

Strange Singletons

Those pure folk who rarely risk the slam zone with less than a combined 30 count may have prospered this week at Akarana, though not entirely. There were a number of lower point count combinations where a slam looked most enticing but not all the defence's honours were where declarer wanted them.

They were with this hand but would you bid to 6♠ with the following collection:

- ♠ A9632 knowing that your partner had 4 card spade support missing
- ♥ AJT the trump queen, an opening hand, had the missing two key-
- ♦ AQJ7 cards (♠K and ♣A) but had signed off in game when you
- ♣ 4 showed a singleton club, Jacoby style?

It seems likely that they have wasted honours in clubs or perhaps not too many other honours. Slam needed one of two good things to happen....and when the ♠Q was singleton, you could take whichever red suit finesse you fancied as the small slam was secure:

<u>Board 5</u>		♠ A 9 6 3 2
North Deals		♥ A J 10
N-S Vul		♦ A Q J 7
		♣ 4
♠ Q	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ 10 8 7
♥ K 9 4 3		♥ 8 7 5 2
♦ 9 5 2		♦ K 8 6 3
♣ Q 8 7 6 3		♣ 10 9
		♠ K J 5 4
		♥ Q 6
		♦ 10 4
		♣ A K J 5 2

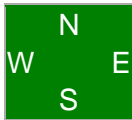
Only half the field bid that one though we had no company in the following one, wisely for the majority pairs.

Your hand was more modest:

- ♠ K832 and for your key decision, you knew partner who opened
- ♥ AJ84 the bidding 1♦ had a singleton club, ♥KQxx and one of
- ♦ 73 the missing aces
- ♣ A65

Perfect clubs and hearts and plenty of missing hcp in the other two suits. Leaving aside bad trump breaks, the slam is hard to make if diamonds break 4-2 (but that $\spadesuit K$ was not where declarer needed it):

Board 22
 East Deals
 E-W Vul

\spadesuit K 8 3 2 \heartsuit A J 8 4 \diamondsuit 7 3 \clubsuit A 6 5		\spadesuit A 9 \heartsuit 10 3 2 \diamondsuit J 6 5 \clubsuit Q J 8 7 2 \spadesuit Q J 7 \heartsuit K Q 9 6 \diamondsuit A Q 10 4 2 \clubsuit 4
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\spadesuit 10 6 5 4
 \heartsuit 7 5
 \diamondsuit K 9 8
 \clubsuit K 10 9 3

Board 28

West Deals
 N-S Vul

\spadesuit K Q J 10 3 \heartsuit A 9 8 5 \diamondsuit — \clubsuit K Q 9 7		\spadesuit 9 4 2 \heartsuit Q 10 4 3 \diamondsuit A Q \clubsuit A J 10 8
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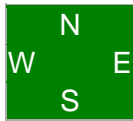
A third slam missing an ace came home when the key $\clubsuit Q$ was where a declarer needed it though these cards presented an interesting challenge:

West	North	East	South
1 \spadesuit	Pass	2 \clubsuit	Pass
?			

At the 11 tables, three pairs played in clubs, five in hearts and three in spades (in each case 2 in slam). The club slam would be good had East had more than two diamonds though two heart discards were not sufficient. The declarers had still to play hearts for no loser, or they should have been in that position. Neither pair in $6\heartsuit$ made their slam, the diamond lead from North in one case beating the slam legitimately.

Board 28

West Deals
 N-S Vul

\spadesuit K Q J 10 3 \heartsuit A 9 8 5 \diamondsuit — \clubsuit K Q 9 7		\spadesuit A 8 5 \heartsuit J \diamondsuit 10 9 8 6 4 2 \clubsuit 6 5 3 \spadesuit 9 4 2 \heartsuit Q 10 4 3 \diamondsuit A Q \clubsuit A J 10 8
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\spadesuit 7 6
 \heartsuit K 7 6 2
 \diamondsuit K J 7 5 3
 \clubsuit 4 2

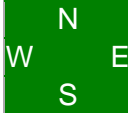
Interestingly, three slams made ($6\spadesuit$ twice and $6\clubsuit$ once) when North either led or switched to the $\heartsuit J$. With the $\spadesuit A$ a certain trick for the defence, that seems an unnecessarily risky card to play and, on the deal, solved all declarer's problems. The choice of slams seems to arise from West's second bid. Those who could make a diamond splinter finished in clubs. Those who rebid in

hearts finished with that suit as trumps while 6♠ seems a strange choice when a 4-4 club or heart fit was available using spades as discards.

Finally, a good singleton lead seemed to go unnoticed at at least three tables on this deal. No slam but strangely the heart game made when one would have thought it should not:

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ Q ♥ Q 9 ♦ A 8 5 4 2 ♣ A 10 7 6 3		♠ 8 ♥ A J 10 8 7 5 4 3 ♦ K Q J ♣ 8	♠ J 10 9 6 4 2 ♥ 6 2 ♦ 10 ♣ Q J 9 4
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	♠ A K 7 5 3 ♥ K ♦ 9 7 6 3 ♣ K 5 2		
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West	North	East	South
	1♥	Pass	1♠
2NT	4♥	All pass	

The bidding at most tables was something similar. Only at one table did East-West bid to 5♣, not correct on the board and certainly not when declarer went three down doubled.

However, for most, East led ♦10 against 4♥. North seemed absolutely fixed as there was no false-card to be made to hide the true diamond position.

Strangely, then at three tables, 4♥ made after this lead. West does not really have any better plan than to try and give their partner ruffs. That ♦9 in dummy and declarer's lack of small diamonds are real give-aways. At one table the ♦ lead was returned with low card, and East followed up with Q♣ not covered. Do you as West play the Ace anyway or try for two club tricks by leaving East on lead?

Singleton leads can backfire especially when led against a slam when you have an outside trick though generally are a positive way to try and beat contracts.

A singleton ♠Q, a singleton ♥J and a singleton ♦10. Only one benefited the defence....and then not always.

Richard Solomon