

ACBL-wide Senior Pairs Game #1

Monday – March 10, 2025 (morning or afternoon)

Analysis by Paul Linxwiler



Paul Linxwiler is the editor of the Bridge Bulletin. He has been a member of the editorial staff since 1997 and executive editor since 2014. He has written dozens of world and national championship reports for the magazine and the Daily Bulletins at the North American Bridge Championships.

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The analyses for this set of hands assumes that pairs use Standard or 2/1 game-forcing methods. Partnerships who use weak notrumps or strong club systems will, of course, have different auctions.

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ 7 5 2
♥ J 2
♦ A Q 10 7
♣ A K 9 8

♠ J 9
♥ Q 6 3
♦ J 3 2
♣ Q J 10 6 3



♠ A K Q 6
♥ K 9 8 7 5
♦ 9 8 5
♣ 2

♠ 10 8 4 3
♥ A 10 4
♦ K 6 4
♣ 7 5 4

At almost every table, E-W will land in 3NT. Where East opens 1♥, West can (depending on methods) bid a forcing 1NT on the way to game, or try a game-forcing 2♣ or 2♦ response, despite holding only a four-card suit. If E-W use the Flannery convention, where a 2♦ opening shows four spades, five hearts and 11-15 HCP, East can open 2♦ and West can go directly to 3NT.

Where East declares 3NT against, say, a low spade lead, the play is not simple. The general idea is for declarer to set up the heart suit by crossing to dummy and running the ♥J. But how exactly should declarer get to dummy? If East plays a diamond to the 10, losing to the jack, and a spade comes back, there's not enough time to establish hearts. The defense can remove the last spade entry to the East hand before hearts are set up.

Better is for East to cross in clubs at trick two and play the ♥J. Assuming this is covered by the queen, king and ace, South can exit with a club, but declarer can simply play low from dummy. This exhausts the clubs in the South hand, and when the next club is won with dummy's king, South's ♥10 can be driven out. But all of this is double-dummy: If North holds the ♥10, the contract fails. There will be some declarers who go down in 3NT.

Things are simpler on this deal where West declares 3NT because after winning the normal ♣Q opening lead, declarer can immediately go after hearts. Now when the ♥J is covered all around and a club comes back, declarer can stick in the 8 or 9. North will win, but the suit is frozen, giving declarer the time needed to drive out the ♥10.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K 2
♥ 7
♦ J 6 5 4 3 2
♣ Q 10 4 2

♠ A Q J 10 8 7 6 3
♥ A Q 3
♦ 7
♣ 8



♠ —
♥ J 9 8 6 4 2
♦ K
♣ K J 9 7 5 3

♠ 9 5 4
♥ K 10 5
♦ A Q 10 9 8
♣ A 6

Getting to 6♠ should be the goal for N-S on this deal. After South opens 1♦, North bids 1♠, and South rebids 1NT, how does North (a) set spades as trumps and (b) create a game force? Jumping to 4♠ directly over 1NT is not best, as slam will be missed on too many constructions. So North needs a tool.

One approach is simply to use old-fashioned Gerber: a jump to 4♣ over 1NT is simply ace-asking, and after South shows two aces, North can reasonably try 6♠.

Another path is by using New Minor Forcing or the better Two-Way Checkback to get the partnership to game. After 1♦-1♠; 1NT-2♣ (asking about a spade fit in NMF); 2♠ would show South's three-card spade suit. A Roman Key Card Blackwood sequence (4NT by North after South's 2♠), would quickly propel the partnership to 6♠.

Board 3South Deals
E-W Vul

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

Most Souths will pass in first seat, but a few hungry players will open 1♠. But where South passes, West will face a decision as to whether to preempt 2♦, weak, if using that method. More than a few Wests will decline to do so because of the presence of the good four-card major on the side. Others, however, will have no compunction about preempting. After, say, Pass-2♦-Pass-Pass, South may choose to make a balancing (takeout) double. This will likely work out poorly on this deal if North bids 3♣ and East doubles.

Where West passes in second seat, West will open 1♣ in fourth position. A 1♠ overcall by South is likely, and West can make a negative double. If North raises to 2*♠, this will get passed around to West, who must decide whether to compete further, either with another double or by risking 3♦.

Board 4West Deals
Both Vul

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

If North opens 1♦ in second seat, some Easts will overcall 1NT. South can double for penalty, and if this is passed back to poor East, a 2♦ runout looks called for. North can double at his turn, and the contract will fail two tricks. But minus 500 for E-W is better than N-S getting to 4♥, which makes due to the friendly trump position. That would cost E-W 620 instead.

If East stays silent over North's 1♦ opener, E-W should have little difficulty getting to the heart game. The same is true if North decides to open 1♣ instead and East overcalls diamonds; most N-S pairs will climb to 4♥ over that.

Board 5North Deals
N-S Vul

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

North opens 1♣, what should South respond? Some players will choose 1♦, while others will bypass the diamond suit to respond 1♠, a popular approach with non-forcing hands. This is not a right-or-wrong choice, but one of partnership style.

Where South responds 1♦, West can bid 1♠. North's 2♣ rebid will get passed back to West, who must decide between passing or balancing with a double.

If South instead responds 1♠ initially, West will (likely) be silenced, and North will rebid 2♣.

We predict that N-S plus 90 will be a common score in 2♣ contracts.

Board 6East Deals
E-W Vul

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

The East hand is another Flannery candidate, as in Deal No. 1. For those who use that conventional opening, 4♠ will be quickly reached. But getting to 4♠ should be trivially easy for pairs where East begins with 1♥: After a 1♠ response and 2♠ raise, West will know what to do. There may even be a few E-W pairs who flirt with slam and end in 5♠ after discovering two aces are missing.

There is little to the play: E-W plus 650 will be normal/universal.

Board 7South Deals
Both Vul

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

It is notoriously difficult to bid extremely strong hands such as South's on this deal. After a 2♣ opening and a 2♦ (waiting) response, 2♠ will be a popular choice of rebid. Many Norths will immediately proceed to 4♠ to show a weak hand with a fit. Despite plenty of extra values and controls, South needs North to hold some perfect constructions for slam to have a play; settling for 4♠ is reasonable. Note, for example, that despite North's possession of a singleton diamond and the ♥K, South still needs to find at least one of the black queens for slam to be successful.

The 4-1 trump split means 11 tricks are the maximum in spades.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

♠ A Q 2
♥ Q
♦ K J 7 4 2
♣ K J 9 7

♠ J 10 9
♥ K J 9 8 6
♦ Q 6 5
♣ 6 5



♠ K 7 4
♥ A 10 5 3 2
♦ A 3
♣ A 8 4

♠ 8 6 5 3
♥ 7 4
♦ 10 9 8
♣ Q 10 3 2

3NT by E/W will be a popular contract on this layout, and there are many paths to get there. Where West opens 1♦, a possible sequence is 1♦-1♥; 2♣-2♠ (fourth suit forcing to game); 2NT-3NT. West could even open 1NT (legal, because the singleton is a high honor); a transfer to 2♥ followed by a choice-of-games 3NT is another way to get there.

If West declares, 12 tricks can be obtained by setting up diamonds; despite the ♦Q being offside, the 3-3 split means that four tricks are available in the suit. That, combined with the favorable position of the ♣Q 10, means that declarer can take three spades, one heart, four diamonds and four clubs. The only defense to hold West to 11 tricks is for North to lead a double-dummy ♥K at trick one, setting up an extra defensive heart winner to cash when North wins the ♦Q.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 9 8 6 5 4 2
♥ Q
♦ J 10
♣ J 5 4

♠ 3
♥ 9 7 6 2
♦ A 9 2
♣ Q 9 8 7 2



♠ K 10
♥ A K 10 8
♦ K 8 7 4
♣ A K 10

♠ A J 7
♥ J 5 4 3
♦ Q 6 5 3
♣ 6 3

The auction at most tables will see East open 2NT (20-21 HCP) followed by West using a Texas transfer of 4♥ to make East declarer in 4♠.

To hold declarer to 11 tricks, N-S must collect the ♦A before declarer has a chance to pitch dummy's diamond losers on the top hearts. Although 11 tricks in spades (E-W plus 650) is par, quite a few declarers will score plus 680 for the extra overtrick.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

♠ K 2
♥ 10 8 5
♦ K Q 10 2
♣ K 10 8 3

♠ 9 4
♥ A K 6 4 3
♦ 9 3
♣ Q 5 4 2



♠ A 10 6 5
♥ Q 9 2
♦ A 7 4
♣ A J 9

♠ Q J 8 7 3
♥ J 7
♦ J 8 6 5
♣ 7 6

After a typical 1NT-3NT auction, South's opening lead may help East declare. A low spade gives up a trick to East's 10, while a low diamond lead may persuade East that South is leading from length, making the finesse of the ♦J a more attractive option.

Double dummy, declarer can take four tricks in each minor and lead up the ♥Q twice to take 11 tricks total. A low spade lead makes 11 tricks more realistically attainable, as declarer does not require any hearts tricks in that case. In practice, many declarers will take fewer tricks when they misguess in the minors.

Could declarer ever go down in 3NT? One possibility is this: After winning, say, a low spade lead, declarer might cash the ♣A and run the ♣J. A fiendish North could win the ♣Q and switch to a low heart. If East decides to play low (well, what would you do?), South could win the ♥J, and the defenders could then run the heart suit.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

♠ A 10 9 4
♥ J 10 9
♦ K J 8 3
♣ J 2

♠ K 6 3
♥ A Q 8 7
♦ A 5 2
♣ 9 6 5



♠ J 7 2
♥ K 6 4 2
♦ 10 4
♣ Q 8 4 3

♠ Q 8 5
♥ 5 3
♦ Q 9 7 6
♣ A K 10 7

There are several possible auctions for N-S, but the key is for them to stay low on this deal, as eight tricks are the maximum in notrump or the minors (and only if South declares). It is possible to get to 2NT from either side.

Where South declares 2NT, West leads the ♥J, dummy's queen losing to the king. Say the ♦10 comes back; South covers with queen, and West the king. Declarer should play low from dummy, as this freezes the suit. But if West tries exiting with a heart, declarer wins the ace in dummy and plays another heart, establishing a heart winner in dummy and throwing West back on lead: West is endplayed, as any exit generates a trick for declarer.

For example, say West gets out with a low spade. This rides to East's jack and South's queen, and declarer plays another spade. West grabs the ace and returns a spade; dummy's king wins, the heart winner is cashed, along with the ♦A, reducing East to four clubs. When the ♣AK are cashed, dropping the jack, declarer can play a low club to the 9 and queen, and the ♣10 will be declarer's eighth trick.

Why can the defense do one trick better when North declares 2NT? Because an opening diamond or spade lead from East destroys the endplay position.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K 7 3
♥ J 3 2
♦ A K 6 5 2
♣ 9 7

♠ A Q J 8 6 2
♥ A 7
♦ 10 9
♣ J 10 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 4
♥ K Q 10 8 6 5
♦ Q
♣ A K 6 5

♠ 9 5
♥ 9 4
♦ J 8 7 4 3
♣ Q 4 3 2

Holding two-and-a-half quick tricks, some Wests will open 1♦; others will pass. Where West opens 1♦ and North overcalls 1♠, East should opt for 2♥. A negative double is also possible, but the heart length and game-going strength of the East hand makes 2♥ (typically played as a one-round force by most experienced pairs) easier to establish a possible heart fit for game purposes. West can raise to 3♥, and East will carry on to game.

Where West passes initially, North's 1♠ opening will fetch a 2♥ overcall from East. West can either cuebid 2♠ to show support, or bid a direct 4♥. Partnership style matters here.

With East declaring 4♥ against a spade lead from South, there are three tricks the defense: two spades and a top trump. E-W plus 420 will be the common result.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 7 5
♥ K J 4 2
♦ A 8 6
♣ Q J 9

♠ K 10
♥ A 10 6
♦ K Q 5 3 2
♣ K 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 6 3 2
♥ Q 8 7
♦ 9 4
♣ A 7 4

♠ Q 8 4
♥ 9 5 3
♦ J 10 7
♣ 10 8 6 2

After North opens a strong 1NT (15-17 HCP), the only decision will be West's in the balancing seat. Holding a strong notrump themselves, some Wests might feel inclined to act, but the flat shape argues against it. Those that double (values/penalty) will likely hear a 2♠ run-out by East to end the auction (or a transfer to 2♠ for those who have that agreement over a double). Those Wests who pass North's opening 1NT, however, will likely see a low spade lead from East.

The successful defense to 1NT hinges on what West does at tricks one and two. If West wins the ♠A, he must switch to a club or a heart at trick two. In this line, the defense will win the race to seven tricks if they knock out declarer's ♥A before declarer knocks out their ♦A.

West can also succeed by ducking the spade at trick one. Declarer can attack diamonds, but West can win the ace and then attack hearts or clubs. This line works because declarer only has one spade trick in this variation.

But if West wins the ♠A and continues spades, declarer will get to seven tricks first: two spades, four diamonds and the ♥A.

On balance, those E-W pairs who declare in 2♠ will take nine tricks (losing two trumps, a heart and a diamond in most lines) for plus 140, outscoring those E-W pairs who choose to defend 1NT and collect 100 for down one.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

♠ J 6
♥ K 7 4 3
♦ 8 6 5
♣ K Q 8 6

♠ A 4 3
♥ J 10
♦ K 9 2
♣ A 10 5 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 8
♥ A Q 9 5
♦ A J 4
♣ J 9 2

♠ 10 9 7 5 2
♥ 8 6 2
♦ Q 10 7 3
♣ 7

The auction at many tables will be 1NT-2♣ [Stayman]; 2♥ [four hearts]-3♥ [inviting game]; 4♥-Pass. But the defense can succeed along fairly obvious lines. South's singleton club goes to North's ace, and a suit-preference ♣10 - indicating a spade entry - allows South to ruff and return a spade to North's ace for another club ruff. Declarer still has a diamond loser after this carnage and will finish down two.

Did E-W do anything wrong? It's hard to lay blame, but any East who elects to downgrade the flat, "quacky" 17-count and pass the 3♥ invitation will do well here.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 5
♥ J 9 3 2
♦ K 9 3 2
♣ K J 7 3

♠ A K Q 6 2
♥ A 10 6
♦ Q
♣ A Q 10 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 7 4 3
♥ Q 8 7
♦ A 8 7 5 4
♣ 9

♠ J 9 8
♥ K 5 4
♦ J 10 6
♣ 8 6 4 2

After two passes, what should North open? Some players, impressed with the 21 HCP, will start with 2♣. Others will regard this hand as a very strong 1♠ opening: First, the value of the ♦Q is dubious, and second, if North opens 1♠ and South passes, game is unlikely anyway.

Where North opens 1♠, it's indeed possible that South could pass this flat 5-count, but most players will scrounge up either a 2♠ raise or a 1NT response (forcing or semi-forcing), with the idea of rebidding 2♠ to keep opener from getting too excited. Here, however, North with rebid 3♣, a game-forcing jump shift. Over that, South can move directly to 4♠ to deny slam interest. (If slam has a play, North would still have the five level to make slam noises.) At those tables where North opens 2♣, the auction will likely continue 2♦ by South (waiting), 2♠ by North, and 4♠ by South. The jump to game in this sequence is weak; 3♠ would be stronger, showing at least mild slam interest.

Even with the club honors favorably placed for North, declarer should lose a heart, a diamond and a club. But some care is required if East leads the singleton ♣9; declarer should be rightfully suspicious that a club ruff is looming. In that case, after winning the club as cheaply as West allows, drawing four rounds of trump is best even though it destroys one of dummy's entries. Declarer can then cross to the ♥K and take a club finesse. This line produces five trumps, two hearts and three club tricks.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 5
♥ A J 5
♦ K J 10 7 3 2
♣ Q 8 6

♠ Q J 7 4 2
♥ Q 10 4
♦ Q 8
♣ 10 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 9
♥ K 9 8 3
♦ A 9 6 5 4
♣ 9 5

♠ K 10 8 6 3
♥ 7 6 2
♦ —
♣ A K J 7 4

As dealer, West has a choice of actions depending on tastes and agreements.

Some aggressive Wests will opt for a 1♦ opening, while others will choose a heavy 2♦ preempt. A third class of Wests, displeased with either of those choices, will pass.

Over 1♦, East has a 1♥ response, and South can choose between a simple 1♠ overcall or some sort of two-suited action. (But note: Experienced players use 2♥ here as natural, showing a good hand with long hearts. Cuebidding opener's minor suit, i.e., 2♦, is typically played as a Michaels-like two-suiter in these kinds of auctions.)

Over South's 1♠, West can either rebid diamonds or make a support double (for pairs who use that method) to show three-card heart support. From here, the auction will likely get high very quickly. North may blast to 4♠, especially at these colors, and East may well guess to press on to 5♦.

Where West opens 2♦, East may decide to go whole-hog and raise to 5♦. For all East knows, N-S could be cold for 4♠.

We predict a variety of results on this board.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

♠ J 10 6
♥ K Q 10 2
♦ J 5
♣ A Q 8 7

♠ A K 3
♥ 6 4
♦ A K 9 8 4
♣ K 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 7 5 2
♥ A
♦ Q 7 6 2
♣ J 10 9 4

♠ Q 9 4
♥ J 9 8 7 5 3
♦ 10 3
♣ 5 2

1NT will be the popular opening choice for North (although some old-schoolers regard hands with four-and-a-half quick tricks as being too good for 1NT). A Jacoby transfer sequence will get N-S to 2♥. We expect that the auction will be overwhelmingly the same at most tables.

In hearts, declarer is slated to lose four trumps and a club to make the contract on the nose. The result of N-S plus 110 will fill the scoresheet.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

<p>♠ J 10 9 6 4 ♥ 10 4 2 ♦ K J 4 ♣ A 2</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ A ♥ 9 8 7 ♦ 10 9 8 7 ♣ Q J 10 8 5</p> <p>♠ K 7 5 3 2 ♥ A 3 ♦ A 6 ♣ 9 7 6 4</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

Pairs who employ a light opening style may get overboard on this deal as N-S. If South opens 1♠ in second chair, South will force to game, starting with 2♥. Depending on style, South can temporize with 2♠, though 2NT is also a possibility. 3NT is the likely destination after that beginning. Where North declares 3NT, East has an automatic lead of the ♣Q. When West wins and returns the suit, the contract is doomed, as East will cash out upon winning the ♠A. But where South declares 3NT, West must find the inspired lead of the ♣A and another club to achieve the same result. On any other lead, declarer has time to dislodge the ♠A, East's only entry to establish clubs. Or if West leads the ♠J to the queen and ace, and East returns the ♣Q, West can win and play another club, but after declarer runs the hearts, West must come down to five cards, likely the ♠10 9 6 and the ♦K J. Double dummy, declarer can cash the ♠K and throw West in with a spade, forcing West to lead away from the ♦K at trick 12.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

<p>♠ Q 6 5 2 ♥ J 10 7 5 ♦ 6 3 2 ♣ A 5</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 9 8 ♥ A ♦ K Q 9 7 5 ♣ J 9 8 4 2</p> <p>♠ A J 4 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ A 4 ♣ K Q 10 7 3</p> <p>♠ K 10 7 3 ♥ Q 9 6 4 2 ♦ J 10 8 ♣ 6</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

A light, third-seat 1♦ opening by North will be common, giving East a choice of ways to proceed. A takeout double is reasonable, a 2♣ overcall less so, but the practical 1NT overcall gives E-W many tools to use, especially Stayman and transfers. 1NT should likely end the auction, though some Norths with a death wish may proceed with 2♣. When/if East doubles, South will take the obvious preference to 2♦. It may be possible for E-W to balance against this, arriving in 2♥ or 2♠ on a 4-3 fit. Several contracts are possible, but 1NT by East will be a popular one. It's also possible for E-W to get to a major-suit contract after a takeout double of 1♦. 1NT by East is no fun to play on the lead of the ♦J. To succeed, declarer will need mirrors. After winning the ♦A, declarer will need to get clubs right and (the real trick) play to drop the singleton ♥A. Results on this deal will vary widely, with the declaring side frequently failing.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

<p>♠ 9 7 6 ♥ A 9 8 4 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A 8 6</p>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ K Q J 10 4 3 2 ♥ 6 3 ♦ 7 6 ♣ J 10</p> <p>♠ A ♥ J 10 7 ♦ A 8 5 3 2 ♣ K Q 4 3</p> <p>♠ 8 5 ♥ K Q 5 2 ♦ J 10 9 ♣ 9 7 5 2</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										

After West opens 1♣, many Norths will choose to overcall 3♠, though the "flat" 7-2-2-2 pattern may persuade some Norths that 2♠ is a sufficient preempt. Where North chooses 3♠, East must make a decision. 3NT is a bit unilateral, not to mention dangerous with only a single spade stopper that can be dislodged on the opening lead. Some East's will try 4♦ over the preempt, but this narrowly focuses on one strain, though it has the benefit at least of getting E-W to game, albeit a minor-suit one. Despite the imperfect pattern (only three cards in the other major), a negative double will be the popular choice. It risks landing E-W in a 4-3 heart fit, but at matchpoints, that might be best anyway. Over 1♣-(3♠)-Dbl-(Pass), West's 4♥ will likely end the auction. But there may be some East players who make slam moves. Against West's 4♥, the ♠K lead from North will go to dummy's ace, but declarer can simply run the ♥J at trick two. Declarer can repeat the heart finesse if South declines to cover, but declarer should ruff a spade in dummy before removing its last trump. Not only does this generate an extra trick by ruffing in the short hand, but it removes the last spade from South, preventing a forcing defense in which repeated spade plays causes declarer to lose control.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

This wild layout will lead to a variety of auctions being conducted at different tables. After North opens 1♥ and East preempts with 3♣, how should South proceed?

For those Souths that choose to keep the focus on hearts and suppress the nearly solid spade suit, the trick will be to find a way to discover if North possesses a club control for slam purposes. With four-card heart support and complete control of diamonds and spades, the possibility of slam is immediately obvious.

One popular path will be for South to cuebid 4♣ over East's preempt. What's unclear, however, is how North should react to this. With excellent trumps and above-average values, North should cooperate in a slam move. For pairs who make control bids with first- or second-round controls (singleton/void/ace/king), North might try 4♦. Holding a void in that suit, this will not excite South, who may give up and settle for 4♥; the chance of two fast club losers is real, and there might be a trump loser to boot, making the five level unsafe. But other Souths will make a second slam-try with 4♠. If (and it's a big "if") North offers a control bid of 5♣ over that, 6♥ might be reached.

South players who try to make spades the trump suit will have the same problem in diagnosing a club control.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

At most tables, the auction will begin 1♠ by South and 2♦ by North. South's choice of rebid will depend on partnership style. 2NT will be a popular and logical choice, as will 2♠ for 2/1 pairs who agree that a rebid of the major is simply temporizing and does not promise a sixth spade.

Over either rebid, North will bid 3♠ to confirm the spade fit before probing for slam. Because a direct 4♠ is available to North on the second round, 3♠ suggests the willingness to hear if South has any slam interest, too. But South, with a minimum opener, should retreat to 4♠.

Holding a prime 18-count, North should not go quietly, but make one more stab at slam with a five-level control bid: 5♣. South can finally cooperate with 5♥ which should get N-S to 6♠.

With the 4-1 trump split, making 6♠ requires a bit of luck, which declarer receives with the friendly diamond layout. With the ♦Q 9 dropping doubleton under the ♦A K, the ♦10 8 7 provides three discards for declarer (two hearts and a club). It's true that (double dummy) declarer doesn't have a trump loser, in practice declarer will. When trumps are played, West drops the ♠J on dummy's ace, and when a low spade is next played toward the closed hand, East plays low (the ♠6). Declarer can cover with the 7 if he's convinced the suit is 4-1, i.e. he believes the ♠J was singleton, but it takes some nerve to play this way. Many declarers will go up with a spade honor from their hand on the second round, creating a trump trick for the defense.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

When South opens 1NT (15-17 HCP), North can invite by whatever methods the N-S pairs is using. For some, it will be 1NT-2NT, for others it will be 1NT-2♣ (ostensibly Stayman); 2♥-2NT. This sequence does not promise a four-card major.

Should South accept? The excellent spots may persuade South to do so. But if East doubles North's 2♣, South may take a more pessimistic view and decline the invitation.

Indeed, a club lead is needed to defeat 2NT by South. After winning the ♣Q at trick one, a spade switch by East is lethal to declarer. The defense will take three spade tricks, two clubs and a heart for down one. On any other lead, declarer has time to set up three heart tricks by leading low from dummy and taking the finesse against East's ♥J. South will score one spade, three hearts and four diamonds.

Board 24
West Deals
None Vul

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

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

A fair number of Wests will elect to preempt with 2♠, which will likely run to South who will choose 3♥ (although some Easts may raise to 3♠). North will then raise to 4♥, ending the auction. If West passes initially and East opens 1♣, South will overcall 1♥ and West will bid 1♠ (or perhaps 2♠ for those who use fit-showing jumps by a passed hand). But when North uses a cuebid raise of 2♣ or 3♣ (depending on how high West bids), N-S are still favorites to get to 4♥.

On, say, a spade lead, South wins the ace and plays the ♣Q at trick two. This establishes the ♣K in dummy for a diamond discard, allowing declarer to hold his losers to one spade, one diamond and one club, assuming declarer gets the trump suit right. Where West has preempted 2♠, this is much easier, although there will be clues on many other auctions, too.

Board 25
North Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

We expect that West will be allowed to open 1NT in fourth position at most tables. A transfer to hearts will then be followed by a choice-of-games 3NT, West selecting the notrump game. There's not much to the play on this deal, as the ♠J is favorably placed for E-W. Declarer should lose just the three obvious tricks – the ♦A K and the ♠A.

Board 26
East Deals
Both Vul

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

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

After East opens 1♣, West can choose between a natural, invitational 2NT (11-12 HCP) or 2♣, an inverted minor raise, showing at least invitational values. Either path will get the partnership to 3NT, as East has a full 14 HCP. The only difference will be which partner will declare. Declarer starts with eight tricks: five clubs (with the suit behaving), one diamond and two hearts. Where East declares, any lead but a club creates a ninth trick for declarer right away. Ten tricks are possible, but to get there, declarer must go after spades first. Let's assume best defense: Say South leads a passive club. Declarer wins the ♣10 in hand, cashes the ♣A and crosses to the ♣K. Before cashing the remaining clubs, which will force declarer to decide too quickly on what to discard from hand, declarer can play a low spade from the table. When North produces the 8, declarer covers with the 9, and South wins the jack. If South exits a diamond, declarer plays low from dummy, and North wins the king. On either a heart or diamond return, declarer wins in dummy and plays another spade, covering North's queen with the king. After South wins the ace, declarer can claim 10 tricks, having lost just two spades and a diamond. Where West declares, play proceeds along the same lines.

Board 27

South Deals
None Vul

♠ K 6 2	♠ 5 4 3										
♥ K 9 6 4 2	♥ Q										
♦ 5 4	♦ J 7 3 2										
♣ 10 8 3	♣ K J 9 5 4										
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; 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		♠ A Q 10 9
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♥ J 7									
		♦ K Q 9									
		♣ Q 7 6 2									
		♠ J 8 7									
		♥ A 10 8 5 3									
		♦ A 10 8 6									
		♣ A									

The high-card points are evenly divided on this deal, and only N-S have an eight-card fit (in diamonds), so it's little surprise that 2♦ by N-S is the highest-scoring contract.

After South opens 1♥, North responds 1NT. Despite holding an opening hand, East doesn't have a clear action to take at this point, although some players will be unable to contain themselves and will try a takeout double. Regardless, South will rebid 2♦, which will get passed around to East. Those East players who were silent on the first round of the auction must decide if their hand is worth competing with a takeout double on this round. It's not an easy decision, as there's a real possibility of a 4-4 spade fit. Some Easts will go quietly, other will double. The latter group will force their partners to choose 2♠ on a three-card suit, but it's hardly a disaster. If N-S don't double, and West can manage to finish down one, the E-W score of minus 50 will outperform the N-S score of plus 90 for 2♦.

Balancing at matchpoints is not for the faint of heart.

In 2♦, South crossruffs clubs and hearts. East will be able to eventually overruff and play the ♦K, but the defense cannot stop declarer from taking eight tricks.

Board 28

West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A K 10 7 5	♠ J 6										
♥ A Q 8 7	♥ J 10 5 3 2										
♦ 5 2	♦ K J										
♣ 10 7	♣ A 9 6 3										
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; 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 8 3 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♥ K 9 6									
		♦ A Q 9 6 4									
		♣ 8									
		♠ 9 4									
		♥ 4									
		♦ 10 8 7 3									
		♣ K Q J 5 4 2									

After West opens 1♠, the East hand is too good for a simple limit (invitational) raise. Yes, there are just 11 HCP, but their placement is excellent. The four-card support, singleton club and good-quality diamond suit on the side - a possible trick source - all suggest treating the East cards as a game force. A splinter bid of 4♣ (club shortness, four-card trump support, game-going values) is the best description of this hand.

South, of course, may double 4♣ as a lead director.

The club splinter is good news for West; slam is possible opposite club shortness. For example, change East's ♦Q to the ♦K, and it's easy to see how 6♠ is almost cold. So West, with good trumps and prime values, should offer a 4♥ control bid to see what East does. (Note that this is not an offer to play in hearts; spades have already been agreed by the splinter bid.)

It's easy to see how some East players might make another slam move (perhaps a 5♦ control bid), and there will be some pairs who get to 6♠ and make it thanks to the diamond finesse working. We suspect most E-W pairs will settle for 4♠, however, and that E-W plus 480 will be a common score.

Board 29

North Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q 9 7 5 4 3 2	♠ K 10 6										
♥ 8 5 2	♥ Q 9 3										
♦ —	♦ Q 7 6 5										
♣ A K 4	♣ J 8 7										
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; 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		♠ A 8
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♥ A 10 7 6									
		♦ J 9 8 4 3									
		♣ 6 3									
		♠ J									
		♥ K J 4									
		♦ A K 10 2									
		♣ Q 10 9 5 2									

Most Souths will choose to open 1♣ in third seat, but some will choose 1♦ with the plan of bidding clubs on the next round. Regardless, West will enter the auction with a spade overcall ... but at what level?

A 1♠ overcall is perfectly reasonable; some Wests will prefer to try for a constructive auction to keep game chances (even opposite a passed hand) in the picture. 2♠ is possible, but it's off the mark. The offensive nature of the hand - the 7=3=0=3 pattern - and the concentration of values outside of the long suit make 2♠ a misdescription. 3♠ is a better try than 2♠, as it suggests a seven-bagger with plenty of trick-taking capability. 3♠, of course, makes things more difficult for North if he wishes to compete, and it will likely end the auction.

Where West overcalls just 1♠, North can try 1NT, but when the auction returns to West, 2♠ will be the call.

Playing in spades, West must remember to ruff a club in dummy with the ♠8 to get to nine tricks.

Board 30
East Deals
None Vul

♠ 9 3
♥ A 10 9 7
♦ K 10 5
♣ 9 8 3 2

♠ 10 8 6 4 2
♥ Q
♦ J 6
♣ A Q 7 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 7
♥ K J 4 3
♦ A Q 8 7 2
♣ J

♠ K J 5
♥ 8 6 5 2
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K 10 5

At almost every table, East will open 1♦ and West will respond 1♥. With the weak 5-5 hand, North might decide to enter the auction with a takeout double, a 1♠ overcall (not pretty) or a conventional "sandwich" 1NT to show spades and clubs. Whatever North chooses to do, East will jump to 3♥ to show extra values and four-card heart support. Some might even try a 4♣ splinter raise, though the hand is a bit understrength for such an action. Either way, most E-W pairs will land in 4♥. (Where East rebids 3♥, West should upgrade his hand; the red-suit honors fit partner's bidding, and there's a ruffing value with the doubleton spade.) Against the best defense of a spade lead (or the unlikely ♥Q lead), declarer can take 11 tricks, losing one spade and one club, assuming declarer doesn't blow a trick to the singleton ♥Q. The plan for West should be to take the ♠A, five diamonds and four trump tricks to draw all of South's trumps, while scoring a club ruff along the way. This means that declarer should play a round of clubs after discovering the 4-1 trump split to ensure a club ruff in dummy.

Board 31
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 8 6 4 2
♥ J 8 6 5
♦ A J 8 3
♣ 3

♠ J
♥ 9 2
♦ Q 7 6 5 4
♣ Q 10 8 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 5 3
♥ Q 10 7 3
♦ K 10 9
♣ K 4

♠ A Q 10 7
♥ A K 4
♦ 2
♣ A J 9 7 6

After South opens 1♣, North has a few choices, but passing should not be one of them; the club fit and 5-5 shape are sufficient for North to bid. If a preemptive raise to 3♣ is available, it would be a reasonably descriptive call: at least five clubs, fewer than, say, 8 HCP, and no four-card major. Over that, South can go directly to 5♣, though there will be some Souths who probe for slam. The play in 5♣ is straightforward. Declarer must lose one diamond, so playing the trump suit for no losers is the key. The finesse is favored in this type of situation, and those declarers that take it will score an overtrick.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 5 4
♥ 9 8 6 2
♦ A K 6 3
♣ Q 9 2

♠ J 9 7 3
♥ K 10 4
♦ 10 7 5
♣ 7 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K Q 8 6 2
♥ —
♦ Q 9
♣ K 10 8 4 3

♠ 10
♥ A Q J 7 5 3
♦ J 8 4 2
♣ A J

After East opens 1♠ in third seat and South overcalls 2♥, what should West call? It feels wrong to pass with 9 HCP, but nothing strongly appeals. A negative double comes closest, but this is dangerous opposite a third-seat opener where E-W may be forced to the three level without a fit and with insufficient values. If West passes, East has an easy 3♣ call at his next turn. Assuming South stays quiet, West must now make some noise, perhaps with a simple 4♣ raise. This will give East the chance to bid 4♠, the matchpoint-preferable game if a fit exists. If West makes a negative double at his second turn, East must be careful to do something dramatic; a simple 3♣ bid does not do this 6-5 hand justice. A jump to 4♣ is better; bypassing 3NT indicates extreme shape. West might simply bid 5♣ over that or try a 4♦ advance in case 4♠ is still on the menu. (Some would reasonably argue that 4♦ and 4♠ over East's 4♣ are control bids to explore for a club slam.) Pairs who play 4♠ will make five, losing one trump trick and only one club, thanks to the friendly layout in that suit: plus 650. Those who play in 5♣ will take 12 tricks, losing only one club, but score just 620.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

♠ A 5 3
♥ 10 8 7 3 2
♦ 10 9 7
♣ 8 5

♠ K Q 9 8 2
♥ A J 6 5
♦ 8 2
♣ 7 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7
♥ 9 4
♦ K 5 4
♣ A K Q J 10 9 6

♠ J 10 6 4
♥ K Q
♦ A Q J 6 3
♣ 4 3

It's difficult to accurately predict common auctions on this board. East will open 1♣ in second chair at most tables. (The hand has full opening values and is too strong for a 3♣ preempt.) South can overcall 1♦, and North can advance with 1♠. After East rebids clubs, South can raise to 2♠ (3♠, anyone?), and some Norths will be content. If East gets another chance, a stubborn 3♣ will be the choice of many. N-S should not sell below 3♠, however. Getting to game is tough for N-S, but 10 tricks are easy. Once West turns up with the ♠A, East must hold the ♦K to have opened the bidding; the diamond finesse is marked.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

East has an automatic 1♥ opening as dealer, and West should respond 2♣ to create a force and bid his longest suit first. The 2♦ rebid by East will make suspect that 3NT is the final destination, but a fourth-suit 2♠ is a reasonable continuation to see if East has anything surprising to say. But when East bids 3♦ next, most Wests will shrug their shoulders and conclude things with 3NT. The misfitting hands, however, will make it difficult to successfully declare.

Assuming North has paid attention to the bidding, a low spade lead is strongly suggested, and when dummy's 10 is covered with South's jack, West must decide whether to win or duck the trick. Say declarer ducks and wins the spade continuation. Double dummy, West can succeed by cashing the ♣A and, noting the fall of the ♣J on his left, exiting with a low club to drive out North's king, setting up the remaining clubs in West's hand. But many Wests will (understandably) run the ♦Q after winning the spade, and whether South wins or ducks, the defense will continue spades. Declarer can finish running the diamonds, but will need to find the inspired play of ducking a round of clubs to North. After cashing a good spade, North's exit will be won by declarer who can then bang down the ♣A and run the suit. This line of play (almost) requires mirrors, and many declarers in 3NT will fail.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

It's possible to open the West hand 1♣, but there's a lot to be said for opening 1NT instead. It gets the strength of the hand across, and E-W get all of their conventional tools to use: Stayman, transfers and so on.

North may well decide to compete over 1NT with whatever conventional gadget N-S use to show a two-suited hand. But East should happily compete over North's interference, using whatever tool E-W have to show diamonds and a non-forcing hand. Lebensohl is one such tool.

If North has managed to show spades and another suit, East's attempt to play in 3♦ will be overruled by South who will raise spades. Any N-S pairs who allows E-W to play diamonds will get a poor score. Those N-S pairs who successfully get to spades will score best.

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

North will open 1NT at almost every table, and East will likely intervene with his favorite notrump defense to show a major-minor two-suiter. The exact call that East chooses may determine the remainder of the auction, so predicting likely auctions is difficult. For example, if East bids 2♠, showing spades and a minor, it might well end the bidding. Or West may raise to 3♠, also likely to end the bidding. But if N-S play negative doubles over two-level interference, South might risk a negative double of 2♠.

N-S will score best if they somehow manage to find their diamond fit and make 10 tricks, which requires taking a view in the trump suit, i.e., finessing West for the ♦Q. A scrappy partscore deal for the final board of the set.