Winter 2026
Match 6 (24 August 2026)

The loneliest number

Board one in this week's OPL was unusual in the variety of scores it produced. Particularly noteworthy was Division 2, where the eight matches produced eight different scores, yet no table had the score that was the most common in Division 1!

A standard auction might proceed as follows. North opens 1D and East makes a 2H weak jump, silencing South (whereas where East overcalled just 1H, some South players found a 2D response). West jumps to 4H. This column has previously discussed the desirability of pushing the opponents out of their 4-major comfort zone, so North bids 5D (or possibly 4NT Unusual, to keep 5C as an option), hoping the minor game makes, or that the opponents would have made 4H or might be pushed to 5H. Another point this column has previously enunciated is the undesirability of bidding 5-over-5, but West's massive heart fit, void in the enemy suit and good shape with the strong side-suit make 5H a reasonable odyssey to undertake.

The top Division 2 score for North-South went to Sherlock Shao for 4C by North making 12 tricks, +170 and +9.71 IMPs, an amusing outcome considering that the top Division 1 North-South score of +400 was worth much less, just +6.43 IMPs!

The next best Division 2 score for North-South was +50 for taking East one down in 5H – a common outcome across the divisions. Can you see the key to making the contract (not counting the stock standard need to draw trumps)? Declarer needs to finesse spades twice on the actual and common layout. Many players ruffed the diamond lead, crossed to hand with a trump, and erred by ruffing another diamond with the H10, leaving the HA as the only trump in dummy. Bruce Neill (Division 1) correctly ruffed the second round of diamonds with the *ace*, leaving a smaller heart in dummy to lead to cross to the East hand ready for the spade finesse. A later club ruff allowed the lead to return to East to repeat the finesse, for 11 tricks, worth +450 (this gave +11.71 IMPs in Division 1, yet only +4.29 IMPs in Division 2).

Finally, let us consider the play in a diamond contract. Declarer has a loser in each major, and must find the CQ. After drawing trumps, some led the C8 and had East helpfully throw the CQ, as if having forgotten the second hand low rule.

Philip Glover declared 5D against one of the top pairs in Division 1, and led a subtly different card, the CJ, and this East remembered a second hand rule, namely "cover and honour with an honour" – but that saw the demise of the CQ and any hope of defeating the contract. Should East have covered the CJ? That would be right if declarer had A-J-x-x, but a strong declarer would not have led the CJ from that holding, preferring to correctly lead a club *towards* the CJ. To get these difficult covering decisions right, stop being lonely and sneak inside the head of your opponent!

BOARD 1

BD: 1	♠6 ♥J ♦AKJT742 ♣AJT8	**Dlr: N** **Vul: None**
♠AQJT98 ♥AT85 ♦ ♣654		♠732 ♥KQ9643 ♦Q8 ♣Q7
	♠K54 ♥72 ♦9653 ♣K932	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N T
N	3	5			14
S	4	5			11 9
E			5	5	6
W			5	5	

Div 1 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 1

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
5♦ by NS	=	400	3
4♦ by NS	+1	150	1
5♥ by EW	-1	50	2
5♦ by NS	-1	-50	1
5♥ by EW	=	-450	1

Div 2 FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 1

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
4♣ by NS	+2	170	1
5♥ by EW	-1	50	1
5♦X by NS	-1	-100	1
6♦X by NS	-2	-300	1
4♥ by EW	=	-420	1
5♥ by EW	=	-450	1
5♥ by EW	+2	-510	1
4♥X by EW	=	-590	1

Comments or questions?
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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.