Partner opened on a balanced hand - commentary

Hand 1

1♣, 1♥, 1NT

South either passes or bids 2♦ but with Clubs covered pass is probably better.

2♦ leads to a final contract of 2♥.

Note that East is perfectly happy to hear his opponents bidding in clubs and hearts.

Against 1NT East has a difficult lead. With the opposition bidding both my suits I start with ♠J.

This immediately sets up 4 tricks in spades for the defence, which together with a heart, a club and a diamond, leads to declarer having no chance in no trumps.

2♥ makes 7 tricks for NS, for 1 down.

Meanwhile EW can make 8 tricks in Spades.

Hand 2

A routine 1NT opener for East.

South will be tempted by 2♦, but with only 5 tricks in sight and vulnerable this would be a brave move.

West should make a weak take-out of 2♥ and if this is passed round to South then a take-out double would not be out of order, although this may be far from obvious to a beginner.

In 2♥ declarer will lose just 3 diamonds, a spade and a club to make his contract.

If NS can find their fit in spades they should come to 9 tricks.

Hand 3

South opens 1NT and North responds 3NT (balanced hand and not enough for a slam).

If the defence starts with a spade then declarer can make 11 tricks provided that he runs the lead to the South hand and takes the heart finesse into the East hand to protect the ♣K.

If the defence start with a small club, they can take the first 4 tricks to hold declarer to 9.

Played from the North hand declarer can make 10 tricks as the ♣K is protected on the opening lead.

Hand 4

With both majors West opens 1♥. Some might bid 3NT on the East's flat hand but, in the absence of an artificial high-card raise, I prefer 4♥ with the possibility of a ruff in the West hand.

North will lead a small diamond. Most declarers will take the ♦A and clear trumps for the loss of one Heart and two Diamonds. However, ducking the first round of Diamonds will kill the defence's communication and lead to 11 tricks in either contract (or spades).

Hand 5

North opens 1NT. My choice for South is 3♥ (game-forcing) on an excellent 12-count, and North will choose 3NT.

East has a difficult lead – ♦Q may well be best.

Declarer will come to 10 tricks but it involves an early Heart finesse together with well-placed Aces in both minor suits.

Partner opened on a balanced hand - commentary

Hand 6

East opens 2NT.
With a maximum possible total of 32 points West bids 3♥ offering a choice of 3NT or 4♥, and with 3-card support and a side suit doubleton East will raise to 4♥.
South will probably lead his singleton spade but declarer takes the Ace, clears trumps and has no difficulty in coming to 11 tricks (3NT also makes 11 tricks).

Hand 7

South opens 1NT, and with a balanced hand, no 4-card major, and a combined 28 to 30 points North has little difficulty in raising to 3NT.
West should lead ♦J.
Declarer can count 9 tricks in any one of the 5 possible denominations when the spade finesse succeeds, and a further trick will emerge eventually in diamonds if he can find an early finesse to the ♦8.

Hand 8

With 17 points in a balanced hand West opens 1♠ (the major).
I tend to raise to 4♠ on the East hand, although 3♠ is arguably more likely, (West will raise 3♠ to 4♠), and sometime in the future you might prefer 4♦.
North will do well not to give a trick away on lead. A trump works best, but he can hardly be blamed for either ♦7 or ♣A.
Declarer has a choice of strategies, any one of which leads to 10 tricks for the loss of just 2 Hearts and a Club.

Hand 9

With both majors in a balanced hand North opens 1♥.
I respond 4♥ (or 4♣) on the South hand but some might prefer 1♠.
Played from the South hand the contract can be held to 10 tricks on a diamond lead.
Played from the North hand East's safest lead is ♠3, but it is not crystal-clear.
Declarer can now make 11 tricks provided he manages the trump suit accurately, but he will have to find a club finesse for a diamond discard to do so.
4♠ also makes 11 tricks from the North hand or 10 tricks from the South hand.

Hand 10

East opens 1♥, South passes with a straight face, West bids 1♠ and East rebids 1NT.
West could bid 2♣ (natural) to offer a choice, but with an 8-card (6-2) major suit fit visible either 2♠ or 3♠ (or even 4♠) seems more likely.
North leads ♦J.
Even against this trump split declarer can come to 10 tricks provided that he does not start trumps with the Ace from hand.

Hand 11

South opens 1♠, North responds 2♥, and South rebids 2NT (forcing) or 3NT. The auction will rest in 3NT.
West must choose between leading ♦J or ♣4.
Provided that he leads small to the ♥Q at an early stage declarer can make 11 tricks in any one of no Trumps, Hearts or Spades.

Partner opened on a balanced hand - commentary

Hand 12

1♦, 1♥, 1NT, 3NT

North probably leads ♣J. Declarer attacks Hearts (the finesse failing twice), but still comes to nine tricks with 2 Spades, 3 Hearts, 2 Diamonds and 2 Clubs.

Hand 13

I open 1NT on this North hand – others might prefer 1♠.

If South feels that his 6-card suit lifts the hand to invitational then the only weapon we have available at present is the raise to 2NT.

Otherwise, he must make the weak take-out of 2♥.

No trumps are doomed as the defence take the 1st 6 tricks in Diamonds.

In hearts, when the ♥Q either drops or finesses and the clubs provide a second stop if the defence attacks them declarer can come to 10 tricks for the loss of just a club, a diamond, and a spade

4♠ also makes 10 tricks, but the game is unlikely to be bid. In any case it is a fairly long shot relying as it does on the ♥Q lying doubleton in the East hand.

Hand 14

1♣, 1♠, 1NT (or 2NT – 17 points), and there the auction will probably end.

No trumps make 8 tricks as the defence attacks Diamonds.

4♠ can make 10 tricks, but do you really want to rely on ♠QJ dropping, and in any case is that the correct play?

Hand 15

South opens 1♥ (both majors), and North raises to 4♥.

With the Diamond finesse working declarer can make 11 tricks in either Hearts or No trumps for the loss of just a Heart and a Spade.

Hand 16

1♦, 1♠, 1NT (or 2NT).

Over 1NT (15 to 17) East invites with 2NT and West bids the game – 3NT.

North probably leads a Heart and declarer starts to set up the Spades.

9 tricks should roll in although he is fortunate that the Queens provide entries in both clubs and hearts.

Hand 17

North opens 1♥ and South chooses from 4♥, 4♦, 2NT or 4NT depending on the conventions available.

Whichever route is followed 2 Club losers should come to light and the auction will finish in either 4♥ or 5♥.

10 top tricks and a Club ruff should roll in for 11 altogether.

Partner opened on a balanced hand - commentary

Hand 18

1NT, 2♠ will probably complete the auction.

A small Heart lead by North works best but it's not exactly inviting.

The obvious play is to lead two rounds of Spades, but then a real game of cat and mouse ensues as declarer attacks the minor suits until South is forced to ruff and shorten his trumps.

Taking just one round of trumps is more comfortable, but feels unlikely.

Declarer can come to nine tricks in Spades (or diamonds or clubs), thanks to all the minor suit honours lying with North whilst 1NT makes 7 tricks.