

**Simple Slams**  
**Chapter 5 : Some Simple Slams**  
With Vera Simple

Board 2 DLR E NS VUL

♠ 9 8 6 4

♥ K 8 4 3

♦ 9 6 2

♣ 10 8

♠ 5

♥ J 7 2

♦ K Q J 8 7 5

♣ A J 6

♠ A J 2

♥ A Q 9 6

♦ A 10

♣ K 7 5 2

♠ K Q 10 7 3

♥ 10 5

♦ 4 3

♣ Q 9 4 3

There is a very reasonable slam here for EW but not one pair in a teams contest managed to reach it. All the EW pairs played the hand in a very unimaginative and prosaic 3NT. Just like they might have in a match point pairs contest. But this was NOT match points, and teams is a different game. Not that 3NT is necessarily the best spot to play at match points either, at least not if you have a reasonable slam to bid.

Those in 3NT were making twelve tricks as a rule, when South led the king of spades and declarer ducked. This is known as a 'Bath Coup', no, not named after Archimedes who found the principle of flotation in the bath, but after the town of Bath where it was first perpetrated. The Bath coup worked only when the person who had led the king was duped into continuing the suit round to the jaws of declarer's AJ, but in this instance it successfully prevented South from leading another one. It then gave declarer a very easy ride if South switched to anything other than a diamond! The ten of hearts allows declarer to pick up ALL of North's hearts, the club switch gives declarer a 'free' finesse since there is no risk in putting in the jack. But even on a diamond switch, declarer can run diamonds and then, after watching the discards carefully, decide whether to play on clubs or hearts.

The most sensible play is to discard both of the spades and two clubs, and then lead the jack of hearts. This is bound to result in eleven tricks anyway, but as it happens, when North covers and declarer wins the ace and plays the queen, South's ten drops if it hasn't already been bared, so declarer has an easy ride to twelve tricks.

But we're talking about slams here, and NOT a 6NT slam either. With a singleton spade in West's hand, West would be somewhat of an eccentric to believe that 6NT is the best spot (in a teams match anyway), and 6D is not only a safer contract but also gives declarer extra chances of making the slam. Say North leads a spade, the best lead as it happens.

Declarer wins the ace in dummy and draws trumps, maybe even playing off an unnecessary round to see what the defenders discard.

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

Board 2 DLR E NS VUL

♠ 9 8 6 4	
♥ K 8 4 3	
♦ 9 6 2	
♣ 10 8	
♠ 5	♠ A J 2
♥ J 7 2	♥ A Q 9 6
♦ K Q J 8 7 5	♦ A 10
♣ A J 6	♣ K 7 5 2
♠ K Q 10 7 3	
♥ 10 5	
♦ 4 3	
♣ Q 9 4 3	

Now the best play is to play the ace of hearts and lead a low one to the jack. If the ten of hearts appears in one, two, or three rounds, then declarer has twelve tricks; if the ten of hearts has not appeared, declarer can fall back on the club finesse, or even a more far fetched SQUEEZE, playing for the hand who has the ten of hearts to also have control of the clubs, one of which would need to be relinquished.

All in all, a pretty good slam, wouldn't you say?

How then should EW GET to the 6D slam? I would suggest the best bidding sequence would be for East to open 1C and over West's 1D, to bid TWO hearts. The SHAPE is not quite right, but East's hand is good enough to force to game opposite a 1D response, and a mere rebid of 1H may never allow East to show West the true worth of the hand. Since this is forcing to game, West has time to investigate and bids 3C. East bids 3NT, but West is not interested in that and bids 4D. Still no game reached and this tells East that West is very keen on a slam; East can hardly have a BETTER diamond holding in view of West's bidding, nor better controls. Remember that East, over West's 3C, bid 3NT? Yet West still showed an interest in slam, and rebid 4D!

East should ask for aces with 4NT, then KINGS with 5NT in case West is in fact looking for a grand slam. West could, for example, have the king of hearts, which makes the grand slam odds on. But West knows East opened at the ONE level, so the grand slam is too much to hope for, and bids 6D to show one king and end the auction at the same time. Had West in fact held the extra king, West would bid 7D or perhaps show the two kings with a bid of 6H and raise East's 6NT to 7NT.

Yes, with twelve CERTAIN top tricks, if you're going to bid the grand slam and bank on one more trick being there somewhere, you may as well bid the grand slam in No Trumps. That is because in 7NT the diamond suit will neither give you protection nor be required for developing the extra trick. If a squeeze is required, it will work without trumps!

Board 14 DLR E NIL VUL

♠ K 8 4  
♥ A K 9 8 6 5  
♦ A 5 4  
♣ 2

♠ A J 9 7 6 3  
♥ 3  
♦ K J 10 6 3  
♣ 5

♠ Q 5 2  
♥ 10 4 2  
♦ Q 8 7 2  
♣ 8 7 3

♠ 10  
♥ Q J 7  
♦ 9  
♣ A K Q J 10 9 6 4

This is a tricky one. What would YOU open on the South hand? To open that hand with a bid of 3NT is to show ignorance of the reasons why you open with a 'gambling' 3NT. The above hand is FAR too good to open 3NT. The way most sensible people play a "gambling 3NT" is that it shows a SEVEN CARD solid suit in either minor with NO outside stops whatsoever. Sometimes that can be stretched to an eight card suit, but it should NEVER be done with a hand that has EIGHT SOLID plus two singletons.

South should either open ONE CLUB or better still, in my view, open TWO CLUBS, then rebid 3C. After all, South could call that a NINE playing trick hand couldn't they? Over 2C, no doubt West would bid 2S and North wonder how many packs the cards the hands have been dealt from, or whether the computer has had a seizure while dealing them. Three hearts from North, 4C from South (NO, NOT asking for aces!!), and 4D from West (who cares if there has been a 2C opening and positive response by opponents?!). Perhaps at this stage North might have enough information to bid 4NT to ask for aces AND settle in 6NT when South shows one only. SURELY South can NOT have any less than a SEVEN SOLID club suit with an outside king or even king queen combination, or eight or nine solid clubs.

The danger of bidding SIX CLUBS is not that the lead will come through the king of spades (West must surely have the ace) but that South might have a doubleton spade and West seven, with East gaining a second round ruff to defeat 6C. Bidding 6C is certainly made easier if East supports West's spades, as many 'expert' Easts would.

But given that East does NOT support spades, what may on the surface appear to be an injudicious punt at a No Trump slam in fact is based on very reasonable inferences from the bidding. Now try it if South opens a ridiculous 3NT! Or, for that matter, if South thinks the hand is worth only a 1C opening.

Finally, a 'point of law'. The NZCBA, in keeping with their normal practice of interfering with people's prerogatives, may have decreed that the aforementioned 8 playing trick hand in clubs is NOT an eight plus playing trick hand at all and cannot be opened as such. Seems like there is some point count requirement as well! All I can say is "BOLLOCKS! The NZCBA is there to guard against unfair practice, not to tell people when eight or nine certain tricks are not an eight playing trick hand, nor to teach people how THEY should play a simple system." Quote me if you like.

Board 24 DLR W NIL VUL

♠ 7 5 2

♥ Q J 10 9 5

♦ 9 7 4

♣ 9 2

♠ J 9 3

♥ K 4 3

♦ Q J 6 5

♣ 10 8 6

♠ A K Q 6 4

♥ 7

♦ A K

♣ A K Q 7 5

♠ 10 8

♥ A 8 6 2

♦ 10 8 3 2

♣ J 4 3

Hand evaluation is far more important than being able to count POINTS. Whether EW are playing STRONG TWOS or WEAK TWOS, the very frigid 6S slam should be easily bid. East might open a STRONG 2S on their hand, or a GAME FORCING 2C. Either way, once WEST shows East spade support (and jack third is PLENTY when partner opens a strong 2S or opens 2C then bids 2S) East can do no less than bid 6S. That, after asking for aces of course (and NOT with 4C either), because West CAN have as much as the ace of hearts plus four small spades or three to the jack and still give a NEGATIVE response to a 2C opener or a strong 2S.

It all boils down to recognising how many TRICKS you have on the East hand. Given that West will have SOME support in EITHER black suit, with a minimum three to the jack or four small, then a small slam must surely be a near certainty. You see, if EITHER black suit is trumps and West has Jxx or xxxx, you no longer expect any losers in the trump suit. How many losers can there be in the OTHER black suit? If you think about it, the answer is 'PROBABLY NONE'. Even if partner has TWO SMALL, and trumps NEED to be drawn, the side suit MAY break 3-3. If West has THREE small, the side suit only needs to break 3-2, which is with the odds, and with extra trump support, the side suit can be ruffed good. So the two small cards in either side suit are NOT going to be losers, are they?

Therefore, having recognised the full potential of the East hand, the ONLY important thing for East to find out is whether West has support for EITHER black suit. Even opposite three SMALL cards, slam still has chances, so much so that it should be bid.

If playing a STRONG TWO system, it is best for East to open with a bid of 2S. Then over West's negative response of 2NT, East bids 3C. West now has a number of options open to them, but on the actual West hand, I would bid THREE spades rather than four. NOT because I consider my hand WEAK, but because I consider it STRONG in view of my negative response in the first place. This is known as the 'PRINCIPLE OF SLOW ARRIVAL' (some call it fast arrival, but they're both the same, just looking from opposite ends of the spectrum). In a game forcing situation, if you support partner SHORT OF GAME, you are implying that you have a STRONGER hand than if you support them by jumping to game. WHY? Because you leave more room for partner to CUE BID and show a genuine interest in slam.

Once West shows ANY serious spade support, whether that is by bidding 3S in a game forcing situation, or a jump to 4S, East should see that there is unlikely to be more than one loser and that is the ace of hearts. West may even have THAT card, so check for it by bidding 4NT first. If west does have that ace, consider a GRAND slam! But when the answer is NONE (5C) East can bid a confident 6S.

You can also see the importance of NOT having to bid 4C to ask for aces. If East needs to elicit trump support for EITHER black suit, West may need to bid 4C to AGREE CLUBS as trumps, or East may in fact need to bid 4C as their second suit, in a sequence where West has made a POSITIVE response of e.g. 3H.

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

Board 24 DLR W NIL VUL

♠ 7 5 2

♥ Q J 10 9 5

♦ 9 7 4

♣ 9 2

♠ J 9 3

♥ K 4 3

♦ Q J 6 5

♣ 10 8 6

♠ A K Q 6 4

♥ 7

♦ A K

♣ A K Q 7 5

♠ 10 8

♥ A 8 6 2

♦ 10 8 3 2

♣ J 4 3

In 6S there is no real problem in the play. If South cashes the ace of hearts, all declarer need worry about is a possible CLUB loser. WITHOUT the ace of hearts lead, declarer can dispose of a heart and club loser on the diamonds and make SEVEN if clubs behave. Mind you, there is a not very nice diamond blockage. Declarer must draw two rounds of trumps, leaving the jack in dummy, then cash two diamonds and return to dummy with the trump jack to cash the QJ of diamonds. Too bad if someone ruffs the second diamond!

Now look at the hand again. For the purposes of making the SLAM, the king of hearts and the king queen of diamonds are NOT NECESSARY!

Final note on the play: Ignoring any extra tricks in the red suits, technically the correct play if you had NO red suit tricks and you were in 6S, would be to win the JACK of spades first then lead to the queen in hand, just in case the suit broke 4-1. You would not want to ruff a club with the jack then, would you? Next, start on clubs, leaving one trump in dummy and one in an opponent's hand. The moment the jack of clubs appears, draw the last trump. If the jack of clubs does not appear but both opponents follow to two rounds of trumps, draw the last trump, because the jack will now drop. If the jack has not dropped and either opponent shows out on the SECOND round, you are still home if that opponent cannot ruff. Now, YOU can ruff your losing club in dummy and bring down the jack at the same time and return to hand to draw the last trump and claim the final club for your twelfth trick. If the second club is ruffed, you weren't ever going to make all of them anyway, were you? Just a bit of forethought is necessary. Imagine the tragedy if you got to an excellent slam just to drop it on the floor through inferior declarer play!