11 - 4NT commentary

Hand 1

North opens 1♠ – I expect better than 8 playing tricks for a 2♣ opener.
South bids 3♠ and North can be more or less certain of 12 tricks provided he is not missing 2 aces, so bids 4NT – 4-ace Blackwood.
When South responds 5♦ (1 ace) he can almost count 12 tricks and bids 6♠.
Note that there is no point in bidding 5NT – he cannot make 13 tricks.
6NT also makes from the South hand when the ♣K is protected on the opening lead.

Hand 2

East opens 1♥ and West either jumps to 4♥ or makes some other forcing bid (e.g.2♦ – Jacoby raises will come later) before jumping to 4♥.
With excellent shape, solid suits and hearts agreed, East asks with 4NT. West's response of 5♦ leaves him 2 aces short and so East signs off in 5♥.
Declarer will clear trumps and lose the 2 minor suit aces before ditching a spade on the third club (rather than risk getting a spade finesse wrong).

Hand 3

South opens 1♣ and North searches for a major suit fit with 1♥.
South now has a choice. 4NT is out of the question – a 1-ace response would take him too high – 4NT is hardly ever the right bid with clubs as a prospective trump suit. 5♣ is a long shot with no promise of trump support. 3NT looks like a good bet and is probably the practical option. Alternatively, he will have to make up a bid such as 2♦ or 2♠ with the option of escaping to 3NT or clubs if necessary.
Facing 3NT north could bid 4NT, but it would not be asking for aces following a natural bid in no trumps. More practical is 4♣, forcing to game following the earlier game bid. The least South can do is 5♣. Better is 4♠ (or 4♥) after which North can bid 6♣.
Following a bid such as 3♦ north will again show his club support with 4♦, and the auction can continue as above.
Both 6NT and 6♦ make 12 tricks.

Hand 4

I open 1♣ on this West hand – others might prefer 1♠.
Following 1♣ East will respond 1♦ and West should make the natural game-force of 2♥ promising 4 hearts, at least 4 diamonds and 19 or so points.
With his solid honours holdings and excellent shape East is better than his 11 points and must either bid 4NT or jump to 5♥. In either case the partnership will find their way to 6♥.
Following an initial 1♠ from West the least East can do is jump to 3♠. Personally, I would jump to 4♠ (note that splinters come later). West is in an excellent position to ask with 4NT (or cue-bid a control) and the auction will rest in 6♠.
Both 6♥ and 6♠ make 12 tricks – 1 ruff in a minor will be enough to bring the contract home.

Hand 5

North's is one of those rare 13-point hands which can legally be opened 2♥, but having said that I would choose to get in fast with an opening 4♠.

In either case South must have thoughts of a slam. Once spades have been set as the suit 4NT from South will show that there are 2 aces missing and the auction must end in 5♠.

Both 5♠ and 5NT make 11 tricks, each losing just the 2 red aces.

Hand 6

East opens 1♦ and West responds 2♣.

East now rebids 3NT (or 2NT – forcing facing the 2-level response).

West does not hold enough for a no-trump slam on two balanced hands, although he could search for a diamond slam with 4♦ after which East might search for a slam with 4NT, but he will be 2 aces short and will have to settle for 5♦.

Note that with 2 aces in his hand he can afford the 4NT bid – both a 1-ace and a 2-ace response allow him to stop in 5♦.

Hand 7

South bids 2♣ and North relays with 2♦. (Some respond 2NT to promise 8+ points but I believe this to be a mistaken strategy even though proposed in some of the best circles – there are more constructive positive responses available).

South will rebid 2♠ - 5-card suit and forcing (I play it as game-forcing).

North can now agree the suit with 3♠. South can then bid 4NT and the partnership will reach 6♠. Note that North must not initiate the Blackwood enquiry – a 1-ace response could leave him with 2 or more diamond losers.

Both 6♠ and 6♥ make 12 tricks, but 6♥ is not a great contract on the 4-3 fit.

Hand 8

West opens 1♥ and East responds 2♦.

If you have looked at reverse bidding then a lowest level reverse of 2♠ by West will be a natural game-force promising 15+ points facing partner's 2-evel response. Otherwise, West will have to force with 3♠.

In either case East will agree hearts at the lowest level.

West will look for a slam with either 4NT or some sort of cue-bid, but the 2 missing aces will come to light and the auction will end with 5♥.

5♥ and 5♠ each make 11 tricks losing just the 2 aces. 5♥ is the better contract.