Raising partner's Opener - Commentary

Hand 1

North opens 1♠.

South has 4-card support. He might add on 1 point for his doubleton, although a doubleton Queen may well be a wasted point or two, but even so it only comes to 9 and so a raise to 2♠ is automatic suggesting about 5 to 9.

With 18 points North must bid again. Either bid 3♠ invitationally (not the best way to play this bid, but it will do for now) or make a trial bid – my preferred method is to bid 3♦ – as natural as possible - and suggesting 17 or 18 points, although he might well add a point or two for the two singletons and raise immediately to 4♠ on 19 or 20.

With a near maximum and a matching honour in Diamonds South will raise to 4♠.

With most of the defensive cards lying right declarer will have little trouble in coming to 11 tricks.

Playing the Losing Trick count (LTC) South will still judge his balanced hand on points, but North might place his hand at 5 losing tricks and jump immediately to 4♠.

Hand 2

East opens 1♥.

West might bid 4♥ on such a fit and should certainly compete to that level but is a little strong for this treatment.

Alternatively West will value his hand at 10 points or 8-loser and will raise to 3♥ in either case.

With 17 points (including 1 for the doubleton), or 5 losers East will not hesitate in raising to 4♥.

(In due course he might show some slam interest by bidding in a new suit (either 3♠ or 4♦ depending on the partnership style.)

Declarer cannot avoid losing a spade and a heart, but otherwise will have little trouble in coming to 11 tricks.

Hand 3

South has an automatic 1♠ opening.

Lacking 4-card support North will respond 1NT, South will rebid 2♣ and South should show preference to 2♠.

The most effective lead is a club. At some point East will get in with the King and return the suit giving the defence a ruff to go with the ♠A and 2 hearts.

In practice West is more likely to lead ♦3 or ♥5, after which declarer should come to at least 8 tricks.

NS can make 8 tricks in spades or 9 tricks in clubs.

Meanwhile EW can make 8 tricks in either red suit.

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Hand 4

West opens 1♠, East responds 2♣ and West rebids 2NT (game-forcing following the 2-level response).
East can now show his 3-card support with 3♠ which West will raise to 4♠.
North probably leads ♥T against 2♠.
East should play low and South must duck to negate the entry.
Declarer needs to get his timing right.
The heart ruff is tempting, but even when the ♣J falls under the ♣Q overtaken by the ♣K there will still be a trump in the South hand.
Better is to take 2 rounds of trumps in hand then clear the top clubs before crossing to the ♠Q to take out the last trump and cash 2 clubs.
10 tricks made, thanks to the favourable lie of the clubs.
No trumps also make 10 tricks, if only to prove that the ruffing trick did not help.

Hand 5

North opens 1♥ (higher of two 5-card suits).
South's hand is a bit flat, but with 4-card support and 11 points (?+1 for the doubleton) – or 8-losers - he must jump to 3♥.
Although only 12 points and with no top controls North will probably bid 4♥ hoping that the shape will work for him.
Indeed, when dummy goes down he can easily count sufficient tricks if the clubs come home.
East will probably lead ♠A.
When the ♥K drops the ♥Q declarer will not be able to avoid a second trump loser alongside the ♥A and 2 spades for 1 down – but it still feels like the right contract.

Hand 6

With a balanced hand and both majors East opens 1♥.
West values his balanced hand at 11 points (1 for the weak doubleton) and raises to 3♥, and with a few points to spare East bids the game.
South has a difficult lead. ♦Q works well but a club seems more likely.
Declarer loses just 2 Hearts and a spade, throwing a third Diamond on either Spades or Clubs so making 4♥, although 3NT + 1 scores better at pairs.

Hand 7

South opens 1♥. With 4-card support and 10 points (+1 for the small doubleton) North will not hesitate to raise to 3♥.
South will raise to 4♥.
(At a more advanced stage North might make a control-showing cue bid of 3♠, or a more or less natural bid of 3♣ – whichever is the agreed partnership method, but the lack of a diamond control should come quickly to light and the partnership will stop in 4♥.)
Declarer cannot avoid the loss of one spade and two diamonds, but 10 tricks should quickly roll in.

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Hand 8

I open 1NT on this West hand – others might prefer 1♠.
In the absence of Stayman East should invite with 2NT and West must show his suit with 3♠ to give a choice. East will raise to 4♠.
North is likely to give a trick away with his opening lead – a trump works best.
After clearing trumps ♥A and small to the Queen together with a diamond ruff in dummy will lead quickly to 10 tricks.
No trumps also make 10 tricks from the West hand, but for me those minor suit stops look a bit thin.

Hand 9

North opens 1♠, South responds 2♣, and North rebids 2♦.
South can now see the 8-card fit in spades and so, with 15 points in a balanced hand, should jump to 4♠.
(In due course we might prefer a fourth suit bid of 2♥.)
Declarer cannot avoid one loser in each of spades, hearts and clubs, but should have little difficulty in taking the remaining 10 tricks.
No trumps makes 9 tricks, but the spade contract is superior in every way.

Hand 10

Some will open 2NT on this West hand, but 1♦ describes the hand better. With only 7 playing tricks in sight you require a response from partner to make a game so take the chance to show the shape. West responds 1♠.
Easiest at this stage is to ask with 4NT on the East hand, and the 5♦ response promising one ace might well be sufficient to take a chance on 6♠.
Declarer will have little difficulty reeling in all 13 tricks, but it is almost impossible to identify the specific minor suit honours holding which will enable you to bid the grand without seriously advanced methods.

Hand 11

South opens 1♣, and North responds 1♠.
With 20 points (including 3 for the singleton) South must bid at least 4♠.
In the absence of other methods I tend to bid 5♠ on the basis of 4 losing tricks facing 9 (although 4♥, 5♦ and 5♥ are all possible), and with the two top trumps North must surely bid 6♠.
East probably leads ♦J, but declarer simply clears trumps and then cashes all of his minor suit winners for 12 tricks.

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Hand 12

West opens 1♠ and North passes.

East must bid at least 4♠ on his hand.

In an older method he would make a delayed game raise with 2♥ but this risks letting the opponents in to locate a minor suit fit.

4NT would do the job, but is rarely the best choice.

In due course a splinter bid, a high-card raise, or a fit-jump might prove the best course, but for now 5♠ is an excellent way forwards.

With 2 top trumps and a few points to spare West must raise to 6♠.

Against 4♠ North will lead ♥2 or ♣T.

Declarer cannot afford to take two red suit finesses.

Against either of the suggested leads declarer's best line is to go up with the ace and clear trumps starting with a finesse before discarding two diamonds on the clubs and giving up a heart before claiming 12 tricks.

If the defence find a diamond lead he must go up with the ace and discard two diamond losers before attacking the trump suit.

6♠ is not a great contract depending as it does on the trump finesse.

Hand 13

North opens 1♥, South responds 1♠, and North rebids 1NT.

South can see only 30 (31, 32) points between 2 flat hands and so will settle for 3NT, although he may travel by way of 3♥, 3♠ as they search for a 5-3 major suit fit.

East has a difficult lead, but probably opts for ♣7. Both 6NT and 6♥ make but they depends on the heart split, the ♦Q dropping, and running the ♠7. They are not great contracts.

Hand 14

1♠, 2♣, 2♦.

West can now see the 8-card spade fit and with 11 (12) points (or 8-loser) bids 3♠, which East will raise to 4♠.

South probably leads a heart. Declarer does best to lead ace and another diamond thereby ensuring a ruff in dummy before attacking trumps. 10 tricks will then roll in, but it will be difficult if he allows the defence to clear the trumps in dummy.

Alternatively, he can establish the clubs with a running finesse on the second round, but he will have to be careful to maintain sufficient entries on table.

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Hand 15

South opens 1NT.

North invites with 2NT, and South, with a maximum, bids 3♠ to show his 5-card major on the way to game. North raises to 4♠.

This is a sequence which many will not recognize, but it is just one of a number of considerations which allows a natural 4-card major system to include ways of showing the 5-card suit.

West probably leads ♦7.

If declarer can read that the 7 is unlikely to be from an honour he will go up with the ace before clearing trumps and running the ♦T towards the ♦Q.

He should come to 10 tricks for the loss of one heart, one diamond and one club, but might make 11 if the defence fail to set up their heart before it goes away on diamond.

Hand 16

1♥, 2♥ should be routine.

Counting points I come to 18 for this West hand, discounting the honour points for the singleton ♦Q, but adding on 3 for the shortage. This would suggest a trial bid.

My choice of style is to bid a naturalish shape-showing 3♣ which East will raise to 4♥ with his near maximum, but other styles of trial bid will work just as well.

Alternatively, West may value his hand a 5-loser in which case he will rebid 4♥ immediately.

I lead ♠6 from North which eases declarer's choice of finesse. ♦A also works, and both ♣6 or a trump are reasonable alternatives.

After that trumps can be cleared in two rounds for the loss of 1 trick, and declarer will make 10 or 11 tricks depending on the choice of spade finesse.

Hand 17

North opens 1♠, South responds 2♦ (the higher of two 5-card suits) and North is strong enough to rebid 3♣.

The least South can do now is 5♣. 4NT would locate the two missing aces, but in general I would discourage the use of Blackwood once clubs have been agreed – a 5♣ response would at least leave you in game, but a 1-ace response could leave you in a very thin slam.

The most constructive way forward would be to start with a 4th-suit bid of 3♥, but this might be getting ahead of ourselves.

Thirteen tricks in clubs are easy, but only biddable if you can place the major suit aces opposite partners' singletons.

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Hand 18

I open 1♣ (always open a minor with 4-4-4-1 shape) on this East hand.
West responds 1♦ and North may or may not double in the search for a major suit fit.
If North passes East will rebid 1♥ and West should rebid 1♠ – natural and forcing at the 1-level. East then chooses between 3♠ (16 points after adjustment) and 4♠ (5-loser hand).
West should raise 3♠ to game on the low loser count.
If North doubles all sorts of possibilities ensue, including both hearts by NS and spades by EW.
Provided that the defence attack trumps and avoid a cross-ruff EW will come to no more than 7 tricks in spades. The trump split is deadly.
Meanwhile NS can make 9 tricks in hearts.