

**Board 5**

North Deals  
N-S Vul

♠ A 8 2		♠ Q J 9 7
♥ A Q 8 6 5 3		♥ 9 2
♦ K		♦ A 7 5 3
♣ 10 6 2		♣ Q J 7
♠ K 10 5 3	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">             N W     E S           </div>	
♥ 10 7		
♦ 10 9 8 2		
♣ A K 9		
♠ 6 4		
♥ K J 4		
♦ Q J 6 4		
♣ 8 5 4 3		

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥
2 ♠	Pass	Dbl	Pass
	3 ♥	All pass	

**Auction Commentary:** East didn't have enough to double originally, and the auction came back to them after South raised and North, with no more than an opener's minimum seven-loser hand, passed. East is in the balancing seat, the last chance to act before the auction ends. When the opponents settle at the two-level in a fit, we should not pass if we are short in their suit. It is likely that we have a fit as well, and the HCP will be roughly balanced between the two sides. East doubles, asking West to choose a suit. North, with an extra trump, competes to the 3-level. When our side has nine trumps, we should usually compete to the 3-level.

Note that it would be a mistake for West to double 2 ♥, even though they have almost the same hand as East. A double in direct position shows a stronger hand. East would jump to either 3 ♠ or 4 ♠ and end up going down.

**Opening Lead:** ♠ Q.

**Play Commentary:** North is going to lose 5 tricks and go one down.


**Takeaway:** Once the opponents have settled in a fit at the two-level, it is vital for our side to balance. Sometimes, both sides can make a contract, and we gain significantly by being plus in our contract instead of being minus in theirs. Sometimes, we can't make our contract, but going down 1 (-50 or -100) is a much better result than letting them make their contract (-110 or -140). Sometimes, we push them to a contract they can't make.

Balancing may seem dangerous when you are just getting your feet wet, but "trust us." Long experience has taught many that balancing is mandatory if you are trying to improve your score. Give it a try, you will see how it can work for you.

*Remember the difference between doubling in direct position and doubling in balancing position.*

**Board 9**

North Deals  
E-W Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 ♣	All pass

**Auction Commentary:** 2 ♦ will be a popular choice for some Norths at their second turn. It is probably better to bid 2 ♠ instead. 2 ♠ shows a minimum, but partner will be pleased if they jump to game with 5 spades because of the singleton. With only 4 spades, South should jump to 3 NT, so you are not yet committed to spades as trumps if your side only has seven of them.

When South passes 2 ♠, West is in the balancing seat. It can be scary to force partner to bid at the three level, but going -100 is still better than going -110 or -140. 2 NT shows the minors here; it is not an effort to play in no trump. East prefers to 3 ♣.

With five spades, it is usually right for South to continue to the 3-level. They chose not to here, perhaps because of their relatively strong club holding and relatively weak hand.

**Opening Lead:** ♥T. We don't want to lead or lead away from the ♠ A and there should be some safety in leading partner's suit. Sometimes, we just want to do no harm on opening lead.

**Play Commentary:** Although East is the declarer, she should try and set up West as the master hand. West has a suit which can be set up, a source of tricks. Win the ♥ A and lead the ♦ Q. Once North wins and the defense cashes 1 heart and 2 spades, they will likely exit with a 3rd spade which West will ruff. It's time to test the diamonds. West will cash the ♦ K and then ruff a small diamond with the ♣ 7. South can over ruff, but now West is in control for the rest of the tricks after taking a finesse in trumps. {When South shows up with 5 spades, 2 hearts and 2 diamonds, they are known to have started with 4 clubs, so West can play the ♣ K and finesse in clubs.} Down 1. Down 1 is good bridge, as North and South were likely making 2 ♠.

**Takeaway:** "Down 1 is good bridge" is a phrase you will hear more and more frequently. We aren't kidding. In competitive auctions, the opponents are often making a higher score when they make their contract than when you are down 1 in your contract. The pros do not often let the opponents have the contract at the two-level when they have shown a fit.

**Board 12**  
 West Deals  
 N-S Vul

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

**Auction Commentary:** North didn't have enough to double originally, and the auction came back to them after East raised and West passed. North is in the balancing seat, the last chance to act before the auction ends. When the opponents settle at the two-level in a fit, we should not pass if we are short in their suit. It is likely that we have a fit as well, and the HCP will be roughly balanced between the two sides. North doubles, asking South to choose a suit. Neither East or West have an extra trump, so neither of them has a reason to compete to the 3-level.

**Opening Lead:** ♣ 3. We aren't in a hurry to lead a heart from our AQ, so we lead passively.

**Play Commentary:** South will lose 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and 1 spade. Making 2

**More on the importance of balancing:** These battles between hearts and spades at the two and three levels happen constantly. They have as much riding on them as do the decisions on whether to bid games and slams. Let's look at what happened.

North could have passed the hand out. If they had, North and South would have been -110 with West making 2 ♥.

After balancing, North and South are making 2 ♠, ending up +110 instead of -110. What a difference!

This is how important balancing can be. A swing of -110 to +110 is worth most of the marbles at any form of scoring. Even if 2 ♠ had gone down 1, North and South would have been -100 instead of -110, and this small difference can still be significant when playing match point pairs. Don't let anyone tell you these part-score decisions aren't important!