

ANC Butler Pairs

Problems, answers and discussions

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Test yourself on these tricky problems from the 2017 ANC Butler pairs

- All vul, you are dealer. ♠T43 ♥9 ♦Q9873 ♣J853
P P 1♠ P ?
- All vul, you are dealer. ♠AK ♥97 ♦AQJ732 ♣K85
1♦ 2♥ (weak) 2♠ 3♥ ?
- NV v Vul, you are dealer. ♠AJ6 ♥KQ3 ♦KJT987 ♣T
1♦ 3♣ P 3NT end. What do you lead?
- No-one vul, partner dealer. ♠QT3 ♥KQ106 ♦2 ♣AK954
Uncontested auction 1NT (11-14 hcp) – 2♣ – 2♠ – 3♣ – 3NT – ? 2♣ was stayman, 3♣ was a further enquiry. 3NT denies 4 diamonds and denies 5 spades (2♠ had already denied 4♥).
- No-one vul, you are dealer. ♠AT8 ♥J7542 ♦QJ ♣Q107
P P 2NT (20-22) P ? Do you transfer to ♥s, do you try 3NT or anything higher?
- Vul v NV, partner dealer. ♠J4 ♥J9 ♦AK9 ♣KQJ943
P P 1♣ 2♠ 3♥ 4♠ ? 2♠ was weak.
- No-one vul, LHO is dealer. ♠K5 ♥Q93 ♦JT6542 ♣A6.
P P 1♣ 1♦, X 2♦ 2♥ P, 4♦ P 4♥ end. LHO's double showed hearts. RHO's 2♥ showed a minimum hand with 4 hearts, 4♦ was a splinter. Your lead?
- Vul v NV, LHO dealer. ♠AT8743 ♥T86542 ♦7 ♣-
1♣ 1♦ P 1♠, 3♣ 3♦ P ?
- Not content with one 6610 shape, here's another!
All vul, RHO dealer. ♠AK9432 ♥AKJ972 ♦5 ♣-
1♦ 2♦ 2♠ P, 3♣ 4♣ 5♣ P, P 5♦ P 5♠, P ? Your 2♦ was Michaels, 2♠ showed diamonds, your 4♣ was undiscussed as was your 5♦ but is obviously wanting partner to bid. Now he finally has, what do you do?
- Dummy: ♠K82 ♥5 ♦AQ42 ♣QT983
Your hand: ♠Q765 ♥J9 ♦T9863 ♣A2
Non-vul v Vul, you were dealer and the auction went 2♦ P 2NT 3♥ X P 4♦ end.
Your 2♦ showed a weak hand with ♦ and ♠, partner's 2NT was an ask. Not sure what your X was but you have ended in 4♦.
LHO leads the ♥2 to RHO's K. RHO continues the ♣5 on which you play the 2, LHO wins the ♣K and switches to the ♠T which goes 2, 4 and your Q. Now what?
- Dummy: ♠T73 ♥K105 ♦J865 ♣AK7
Your hand: ♠AK ♥AQJ76 ♦A972 ♣J4
Non-vul v vul, RHO was dealer. Your auction was uncontested and ended in 6♥. Lead was ♠Q. Slam basically depends on playing the diamonds for 1 loser. Trumps are 3-2 and both opponents will follow to 3 rounds of each black suit if you try messing around with those. What layouts can you play for?
- All vul, RHO dealer. ♠AKQT7 ♥AKT9 ♦Q8 ♣74. RHO passes and you bid uncontested 1♠ – 2♦ – 2♥ – 4♥. 2♦ was 10+, 4♥ is obviously enough to game force but is limited because partner did not go through fourth suit. Do you move?
If you do, and bid blackwood, partner will show 1 key card. Now what?
- Vul v NV, LHO dealer. ♠AQ76 ♥AKT542 ♦7 ♣AT
3♣ P 4♣ X, 5♣ 5♠ P ?

Answers and discussion

1. I elected to pass but this cost a vulnerable game when partner held ♠AKQJ2 ♥AQ842 ♦A64 ♣-. He had elected not to open a game force as it is often hard to show 2 suits when doing that. Perhaps I should stretch to raise with 3 card support and a singleton.
2. Facing a tricky bid, partner elected to raise on the doubleton and bid 4♠. Unfortunately sitting opposite with ♠Q10972 ♥A ♦T95 ♣AQT3 this caused me to propel us into 6♠. After a ♥ lead to the A this is still a pretty good slam, basically requiring the spades to play for no loser or, failing that, a diamond finesse into the hand that has made a weak jump. Sadly there was ♠Jxxx over me and the diamond finesse was offside so 6♠ failed. 6♦ was the right spot.
3. This is one from the textbooks. You are looking at almost all the defence's assets and there are going to be a lot of club tricks quickly available to declarer in dummy. So it is likely your only chance is to get your diamond suit going quickly. RHO almost certainly has the A for his 3NT bid but where is the Q? If RHO has it there's probably no chance, if partner has it that's great. If dummy has it again you are probably in trouble — except in one case — singleton Q. So you try the ♦K and, to your immense satisfaction see the following dummy:

♠T73 ♥872 ♦Q ♣AK8642.

Declarer has the two red aces and ♣Q but that's all so 3NT just makes 8 tricks (note the ♦J lead would give the ♦Q declarer's 9th trick). As it turns out a spade lead would also work as partner has K9542.

4. Having discovered partner did not have 4 diamonds, I decided 3NT could be very silly and put partner in the 4-3 spade game instead. This proved to be exactly what partner did not want holding ♠8752 ♥A98 ♦AQ9 ♣QJT! 4♠ failed by 2 when everyone else was in the normal 3NT making.
5. With so many queens and jacks and a poor heart suit I elected to just bid 3NT. Like every slam decision we made in this particular match that was wrong when partner turned up with: ♠Q2 ♥AKQ8 ♦AK92 ♣KJ8. 6♥ would have been easy. Not many got to this slam but I was surprised how many tables played in 4♥. Had I elected to transfer partner was going to super-accept and I would surely have moved towards 6♥ then.
6. Partner passed and we defended 4♠ undoubled for 2 off. This was very conservative considering 3♥ must show a maximum passed hand so the partnership basically has game values. He felt he should have tried 5♣ which was cold opposite my hand of ♠2 ♥AT874 ♦QT8 ♣AT86.
7. There was a lot of information from the auction here. Firstly RHO has shown no interest opposite the 4♦ bid so could be looking at diamond wastage. Secondly, LHO is a passed hand but is making a mild slam try with 4♦ — so he obviously has quite a shapely hand which has caused him to get excited now a heart fit has been found. He has shown hearts first so presumably they are longer than his spades. With diamond shortage that means he probably has long clubs and they will set up once your ♣A is knocked out. So any weakness is likely to be in spades. I therefore took a chance with the ♠K.

The full hand turned out to be:

	♠ QJT64	
	♥ 7	
	♦ A87	
	♣ 9743	
♠ A9	N	♠ 8732
♥ KT642	W	♥ AJ85
♦ 3	E	♦ KQ9
♣ QJT85	S	♣ K2
	♠ K5	
	♥ Q93	
	♦ JT6542	
	♣ A6	

Dummy was much as expected. After the ♠ lead, declarer needs to get the trumps right to make 4♥. When he guessed wrong, the defence had 4 tricks for a pleasing +50.

In retrospect I think only East bid this hand well. After partner has passed, my 1♦ overcall is pretty pointless. It takes up no space and doesn't indicate a good lead for partner, an important consideration because we don't have the majors so are almost certainly going to end up defending. Having bid 1♦ though, I think North should bid 1♠ rather than 2♦ over the double — not only might that help us find a spade fit, it also helps indicate a good lead. And finally was West's 4♦ a good idea? Making slam opposite a weak NT type hand requires partner to have almost perfect cards. Is the chance of that worth the amount of information the 4♦ splinter gives away? My instinct is not. I am sure that, had West just bid 4♥, I would have led the ♦J.

8. At the table Arjuna De Livera elected to give up over 3♦. Unfortunately for him (and fortunately for us) his partner's hand was ♠J ♥AK7 ♦QJ65432 ♣A9. With hearts splitting 2-2, 4♥ was making. As so often seems to be the case in bridge, taking the more aggressive action would have paid dividends (although I personally think his pass was perfectly reasonable).
9. This was the very first board of the last day. We had had a good previous day to climb to 6th place within 10 VPs of the lead. Our first match was a crunch one against the leaders Mike Ware and Pete Hollands. I passed 5♠ at the table but partner held ♠T976 ♥63 ♦Q983 ♣974 and 6♠ was an easy make. A key point I failed to appreciate at the time was with equal length in the majors partner would have bid 5♥. So 5♠ will have a distinct preference for spades. Therefore 6♠ is surely worth a try. Two of the three pairs that did try it were rewarded with a double and +1660. What a nice start to the day that would have been (more on that later!) One table found the 7♣ save for 800, the others matched our result.
10. Mike Ware played this extremely nicely. After discovering the ♣K and ♥Q in the north hand (I had won ♥K at trick 1), he reasoned I needed the ♦K for my vulnerable 3♥ overcall. So he played a ♦ to the A dropping my singleton K. Now he could cross back to the ♣A, finesse partner's ♦J and later throw his three remaining spades on the good clubs to make an overtrick. Not bad when we were making 4♥ our way. I would have done better to just play ♥A at trick 2 and not give so much away.

The full hand:

	♠ T3	
	♥ Q732	
	♦ J75	
	♣ K764	
♠ Q765	N	♠ K82
♥ J9	W E	♥ 5
♦ T9863	S	♦ AQ42
♣		♣ QT983
	♠ AJ94	
	♥ AKT864	
	♦ K	
	♣ J5	

11. This is basically a suit combination problem. There are not many diamond layouts that allow you to play the suit for one loser it but they include:
 - a) Singleton K or Q under the A
 - b) Doubleton KQ in either hand
 - c) KT or QT doubleton under the J (lead up to the J, if it goes 10 J Q/K drop the other honour next, if the honour goes up run the J next to pin the now singleton 10)
 - d) KQx under the A (lead up to the J and insert the 8 losing to the Q, next run the J to pin the 10 — this position is known as an intra-finesse).

These suggest the best line is to try leading up to the J and later hope to guess well!

At the table there was Kx offside and QTx onside so the slam had no chance.

12. I continued with Blackwood and gambled 6♥ over 1 ace (basically hoping partner had some ♣ values). This was pretty stupid considering I probably also need him to have ♦AK and ♥Q to make the slam good. To rub it in 6♥ then got doubled on my right.

Dummy hit with: ♠82 ♥Q765 ♦AKJT6 ♣Q2.

I initially thought the double had been based on ♣AK and when the ♦2 was led, had visions of scoring the doubled slam I had missed out on at the start of the day. But no, the double was a genuine Lightner double asking for an unusual lead. Diamonds were 6-0 and the opening lead was ruffed, followed quickly by ♣A, ♣ to K and a second ruff for -800!

13. The very last board of the event was yet another distributional one. When partner freely bid 5♠ over 5♣ I thought I was worth 6♠. This promptly got doubled and I now had visions of the pre-empter having a void!

But the full hand was:

♠ AQ76	♠ T4	♠ KJ952									
♥ AKT542	♥ 6	♥ J									
♦ 7	♦ AQJ	♦ KT985									
♣ AT	♣ K987643	♣ J2									
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	N										
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	♠ 83										
	♥ Q9873										
	♦ 6432										
	♣ Q5										

After the bidding I had assumed partner might easily be void in clubs — I never dreamt he had 2! After a ♥ lead (South no doubt also thinking North was void) partner won A, drew trumps in 2 rounds and led a ♦ up. The heart split meant that suit couldn't be set up but the favourable diamond layout meant that suit could. At the third attempt I finally did have +1660! It would have been supremely ironic to have scored that on both the first and last board of the final day!

This hand does perhaps show up one of the weaknesses of the current format. By the end of such a long round robin, our opponents were out of contention. Would they really have bid this way had they been in contention to win? I very much doubt it. It is therefore a great advantage to be playing a pair out of contention at the end of the event. Perhaps a return to three stages with a 5 table final stage (matching the Womens and Seniors) would be better? 🍷