

Slamming on a Friday night

By David Scott-Jones

Friday nights at the club continue to provide hidden gems for the enthusiast. Here are a few more we spotted (usually in the post-mortem). Firstly a slam that is trivial to play but quite challenging to bid – especially after a weak 2♥ opening. Here is our auction to the second-best contract:

Dealer East	♠ A J 9 7										
Both vul	♥ 10 8 4 3										
	♦ A Q 10										
	♣ A J										
♠ 5 4 3 2	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="padding: 0 10px;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">W</td><td></td><td style="padding: 0 10px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="padding: 0 10px;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 6		♥ K Q J 9 7 2									
♦ 9 6		♦ J 8 7									
♣ 9 8 6 3 2		♣ 7 5 4									
	♠ K Q 10 6										
	♥ 5										
	♦ K 5 4 3 2										
	♣ K Q 10										

West	North	East	South
		2♥ (1)	Dbl
No	3♥ (2)	No	4♦
No	6♦ (3)	All pass	

- 1) Weak – 6-10 points and a six-card suit
- 2) Game force with at least mild slam interest
- 3) Gambling that it will be South, not West, who is short in hearts. (This will also work if West has the singleton ♥A!)

We had a slight misunderstanding here. My partner thought my 3♥ bid denied four spades – and I thought her 4♦ bid did the same, while virtually guaranteeing five diamonds. I thought I was too strong to jump to 4♠. I would have done that with an ace less, taking the slight risk that partner might not have four spades (but hey, that's why people pre-empt!) Anyway 6♦ was easy and a clear second for us. Congratulations to Keith and Helen Foreman, the only pair to reach 6♠!

This one is also mostly about the bidding, but with a small technical point in the play:

Dealer East	♠ K										
None vul	♥ K 5 4										
	♦ 7 2										
	♣ A K Q J 10 8 5										
♠ 7 5 4 2	<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="padding: 0 10px;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 0 10px;">W</td><td></td><td style="padding: 0 10px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="padding: 0 10px;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q J 9 8 6 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q J 10		♥ 9 8 6 3									
♦ 9 4 3		♦ K 10									
♣ 9 7 6		♣ 3									
	♠ A 10										
	♥ A 7 2										
	♦ A Q J 8 6 5										
	♣ 4 2										

West	North	East	South
		No	1♦
No	2♣	No	2NT (1)
No	4NT (2)	No	5♣ (3)
No	6NT (4)	All pass	

- 1) Great choice, limiting the hand to 15-16 and making life easy for partner. Obviously too good for 2♦, and 3♦ puts too much emphasis on the ♦ suit.
- 2) Roman Key Card Blackwood
- 3) 0 or 3 aces (real aces, i.e. not the trump king as no trump suit has been agreed)
- 4) Another good decision. It is hard to imagine circumstances when 6♣ will make when 6NT won't.

Twelve tricks are clearly cold on any lead and the successful diamond finesse gives you your thirteenth. +1020 was a clear top for Pam Jardine and Inu Kassam (on the auction shown).

Should you bid the grand slam? Probably not as you'll do well enough just by reaching slam in no-trumps. 7NT might be laydown (for example, if South has either the ♠Q, ♥Q, or ♦K instead of the ♦QJ, along with his known three aces), but bidding a grand slam on a finesse is losing bridge in the long run. What about 7♣ though? You have the same twelve tricks and you might avoid the finesse for the thirteenth by attempting to ruff the diamonds out, having discarded one of North's on the ♠A. Unfortunately there is only one outside entry to the South hand (the ♥A), so unless the ♦K comes down in two rounds that line won't work. I make it about 19% better just to take the finesse. Conclusion: settle for 6NT!

Only one pair bid to 6♥ on this hand and everybody made eleven tricks (one pair was in 3NT):

Dealer North
None vul

♠ A Q 8
♥ 8 7
♦ K Q 10 4
♣ 9 7 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 5
♥ A K Q J 10 9
♦ 7 5 3
♣ K 4

♠ J 9 2
♥ 6 2
♦ A J 6 2
♣ A Q J 8

♠ 10 7 6 4 3
♥ 5 4 3
♦ 9 8
♣ 10 6 3

West	North	East	South
	1♦ (1)	Dbl (2)	No
4♥	All pass		

- (1) Precision
- (2) General takeout – doesn't show short ♦s or promise support for all the other suits...
- (3) ...which is not a problem this time!

I assume that most Norths led a top diamond, in which case you have no excuse for not making twelve tricks! Win, draw trumps, and play off four rounds of clubs throwing both your *spades* away. Now cross back to hand by ruffing a spade and lead a diamond towards the jack. The defence can make only the other top diamond.

Here is a competitive bidding problem with some interesting points in the play:

Dealer West
None vul

♠ J 8 7 5
♥ A 8
♦ 10
♣ K Q 8 7 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 9 6 4
♥ J 7 2
♦ A K J 7
♣ 10

♠ K 3 2
♥ Q 4
♦ Q 6 5 4 3 2
♣ A J

♠ 10
♥ K 10 9 6 5 3
♦ 9 8
♣ 9 6 5 2

You might have this lively auction:

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♣	2♦	3♣ (1)
4♦ (2)	No	4♠ (3)	All pass

- 1) South would obviously like to introduce hearts but is too weak – partner might get too excited if he has a fit. Better to just make a pre-emptive raise of clubs
- 2) A bit stuck! Giving up on 3NT, this is a good pragmatic effort
- 3) The jump to 4♦ shows a shapely hand and practically guarantees 5+ spades

As it happens 5♣ doubled is only one down and maybe somebody should have bid it, especially as the opposition might go on to 5♦ or 5♠. But by this stage it isn't clear who can make what.

So North leads a top club against the spade game, and declarer wins and starts drawing trumps to discover the bad break. Say that after three rounds he turns his attention to diamonds, leaving North with the master trump. North holds off till the fourth round before ruffing to strand the last two diamond winners in dummy. Now another top club forces out West's penultimate trump and he has only hearts to play. South beats dummy's queen and plays another club. Declarer ruffs, but now North has the last two tricks with ♥A and a club. Nine tricks: 5 spades, 3 diamonds, and a club.

Happily nobody fell into that trap! Of course declarer should play *four* rounds of trumps (or duck the second round when South shows out), conceding the trump trick *before* starting diamonds. Now North has to switch to ace and another heart to hold the contract to ten tricks (4 spades, 5 diamonds and a club). If he continues clubs two losing hearts go away on the long diamonds for +450.

So the par result is +100 to East-West for 5♣ doubled down one, but nobody managed that on the night. 4♠ was bid twice, one 420 and one 480 (!); there were two 5♦+1 (no ♥ lead) for two more 420s; 3NT scored 430 once; and one pair languished in 4D making 190.

On this next hand 4♠ looks easy, but isn't. Let's look at only two hands to start with (rotated for convenience). West leads a middling club. How do you play?

♠ J 8 7 6 3	
♥ K 10 8 6	
♦ 5	
♣ A K 7	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: right;">W</div> <div style="text-align: center;">N E</div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">S</div>	
♠ A Q 10 5	
♥ A 4 2	
♦ Q 10 7 4	
♣ 10 6	

South	North
1NT	2♥ (1)
2♠	3♥
4♠	No

(1) Transfer, showing five spades

It looks like you have only three losers, but do you have ten tricks? Suppose the trump king is offside and hearts don't break 3-3. You'll still be fine if trumps are 2-2, as you can ruff both a club and the long heart in the short trump hand, generating extra trump tricks. You will make four of dummy's spades, two hearts, two clubs and two ruffs. But that means you can't afford to touch trumps yet.

At trick two play dummy's diamond (you'll see why shortly). East jumps in smartly with the ace and plays a trump though. (This is the best defence.) You play low but West takes the king and plays another trump. You win with the ten as East discards a club. It looks like all your worst fears are coming true. Anyway you cash your remaining high club and ruff dummy's last club with the ♠Q. These cards remain:

♠ J 8 7
 ♥ K 10 8 6
 ♦ -
 ♣ -
 []
 ♠ A
 ♥ A 4 2
 ♦ Q 10 7
 ♣ -

West still has the nine of trumps but you can't afford to draw it as that will leave you with two heart losers if they don't break. So you play three rounds of hearts. As expected East wins the third round and West throws a diamond. But now the defence is helpless. They would like to play the last trump to stop the high heart ruff but East can't get his partner in because of your foresight in playing a diamond at trick two! The textbooks call this a "Scissors Coup" - because it cuts the defensive communications - and it doesn't come up very often. Here is the full hand as it was originally dealt:

Dealer West ♠ A Q 10 5
 Both vul ♥ A 4 2
 ♦ Q 10 7 4
 ♣ 10 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 4
 ♥ Q 9 5 3
 ♦ A 9 6
 ♣ Q J 9 5 3

♠ K 9 2
 ♥ J 7
 ♦ K J 8 3 2
 ♣ 8 4 2

♠ J 8 7 6 3
 ♥ K 10 8 6
 ♦ 5
 ♣ A K 7

At the club all Norths played 4♠, three succeeding and three going one down. Congratulations to the successful declarers – especially if they met with that defence and found the Scissors coup to thwart it!

By the way the double dummy analysis (on the hand sheet) claimed that while *North* can always make 4♠, *South* should always fail. This assumes West leads a trump and allows East to win the first round of diamonds to continue the trump attack.