

ACBL-wide Senior Pairs #1

March 19, 2018 – Set 218029

Analysis by Barry Rigal



American Contract
Bridge League

Bd: 1 ♠ A K
Dlr: North ♥ A Q 10 3
Vul: None ♦ A K 10 8 4
 ♣ K 6
♠ 4 ♠ 7 6 5 2
♥ K 9 8 2 ♥ 7 6 5 4
♦ 9 6 ♦ Q 2
♣ A Q 9 8 5 2 ♣ J 10 7
 ♠ Q J 10 9 8 3
 ♥ J
 ♦ J 7 5 3
 ♣ 4 3

Some use the sequence 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♥ to show diamonds and secondary hearts, but most Norths will opt to rebid 2NT. Now South can either drive to 4♠, or, if playing Texas, can transfer to 3♠ and raise to game, to make a mild slam-try. North has no extras and a doubleton spade, so may or may not look for slam. 6♠ depends simply on the diamond guess. When North finds spades are 4-1 with East having the length, he might well go wrong. Conversely, on a heart lead he could emerge with 13 tricks if he gets everything right.

Bd: 2 ♠ K 10 4
Dlr: East ♥ K Q 10 9 4
Vul: N-S ♦ J 8 2
 ♣ Q 2
♠ J 3 2 ♠ A Q 9 7
♥ A J 6 ♥ 3
♦ K 10 4 3 ♦ A 6 5
♣ K 9 3 ♣ A J 7 6 5
 ♠ 8 6 5
 ♥ 8 7 5 2
 ♦ Q 9 7
 ♣ 10 8 4

When East opens 1♣, the field will be divided between those Wests who respond 1♦ and those who drive to game, or invite game, in notrump. Either way, 3NT by West on a top heart lead looks normal enough. West will duck, of course, and now what does North do? A deceptive switch to the ♠10 probably won't work today. A diamond shift should see declarer win in hand and play on clubs by leading low to the jack, after which 11 tricks appear to be the most likely outcome. Anyone bringing home 12 tricks in 3NT will surely score well for their pains.

Bd: 3 ♠ A J 5 3
Dlr: South ♥ 8 6
Vul: E-W ♦ 10 8 7 3
 ♣ 10 8 7
♠ Q 9 7 ♠ K 10 8
♥ A 9 7 4 ♥ J 5 2
♦ K 9 5 ♦ Q J
♣ K Q 3 ♣ A 9 6 5 4
 ♠ 6 4 2
 ♥ K Q 10 3
 ♦ A 6 4 2
 ♣ J 2

3NT, most likely played by West, again looks to be the normal final contract, whether or not he opens a strong(ish) notrump. Should North lead a spade or diamond on a blind auction? Put me down for the ♦8, especially if East has produced an inverted raise of clubs. Assuming South wins the ♦A and shifts to ♥K, West will duck, win the reversion to diamonds, and will then need to find the ♠J to take 10 tricks. While the defenders can set up a fourth winner by leading hearts to trick one, +630 looks a relatively standard result for E/W here.

Bd: 4 ♠ 10 4 2
Dlr: West ♥ A K 7
Vul: Both ♦ 10 2
 ♣ Q J 7 6 5
♠ A J 6 ♠ K 9 8 7 3
♥ 10 8 4 ♥ J 6 5 2
♦ 6 5 3 ♦ A K 4
♣ 9 8 4 2 ♣ 10
 ♠ Q 5
 ♥ Q 9 3
 ♦ Q J 9 8 7
 ♣ A K 3

In third seat only a very few chicken-hearted Easts will pass, as opposed to opening 1♠. South is also unlikely to pass now; a double looks better than a 2♦ overcall here, and that ought to get his side peacefully enough to 3♣. This is a contract that appears to offer very few excitements in the play. +110 looks a relatively sensible result for N/S. Still, you could imagine some desperadoes will press on to 3♠ as E/W, despite the vulnerability. If they can avoid the double, they rate to come to eight tricks, for -100, which will represent a decent score.

Bd: 5 ♠ Q 9
Dlr: North ♥ J 10 6 5
Vul: N-S ♦ 5 4 2
 ♣ Q J 10 7
♠ 8 6 5 ♠ A J 10 7 3
♥ A Q 9 8 4 ♥ 2
♦ J 3 ♦ A 9 7
♣ 8 5 4 ♣ A K 9 6
 ♠ K 4 2
 ♥ K 7 3
 ♦ K Q 10 8 6
 ♣ 3 2

When East opens 1♠, South has a second consecutive chance for a flawed 2♦ overcall. If South passes, West has the option to go low by reaching 2♠ via the forcing notrump, or making a constructive raise. In favor of optimism is the chunky five-card suit, but the bad trumps and minimum hand argue for pessimism. East will drive to 4♠ facing the aggressive position, but decline in 2♠ facing the cautious one. Where do you want to play? It really isn't clear! Declarer can come home in 4♠ by maneuvering to ruff both minors in dummy, or by taking the heart finesse.

Bd: 6 ♠ A J 8 4
 Dlr: East ♥ A 10
 Vul: E-W ♦ 2
 ♣ K J 10 9 7 3
 ♠ K 10 6 ♠ Q 9 7
 ♥ K Q 8 7 5 2 ♥ J 3
 ♦ K 4 ♦ 10 9 8 7
 ♣ 6 4 ♣ Q 8 5 2
 ♠ 5 3 2
 ♥ 9 6 4
 ♦ A Q J 6 5 3
 ♣ A

When South opens 1♦ some Wests will make a simple overcall in hearts, others will jump to 2♥, showing a moderate hand because of the position and vulnerability. Whichever action he takes, it is hard to see N/S going plus, as the lie of the diamonds means 3NT is virtually hopeless after a heart lead, as that disrupts the entries to the club suit, while diamonds lie terribly today. If declarer takes a diamond finesse, any West who ducks the first round of diamonds will be embarrassed by the result.

Bd: 7 ♠ 10 2
 Dlr: South ♥ 7
 Vul: Both ♦ A Q 8 6
 ♣ Q 9 7 6 4 3
 ♠ Q J 7 ♠ A K 8 6 3
 ♥ A 10 8 5 ♥ K Q 9 3
 ♦ J 9 5 2 ♦ 7 3
 ♣ A 10 ♣ K 2
 ♠ 9 5 4
 ♥ J 6 4 2
 ♦ K 10 4
 ♣ J 8 5

Sometimes it is hard to decide between the 5-3 and 4-4 fit. Today it seems to make absolutely no difference which you choose, though I suppose you have slightly more difficulty in negotiating a bad heart break in hearts than in spades. Regardless of whether North intervenes by bidding one or both minors, the final contract will surely be four of a major, making 11 tricks. If E/W get to 3NT they can take 11 tricks for almost a clear top on any lead but a diamond - in which case they would collect a round zero instead.

Bd: 8 ♠ K J
 Dlr: West ♥ K J 7 5
 Vul: None ♦ J 9 3 2
 ♣ K 8 2
 ♠ 10 5 4 ♠ Q 9 8 6 3 2
 ♥ A 3 ♥ 10 8 6 4
 ♦ Q 8 6 ♦ A 10 7
 ♣ J 7 6 4 3 ♣ —
 ♠ A 7
 ♥ Q 9 2
 ♦ K 5 4
 ♣ A Q 10 9 5

North's hand is hardly a classic opener (Ely Culbertson is turning in his grave at the idea). But with nobody vulnerable, it pays to get in early at pairs. You'd expect East to bid spades over 1♦, and now N/S rate to reach 3NT on a spade lead. Since he does not have second sight, declarer will win the ♠A, cash the ♣A, then play a club to the eight and take the ♣K. To leave himself in the game, East must pitch two diamonds and a spade; now to bring home his contract, South must lead a heart to the nine. Any declarer who reads the cards this well will truly deserve his top!

Bd: 9 ♠ Q 7 4
 Dlr: North ♥ Q 3
 Vul: E-W ♦ A J 7 6 5 2
 ♣ 6 2
 ♠ K 5 ♠ A 10 9 8 6 2
 ♥ A K J 9 8 7 5 ♥ 4 2
 ♦ K 8 ♦ Q 4
 ♣ J 9 ♣ Q 5 4
 ♠ J 3
 ♥ 10 6
 ♦ 10 9 3
 ♣ A K 10 8 7 3

North has a mandatory 2♦ opener, despite those irksome major-suit queens - don't wait for the perfect hand to preempt. If East passes (and what else can he do?) there is much to be said for South bidding clubs instead of raising to 3♦. Surely the opponents can make game in one major or the other? Getting the clubs in should render it impossible for E/W to reach their only making game of 3NT. The point is that the defenders can beat 4♥ by force via a trump promotion on the third round of clubs. Of course, on passive defense West might still go wrong in trumps in 4♥.

Bd: 10 ♠ K
 Dlr: East ♥ 10 9 7 3
 Vul: Both ♦ A Q 9 8 4
 ♣ 10 9 6
 ♠ A 9 3 ♠ J 8 7 6 5 2
 ♥ A Q J 2 ♥ 6 5
 ♦ 6 3 2 ♦ 10 5
 ♣ A K 5 ♣ J 3 2
 ♠ Q 10 4
 ♥ K 8 4
 ♦ K J 7
 ♣ Q 8 7 4

West's controls make him too strong for a 1NT bid, despite his flat shape. If he opens 1♣, you'd expect most Norths to be unable to resist a 1♦ overcall, and now South can respond 1NT. Will West then double to show extras or an unspecified good hand? The expert community really doesn't agree on what that double means. A quick glance at the double-dummy analysis suggests that, curiously, spades plays best from the weak hand, to avoid a club lead, while South can take eight tricks in notrump. In other words, a good hand on which to declare, not defend.

Bd: 11 ♠ K 7
 Dlr: South ♥ 10 9 3
 Vul: None ♦ 9 4 3
 ♣ K 10 9 7 5
 ♠ Q J 6 ♠ 3
 ♥ Q 8 7 6 ♥ J 5 4 2
 ♦ Q J 8 6 ♦ A K 7
 ♣ 4 2 ♣ A Q J 6 3
 ♠ A 10 9 8 5 4 2
 ♥ A K
 ♦ 10 5 2
 ♣ 8

Some Souths will open 4♠, but those defensive tricks suggest a 1♠ bid instead. Now when East doubles North's 1NT response, South can rebid 2♠, and West will want to compete. His options may include a takeout double, an artificial 2NT call, or a simple 3♥ bid. When North competes to 3♠, par will have been achieved..but if East raises 3♥ to 4♥, the defenders may have their work cut out to set it. They must lead ♠K and another spade. Then South wins the first heart to play ♠A followed by a fourth spade when in with ♥A, to promote a trump for North.

Bd: 12 ♠ K 9 8 5
 Dlr: West ♥ 10 5 4 2
 Vul: N-S ♦ Q 6 2
 ♣ 10 2
 ♠ Q 3 ♠ J 6 4
 ♥ K Q 7 6 3 ♥ J 8
 ♦ K J 9 7 5 ♦ 8 4 3
 ♣ 6 ♣ A Q 7 5 4
 ♠ A 10 7 2
 ♥ A 9
 ♦ A 10
 ♣ K J 9 8 3

When West opens 1♥ (most will) East will respond 1NT. That lets South double, hoping he doesn't hear North bid diamonds. It will be West who introduces 2♦, though, and North may have just enough to compete to 2♠. That rates to end the auction, and then the issue will be whether the defenders can hold North to eight tricks by taking the club ruff and then have declarer misguess trumps. If West consciously breaches the Law of Total Tricks by competing to 3♦, he can be doubled and set 300.

Bd: 13 ♠ J 7 6 5
 Dlr: North ♥ A K J 10 9 3
 Vul: Both ♦ 8
 ♣ 10 9
 ♠ A 8 ♠ Q 4 2
 ♥ 8 7 5 4 2 ♥ 6
 ♦ K 4 2 ♦ A J 10 7 6 3
 ♣ K Q 8 ♣ J 5 2
 ♠ K 10 9 3
 ♥ Q
 ♦ Q 9 5
 ♣ A 7 6 4 3

It is hard to imagine too many Norths being put off by the puny four-card spade suit from opening 2♥. But those who do pass and subsequently manage to bid to four of a major will perhaps be able to point to their result in that contract as a justification for not preempting. I'm not buying that; 4♠ is, after all, on a finesse at best, and actually needs rather more than that. So while playing 2♥ and collecting +170 will not be a spectacular result today, it is where N/S are supposed to end up, and virtue will eventually be its own reward.

Bd: 14 ♠ Q 9
 Dlr: East ♥ A 7
 Vul: None ♦ K 5 3
 ♣ K J 9 8 6 4
 ♠ 8 3 2 ♠ A 7 5 4
 ♥ K J 9 ♥ Q 10 8 4 2
 ♦ Q 10 2 ♦ J 8 6
 ♣ Q 10 7 2 ♣ 3
 ♠ K J 10 6
 ♥ 6 5 3
 ♦ A 9 7 4
 ♣ A 5

Once South bids 1♦, he is almost certain to reach 3NT on an auction such as 1♦-2♣-2NT-3NT. That leaves West a problem on opening lead. Those who opt for a passive spade will be disappointed, those who put a heart on the table (perhaps the jack?) will end up defeating 3NT. Note that if the defenders lead and continue the attack on spades, then declarer might emerge with an extremely unlikely +460, and some very unhappy opponents. Of course if East is on lead to 3NT, it will be a whole different story.

Bd: 15 ♠ 9
 Dlr: South ♥ 10 8 7
 Vul: N-S ♦ 10 9 8 5 3 2
 ♣ A 5 4
 ♠ Q 10 8 6 ♠ 7 5 4 3 2
 ♥ K Q 9 5 2 ♥ J
 ♦ A Q 4 ♦ 6
 ♣ J ♣ Q 8 7 6 3 2
 ♠ A K J
 ♥ A 6 4 3
 ♦ K J 7
 ♣ K 10 9

There is no reason to consider upgrading the South hand into a 20-22 2NT call. If South does that, or can open a 19-20 2NT, he will end up in 3NT. Now even after a top heart lead, the defenders have enough fire-power to set up their five winners. More likely is that West will hear South open 1♣, over which he can either double or bid 1♥, depending on style. Now the issue is how many diamonds N/S will bid, and how high E/W may compete in spades. The favorable position in clubs offsets the bad diamond break and means +130 is par for N/S, while E/W can make 2♠.

Bd: 16 ♠ K J 10 8 7 3
 Dlr: West ♥ 4
 Vul: E-W ♦ A Q 7 4 3
 ♣ Q

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

♠ Q 5 4 2
 ♥ K 7 6
 ♦ J 10 8
 ♣ K 7 2

Some Wests will pass, others may preempt to 2♥, 3♥, or possibly 4♥. No matter how many hearts he bids, you'd expect North to introduce spades, and East to raise hearts. After that, where is the music going to stop? Both West and North will love their offensive possibilities, and each may bid on until doubled. E/W can take 11 tricks in hearts, while on perfect defense 5♠ must lose one trick in each suit plus the diamond ruff. Given the vulnerability, spade sacrifices (probably for -300) will surely be the order of the day, even if North is bidding to make his contract.

Bd: 17 ♠ A 8 6 3
 Dlr: North ♥ A 10 9
 Vul: None ♦ A 7
 ♣ K Q 9 8

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

♠ Q J 2
 ♥ K J 4 3
 ♦ 8 5
 ♣ A 7 6 5

I believe North has far too much for a 15-17 notrump bid, but I may be in the minority. In practice, whether North opens 1♣ and jumps to 2NT over the 1♥ response, or South follows a Stayman sequence in response to a 1NT call, North will end up in 3NT. You could sympathize with a disastrous club opening lead from East in the latter case; but after a top diamond lead from East, declarer will discover he needs to find the ♥Q to make his game. Moreover, if he tests clubs and finds East with length, he is unlikely to get this right – unless West naively discards a heart.

Bd: 18 ♠ J 10 5 4
 Dlr: East ♥ A 4 3
 Vul: N-S ♦ 10 8 6 5
 ♣ 6 3

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

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

West rates to open 1NT, either because he thinks it is technically correct, or because he wants to close the opponents out of the majors. Now when East uses Smolen to show his major suits West should declare 3NT. What is North to lead now? The ♦8 (2nd/4th) will see South obliged to take his ace and return the suit (partner might have led from ♦KJ98). Declarer will win in dummy and play a heart to the jack, as South gives count. If the defenders mistakenly duck a second heart, West can respond by ducking a club. Now he may come quite close to making his improbable game.

Bd: 19 ♠ A 8 6 5
 Dlr: South ♥ 10 8 2
 Vul: E-W ♦ A 8 6 5
 ♣ 7 4

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

♠ 9 4 3
 ♥ A J 6
 ♦ J 2
 ♣ K Q J 10 2

When West leads a second highest heart against South's likely contract of 1NT, South will win in hand and drive out the ♣A. Regardless of what the defense does now, the ♥J serves as a re-entry to hand, and allows declarer to come to eight tricks. The defenders can do better by attacking diamonds, but in practice this deal looks like a classic 'small board' at pairs, where the fight will be about overtricks and undertricks. My money is on +120 at a majority of the tables.

Bd: 20 ♠ 8 5 2
 Dlr: West ♥ 4 3 2
 Vul: Both ♦ K 6 5 3 2
 ♣ K 2

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

♠ Q 6 4 3
 ♥ K 9 7
 ♦ A J
 ♣ A Q 8 5

In first seat you'd expect West to open 1♣ rather than 1NT (and yes, a very few may opt for 1♠). East now has the choice of dredging for a red-suit fit or passing 1♣. If he responds, South may overcall 1NT and play there, probably without much luck if the defenders go passive with club leads. If East passes initially, South can choose between passing out 1♣, doubling then rebidding 1NT, or balancing with 1NT – which would normally show a weaker hand than this. Few pairs will make a contract here, unless the defenders gift South a trick or two in the majors.

Bd: 21 ♠ 9 5
 Dlr: North ♥ 10 2
 Vul: N-S ♦ K Q 6
 ♣ A K 10 9 4 2
 ♠ K Q 3 ♠ J 2
 ♥ Q ♥ K J 9 6 5 3
 ♦ A J 9 8 7 ♦ 10 5 4
 ♣ 7 6 5 3 ♣ Q 8
 ♠ A 10 8 7 6 4
 ♥ A 8 7 4
 ♦ 3 2
 ♣ J

When East preempts to 2♥ over North's 1♣ opener, South can double then introduce spades, or bid and rebid spades, each of which would not be forcing. Both approaches should see South declare 3♠. Curiously, though, it is hard to defeat 4♠ after the ♥Q lead. West must duck his ♦A at trick two. If South runs the ♠9 round to him, West must take his ♦A and shift to a club. Now if declarer plays off both top clubs and leads a third, East ruffs in with ♠J. But should South ruff the second club to hand and cash the ♠A, West must unblock in trumps to avoid the throw-in!

Bd: 22 ♠ K Q
 Dlr: East ♥ A K Q 5 4
 Vul: E-W ♦ K J 10 8 4
 ♣ K
 ♠ J 8 5 4 ♠ A 3
 ♥ 9 2 ♥ J 7 6 3
 ♦ Q ♦ 9 6 5
 ♣ A J 8 7 5 4 ♣ 10 6 3 2
 ♠ 10 9 7 6 2
 ♥ 10 8
 ♦ A 7 3 2
 ♣ Q 9

At unfavorable vulnerability, West might pass rather than preempt to 3♣. Whether he acts initially or later, N/S will have to decide whether to play game or partscore, and which red-suit to declare. There is little to choose between them: 4♥ could be much better if hearts broke or go down in flames against a 5-1 split. Today, though, each game needs declarer to find ♦Q — and it will be hard to misguess that card on this layout. If N/S finish up in 3NT, they will take nine tricks there too, so the only sensible game that fails is the 5-2 spade fit.

Bd: 23 ♠ K 6 3
 Dlr: South ♥ 6 5 4
 Vul: Both ♦ A Q 9 2
 ♣ Q 8 5
 ♠ A Q 8 ♠ 9 7
 ♥ K J 8 2 ♥ A Q 9 7 3
 ♦ 10 8 6 ♦ J
 ♣ J 4 3 ♣ A K 10 6 2
 ♠ J 10 5 4 2
 ♥ 10
 ♦ K 7 5 4 3
 ♣ 9 7

At some tables South will preempt, elsewhere either West or North might decide they have an opening bid. One way or another, East should bring hearts into play and West will raise, allowing the partnership to play game in peace and quiet. But the real over-bidders might find a way to reach slam. 6♥ is playable enough: in theory it needs the club finesse, plus either the club break or spade finesse. But South may be able to shift to a spade early, and force declarer to commit himself prematurely as to what to do. 12 tricks ought surely to be the norm in hearts, though.

Bd: 24 ♠ 9 8 5 2
 Dlr: West ♥ 3
 Vul: None ♦ J 6 5
 ♣ K Q 6 4 3
 ♠ K 7 3 ♠ A Q 4
 ♥ K Q J 10 8 7 2 ♥ 9 6 4
 ♦ 8 3 ♦ A K 10 7
 ♣ 7 ♣ A 8 5
 ♠ J 10 6
 ♥ A 5
 ♦ Q 9 4 2
 ♣ J 10 9 2

What do your first-in-hand preempts look like when non-vulnerable? If you would open 3♥ on a wing and prayer, then maybe this hand qualifies as a 4♥ preempt (don't be afraid, we aren't judging you). East will surely do no more than raise a 3♥ opener to game without considering slam. However, if West bids 4♥, East might simply blast out 6♥, or use keycard en route to playing slam. The two hands do fit perfectly together, and there are 12 top tricks, but simply reaching slam will surely be worth at least a 75% result.

Bd: 25 ♠ 10 7 6 2
 Dlr: North ♥ A K 8 2
 Vul: E-W ♦ K 3
 ♣ 10 3 2
 ♠ A K J 9 8 ♠ Q 4 3
 ♥ 4 ♥ 9 7 3
 ♦ Q 6 5 ♦ 10 8 7 4
 ♣ K J 9 7 ♣ A Q 4
 ♠ 5
 ♥ Q J 10 6 5
 ♦ A J 9 2
 ♣ 8 6 5

In third seat, some Souths will open 2♥, others 1♥. When West bids spades, North might drive to 4♥ or show a raise to 3♥, but what happens after that will be harder to predict. While the defenders can cash four winners against 4♥, West may lead two rounds of spades. Now declarer might take the diamond finesse, and go two down instead of one. Even if South guesses to ruff out the diamonds, he will still have to draw precisely one round of trumps to bring home his game. Spade contracts by E/W are likely to make precisely nine tricks, and many will play 3♠.

Bd: 26 ♠ K 10 6
 Dlr: East ♥ K 10 9 5 3
 Vul: Both ♦ K J
 ♣ K 3 2

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

♠ 9 8 3
 ♥ A Q J 4 2
 ♦ 8 3
 ♣ Q 8 7

Another unlikely opening for West; in practice, most Norths will get to open 1♥, after which the board becomes a battle of the red suits. E/W can make at least 3♦, despite holding a 9-card fit and less than half the deck, and might get clubs going, to avoid losing a spade trick. Meanwhile, on accurate defense, N/S can only take eight winners, despite their 10-card heart fit. Against 3♥, the defenders ought to take two tricks in each black suit and at least one in diamonds. I suspect -100 won't be terrible for N/S. Will any genius as North work out to pass out the board?

Bd: 27 ♠ Q 10 7 3 2
 Dlr: South ♥ Q J 9 3
 Vul: None ♦ A Q 4
 ♣ 4

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

♠ 6 5 4
 ♥ 8 6 4
 ♦ K 3 2
 ♣ Q J 9 7

West will bid 1♦ rather than distort his hand into opening any number of notrump, and most Norths will overcall 1♠. Now what? South is likely to raise spades sooner or later, while West rates to make a takeout double at his second turn, but it is not clear where E/W will end up. E/W actually belong in notrump; on a spade lead, they figure to take at least eight tricks there. They can take +110 or +130 in diamonds, while clubs plays for +110. In other words, this is a fine pairs deal, on which overtricks may be paramount.

Bd: 28 ♠ Q J 9 8 6
 Dlr: West ♥ 5 4
 Vul: N-S ♦ J 10 6 4
 ♣ 9 3

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

♠ 5 4 2
 ♥ 7 2
 ♦ Q 9 2
 ♣ K Q J 10 5

This board may appear in a bidding challenge competition sooner or later. If you look at the East and West cards in 6♥, 12 tricks can almost be claimed at the get-go, unless both red suits break very badly. But switch East's small diamond into a club and the limit on the hand is 11 tricks; and how will the partnership ever find that out? Note that if E/W agree hearts and East shows a singleton spade, then West will quite reasonably imagine that his cards have gotten worse rather than improved.

Bd: 29 ♠ A Q 10 5 4 2
 Dlr: North ♥ 6
 Vul: Both ♦ 8 6 5 2
 ♣ 9 3

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

♠ K 8
 ♥ 9 4 3 2
 ♦ J 9 7
 ♣ 10 8 5 4

North has a textbook 2♠ opening, and East will surely stretch to overcall 3♥. Now West will make at least one slam try before letting his partner out in 4♥. However, you can imagine some aggressive Souths raising spades, or West jumping to 5♥ to ask East to bid slam with a spade control. Regardless, it looks normal for E/W to end up in the heart game and collect 11 tricks. One exception might come if North passes initially, when East may play 3NT and rack up 13 tricks there.

Bd: 30 ♠ —
 Dlr: East ♥ K Q 9 5 4 2
 Vul: None ♦ K J 10 7 6
 ♣ K 7

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

♠ K Q J 9 8 2
 ♥ A J 10 8
 ♦ 8 3
 ♣ 3

You'd envisage West overcalling 2♣ over 1♠ at a plurality of tables, with East supporting clubs while N/S bid and raise hearts. Both sides rate to act aggressively here: E/W do, after all, have a big fit, while East's heart void may encourage him to preempt to the maximum. In fact, N/S can take 11 tricks if they guess diamonds, while the 6-0 spade break means that West may be able to discard his spade loser on the ♦Q. Bottom line: par on the deal is 6♣x down one, but you might well see both sides being allowed to bid and make game.

Bd: 31 ♠ Q J 9 4
 Dlr: South ♥ J 10 8
 Vul: N-S ♦ 8 7
 ♣ K Q 10 6
 ♠ 10 7 6 3 ♠ K 8
 ♥ A 6 ♥ Q 9 5 2
 ♦ J 3 ♦ Q 9 6 5
 ♣ A 8 5 4 3 ♣ 9 7 2
 ♠ A 5 2
 ♥ K 7 4 3
 ♦ A K 10 4 2
 ♣ J

With E/W silent, South will open 1♦ and have to decide what to do over a 1♠ response. Simplest is best: support with support. A raise to 2♠ will probably see North pass, where after a heart lead he ought to collect +170. But if South finds the real stretch of reversing into hearts, North will jump to 3NT and play there, in what rates to be a perfectly makeable spot — especially since East is almost endplayed on opening lead. A small diamond gives away the least, but a low club, ducked all round, might suffice to hold declarer to nine tricks.

Bd: 32 ♠ A K 2
 Dlr: West ♥ A Q 9 5 4
 Vul: E-W ♦ Q 7
 ♣ K 8 6
 ♠ J 9 8 5 3 ♠ 10 7 6
 ♥ 8 7 3 2 ♥ J 10 6
 ♦ A 8 4 2 ♦ K 9 3
 ♣ — ♣ Q J 10 3
 ♠ Q 4
 ♥ K
 ♦ J 10 6 5
 ♣ A 9 7 5 4 2

Where N/S play 2/1 GF, a typical auction will see North open 1♥ and South respond 1NT. North will raise to 2NT to show 18-19 balanced or semi-balanced, and South has an easy acceptance. West should have no reason not to lead spades, after which the extremely fortunate lie of the hearts makes up somewhat for the bad news in clubs. In practice, though, when clubs go pear-shaped, unless South has unblocked hearts immediately, declarer's awkward communications means that 11 tricks are no longer possible. So +460 may score N/S extremely well here.

Analysis by Barry Rigal



Barry Rigal is a player, author, commentator and syndicated columnist. Born in London in 1958, he has been a professional bridge player since moving to New York in 1994. Rigal has written many books as well as magazine and newspaper columns and has contributed to the world championship books for two decades. He has also served as the Chief Vugraph commentator for the World Bridge Federation for 10 years.

Married to Sue Picus. He has won two North American championships as well as EC Mixed Teams and multiple UK titles. As a professional player claims to be the only pro ever to have been shut out by his client from declaring a single board in a session - not for want of trying! At college reached the quarterfinal round of the University Challenge for Queen's Oxford - where he suffered the indignity of losing to Queen's Cambridge - and a team headed by the comedian Stephen Fry. He also claims that his tutors awarded him the title of "The laziest man in Oxford."