Winter 2026
Match 1 (20 July 2026)

The last laugh

At the end of the first round of this season's Online Pairs League, Julianne Rocks and Kevin Davies (EW) have the top score of 18.57 IMPs, while the North-South leaders are Phil Glover and John Friesen on 13.71 IMPs. The bulk of these IMPs for each of these pairs came from Board 2.

Nowadays it is popular to play a 2D opening as showing a weak two in either major, and 2H and 2S openings as showing that suit plus a minor (some play 2H as showing hearts and any other suit). At both our featured tables, East opened 2H and South overcalled 2S, but the approaches at each table diverged after that.

There is something to be said for the strategy of giving the opponents the last guess. I rather like the 4H bid of Julianne when she was West. Will this make? Not this time. But it ups the ante. "My country, right or wrong" says North with a 4S bid, as one tends to in a 4-level battle between the majors. This was passed back to Julianne, who doubled. Again, this could be wrong, but your side seems to have all the suits except spades, so it seems reasonable to back yourself to have stampeded your opposition into the wrong spot.

What should West lead against 4S doubled? Often a trump is best when your side is strong in all the other suits, and that allows the contract to be taken two down. In practice (at this table and others), loyal West led a low card in partner's suit, low from dummy, HQ from East who returned the singleton club. Declarer now had two chances to hold the loss to one down: either lead diamonds and ruff twice in dummy, or finesse to the H10 (drawing trumps first would also work given the 2-2 break) to set up the HK as an extra winner.

Instead, declarer played one round of trumps before attacking diamonds. Julianne gained the lead and led a second round of trumps. Declarer ruffed a diamond and then had no route to an extra trick and was two down, -500 and 9.57 IMPs away.

BOARD 2		
BD: 2	♠A53 ♥KT5 ♦6 ♣JT9432	**Dlr: E** **Vul: NS**
♠T9 ♥J64 ♦AKT8		♠87 ♥AQ873 ♦J7432

♣KQ65		♣7
	♠KQJ642 ♥92 ♦Q95 ♣A8	

At our other table, after East opened 2H and John Friesen (South) overcalled 2S, West was content to bid just 3H. She was right that this was a partscore deal – but cautious parsimony would later crescendo to extravagance. North raised to 3S and South made it 4S, passed to East, who bid 5H. You can see what he was thinking, not wanting to allow the opponents to make their vulnerable game, but he had taken the last guess, and Phil (North) rightly doubled.

The guess proved to be a wrong one – a phantom sacrifice against a game that was not making. Worse still, a diamond trick was lost to the queen, when the "nine never" rule (don't finesse if holding nine cards in the suit) failed, and that was -800 and a 9.43 IMP swing.

Comments or questions?

You can interact with Derrick about his analysis on the Bridge NSW Facebook page by commenting on the post for that week of OPL.

About Derrick Browne

Derrick Browne is the author of over 40 books and pamphlets on bridge. He is also owner of Trumps Bridge Centre in Mosman, Sydney, which offers training, duplicate games, bridge books and accessories, and holidays including Canberra 20-23 September and Leura 22-25 November.