card strength a double promises. If the auction goes as suggested they won't find their heart fit, and EW will probably end up in the making spade game. (West is stretching a bit to bid a forcing 3♣, but they should take courage from the good spade support they have.) If South doubles 1♠ EW may find themselves at the four level before they know of their spade fit, and may have to content themselves with a penalty double and one off. (East will win the first heart and lead a club for a ruff.)

Hand 31

S	W	N	E
P	1NT	P	2♦
P	3♥	AP	

East was intending to continue with an invitational 2NT over the expected 2♥ rebid, but when West jumps in the transfer suit to show a minimum with four-card support, they should pass (although I couldn't swear I'd resist the temptation to raise to game). A weak no trump usually has 7-8 losers, and when the good heart fit is revealed East can put West with the higher number if they are minimum, and their own seven is not enough for game. It looks as if game depends on a good guess in hearts – finesse the jack and you make, the king and you're one down. It needs them 2-2 as well if the honours are split (or a singleton queen with South), so it's probably better to stay out of it in pairs.

Hand 32

W	N	E	S
P	1NT	P	2♣
P	2♦	P	3NT
AP			

On a club lead (10 is best, unless playing strong tens) North will win and go after diamonds. They should scramble nine tricks before the clubs are set up, even if they try running the ♠10. If they use diamond entries to double-finesse against the ♠J they may come to ten tricks for a good score.