



## 1 Recent hands

The first night of the Christmas Pairs was won easily by John Wolken and Margaret Archer with a score of 66.90%. One hand in particular caught my eye:

Board 23	♠4												
South dealer	♥ KJ972												
Both vul	♦ QJ8632												
	♣ 9												
♠AQ97653	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠K82		
	N												
W		E											
	S												
♥ Q8		♥ A6											
♦ T7		♦ A9											
♣ A5		♣ K87432											
	♠JT												
	♥ T543												
	♦ K54												
	♣ QJT6												

West will open second in hand with 1♠ (most players will be guaranteeing at least 5 spades with this bid). Suppose North passes. Then East is too strong for either 4♠ (which would show a weak shapely hand with spade support) or 3♠ (which would show a limit raise). In normal Acol East will begin with 2♣ waiting to see what their partner will do. In fact West will probably bid 2♠, their weakest possible bid but likely showing 6 or more spades. How should East continue? The robotic bid is just 4♠ to close the auction. But if East pauses to consider they will realize

that, despite partner's minimum rebid, not much is needed for a slam and they might therefore try 4NT. If the partnership is playing Roman keycard Blackwood the 5♠ is very good news; it shows two aces and the queen of trumps. So East can bid 6♠ with some hope. From East's point of view spades are solid and either partner has a doubleton club (allowing clubs to be established), 4 clubs or 3 including the queen (again clubs can be established), or Axx in clubs (this is the only really dangerous case against a red suit lead but, even then a 2-2 break in clubs will bring the slam home. Oddly enough, this type of reasoning shows that, usually, if 6♠ makes then also 7♠ makes so a gutsy player will bid the grand slam!

On the second night Stewart and Christine Kerr had an enormous 67% score. The wildest hand that night was

Board 14	♠KJ9842												
East dealer	♥ T83												
None vul	♦ Q842												
	♣ void												
♠Q	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠A72		
	N												
W		E											
	S												
♥ AKQJ754		♥ 62											
♦ J63		♦ AKT95											
♣ J8		♣ 632											
	♠T53												
	♥ 9												
	♦ 7												
	♣ AKQT9754												

East will open 1♦ and a gutsy South will bid 5♣. But West will surely compete to 5♥ and it takes an inspired East to bid on. The weird thing about this hand is that West can make 7NT with the aid of a successful diamond finesse since North cannot lead a club. But if East declares no-trumps they will lose the first 8 tricks!

The Christmas Pairs as a whole was won by Stewart and Christine well ahead of the field with an average score of 62.32%. The final night was notable for many exciting hands. Look at this one for example:

Board 8	♠ KJ2	
West dealer	♥ K8	
None vul	♦ AQ876	
	♣ K75	
♠ 97	N W     E S	♠ Q8653
♥ JT654		♥ Q97
♦ 42		♦ 9
♣ 8643		♣ QJT9
	♠ AT4	
	♥ A32	
	♦ KJT53	
	♣ A2	

I want to discuss the play in a 7♦ contract. There are 12 tricks on top (including diamond ruffs) and the only issue is how to avoid a club loser. A simple finesse will solve the problem

but, without looking at the East-West hands, who do you play for the ♠Q? In a situation like this you should delay your choice and learn as much as you can about the opposing cards. In this particular case you would draw trumps, noting that East had a singleton diamond. Then play 3 rounds of clubs ruffing the third; this doesn't tell you much except that each opponent has at least 3 clubs. But when you play 3 rounds of hearts East follows to the third round with the ♥Q; it's not certain but this may mean that East had only 3 hearts initially. So it looks as though East has more black cards than West; hence East is more likely to hold the ♠Q. Not a certainty by any means but better odds than 50%. In fact you may be able to gain a bit more information by playing out all your trumps before taking the spade finesse; if West discards his "useless" ♠9 and ♠7 you will feel much more confident.

## 2 Club news and comments

There was a mistake in the last Newsletter: Judy Robertson is treasurer of the club not Barbara Wilkes (whose duties are full enough as secretary!).

The next Newsletter will appear in February 2014. Have an enjoyable and restful holiday!

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