Plockton café drive 2026 hand commentary by Liz McGowan

1

N / -

	♠ KJ9 ♥ 64 ♦ Q6542 ♣ T76	
♠ 754 ♥ 982 ♦ A7 ♣ A9432		♠ Q632 ♥ AKJ53 ♦ T93 ♣ 8
	♠ AT8 ♥ QT7 ♦ KJ8 ♣ KQJ5	

	NS	EW
NT	7	5
♠	6	6
♥	5	8
♦	7	5
♣	8	5

6 / 8 HCP 10 / 16

Playing 5-card majors East will want to open and this is a good time to follow that instinct.

South will overcall 1NT, but West can raise to 2♥ to reach a nice spot. If East passes South will probably play in 1NT, making lots of tricks on a club lead.

2

E / NS

	♠ J9743 ♥ J52 ♦ AT8 ♣ K9	
♠ A8 ♥ KQ83 ♦ Q4 ♣ 86542		♠ T ♥ A974 ♦ KJ765 ♣ QJ3
	♠ KQ652 ♥ T6 ♦ 932 ♣ AT7	

	NS	EW
NT	4	6
♠	8	5
♥	3	9
♦	4	9
♣	4	9

9 / 11 HCP 11 / 9

Not such a great opening bid for East but passing may mean the deal is passed out. If you do open, South will overcall 1♠.

North should not raise to game at this vulnerability: the hand is primarily defensive and 5332 has limited ruffing values.

I predict a mixed bag of results!

3

S / EW

	♠ Q873 ♥ J3 ♦ A9743 ♣ Q7	
♠ AT ♥ Q98765 ♦ QJT ♣ AK		♠ 64 ♥ AK42 ♦ 652 ♣ 8632
	♠ KJ952 ♥ T ♦ K8 ♣ JT954	

	NS	EW
NT	4	9
♠	9	4
♥	3	9
♦	7	6
♣	7	6

9 / 16 HCP 7 / 8

West should certainly open this 11 count (only 6 losers).

The Double Dummy Solver defeats 4♥ by underleading the ♦A to give South a ruff. Since no normal player would find this defence, North-South do better to sacrifice in 4♠.

Easier for the defence to beat that game, but +100 is not much compensation for a vulnerable game and they might just bid on to 5♥…

4

W / All

♠ K97
♥ J53
♦ T74
♣ AK73

♠ AT542
♥ T
♦ AQ83
♣ 865

♠ QJ86
♥ KQ974
♦ J962
♣ –

♠ 3
♥ A862
♦ K5
♣ QJT942

	NS	EW
NT	7·8	5
♠	2	11
♥	5·6	7
♦	2	10
♣	8·9	4

HCP: 11 / 10 / 9 / 10

This one may be passed out by those who rely too much on HCP. Yet 4♠ is quite playable with a combined 19 count.

If West does not open in first seat East should look at his majors and chance an opening in third.

You may not reach game, but you should manage a nice plus score

5

N / NS

♠ KJ62
♥ A963
♦ T53
♣ AJ

♠ QT4
♥ QJ
♦ AQ94
♣ KQT7

♠ 875
♥ K85
♦ 82
♣ 96532

♠ A93
♥ T742
♦ KJ76
♣ 84

	NS	EW
NT	6	6
♠	7	6
♥	8	4
♦	7	5·6
♣	5	8

HCP: 13 / 16 / 3 / 8

A weak 1NT from North will be passed round to West, who may double. A club lead holds declarer to 6 tricks for +200, but East will probably run to 2♣ for a less stressful +90.

Strong no-trumpers open one of a minor and may buy the contract in 1NT, losing 100 for a below average score.

Pairs scoring makes every deal count.

6

E / EW

♠ T6
♥ J53
♦ KQ73
♣ AK64

♠ AQ53
♥ 87
♦ J52
♣ 8753

♠ KJ872
♥ AQ92
♦ 84
♣ Q2

♠ 94
♥ KT64
♦ AT96
♣ JT9

	NS	EW
NT	7	6
♠	5	8
♥	8	4
♦	10	3
♣	8	4

HCP: 13 / 7 / 12 / 8

If the auction goes 1♠ - Pass - 2♠ - Pass - Pass South should make a re-opening double, hoping to push opponents up a level.

North can respond 2NT to show two places to play (aka 2p2p) and South bids 3♦, knowing North will convert to hearts if diamonds is not one of his suits. +130 is possible if you drop the ♣Q, but East will likely bid 3♠.

Still, +100 is a much better score than -110.

7

S / All

	♠ 84 ♥ J98 ♦ T862 ♣ K652	
♠ K2 ♥ Q742 ♦ KQJ9 ♣ AT9		♠ AJT973 ♥ 63 ♦ A75 ♣ QJ
	♠ Q65 ♥ AKT5 ♦ 43 ♣ 8743	

	NS	EW
NT	2-3	9
♠	2-3	10
♥	4	8
♦	3	10
♣	5	7

	4	
15	HCP	12
	9	

Our Double Dummy Solver makes 4♠ by picking up the ♠Q, something a real person would never do. (Playing for the queen to lie over the jack lost its appeal when we stopped shuffling the cards imperfectly!)

But many will make 4♠ anyway if South cashes both top hearts, establishing a discard for the losing club. The irritating DDS switches to a club at trick 2.

8

W / -

	♠ A64 ♥ 72 ♦ A94 ♣ AKQ94	
♠ Q53 ♥ Q54 ♦ 7632 ♣ J32		♠ KT7 ♥ AJ86 ♦ QJT ♣ 765
	♠ J982 ♥ KT93 ♦ K85 ♣ T8	

	NS	EW
NT	10	3
♠	10	3
♥	8	4
♦	9	4
♣	10	3

	17	
5	HCP	11
	7	

North's hand is really too good for a 15-17 1NT with the fine 5-carder and 2 side aces.

1NT will be passed out when 3NT makes easily, even on a passive ♦Q lead.

The DDS overtrick comes by playing on hearts, then endplaying East with the third round of diamonds. He peeks.

9

N / EW

	♠ AK94 ♥ Q76 ♦ K64 ♣ K63	
♠ T532 ♥ J5432 ♦ — ♣ QT84		♠ Q86 ♥ AT98 ♦ A52 ♣ A52
	♠ J7 ♥ K ♦ QJT9873 ♣ J97	

	NS	EW
NT	6	7
♠	5	7
♥	4	9
♦	9	4
♣	5	7

	15	
3	HCP	14
	8	

Not easy for East-West to get involved here. If North opens a strong no-trump South will transfer into diamonds for an easy plus. A weak no-trumper may open 1♠, giving South a real headache. Probably better to overbid a tad with 2♦ rather than choose the distorted 1NT, but whatever choice you make will probably end in a minus score.

10

E / All

♠ A9632
♥ 8
♦ J9542
♣ QJ

♠ JT7
♥ AKJT542
♦ AQ
♣ 4

♠ KQ
♥ 93
♦ KT876
♣ AT95

♠ 854
♥ Q76
♦ 3
♣ K87632

	NS	EW
NT	1	11
♠	4	7
♥	1	12
♦	3	9
♣	5	8

8 / 15 HCP 12 / 5

4♥+1 should be a popular result. DDS makes slam by finessing against the ♥Q, but there is no reason not to follow “nine never”.

Unless, of course, North decided to show a 2-suiter, giving you a clue.

11

S / -

♠ T8743
♥ 96
♦ 932
♣ T74

♠ AKQ952
♥ A8
♦ J85
♣ 93

♠ 6
♥ KQJ743
♦ AKT7
♣ 65

♠ J
♥ T52
♦ Q64
♣ AKQJ82

	NS	EW
NT	2	7
♠	3	9
♥	1	10
♦	2	10
♣	7	5

0 / 14 HCP 13 / 13

If South opens with a pre-empt – a club short of a Gambling 3NT, but there is rarely a perfect hand – West may win the contract in 4♠ and go down when trump break badly.

Over 1♣ it may be possible for East to insist on hearts.

The 4-level is quite high enough: South cashes 2 clubs and switches to his spade so there is an inevitable diamond loser.

12

W / NS

♠ KQT6
♥ 3
♦ K64
♣ AJT74

♠ J97432
♥ KT
♦ Q82
♣ Q2

♠ A5
♥ J9872
♦ AJT753
♣ –

♠ 8
♥ AQ654
♦ 9
♣ K98653

	NS	EW
NT	7·6	4
♠	6·5	7
♥	7·5	5
♦	4·3	9
♣	11	2

13 / 8 HCP 10 / 9

Hard to predict an outcome of what may be an exciting auction. Some Wests may open a seriously flawed weak 2♠, but that should not keep North-South out of their club game. A disciplined pass allows East to show the 2-suiter, and perhaps reach the par score of 5♦X-2.

13

N / All

	♠ J ♥ AKJT6 ♦ K8542 ♣ Q4	
♠ A973 ♥ 9752 ♦ A73 ♣ 87		♠ T8654 ♥ Q ♦ QT9 ♣ KJ62
	♠ KQ2 ♥ 843 ♦ J6 ♣ AT953	

	NS	EW
NT	9	4
♠	5	8
♥	10	2
♦	9·8	3
♣	8	4

	14	
8	HCP	8
	10	

North will probably play in 4♥. (Surely no vulnerable East will overcall here?)

The play is made awkward by the 4-1 trump break. Obvious to DDS to drop the singleton ♥Q and play on diamonds, but there is no shame in going down this time.

14

E / -

	♠ AJ75 ♥ Q32 ♦ 9754 ♣ T9	
♠ 8 ♥ J76 ♦ AQJT32 ♣ AJ8		♠ QT642 ♥ T854 ♦ 6 ♣ 754
	♠ K93 ♥ AK9 ♦ K8 ♣ KQ632	

	NS	EW
NT	6·7	6
♠	8	5
♥	6·7	6
♦	6·7	6
♣	8	5

	7	
13	HCP	2
	18	

North-South have the combined 25HCP recommended for 3NT, but on this occasion points do not produce enough tricks. The only real way to go plus is to defend a diamond contract by East but that is not a serious possibility…

15

S / NS

	♠ Q82 ♥ KJ8 ♦ KQJ74 ♣ Q4	
♠ K93 ♥ AQ65 ♦ A98 ♣ J32		♠ AJT76 ♥ T42 ♦ T5 ♣ 765
	♠ 54 ♥ 973 ♦ 632 ♣ AKT98	

	NS	EW
NT	6	7
♠	6	7
♥	6	7
♦	9	4
♣	9	4

	14	
14	HCP	5
	7	

Weak no-trumpers will likely buy the contract in 2♠ after a transfer and worry about going down. But they should score well enough.

Over a 1♣ opener North can introduce diamonds and compete to the 3-level to score +110.

16

W / EW

	♠ 6432 ♥ 6 ♦ QJ9732 ♣ 87	
♠ AQ95 ♥ AQ98 ♦ AK ♣ K32		♠ KJT ♥ KT43 ♦ T864 ♣ T9
	♠ 87 ♥ J752 ♦ 5 ♣ AQJ654	

	NS	EW
NT	2	11
♠	1	11
♥	1	12
♦	4	9
♣	5	7

3 / 22 HCP 7 / 8

Received wisdom suggests that 20-22 is too wide a range for a 2NT opener: this 22-count is far stronger than a minimum 20.

If West opens 2♣ South may stick in an overcall. Now West can be sure that the ♣K is well-placed, but probably cannot find the heart fit that makes slam playable.

17

N / -

	♠ 763 ♥ QJT5 ♦ AQ6 ♣ A42	
♠ AJT984 ♥ — ♦ 875 ♣ KJ76		♠ 52 ♥ AK8742 ♦ KT93 ♣ 8
	♠ KQ ♥ 963 ♦ J42 ♣ QT953	

	NS	EW
NT	5	8
♠	3-4	9
♥	5-6	7
♦	5	8
♣	6-7	6

13 / 9 HCP 10 / 8

If West were dealer it would be easy for the partnership to reach its best spot in spades.

But when North opens East will surely overcall in hearts, and West is not well-placed to argue.

Still, if South leads a club you can make 2♥ by discarding the losing spade and playing a diamond to the king.

18

E / NS

	♠ QJ9 ♥ Q954 ♦ K975 ♣ J9	
♠ 653 ♥ 2 ♦ AJT64 ♣ K872		♠ AK42 ♥ A87 ♦ Q82 ♣ T63
	♠ T87 ♥ KJT63 ♦ 3 ♣ AQ54	

	NS	EW
NT	6	7
♠	4	8
♥	8	5
♦	4	9
♣	5	8

9 / 8 HCP 13 / 10

A partscore battle.

It is important to compete, but not too far.

If East opens a weak 1NT the partnership will need to agree lebensohl to allow West to bid 2NT without getting too high.

19

S / EW

	♠ KJT653 ♥ 82 ♦ K4 ♣ A64	
♠ 84 ♥ Q9743 ♦ A83 ♣ 852		♠ Q97 ♥ AJT ♦ Q762 ♣ KJ9
	♠ A2 ♥ K65 ♦ JT95 ♣ QT73	

	NS	EW
NT	8	4·3
♠	10	3
♥	6	7
♦	7	6
♣	9	4·3

11 / 6 HCP 13 / 10

The cards lie well for North-South, but not quite well enough for them to make game.

The Double Dummy Solver picks up the ♠Q, but a real player might be accused of peeking.

There is a good case for North to open a strongish weak 2♠ in third seat to buy the contract.

20

W / All

	♠ AJT32 ♥ AKT43 ♦ — ♣ 875	
♠ 98 ♥ Q ♦ A97 ♣ AKJT642		♠ KQ654 ♥ J85 ♦ T652 ♣ Q
	♠ 7 ♥ 9762 ♦ KQJ843 ♣ 93	

	NS	EW
NT	3	9
♠	5	6·7
♥	10	2
♦	8	5
♣	3	7·8

12 / 14 HCP 8 / 6

If North can make a Michaels cue-bid to show both majors South should probably blast game.

Four hearts means a known 9-card fit, and a singleton in the second suit means you can establish it.

If West kicks off with three rounds of clubs, you can ruff and lead the ♦K to establish two diamond winners. ♠A is a third trick, and you can make 7 trump on a crossruff.

Better than allowing West to play 3NT!

21

N / NS

	♠ T65 ♥ JT42 ♦ 854 ♣ KQ4	
♠ J82 ♥ 9 ♦ J632 ♣ T9652		♠ KQ97 ♥ 875 ♦ AK97 ♣ 83
	♠ A43 ♥ AKQ63 ♦ QT ♣ AJ7	

	NS	EW
NT	9	4
♠	5	7
♥	9	4
♦	4	9
♣	7	6

6 / 2 HCP 12 / 20

If South could open 2NT North should simply raise to 3NT. 4333 distribution is not conducive to making extra tricks from ruffs. But East will open ahead of South, making it harder to reach the making game.

South will double a weak no-trump, but East-West can scramble into 2♦, which plays rather well.

22

E / EW

♠ T2
♥ 8
♦ 82
♣ AKQJ9832

♠ Q4
♥ 97654
♦ AK96
♣ T5

♠ AJ9875
♥ QJ3
♦ QT5
♣ 4

♠ K63
♥ AKT2
♦ J743
♣ 76

	NS	EW
NT	8	3
♠	4	8
♥	5	7
♦	5	7
♣	10	2

10 / 9 HCP 10 / 11

No matter how the auction begins, I suspect most Norths will try 5♣ at the first opportunity.

Some may even make 11 tricks if the defenders do not cash their three winners.

I have a sneaking admiration for anyone who tries 3NT, which might even make overtricks if the defence is not careful.

23

S / All

♠ K4
♥ AJ86
♦ Q85
♣ T952

♠ QJ8
♥ KQ7
♦ T72
♣ J764

♠ T73
♥ T95432
♦ A
♣ AKQ

♠ A9652
♥ —
♦ KJ9643
♣ 83

	NS	EW
NT	7	5
♠	9	3
♥	5	8
♦	10	2
♣	6	6

10 / 9 HCP 13 / 8

An unlucky board for East-West pairs.

4♥ looks a reasonable spot but can be down two when North makes a spade ruff to go with two natural trump tricks.

In fact, -200 may not score too badly. If South opens the final contract might be 4♠X, and if West leads a heart +790 is quite a likely outcome.

24

W / -

♠ K7
♥ 874
♦ A752
♣ K632

♠ AQ4
♥ 963
♦ KQT4
♣ AT7

♠ J982
♥ QJ52
♦ 986
♣ 85

♠ T653
♥ AKT
♦ J3
♣ QJ94

	NS	EW
NT	8	5
♠	7	6
♥	7	6
♦	7	6
♣	9	3

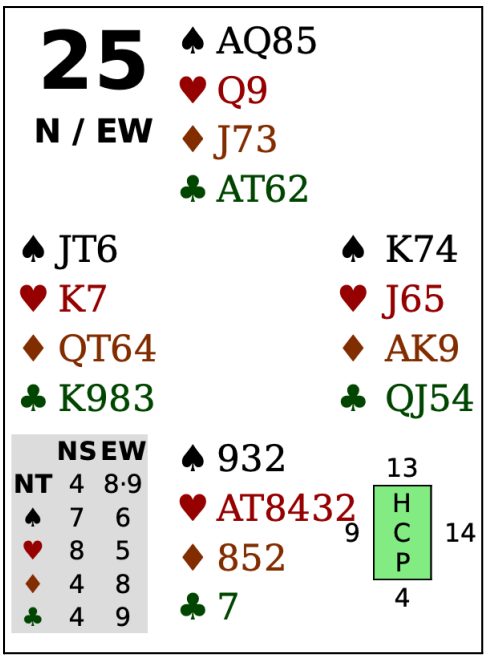
10 / 15 HCP 4 / 11

No-one can make much here.

Strong no-trumpers may buy it in 1NT.

DDS leads a heart from the North hand for -2, but a real North should choose to lead from Kxxx rather than Axxx and settle for -1.

If West opens 1♦ that may be passed round to South. A brave 1NT might secure a top score.



On partscore deals it is important to push opponents to the 3-level.

That will be hard for East-West if North opens a weak 1NT. South transfers into hearts and there is no easy way to get into the auction.

Where North, playing a strong 1NT, opens an amorphous 1♣, East will have to make an equally amorphous double to compete.