

ACBL-wide Junior Wide Game #1

Tuesday Daytime – January 22, 2018 – Set 226031



American Contract
Bridge League

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Oren grew up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and learned bridge at 14. He graduated from the University of Chicago in 2016 and has been playing and writing about bridge full time since then. His articles appear frequently on BridgeWinners and in The Bridge World. He is a regular on U.S. Junior teams. He has won a gold and silver medal in world Junior tournaments and was the non-playing captain of the U.S. open team in 2016.

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 5		
♥ K Q 5		
♦ K 10 9 8 5		
♣ Q 8 3		
♠ A 10 8 6		♠ Q 9 7
♥ J 8 4 3		♥ 10 9 6 2
♦ A 3		♦ J 7 2
♣ 10 4 2		♣ A J 7
		♠ J 4 3 2
		♥ A 7
		♦ Q 6 4
		♣ K 9 6 5

The auction rates to be straightforward at most tables, with only N/S bidding: 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT - Pass. A balance by West would be aggressive, but with neither side vulnerable at matchpoints, aggressively competing for partscores can be highly profitable, particularly if the partnership reaches 2♥ by West. Best defense will achieve down one, but North might lead the ♠K against that contract — with disastrous results.

Against 1NT by North, a heart lead looks routine, but should East lead high or low? We would lead low, rating the heart spots slightly too weak to lead the ♥10. Change the ♥6 to the ♥7, and the decision would be closer.

The percentage play in the diamond suit is to lead low to the ♦Q, then finesse West for the ♦J. On a heart lead, declarer might choose to win the first round in the North hand and attack diamonds this way. If declarer loses two diamond tricks, the defense can always hold declarer to seven tricks, but it would not be surprising to see some declarers take more.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K 7		
♥ A J 10 8 5 3		
♦ 10 3		
♣ A K 5		
♠ 9 5 4		♠ A Q J 8 2
♥ 9 7 4		♥ K 6
♦ A J 6 5 4		♦ K Q 8
♣ 10 7		♣ Q 6 3
		♠ 10 6 3
		♥ Q 2
		♦ 9 7 2
		♣ J 9 8 4 2

Would you open the East hand 1♠ or 1NT? We have no aversion to opening 1NT with a five-card major and would do so with this hand, rating it slightly too weak for an upgrade into the 18-19 range. 10 tricks are available in both spades and notrump due to an exceedingly friendly lie of the N/S cards, and we would not expect many players to even sniff at it.

If East opens 1NT, South and West will pass, and North will balance with whatever shows a single-suited hand with hearts in North's methods. East should compete with 2♠, and that will probably end the auction. After a likely heart lead, North may lay down a high club — the king is better than the ace — to tell South what is going on, then revert to hearts in case South started with a singleton ♥Q.

After this start, East would like to finesse in spades twice, but the entry situation is tricky. Crossing to dummy twice in diamonds will block the suit and leave declarer unable to lead up toward the ♣Q. A compromise might be to cross to the ♦J, then finesse in spades. After the finesse wins, East can cash the ♠A. This play will be a great success on today's layout: the ♠K falls, and diamonds divide 3-2, allowing declarer to dispose of the remaining club losers for 11 tricks and a good matchpoint score of +200.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 7 2
♥ A J 7 2
♦ 10 8 6 5
♣ K 6 4

♠ K Q J 10 6 5

♥ 5

♦ A J

♣ Q 8 5 3



♠ 9 8
♥ 10 6 4
♦ Q 9 3 2
♣ A J 9 2

♠ A 4 3

♥ K Q 9 8 3

♦ K 7 4

♣ 10 7

After a 1♥ opening by South and a 1♠ response by North, should South raise to 2♠ or rebid 1NT? We don't raise on three-card support and a balanced hand, but 2♠ is a tempting call. North might contemplate a slam contract, which could be excellent if South has four spades and a singleton club, but it should be easy to stop safely at the four level.

A diamond lead by East is fairly likely. Double-dummy play by declarer could secure 11 tricks, but 10 is a much more likely result. This board figures to be rather flat around the room at +420 for N/S.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 10 7 5 2
♥ 9 6 5 4
♦ K 8
♣ A 9 3

♠ 6 4

♥ 10 8 7 3

♦ A Q J

♣ J 10 7 4



♠ Q J 3

♥ A Q J 2

♦ 10 9 7 5

♣ 6 2

♠ A K 9 8

♥ K

♦ 6 4 3 2

♣ K Q 8 5

We might consider a 1♥ opening by East in third seat if nonvulnerable, but you would have to hold a gun to our heads to get us to do so vulnerable. We prefer to open 1♦, not 1♣, with South's distribution but might make an exception with such strong clubs. We do not think highly of a 1NT opening on this collection, although a few players might try their luck with it. Regardless of which minor suit South opens, the auction rates to continue 1♥ by North, 1♠ by South, and 1NT by North, ending the auction.

After a 1♣ opening bid, we would lead the ♦10 as East, not a low one (compare with Board 1), and declarer can drive out the ♣A and take eight tricks, provided that the defense does not give declarer any undeserved gifts.

Clubs can take two more tricks than notrump, so kudos to any pairs who find that strain. If a pair's 1♠ rebid indicates a balanced hand, this may be possible. We would expect most pairs to angle for notrump at matchpoints, however.

Board 5

North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 6 2
♥ Q 7
♦ A 8 7 6 5
♣ Q 10 7 2

♠ A 5 4 3

♥ A K J 6 2

♦ 4

♣ A K 8



♠ K J 9 8 7

♥ 8 4 3

♦ K J 10 9

♣ 3

♠ Q 10

♥ 10 9 5

♦ Q 3 2

♣ J 9 6 5 4

North opens 1♥, East overcalls 1♠, and South ... what? Pass would be the 'standard' action, but it is always tempting to support partner in a competitive auction. A doubleton spade could be an important ruffing value. If South does raise, North will drive to game and might try for bigger things along the way.

If South passes over 1♠, N/S may not reach game. North has a tough reopening problem if 1♠ is passed around to him — off shape for 1NT or double, no suit to bid. Still, passing out the nonvulnerable opponents in a one-level contract when you hold about half the deck in your own hand doesn't look like a winning matchpoint action.

4♥ is a touch-and-go contract. East will presumably lead the singleton club, which may not be the best start to the defense, because it makes it easy for declarer to double-finesse in clubs, avoiding a loser there. Cashing the ♥AK will work on this layout, but if the ♥Q does not fall, declarer might lose two spades to go with the red-suit losers. An alternative is to lead a low spade at trick two, hoping to set up the possibility for a spade ruff before taking the top trumps. East can rise with the ♠K, cross to West in diamonds, and receive a club ruff, but that will be the end for the defense. The remaining trumps divide 2-2 and declarer can ruff the fourth round of spades in dummy.

It's hard to estimate the likely contracts on this board, but it looks like making 4♥ would give N/S a fine score, and any E/W that goes plus will scoop up most of the matchpoints.

Board 6East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K 10 9 2
♥ K 10 5 3
♦ 8 5
♣ A J 2

♠ J 8 7 5 3
♥ A Q 9 8 7
♦ K
♣ 7 5



♠ A 4
♥ 4
♦ A Q 10 6 4
♣ K Q 10 4 3

♠ Q 6
♥ J 6 2
♦ J 9 7 3 2
♣ 9 8 6

An easier board to analyze. A likely start is 1♦ - Pass - 1♥ - 1♠ (we would stick in an overall mostly because of the favorable vulnerability); 2♣ - Pass - 2NT - Pass. East has extra values and distribution, but at matchpoints it looks right to shove it into 3NT and hope partner can take more tricks than the field.

Ten tricks are a probable result whether North leads his own suit or tries for the 'sneak attack' of a low heart. By the way, the ♦K's popping up makes it easy to take 10 tricks on a heart lead, but we would have been planning to finesse the ♦Q even though this might open us up to the loss of too many heart tricks. It's matchpoints, so we would rather go down in a cold contract than refuse to take a finesse that rates to win — at least when we are in a normal contract.

Board 7South Deals
Both Vul

♠ 9 4
♥ K 8 7 5 3
♦ Q 10 6
♣ 9 5 2

♠ K J 7 6 3
♥ A J 6 2
♦ J 8 3
♣ 6



♠ A 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ 5 4
♣ A Q J 10 8 4

♠ Q 10 8 5
♥ 10
♦ A K 9 7 2
♣ K 7 3

At most tables, the auction will begin 1♦ - Pass - 1♠ - 2♣; 2♠. Aggressive Wests might raise to 3♣, but we would be a little nervous about it, vulnerable, with such a weak hand. That shouldn't affect the final result of 4♠ by North. North might upgrade this hand to a game drive in light of the singleton club, but even if North simply makes a game try, South should accept with a singleton of his own, a potential source of tricks in diamonds, and the well-placed ♣K.

Eleven tricks are available here by leading the singleton club. If East takes the ♣A, North's third diamond goes away and the diamond suit sets up. If East ducks, the club loser goes away.

If spades or diamonds divided unevenly there might be some difficulty managing everything, but with friendly splits in both suits, it would be a disappointing result for North to take only 10 tricks.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

♠ 9 8 5 4
♥ A 5
♦ 7 6
♣ A 9 6 5 2

♠ K 10 6
♥ K 10 3 2
♦ A J 9 3
♣ Q J



♠ Q
♥ Q 9 8 6 4
♦ 10 5 4 2
♣ 7 4 3

♠ A J 7 3 2
♥ J 7
♦ K Q 8
♣ K 10 8

Time to plug an adjunct to one of our favorite conventions, Two-Way Checkback (also called Two-Way NMF and similar to XYZ). After 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT, 2♣ by South forces North to bid 2♦, after which South will make an invitational call or pass to play in a diamond partscore. 2♦ is an artificial game force.

However, this South hand offers another possible sequence: rebid 2♣, then jump to 3NT. Many pairs use this sequence to indicate five cards in the major and a balanced hand, offering opener a choice of game contracts. Holding three-card spade support but otherwise notrump-oriented values, North might pass 3NT.

Whether this will be a success or not depends on several players' guessing skills. After the likely heart lead and continuation, North must rise with the ♥K in order to take 11 tricks as the cards lie. If North plays low, East can win the ♥Q and must shift to clubs in order to hold declarer to 10 tricks.

The matchpoint difference between +430 and +460 is probably huge, since +450 is a normal-looking result in a spade contract. Only an inspired low-heart lead from West's ♥A-5 rates to hold declarer in spades to 10 tricks. Leading the ♣A and shifting to the ♥5 might get the job done, but declarer might well rise with the ♥K in that scenario.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul♠ 10 7
♥ Q J 7 6 2
♦ A 9 7 4
♣ A 5

♠	Q 9		
♥	A K 9 8 5 4 3		
♦	Q 8 6 2		
♣	—		
		N	
		W	E
		S	
♠	8 6 5 3 2		
♥	10		
♦	K 10		
♣	10 9 6 3 2		
♠	A K J 4		
♥	—		
♦	J 5 3		
♣	K Q J 8 7 4		

We would open 4♥ with the North hand, but even after a 1♥ opening bid, it's hard to imagine North being persuaded to put down dummy in 3NT. A slow route to 4♥ might attract a double by West. After a 4♥ opening gets passed around, West would like to double for penalty, but the vast majority of players would treat this as a takeout double — or at least a general strength-showing double — so West has little choice but to pass and collect 50-point undertricks.

It's wildly unlikely that East finds the best lead for the defense of the ♦K. A more likely lead is a club, letting declarer ruff out West's ♣A. Declarer's plan will be to discard diamond losers on the black-suit winners. Suppose declarer takes the ♥A-K before crossing to dummy to take discards. East shows out, revealing the bad trump split.

Declarer might now lead a low spade to dummy's ♠J, then start cashing the clubs, without taking the second round of spades. This might allow declarer to reenter dummy in spades if West can ruff the third round of clubs. West might do better to discard a spade on the third club, not to ruff. Now declarer must be careful. If declarer discards a second diamond, West will be able to ruff the second round of spades, and the defense will take three heart tricks, plus two diamonds for down two.

Instead, declarer should discard a spade on the good club, then start running spade winners. West can ruff the second spade with the ♥7, but declarer overruffs and exits in trumps. West takes the ♥Q-J but will be down to only diamonds and will have to break the suit, giving declarer a trick in the suit — down one. Ruffing the second spade high is no better, because it holds West to two trump tricks while declarer pitches a second diamond, again losing just two tricks in each red suit.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul♠ K 7 4 3 2
♥ Q 7
♦ 9 7 3
♣ K 7 5

♠	A Q 8 5		
♥	K J 9 8		
♦	10 8 6 4 2		
♣	—		
		N	
		W	E
		S	
♠	6		
♥	A 10 4 3		
♦	A 5		
♣	A 10 9 8 6 4		
♠	J 10 9		
♥	6 5 2		
♦	K Q J		
♣	Q J 3 2		

East opens 1♣, South passes, and West responds 1♠. We would make a takeout double with the North hand, and East rebids 2♣. A so-called "free bid" in a competitive auction like this does not show any extra values, but passing with a poor minimum is a possibility. East should be happy to show the club length with three aces, 6-4 distribution, and some 10s and 9s.

South has 10 HCP but no convenient call over the 2♣ rebid. N/S can make a diamond partscore while E/W can make 3♣, at least at double-dummy. It will be difficult to take nine tricks in clubs in practice, because East does not know trumps are splitting 4-0.

If N/S can push E/W up to 3♣ (or if E/W get there on their own), they likely will go plus. Reaching a diamond contract looks quite difficult.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul♠ A Q 9
♥ A 9 7 4
♦ A K
♣ A 10 9 6

♠	10 7 6 5 3		
♥	10 6 3		
♦	J 6 2		
♣	K J		
		N	
		W	E
		S	
♠	J 8		
♥	K J 8 5		
♦	10 5 3		
♣	Q 8 5 2		
♠	K 4 2		
♥	Q 2		
♦	Q 9 8 7 4		
♣	7 4 3		

It looks normal for E/W to reach 4♥ by West after a 2NT opening. North will probably lead a low spade. The ♠8 should be played from dummy. Putting up the ♠J and having it win will not do declarer that much good, but playing the ♠8 and having South produce the ♠K, as he will do here, will give declarer three spade tricks.

At IMPs, it might be right to take a safety play in the heart suit. First lead to the ♥K, then lead a low heart from dummy, covering South's card as cheaply as possible. This will ensure no more than one loser against any 4-1 heart break.

At matchpoints, make the best play for no loser, which is to cash the ♥A, then lead low to the jack ... losing to the doubleton queen offside (it always seems to be doubleton queen offside, doesn't it?). Some unlucky declarers might lose two club tricks as well, if they take a double finesse through South. They would have our deepest sympathies.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A J 3	♠ 9 8 7 6 2	♠ K Q
♥ A 9 5 2	♥ J 4	♥ K 10 7 6 3
♦ K 7	♦ 4 2	♦ 6 5 3
♣ Q 10 4 3	♣ K 9 7 2	♣ J 8 6

♠ 10 5 4	♠ K Q
♥ Q 8	♥ K 10 7 6 3
♦ A Q J 10 9 8	♦ 6 5 3
♣ A 5	♣ J 8 6

Suppose you hold the South cards. You hear 1♣ - Pass - 1♥, and you overcall 2♦. West raises to 2♥, which is passed back around to you. Are you in or out?

Count us out. We were toward the bottom of the range for a vulnerable 2♦ overcall to begin with, the ♥Q is of questionable value, and partner has not given us any encouragement. Competing aggressively is important at matchpoints, but vulnerable, I do not want any further part of this auction.

That said, balancers would probably push their opponents into 3♥, which will make, although if E/W elected to defend, even undoubted, they would collect a juicy +200.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 6	♠ K Q 8 7 5 4 3	♠ A 10 2
♥ 9 8 5 4	♥ A Q 6	♥ K J 2
♦ A Q 6	♦ J 5	♦ K 9 8 4 3
♣ Q 8 3 2	♣ 10	♣ 7 6

♠ 9	♠ A 10 2
♥ 10 7 3	♥ K J 2
♦ 10 7 2	♦ K 9 8 4 3
♣ A K J 9 5 4	♣ 7 6

Deep Finesse will tell you precisely how many tricks can be taken on any given deal, but that doesn't mean the "par contracts" are realistic to reach or make. Take this deal, for example. E/W can make 3NT on an extraordinarily lucky lie of the cards, but they probably won't even be in the auction. A normal auction by N/S would be 1♠ - 1NT - 2♠ - Pass, with E/W passing throughout.

East will likely lead a club or a diamond — we prefer the club lead. Declarer can ditch one of the red-suit losers on the second round of clubs, will lose a heart finesse, plus two other red cards and two spades. That's minus 110 for E/W — a pretty poor result on a deal that belongs to them for game!

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 9 7 5 4 2	♠ J 8	♠ A K 10
♥ 8	♥ 10 9 3	♥ Q J 6 4
♦ 7 2	♦ A 9 8 6 3	♦ Q 5
♣ Q 10 9 3	♣ J 8 2	♣ A K 7 4

♠ 6 3	♠ A K 10
♥ A K 7 5 2	♥ Q J 6 4
♦ K J 10 4	♦ Q 5
♣ 6 5	♣ A K 7 4

After 1♣ by East and a 1♥ overcall, it is clear in our view for West to enter the auction. Our choice would be a 1♠ response, but a weak jump shift to 2♠ would be fine with us, if that call is available in your methods. One call we can't stand is pass. Yes, there are only 4 HCP, but with 6-4, bid one more, the old saying goes.

E/W will have a trivial time making 4♠. N/S have a worthwhile sacrifice in 5♦ if they can find that fit and run the ♥10 to pin West's singleton ♥8. We aren't holding our breath and suggest you don't hold yours either.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 5	♠ K 9 8 6	♠ Q J 10 4
♥ A 9 6	♥ Q 10 4 2	♥ J 7 5
♦ J 6 2	♦ A K 9 4	♦ Q 10 8
♣ J 9 7 6 3 2	♣ K	♣ Q 10 8

♠ A 7 3 2	♠ Q J 10 4
♥ K 8 3	♥ J 7 5
♦ 7 5 3	♦ Q 10 8
♣ A 5 4	♣ Q 10 8

North and South both have a few marginal decisions on this deal. A pass is normal by South, vulnerable with 11 HCP and sterile distribution. 1♣ is fine in a light-opening-bid context — two aces and a king are nice cards.

Suppose South does pass. North will have to decide how high to raise after South's 1♠ response. We think it's close. North has a pretty ratty 15-count, and the singleton king isn't so good. There is a strong argument for pulling in one's horns at matchpoints and protecting the plus. Still, many would jump to 3♠, which is a fine bid, if a bit aggressive. South may well make another try after a raise to 2♠, with a maximum passed hand and three prime cards.

Reaching game is likely and it will probably fail, unless the defense slips. After the likely club lead, declarer has a choice of lines. It looks best to win the ♣K and lead a heart to the ♥K at once. Playing on trumps early might allow the defense to draw trumps if they split 4-1, which would prevent declarer from ruffing a club in dummy.

The ♥K loses to the ♥A, and a later finesse of the ♥10 will lose to the ♥J, but with hearts 3-3, declarer has a discard for the diamond loser. Bad luck in the trump suit then dooms the game.

Board 16West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 10 3	♠ A J 8 7 5 2	♠ K Q 9 4
♥ K J 10 2	♥ 7 5 4	♥ 8 3
♦ 10 6 4	♦ 8 5 2	♦ A K 7
♣ 7 6 5 2	♣ 3	♣ K J 10 8

♠ 6	♠ 8 7 6	♠ K 5 3
♥ A Q 9 6	♥ J 10	♥ K 7 6
♦ Q J 9 3	♦ A 9 8 5 3	♦ K J 10 6
♣ A Q 9 4	♣ A 10 2	♣ 8 7 5

Second-seat preempts tend to be sounder than in first seat, but at favorable vulnerability, we would still classify the North hand as a 2♠ opening. East's 2NT overcall shows about the same strength as a 1NT overcall: 15-18 HCP or so. South probably should not double, because it is quite possible E/W can make 2NT, and they may even bid game if South passes. Not today, though.

Against 2NT, there is a case for South to lead the ♦Q rather than a spade, because even if North has strong enough spades to establish tricks in the suit, it is unlikely North holds a side entry. Of course, when we lead the ♦Q, dummy hits with ♦K-10-x and declarer has the ace. On this layout, a spade may be better for the defense, because North can win it and shift to diamonds. After a diamond

lead, if North ducks the first round of spades, South may wind up getting endplayed.

Suppose South leads the ♠6 to North's ace and a diamond comes back. East will gain the lead and lead a heart, which South does best to duck. East will probably put in the jack, which holds, then lead the ♠10 from dummy. North might not cover, which allows declarer to stay in dummy to take a club finesse. In either case, it looks like declarer will lose one trick in each major and two in each minor for down one. Down two is unlikely, but it may be possible for the defense to slip and allow declarer to make the contract.

Board 17North Deals
None Vul

♠ A J 9 2	♠ 8 7 6	♠ K 5 3
♥ A Q 9 5 4	♥ J 10	♥ K 7 6
♦ 7	♦ A 9 8 5 3	♦ K J 10 6
♣ Q J 6	♣ A 10 2	♣ 8 7 5

♠ Q 10 4	♠ 8 7 6	♠ 5
♥ 8 3 2	♥ J 10	♥ K 7 6
♦ Q 4 2	♦ A 9 8 5 3	♦ K J 10 6
♣ K 9 4 3	♣ A 10 2	♣ 8 7 5

Despite holding 24 HCP, an eight-card heart fit, and a singleton, E/W do not belong in game. Making 4♥ requires trumps to split, the defense not to be able to take a ruff in clubs, and the black-suit losers to be taken care of. A well-judged auction might be West opening 1♥ in fourth seat, East using Drury, West trying for game with 2♦, and East signing off in 2♥ with his shapeless minimum. Or, if the East hand is below your standards for Drury, a simple raise to 2♥.

However, on this layout, the overbidders will carry the day, because every suit is friendly. It's even possible that E/W take 11 tricks if North plays low on the first round of diamonds and West guesses to put up dummy's ♦K.

Board 18East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A K Q 7	♠ J 10 9 4 3	♠ 5
♥ Q J 9 6	♥ A 10 5 4	♥ 8 7
♦ A J 7 3	♦ 10	♦ K 8 5 4
♣ 3	♣ A Q 10	♣ J 9 8 7 6 2

♠ 8 6 2	♠ J 10 9 4 3	♠ 5
♥ K 3 2	♥ A 10 5 4	♥ 8 7
♦ Q 9 6 2	♦ 10	♦ K 8 5 4
♣ K 5 4	♣ A Q 10	♣ J 9 8 7 6 2

East might open 3♣ first seat at favorable vulnerability, opting for maximum preemption, but this would be a minority action. By the way, if East does open 3♣, West has an automatic pass, despite the 17 HCP. There is likely no fit and making 3NT is a long way off. North might even balance with his actual hand — he probably shouldn't, though — which is another reason not to respond with the West hand (and also not to hesitate and give away the show).

Suppose East starts with the normal pass, and West opens 1♦ in third seat. We would overcall 1♠ as North, although some would double, and South will raise to 2♠. West starts licking his lips at the prospect of defending 2♠, but East may spoil the fun by balancing with 2NT, showing both minors. Still, E/W might score better in 3♦ than against 2♠ undoubled, if West can make it, that is.

North leads the ♠J, and it looks normal to discard dummy's hearts on the top spades, then ruff a heart in dummy. After that, lead a club in order to establish communication. Now, an overtrick may even be possible. North will probably win the club and play a spade. Knowing South will be able to overruff a low diamond, West should ruff with dummy's king, then ruff a club, ruff a heart, and lead a club. If South follows or discards, West can ruff low, and ruff a heart in dummy. South can overruff, but with the ♦Q onside, West will be able to score both diamond tricks: three spades, three ruffs in dummy, and four trumps in hand. If South discards a club on the fourth spade, then ruffs in with the ♦9 (say), West overruffs and ruffs a heart, as South follows suit. In this variation, West scores all of dummy's trumps but only three in the West hand.

Board 19

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K Q 9 6
♥ A 8
♦ 8 7 3
♣ J 10 9 7

♠ 8
♥ 9 4 3 2
♦ K Q J 9 5
♣ A Q 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 5 4
♥ K Q 6
♦ A 4 2
♣ 8 6 4 3

♠ A J 10 3 2
♥ J 10 7 5
♦ 10 6
♣ K 5

North has a classic rebid dilemma after N/S bid: Pass-1♦-1♠. North could rebid 1NT with a singleton spade, 2♦ on the strong five-card suit, or 2♣ on the three-card suit. We have a certain admiration for the 2♣ rebid but we would select 2♦, missing the heart fit. The 1NT rebid is the winner on today's deal, because South can rebid 2♥ to show at least five-four in the majors and no game interest.

A partnership who reaches 2♥ has done well in the bidding, but while Deep Finesse says nine tricks are available, it is very possible declarer will only take eight. If the defense shifts to spades in time, it may be difficult for declarer to draw enough trumps without allowing the defense to cash a spade winner. Very well done to any pair who scores +140 on this board.

Board 20

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 10 9 8 6 4
♥ 10 9 6
♦ A K 10 5
♣ 10

♠ K Q 7 5
♥ A Q
♦ 9 8 3 2
♣ A 8 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 2
♥ K 8 7 3 2
♦ Q J 7
♣ 9 7 4

♠ J 3
♥ J 5 4
♦ 6 4
♣ K Q J 5 3 2

North opens 1NT, and South has enough strength to invite game (at IMPs, South might just jump to 3NT). Playing four-suit transfers, N/S might reach 3NT after South shows clubs and North says he likes them. If South cannot learn North's opinion on clubs, then a straightforward invite in notrump looks like the best idea. We would like to be able to sign off in 3♣ after an invitation when North shows a minimum, to ensure South's clubs will be worth tricks.

Suppose North ends up declaring a notrump contract (2NT or 3NT) on the lead of a heart to the queen. The club suit will run, but the diamonds are wide open. In 2NT, declarer might simply cash out his eight tricks to avoid the possibility the defense can take five diamond tricks. In 3NT, however, North should try to make the

contract, and the best play looks like a low spade toward dummy's ♠J. East may be caught napping and duck, so the ♠J will take the ninth trick.

East should stop and think when declarer leads a spade. This is a strange looking play, rather than going after the club suit. It is likely North holds the ♣A and is trying to steal an undeserved trick in spades. Rising with the ♠A and switching to the ♦Q looks like the right play. Here, E/W can take four diamond tricks, holding declarer to eight. Another possibility is that North holds the ♦A and East must take the ♠A and shift to diamonds, driving out that card while West retains an entry — presumably the ♦K.

Board 21

North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 3 2
♥ A 10 7 6
♦ J 10 9 4
♣ Q 7 6

♠ A 9 4
♥ K 9 5
♦ A Q 8 3 2
♣ 10 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 7 6 5
♥ Q 8 3
♦ —
♣ K J 8 4 3 2

♠ K Q J 10
♥ J 4 2
♦ K 7 6 5
♣ A 5

Only the 4-0 diamond split means N/S can be defeated in any game contract. After North opens 1♦, East might try an offbeat 3♣ overcall, trading on the favorable vulnerability. Then, N/S will likely wind their way to 3NT. West might bid 4♣ at some point, offering the opponents a chance at a plus score, something plenty of N/S pairs will be unable to achieve. Perhaps West should look at his red-suit holdings and opt for defense, which would be a winning decision on this deal.

If East does not overcall in clubs, likely N/S auctions are 1♦-1♠-1NT-3NT or 1♦-1♠-2♠. Now South can investigate alternative contracts however his partnership does that, probably ending in 3NT. If North is the declarer, a club lead will put an end to declarer's chances.

If South winds up as declarer, West may lead a heart, which gives declarer a chance: put up the ♥K and take nine tricks. However, it is normal to duck the heart lead, giving East a chance to shift to clubs at trick two, not that a club shift is automatic.

Board 22East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 6 3
♥ 8 7
♦ Q 9 8 6 4
♣ Q J 6 4

♠ A Q 9 5
♥ A K J 6 5
♦ A K 10
♣ A



♠ K 10 4 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ J 7 5 2
♣ 7 3

♠ J 8 7
♥ Q 10 9
♦ 3
♣ K 10 9 8 5 2

The vulnerable E/W are unlikely to get in N/S's way here. After North's strong 2♣ opening, N/S will probably locate one of their major-suit fits. Playing in spades looks better than playing in hearts. If both majors divide evenly, two of South's diamonds can be discarded on hearts, and the ♦10 can be ruffed in the South hand. In a heart contract, declarer must rely on one of the red suits to come in in order to take 12 tricks.

If North hears South show a little sign of life — perhaps by a positive 2♦ response — North may simply drive to slam after discovering a major-suit fit. Declarer will receive a bit more good luck — major-suits split and ♦Q onside — than bad — ♥Q offside — so 12 tricks will be a likely result.

Board 23South Deals
Both Vul

♠ K 9 6 4
♥ 7 3
♦ Q J 7 5
♣ A 9 7

♠ A 10 5 2
♥ 9 2
♦ A 8 6
♣ 10 4 3 2



♠ 8 7
♥ Q 10 8 6 5
♦ K 9 4
♣ K Q J

♠ Q J 3
♥ A K J 4
♦ 10 3 2
♣ 8 6 5

This deal is a potential passout. South will not open unless his pair uses light opening bids, and West and North have clear passes. (North holds the wrong type of hand to consider a light opening in third seat.) East's hand doesn't meet the Rule of 15, which suggests opening in fourth seat if your HCP and your spade length add to 15 or more, but with concentrated values in the majors, we probably would open 1♣ anyway.

South overcalls 1♥, and West makes a negative double. A 1♠ rebid can be made on a three-card suit, but with most of the HCP in hearts and 3=4=3=3 distribution, a 1NT rebid by East looks best.

We would lead a club with the South hand, even though East opened the suit. Making 1NT may require careful play and a potential endplay. After winning the ♣A on the second or third round of the suit, declarer leads a spade to the ♠Q, then a diamond toward dummy. Suppose South rises with the ♦K, unblocks clubs (if he has any remaining), and plays another diamond. North must hold up to prevent declarer from accessing dummy in diamonds. Then another round of spades forces another duck by North (lest the ♠K become an entry).

Now declarer must make the key play of cashing the ♥A-K. South, a passed hand, has shown up with the ♣K-Q-J, ♦K, and presumably the ♥Q. North must have both aces and no more than two hearts. By cashing the hearts before exiting in diamonds, East endplays North. After winning the ♦A and cashing the ♣10, the good diamond is discarded from the West hand. North, down to ♠A-10, must concede the seventh trick to dummy's ♠K.

Congratulations to any declarer who makes 1NT against strong defense here. Maybe it would have been simpler if the board was just passed out.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

♠ K J 9 6
♥ 10 5 4
♦ 9 4 2
♣ 8 5 2

♠ 7 5 4 3
♥ A K Q 6
♦ 5
♣ K J 9 7



♠ Q 2
♥ J 9 7 3 2
♦ Q 10 6 3
♣ A 4

♠ A 10 8
♥ 8
♦ A K J 8 7
♣ Q 10 6 3

North opens 1♣ in second seat, East overcalls 1♦, and South responds 1♥. This does not show a five-card or longer suit, because a negative double in this position shows at least 4-4 in the majors. North has a close decision whether to raise to 2♥ or 3♥. We think North is a hair short for a jump to 3♥, but if his distribution were 3=4=1=5 instead, we probably would do it. 4-4-4-1 shape usually plays less well than it might seem.

In hearts, there are only three losers, but how many winners? If the defense never shifts to trumps, declarer may be able to take 10 tricks by crossruffing. Two rounds of trumps are necessary to hold declarer to seven trump tricks. After a diamond lead to the ♦K, a trump shift by East looks right, since he holds strength in all three other suits. However, we expect plenty of defenders will not shift to trumps, and some declarers might scramble 10 tricks.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 9 4 2	♠ 8 5
♥ A 2	♥ K 10 8 5 4
♦ A K 5 2	♦ J 6 4
♣ K Q 7 5	♣ 8 4 2
♠ A K Q 10 7	♠ J 6 3
♥ 7 3	♥ Q J 9 6
♦ 10 9 8 7 3	♦ Q
♣ 10	♣ A J 9 6 3

After 1NT-Pass-2♣, should West overcall 2♠? That isn't clear. West surely wants a spade lead if East is on lead, but overcalling could lead to trouble — N/S will be quick to double at matchpoints, and minus 200 and 500 are scary scores. Let's say West passes. North will deny a major, and South will probably bid 3NT.

West should double 3NT, provided that the double has the standard meaning of showing a strong suit, usually a major. East probably would have led a heart if there was no double, but after West's double, a spade lead is indicated. N/S may stand their ground in 3NT doubled or they may run to 4♣, but either way, they are headed for a minus score after West doubles 3NT.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

♠ A J	♠ 8 7 3
♥ 6 5 3 2	♥ K J 8 7
♦ A 9 8 7	♦ J 5
♣ K Q 2	♣ 8 7 5 3
♠ K 10 9 6 5 2	♠ Q 4
♥ A 4	♥ Q 10 9
♦ 10 4 3 2	♦ K Q 6
♣ 6	♣ A J 10 9 4

East passes, South opens 1♣, and West? Our choice would be 1♠, preferring the one-level overcall to a 2♠ jump, vulnerable, on such a weak playing hand. (If it seems odd to say West is too weak for a weak 2♠ call, we would point out that the one level is lower than the two level.) There may be a case for North to ignore the weak heart suit and jump to 3NT, but suppose North makes a negative double.

South has a clear 1NT rebid in our view, despite not holding a true spade stopper. In the absence of a spade raise, it is likely North has some spade length, and often an honor. It may be crucial to play from the South hand if North has a spade holding like ♠K-x-x or ♠A-x-x, in which case a spade lead by East will

be damaging, but a lead from West will not hurt declarer. A 2♣ or 2♥ rebid would be an even larger distortion than 1NT with an imperfect stopper, and if North has a strong hand with no spade stopper himself, he can cuebid 2♠ to confirm South has a true stopper.

After a spade lead against 3NT, declarer should run the clubs, discarding hearts from the North hand. West will have to make four discards and may throw a diamond, making it easy to run that suit. On the other hand, if West does not discard any diamonds, that may be a clue that West is protecting something in the suit. If West had started with ♦5-4-2, mightn't he have thrown one? When East follows with the ♦J on the second round of diamonds, it is probably correct to finesse dummy's ♦9 for 11 tricks.

If E/W actually have defended this way with diamonds 3-3, perhaps you should find an easier game.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

♠ J 3	♠ K Q 7 5 2
♥ 8 5	♥ 10 9 6 2
♦ 10 2	♦ 8 5
♣ A K 10 7 6 4 3	♣ Q J
♠ 8	♠ A 10 9 6 4
♥ K Q J 7 4 3	♥ A
♦ Q J 9 7 4	♦ A K 6 3
♣ 2	♣ 9 8 5

Good luck finding this excellent slam. South opens 1♠, and most Wests will either overcall 2♥ (our choice) or make a Michaels cuebid. If North shows the club suit immediately — an overbid, probably — South may drive to slam, but if North passes, South will double a heart bid — likely 3♥ — at his second turn. North will probably jump to 5♣, which may be where the partnership rests. 23 HCP slams are pretty tough to reach.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 8 7 5 3		♠ K Q
♥ 8 6		♥ K 7 5 3 2
♦ K 7		♦ A 8 3 2
♣ 10 9 6 5 2		♣ Q 8
♠ A 9 6		♥ A Q J 4
		♦ 10 9 4
		♣ A K J

After East opens 1♥ in third seat, South is too strong for a 1NT overcall, so South doubles. North advances with 1♠, and South rebids 1NT, showing about 19-21 points. We see some players doubling and bidding 1NT with minimum hands, but this is not a good idea. If you are offshape with a minimum hand, pass. If you have appropriate shape — i.e. support for all the unbid suits — double and pass a minimum advance.

The cards are friendly for N/S, so they can make game, but it is normal to end in 1NT. West probably will lead the ♥8, and East should be able to read this as the top of a likely doubleton, and withhold the ♥K. The lead remains in dummy, and it is convenient to lead a low spade, expecting East to hold at least one of the

spade honors. In fact, an honor pops up, letting declarer win the ♠A and play back the ♠9. +180 rates to be a common score for N/S, although some pairs will probably get to game, on sheer momentum if nothing else.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

♠ 7 4 3 2		♠ A J 10 9 8
♥ 2		♥ 7 6
♦ A K Q 8 7		♦ 6 5
♣ A 8 4		♣ 10 5 3 2
♠ K Q		♥ K Q 9 8 4 3
		♦ 3
		♣ K Q 9 6

After two passes, South opens 1♥, and West should double. Yes, the diamonds are strong, but it is more important to get all three suits into the picture. We like a raise to 3♥ with the North hand, which we treat as a mixed raise — about 7-9 points, four-card support, and usually a little shape.

As the cards lie, East would do well to bid 3♠, but that looks a little rich for our blood. We would probably defend 4♥ as E/W for a disappointing score. If East does bid 3♠, then West has an easy 4♠ bid over South's game bid. If 4♠ comes back to South, it looks unlikely N/S can make 5♥ (surely North would have doubled 4♠ with two aces?), so South may double on the theory that he expected to make 4♥ or pass on the theory that he may not

have enough defense to defeat 4♠. We think doubling is the normal matchpoint action, but we would not be surprised at all if it worked out badly.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 10 3		♠ 6 2
♥ 5 2		♥ 10 7 4
♦ Q J 10		♦ K 8 7 5
♣ Q 10 9 5 3		♣ K 6 4 2
♠ A K 9 8 7		♥ K 6 3
		♦ A 6 3
		♣ J 7

We like a 1NT opening with the South cards, describing the strength and shape at once. In either major, declarer's fate will depend on which minor the defense leads. A diamond lead will let the defense take two more tricks after winning the ♠Q, a club lead only gives the defense one extra trick.

West has a natural diamond lead, so the best chance for an overtrick looks like playing in 4♥ from the North side, against which East will have essentially a pure guess as to which suit to lead. I guess this hand might be a victory for the 1♠ openers, because the auction may proceed 1♠-2♥-3♥ and 4♥ may be reached.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 10 9 8		♠ 2
♥ A 9 4		♥ 8 6
♦ 10 7 6		♦ A J 9 2
♣ K 4 3		♣ J 10 8 7 6 5
♠ K 5		♥ K J 10 7 5
		♦ Q 5 4
		♣ A 9 2

After 1♥-1♠-1NT by N/S, North could simply guess at a major-suit game, but a better idea is to investigate both contracts. We like to play two-way checkback on this auction, so a 2♦ rebid by North is artificial and game-forcing. South would rebid 2♠ with a three-card fit, but with the actual hand a 2♥ rebid looks best, showing a strong suit. This is all North needs to know to pick a contract.

We would probably lead a diamond as West. It is unlikely spade tricks are going away, and leading the ♠J might cause declarer to pick off a short honor in the East hand — picture East with stiff ♠K. We prefer a diamond rather than a club because it is a more passive choice. We don't like leading away from kings or queens when we can afford it.

The diamond lead makes it very difficult to make 4♥, and the intuitive line of ruffing clubs in dummy will fail. Suppose declarer takes East's ♦J with the ♦Q and plays ♣A, club ruff, spade to the ♠K, club ruff, ♥Q will fail, because West can give East a spade ruff, then the defense can wait for its diamond tricks. We would imagine that many declarers would succeed, but plenty will be defeated.

Board 32

West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 7	♠ 10 8 5										
♥ A 10 8 7 4	♥ Q										
♦ A 10 2	♦ Q J 7 5 4 3										
♣ A K 7	♣ J 9 3										
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	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♥ J 6 2									
		♦ 9 8 6									
		♣ 8 6 2									
	♠ A J 9 2										
	♥ K 9 5 3										
	♦ K										
	♣ Q 10 5 4										

It is borderline whether to open the West hand 1NT or to treat it as stronger than 15-17. We like the aces and 10s, but the doubleton ♠Q is a negative, and it might be important to side notrump with West, so we like the 1NT opening. 1♥ is perfectly fine too, though.

Some Norths might show the diamond suit after 1NT, but we think pass is the majority action. Should South balance? Nonvulnerable at matchpoints we think we would get in there, perhaps with a 2♣ call to show both majors or 2♣ showing clubs and a major suit. If South shows clubs and a major or makes some sort of ambiguous call, West will probably show the heart suit and end up in 2♥.

Suppose South shows clubs and North leads a club against 2♥.

West will probably win, and hopes are not high for the contract. The two main options are to lay down the ♥A, playing for singleton honor somewhere or ♥K-Q-doubleton, or to lead a low heart toward the ♥J. The latter option requires South to hold both honors triplex or North to hold honor-doubleton and for declarer to read the position correctly. It also requires dummy's ♠K to be an entry in order to lead a heart from dummy on the second round of the suit. The straightforward chance of short heart honor(s) looks like a better hope, and on today's deal North does drop the ♥Q. A second round of hearts goes to the jack and king, as North shows out.

There are some double-dummy ways to make 2♥ from here, but we would probably go down against good defense.

This is a classic matchpoint partscore deal — either side might buy the contract and go plus or minus. The scores rate to be all over the place on this board.

Board 33

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 8 6 4 2	♠ J 5 3										
♥ Q 7	♥ 8 6 5 4 3										
♦ 10 5	♦ J										
♣ K J 9 4	♣ Q 7 5 3										
	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 9 7
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♥ K J 10 2									
		♦ Q 9 4 3									
		♣ 6 2									
	♠ A 10										
	♥ A 9										
	♦ A K 8 7 6 2										
	♣ A 10 8										

We admit we would open 2NT with the South hand, probably leading to the inelegant contract of 3♥. Oh well, it's not the last time our bidding will have been inaccurate.

As West, we would be loath to lead away from one of the black-suit kings into a 2NT opening bid, so we would try the ♦10 as our opening shot. That will be covered by the jack, queen, and ace. Declarer might go about establishing diamonds, playing ♦K (discarding a spade) and another diamond. If West ruffs in with the ♥Q, a second spade can be thrown from dummy. If West discards, we would throw a spade from dummy all the same, giving East the ♦9 but setting up the rest of the diamonds, while keeping dummy's trump length intact.

East may shift to clubs, setting up a trick for West in that suit, and the defense will take three trump tricks as well. If East plays a fourth diamond instead of a club, West can ruff high, and dummy discards a club. Since West holds all the club honors, he cannot effectively play that suit. If he plays a spade, dummy ruffs, and as the cards lie, declarer can hold the damage to down one, but he must be careful. A heart is led to the ace (exhausting West of trumps), and a fifth diamond is played, discarding a club from dummy as East ruffs. The ♣A remains intact, so when East plays a club (with or without cashing trump winners), declarer wins and plays the final diamond, for a third club discard from dummy.

If declarer plays a second round of hearts before playing the fifth diamond, East can win and shift to clubs without playing the rest of the high trumps. Then if declarer tries to cash diamonds to pitch clubs, East can ruff and lead a club to West while dummy still has a club.

Board 34East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 2	♠ A 7 4	♠ K Q 8 6
♥ K Q J 9 7	♥ 10 4 3	♥ A 5 2
♦ K 9	♦ A J 8 5 2	♦ 10 6 4 3
♣ A K 4 2	♣ J 5	♣ Q 9

♠ 10 9 5 3		
♥ 8 6		
♦ Q 7		
♣ 10 8 7 6 3		

We like opening 1NT with five-card majors as much as the next guys, but West has a clear 1♥ opening, because it is too strong for a 1NT opening, and 5-4-2-2 distribution is not particularly notrump-oriented. East should use Drury, not respond 1♠. If it's right to play in spades, it may be possible to find that fit later, but the key feature of East's hand is the heart support.

The goal on this deal is to make an overtrick in 4♥ without needing the ♦A onside. With spades 4-3, it is possible to knock out the ♠A, discard a diamond on the third spade, and then ruff a club in dummy. However, declarer must be careful. If declarer plays on clubs without cashing the spades first, North can throw a spade, perhaps preventing declarer from being able to take the discard safely.

Say North leads a trump. We would win in the West hand and lead the ♠J. North must win this trick, otherwise a second round of spades will establish two spade discards. North's best return is a spade, which will force declarer to discard a diamond on a spade at once. If North plays another suit, West will remain with a spade entry, and the club ruff can be taken first. +450 will probably be a good matchpoint score for E/W. Well done to declarers who make five against tough defense.

Board 35South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 9 2	♠ A 10 8 5	♠ K 3
♥ A K Q 10 3	♥ 9 4	♥ J 8 6 5 2
♦ K	♦ Q J 7 5	♦ 9 4 3
♣ K 10 5 3	♣ A 8 7	♣ J 6 4

♠ Q 7 6 4		
♥ 7		
♦ A 10 8 6 2		
♣ Q 9 2		

After a 1♥ opening by West, we think North has a clear takeout double, at favorable vulnerability. Competing for partscores is of utmost importance at matchpoints, and North should get in now rather than hoping to balance later. We like a preemptive raise to 3♥ as East, with a fifth trump compensating for the lack of distribution, over which South will compete with 3♠, West will probably try 4♥, perhaps hoping to make opposite a little shape.

Neither North nor South can really double — in fact, the contract is the ♣9 away from making — but sacrificing doesn't look right either, when the contract might go down. Although it is probably not the best decision on any given layout, passing 4♥ out looks like the best down the middle choice. Either double or 4♠ could be a disaster if it is wrong.

Against 4♥, the defense should take four tricks unless N/S break clubs or if West manages to steal a diamond trick.

Board 36West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 8 6 4	♠ Q 10 9 7	♠ K 5 3 2
♥ 6	♥ K 9	♥ 10 8 7 5 2
♦ Q J 5 4	♦ A K 10 6	♦ 8 3
♣ K 9 8 3	♣ J 7 4	♣ 6 5

♠ J		
♥ A Q J 4 3		
♦ 9 7 2		
♣ A Q 10 2		

Most auctions will lead to 3NT by N/S, after South checks to see if North has three-card heart support. Ten tricks looks like a normal result, although if declarer gets two spade tricks before the defense sets up its club might allow some declarers to take 11. However, the 5-1 heart split makes this unlikely.

As the cards lie, the only realistic way for declarer to take 11 tricks is if West wins the first round of spades and declarer guesses to double finesse in diamonds. That might result in two spade tricks, four hearts, three or four diamonds, and two clubs. (That might add up to 12 tricks, but the defense will get the ♠A-K before declarer gets both the spades.)