

# ACBL-wide Junior Fund Game #1

January 23, 2018 – Set 218031

Analysis by Oren Kriegel



American Contract  
Bridge League

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

At most tables, South will open 1♠, West and North will pass, although aggressive players might respond 1NT with the North hand. Giving the opponents a free run is often a losing matchpoint strategy, and North isn't totally broke. A 1NT response makes it harder for E/W to get into the bidding, and it may enable N/S to compete profitably to 3♥. If North passes, East will probably balance with 2♣. South may or may not bid 2♥, but if not, E/W should rest in a comfortable club partscore and lose just one trick in every suit. If N/S bid 3♥, they should take eight tricks for a better matchpoint score than if E/W play the hand.

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

While the East hand does not meet traditional requirements for a weak 2♠ opening — such as two of the top three or three of the top five honors — in first seat at favorable vulnerability, 2♠ seems automatic. South has a minimum for a 3♥ overcall, but with shortness in the enemy suit, he should strain to get in the bidding. North has a big hand facing the 3♥ overcall, and if North can bid a natural 4NT, that would be a good description. Most pairs would play that as some form of Blackwood, though, so 3NT looks like a better choice. South should not consider removing to 4♥, since the 3♥ overcall almost always contains a six-card or longer suit. Against 3NT, East will likely lead a low spade, won with dummy's ♠10. With both hearts offside, 10 tricks are the limit.

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

After three passes, East has “only” 21 HCP, but the strong diamond suit makes this a clear-cut 2♣ opener in our opinion. E/W should settle into 3NT after a Stayman or Puppet Stayman sequence does not reveal a major-suit fit. What should South lead? A spade is the fourth-best from your longest and strongest, but we don't like leading from A-Q-x-x into a strong, balanced hand. With a fifth spade, that lead would be much more attractive. A minor might be the most passive choice, but East will have at least seven cards in the minors on this auction and we might be helping him set up his suits. That leaves a heart, which would be our choice — although we don't love it. After a heart lead, North needs to shift to a spade after winning the ♦A. That could be hard to do without playing Smith Echo. Playing that convention, South signals low-high to tell North not to continue the opening lead suit. Looking at strong clubs and weak spades in dummy, North has an easy spade shift, holding declarer to 10 tricks.

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

When West picks up his hand, he will expect big things on this deal. How unfortunate to have the auction proceed 1♠ – pass – pass – pass! In our view, North is not worth a vulnerable two-level overcall, despite holding a decent five-card suit and an opening hand. With a sixth club and the same high-cards, North would have a normal — albeit minimum — 2♣ overall. Even most aggressive responders would pass 1♠ with the East cards, and South has nothing resembling the strength to balance with a double. Declarer in 1♠ can try whatever antics he likes to finagle a 10th trick, but nothing rates to be successful, and +140 for E/W rates to be a very normal score on this board.

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

Finally some excitement! North is far too strong to open 1NT, with a very prime 17-count, 5-4 distribution, and great spot cards. By the way, we think North should plan to reverse into 2♦, not rebid 2NT, if South responds in a major. On the actual deal, the auction rates to start 1♣ – 1♦ – 3♦, over which South can rebid 3♠, which just shows a concentration of values, not a genuine spade suit. North will rebid 3NT over this, and South can move toward slam. Grand slam, which requires clubs to come in — a little better than a 50% chance — is a poor prospect. 6♣ and 6♦ are the best slams, but 6NT might appeal to the matchpoint mavens out there. With nothing in hearts, South might expect only one heart stopper and steer the partnership toward a minor suit. With West holding ♣Q-x-x, the normal play in clubs — cashing the ♣A, then finessing through West — succeeds, rewarding the greedy 6NT bidders.

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

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

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

Unless East is an aggressive opener, West will open 1NT in third seat. North might enter the bidding, perhaps via a two-suited 2♦ overcall, showing diamonds and a major. That shouldn't give E/W much grief, and they should settle into 3NT easily enough. North will probably lead the ♦Q, after which West can take 12 tricks — but will he? The fall of South's ♦9 means that the defenders will not be able to take more than two diamond tricks if they gain the lead, so West can go all out, without risking going down if he loses the lead. We would lead a spade to the ♠K and finesse in spades, getting the good news. Then a club to the ♣A and a finesse of the ♣8, seeing North show out in that suit. We think it is too risky to finesse in hearts, which could see declarer take only one heart trick and three clubs. Instead, cross to the ♥K and take the proven club finesse, locking up 11 tricks — and (presumably) a good matchpoint score.

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

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

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

Compare the South hand on this deal to East's on Board 2. We would not open this hand 2♠, vulnerable, with such a weak suit. North will probably open 1♦ in third seat. Even if this hand does not meet your opening-bid standards in first or second seat, in third seat things are a little more relaxed. East has a close decision about whether to overcall 1NT or double, planning to take strong action later. We would overcall 1NT, maybe a little conservative, but with only two spades, double is a bit risky, and it might force us to reach 2NT. Over East's 1NT, South will bid 2♠, and play there. It's not a pretty contract. Double dummy, South can make it, but that requires some very successful views in the play, and we do not expect many declarers to make eight tricks in practice — at least not without some help from the defense.

Bd: 8      ♠ A 7  
 Dlr: West    ♥ Q 10 8 7 6 3 2  
 Vul: None    ♦ Q 2  
              ♣ 5 2

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

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

This is a tricky deal to analyze. West will likely open 2♦. Should North overcall? We think not. A jump to 3♥ shows a strong hand when the opponents preempt, and a 2♥ overcall shows a little more in high cards, not to mention that the ♦Q is of dubious value. How East will respond to 2♦ is uncertain. He might choose a big preempt — 4♦ or maybe even 5♦. On the other hand, getting clubs into the picture could be useful, so 3♣ is a possibility, planning on raising diamonds later. Another option is to try for game via 2NT. In any case, South will overcall spades at the three or four level, and N/S will probably end up in 4♥ or 4♠. Well done to an E/W pair that finds 5♦. The best chance of that appears to be if East shows clubs, allowing West to appreciate how good a hand he has.

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

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

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

This is another tough deal. North opens 3♦, and East will likely overcall 4♣. There is something to be said for getting the major in first, but with this much disparity in suit length and strength, 3♥ looks like too great a distortion. Over 4♣, it might be very difficult to reach hearts. West will likely bid either 4♦ or 4♠. The former might get East to bid 4♥, which might lead to 6♥, but if West is worried that East will take 4♦ as a club raise — as most players would — then he might pick 4♠. With 7-5 distribution, East should insist on playing in one of his suits, but over 4♠, what could he do other than rebid 5♣? At least 5♣ will achieve a plus score, if not a terrific matchpoint result. Finding hearts or slam after the preempt will be a difficult feat to achieve.

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

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

             ♠ 8 5  
              ♥ A Q  
              ♦ A K J 10 9  
              ♣ Q J 10 5

East passes, and South opens 1♦. You should not be averse to opening 1NT on this distribution, but this hand is too strong — a prime 17 HCP, great suits, great spot cards. After North responds 1♠, South has to choose between rebidding 2♣ and 2NT. Both are fine in our view. 2♣ is probably the "correct" call, but the lure of 2NT at matchpoints might be hard to resist — and we might succumb to the temptation ourselves. After a 2NT rebid, North will probably check back for a spade fit — via new minor forcing, perhaps — and then place the contract in 6NT, which should make on the nose. The 2♣ rebid might help the partnership reach the theoretically best contract, 7♣, which is virtually cold when clubs are 3-2 and will often make when clubs are 4-1. Today, though, the clubs are foul, and declarer will be unable to avoid losing a trick. Bridge can be a cruel game.

Bd: 11     ♠ Q 6 4 2  
 Dlr: South   ♥ 9 5 2  
 Vul: None     ♦ Q 10 9 7  
                  ♣ Q 4

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

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

In the modern game, South has a clear 1♣ opening, but conservative openers might pass. West will overcall 1♦, and North should pass. It is acceptable to bid 1♠ here with 6 HCP and a four-card suit, but with length and strength in diamonds, the North hand is better suited to defense than offense. A 1♠ response might get South too excited. East will cuebid 2♣, showing a strong diamond raise. West has more than a minimum overcall, so he should bid 2♥, over which East can suggest notrump with 2NT. It's a close decision whether West should pass 2NT or retreat to 3♦. On this deal, West does better to bid 3♦, which can make despite the bad trump split, if declarer ruffs heart losers in dummy. Passing 2NT should lead to a minus unless the defense slips.

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

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

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

Three passes to South is a likely start, although some frisky Easts might open light in third seat. 1NT is a possible opening for South, although it's borderline whether he is too strong. 6-3-2-2 distribution with a long minor is often best treated by opening or rebidding notrump. This hand is right on the cusp between a 1NT opening and 1♣ followed by a 2NT rebid. Opening 1♣ and jump-rebidding 3♣ would misstate the hand-type, in our view. In any case, it looks like all roads lead to 3NT by South. A spade lead is likely, giving South an extra trick in that suit. South will develop the clubs and has to decide whether to take the heart finesse for overtricks or to cash out for nine tricks. Lots of matchpoints will hang on the decision, and it will be far from clear what is indicated. On this layout, the bold finessers will win the day. Switch the red-suit kings, and the cautious cashers will have the last laugh.

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

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

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

This is another deal likely to start with three passes. A bit too weak to open 2♣, West should open 1♣. Whether East responds 1♦ or 1♥ is a matter of style. We would choose 1♥ as an unpassed hand, and we think it is a tossup as a passed hand. Either response will give West a difficult rebid problem. Over 1♦ the problem is worse. A jump shift to 2♠ on a three-card suit is likely the least bad alternative. After 1♣-1♥, on the other hand, opener can choose between a faux 2♦ reverse on a three-card suit and an off-center jump to 3NT. 3NT shows a strong hand with long, strong clubs, but typically the clubs are longer and stronger. Just looking at the E/W cards, a grand slam is a good contract. Here, the club split means you will fail in a grand — unless North shows you his hand — and even 6NT can go down if the defense starts with a heart lead. Getting to slam will likely be an awkward endeavor: West shows a big hand, East makes some move toward slam, and West accepts. The specific auctions will vary widely from table to table, and we expect many pairs to miss slam.

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

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

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

What do you open with 4-4 in the minors? We usually recommend 1♦, and this East hand is no exception. After a 1♦ opening and a 1♠ overcall by South, West should make a negative double. North will offer a strong spade raise, likely via a 2♦ cuebid, but some partnerships have different ways to show a strong raise, such as 2NT showing invitational-plus values with four or more spades. N/S will probably declare a spade partscore, and E/W would do well to push the opponents up a level. 2♠ will probably make, while 3♠ probably will fail. Unless West leads the ♥Q — we wouldn't; put us down for the ♦J — declarer can take nine tricks, but eight are more likely. Taking nine tricks requires a winning view in both hearts and clubs.

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

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

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

Even though E/W have a good sacrifice available — even 6♣ is profitable against a heart game — they probably will not be in the auction. South will presumably open 3♥, and West will pass. North might not expect to make 4♥ all of the time, but 4♥ is a good bid to make on general principles. The strength is roughly evenly split between the two sides, North does not know who can make what, and N/S have a 10-card heart fit. North will do better in the long run to further the preempt with 4♥ rather than trying to guess when to pass and when to bid with these kinds of hands. If North does bid 4♥, it will shut East out of the auction, and N/S will probably be able to make an overtrick in 4♥. Only an initial trump lead (or a devious low spade) will give declarer a problem, and good luck finding either of those leads.

Bd: 16 ♠ K J 7 3  
 Dlr: West ♥ 6 3  
 Vul: E-W ♦ A Q 10 5 3 2  
 ♣ 10  
 ♠ A 6 5 ♠ 10 9 8  
 ♥ 10 7 ♥ Q J 5 4 2  
 ♦ 9 6 4 ♦ K  
 ♣ A Q J 9 5 ♣ 8 7 4 3  
 ♠ Q 4 2  
 ♥ A K 9 8  
 ♦ J 8 7  
 ♣ K 6 2

West has a borderline opening bid, and we would open 1♣, despite “only” 11 points. The good five-card club suit and side ace are big upgrade factors. We would much rather have this hand than a 4-3-3-3 13-count with scattered honors. North overcalls 1♦, East bids 1♥, and South cuebids 2♣. West passes, and North bids 2♠. South might try 2NT, angling toward 3NT, but North will sign off in 3♦, which South may well pass. 3NT is a playable contract, but it's doomed with the ♦K offside (yes, at double dummy you can drop East's singleton ♦K offside, but let's be realistic). You should get a good matchpoint score for +130 in 3♦.

Bd: 17 ♠ 9  
 Dlr: North ♥ J 3  
 Vul: None ♦ A K 9  
 ♣ K Q J 9 8 4 2  
 ♠ K 8 3 ♠ Q 6 2  
 ♥ A 10 9 8 7 2 ♥ K 4  
 ♦ J ♦ Q 8 7 6 5 4  
 ♣ 10 7 5 ♣ A 6  
 ♠ A J 10 7 5 4  
 ♥ Q 6 5  
 ♦ 10 3 2  
 ♣ 3

After 1♣-1♦-1♠, should West bid 2♥? We think that's a close call, but it's good to get your suit in there, especially nonvulnerable at matchpoints. North has a straightforward 3♣ bid. If N/S play Good-Bad 2NT, where a 2NT bid by North would show a weaker 3♣ bid, then North's 3♣ bid is forward-going — but nonforcing. If N/S don't have that gadget available, then 3♣ is wide-ranging. No matter what range the 3♣ bid shows, South has an easy pass with a misfitting minimum. The killing lead against 3♣ is a diamond, after which East can use the ♣A and ♥K as entries to give West two diamond ruffs. After the ♥K lead, the defense can get at most one diamond ruff. This time, a 2♥ bid steers East wrong on opening lead.

Bd: 18 ♠ 9 8 6 3  
 Dlr: East ♥ Q 10 6 5  
 Vul: N-S ♦ —  
 ♣ A 10 8 5 3  
 ♠ J 10 5 2 ♠ Q  
 ♥ 7 4 2 ♥ K  
 ♦ K Q 6 4 ♦ A J 10 7 5 3 2  
 ♣ Q 2 ♣ J 9 6 4  
 ♠ A K 7 4  
 ♥ A J 9 8 3  
 ♦ 9 8  
 ♣ K 7

If you look at the double-dummy results, you will see that N/S can make 6♥, but that's not a realistic result. If you can manage to take 12 tricks in hearts, you will score well — if you're in at least game that is. East will probably open 1♦, although some players who detest singleton honors might pass or preempt. South will overcall 1♥, being a little light to double, planning on bidding hearts. After 1♦-1♥, West has an easy negative double. It is important to get the spades into play before raising diamonds. North should just leap to 4♥. Other than the lack of a fifth heart, North has almost an ideal 4♥ bid. E/W have a good save in diamonds, and East might try 5♦, but that is a pretty gambling action. N/S will probably be allowed to play 4♥ if North jumps there directly. A slower route might allow E/W to get together in diamonds.

Bd: 19 ♠ 6  
 Dlr: South ♥ Q 10 7 6 2  
 Vul: E-W ♦ K 5  
 ♣ A Q 10 7 4  
 ♠ A K J 9 ♠ Q 10 8  
 ♥ 4 3 ♥ A J 9  
 ♦ A 10 7 6 ♦ Q 9 8 4 2  
 ♣ K 8 5 ♣ J 9  
 ♠ 7 5 4 3 2  
 ♥ K 8 5  
 ♦ J 3  
 ♣ 6 3 2

South passes, West opens 1NT, and North will enter the auction in some way, preferably showing a two-suited hand. This might be 2♥ showing hearts and a minor (as in Cappelletti, Woolsey, or Multi-Landy) or 2♣ showing clubs and a higher suit (as in DONT or Meckwell). East will steer the partnership into 3NT, which is doomed at double dummy. But will it make at the table? The winning defense is to lead a low heart. If declarer puts up dummy's ace, he will set up enough tricks for the defenders in hearts and clubs, and they will take them when in with the ♦K. So declarer plays the ♥9 from dummy, and South wins the ♥K. Now South must make the key play of shifting to clubs, setting up that suit for North to cash when in with the ♦K. Could you blame North for leading a low club? West should play the ♣J from dummy, in case it holds or it forces out the ♣A — although the ♣9 will do just as well on this layout. West now can play a diamond to the ♦A and another, setting up that suit while retaining the guarded ♣K as a stopper.

Bd: 20 ♠ A 10 8 6 3  
 Dlr: West ♥ J 3  
 Vul: Both ♦ 9 8 6  
 ♣ J 8 5  
 ♠ 7 ♠ Q 4 2  
 ♥ K 7 5 ♥ A Q 8 6 4  
 ♦ K 10 7 4 3 ♦ A 5  
 ♣ 10 9 4 3 ♣ A 7 6  
 ♠ K J 9 5  
 ♥ 10 9 2  
 ♦ Q J 2  
 ♣ K Q 2

The East hand presents a recurring question: open 1NT or open one of a major? We are firmly in the 1NT camp. 1NT gets the strength and shape of the East hand across immediately. After a 1♥ opening, you may struggle to describe your hand accurately. A simple sequence like 1♥-1♠ will give you an insoluble problem. On this layout, though, a 1♥ opening might work better. If East opens 1NT, he will probably play it there, taking eight tricks for +120. A 1♥ opening will lead to a heart contract, and even if E/W don't reach game, 10 tricks are available for +170. In the long run, though, we maintain that opening 1NT with the East hand will be a winner.

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

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

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

Would you open 1NT with the East cards? We sure would. 14 HCP plus a great diamond suit, 1NT looks automatic to us. That East is at favorable vulnerability makes it even more attractive. Look what happens here. Over 1NT, South has no good way to enter the auction and likely will end up defending 1NT and going +50. Over 1♦, South might overcall 1♠, but more likely he will pass, and after 1♥-Pass-1NT, he can double — takeout of hearts. That will allow North to compete to 2♠ and go +110 or maybe +140. Either way, a winner for the 1NT opening.

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

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

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

We see that N/S can make 3NT, but we wouldn't get there. We would open the South hand 2NT and pass as North. We might bid Stayman at IMPs, but at matchpoints, we'll try to stay low and hope for a plus. The cards are friendly for N/S, so nine tricks are available. That relies on clubs being 4-3 and there being a heart entry to access the spades. We would hope to go +150 on this board and beat some players who are only +120, while the brash bidders might be rewarded with +400 and a great score.

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

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

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

N/S will wind their way to 4♥ on these cards. East would do well to find a spade lead, setting up a trick for the defense there. If East does not find that lead, declarer can play the ♥K-A, discovering that he has a loser there, then lead a diamond toward the ♦Q. West needs to rise with the ♦K in order to hold declarer to 11 tricks. If East leads a spade, though, declarer will need to guess hearts in order to make an overtrick. +650 should score well for N/S, and +620 might be below average. Note to the matchpoint-greedy pairs in 3NT — you'd better be a good guesser, because if you get the hearts wrong, you'll end up with +600 and a poor score when the field is in the nine-card heart fit.

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

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

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

After Pass-1NT, should East come in to show the majors? That's not clear. On the one hand, it is important to compete for the partscore. On the other hand, West is a passed hand. Entering the auction when you are outgunned risks conceding a large penalty or giving the opponents information about how to play the contract. Here, coming into the bidding is very dangerous. If South can arrange to double E/W for penalty, they should collect a big number, probably 500 or more. Passing will work much better here, and North will end up in 3NT. A heart lead is likely, which gives declarer a second heart trick immediately. Then North can cross to dummy in clubs, take the diamond finesse, and play spades. Even if East manages to play low smoothly and declarer finesses the ♠9, losing to West's ♠10, a squeeze looms over East. Declarer cashes the clubs first, then takes the diamonds. On the last round of diamonds, East will be down to ♠K-Q and ♥K-9. Whichever he discards costs a trick. Kudos to declarers who take 12 tricks in 3NT. +490 should be a fine score — losing only to the pairs who get to penalize an intrepid E/W pair.

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

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

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

Do you play Stayman? We don't! At least not with hands like South's. With 4-3-3-3 distribution, we never — well, almost never — bid Stayman after partner opens 1NT or 2NT. The gain from playing in a major usually comes from setting up a side suit via ruffing or ruffing losers in one hand or the other. Those conditions don't materialize as often when both hands are balanced, and sometimes a suit takes fewer tricks than notrump, usually when the trump suit splits badly and those losers could be avoided in notrump. In that vein, South has an automatic 3NT bid over North's 2NT opening in our view. It doesn't matter on this deal, because there is no major-suit fit, but that is the principle. East has a normal spade lead against 3NT, which costs a trick in the suit. Not playing with mirrors, declarer will not guess clubs. The likely result is 10 tricks. If you take more than that, well done.

Bd: 26 ♠ 4  
 Dlr: East ♥ Q 9 6 4 3  
 Vul: Both ♦ K Q 8 4  
 ♣ K 8 5  
 ♠ K Q 5 ♠ A 9 8 3  
 ♥ K 10 8 5 2 ♥ 7  
 ♦ A J 6 5 ♦ 9 3 2  
 ♣ 10 ♣ J 7 4 3 2  
 ♠ J 10 7 6 2  
 ♥ A J  
 ♦ 10 7  
 ♣ A Q 9 6

After Pass-1♠, would you overcall 2♥ with the West cards? Not us — we're vulnerable, facing a passed hand, with a weak suit that is only five cards long, and we have minimum values for a two-level overcall. If you do overcall 2♥ with the West hand, you will play there, probably doubled, after Pass-Pass-Double-All Pass. If you pass with the West hand, you might defend 2♥, after N/S bid: 1♠-1NT-2♣-2♥-Pass. Against 2♥ by North, East will probably opt for a diamond lead, the unbid suit. West will win the ♦A and will probably continue with a diamond. Declarer's first move will probably be taking a trump finesse. West can win and may play a third diamond. Analyzing the play gets messy, but the most common results look like making two or down one. Going plus on this board is probably the key for E/W, as some pairs will get in trouble by entering the bidding as West.

Bd: 27 ♠ —  
 Dlr: South ♥ 9 8 6 4 2  
 Vul: None ♦ A K 7 6 3 2  
 ♣ J 10  
 ♠ A 8 6 4 3 ♠ K J 9 5  
 ♥ 7 5 ♥ A K  
 ♦ 10 9 ♦ 8 5 4  
 ♣ Q 9 8 5 ♣ K 4 3 2  
 ♠ Q 10 7 2  
 ♥ Q J 10 3  
 ♦ Q J  
 ♣ A 7 6

The North hand on this board gives you a chance for a tactical third-seat action. What would be your pleasure? We're not sure what we would choose. 1♦ is possible, as are 2♦ and 3♦. Bidding hearts seems a little strange, with five little hearts and six strong diamonds, but opposite the South hand, introducing hearts will certainly be successful. Pass is another choice, if you feel that nothing else fits, but that also seems a bit odd. We would probably choose 3♦ with plenty of trepidation. If North does open 3♦, it figures to end the auction for +130. It's unclear whether that will be a good matchpoint score. On deals like this, the scores rate to be all over the map, and it's hard to predict how the auctions will go at many tables.

Bd: 28 ♠ 9 8 7  
 Dlr: West ♥ A K 5 4 3 2  
 Vul: N-S ♦ A 8  
 ♣ 6 4  
 ♠ A K J 5 2 ♠ 10 6 4  
 ♥ 9 ♥ 8 7  
 ♦ 7 6 5 4 2 ♦ K 10 9  
 ♣ 10 9 ♣ A K Q J 7  
 ♠ Q 3  
 ♥ Q J 10 6  
 ♦ Q J 3  
 ♣ 8 5 3 2

After West passes, we consider the North hand a clear 1♥ opening with ♥A-K-x-x-x and a side ace. While we would normally double 1♥ with East's distribution, the combination of weak spades and strong clubs sways us toward 2♣. South will raise to 2♥, West will bid 2♠, and North will compete to 3♥. How should East know to bid 4♠? We certainly wouldn't. The cards just lie very well for E/W, giving them 11 tricks in spades. We would content ourselves with 3♠ and hope that +200 is a reasonable result.

Bd: 29 ♠ Q 4 3  
 Dlr: North ♥ J 8 2  
 Vul: Both ♦ K  
 ♣ K Q J 10 8 4  
 ♠ J 9 7 5 ♠ 10 8  
 ♥ K 9 5 ♥ A 10 7 3  
 ♦ 10 5 4 ♦ Q J 9 8 3  
 ♣ 9 7 2 ♣ A 3  
 ♠ A K 6 2  
 ♥ Q 6 4  
 ♦ A 7 6 2  
 ♣ 6 5

After 1♣-1♦, South has an easy 1♠ bid. It is important to distinguish this auction from 1♣-1♥, where a 1♠ bid shows five or more spades. After a 1♦ overcall, a negative double shows 4-4 in the majors. With length in only one major, you can just bid it, even with only four cards. After South bids 1♠, West is too weak to raise to 2♦, and North will probably rebid 2♣ rather than raise spades on three-card support, although 2♠ is a perfectly reasonable option too. South will probably jump to 3NT, a simple choice of games, and North has an easy pass, with only three spades and a working diamond honor. After a diamond lead against 3NT, declarer can knock out the ♣A and take 10 tricks: three spades, two diamonds, and five clubs. With spades 4-2, the defense does not need to be careful to cash out in hearts — their heart tricks can't go away.

Bd: 30 ♠ —  
 Dlr: East ♥ 9 3  
 Vul: None ♦ J 10 8 7 6 4 3 2  
 ♣ 4 3 2  
 ♠ A 10 7 6 4 ♠ K J 8 3 2  
 ♥ J ♥ 8 6 5  
 ♦ A K Q ♦ 9 5  
 ♣ A Q J 6 ♣ K 10 7  
 ♠ Q 9 5  
 ♥ A K Q 10 7 4 2  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ 9 8 5

1♥ or 4♥ with the South hand? Mark us down for 4♥, at least nonvulnerable. When the decision is close, it often works to open 4♥ or 4♠. It puts the opponents in a tough spot. Look at these E/W hands: 6♠ is a worthwhile contract, essentially only requiring there to be no spade loser (although with diamonds 8-0, a diamond lead by North could defeat the slam legitimately). E/W are unlikely to reach slam after the 4♥ opening. West will probably double, East will remove to 4♠, and West has a problem. Slam could easily be a good contract, but E/W also could go minus at the five level if East has a bad hand. There is no absolutely correct answer on hands like these. We would probably wimp out and pass 4♠ with the West hand, but we don't feel strongly. Even if E/W reach slam, though, the contract will probably fail. South probably will start by leading a high heart (underleading the ♥A-K-Q to try putting partner in to give you a ruff is a desperado move that you should not be tempted by), after which declarer will have to guess trumps. He can cater to either player having all three spades and will surely lead to the ♠A first, in case North has all three trumps. Whoops! South has a trump trick and down declarer goes. After a 1♥ opening by South, guessing spades is much more likely.

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

South opens 1♥, West overcalls 2♣, and North is a little too light for a negative double at this level, so he passes. East bids 2♠. Is that forcing? That depends on partnership agreement — both treatments are reasonable. If 2♠ is forcing (or perhaps if it isn't), West will bid 3♣, probably playing there. That is an ugly contract, although if North leads a heart declarer might do alright. After the ♥9 lead, South must withhold the ♥Q. He can read from the lead that declarer has ♥AKJ10 and maybe a fifth heart. Playing the queen cannot gain and it might lose. Declarer might scramble nine tricks if the defense is sloppy, but down one is a more likely result. North would need to avoid a heart lead to beat the contract two tricks legitimately, which is unlikely to happen. If East's 2♠ bid is nonforcing and West guesses to pass, at least E/W will find a fit, and 2♠ will probably make.

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

Some might open the West hand, but with only 11 points and 4-3-3-3 distribution, we would pass, despite holding two aces and a king. North also passes, and East might open or might pass, depending on style. If East passes, South probably will too — he falls short of the Rule of 15, a reasonable guideline about whether to open borderline hands in fourth seat: Count your HCP and add them to your number of spades. If the total is 15 or greater, open the bidding. That's just a rule of thumb, but there is far worse advice lurking out there. If East does open, South will overcall 1♠, and West will make a strong heart raise, likely via 2♠. North will be tempted to compete to 3♠ — we certainly would be — which might turn a plus into a minus. It will depend in large part on the opening lead. This would not be a successful time to lay down the unsupported ♥A, which will allow declarer to ruff two hearts in dummy and set up another heart trick, eventually taking five spade tricks in hand, two ruffs in dummy, one heart trick and one club trick.



### Analysis by Oren Kriegel

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