

2026 ACBLwide Silver Senior Pairs

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Analysis by Paul Linxwiler



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

Board 1
North Deals
None Vul

♠ A J 10 9 6 3
♥ A
♦ K
♣ Q J 9 8 7

♠ K Q 8
♥ K Q 6 3
♦ J 7
♣ K 10 4 2

♠ 5 2
♥ 10 8 5 4 2
♦ Q 8 6 4
♣ A 3

♠ 7 4
♥ J 9 7
♦ A 10 9 5 3 2
♣ 6 5



NS 3♠; EW 2♥; NS 2♣; NS 1♦;
Par +140: NS 3♠=

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠	All Pass	

With good 6-4 openers, it's typically suggested to bid the six-card suit, rebid the four-card suit followed by bidding the six-bagger again, if the auction permits. Here, however, North is 6-5, but the emphasis on the good six-card major should still be in place. After South's 1NT (whether "standard," forcing or semi-forcing), North has an easy 2♣ rebid. 3♣ is possible, too, but taking it slow on hands where it's not clear if a fit exists is good policy.

South's 2♦ is natural and nonforcing. With most minimum, balanced openers, North would pass, but North does not have that type of hand. A 2♠ continuation shows a good six-card suit, no diamond tolerance, and (likely) extra values. Again, 3♣ is a possible alternative, but it makes it sound as if North is 5-5 and risks losing the matchpoint-relevant major suit.

In 2♠, North's goal should be to play for an overtrick by losing two clubs and two spades (or perhaps one spade and three clubs). On a heart lead, declarer wins and can immediately try the ♣Q (among other ideas), threatening to ruff a club in dummy. The defense may be tempted to win and shift to a trump, which will likely help declarer restrict the defenders to a single trump trick.

Note that declarer may wish to overtake the ♦K with dummy's ace as a way to lead a trump or a club toward the closed hand.

Board 2
East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 9 8 6
♥ Q 9 4
♦ A K 7 4
♣ A 9

♠ K 5
♥ 8 7 6 2
♦ 9 8 5
♣ 10 8 7 4



♠ 10 7 3
♥ K J 10
♦ Q 3
♣ K J 6 5 3

♠ A Q 4 2
♥ A 5 3
♦ J 10 6 2
♣ Q 2

NS 3♠; NS 2N; NS 2♥; NS 2♣; NS 1♦;
Par +140: NS 1♠+2

West	North	East	South
	1NT	1♦	Pass
Pass		All Pass	

If the vulnerability were reversed, North might give serious consideration to defending 1♦, hoping to score +100 or +200 when declaring 1NT would yield a lesser score. Here, however, the chance of scoring +90 or +120 on offense in 1NT versus collecting mere 50s for undertricks defending 1♦ makes balancing somewhat more attractive.

A balancing 1NT over a minor-suit opening is typically defined as showing a balanced 11-14 HCP. There will some Souths who will aggressively raise to 2NT, and it would not be surprising to see some N/S pairs get overboard in 3NT.

In notrump, N/S should come to eight tricks, as the defense can take three spades, one heart and an eventual club trick when declarer goes about developing that suit.

Board 3
South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A K Q
♥ K 4
♦ K 9 8 5
♣ A Q 10 4

♠ 10 6
♥ Q 9 5
♦ 10 7 3 2
♣ K 8 5 2

N		E
W		S

♠ 8 5 2
♥ J 10 7 6 3
♦ A Q 4
♣ J 7

♠ J 9 7 4 3
♥ A 8 2
♦ J 6
♣ 9 6 3

West	North	East	South
			Pass
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

The transfer to 3♠ followed by the choice-of-games 3NT should drive almost every N/S pair to 4♠.

Making 10 tricks is easy, so the matchpoint goal for North is to make an overtrick. A mandatory step, therefore, is for declarer to make sure that a heart is ruffed in the closed hand. On, say, the lead of the ♥J by East, declarer must resist banging down the ♠A K Q right away. Instead, after winning the heart lead with the king, declarer should cash two trumps, cross to the ♥A and ruff a heart.

From here, declarer must get to dummy to draw the last trump, and the simplest way to do that is just to duck a diamond. East will likely win the queen, and best defense is to cash the ♦A and exit passively with the last trump. After winning in dummy, declarer must then play a club to the queen to score an overtrick; the defense scores only two diamond tricks.

NS 5♠; NS 3N; NS 3♦; NS 3♣; NS 1♥;
Par +450: NS 4♠+1

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 9 7 6
♥ K 9 8 6 3
♦ K 9 4 2
♣ 10

♠ 8 4 3
♥ Q 4
♦ J 10 6
♣ A J 8 4 3

N		E
W		S

♠ A K J 10 2
♥ 7 5
♦ Q 8 5
♣ Q 5 2

♠ Q 5
♥ A J 10 2
♦ A 7 3
♣ K 9 7 6

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♠	Dbl
2♠	3♥	Pass	Pass
Pass?			

The question mark on West's final pass is at the heart of this matchpoint problem: Is passing, doubling or bidding 3♠ better?

Double-dummy, of course, it's easy to see that bidding 3♠ is better, as 3♥ makes and 3♠ is down one unless East guesses to drop the doubleton ♠Q offside. But even minus 100 is better than minus 140, so bidding 3♠ is the winner here.

But we all know that third-seat openings can be suspect, and West may be hesitant to push to the three level vulnerable on this quacky collection. And with a likely eight-card fit, E-W would be above their "total tricks" level.

Note that 3♠ could go off two on this line: The defense cashes the ♥A, plays a heart to the king. North exits a trump. Declarer wins the ace, plays a club to the jack and tries the trump finesse. The idea is to cater to 4-1 trumps. The ♣A might be used as a second dummy entry to repeat the spade finesse. But here, South the ♠Q wins and gives North a club ruff. Ouch.

EW 3♠; NS 3♥; NS 2♦; EW 2♣;
Par -140: EW 3♠=

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K J 10 9 6 4
♥ 3 2
♦ J 5 4
♣ 8 5

♠ A Q 2
♥ A K Q 7 5
♦ 8 7
♣ Q 10 4

N		E
W		S

♠ 8 7
♥ J 9 8 6 4
♦ A Q 3
♣ 7 6 3

♠ 5 3
♥ 10
♦ K 10 9 6 2
♣ A K J 9 2

West	North	East	South
3♥	2♠	Pass	Pass
	Pass	4♥	All Pass

This will be a common auction, but 4♥ has no play and will finish down two if North finds a club lead to secure a ruff.

Might some West choose 2NT instead? Maybe, but East might still transfer to hearts, and 4♥ might be reached on that sequence, too. A frustrating deal for E/W.

NS 3♠; E 2N; EW 2♥; NS 3♦; W 1N;
NS 2♣; Par +100: E 3N×-1

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

EW 5♥; EW 3N; NS 3♠; NS 3♦; NS 1♣;
Par -300: NS 5♠x-2

West	North	East	South
3♣	3♠	1♥	2♣
		4♥	All Pass

West's 3♣ cuebid shows a limit raise or better in hearts. A direct jump to 4♥ would show a weak/preemptive raise.

There is nothing to the play in 4♥, as East will easily make an overtrick, losing just two clubs. The only real drama is in the auction: Can N/S work out that sacrificing in 4♠ (even 5♠!) is the right thing to do? Might North risk even 4♠ at his first turn to speak? Should South raise to 4♠ over 4♥? The vulnerability might persuade some to try it.

E/W, of course, may well push on to 5♥ over 4♠, but congratulations to any N/S pairs who then continues to 5♠ (doubled, of course). Repeated heart leads by the defense will defeat 5♠ two tricks.

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

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

EW 4♠; EW 4♥; EW 3N; EW 4♦; EW 4♣;
Par -620: EW 4♥=; EW 4♠=

Describing super-strong hands such as West's is difficult in most systems. A caveman approach might be 2♣-2♦(waiting)-3NT to show 25-27 balanced. (Rebidding 3♣ should show very long clubs and typically a disinterest in other suits. The West hand is three-suited and semi-balanced, making a notrump rebid more flexible.) Over such a start, East could pass or try for a major-suit fit via Stayman or transfers assuming your partnership has agreed to play them over a jump to 3NT.

For those that play Kokish (also known as Birthright) over 2♣-2♦, opener could rebid 2♥ to show either primary hearts OR a balanced 22+ HCP. Responder's 2♠ continuation is artificial, asking for clarification, and 2NT would show the balanced super-max. From there, partnership methods would allow for major-suit fit exploration, with 3NT the likely landing place when none is discovered.

Interestingly, 4♥ and 4♠ will each produce 10 tricks with careful play - even with the bad trump splits - while 3NT yields only nine tricks. Even though it looks as if only eight tricks are available in notrump after clubs prove to be 3-3, the defense must present declarer with a ninth trick in the ending no matter what they do.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

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

W 5N; E 4N; EW 5♦; EW 3♠; W 3♥; E 2♥;
EW 2♣; Par -460: W 3N+2

We expect the E/W auction to be 2NT-3NT at most tables, though some North players might risk a 3♣ overcall in an attempt to disrupt the E/W auction. Even then, E/W might wind up in 3NT anyway, but it's possible that East continues with 3♦ over North's 3♣, and E/W end in the matchpoint-inferior 5♦.

In 3NT, declarer has 10 easy-to-develop tricks on a non-club lead: three spades, two hearts, four diamonds and a club.

Making 11 tricks is rather double-dummy (although a 3♣ overcall might assist West in finding the right line). If North leads, say, the ♠10, declarer wins, cashes the ♦A (unblocking the 10 from hand!) and plays a diamond. South wins and (say) plays another spade, but declarer wins and runs the diamonds. This is the position with the lead in dummy:

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

When declarer cashes the ♠A, North is squeezed. A heart discard is fatal, as declarer's spots are too good, while a club discard allows declarer to play a club to the king and ace, endplaying North. Again, this line is double-dummy.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

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

NS 4♦; EW 4♣; EW 2♥; NS 1♠;
Par +130: NS 4♦=

We suspect that the auction 3♦(North)-All Pass will occur at most tables. East's clubs are quite good, but the hand's values are not good enough for a vulnerable four-level overcall. West might consider balancing with 4♥, but it's a stab in the dark, and here, it would lead to minus 200. (And don't you dare as East say that you would pull 4♥ to 5♣; 4♥ might be cold, and you have no way of knowing otherwise.)

Board 12West Deals
N-S Vul♠ K J 6 4
♥ 2
♦ Q 9 8 6
♣ 10 8 3 2♠ A Q 10 9 8 5 3
♥ A J 8 7 5
♦ —
♣ 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7
♥ K Q 10 9 4 3
♦ J 4 3 2
♣ J 5

♠ 2
♥ 6
♦ A K 10 7 5
♣ A K Q 9 6 4EW 6♥; EW 4♠; NS 5♦; NS 4♣;
Par -500: NS 7♦x-2

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	1NT	4NT
5♥	5NT	6♥	All Pass

On this freak layout, many different auctions are possible. After West opens 1♠ and East responds 1NT (say, forcing or semi-forcing), South should climb into the auction, either with an Unusual 2NT or, better, 4NT showing the minors. The playing strength is appropriate for this jump, and it can help suppress major-suit competition. But West should not be silenced with his 7-5 player, and 5♥ is the natural continuation. No doubt this will come as quite a surprise to East!

From that point, things can go a variety of ways. If North elects to compete, he can bid 5NT to ask South to pick his best minor. Or, as North has better diamonds than clubs, 6♦ directly is possible. As it is unclear who is sacrificing and who is bidding to make, East may well take the plunge and bid 6♥, especially at favorable vulnerability.

It would take a lot of nerve for South to take the push to 7♦ at unfavorable colors. But doubling 6♥ is not recommended, as there is no guarantee that both minor-suit aces are cashing. Indeed, 6♥ is cold. An exciting deal.

Board 13North Deals
Both Vul♠ A 9 5
♥ J 10 6 5
♦ K Q 9 3
♣ K 3♠ Q 8
♥ 9 7 3
♦ A 8 5 4
♣ A 9 8 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 7 6 3
♥ 8 4 2
♦ J 10 6
♣ Q J 7

♠ J 10 4 2
♥ A K Q
♦ 7 2
♣ 10 6 4 2NS 3♠; NS 3♥; NS 2N; NS 2♦; NS 2♣;
Par +140: NS 1♥+2; NS 1♠+2

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
	1NT	All Pass	

This simple auction will be replicated at most tables.

Given the bidding, a diamond or spade lead is unattractive from East's point of view (although either could easily be right), and leading the ♣Q from Q-J-x could easily cost a trick later, there's a lot to be said for a top-of-nothing ♥8 lead. As it turns out, this neutral lead gives declarer no help.

Rather than rattling off the top hearts right away, however, declarer should make use of the dummy entries to lead up toward the closed hand. So after winning the ♥A at trick one, declarer should play a low diamond toward his hand, West ducking. Then after a heart to the king, another low diamond should be played from dummy, West ducking again (best). Finally, a third heart is won in dummy and a low club is played. From here, declarer will finish with eight tricks: one spade, four hearts, two diamonds and a club.

Board 14East Deals
None Vul♠ A J 10 5 4
♥ 2
♦ K 10 9 4
♣ J 9 2♠ Q 3
♥ 9 4
♦ Q J 8 3 2
♣ A 6 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9
♥ A Q 8 7 5
♦ 7 6 5
♣ Q 8 7 3

♠ K 8 7 6 2
♥ K J 10 6 3
♦ A
♣ K 10

NS 5♠; NS 3N; NS 2♥; Par +450: NS 4♠+1

West	North	East	South
Pass	?	Pass	1♠

The North hand is difficult to describe after partner opens 1♠. It's a bit too good for a direct 4♠ (showing a weak five-card raise) because the hand is relatively control-rich: the ♠A, the ♦K and the singleton heart might be enough for slam to be playable opposite certain maximum constructions for South. Imagine, for example, if South's ♥K were instead the ♥A; in that case, 6♥ would be a fine contract.

A limit raise comes close in terms of values, but how would you feel as North after 1♠-3♠; Pass? If your partnership has an artificial raise available (such as Bergen), you could try that and then bid 4♠ yourself if partner declines the invitation.

Another shot is to try a light 4♥ splinter bid. Partner will expect more in terms of high cards, but this isn't a terrible description.

4♠ is easy, as is the overtrick.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♦	Pass	3NT	All Pass

The West hand is too heavy for a weak 2♦ opening, though some will choose the preempt instead of opening at the one level. The solid suit and the club fragment means that 3NT might be playable if East has the right bits and pieces, which is the case on this layout, thanks to the favorable position of the ♥K and the nice spade intermediates.

But if West opens 2♦, East will pass, as advancing has too many downsides without a clear trick vehicle.

EW 3N; EW 3♠; EW 4♦; EW 3♣; EW 1♥;
Par -400: EW 3N=

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♠	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	All Pass		

A few intrepid Souths may try a takeout double at their first turn, but E/W will still buy the hand in diamonds, either at the two or three level.

In 2♦, nine tricks are simple, even on a passive trump lead. After drawing trumps, declarer can play along crossruff lines, conceding a spade and two hearts early in the play and another spade in the ending. To make 10 tricks, declarer must guess the club suit: Take a club finesse against North or a ruffing finesse against South? Those that guess the latter will have a parking spot for the late spade loser.

Of course, any declarer blessed with a heart lead (or later heart shift) will generate an extra winner that way.

EW 4♦; NS 2♠; NS 2♥; EW 1N; EW 1♣;
Par -130: EW 4♦=

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♣	Pass
1♥	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♦	Pass	3NT	All Pass

This is a difficult deal to project a likely auction. Despite the extra values for E/W, no obvious fit exists, so many pairs will settle for 3NT.

With clubs not behaving, nine tricks are the maximum, although a double-dummy line allows an overtrick to be made even when South leads a low spade to the queen, king and ace. When declarer runs the diamonds, North can pitch two low hearts, declarer a spade and two hearts, and South (who must keep the club guard) releases two hearts also. Declarer then crosses to the ♣A and exits the ♠10 to South's jack. With spades blocked (South is down to the J-9-8) South gets only three spade tricks before having to play a club into declarer's tenace.

Back in the real world, every human declarer will test clubs from the top and take just nine tricks.

EW 6♦; EW 4N; EW 4♥; EW 5♣; EW 1♠;
Par -920: EW 6♦=

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	Pass	Pass
2♣	All Pass	Dbl	Pass

Playing in clubs, West's plan should be to engage in a crossruff, trumping spades in the closed hand and diamonds in dummy. There are many lines in which declarer can make 10 tricks adopting this idea. Even though the double-dummy analyzer says that the defense can hold declarer to nine tricks (North must lead a trump and South must play low; it's incredibly complicated!), we expect to see lots of E/W scores of +130 for making four.

W 3♥; EW 2♠; E 2♥; EW 3♣; EW 1N;
EW 1♦; Par -140: W 1♥+2

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	Pass	Pass
Pass	2♣	All Pass	1NT

As South, it's losing bridge to pass with these types of hands as responder. The chance of improving the contract in two of another suit - or by having the opponents competing - is greater than unpleasant scenarios, such as when opener jumps to 3♠. Although East has some values and E/W can make 2♥, there's really no opportunity for East to safely enter the auction, and defending 2♣ will be a popular choice.

EW 2♥; NS 2♦; EW 1♠; NS 1♣;
Par -100: NS 3♦x-1

This auction begs for a trump lead: East has five spades over the opening bidder and needs to protect them from being ruffed in the dummy. If the opening lead is won in dummy and a low spade is played, West can rise and play another trump. Although North can win the king and take the ruffing finesse against East's ♠K, declarer will ultimately lose control of the hand and finish down one. The defense will simply have too many black-suit winners in the ending.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

West	North	East	South
1♦	Dbl	Redbl	1♠
Dbl	All Pass		

There are many different ways the auction could proceed on this deal. First, some players will pass the West hand, but this is a constructive minimum opener with two-and-a-half quick tricks, some shape and four spades, meaning that West is less likely to have a rebid problem. Live a little and get in there! North has a normal-looking takeout double, and East has enough values for redouble, attempting to penalize N-S. The diamond fit is a minus on defense, but redouble is a reasonable start. South might decide to bid 1♠ right away - simply to show a preference, not values.

W 4N; EW 4♥; E 3N; EW 5♦; W 3♠; E 2♠;
W 3♣; E 2♣; Par -630: W 3N+1

Should West really double 1♠? As the redouble sets up a "catch them if you can" situation, the double typically shows length. The redoubler might overrule this, but here, holding the ♠K J, East is happy to defend if West has four spades. On a trump lead, it's easy to see that South is in a world of trouble. Indeed, the double-dummy analysis says that WEST can make 3♠! It's entirely possible that South will finish down four, but even down three would cost N/S 800, more than the vulnerable game for E/W.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 9 5
♥ Q 4 2
♦ Q 10 8 7
♣ Q 10 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 4
♥ 9 7 6 3
♦ A 9 5 3
♣ A K J

♠ Q 6 2
♥ A J 10 8
♦ 4 2
♣ 9 8 5 4

EW 4♠; EW 3N; EW 5♦; EW 3♥; EW 3♣;
Par -420: EW 4♠=

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1NT	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

This will be a near-universal sequence for strong notrumpers.

We suspect that the ♥J will be a popular attacking lead by South. Dummy's king will win, and declarer can go about setting up spades, finding the suit to be 3-3. At this point, declarer has nine top tricks, with the possibility of making an overtrick via a club finesse if the defense fails to cash out.

How should the defenders act on the first few tricks? When the ♥K holds at trick one, North should signal encouragement. Players using upside-down carding may have an advantage here, as the ♥2 will let South know it's safe to continue playing hearts. Standard signalers will have a harder time, as the ♥4 is more difficult to read. But one way to help North get on lead is for South to play the ♠Q on the second round of spades. Declarer is known/suspected to have just two spades based on the auction, so North will win the ♠J on the third round of the suit. This allows North to cash the ♥Q and continue a heart to South, holding declarer to just nine tricks.

If South wins the ♠Q on the third round of the suit, however, he must continue with a low heart to North's queen to guarantee collecting three heart tricks. If South decides to switch to a minor suit instead after winning the ♠Q, declarer will have the chance to make an overtrick.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 5 4 2
♥ A Q 10 3
♦ 8 4
♣ Q 9 7 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 7 3
♥ K 9 8 5
♦ Q 7 2
♣ 5 4

♠ A Q 8 6
♥ J 6 4
♦ K 10
♣ A K 10 8

NS 3♥; NS 2♠; NS 3♣; NS 1N; EW 2♦;
Par +140: NS 2♥+1

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Sure, some North players will invite via Stayman with their 8 HCP. And here, South - holding a maximum 17-count - will accept and play in 3NT. But inviting with 8-point hands opposite a strong 1NT is a long-term losing action. The 1NT opener is more than three times as likely to hold 15 or 16 points than 17 points, and unless responder's 8-count contains a chunky five-card suit, finding nine tricks will be an uphill battle. Especially at matchpoints, it's not a great idea to invite.

As the defense can run diamonds if East gains the lead, declarer will need to keep his right-hand opponent off lead if possible.

Say East leads the ♠10. This will run to South's queen, and declarer can soon claim seven tricks: two spades, one heart and four clubs. For those declarers in 1NT, that's sufficient, but for those in 3NT, the ♥K must be onside and likely the ♦A, too. When a heart to the queen loses to the king, the defense can switch to diamonds, defeating the contract. Note that the defenders have to be careful: If East switches to a low diamond to the 10 and jack, West can play the ace to drop South's king, but East must unblock the ♦Q on the ace to avoid blocking the suit. Alternatively, East might try starting with the ♦Q (although this might look like top of a doubleton to West). If the queen is covered by the king and ace, West must bang down the ♦J next.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

S 5♠; N 4♠; NS 3N; NS 5♦; S 2♥; N 1♥;
NS 1♣; Par +650: S 4♠+1

West	North	East	South
			1♦
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♠
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

This example auction leans a bit in the conservative direction, with N/S stopping in game, but there will certainly be pairs who push to the five or six level on this deal. 6♠ is not bad, clocking in at about 70%, but failing here as both pointed kings are offside. Unlucky.

Some explanations about the auction. 2NT is a popular treatment commonly referred to as “spiral,” asking opener to define the spade raise more closely. As it’s common to raise on three-card support with certain hands, 2NT asks opener to bid 3♣ or 3♦ to show a maximum or minimum three-card raise respectively, while 3♥ and 3♠ responses show min/max four-card raises. Here, South has an excellent 14-count with four pieces, so 3♠ it is.

The next bids – 4♥, 4♦ and 4♥ – are all control-showing, expressing slam interest. Neither side can quite pull the trigger with Roman key card Blackwood, however, as South has two low clubs, and North has poor trumps. The mutual dancing around the RKCB decision might make both players suspicious that too many defects are present; settling for game is reasonable.

Board 24
West Deals
None Vul

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

NS 5♠; NS 3♥; NS 1N; NS 2♦; EW 1♣;
Par +450: NS 4♠+1

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♣	1NT
Dbl(?)	2♣	Dbl(?)	2♠
All Pass			

After the normal 1♣ opening and 1NT overall, West might decide to risk a penalty double as a way to show a passed hand at the higher end of values. This is a borderline call, but the presence of an obvious lead/trick source (hearts) might persuade some Wests to try it.

Even without the penalty threat, North would move to show the majors. With a weak 5-5 shape, a common approach is to bid Stayman. If South has a four-card major, great; that’s where the partnership will land. But if South bids 2♦ to deny a four-card major, North can next bid 2♥. This normally promises a weak 4-5 or 5-5 in the majors, and South can pass or correct.

Should East double 2♣? Although this should confirm good clubs, some pairs add an additional stipulation that it shows a desire to compete or penalize the opponents. Regardless if East chooses to pass or double, however, South has an easy 2♠ call, which may well end the auction. Even if West raises to 3♣ over 2♠, North might well compete to 3♠.

On this layout, everything is perfect for N/S. Spades are 2-2 with the ace onside, and there is just one heart loser, so South will score 11 tricks in spades without breaking a sweat.

Board 25
North Deals
E-W Vul

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

♠ J 10 9 3	♠ —	♠ —
♥ —	♥ 10 6 4 3 2	♥ —
♦ 10 6 4 3 2	♦ —	♦ —
♣ 10 9 7 2	♣ —	♣ —

EW 4♥; EW 2N; EW 2♠; E 3♦; EW 3♣;
W 2♦; Par -620: EW 4♥=

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
3♥	1NT	2♦	Pass
	Pass	4♥	All Pass

Some North players will choose to open 1NT with this soft 15-count. When East shows the majors with whatever gadget his partnership uses (2♦ is an example here), West can invite to the heart game, and East, knowing where all the high-card strength will be located on this deal, may well accept. Passing 3♥ is also acceptable.

Despite the 5-0 trump split, 4♥ plays exceedingly well. North is on lead; say a low trump is chosen to cut down on ruffs; the bad split is revealed. No matter: West wins cheaply in hand, takes the spade finesse, cashes the ♠A and ruffs a spade. Next comes the ♣K, the ♦K, a diamond to the ace and the ♣A. When declarer next ruffs a club in dummy, that brings his uninterrupted total to eight tricks. A spade is now ruffed with the remaining trump, overruffed by North, but there is no way to stop declarer from taking two more trump tricks in dummy. Making four.

At tables where North opens 1♥ however, E/W will be deflected from the heart game. East will overcall 1♠, and West will have a difficult decision to make. A 1NT advance is reasonable, a choice that might end the auction. With best play by both sides, West can manage eight tricks.

Board 26
East Deals
Both Vul

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

♠ A 8 4 3	♠ —	♠ —
♥ A 10 8 7	♥ —	♥ —
♦ —	♦ —	♦ —
♣ J 10 7 5 3	♣ —	♣ —

N 2♥; NS 1N; EW 2♦; NS 2♣; E 1♠; S 1♥;
Par +110: N 2♥=

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1♠	1NT	1♦	Dbl
Pass		Pass	Pass

Don't like this auction? Neither do we. There are lots of detours that might occur. North might choose to pass rather than bid 1NT at his first turn. South might pull 1NT to 2♣ to emphasize the light, shapely nature of the hand. West might persist with with 2♦. North might double that. There can easily be some fireworks on this scrappy partscore deal.

1NT is easy, of course. North has five clubs and the two major-suit aces.

Board 27
South Deals
None Vul

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

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

EW 4♠; EW 4♥; NS 3♣; EW 1N; NS 1♦;
Par -300: NS 5♣x-2

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1♠	2NT	3♦	Pass
4♦	Pass	4♠	All Pass

Some folks always seem to upgrade their 19-counts into the 2NT range (20-21 HCP), but there's no particular reason to do so with this West construction, and 1♠ is fine, planning to bump a 1NT response to 2NT or 3NT.

When North climbs into the auction with an Unusual 2NT to show the minors, how should East react? A jump to 4♠ typically shows a weak raise, while a simple 3♠ is typically used to show a mildly constructive three-card raise. East's hand is too good for either action, so a conventional 3♦ raise can be employed instead. The "unusual vs. unusual" defense allows the opening side to make use of the minor-suit information provided by the overcaller. A "cuebid" of the lower suit (3♣ in this case) would show an invitational or better hand with lower major, i.e., heart length, while a "cuebid" of the higher suit (3♦, as in the example auction) shows an invitational or better hand with the higher major, spades.

West's hand is too strong to simply move to 4♠, however, as slam is still possible, so a 4♦ control bid shows extra values. But East, who stretched slightly on the last round, lacks a heart control, and retreats to 4♠, having expressed his values adequately.

There's not much to the play, as East will lose two trump tricks and the ♥A, making four.

Board 28
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

EW 4♥; E 3♠; NS 2N; W 2♠; NS 3♦;
NS 1♣; Par -420: EW 4♥=

In third seat, should East open 1♥ or 3♥? In first or second seat, the 3♥ option is much more attractive, but as this hand is a maximum for a three-level preempt, some East players may choose 1♥ instead.

Over a 3♥ opening, South should try 4♦. There are obvious/possible downsides to such an action, but passing is cowardly. 4♦ may well end the auction, and South will finish down one, losing two spades and two clubs. But minus 100 may not be a terrible score, as E/W can take 10 tricks playing in hearts, although this requires a successful finesse of South's ♣J. Getting to 4♥ is extremely pushy, but any East player in 3♥ should lose just one heart, one diamond and one club.

Over a 1♥ opening, South can start with a 2♦ overcall. West, as a passed hand, might try a 2♠ advance (or a negative double). East will retreat to 3♥, and South must weigh whether to proceed or give up.

Board 29
North Deals
Both Vul

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

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

EW 2N; N 2♦; EW 2♣; EW 1♥; S 1♦;
Par -120: EW 2N=

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♥	Pass
?			

What should West do when East rebids 2♥? Some players always steer to the (presumed) 5-2 fit and bid 2♠. Others hope that partner is 5-5 and pass 2♥. Others still bid 2NT even though this hand is not strong enough for that action; 2NT should be invitational, and West has but 9 HCP.

On this particular layout, 2NT happens to be the winner, and there will be result merchants who will justify their choice by entering +120 into their private score card, but if they had gone down two vulnerable, we suspect that they would just quickly forget about the deal. Nevertheless, developing a consistent approach to these types of sequences is good for partnerships; reflexively bidding 2NT with non-fitting 9-counts isn't a long-term winner.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 10 7
♥ Q 9 7 2
♦ K 10 8 6
♣ 10 9

♠ 9 2
♥ A J 10 8 4
♦ Q 5 4
♣ Q 7 5



♠ 4 3
♥ K 5 3
♦ 7 3 2
♣ K J 6 4 2

♠ A K J 8 6 5
♥ 6
♦ A J 9
♣ A 8 3

West	North	East	South
		1♠	Pass
2♠	Pass	4♠	All Pass

With a prime, shapely 17-count, South should just boost to game. In 4♠, South has a heart loser, a club loser and a possible loser in diamonds. But if the defense doesn't get their heart trick at the outset (and it's not clear to lead the ♥A), declarer may be able to discard the heart loser on the fourth round of diamonds if he can get the suit right.

On a spade or club lead, declarer wins, draws trumps in two rounds and hooks West for the ♦Q. In this variation, declarer makes 12 tricks, a result that will be common we suspect.

NS 5♠; NS 4N; NS 5♦; NS 1♥;
Par +450: NS 4♠+1

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 3
♥ A K Q 7 4 2
♦ A K 8
♣ A K 10

♠ 9 5
♥ 6 5 3
♦ J 10 9 7 6
♣ 8 6 5



♠ Q 8 7 6 4 2
♥ J 10
♦ Q
♣ Q 9 4 2

♠ A K J 10
♥ 9 8
♦ 5 4 3 2
♣ J 7 3

West	North	East	South
			Pass
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♣
Pass	6♥	All Pass	

N/S should get to slam on these cards, but anyone who tells you there's an easy way to do so is looking at the hand records. Assuming natural methods after the strong 2♣ opening and waiting 2♦ response, North shows hearts and South shows spade values. 3♥ confirms at least six cards in the suit, and North raises to game with the doubleton heart.

North has a three-loser hand, so probing for slam is reasonable after this start, but North is also aware that South did not bid 2♠ directly over 2♣, showing K-Q-x-x-x or better. That means that South's spades are broken and/or fewer than five cards in length. When Roman key card Blackwood (4NT) reveals that South has the ♠A (5♣), South could elect to simply bid 6♥ and hope that another trick is available for slam (the ♠K or a minor-suit queen). When dummy appears, North's optimism is rewarded, as the ♠K is available for the slam-going trick, assuming trumps behave.

Should North have bid 5NT first to confirm all the key cards and ask for specific kings? Normally, yes, but North is looking at both minor-suit kings and knows that South may be hesitant to show the ♠K via 6♠ because it's above the agreed suit, hearts. Unable to count 13 tricks in any case, settling for 6♥ is reasonable, although matchpoint pigs might angle for 6NT.

With trumps 3-2, 6♥ is easy with six trump tricks and the A-K of the other three suits.

Notice that 13 tricks are available in notrump because the ♠Q is inside. But why does 7♥ fail? Because an opening spade lead from East would destroy declarer's ability to enjoy the spade finesse; declarer could win the ♠J at trick one in dummy and cash the ♠A for a pitch, but the ♠K would get ruffed by West. Even though declarer can overruff, there's an inescapable minor-suit loser at the end.

NS 7N; NS 6♥; NS 5♠; NS 5♣; NS 4♦;
Par +2220: NS 7N=

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

	♠ N	
♠ W		♠ E
	♠ S	

N 4♥; NS 3N; NS 3♠; S 3♥; NS 4♣; NS 2♦;
Par +420: N 4♥=

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣	2♦	Pass
Pass	Dbl	All Pass	

Back-to-back 23-counts for North!

Left to their own devices, N/S will likely arrive in 3NT after the sequence 2♣[strong, artificial]-2♦[waiting]; 2NT[22-24 semi-balanced]-3NT. But let's say East dares to inject a 2♦ overcall, even at unfavorable vulnerability, in an attempt to disrupt the N-S auction. N-S might simply brush this aside and get to 3NT anyway, but a path to punish East for his insolence exists.

When a strong 2♣ opener is overcalled, many pairs have the agreement that a double by responder shows a very poor hand, while passing shows some values. With a flat 6-count, passing is South's choice in this scheme. The 2♣ opener can then reopen with a double to show a strong, balanced hand (22+ HCP). On this sequence, South might well pass, hoping for the magic +500 due to the vulnerability.

South's wish comes true, as the defense scores two spades, two hearts, two diamonds and a club for down two; plus 500 is better than any game score N/S can make.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

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

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

	♠ N	
♠ W		♠ E
	♠ S	

EW 4N; EW 4♣; EW 2♥; E 2♦; EW 1♠;
W 1♦; Par -430: EW 3N+1

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♣	1♥
Dbl	Pass	1NT	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

Although the quality of South's heart suit is poor, the good outside values make this overcall normal. After West's negative double, strongly suggesting four spades, East rebids 1NT with heart well-stopped (an understatement). Should East pass for penalty instead? Questionable. West's negative double could contain as few as 6 HCP, making defending a one-level contract a dicey affair. The fact that West has 12 HCP is coincidental.

Should West simply bid 3NT (instead of 2NT) over 1NT? Many will do so, but it may depend on partnership style. If the partnership regularly opens borderline 11- and 12-counts, inviting first is prudent.

Against 3NT, South has a terrible time on opening lead, as most anything blows a trick. And every time South regains the lead, it just gets worse. East can actually make an overtrick if he guesses to play a low spade from hand to catch South's singleton ace.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

	♠ N	
♠ W		♠ E
	♠ S	

EW 5♠; EW 5♥; EW 4♦; EW 2N; EW 2♣;
Par -450: EW 4♥+1; EW 4♠+1

West	North	East	South
	2♠	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

East has a "good" weak two-bid in spades. If E/W are playing some version of Ogust - in which the 2NT inquiry asks about suit/hand quality - East can show a good suit and a good hand with 3♠. This should be enough for West to take a shot at game. There are no guarantees that this will work, of course, but the West hand offers various trick sources and a mild trump fit.

The play in 4♠ is simple. With the ♠K cooperating, declarer will make an overtrick; the defense can only score the ♣A K.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

♠ Q 6
♥ 6 4 2
♦ A Q 10 8 7 4
♣ K 3

NS 2♦; NS 1♥; Par +90: NS 1♦+1

Some South players will open with a weak 2♦, if available. Yes, there are 11 HCP, making it a maximum in context, but the hand contains a lot of losers. This action will likely end the auction.

Other Souths will open 1♦, and after a 1♥ response from North, rebid 2♦. If North knows that his partner might open garbage such as the actual South construction, he might well decide that discretion is the better part of valor and pass. After all, opener didn't raise hearts, didn't bid 1♠, and didn't bid 2♣: the hands do not fit. If you bid 2NT here, you get what you deserve. Where are the tricks coming from?

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

♠ 10 7 6 5 2
♥ J 9 7 5
♦ A 10 7 6
♣ —

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

This will be a popular sequence, although some Easts will prefer a direct 3NT at their second turn.

At first glance, it looks like declarer will struggle, as clubs and hearts do not behave. Even with the ♠A Q favorably placed from declarer's point of view, that's only eight tricks: two spades, three hearts and three clubs. How to make an extra trick?

A double-dummy line exists, though some declarers may stumble onto it. On, say, a low spade lead from South, North wins the ace and continues with the queen. East wins, but before testing clubs, tries the ♦Q to see what the defenders do, as a club is pitched from dummy. If South ducks, North wins the king. A heart exit is won in hand, and now three rounds of clubs puts South under extreme pressure. If South releases two spades (a heart is fatal, as declarer can pick up the suit), declarer can next cash the ♠J, the ♥Q and the ♥10 covered by the jack and ace. A fourth round of hearts puts South on lead, endplaying him. South can cash the ♦A but must then concede a diamond to declarer at the end.

EW 3N; EW 3♥; EW 3♣; EW 1♠; EW 1♦;
Par -600: EW 3N=