



Last week's winners: Monday 1/3/04

Friday 5/3/04

1st Bob/Michael 69%2nd David/Kenneth 60%1st John G/John 65%2nd Dave/Norman 65%

Interesting results (and boards) on Friday, with John/John just winning by one point. Only 3 of the 10 pairs managed above 50% – Mike (Can)/Philip got a very respectable 59% for 3rd place. I guess that the 6 ♠ doubled, making, when others were playing in 1 ♠ helped? In fact, there was a lot of 'silly' slam bidding on Friday (and Monday), you get my opinions later.

I was just kibitzing on Friday; it was great to see the Brit foursome finishing 15%+ ahead of the likes of Michael, Bob, Chuck, Clive, Hans, Alex, Jeff etc. (all less than 50%!). Rule Britannia. And Mike/Philip(also a Brit) finishing a clear 10%+ ahead of them is also quite something, eh?

Bidding Quiz**Standard American is assumed unless otherwise stated.**

Hand A	Hand B	With Hand A partner opens 1 ♣, what is your response?
♠ A862	♠ J10964	
♥ AK65	♥ J98	With Hand B LHO opens 1NT, partner overcalls 2 ♦ (natural)
♦ A543	♦ Q10943	and RHO bids 3 ♣. What do you do?
♣ 5	♣ -	
Hand C	Hand D	With Hand C partner opens 1 ♥. You respond 1 ♠ and partner rebids 2 ♦. What is your bid?
♠ K1096	♠ 105	
♥ K54	♥ -	
♦ 107	♦ K10974	With Hand D partner opens 1 ♠, what do you bid?
♣ KQJ7	♣ K98642	
Hand E	Hand F	Just 12 points, would you open with Hand E?
♠ 762	♠ K3	
♥ AQ106	♥ AKJ763	With Hand F RHO opens 1 ♠, What do you do?
♦ KQJ9	♦ 652	
♣ 93	♣ AJ	
Hand G	Hand H	With Hand G partner opens 1 ♦. Now your ♠'s are much better than your ♥'s, but we all know (I hope) that a 4 card suit is a 4 card suit. To bid 1 ♠ would deny 4 ♥'s. So you correctly bid 1 ♥ and partner raises to 2 ♥. So what now? Do you go slamming?
♠ AKQ4	♠ A7	
♥ 8743	♥ K8	
♦ 65	♦ KQ2	
♣ AK6	♣ AKQ984	What do you open with hand H?
Hand J	Hand K	Suppose that you play 2 ♣ followed by 2NT as 23-24 pts and 2 ♣ followed by 3NT as 25+ points. You open Hand J with 2 ♣ but what is your rebid?
♠ K72	♠ Q10975	
♥ AKQ	♥ 108	
♦ AKJ	♦ Q94	With Hand K partner opens 1 ♠ and RHO doubles, what is your bid?
♣ KQ72	♣ 1083	

The Beginner's Page

Responder's 2nd bid

We have already looked at the opening bid, responder's bid and opener's rebid. Time to look at what responder should do at his 2nd turn.

What you (as responder) should do depends upon your hand (obviously) but also upon what your partner had done. By the time that partner has opened and rebid you have a fair idea about his strength and shape. Quite often, his 2nd bid will have either shown a strong, invitational or weak hand and you bid (or pass) accordingly. This week we look at the situation where opener simply supports our suit: -

Hand 1	Hand 2	With these hands 1-6 partner opened 1♦. You responded 1♥ and partner bid 2♥. What do you do?
♠ A764	♠ A764	With Hand 1 you should pass. You have a minimum and partner has shown no more than a minimum.
♥ A754	♥ AK54	With Hand 2 you have game values – so bid game! 4♥.
♦ 987	♦ Q87	
♣ 85	♣ 85	
Hand 3	Hand 4	So that's quite simple, pass with a minimum and bid game with game values (an opening hand +). But what if you are non-min but not sure of game? Simple, we invite partner, by bidding 3♥: -
♠ AJ64	♠ A864	Hand 3 has 11 points and so you invite game by bidding 3♥.
♥ AQ54	♥ AQ542	Hand 4 also has 11 points, but this hand has improved when partner has supported your 5 card suit. So bid game, 4♥.
♦ 987	♦ J8	
♣ 85	♣ 85	

Actually, there are more sophisticated ways to invite game rather than simply bidding 3 of the suit (trial bids), but that's for a later date.

Hand 5	Hand 6	Sometimes we will be dealt a hand that is too strong to simply sign off in game.
♠ A764	♠ AJ64	Now you need around 33 combined points to make a small slam in a suit when you have a fit. Opener has promised about 13+ and so both of these hands are worth slam.
♥ AQ1086	♥ AK543	Simplest is just to bid 6♥ with both of these.
♦ K7	♦ K873	
♣ A5	♣ -	

So that's all quite straightforward. If opener supports our suit then we take charge, by either passing, inviting or bidding game or looking for slam. Incidentally, I selected hands 5 & 6 carefully as they do not require to know how many aces partner has, slam is a good prospect whatever. You can establish how many aces partner has by bidding Blackwood (4NT) and I will cover that later.

Summary. When partner opens and you respond in a new suit (a major in our examples), both hands are unlimited. When partner simply supports your suit then that bid is not forcing (about 12-15 points). It is up to you to make the next move. Pass with a minimum (about 6-10), invite (3♥ in our examples) with an invitational hand (about 10-12) and bid game with more (good 12+).

Next week we'll look at what to do when opener has introduced a 3rd suit.

Obey The Law!Board 17 from Friday 27th, love all.

I've said it many times - compete to the total number of trumps.

Dealer:	♠ K62		West	North	East	South
North	♥ AJ643					
Love all	♦ Q74		-	pass	pass	pass
	♣ 64		1♣	1♥	2♣ (1)	2♥
			3♣ (2)	pass	pass	3♥ (3)
♠ A94	N	♠ Q108	4♣ (4)	pass	pass	pass
♥ 9	W E	♥ 1085				
♦ KJ103	S	♦ A86				
♣ KJ852		♣ Q1097	4♣ went 1 off for a poor score to E-W, so who bid one too many? Let's look: -			
	♠ J753					
	♥ KQ72					
	♦ 952	(2) The 2♣ bid at (1) would normally be 4 card support and so				
	♣ A3	3♣ here is fine.				
		(3) With 4 trumps South can happily compete to the 3 level.				
		(4) But this is one too many.				

East has only promised 4 ♣'s and so West's 4♣ bid is too much according to The Law. And what happened? 4♣ was bid at two tables and went minus one at both. West should be content with pushing N-S up to the 3 level (3♥ does not make).

A 5-3 fit or 3NT?Board 15 from Friday 5th, N-S vul

North (C)	South	West	North	East	South
♠ K1096	♠ 7	-	-	-	1♥
♥ K54	♥ AQ1093	pass	1♠ (1)	pass	2♦ (2)
♦ 107	♦ A5432	pass	2NT (3)	pass	3♦ (4)
♣ KQJ7	♣ A2	pass	3NT	all pass	

First, what can we say about the bidding? 1♠ at (1) is correct even if playing 5 card majors, do not support partner's 1♥ opening with 3 cards if you have 4 ♠'s – a possible 4-4 ♠ fit is preferable to a 5-3 ♥ fit. 2♦ at (2) is obvious. 2NT at (3) is not wrong but it is non-forcing and this is a lovely 12 count, I would bid 3NT. 3♦ at (4) accepts the game invitation and shows 5-5. So should West then bid 4♥ or 3NT? Close. South is known to have just 3 cards in the black suits, but I agree with the 3NT bid – North has ♣'s well stopped and the contract is played from the correct hand (the one with the ♠ tenace). You are very unlikely to get a ♦ lead on the bidding and a ♣ or ♠ lead will not hurt. Well bid Norman/Dave.

And what happened? 3NT was bid at just one other table and either made +1 or +2 for the two top scores. 4♥ was bid the other 3 times and made 10 tricks exactly on every occasion for the joint bottom. It looks like 4♥ should make +1 (5 ♥'s, 4 ♣'s, ♦A and a ♦ ruff) but East can over-ruff the 3rd ♦.

The bottom lines. I said just last week that 3NT is sometimes preferable to 4♥/♠ with a 5-3 fit. Think about 3NT if you have the outside suits well stopped. Also, if it's a close decision (as this one) think about who is declarer and the opening lead. This North hand should try to be declarer with this ♠K.

1♠ or slam?

Dealer: ♠ 742
 East ♥ AQJ7
 N-S vul ♦ 8532
 ♣ A3

♠ 105 N ♠ AKQJ9
 ♥ - W E ♥ K8652
 ♦ K10974 S ♦ AJ
 ♣ K98642 ♣ 10

♠ 863
 ♥ 10943
 ♦ Q6
 ♣ QJ75

Table A:

West (D)	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	pass
pass (1)	pass		

Board 2 from Friday 5th, N-S vul.

Yes, this really did happen on Friday.

Table B:

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	pass
2♣ (2)	pass	3♥ (3)	pass
3NT (4)	pass	4NT (5)	pass
5♣	pass	5NT (6)	pass
6♥	dbl (7)	pass	pass
6♠ (8)	dbl (9)	all pass	

Table C:

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	pass
1NT	pass	2♥ (9)	pass
2♠	pass	4♠	pass
pass	pass		

So then, three entirely different auctions! Which do you think is sensible? Let's see: -

Table A: Nothing on earth could bring me to pass 1♠ with this hand. It does not have the values for a two level response but 1NT is the correct bid at (1), especially if you play 2/1. You do not need a balanced hand for the 1NT response over partner's 1♥/♠ opening – it is sometimes a 'courtesy' bid when you have a few points but cannot support partner and have insufficient values for a two level bid (11 points). If you pass with 6 points then you may well miss game (or slam?!) if partner has a strong hand.

Table B: This West took a rather more optimistic view! Clearly not enough for a two level bid (playing a strong NT you need 11+), but he mistakenly thought that he could not bid 1NT at (2) with a void! The rest of the auction was amusing, East was obviously going slamming once partner had promised 11+ points! 3♥ at (3) is sensible if partner is likely to pass 2♥. I don't really like 3NT at (4), I would bid 3♠. Nobody really knew what 4NT at (5) was (it should be natural – quantitative; the ace ask (Gerber) is 5♣ over a 3NT bid). Anyway, West was not sure and indicated his dearth of aces. 5NT at (6) can only really be asking for kings and there we are in the slam zone. Now obviously a few wheels had come off here, and if North had had the wit to pass (let it be) then East would have had no reason to suppose that West preferred ♠'s and may well have passed 6♥! However, would you fail to double a slam holding AQJ7 in trumps and another ace? Be honest now. Anyway, West finally gave preference at the 6 level (8) and the slam rolled home thanks to the fortunate ♦Q position.

Table C: A sensible auction at last. Although 3♥ at (9) is an excellent alternative.

The bottom lines. Don't pass partner's opening with 6 points. A 1NT response to a 1♥/♠ opening may be *any* shape (6-10 pts). Know what bid asks for aces. It's usually best to agree trumps before Blackwood. Don't be too quick to double if opponents are in a silly contract and can run into a better one. Supporting partner is usually better than bidding NT - so 3♠ at (4).

Responding to Partner's 1♥/♠ Opening

Obviously, after the last hand, a few words on the 1NT response to an opening 1♥/♠ are in order. Playing Standard American (or any strong NT system) you need a good 10+ or 11 points to respond with a new suit at the two level. When partner is inconsiderate enough to open 1♥/♠ this does not leave much bidding space and often an off-beat 1NT is the only option (just one reason why I don't like to play 4 cards majors, especially with a strong NT). So, 1NT over partner's 1♥/♠ opening could be just about anything; consider the following, partner has opened 1♠ in all cases and we are playing Standard American: -

Hand 7	Hand 8	Hand 9	Hand 10	Hand 11	Hand D
♠ 92	♠ 92	♠ -	♠ 64	♠ K4	♠ 105
♥ KJ8732	♥ KJ8	♥ QJ982	♥ AKJ8	♥ AKJ83	♥ -
♦ 6	♦ Q965	♦ K872	♦ AJ63	♦ AJ63	♦ K10974
♣ QJ65	♣ Q963	♣ Q653	♣ Q54	♣ K6	♣ K98642

Hand 7: Bid 1NT. If partner rebids 2♣ then pass. If partner rebids 2♦ then bid 2♥ - this shows a weak hand with long ♥'s. If partner rebids 2♥ then think about a 4♥ game! If partner bids 2♠ then he has a 6 card suit and so passing 2♠ is fine. Of course if partner's rebid is pass then that may not work out too well – one good reason for playing a forcing NT here – more of this later.

Hand 8: Bid 1NT. This is the opposite side of the coin. You have a genuine NT shape and would not mind if partner passed your 1NT bid.

Hand 9: Bid 1NT and pass a 2♣/♦ rebid from partner. If partner rebids 2♥ then game may be there, invite with 3♥. If partner rebids 2♠ he has a 6 card suit so it's not too bad.

Hand 10: Now here you have game (and possibly slam), too strong for 1NT. So you bid 2♦. There is no need to jump, 2♦ is forcing. And you cannot bid 2♥ as that promises a 5 card suit.

Hand 11: 2♥. Here you can bid 2♥ as you have a 5 card suit. Slam is definitely a possibility, but it could be in any strain, that's why I would not jump to 3♥ - it takes up unnecessary bidding space and it is by no means certain that ♥'s is going to be the final contract.

Hand D: So now you know enough to realise that 1NT is the bid with this hand!

Now as the 1NT response can be virtually any shape, even with singletons/voids, it would sometimes be very difficult to play in 1NT if opener passes. This is just one of the reasons why the superior 2/1 system has a forcing 1NT here – opener cannot pass.

A Word about the weak NT

I have repeatedly said that you need 11 points to respond with a new suit at the two level. But if you play a weak NT it is different – 8 points are sufficient. This is probably the main advantage of playing a weak NT – you do not have to respond with a distorted 1NT quite so often and can tell partner what you really have.

Take our 'problem' Hand D for example. As I said, 2♣ is way over the top playing Standard American; but playing a weak NT then I would stretch and bid 2♣ over partner's 1♠ opening. And Hands 7 & 9 are simpler, you can bid 2♥.

Overcall or double first?

Board 10 from Friday 5th, both vul.

Dealer:	♠ J	West (K)	North	East	South (F)
East	♥ 953				
both vul	♦ AKJ10873	-	-	1♠ (1)	dbl (2)
	♣ 42	2♠ (3)	3♦ (4)	3♠ (5)	dbl (6)
		pass	4♦ (7)	pass	pass (8)
		pass			
♠ Q10975	N	♠ A8642			
♥ 108	W E	♥ Q4			
♦ Q94	S	♦ -			
♣ 1083		♣ KQ9765			
	♠ K3				
	♥ AKJ763				
	♦ 652				
	♣ AJ				

I have a lot to say about this bidding (as always?). In fact every player made at least one bid that I do not particularly care for (what's new?), so let's have a look: -

- (1) When 5-5 in the black suits it is debatable if you should open 1♣ or 1♠. When 5-6 then 1♣ is surely best, especially as this ♠ suit is rather poor. Having said that, opening 1♠ worked quite well here.
- (2) So, double (with the intention of bidding ♥'s next go) or simply overcall 2♥? A nice hand, but overcalling 2♥ is probably enough although I would not criticise the double too much. But bear in mind that a two level overcall, vulnerable, shows values for an opening hand +.
- (3) There's only one 'real' bid here - 4♠! Obey The Law. A 4♠ bid here certainly would make it difficult for South to show his ♥'s!
- (4) After West has bid, North does not have to. So 3♦ here is a free bid and shows values.
- (5) It looks like opponents have game, maybe slam, in ♦'s or ♥'s, perhaps 4♠ is the bid here?
- (6) This is the problem with doubling instead of overcalling initially (and it should have been a lot worse if East or West had gone to 4♠). Anyway, they did not and so South is off the hook. He doubled initially with the intention of bidding ♥'s later. Unfortunately he is now up at the 4 level (or you could say fortunately – it could have been the 5 level), but partner has shown values and 4♥ is the bid now. Double here shows extras and leaves it up to partner. Unfortunately it says nothing about this great ♥ suit!
- (7) It's obviously correct not to defend, but partner has shown extras and 5♦ (even 6♦?) is certainly worth considering. Surely a near solid 7 card suit is worth more of a noise?
- (8) Either 4♥ or 5♦ are worth considering here. I would bid 4♥, but then I would have last go.

And what happened? 4♦ made +2 for a poor score. One N-S pair were allowed to play in 4♥ making +3! All the other E-W pairs sacrificed correctly in 4♠ or 5♠. I guess that 6♦ or 6♥ are difficult to reach - but quite possible if South had bid 4♥ at (5) or if North had made more of an effort. But 4♥, 5♦ or 5♥ should certainly be reached. Should North be looking for 6♦ after partner's strong bidding? Possibly, 6♦ is an excellent contract - 6♥ may catch a Lightner double and thus a ♦ lead? But then South may run to 6NT and what can E-W do about that? (It even makes an overtrick on a non ♠ lead). As I said, some interesting hands on Friday.

The bottom lines. A simple overcall is often best in preference to a double – especially if the opponents compete. If your RHO doubles, then make life difficult for them and support partner pre-emptively to the limit of The Law (so 4♠ at (3) in this case). If you think that your hand is good enough to double and then bid your suit, then follow that plan through! A near solid 7 card suit with a singleton in opponent's suit is worth more than a squeak.

Worth a raise?

Dealer: ♠ K5
East ♥ K1073
Both vul ♦ AK865
♣ 108

♠ A87	N	♠ Q32
♥ AQ42	W E	♥ 65
♦ J	S	♦ 72
♣ KJ963		♣ AQ7542
	♠ J10964	
	♥ J98	
	♦ Q10943	
	♣ -	

So, two very different evaluations of their support by the three South's. There are number of interesting points in this bidding: -

Board 10 from Monday 1st, both vul.

Table A:

West	North	East	South(B)
-	-	pass	pass
1NT (1)	2♦ (2)	3♣	5♦ (3)
dbl (4)	pass	pass	pass

Table B:

West	North	East	South
-	-	pass	pass
1♣ (5)	1♦ (6)	2♣	pass (7)
3♣	pass	pass	pass

Table C:

West	North	East	South
-	-	pass	pass
1♣ (5)	1♦ (6)	3♣ (8)	pass (9)
3♥	pass	pass (10)	pass

- (1) How many times must I say that opening 1NT with a singleton is not allowed? What's wrong with the obvious 1♣?
- (2) Natural.
- (3) Nice shape and intermediates, so definitely worth a raise. But to the 5 level?
- (4) There is a saying in Bridge, bid your hand just once. This West has already made a distorted bid of 1NT, but at least his partner now knows that he has 15-17 points. So why on earth double with a singleton trump and 5(!) card support for partner's suit. Two terrible bids.
- (5) The obvious opening.
- (6) The 1♦ overcall is best here. Double would work out badly if partner bids ♠'s.
- (7) Apparently this player had been taught that you need 6 points to support partner. Perhaps, but you have to adjust for number of trumps, shape and intermediates etc. There is a case for 2♠, 2♦, 3♦, 4♦, or 5♦; but not pass!
- (8) Another reasonable option, showing 10-12 points in support of ♣'s.
- (9) Again, supporting partner's ♦'s is in order.
- (10) I've seen a silly pass like this before (Well excuse me for bidding my hand – news sheet 39). Presumably this East thought as Ian did then – *'I've already bid my hand – it's up to you if you want to bid again – I'm not going to'*? Really silly of course. West has a good hand and 3♥ here is natural and a game try – quite reasonable. East should, of course, bid 4♣.

So what is the 'correct' bid at (3) or (7) or (9)? 4♦ looks about right to me, but some people think that 4 of a minor is for children. OK. I certainly would not argue with the 5♦ found by Bob/Michael, but pass, 2♦ or 3♦ are all too feeble for me.

And what happened? 5♦ doubled made, +750, a top. 3♥ went 3 off, so -300 for a poor score. All the other tables were in reasonable contracts (either 4♦ by N-S or 3♣ or 5♣ by E-W).

A 2NT opener or what? – part 1

Board 12 from Friday 5th, N-S vul.

North (J)	South	West	North	East	South
♠ K72	♠ 862	pass	2♣ (1)	pass	2♦
♥ AKQ	♥ J9763	pass	3NT (2)	pass	pass (3)
♦ AKJ	♦ 7	pass			
♣ KQ72	♣ J864				

3NT is not the best contract (4♥ is),
but how should the bidding go?

- (1) How do you bid a balanced 25 point hand? Some bid 2♣ followed by 3NT, others simply open 3NT. Before I go into what is most definitely (in my opinion) the best method, let's just have another look at this North hand. I said 25 points, but is it? No! I keep on saying it, deduct a point for 4333 type shape. Also, AKQ and AKJ in 3 card suits are not worth 9 or 8 points resp. etc. So this hand is really only a poor 23-24 points. The correct bid is 2♣ followed by 2NT at (2).
- (3) South is in a bit of a bind now. To transfer (4♦) at (3) could work out best (it would on this occasion), but not always. The answer is that this sequence 2♣ - 2♦ - 3NT is silly as it inhibits the use of Stayman and transfers below 3NT. Far better to use Benjamin twos so that 2♦ - 2♥(relay) - 2NT shows 25+ and is game forcing. Then you can use Stayman/transfers at the safe level below 3NT.

And what happened? 3NT made +1 on all of the 4 occasions it was bid. Only Dave/Norman bid to the excellent 4♥ making +1, and they don't even play transfers!

A 2NT opener or what? – part 2

Board 4 from Friday 5th, both vul.

West (H)	East	West	North	East	South
♠ A7	♠ KJ10982	2NT (1)	pass	3♥ (2)	pass
♥ K8	♥ A105	3♠	pass	6♠ (3)	all pass
♦ KQ2	♦ A108				
♣ AKQ984	♣ J				

6♠ is not the best contract (7NT is, and 6NT ain't bad),
but how should the bidding go?

- (1) How do you bid a semi-balanced 21 point hand? Obviously open 2NT, which is what everybody (I think) opened on Friday. So obvious? You've guessed it – I disagree! Just look at that West hand. If you think that this ♣AKQ984 is worth 9 points (the same as the ♥AKQ nothing of the previous hand), then you simply do not understand Bridge – read up on hand evaluation. This is *not* a 21 point hand! It's more like 24. So open 2♣ followed by 2NT.
- (2) If West opens correctly then East, with a good 6 card suit and a hand bristling with intermediates should probably bid the grand. Opposite a mere 2NT opener then 6♠ is probably correct; playing RKCB I would try Blackwood at (3) and bid 7NT or 7♠ only over a 2 key cards + ♠Q response. You just have to agree which bid is RKCB at (3)! 4NT?

What happened? 6♠ scored poorly. 6NT was reached twice. Only Dave/Norman bid to the excellent 7NT. However, their bidding (2NT - 4♣ - 4♠ - 5♣ - 5NT - 7NT) is far too optimistic for me. The East hand is only worth a small slam if West opens just 2NT unless he has ♠Q.

The bottom lines (for both of the above hands). AKQxxx is good, AKQ in a 3 card suit is not. If you think that they are both 9 points then you need to read up on hand evaluation. Play Benjamin twos - the 3NT opener (either directly or via 2♣) with 25+ points sucks. Piglets

Good enough for slam? – part 1

Board 17 from Monday 1st, love all

North	South (A)	West	North	East	South
♠ K1075	♠ A862	-	1♣	pass	2♦ (1)
♥ 8	♥ AK65	pass	2♠	pass	3NT (2)
♦ J7	♦ A543	pass	pass	pass	
♣ AKJ862	♣ 5				

I've mentioned this a few times before, a jump shift response shows a good long suit. Obviously this ♦ suit complies with neither, a simple 1♦ response is called for at (1). And what about 3NT at (2)? Really silly with a known 4-4 ♠ fit.

So how should the bidding go? How about 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♠ - 4♠ - pass.

South has (maybe just about) the values to look for a ♠ slam at his 2nd turn, but I would not because (a) a singleton in partner's 1st bid suit is not usually good, and (b) this ♠ suit is really not slam quality. So settling for 4♠ is the best bid.

And what happened? The sensible 4♠ contract was reached at just two tables for a good score. Two tables overbid (to 5♠ and 6♠ and both went down). The silly 3NT was reached at two tables; one made exactly for a poor score, one managed 3 overtricks! Presumably the semi-psyched 2♦ bid confused the defence?

The bottom lines. Look for the 4-4 fit. Axxx or Kxxx are usually not good enough suits to look for slam with just a 4-4 fit unless you know that partner has a good suit. A singleton in partner's first bid suit is not good. The jump suit response shows a *good long* suit.

Good enough for slam? – part 2

Board 3 from Friday 5th, E-W vul.

North (G)	South (E)	West	North	East	South
♠ AKQ4	♠ 762	-	-	-	1♦ (1)
♥ 8743	♥ AQ106	pass	1♥ (2)	pass	2♥
♦ 65	♦ KQJ9	pass	4NT (3)	pass	5♦
♣ AK6	♣ 93	pass	6♥	all pass	

The slam was hopeless. Anybody to blame or just unlucky? Let's see: -

- (1) Just 12 points, so do you open? Yes! The shape is reasonable and with all the points and good intermediates in the long suits, this is a very sound opener.
- (2) Obviously you bid 1♥ (and not 1♠) I hope. Never deny a 4 card major (even 8743).
- (3) Blackwood. Did you go slamming with Hand G in this week's quiz? I hope not! This hand (especially with the miserable trumps and small doubleton in partner's first suit) is nowhere near good enough to look for slam. 4♥ is the correct bid.

And what happened? Even with one of the club's top declarer players at the helm, the contract went two off. Even 4♥ went one off at another table – I can't imagine how! One North subsided in a pathetic 3♠ (two off – do not deny a 4 card major! – got that Mike/Philip?). And there is always one pair who cannot find the 4-4 fit and land in an inferior 3NT (it's no excuse if you make +2, eh John/John?). Am I right or am I right, John?

The bottom lines. As I said above, Axxx or Kxxx are not usually good enough to look for slam in a 4-4 fit. xxx is nowhere near! xx is not a good holding in partner's 1st bid suit. You generally need 31++ points for a slam when you have a fit, 16 opposite a minimum hand is not enough. And zero points in partner's two suits is a big BIG minus!

Bidding Quiz Answers

- Hand A: 1♦ (or 1♥ if that is your style). Do not jump to 2♦ (or 2♥) as that bid promises a better, longer suit.
- Hand B: 4♦ (or 5♦ perhaps, depending upon how good a declarer partner is?). Anything else, especially pass, is rather pathetic. I would not mention this ♠ suit as you already have a fit and you don't really want ♠'s led if you end up defending.
- Hand C: 3NT or 4♥. The ♥ Kxx are excellent, and with good intermediates this hand is worth game. I think that 2NT or 3♥ are underbids. So, 3NT or 4♥? Perhaps a matter of style with a 5-3 fit. 4♥ is certainly not wrong but I would bid 3NT as you have the black suits well stopped and it may be necessary to protect the ♠K from the opening lead.
- Hand D: 1NT. A process of elimination. You cannot pass with 6 points and you need 11 (or a good 10) points to bid a new suit at the two level. The 1NT response to a 1♥/♠ opening is 6-10 points and may be *any* shape. This is a good hand if you play 2/1 as 1NT would then be forcing - you don't really want to be left in 1NT with a void and you will always find a 5/6-3 minor suit fit or the 5-2 ♠ fit.
- Hand E: Open 1♦. With two good suits and good intermediates it's well worth an opener.
- Hand F: 2♥. You could double and then bid ♥'s later, showing a hand too strong for a simple overcall, but I'm not convinced that this hand is that good. 2♥ looks fine to me (and is simpler, especially if there is competition).
- Hand G: 4♥. This hand has 16 points and a fit for partner. Often enough for slam, but not with these pathetic trumps. Partner's minimal rebid promises no more than about 12-15 points (and it could be just 3 card ♥ support!). 4NT is a *gross* overbid. Now you could find out if partner is maximum by means of a game try (I explained this in news sheet 5) but I would not even bother. Even if partner is max with 4 ♥'s this ♥ suit is too pathetic to look to slam for me. A small doubleton in partner's 1st suit is also an ill omen, a ♦ honour would improve this hand (but not by enough).
- Hand H: 2♣, followed by 2NT, showing a (semi) balanced 23-24 (or 22-24). A 2NT opener is 20-22 (or 20-21 in the modern style). This hand is worth far more. If you opened 2NT (and most of our players did) – including a few of our top players, then perhaps you should read up on hand evaluation? There's a whole appendix in the 2003 yearbook, I'll lend it to you if you don't have your own copy.
- Hand J: 2♣, followed by 2NT. This is a miserable 25 pts. With it's totally flat shape and top honours in the short red suits, downgrade to a (poor) 23-24 pts.
- Hand K: 4♠. When RHO doubles it's best to play jumps to 3♠ and 4♠ as pre-emptive. Partner has 5 trumps, so with 5 card support bid what The Law dictates - 4♠. With only 4 ♠'s then a pre-emptive 3♠ would be in order. If you have a stronger hand which warrants a genuine raise to 3♠ or 4♠, then you bid 2NT first. The 2NT bid in this situation is conventional (good raise of partner's suit) as with a genuine 2NT bid you would redouble.

Summary of Friday

As I said earlier, Friday's hands were very interesting. 7 out of the 10 pairs scored less than 50%. Every one of our leading players made a number of bidding mistakes – except me, that is. Now of course some members may not consider me a 'leading player' – but then I am not included in the statistics as I did not play! I am, however, indisputably our leading kibitzer – just call me Oscar. Nobody is better at telling you what you should have done after the event!