Winter 2026
Match 4 (10 August 2026)

Maximal double, maximal rubble

After agreeing your fit at the 2-level, a bid of a new suit is a game try, and this is especially useful when the opponents bid over you e.g. after 1S (2C) 2S (3C by next opponent) now an "in between step" (3D or 3H) invites game, while a reraise (3S) is competitive (no game interest, but usually an extra trump). What if there is no in between step available, e.g. after 1S (2H) 2S (3H by next opponent) as the bidding often started on the deal below? In such cases where the opponent made the "maximal" bid (the one immediately below your suit), the only way to invite is to double, often referred to as a "maximal double".

Over South's 3H, West has a close decision whether to make this maximal double, or compete with 3S, or perhaps pass or 4S if you think one of those may lead the enemy to make a wrong decision. Ted Griffin doubled as West (inviting game), and Bruce Neill had an easy 4S bid as East, with a maximum and the well-placed HK over the bidder. This would probably have made for +620, but North sacrificed in 5H and now East could double and collect +500 the easy way, without partner having to make the tight game. (All our Division 1 declarers in spade contracts made ten tricks, but this was not always the case in other grades.)
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	BOARD 4	
BD: 4	♠A83	**Dlr: W**
	♥AQJ965	**Vul: ALL**
	♦	
	♣Q543	
♠KQJ965		♠T72
♥82		♥K3
♦A43		♦JT965
♣KJ		♣AT2
	♠4	
	♥T74	
	♦KQ872	
	♣9876	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	2		3		13
S	3		3		14 8
E		2		3	1 5
W		2		4	1

Div 1 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 4

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
4♥ by NS	-1	-100	2
3♠ by EW	+1	-170	3
2♠ by EW	+2	-170	1
4♥X by NS	-1	-200	1
5♥X by NS	-2	-500	1

Board 10 featured another marginal 4S for East-West. This hand helped send Julianne Rocks and Kevin Davies to top spot in Division 1; they stopped in 3S and made ten tricks for +170, but this was worth 8.86 IMPs because everyone else was going down in 3S or 4S, except at one table where North-South made 5C doubled!

East opened 1S but there was a lot of divergence thereafter. Some South players passed (normal?) but aggressive players overcalled 2D or make a takeout double. Some West players invited game, while others bid 4S, the classic IMPs game try (bid game and try to make it).

Defence was now critical. South doesn't want to lead a singleton trump, and doesn't want to lead a suit headed by the ace without the king, so a low heart is chosen by a process of elimination. An honour is played from dummy and North wins the HA. There is no reason for North to assume a heart ruff will be coming for the defence, and the dummy's hearts are an imminent danger. The classic defence is to lead towards weakness, and if North leads the DQ (or a low diamond, if reluctant to cast forth the honour) the defenders can quickly finish with five tricks.

BOARD 10

BD: 10	♠J98 ♥A4 ♦Q3 ♣QJ9852	**Dlr: E** **Vul: ALL**
♠K653 ♥KQJ97 ♦764 ♣7		♠AQ742 ♥82 ♦KT2 ♣KT3
	♠T ♥T653 ♦AJ985 ♣A64	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	2			10
S	4	2			9 12
E			1	2	9
W				1	

Div 1 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 10

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
5♣X by NS	=	750	1
4♠ by EW	-2	200	3
4♠ by EW	-1	100	1
3♠ by EW	-1	100	2
3♠ by EW	+1	-170	1

At one table, East opened 1S, South passed, West bid 2NT as a good spade raise, and North, Adrian Beaumont, bid 3C. East bid 4S, and South, Dell MacNeil, bid 5C, which looks like sensible insurance although as the cards lie there is no game available for either side. Well, that's the theory…

East started with the SA. At trick two, a heart switch or even a spade continuation would defeat the contract but the actual D2 lead was dangerous, risking setting up dummy's long suit; and so it was, after Adrian ran the lead to his DQ, led the CQ (covered by king and ace) and a club to the jack, then repeated the diamond finesse. With that suit established and a trump still in South's hand, 11 tricks were taken for +750 and +11.86 IMPs – a maximal double of a different kind.

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.