



Regional Improvers Pairs – Sunday 3 July 2016

I have assumed for this commentary that most participants will be playing a 12-14 NT and 4 card majors. I have not commented on hands where some may have a gadget such as Multi 2♦ or Lucas 2 bids or where some may play 5 card majors or a strong NT. Hopefully this caters to a significant majority.

1	Q643
North	872
None	KJT
	K52
JT972	A85
Q9	654
AQ5	8632
J76	AT8
	K
	AKJT3
	974
	Q943

If South passes because of the stiff ♠K the hand will be thrown in for a dull start to proceedings. Most I expect will open 1♥ and the bidding will proceed 1♠-2♣-2♥-Pass. West may get involved with a 1♠ overcall or if not then may well protect with 2♠ over 2♥. So the probable contracts will be 2♥ by South or 2♠ by West with 3♥ a less likely outcome if North takes the push. With good defence 2♥ should make on the nose losing 2 ♣s and a trick in each other suit. And unless West can see the NS hands 2♠ is likely to go off, losing 1 trick in ♣s and 2 in the other suits. So the most common scores should be +110 and +100 for NS with the more active EWs coming out on top.

2	QJT75
East	K92
NS	K
	A865
A43	K86
JT84	A53
AT653	J9
4	QJT97
	92
	Q76
	Q8742
	K32

Those who stick to point count will pass the East hand while others will deem it worth a 1NT opener. After a Pass the bidding will go to North who will open 1♠, East will come to life with 2♣, South 2♦ and North will end the bidding with 2♠. After 1NT by East, West may pass but many would use Stayman to try to improve the contract. If West passes then North has to decide whether to bid vulnerable. Those with gadgets like ASTRO (or ASPTRO) would bid 2♦ to show ♠ and another suit. But if North bids then NS will again get to 2♠. Only if West and North pass 1NT will EW get to play the hand. 1NT by EW ought to make as long as they play on ♣s – duck the ♠ lead, win the 2nd with the ♠A and play a ♣ will give at least 7 tricks. NS in 2♠ are likely to go 1 off losing 2 trumps, 2 ♥s and a trick in both minors. So 1NT will have to make an overtrick to beat +100 for 2♠-1.

3	K75
South	AQ954
EW	Q
	K987
J	A9864
J762	3
J54	K72
AQJT5	6432
	QT32
	KT8
	AT9863

This one is a little easier to predict the bidding. North will open 1♥, South will bid 2♦, North 2♥ and South should bid game with his 3 trumps and a void. Despite Deep Finesse saying that 11 tricks can be made 4♥ is no walk in the park! East has an unattractive lead and will probably try the ♠A or a ♣. The play is a lot harder to predict than the bidding but the ♠A or a ♣ lead (discard in dummy) is helpful to declarer, so there will be some who make their 10 tricks, but others will find it too tricky to manage. I can see a few +140 for those who were too timid to bid game, some +420 and some -50 scores. Those making 4♥ will score well.

4	Q973
West	KJ
All	QJT7
	KQT
T8	K52
AT963	Q754
A4	K85
AJ73	865
	AJ64
	82
	9632
	942

West will open 1♥, North should double, 2♥ by East (with a 4333 distribution this is not the time to launch into 3♥) and the spotlight is on South. Despite the meagre 5 points South should bid 2♠. EW may well go to 3♥ so the contracts will be mostly 2♠ by NS or 3♥ by EW. Against 2♠, if EW find their ♦ ruff then 8 tricks will be the limit (even if East doesn't lead one the ♥ guess should be clear once East has shown up with the ♠K and ♦K). Without a ♦ ruff 2♠ can make 9 tricks if the trumps are picked up without loss – small to ♠J then lead the ♠Q to pin the ♠10. 3♥ will go one off losing a trump and 4 black suit tricks. So again the more aggressive bidders who get to 3♥ will win the day with -100 against -110 or -140.

5	A9732
North	JT6
NS	94
	K32
QT	K854
AK8	Q954
J8	AQ2
AQJ975	86
	J6
	732
	KT7653
	T4

Another 11 pointer for East. This time I think pass is clear with no fillers (10 & 9) and no suit with a source of tricks. Surely no one will try 3♦ on the South hand vulnerable! So West will open 1♣, North isn't really good enough for 1♠ so 1♥ from East, 3♣ from West with such a good hand and 3NT from East which I expect will be the (almost) universal contract. South will lead a ♦, the ♣ finesse fails but ♥s are 3-3 so 11 tricks are there. Note that North should duck the ♣K the first time (quickly!) to make life more difficult for declarer. If East comes back to hand to finesse again with the ♥Q it blocks the suit and although 11 tricks can still be made as the cards lie this might gain a trick or two. So a lot of +460 scores for EW and anything less will score badly.



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6	KT2
East	A7
EW	T5
	KQ9765
Q98	J64
J93	KQT82
A986	KQJ
AT3	42
	A753
	654
	7432
	J8

This one could turn out badly for EW. I can see some in 2NT after East opens 1♥ and West bids 2NT. If North leads his 4th best ♣ then this will set up 8 tricks for the defence for 3 off vulnerable – ouch! A couple of things might prevent this happening – if East decides to open 1NT or if EW are playing 5 card majors. The first is less likely with a good ♥ suit. Playing 5 card majors West would bid 2♦ over 1♥ then raise 2♥ to 3♥. 3♥ will make for a good score. Against 2NT by West, North should really lead a low ♣ but some might try the ♣K after which it becomes more murky. If South unblocks the ♣J (which might be right if North has a very strong suit) and declarer ducks then North has a tough decision to make – does South have the ♣10 as well? 3 off can still be achieved but it is less easy.

7	T2
South	Q865
All	A53
	KJ75
QJ843	AK97
94	AT
T8742	QJ96
A	986
	65
	KJ732
	K
	QT432

Ignoring any pairs who play Lucas 2 bids or the like who would open the South or West hands, the bidding will pass round to East who will open 1NT. Most vulnerable Souths will pass and West will transfer with 2♥. East has a hand (max with 4 ♠s) which would break the transfer if EW allow this but even then it would take a very optimistic West to go to game. As it turns out though the EW hands are a miracle fit and NS can't engineer a ♦ ruff, so 10 tricks are there in comfort. If NS do come in then EW are still likely to play in a ♠ part score but if they choose to double NS is ♥s they can hold it to 7 tricks with ♣A, ♠ to ♠K, ♣ ruff, ♠ to ♠A, ♣ ruff. So NS have to be careful! +170 for EW will be the most common result.

8	KQJT93
West	A54
None	
	QT92
865	A72
T86	K3
AQ762	JT83
K4	A875
	4
	QJ972
	K954
	J63

Well I am pretty sure there will be only one contract on the score sheets on this one – 2♠ by North. The question is will it make? Well – a small ♣ to ♣K, ♥ switch to ♥K, ♥ back, ♠K to ♠A, ♣A, ♣ ruff, ♥K, ♣ ruff, ♥ ruff holds it to 6 tricks! In the real world East is likely to lead the ♦J ruffed by North. Then the ♠K to ♠A and another ♦ ruffed followed by the drawing of trumps which are nicely 3-3 for declarer. Then North plays on ♥s with a trump still left and EW will only take the ♠A, ♥K and ♣AK for an overtrick. I'm sure there will be some variations which don't fare so well but +140 will not be alone for NS. Any EWs who do get involved will be delighted to find that they can make a nice part score in ♦s with as many as 10 tricks possible. So there may be a few +110 and even +130 for EW.

9	8
North	K7652
EW	3
	AJ8532
QJ9654	AKT72
9	AQT84
Q62	T7
QT6	7
	3
	J3
	AKJ9854
	K94

And a bit of a monster on this one. North will pass unless NS have a gadget for this kind of hand, East will open 1♠, South 2♦ and West will blast 4♠ – this should be clearly preemptive since with a good hand and a fit West would bid 3♦. Back to South who may decide that 5♦ would be a decent sacrifice at the favourable vulnerability. Having shown his hand West should leave this to East who may or may not be pushed into 5♠. Clearly 4♠ makes and 5♠ goes 1 off. What about 5♦? It is certainly 2 off losing 2 tricks in the majors and the ♦Q and West is likely to lead his ♥ which will set up the ♥K for a ♣ discard for South. So I think a lot of +620 and some +300 scores for EW. Some NSs may get a +100 from 5♠ and do well.

10	JT5
East	42
All	QT97
	KQ52
AK4	8762
AQ85	KJ3
J853	K4
AJ	9863
	Q93
	T976
	A62
	T74

West will open 1♥ and East will bid 1♠ although some may prefer 1NT with such weak ♠s and others may raise to 2♥. Whatever East does West will no doubt bid 3NT to reach the normal contract. There are too many alternative leads and lines of play to be clear as to whether 3NT will succeed or not, but with careful play most lines will gather 9 tricks. The ♣98 are good cards and ♠s being 3-3 is also helpful. For example if North leads the ♦10 to ♦A and a ♦ back then the ♠ break looks the only chance for 9 tricks. There will no doubt be some who get a minus score as EW but there should be more plus scores and only a few in a part score.



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11	K83
South	AJ873
None	987
	K6
Q2	AT9754
QT94	K6
QT	K54
AQT52	J9
	J6
	52
	AJ632
	8743

West will open 1♣, North will overcall 1♥, East will start with 1♠. For most a 1NT now from West would show a stronger hand so West will have to bid 2♣. East then has a good hand but not quite good enough to demand game, so a 3♣ bid looks best. This shows a hand with 6 ♠s and invites game. West's hand is not great with all those queens and pass is called for with 3NT the only real alternative. South will lead a ♥ and North has the first decision to make – to win the ♥A or play the ♥J. Partner could be leading from ♥K65, ♥652, ♥52 or ♥5! South's failure to bid 2♥ suggests he doesn't have ♥Kxx so North should play the ♥A and play a ♥ back. Lines of play after this are not 100% clear but certainly 9 tricks are very makeable. So +140 for EW will feature but there will be some minus scores too I'm sure.

12	Q76
West	83
NS	K543
	T842
AJ43	T9
A	J764
QJ972	AT8
KJ6	Q975
	K852
	KQT952
	6
	A3

After 1♦ from West and 1♥ from East, no doubt South will be frustrated that his great ♥ suit has been stolen! Would 2♥ by South be natural and show a hand like he has? Well many top players do play this but you would need to discuss it with your partner first! So South will no doubt pass, West will bid 1♠ and East will bid 1NT or 2♦. Now 2♥ by South should certainly be read as natural and would probably win the auction but again many Souths will pass. The hand plays well for EW in both NT and ♦s and NS will do well to get a plus score. 2♥ by South will go 1 off probably so EW will need to double it to get a good score. I can see some +100, +110, +120, +130 and even +150 scores for EW. Any plus for NS will be gold dust!

13	AQJ2
North	AK97
All	542
	96
	KT98643
QT543	
KQJT7	9863
K52	AQ
	75
	J862
	A
	JT8743

1NT from North and East has to decide what to do. 3♠ is preemptive but vulnerable there are a lot of losers. Pass seems a bit timid. So 2♠ is what is left and even with only 9 points East has great distribution and a reasonable ♠ suit. Now South isn't good enough to dredge up a bid but any who play Lebensohl could bid 2NT to demand 3♣ from partner which they would pass. West wishes East hadn't bid and anything from Pass to 3NT could be right. Opposite a vulnerable overcall I think Pass is too pessimistic. 3NT could be right but the void ♠ is not a good feature. So 2NT is probably what West should bid. East won't sit for this and will pull to 3♠ after which West should take the medicine and pass. South will lead the ♦A and switch after which North has to give South a ♦ ruff to beat 3♠. There will be a few plus scores for EW but most will go to NS I expect.

14	AJT65
East	JT5
None	5
	AK54
74	K3
83	A97
9643	KQJT2
J9632	QT7
	Q982
	KQ642
	A87
	8

East will like his hand and will open 1♦ planning to rebid 1NT. After 1♥ from South, North has a great hand and should bid 2♦ – an Unassuming Cue Bid (UCB) – to show a solid raise to at least 2♥. This lets all the direct raises in ♥s be more preemptive than constructive. East will probably double 2♦ to show a good suit and NS will proceed to 4♥. The play should yield 11 tricks, ruffing a ♦ and pitching one on the ♣K to lose only the ♥A and ♠K. 4♠ is as good if not better than 4♥ and will score the same number of tricks but more will be in the ♥ game. Those who make only 10 tricks won't score too well. It's tough to see a plus score for EW so any of those will be tops.

15	7652
South	63
NS	AK
	Q9874
KJ843	T9
A92	J875
T82	QJ74
32	JT5
	AQ
	KQT4
	9653
	AK6

A nice hand for South who will open 1♥ preparing to rebid 2NT this time. North will bid 1♠ or 1NT – the hand isn't good enough for a bid at the 2 level with only 9 points, no fit and a ropy suit. South will bid 2NT over 1♠ or perhaps even 3NT over 1NT, but North would raise 2NT to 3NT anyway. Played by South is best to protect the ♠ position but if played by North East would probably lead a ♦ which does no great harm. The fly in the ointment may come from a 1♠ overcall by West which makes life a little trickier. North could double 1♠ or could stretch to 2♣ and either of these actions will get NS to 3NT by South. I would expect to see plenty of +400 and +430 scores for NS and perhaps even a rare +460. Any plus EW score will again be a very rare event.



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16	T943
West	AJ5
EW	9
	AQ854
KJ	A62
932	KQT84
KQJ6543	A72
9	J3
	Q875
	76
	T8
	KT762

West should open 1♦ – the hand is way too good for a preempt. North may double if feeling aggressive or more likely perhaps will pass. East will bid 1♥ and West will rebid ♦s. East then has a difficult bid since 3NT, 4♥ and 5♦ are all still possible final contracts. 5♦ at Pairs isn't that attractive and needs 11 tricks. So what can East do? 2♠ is the best answer. West didn't bid 1♠ over 1♥ so he won't raise. 2♠ is forcing and shows where your values are. West has a choice between 3♦ and 3♥ over 2♠ and 3♦ looks the most descriptive option – a weak hand with long ♦s. East may not like it but 5♦ looks the best contract now. As it happens 5♦ is an easy make losing only 2 aces, but 4♥ will make 10 or even 11 tricks for a better match point score. Well done to those in 4♥.

17	AT83
North	K
None	J94
	KQ532
Q964	J2
A65	QJ987
65	AQ82
J984	AT
	K75
	T432
	KT73
	76

Another hand with a bare K (see board 1). Some may pass because of this but on this hand I think you are good enough to open despite it. So 1♣ and East will overcall 1♥. South doesn't really have a bid – 1NT is the only possible choice but most will pass. West will probably raise to 2♥ – by not bidding 2♣ (UCB see above) this is a weakish raise. And this will be passed out. There are plenty of pitfalls in 2♥ so even on a helpful ♣ lead it may still go off with the nasty trump break and the ♦K wrong. I would expect a fairly even mix of plus and minus scores on this one.

18	J843
East	Q654
NS	32
	AJ6
T97	K52
A3	J9
A86	KT954
T8743	KQ9
	AQ6
	KT872
	QJ7
	52

No doubt East will open 1NT and this is likely to be passed out. South may overcall 2♥ but that looks dangerous to me vulnerable. Those who do however fall on their feet finding North with a reasonable hand and 4♥s! Against 1NT South will lead a ♥ and the hand is not nice to play. The ♥Q wins, a ♥ back to the ♥A, a ♣ to ♣K wins. Best as the cards lie is then to win the ♦A and a 2nd ♣ to ♣A. North should really play a ♠ at this point but may fall into the trap of playing a ♥. But this will endplay South after the ♥s are cashed and will mean only 1 off rather than 2 off. 2♣ or 2♦ by EW play well and make but it's hard to see how you get there, so any plus for EW should score plenty of match points.

19	T653
South	63
EW	J7652
	62
J87	A9
A2	KQJ954
84	AK9
AKJ753	94
	KQ42
	T87
	QT3
	QT8

A meaty one. West opens 1♣ and East will bid 2♥ – a strong jump force. This is game forcing, shows a good suit and **no other suit** except sometimes support for partner's suit. Ax is reasonable support but West should just bid 3♣ with such a good suit. East can now bid 3♦ (remember this isn't a suit, just shows values there), West will bid 3♥ to show secondary support and East gets more excited. East cue bids 3♠, West cues 4♣ and East will now be more confident of bidding slam. So 4NT, 5♥ from West and 6♥ from East. There really isn't any defence to 6♥ and South does best to lead the ♠K since any other lead and East might just draw trumps and take the first round ♣ finesse which makes 13 tricks. So top marks for slam with the overtrick getting a top.

20	Q94
West	AJ42
All	KJ632
	K
J762	AK53
Q86	KT95
AT5	7
864	AQ32
	T8
	73
	Q984
	JT975

Yet another singleton K hand! And again I would say the hand is worth an opener anyway. So 1♦ from North, a text book double from East, pass from South although there may be some who bid 2♦, 1♠ from West and East is worth a raise to 2♠. Since West has been forced to bid the 1♠ bid shows no values. A bid of 2♠ would show about 9-10 points. This is a tricky area of bidding which needs discussion in a partnership. If South bids 2♦, West has the values to bid 2♠ and then East has more information, so can raise to 3♠ or perhaps 4♠ with such a nice hand. Double dummy 4♠ can be made but it doesn't look easy I have to say. More likely 9 tricks will be made so there should be a number of +140 scores EW. Any +170 or +620 will do well and those who score -100 will rue their aggression.



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21	JT42
North	QJ976
NS	T7
	Q3
K875	Q963
K42	A53
J6	Q98432
AK42	
	A
	T8
	AK5
	JT98765

South should be the first in with 1♣, West has nothing sensible to bid so should pass, North 1♥ and East, having already passed, might double or bid 2♦. If double is chosen then it will be hard to keep West out of 4♠ – not a great contract and one which doesn't make on this hand. A 2♦ bid might well win the day – South isn't strong enough to bid 3♣ although some will anyway. Any ill judged bids by NS should be doubled for a nice penalty to EW (West should lead ♣AK against a ♣ contract to hold it to 8 tricks). East's 2♦ contract should make 10 tricks in comfort since North has no entry to give South a ♠ ruff. I predict a mix of scores with +130 or +200 for EW doing well and +50 or better doing well for NS.

22	AT987
East	8
EW	KT52
	K83
J32	Q64
QJT54	A762
AJ3	976
QJ	A75
	K5
	K93
	Q84
	T9642

West will no doubt open 1♥, North will bid 1♠ and West has a choice to make. Is the hand good enough for 3♥ or not? Personally with 10 points in a 4333 hand I would err on the side of caution and just bid 2♥, especially at matchpoints where a plus score is good. Whatever East bids should be the final contract. North has an unattractive lead but anything but the ♠A is OK. When South gets in with the ♥K, NS can get a ♠ ruff which is enough to hold EW to 7 tricks. If North leads the ♠A this effectively stops the ♠ ruff and lets EW make 2♥. The majority of scores should be plus for NS and the +200 scores will do best.

23	987
South	AT97
All	KT85
	83
KQJ	AT42
K6542	J8
AQ92	J764
9	K52
	653
	Q3
	3
	AQJT764

A solid 3♣ preempt for South this time, double from West is better than a unilateral 3♥ on a weak suit, and East has a tricky choice between 3♠ and 3NT (3♦ is possible too but I prefer to bid the major to avoid missing game if it is there). The ♣A would be better than the ♣K for 3NT since you can hold it up, so I would plump for 3♠ here. West should pass this since the double has really shown the hand and you may well be in a 4-3 fit. South will very likely lead his ♦ and declarer should duck this – if it is singleton then rising with the ♦A gives you 2 losers anyway. The ♦K wins, the ♦10 is returned to ask for the higher suit after South ruffs, The ♥Q to ♥K/A and another ♦ ruff, followed by the ♣A to hold it to 8 tricks. The defence are likely to have the upper hand against any EW contract so there will be few plus scores that way.

24	K85
West	AJ
None	T985
	J874
T973	AJ642
T9872	KQ6
3	KQ4
AT6	Q5
	Q
	543
	AJ762
	K932

East will open 1♠, West will raise to 2♠ with a nice distributional hand, East will probably try 2NT and West will settle for 3♠. Some pairs I am sure will push to 4♠, others will stop in 3♠. Against a ♠ contract South may well lead a ♥ as the least unappealing and this gives NS the chance to beat 4♠. ♥A, ♥J to ♥K, ♠A, ♠ to ♠K. Then North can play a ♦ to South to get a ruff in ♥s to make 4 tricks for the defence. So some may go down in 4♠, some will make 4♠ and others will make 9 or 10 tricks in the ♠ part score. A plus score for NS will score well as will +420 for EW.

Not the most exciting set of boards with only one slam and 7 games. But every board at matchpoints has interest and the part scores are often the most difficult. Hopefully there was enough to make it interesting and challenging.