

ACBL-wide Senior Pairs Game #2

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Analysis by Jim Munday



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Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 3
♥ A K 8 2
♦ A Q 9 8 4
♣ 4 2

♠ —
♥ Q 7 6 4
♦ J 3 2
♣ A 10 8 6 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 8 7 5
♥ 10
♦ K 10 7 6
♣ Q J 9 7

♠ A K J 10 6 4 2
♥ J 9 5 3
♦ 5
♣ K

An early action deal will see South opening 4♠ in third seat at many tables, putting the spotlight on West. Despite holding the best hand at the table, a poor spade holding for offense and facing a passed partner are big deterrents. Pass and double both get votes. 4NT showing any two suits is possible, but compels our side to reach the five level with limited offensive potential. A good rule of thumb opposite high-level takeout doubles. Don't compete to the five level unless you have a six-card suit or at least 10 cards in two suits. East's hand doesn't meet that threshold so should pass if West does double. Not a foolproof formula but nets a tidy profit here. E/W can take five tricks against a spade contract but must get their heart ruffs to do so. Those using upside-down carding might have trouble thanks to that pesky ♥10. E/W will be in diamonds at some tables and N/S would have to go out of their way to allow more than nine tricks regardless of which opponent declares.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 3
♥ A
♦ A K J 9 7 6 5 4
♣ J 5

♠ A K Q 10 9
♥ J 8 7 2
♦ 8
♣ K 8 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6 5
♥ Q 10 6 3
♦ 10 2
♣ A 9 6 4 3

♠ 8 7 4 2
♥ K 9 5 4
♦ Q 3
♣ Q 10 7

West raises South's spade suit from Board 1 with an eighth diamond. The West hand is difficult to describe in standard methods. Facing a passed partner, various levels of diamonds are possible, and some will try a gambling 3NT. North will bid spades if given the opportunity, though anything higher than the two level will be uncomfortable. I don't see E/W selling to the opponents below 4♦. North has a good idea what to lead against a gambling 3NT and that contract should fail quickly. In diamonds, declarer can wriggle all they want but there are three inevitable losers. N/S can do well in either major with good guessing in hearts and clubs, though spades rates to play more comfortably in practice.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A Q 6 4 2
♥ Q 9
♦ K 6
♣ J 10 8 5

♠ J 8
♥ A 8 7 5 4 2
♦ J
♣ A K 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 5 3
♥ K J 6
♦ Q 10 8 7 5 2
♣ Q

♠ K 10 9
♥ 10 3
♦ A 9 4 3
♣ 9 7 3 2

A partscore battle will lead to an abundance of different results here. West will open 1♠ in second seat with North overcalling 2♥. Holding better hearts than spades could give some Easts pause, but with side shortness most will raise to 2♠. At favorable vulnerability, South might opt for a responsive (takeout) double if East raises, but N/S are likely to compete to at least 3♣ or 3♥ regardless. Some E/W pairs will compete further to 3♠, though neither has a clear reason to do so. N/S should achieve five tricks on defense versus spades by getting a diamond ruff to go with a trick in each suit. The adverse club position makes playing in clubs or hearts a challenge for N/S. Precise defense is needed to win six tricks against clubs. Seeing through the backs of the cards will allow declarer to win eight in hearts but most will take fewer.

Board 4West Deals
Both Vul

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

Most Wests will open despite just a modest 12 count. East will at least invite after opener raises their spades. If opener has shown real diamond length, driving to game is more attractive upon confirming opener has four spades. Those who reach game will be pleased with the outcome as the E/W hands fit together nicely. With both diamonds and spades cooperating, E/W are due 10 tricks in spades via any plausible line.

Board 5North Deals
N-S Vul

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

East gets to join the seven-card suit party but should content themselves with 1♠ in second seat. Even thinking about acting is an overbid for South but no doubt some will. With scattered quacky values and flat shape, West is worth only a single raise. East has excellent potential with the known 10-card fit and should invite at a minimum. Responder has a maximum in high cards and will accept. The hands are not a perfect mesh but game certainly has good chances. Hard to visualize any contract outside of spades at these colors but any N/S pair that intervenes is apt to regret it. South has a natural heart sequence lead, which gets the defense on the best track. Success then boils down to the spade suit. The best play in a vacuum is to finesse for the ♠K; it would take an inspired declarer (or a rabbi) to drop the singleton king offside. A less successful start for the defense might allow declarer to discard their heart loser on a minor suit winner.

Board 6East Deals
E-W Vul

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

A competitive auction looms with lots of pathways depending on style and methods. East will open 1♦ in standard methods and South has options. Double gets both majors in play immediately as does an off-beat Michaels cuebid (usually showing at least five of each major), though at the expense of the ideal shape for either action. A 1♥ overcall planning to compete later will also receive support. West can introduce clubs in some fashion with the long, strong suit making up for limited values. The spotlight turns to North who should support/show the majors regardless of South's choice. Those N/S pairs who reach game will score very well thanks to the friendly layout, but contracts will be all over the map on this one. E/W pairs who compete too high might suffer a large penalty thanks to being trump poor. The ninth heart provides a little more security for N/S in that strain but 11 tricks in either major should come in thanks to

the friendly lie of the E/W cards. North has two entries to lead through each major suit honor that East, not unexpectedly given the opening bid, holds. N/S can win five tricks on defense in a club contract.

Board 7South Deals
Both Vul

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

South kicks off the proceedings with 1♠, which catches West by surprise. When the opponents are bidding your best suit, staying silent is often the wisest course of action, and West should pass. North will respond 1NT. The vulnerability should silence East, but there will be a smattering of club bidders. South rebids 2♥, which will get passed back to East, who can now comfortably balance with 3♣ without partner taking them too seriously. North might well compete to 3♥ if so. Expect to see heart and club contracts dominate the scoresheet at various levels. N/S have only five top losers in hearts, but that's not the same thing as eight tricks. Achievable, but there is a lot of work to do and East's pesky heart holding may play a role. With the minor-suit honors lying well, a club contract should produce 10 tricks for E/W, though South has an opportunity to fool declarer by smoothly ducking if a club is led to one of the royals. Any making contract should score well.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

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

Though holding two unstopped suits, the modern style is to open a strong notrump with balanced hands in range. Holding both black suits, 1♣ is an alternative. East will raise clubs if so, and can consider transferring to them over a 1NT opening if methods allow. South will be taking some action at their first turn, introducing diamonds or perhaps doubling 1NT for penalty if conventionally able. Club and diamond contracts will abound, with some N/S pairs in spades. N/S can take eight tricks in notrump on offense or defense, though the lead will be important in the latter instance. Nine tricks in clubs is the limit with normal play in the heart suit by finessing against the ♥J, but N/S must cash their diamond winners early before they can be discarded on spades. Diamonds provides the same nine tricks for N/S, but E/W must take care to prevent the spades being established for a heart pitch. Spades can be held to eight tricks

routinely and on a different day might not even manage that many. A victory for trump quality.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

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

Another partscore deal, this one begins with North opening 1♠. East should avoid overcalling at the two level with poor values, balanced shape, and a modest suit. South has a normal spade raise. West has a borderline double known as an OBAR (opponents bid and raise) double, a competitive bidding tool used by some advanced pairs. With opposing shortness, the strength expectation for a takeout double or overcall can be relaxed immediately after a raise. This takes pressure off partner in the balancing seat, as it would here. Don't try this without discussing it with your partner and proceed with caution. East might balance if 2♠ is passed back to them, but it's much easier to compete to 3♥ if West doubles. North might well take the push to 3♠ if so, and regret it, particularly if East finds a speculative double with promising defense. The cards lie favorably again for E/W here, with the exception of the heart suit. Normal play in hearts will hold E/W to eight tricks, unless declarer is inspired to play South for the

♥Q and take a backwards finesse, with little reason to do so. Despite nine trumps and the majority of the high-card points, N/S can be held to seven tricks in spades, which should be against the LAW.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

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

A battle of dueling strong notrumps but West gets first crack here. North has a good hand but no bid over 1NT and should pass even if playing double as penalty with very few actual tricks and without a good lead. That is likely to end the auction. Differing notrump ranges might well see N/S declaring 1NT or E/W finding their way to hearts. Different schools of thought on opening lead provide a number of options: a top of nothing heart, a high club to take a look at dummy, or the tried-and-true fourth best diamond. Seven tricks are available regardless, but some options will be more challenging than others and declarer has a lot of guessing to do. If North doubles, declarer's task is much easier as it should lead to winning guesses in the black suits when the time comes. If N/S declare in notrump, the lack of a dummy entry should restrict declarer to six tricks after conceding a diamond. Hearts can play quite well, particularly if by West.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

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

West opens 1♥. It's OK to want to bid with the North hand but it's too weak for a two-level overcall and underpowered offensively for a preempt. East will show a good hand with hearts per partnership agreement and 4♥ should be the overwhelmingly common contract. Any N/S high-level club intervention is apt to be met rudely by E/W and result in a significant penalty, which should be a warning to those bidding with the North hand. The lead against 4♥ will be the key at most tables. It's a catch-22 in that if N/S bid clubs that lead is easier to find, though at risk of a hefty penalty. A blind auction will make it harder for North to find a club lead but any information leakage from E/W such as West advertising short clubs or both red suits makes it more attractive. If N/S do not lead clubs, declarer can, with slight risk, take a pitch on the third spade before playing on trumps and emerge with 12 tricks for an excellent score.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

A weak 2♥ opening will start the bidding here. From East's perspective, game is not really on the radar with all those queens and jacks but they might increase the pressure by making a blocking raise to 3♥ to force the opponents to compete a level higher if entering the auction. South has a balancing double at the two level, but should go quietly with uninspired shape and soft values if the bidding is any higher. Heart partials will be the most frequent here with a few N/S club contracts and some E/W pairs getting too high. A friendly layout for E/W here. A couple different lines are possible but with the ♣K onside, the ♥Q doubleton onside, and the diamonds 3-3, nine tricks are all but assured in hearts. The defense needs establish their club winner in time to avoid a tenth. If the cards lay well for E/W, then they don't for N/S, and any venture into the auction in that direction will lead to a poor score with minus 200 or worse looming.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

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

N/S will start 1♦-2♣ which can lead to awkward rebids. North has stoppers but an unbalanced hand and a 4-4 major suit fit is still possible. A couple key questions that you/partner should know the answers to: Does 2NT by North deny a four-card major? Does 2♥/2♠ by North show extra values? An unbalanced hand? 3NT will be the landing spot here regardless, but the answers to those questions will be valuable on a different day. North will likely get a heart lead and can utilize the power of the 8-spot by playing low to gain an extra trick in that suit, perhaps regretfully. The diamond suit provides another example of the "restricted choice" finesse when the ♦J falls on the second round. Holding ♦J104, East would have a choice of the jack or 10 so the odds favor finessing against the 10 on the third round. East has a chance to shine on defense if declarer takes the losing spade finesse. Depending on how the bidding/play has gone, East might find a desperation ♣Q shift striking gold and give five tricks to the defense. Anyone finding this shift, earns their top board.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

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

N/S will start the bidding with 1♥-2♣ at most tables. Spades can be shown later. By bidding clubs first the black suit lengths are accurately and economically identified. Playing 2/1 methods, a game force is also established immediately. The poor club suit gets little respect these days which can be inconvenient when we actually have them. South will rebid 2♦. North's rebid will depend on methods, but if forcing, 2NT to learn more about the hand is a good shot. South can now bid 3♣ to show club length as well (and thus short spades) and North will have to decide how high to proceed. The hands fit very well and slam is a good bet. Those who can bid clubs naturally may have an easier road and pairs who reach 6♣ have a chance to score well. If East decides to make an ill-advised intrusion into the auction, that can lead to a large penalty or perhaps aid N/S in the play. In notrump contracts, there is not much to the play beyond driving out the ♦A. That gets declarer to 11 tricks and if

the ♦10 drops (or an unlikely squeeze), a 12th. Neither works today, though some will benefit from a defensive slip. A spade ruff will present declarer with that elusive 12th trick in clubs but the layout is challenging and declarer must time the play carefully. A spade lead from the sequence is most likely, declarer needs to ruff a spade, drive out the ♦A and draw trumps. The ♣10 being a welcome sight allowing declarer to overtake. The defense can challenge declarer by leading hearts initially and tangling entries. Declarer will have to navigate two spade ruffs with the late entry to the ♦J threatened. Returning to hand by ruffing hearts works, a second diamond unluckily does not.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

South opens 1♥ and West has a decision. 5-3-3-2 is a poor shape for a two-level overcall but it's a good suit, favorable vulnerability and the lead could be important making it barely palatable. North will raise hearts. If West overcalls, East will surely raise, if not, E/W should compete to 3♦ in some fashion. East can make a pre-balancing/OBAR double (discussed on Board 9) or West can balance with 3♦. N/S both have flat hands and are as minimum as they can be, and at dangerous vulnerability they should avoid the temptation to bid further. The danger of the flat shape is apparent in a N/S heart contract. Six losers and really no place to put them, so bidding to the three level will produce the dreaded minus 200 on a partscore deal. That same balanced shape gives E/W a pretty easy ride in diamonds. Declarer only need take modest care in dealing with West's third heart to come home with nine tricks.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

North opens 1♠ in second seat. East has an opening bid but it would be a mistake to double. In order to compete effectively, advancer needs to be able to bank on support for all the unbid suits, especially majors. When the opponents are bidding your best suit, passing is often right course of action. There will be an opportunity to act later. If East does double, E/W will survive only because West is kind enough to hold six clubs. N/S, however, may find their heart fit that might well be missed otherwise. Auctions will vary widely, especially at tables where East does act initially, with a number of heart, spade and club contracts. Best defense against clubs is for North to lead a diamond, giving the defense a tempo. Declarer would normally attack trumps right away with 10 of them, but can reasonably afford to make what's called a discovery play. North would likely lead a top heart from the ♥A K but declarer can be sure by playing on that suit. When South shows up with the ♥A and likely a minor suit quack

or two, declarer can place the ♣A with North given the 1♠ opening. The suit can thus be played for one loser only by hoping it is a singleton and the layout rewards such an endeavor. E/W will benefit similarly against a spade contract by forcing the ♣A to catch "air," allowing an effective tapping defense to hold declarer to eight tricks. Precise defense is needed to defeat 3♥ by promoting a second trump trick after an initial spade ruff. Any making contract should score well for that side.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

4♥ will be reached by N/S at almost every table with a combined nine hearts and 27 HCP. A few pairs might gamble out 3NT. Which game will score best depends on the opening lead and play. In notrump the defense can take the first three tricks with a club lead, but if East were to lead a spade or diamond, an eleventh trick become available for declarer and a huge score will be waiting for any N/S pair that manages to take them. Against 4♥, a spade lead will be common, though some will try the doubleton diamond - particularly if East makes an inelegant overcall in that suit over 1♣. Seeing all the hands 11 tricks are pretty easy. Win the opening spade or diamond lead (if the defense cashes two clubs a winner in that suit can be established), draw trump, discard a club on the third diamond winner and lead towards the ♠Q. Not so easy at the table and it's really hard not to duck an opening spade lead hoping to win

with the queen in hand. Speaking of not easy, if East does win the ♠K at trick one, a club shift is needed to hold declarer to 10 tricks. E/W pairs that find this sequence of plays will be justly rewarded with a huge board.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

A tricky deal for E/W here after starting 1♠-1NT-2♦, West is in a precarious position. 1NT forcing is a common treatment, but one of the downsides is that a two-level minor rebid can be three cards. Pass feels like the “least of evils” approach but West should be prepared to apologize when opener has 5-3-3-2 shape. 2♥ and even 2NT will be the choice of some, leading to myriad possible contracts. Another super-friendly layout for E/W, so those exhibiting optimism have a chance to score well thanks to the ♣A and ♥K being well-placed and the diamonds splitting, but perfect timing is needed. In notrump, the defense is frustrated by not being able to establish any suit in time, though a spade lead will test declarer. Declarer must lead to the ♣K, duck a diamond, and then take the heart finesse in due course. Diamonds also plays well with declarer able to ruff some spade losers and utilize dummy’s side-suit winners. Even hearts or clubs will take a surprising number of tricks with best play.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

If North looks really hard, they can find four spades and respond 1♠ to the 1♦ opener. South is not good enough to bid 2♥ over a 1♠ response as it is a “reverse.” (A reverse is when opener introduces a higher-ranking suit while raising the level of the auction; if partner prefers the first suit, they have to raise the level yet again, thus opener needs to have extra strength to handle that circumstance.) 3NT will be a common contract regardless of North’s initial bid, though on this deal, a 1♠ response will make it really hard for the defense. If East happens to lead a spade, the layout allows the defense to take the first four spade tricks simply by West playing the 10 (or jack) on the first round and continuing with the ace. A tough lead to find when North bids spades. While declarer is not dead yet, they will need mirrors to guess the diamond suit and will likely finish with only eight tricks. Bridge is a funny game. At first glance it would seem the defense can take those same four spade tricks upon winning the ♦Q even with a different lead, but when West has to lead the suit first, the winners get tangled and they can only manage three. Frustrating.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

Slams have been rare so far but a potential one pops up here for E/W. Methods will dictate their level of success with most Wests opening a strong 2♣. Gauging the strength of the spade fit, which is the key to the potential slam, will be a challenge unless East is able to show the suit naturally or make a length-showing raise. Spades will be the dominant strain with pairs in four, six and even a few in seven. The play is not complex but there are a few points worth noting. Superficially, the slam depends on the diamond finesse but closer examination shows that unless the defense finds a club lead, even if the diamond finesse loses, West’s club loser can be discarded on East’s third diamond. Those are good odds. A common defensive problem arises here as well. When dummy leads the ♦Q, South must not cover. Look at what happens if they do: declarer can next lead to dummy’s 9 and take three tricks. Ducking holds declarer to two diamond winners. This is a corollary to the “cover and honor with an honor” rule. It’s often best to cover the *last* of touching honors.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

South doesn't really have a descriptive bid at unfavorable vulnerability so West will get to open in fourth seat at most tables. While the strength is OK for a 2♣ opening, with three potential strains, doing so crowds the auction unnecessarily. If 1♥ is passed out, how good will our game chances be? 2♣ auctions are challenging enough, so strive to open naturally with flexible hands. East will show a strong heart raise as a passed hand, after which West may well drive to slam. E/W should find their way to hearts regardless, whether game or slam will depend on methods and judgment. A textbook spade position for declarer here. With a suit requiring a finesse or guessing a missing honor, look for ways to get the opponents to help out. Opportunities abound, particularly when we have a huge trump fit. If we can reach a position where E/W have only hearts and spades when we lead a spade from dummy, declarer only need cover South's card to guarantee 12 tricks. How do we

reach that position? Two clubs must be ruffed in dummy, trumps drawn, and the ♦A cashed. Say a trump is led, win in hand (South following). Cash the ♣AK, a tiny risk, and ruff a club high. A second trump to hand, ruff the last club. Cash the ♦A and the position is set. West will be a tad disappointed perhaps that this care was not needed here, but there is satisfaction in a well-played hand.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

East has a textbook weak 2♥ bid in first seat. South should pass with poor shape and possibly the worst 13-point hand in history. Responder will be tempted to run with the heart void, but oftentimes this is trading the frying pan for the fire. If playing a new suit is not forcing (uncommon), it's possible but still risky. Consider that we are offering partner two tricks in a heart contract, they might be offering us zero in spades. Best to pass and hope for the best; perhaps North will rescue us. With heart length and modest values, North should let sleeping opponents lie. 2♥ will be a popular contract here. A sequence such as QJ109 is a difficult lead to turn down. North will win the ♣A and continue the suit. With a less than ideal trump holding, there are two potential strategies. With lots of side winners, it's generally best to play trumps to avoid the opponents scoring their trumps separately. With limited resources, it's generally best to try to score as many ruffs as we can. At first

glance, we are in the second camp. Ideally we could take the ♣K, then lead our singleton diamond. Dummy then has two spade entries to ruff diamonds in hand going cheerfully along that second path. We must think first. What's going to happen if we lead a diamond? South will win and cash two club tricks, North will throw spades away. Our plan is not likely to work. We must cash our spade tricks before the mice get at them. If East is feeling lucky, a spade to the jack will provide three spade tricks, pitching that diamond instead. Then one diamond ruff, and exit a club. The defense is going to have to help us and we can actually make 2♥, though if the spade finesse were to lose, N/S might.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

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

East will have to contend with a 1♦ opening by North. Another hand that is nowhere near as good as its high-card points suggest. Technically in range for a 1NT overcall, but with so few tricks and awful values, a huge penalty could easily be looming. Double is a bit more flexible, allowing us to stop at the one level facing a poor hand while at least getting into the auction. Over a 1NT overcall, West will invite or drive to game. Over a double, 1NT is the best description for West showing a constructive and balanced hand. Ideally the diamond holding would be more robust, but no number of clubs paints a clear picture. Notrump contracts by E/W at some level will permeate the scoresheet. Virtue will have to be its own reward here, as 3NT by East rates to roll home with the ♥K onside and the tangled diamond position. Declarer has the time to establish nine tricks unless the opponents attack diamonds profitably. Only the devilish lead of the ♦8 will lead to certain defeat. 3NT by West is easily defeated on the expected low diamond lead from North.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

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

West will open 1♠ and East will invite game, most commonly starting with a forcing 1NT response. West has a nice hand but can't be sure of a fit and should simply rebid 2♦. 3♠ showing a three-card limit raise is a nice surprise. The only question now is whether to try for slam. Concealment versus disclosure is a common bidding dilemma. West can show slam interest with 4♦ (disclosure) implying need of a club control. East retreats to 4♠ without one. Needing a near-perfect hand for slam, West can just bid 4♠ without giving any additional information (concealment) to the opponents. Almost everyone will be in 4♠ here. Disclosure is costly here if North is listening to the bidding and finds a club lead – the suit declarer is ostensibly worried about. N/S will take the first three tricks and most of the matchpoints. Ironically, 12 tricks can be won on a heart lead with a successful guess at trick one. Note that if East held the ♣AQ instead of the ♥AQ, slam would be an excellent bargain. Thus is the risk/reward of bidding judgment.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

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

South opens a strong 1NT in third position. A 2♠ overcall by West would be incredibly risky with soft values, a modest suit and poor shape, especially vulnerable. 1NT rates to end the auction unless West acts. If West does bid spades, North has a textbook takeout double. N/S can wriggle into a minor suit fit from there, but East will raise spades in that circumstance, after which E/W might learn the wisdom of the pass card as an expensive penalty looms. Against a spade contract, N/S just have to avoid a disaster to collect their five winners. 1NT contracts are tricky. On a spade lead, the defense is likely to come to seven tricks with declarer relying solely on the club finesse though 1NT can be made seeing all the cards. N/S will have a pretty easy ride in 3♣ or 3♦ with just four losers given normal play. This deal shows the critical nature of vulnerability at matchpoints with E/W undertricks being 100 (more if doubled) a pop.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

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

East has a prototypical weak two in spades *except* for the one flaw of a side five-card heart suit. Style and methods will dictate East's choice; passing and hoping to show the majors later is a viable course. A 2♠ opener will simplify matters here as West can visualize game opposite a vulnerable weak two. It's not as easy to reach game if West opens the bidding, whether it be 1NT or 1♦. Almost everyone will play in spades here but those who bid to game will be glad they did. South has a tough lead problem when East is the declarer. We strive to avoid leading empty aces against suit contracts, but when RHO has preempted, that changes things. A passive lead might see dummy come down with running diamonds and an ace or two can disappear. Leading the shorter ace to see dummy has some appeal at matchpoints. Here it doesn't matter. Declarer should lose just the two major-suit aces by leading towards the spade honors twice.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

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

Another 1NT opener for N/S. While some balanced hands with a five-card major are worth opening 1M, this doesn't look like one of them. North can invite in notrump, shoot out game in 3NT, show diamonds, or even make a conservative pass depending on their range and methods. The lower N/S can buy the contract, the better off they will be here. If East gets a chance, they can show the majors allowing E/W to find a profitable 2♠ contract. N/S are apt to bid again but don't have a great place to land. There will be a wide variety of contracts on this deal. West has a tough lead against notrump, unless aided by East in the bidding. Leading from king-fourth is a losing battle in the long run. West might try a spade hoping to hit partner's suit and be rewarded handsomely here. A low diamond lead would help declarer guess that suit with a second-round finesse of the 10. A wide range of tricks are available depending on the lead and play.

E/W can do well in spades but have to take advantage of the club position while West still has an entry for the second club winner. Ruffing hearts early, though tempting, gives the defenders an opening.

Board 28
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 6 3
♥ A K 9 8 2
♦ 10 5 4
♣ K 8 2

♠ K 10 2
♥ 10 6 5 4
♦ 8 2
♣ A Q 10 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 4
♥ Q 7
♦ A Q J 9 7
♣ 9 5 3

♠ A 9 8 7 5
♥ J 3
♦ K 6 3
♣ J 6 4

A competitive auction looms after a slow start. East opens 1♦, over which South can make a now-or-never 1♠ overcall. West as a passed hand is well worth 2♥ and North will raise spades. East has a full opener but no great option, with modest heart support and only five diamonds. There is a spade stopper but needing fast tricks in notrump, one may not be enough. If East passes, West could compete with a double but might be wary of a light third-seat opener. Some will land in notrump, diamonds, or hearts. E/W should be loathe to sell to 2♠ at matchpoints, but there will be some who do so. An example of the power of the spade suit. N/S can make 3♠ without breaking a sweat thanks to the location of the key minor-suit honors and the even spade break. E/W contracts will not play well with a diamond part-score the least worst. Notrump should be disastrous as N/S can run both black suits after knocking out declarer's spade stopper.

Board 29
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q J 9 7 4 2
♥ Q 4
♦ 8 4 2
♣ Q 3

♠ A 8
♥ A 3
♦ Q 6
♣ A 9 8 7 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 6
♥ J 10 6 5 2
♦ A K 5
♣ K J 4

♠ K 5 3
♥ K 9 8 7
♦ J 10 9 7 3
♣ 10

Expect the final contract to hinge on South's first call after 1♣ by North and a 1♥ overcall by East. A heart stopper and responding values suggests 1NT. The singleton club and heart length suggest pass might be better, loathe as we are to contemplate such an action. If South responds 1NT, West might chime in with 2♠ on that meager collection and North will rebid clubs. If South passes, West and North can bid their suits a level lower. Another partscore deal, with most tables landing in clubs or spades. N/S will likely amass eight tricks in 1NT since West does not have a timely entry to their spades and South's heart spots provide a third stopper, though declarer must be careful with entries. All roads should lead to nine tricks in clubs. Spade contracts will be the most interesting as N/S can hold E/W to four spades and two diamond tricks with perfect defense. They will need to do so if defending 2♠ undoubled to get many matchpoints.

Board 30
East Deals
None Vul

♠ K Q 6 5
♥ J 8 6 4 3
♦ A 10 9 7
♣ —

♠ A J 3 2
♥ Q 9
♦ —
♣ K Q J 7 6 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 7
♥ A 7 2
♦ K J 4 3 2
♣ 8 3 2

♠ 10 8 4
♥ K 10 5
♦ Q 8 6 5
♣ A 10 9

West might open 1♥ in third seat, but ideally should have a better suit. Passing, hoping to make a takeout double of clubs perhaps, is an option but the opponents are not always so considerate. Voids create action and after a modest start, both sides should compete vigorously. If E/W diagnose their double fit in the red suits, they may get too active and propel N/S into a potentially making 5♣. If seeing all four hands, both sides can do quite well on offense. N/S rate to take 10 tricks in clubs, a heart lead will allow an 11th, but even then declarer must navigate the spade suit for one loser. X-ray vision allows 10 tricks in hearts for E/W but nine is more realistic. The adverse diamond split restricts the trick-taking potential in that strain. Any making game will be a huge board.

Board 31
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 5
♥ J 4
♦ J 10 9 6 4 3
♣ A K Q 2

♠ A J 8 6 2
♥ 10 7 6 2
♦ A Q 8 5
♣ —

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 7 3
♥ A K 9
♦ 2
♣ 10 9 8 6 5 3

♠ K 10 9 4
♥ Q 8 5 3
♦ K 7
♣ J 7 4

East will face a key decision after seeing partner open 1♦ and RHO overcall 1♠. Values to act, but flaws everywhere. Unbalanced hand for 1NT, only three hearts for a negative double, and though the values for a 2/1 response are relaxed after an opposing overcall, a poor suit for 2♣. The "winning" bid, this time, is 2♣ because opener has a huge fit. South is apt to raise spades, ideally with a "mixed raise" which shows at least four-card support and about 8-10 support points which could block E/W from finding their club fit otherwise. If E/W find their club fit, they should find an effective 5♣ bid whether the opponents reach 4♠ or not. Otherwise they might be defending a spade contract. 5♣ has only two major-suit aces off the top, but with this layout declarer can't shut out South's ♣J. In fact, declarer has to avoid playing too many trumps early to bring in 10 tricks. Best play should result in 10 tricks for N/S in spades. If East leads a top heart, they can give partner a ruff, but declarer can then pick up the ♠Q with a proven finesse. Declarer can survive a spade misguess if East leads their singleton diamond by leading towards the ♥Q.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 9 4
♥ 10 8
♦ 9 4 3
♣ 9 8 7 6 3

♠ 8 7
♥ K 7
♦ A Q 10 5
♣ Q J 10 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6 2
♥ A J 5 4 3 2
♦ 8 7 6 2
♣ K

♠ A K Q 10 5 3
♥ Q 9 6
♦ K J
♣ A 4

A potential slam deal looms late in the session for those who get this far. North will open their systemically appropriate minor and East can introduce hearts, with the vulnerability dissuading some from getting too active. South is thinking slam as soon as partner opens, but the heart suit is worrisome. For now South bids 1♠. North does best to rebid 1NT here, showing the essential balanced, minimum nature of the hand, and if East has bids hearts, a heart stopper. Methods will dictate the actions from here, though slam is best played by South to protect a potentially fatal club lead. Not everyone will achieve that. Spades and notrump contracts will dominate the scoresheet and those who reach slam will be happy. 6♠ or 6NT by South is best, just needing the spades to come in or a miracle in the club suit. Both wishes come true here with the ♣K singleton, and the ♠J tumbling down just in time. Those greedy enough to play for an overtrick if the ♥A is not cashed, persuaded perhaps by a 1♥ overcall by East, will succeed.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 9 8 7 5
♥ 9 8 7 4
♦ 10 3 2
♣ 4

♠ A 4 3
♥ J 10 3
♦ A 6
♣ A Q 9 6 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6 2
♥ A Q 6 5 2
♦ K J 4
♣ 10 8 5

♠ K Q J
♥ K
♦ Q 9 8 7 5
♣ K J 7 3

North will kick off with a strong 1NT at most tables. With the red siren 5-3-3-2 shape and a modest hand, some Easts will overcall and some will not. With no interference, South should bid 3NT even if playing a 3♥ response suggests this shape (short hearts, both minors). That will too often steer us out of 3NT when that is still our best spot, a not unlikely occurrence given that it's a singleton honor. If East shows hearts, N/S may well wind up in 5♣ and thus East will show a profit for their enterprise on this day, but will face a significant loss on others. Very little to the play. Against 3NT, East will lead their heart suit but declarer always has 10 tricks. In clubs, just a heart and diamond to lose. Making 5♣, but a matchpoint defeat. If E/W get too carried away in hearts, N/S might accrue a worthwhile penalty as trump leads and pinpoint defense will hold E/W to six tricks.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 2
♥ 10 9
♦ J 5 2
♣ A K 10 6 5 4

♠ Q 10 5 4
♥ K 7 6 4
♦ K Q 10
♣ 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 6 3
♥ A 3 2
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ Q J 8

♠ A K 9 7
♥ Q J 8 5
♦ A 6 4
♣ 9 7

South will open 1♣, 1♦, or 1NT depending on methods and notrump range. West, at favorable vulnerability with a good suit, can intervene aggressively in clubs. North has a prototypical negative double and N/S will no doubt discover one of their major-suit fits. As it happens, E/W competing in clubs could propel N/S into a game they might not bid if left to their own devices. Interfering in the opponents' auction can be a double-edged sword. With both major suits splitting, 10 tricks in either major will be no trouble. If West shows a long club suit, declarer should play the major suits to guard against length with East, though no worries here. With two balanced hands, E/W should not contemplate a save, even with the green-light vulnerability. Five-level saves should only be considered with significant extra shape as the success window is too narrow otherwise. Holding balanced hands, even when the save turns out to be cheap enough, the opponents might have been going down.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

A quiet hand, though a bread-and-butter board for winning at matchpoints. South will open 1♥ with grandiose ambitions, rebidding 2♣ over the 1♠ response. North should simply take a preference to 2♥. Rebidding a five-card spade suit should be avoided; opener might have none and will rarely have three. Prefer the safety of the sure seven-card fit. South's optimism should dim opposite a mere preference and the spotlight falls to West. Selling out at the two level is rare but too many negatives here to act. The opponents do not have a guaranteed fit, partner rates to have length in both majors and thus the odds for a fit our way is diminished and the vulnerability is wrong. West does not have an obvious lead. A trump is possible, dummy might be able to ruff club losers and West has a good club holding. The ♠J, hoping to hit partner, is also an option. This deal shows the importance of count signals. Say the ♠J is led to the ace and a spade continued hoping West has a singleton. Declarer should

lead their singleton diamond early, forcing the opponents to guess the length. West can't tell the exact number but can win the ace on the first round. If East shows an even number, West simply plays a second diamond to kill the dummy. If an odd number, this is likely three else East might have led their singleton at trick two. Those diamond winners are likely to be stranded and in this way E/W can actually defeat 2♥ for a fine score. N/S can take seven tricks in every strain but diamonds - so close!

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

We end with a whimper. East can open light in third with 1♣, South has a routine 1♠ overcall. West, as a passed hand, can consider responding 1NT or 2♦. Imagine sitting East seeing partner bid 2♦ in this spot. Sadly, crawling under a nearby chair would be considered Unauthorized Information, and East must find a call. 2NT looks like the least of evils. Since partner forced us to the two level, 2NT just shows a balanced opening hand. 0 for 2 on that front, but sometimes we must improvise. If we bid 2NT freely over an opponent's two-level action, it shows the stronger hand (18-19). Lots of contract possibilities, though the lower the better for both sides. Notrump contracts for E/W will depend on the lead and defense but seven tricks is a likely outcome. Declarer must be sure to duck the first two clubs to maintain communication with East's club suit. A difficult hand for both sides and there will be a wide range of tricks taken. No other contract rates to make for either side though the minors offer some hope.