Winter 2026
Match 2 (27 July 2026)

Smolen valour

An oft-asked question is how to bid hands with five cards in one major and four cards in the other major, after partner opens 1NT. A popular modern approach is that Stayman then (if opener answers 2D) 2H or 2S is weak with five cards in the shown major, a “drop dead” bid (but some play Stayman then 2S as invitational).

With game points in answer to a 1NT or 2NT opening, the late Mike Smolen suggested using Stayman and then (if opener denies a major) to bid 3H to show five **spades**, or bid 3S to show five **hearts**. This sequence occurred at two of our Division 1 tables. Thus East opened 1NT, West responded 2C Stayman, East bid 2D no major, and West players Gerald Dawson and Elena Rochtchina bid 3S, Smolen, showing five hearts (and four spades, given the initial Stayman call).

Better still, the two East players who faced this auction actually remembered, and bid 4H to show the fit (another possibility would be to bid 4C to show a control and a maximum hand). West then bid on to slam.

At one of these two tables, South led a diamond, and by the simple expedient of playing second hand low, declarer gained the extra trick needed for the contract. But at the other table where Eric Baker was declarer (as well as at several other tables that reached slam without employing Stayman), South led a heart, which gave declarer no help.

With hearts behaving, slam just needs a successful finesse to any of the three jacks to prevail. Some declarers finessed to the CJ and went down. Some finessed to the DJ and went down. Eric rightly drew trumps then led a low spade towards the jack. Even if this had lost, a 3-3 spade break would have seen the contract home – and if that did not work either, declarer could find out and still be able to try something else, such as finessing to the DJ.

BOARD 2		
BD: 2	♠Q63 ♥J4 ♦T94 ♣Q9753	Dlr: E Vul: NS
♠AK94 ♥Q9652 ♦K8 ♣KJ		♠J75 ♥AK3 ♦AJ72 ♣A42
	♠T82 ♥T87	

♦Q653
♣T86

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
T

N						5	
S					16		17
E	4	6	6	6	6	2	
W	4	6	6	6	6		

Div 1 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 2

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
6♥ by EW	-1	50	1
6NT by EW	-1	50	1
4♠ by EW	+2	-480	1
4♥ by EW	+2	-480	1
6♥ by EW	=	-980	3
6♥ by EW	+1	-1010	1

Div 2 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 2

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
7NT by EW	-1	50	1
4♥ by EW	+1	-450	1
4♥ by EW	+2	-480	2
6NT by EW	=	-990	4

Valour at the bridge table is admirable. So is surviving to do battle again next Monday.

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.