

ACBL-wide Senior Pairs Game #1

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Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

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

E/W pairs who get to 4♥ will score best, as 10 tricks are available on the layout, but getting to game will be difficult with 13 HCP opposite 9, especially after a 1♣ opening from East.

But what about South? After East's 1♣ opening, some Souths will stay silent, but others may risk a 1NT overcall. (A takeout double is poor because of the doubleton heart.) In those cases, West may double for penalty. That contract is down three, but North may run from the double. N/S pairs that are able to land in clubs (the suit East opened!) will be fine; even 2♦ (likely doubled) isn't bad. When N/S get to a minor-suit contract, E/W will need to compete in hearts to protect their matchpoint equity.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

The powerful South hand presents an awkward rebid after a 1♣ start. If 1♣-1♥, 3♣ is possible but a mild understatement of the hand's strength. Some might try a fancy 2♠ jump shift instead, but that carries its own risks. Those Souths content with 3♣ may get a welcome 4♣ raise from North, and after a 4♠ control bid, N/S should eventually get to 6♣. Holding the spade tenace, some Souths will convert to 6NT at this form of scoring. Yes, E/W might compete in spades and deflect N/S from slam with auctions such as Pass-Pass-1♣-1♠; Dbl-3♠. A penalty of 800 is available, but some Souths will settle for 3NT, red vs. white.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

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

With a poor-quality suit and scattered outside honors, a weak 2♦ opening by South is not a thing of beauty, but it will be the choice for some. Many Norths will instead get to open 2NT, but regardless of how the early auction goes, 3NT by North will be a popular contract.

More aggressive pairs will aim higher, with 6♦ and 6NT in the picture, although North must declare to avoid a lethal heart lead from West. Playing in slam will require some good guessing, as there are just 11 top tricks. A finesse in hearts or clubs is available for trick 12, but the decision as to which suit to try must be taken before all the spade and diamond winners are cashed, else declarer risk going down more than one.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A Q 8 7 3
♥ A 10 3
♦ Q 9
♣ A 9 3

♠ K 9 5 4 2
♥ J 6 4 2
♦ 7 4 3 2
♣ —

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10
♥ K
♦ A J 10 6 5
♣ K 10 7 5 4 2

♠ J 6
♥ Q 9 8 7 5
♦ K 8
♣ Q J 8 6

Where West opens 1♠, East will respond 1NT, but where West opts for a 1NT opening instead, East can initiate a transfer to hearts with 2♦. In either scenario, South will be in the auction, with a two-suited 2NT call being a likely candidate for many. If West passes, North will get to express a 3♦ preference. East will compete, either by bidding hearts or, perhaps, by doubling. If West risks accepting a heart transfer directly over 2NT, 4♥ might be reached. The friendly heart layout makes 4♥ (and even 3NT!) makeable from the West side, while East can take only nine tricks in hearts if the defense collects its club ruffs.

Board 5

North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 3
♥ K 10 9 8 7 3
♦ A K 8 5 3
♣ 6

♠ 10 9 6 5 2
♥ 5
♦ Q 10
♣ K Q 7 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K 8 7
♥ A 6 4 2
♦ 9 6
♣ 9 8 4

♠ Q J 4
♥ Q J
♦ J 7 4 2
♣ A J 10 2

Some will open the “quacky” East hand, others (even those who normally open 12-counts) will decline on this particular pile of ... cards. The auction might develop several ways. If East opens (say) 1♦ and South makes a takeout double, West will offer 1♥ and North can show spades. West will eventually confirm a diamond fit. This type of sequence may land E/W in diamonds instead of hearts, even if West jumps to show a diamond-heart two-suiter. Other auctions will feature South opening 1♣ (1♥?! in third seat, where West can employ an unusual 2NT to show a red two-suiter. Again, E/W might well land in diamonds. Even when West gets to open 1♥ or 2♥ in fourth seat, West’s eventual rebid in diamonds risks losing the 6-2 heart fit. E/W pairs who manage to play in hearts (even a partscore) will do well.

Board 6

East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K 6 4 2
♥ Q 4
♦ A J 8 2
♣ 7 4 2

♠ A Q 10
♥ A K 10 6 3
♦ 10 9
♣ K 8 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 7 5 3
♥ —
♦ Q 7 6 5 4 3
♣ A J 3

♠ J 8
♥ J 9 8 7 5 2
♦ K
♣ Q 10 9 5

Easts who open 2♥ on this unsuitable collection will likely play there and get what they deserve, finishing down three vulnerable. At most tables, North will get to open after three passes. Some Norths will choose 1♥, and after a 1♠ response, make a three-card raise ending the auction. South declarers who guess to play trumps by playing low to the ♠Q may take nine tricks. Where North opens 1NT, South may try to get the partnership to a diamond partscore. In 3♦, declarer must again guess spades by playing low to the queen instead of the 10 on the first round. South can, of course, decide to pass 1NT instead. Stayman isn’t an option with the South hand, as there’s no good way to proceed if North replies with the expected 2♥. Although the double-dummy analysis says 3NT is technically makeable for N/S, good luck bidding it or bringing it home: You’ll need mirrors.

Board 7

South Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 7 5
♥ 7
♦ A Q J 5 4 3
♣ Q 10 8

♠ Q 10 9 6 2
♥ 10 8 3
♦ K 6
♣ 7 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 3
♥ Q J 9 6 5 4 2
♦ 8 2
♣ J 5 4

♠ A K 8 4
♥ A K
♦ 10 9 7
♣ A K 9 6

At tables where South begins with 2♥/3♥, the auction will likely continue with two passes, with East doubling. (3NT instead is a bit limp with a prime 21-count.) West might try 5♦ in response to this, though 4♦ will get some votes. Over the 5♦ jump, East may well guess to bid slam in diamonds or notrump. What if South passes initially? West has a textbook weak two-bid in diamonds, for pairs who use that method. East can start a Blackwood sequence to drive to slam.

West Deals
None Vul

Board 8

Best Deals

None Vul

♠ K 10
♥ 8 6 4
♦ A K 7 6
♣ 10 8 7 2

♠ A 9 8 5 4 3 2
♥ J 5
♦ 4 3
♣ K 9

W N E S

♠ Q 6
♥ K 3
♦ Q J 9 5
♣ A J 6 4 3

♠ J 7
♥ A Q 10 9 7 2
♦ 10 8 2
♣ Q 5

With West dealing, a common sequence here will be 3♠-All Pass. Declarer will lose the obvious five tricks (a spade, a heart, two diamonds and a club) for down one. Some Wests, unimpressed by the quality of the spade suit and the “flat” 7-2-2-2 distribution, may opt for 2♠ instead. If that succeeds in silencing N/S – a real possibility – those West players will grab most of the matchpoints.

North Deals
E-W Vul

Hand 9

North Deals
V Vul

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

N

W

E

S

♠ K 8 2
♥ K 9 6
♦ Q 8 7 6 3
♣ 9 2

A large number of tables will hear the auction 1NT-All Pass. If North guesses to play East for the doubleton $\spadesuit A$, eight tricks are possible. Many declarers will finish with just seven, however. Note that it's a losing proposition to make invitational raises in notrump with hands like South's. Flat 8-counts typically aren't enough opposite a 15-17 1NT. If responder's five-card suit offered a trick source, such as A-K-J-10-x, responder could reasonably risk an invitation in that case.

East Deals
Both Vul

Hand 10

West Deals

South Vul

♠ A K 5 4
♥ A 7 6 4
♦ 3 2
♣ A 7 5

♠ 8 3
♥ 9
♦ A K 10 7 6 4
♣ 10 9 6 4

♠ Q 10 9 2
♥ Q J 10 3 2
♦ 8
♣ K Q 2

♠ J 7 6
♥ K 8 5
♦ Q J 9 5
♣ J 8 3

Some aggressive Wests might choose to open 1♥, but most will pass. In third seat, few West players will resist the textbook 2♦ preempt, with some even trying 3♦. North will have an easy takeout double in either case. And at this vulnerability, South will do best to convert the double to penalty. Souths who instead try a natural 2NT (assuming that choice is systemically possible) will find themselves in a no-play contract.

In a diamond contract by West, N/S should score six tricks on defense, which is guaranteed if North begins by cashing the four quick tricks at the outset.

South Deals
None Vul

Hand 11

South Deals
Game Vul

♠ —
♥ J 10 5 4 2
♦ Q J 9 3
♣ 10 8 7 5

♠ Q 8 6 3 2
♥ A K 6
♦ 4 2
♣ Q 9 4

W N E S

♠ A 9
♥ 8 3
♦ A K 10 8 6 5
♣ A K 3

♠ K J 10 7 5 4
♥ Q 9 7
♦ 7
♣ J 6 2

The South hand looks like a normal, weak 2♠ opening, but from there, the auction can turn ugly for N/S. After West and North pass, the spotlight turns to East. With a prime 18-count and a good six-card suit, a 3♦ balance doesn't do justice to the hand, so many Easts will opt for a double instead, planning to correct a constructive 3♥ advance to 3NT, or overrule a lebensohl 2NT (a relay to 3♣) by bidding 3♦ instead to show extra values and diamond length. West will happily convert the double to penalty. In spades, South can manage to take just four tricks on this layout, allowing E/W to collect 800. For E/W pairs who elect to declare, the maximum plus score is in notrump where 11 tricks are available for 460.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 8 7 3
♥ Q J 10 5
♦ J 8 6 3
♣ 8 2

♠ Q 6
♥ A K 7 6
♦ Q 9 5
♣ Q J 10 4



♠ 5 4
♥ 9 8 4 3
♦ A K 4 2
♣ 7 6 5

♠ A K J 10 9 2
♥ 2
♦ 10 7
♣ A K 9 3

At many tables, the auction will see West (dealer) pass, North open 1♣, East overcall 1♠, and South make a negative double. From there, there will be some differences. Some West players will deem their hand to be too weak to raise spades; after they pass, North will bid 2♥, and East will continue with 2♠. This should end the bidding, especially at these colors, though some aggressive N/S pairs may compete to the three level. They'll regret it, as 3♥ will fail by two tricks vulnerable. Where West raises to 2♠ over South's negative double, East may make a game try or jump to game directly. Against a spade contract, it's critical that the defense lead a round of trumps (one high diamond is OK, too). Otherwise, declarer has enough entries to ruff both low clubs in dummy. Plus 420 will be a great score for E/W, though plus 170 shouldn't be bad either, as best defense holds East to nine tricks.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ 9 6
♥ J 9 8 5
♦ A J 10 3
♣ Q J 5

♠ J 7 5 3 2
♥ Q 10 7 6 4
♦ 9 8
♣ 8



♠ A Q 8
♥ 3 2
♦ K Q 6 5 2
♣ A K 7

♠ K 10 4
♥ A K
♦ 7 4
♣ 10 9 6 4 3 2

South will get to open 1♦ at most tables, with the idea of rebidding 2NT on the next round to show 18-19 HCP. Should North respond to 1♦? This is a matter of partnership style. At matchpoints especially, finding a potential major-suit fit is valuable enough to justify responding with hands such as this. If North responds 1♠, what might happen? If opener rebids 2♦, North can pass and hope that the six-card fit and singleton club in dummy makes the contract playable. If South rebids 1NT, North can try 2♥, which is nonforcing for pairs who play some version of New Minor Forcing. And if South rebids 2NT, North can use whatever conventional gadget is available to the partnership (such as NMF) to get to 3♠ on the 5-3 fit. 1♦ is makeable on this layout, but so is 3♠.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

♠ K 5 4 3
♥ Q 10 7
♦ Q 4 3 2
♣ 7 6

♠ J 9
♥ A J 3
♦ J 8
♣ K Q J 5 4 2



♠ Q 10 7
♥ 9 8 6 5
♦ A 10 9 7
♣ A 10

♠ A 8 6 2
♥ K 4 2
♦ K 6 5
♣ 9 8 3

There are several different ways the auction might develop after North opens 1♣ in fourth seat. Against a silent E/W, South may respond 1♦ or 1♥, depending on partnership tastes. After either, North will usually opt for 2♣. If South continues with 2NT, game in notrump should be reached. South's intermediates make an invitational 2NT an attractive option. Understandably, some N/S pairs will finish in a club contract. It's even possible that some Norths will consider a raise to 2♥ over a 1♥ response, but this will make it difficult to reach the premium spot.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K Q 10 9 7 6 5 3
♥ J
♦ 10 5 2
♣ 4

♠ 8 4
♥ 9 6 3
♦ A 9 7 3
♣ Q J 10 8



♠ J
♥ A K Q 8 7 4
♦ K J
♣ K 6 5 3

♠ A 2
♥ 10 5 2
♦ Q 8 6 4
♣ A 9 7 2

At many tables, the auction will see West overcall South's 1♥ opening with 4♠. There will be some votes for 3♠, too, but the decent eight-card suit and favorable vulnerability will push more Wests into the 4♠ camp. If 4♠ is passed back to South, a tough decision must be made. Passing is probably right most of the time (and works here, as West has only nine tricks in spades), but some Souths will be unable to resist competing. Note, however, that whether South attempts 4NT (as some sort of takeout), or 5♣, North may well retreat to hearts. 5♥ is down one when West leads the singleton club and gets a ruff. The same is true, of course, if South tries a unilateral 5♥. Congratulations to any N/S pair who successfully makes it to 5♣ and plays there.

Board 16West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A K Q 5 3
♥ A
♦ K 6 4 2
♣ J 6 5

♠ J 9
♥ Q J 10 5 2
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ Q 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
♥ K 9 8 6 4 3
♦ Q J 5
♣ A 9 8 7

♠ 10 8 7 6 4 2
♥ 7
♦ A 10
♣ K 10 3 2

After West opens 1♠, how should East respond? The hand is too good for a preemptive raise to 4♠, and 2♠ is an absurd underbid. An invitational raise – either with a natural 3♠ or a conventional gadget – is more accurate, and there will even be some Easts who force to game via Jacoby 2NT or related convention. The more aggressive East's response, the more inclined West will be to make a slam move. If the duo discovers that East has a second-round club control, slam could be reached. But 4♠ will be a popular contract. Question: Say you're South, and the opponents sail into 6♠. Would you take a seven-level sacrifice?

Board 17North Deals
None Vul

♠ K 7 6
♥ K 7 5 4 2
♦ A 3
♣ A K Q

♠ 10
♥ J 8 6
♦ J 9 7 6 4 2
♣ J 9 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 8 3 2
♥ A Q
♦ 10 5
♣ 8 7 3 2

♠ J 9 5 4
♥ 10 9 3
♦ K Q 8
♣ 10 6 5

After South opens 1♠ in third seat, West's hand is too strong for a 1NT overcall (or an ugly 2♥), so double is best. East will advance with 1NT. Although 2♥ is a possible second-round action for West, that call typically suggests an extra-value hand with primary hearts, so instead, a raise to 3NT is an attractive alternative. Even with the 5-3 heart fit, 3NT is a much better contract on this layout than 4♥, as the defense can engineer a spade ruff in a heart contract. When East declares 3NT, the plan will be to set up some heart tricks. Even when South makes the best lead of a diamond, declarer can still succeed here, although it will take some careful play. After winning the opening lead of a club or a diamond in dummy (West), declarer should play a low heart from table. South will win the trick, but regardless of how South continues, declarer should win and play another round of low hearts. After declarer cashes their winners, South will forced to concede a spade trick at the end.

Board 18East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 10 3 2
♥ A K
♦ K Q 10 8 3
♣ Q J 7

♠ A K Q 4
♥ Q 9 8 2
♦ A 2
♣ 9 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 5
♥ J 10 7 3
♦ J 9 7 6 4
♣ 4 3

♠ J 8 7 6
♥ 6 5 4
♦ 5
♣ A K 10 8 2

After West opens 1NT in third seat, the auction could continue in several ways. Despite the unfavorable vulnerability, some Norths might try to show a major two-suiter via a conventional gadget. Enterprising E/W pairs might go for the matchpoint gold of +200 by doubling South's heart preference: 2♥ will fail one trick if the defense plays trumps at every opportunity. Where North stays silent, East must choose what to do, if anything, in response to 1NT. Some will pass, and some will explore for better strain/level. After a Stayman inquiry reveals that West does not possess a four-card major, East can try 2NT, likely ending the auction, as West has a minimum. Nine tricks are available in notrump if West plays a diamond to the 10 at some point.

Board 19South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 7
♥ 8
♦ A Q J 10 8 7 5 4
♣ 8 2

♠ A K 9 8 4
♥ J 5 4
♦ 9
♣ A 10 7 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 5 3 2
♥ A 10 6
♦ 3 2
♣ K Q 6 5

♠ Q 6
♥ K Q 9 7 3 2
♦ K 6
♣ J 9 4

Another eight-card suit for West! Both 3♦ and 4♦ preempts by West will see North overcall in spades or perhaps make a takeout double. Either scenario makes 4♠ by North or South a likely contract. There's not much to the play in 4♠. With the black suits behaving, the only (low) hurdle declarer must negotiate is in the heart suit. Playing East for both heart honors is indicated after West's preempt.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 6 2
♥ J 7 5 2
♦ Q 9 8 7 2
♣ 9 2

♠ 7 5
♥ Q 8 6 4
♦ 10 6 3
♣ Q 7 5 4

♠ K 4 3
♥ 9 3
♦ A K 4
♣ A K J 10 6

♠ A Q J 10 9 8
♥ A K 10
♦ J 5
♣ 8 3

At most tables, East will open 1♣ in third seat with the idea of jumping to 2NT on the next round. South will overcall 1♠, which will be passed back to East. To show a balanced 18-19 HCP with a spade stopper, it's no longer necessary for East to jump to 2NT in this case, as 1NT gets the job done. (1NT in this position does *not* show a balanced 12-14 HCP.)

The offensive nature of South's values strongly suggests continuing with 2♠; South has seven tricks in hand with spades as trumps. This will likely end the auction, though some stubborn East players may try 3♣.

2♠ by South makes easily, while 3♣ by East fails by a trick.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 9 7 4
♥ 8 7 3
♦ K 10 9 6 5
♣ 10 6

♠ 6
♥ Q J 10 6 4
♦ Q J 8 3 2
♣ K 3

♠ J 10 8 5 3 2
♥ K 2
♦ 4
♣ Q 8 7 5

♠ A K Q
♥ A 9 5
♦ A 7
♣ A J 9 4 2

Tempted by the favorable vulnerability, some Easts may risk 2♠ in second chair. With a powerhouse, South must begin with a double. North can advance with a constructive 3♥ (for those using lebensohl), but jumps to 4♥ will be popular, too. Blackwood sequences can then propel N/S to the six level in hearts (although North's heart length may be unclear to South) or notrump (the favorite with so many values in spades). Where South gets to open 2♣ undisturbed, South will follow with a 2NT rebid. North can transfer to hearts and then bid diamonds at the four level to show values and the two-suited nature of the hand. Many pairs don't have clear agreements on how opener can show a preference to the major and keep slam in the picture, but here, South can simply drive to 6♥ or 6NT with a Blackwood sequence or just a blast to the six level.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 8 7
♥ 8 7 2
♦ J 5
♣ A K J 7 5

♠ 9 3
♥ J 5 3
♦ 10 8 6 4
♣ 9 8 6 3

♠ A 10 5 4
♥ A K 10 9 6
♦ K 9
♣ Q 4

♠ K Q 6 2
♥ Q 4
♦ A Q 7 3 2
♣ 10 2

After East opens 1♥, some Souths will risk an off-shape takeout double or a 2♦ overcall with a poor suit. Not recommended, but your mileage may vary. Regardless of South's action, West has an easy 2♥ raise. East can make a game try, though might not do so if South doubled or overcalled on the previous round. It's not clear that most E/W pairs will reach game: There will be quite a few E/W pairs in partscore on this deal.

Unless South specifically leads a club, 11 tricks are available in a heart contract, but it's somewhat lucky. Say South leads the ♠K: East wins, cashes the ♥A K, noting the fall of the ♥Q, and then cashes four rounds of clubs, North helplessly following suit, as declarer sheds two diamonds. The defense can score only a spade and the high trump from there.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

♠ 5 4 3
♥ A 6
♦ J 5 3
♣ K 9 8 5 3

♠ A K Q J 9
♥ 9
♦ A 7 4
♣ J 7 4 2

♠ 10 8 7 2
♥ K 10 7 5 3 2
♦ Q 8
♣ 6

♠ 6
♥ Q J 8 4
♦ K 10 9 6 2
♣ A Q 10

There will be quite a few tables where the auction goes 1♦-1♠; 1NT-2♣ [New Minor Forcing]; 2♥-3NT. (Pairs who instead use two-way checkback will have a similar sequence.)

South has an easy 10 tricks on the layout, whether declarer goes after diamonds or clubs.

This might be the flattest board of the entire set, as most N/S pairs will post +630.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

♠ J 9 7 4
♥ 7 5
♦ A K 5 4
♣ A 4 2

♠ A 10 8 3
♥ K 3 2
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ J 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 2
♥ A J 10 8 6
♦ Q 10 6 2
♣ Q 9 5

♠ K Q 6 5
♥ Q 9 4
♦ J
♣ K 10 8 7 3

After West opens 1♦, and East responds 1♠, West has an obvious raise to 2♠. Should East make a move after that?

The East hand is an aceless 11-count with a poor fit for partner's first suit. What kind of hand would West need to hold to make a game try by East worthwhile? Something like this:

♠ A 9 7 4 ♥ K 5 ♦ 10 9 5 4 ♣ A Q 4.

East would be a favorite to take 11 tricks opposite this perfecto which has no wasted values in diamonds and golden fillers in clubs. If East has a natural 3♣ game try available, that might be an attractive option. On this particular layout, however, eight tricks are the most E/W can manage, so any Easts who invite are likely to go minus.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 10 9
♥ K 3
♦ A Q 8 6 2
♣ A J 10 9

♠ A 6 3 2
♥ J 8 6 5 2
♦ 10 4
♣ 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q J 8 7 4
♥ 10
♦ 7
♣ K 8 7 4 3

♠ 5
♥ A Q 9 7 4
♦ K J 9 5 3
♣ Q 2

This board will feature high-level, competitive bidding at most tables. Over East's 1♥ opening, South will enter the auction with a spade overcall or a two-suited (Michaels) action showing spades and a minor, with the vulnerability fueling the N/S bidding. A possible sequence might be Pass-1♥-1♠-Dbl; 3♠-Pass-Pass-Dbl/4♦. E/W will likely discover the diamond fit at a high level, and many pairs will get to 5♦. Some may get to 6♦ and make it. Another sequence where Michaels is used might be this: Pass-1♥-2♥-Dbl; 3♠-Pass-Pass-Dbl/4♦. Methods matter: Those using Unusual vs. Unusual will define the initial double by West as penalty against at least one of South's suits, but the second double may be nebulous in the context of the auction. Regardless, E/W can still discover the diamond fit.

Finally, some Wests will risk the 5-2 heart fit and be rewarded for their matchpoint greed (+650) if declarer correctly reads the trump position, a real possibility after a Michaels sequence.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

♠ 10 9 8
♥ 7 2
♦ Q 9 4 3
♣ 10 8 7 2

♠ A K J 3
♥ J 10 8 5 3
♦ 7 5
♣ 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6 5
♥ 6 4
♦ K J 10 6 2
♣ Q J 5 4

♠ Q 7 4 2
♥ A K Q 9
♦ A 8
♣ A K 9

Most pairs define 2NT openings as showing 20-21 HCP, so the East hand must be opened 2♣ first with the idea of rebidding 2NT to show 22-24. For pairs who use the popular 2♦ waiting response, that will be West's choice here. East's 2NT follow-up will end the auction at many tables, though there's always a few Wests who won't resist the urge to bid 3NT (or use a puppet Stayman sequence along the way).

The play in 2NT is difficult for declarer, as there are no entries to dummy. The right plan, therefore, is to cash winners in hand and hope that an opponent can be thrown in to provide some extra tricks. Double dummy, declarer needs two rounds of each suit to be played. This reduces the North hand to all major-suit cards, and the South hand to all minors. From there, either opponent can be endplayed. It's not easy single dummy.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q
♥ A 10 8 4 2
♦ A Q 10 6
♣ A 10 5

♠ K J 10 7 3
♥ J
♦ K 8 2
♣ Q J 8 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 6 4 2
♥ 7
♦ J 5 4 3
♣ K 6 3

♠ 9 5
♥ K Q 9 6 5 3
♦ 9 7
♣ 9 7 4

A popular sequence after West opens 1♥ will be for North to overcall 1♠, East to bid 4♥, and South to bid 4♠. E/W pairs who have the discipline to not compete further will collect +50 for their position, as North must lose a heart, two diamonds and a club. There will be some Easts, however, who can't stand to defend with a hand such as theirs, so they'll push to 5♥, taking a phantom save.

Board 28
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ Q J 2
♥ K 9 7
♦ K 10 8 6 5
♣ 9 3

♠ K 8 6 3
♥ Q 8 6 3
♦ Q 3
♣ K 8 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 9 7
♥ A J 5 2
♦ 9 7
♣ J 7 5

♠ 5 4
♥ 10 4
♦ A J 4 2
♣ A Q 10 4 2

If East opens 1♣ in third seat and West responds 1♦, East can easily raise the suit. When this is passed back to North, a balancing double is a choice some will opt for, but E/W will compete to 3♦. With such flat, mirrored distributions, N/S will be unhappy if they get too aggressive after a balancing action, as the vulnerability makes three-level major-suit contracts too expensive. It's fine not to sell to 2♦, but don't go crazy. Some Wests will choose to respond 1NT to a 1♣ opening and will likely manage eight tricks, but this will be an inferior spot compared to the pairs who take 10 tricks playing in diamonds: +130 is better than +120, especially at matchpoints.

Board 29
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ K J 7
♥ Q 9 8 7 5
♦ J 10 5
♣ J 7

♠ 9 4 3
♥ K 10 2
♦ A K 8 7 6
♣ A 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 10 8 2
♥ A J 6 4
♦ 2
♣ Q 10 3

♠ 6 5
♥ 3
♦ Q 9 4 3
♣ K 8 6 5 4 2

New Minor Forcing auctions will be common. For example, 1♦-1♠; 1NT-2♣ [NMF]; 2♠-4♠ will be a popular path to game. Some matchpoint-addicted South players might try 3NT instead. In spades, South has two trump losers and a club loser, so finding the ♥Q is paramount. Say West doesn't give away the show with a heart lead and tries the ♦J instead. One plan to get a count on the deal is for declarer to win the ♦A K (pitching a club) and ruffing a diamond. A club to the ace can be followed by another diamond, declarer ruffing, and West overruffing. If West exits with the remaining club, East will win the king, but then what? A club exit will be ruffed by South, as West scores another overruff. But even if West tries to get out with the remaining trump, declarer will win, draw the outstanding trump from East, and will then know West's exact pattern: 3=5=3=2. South can cash the ♥A and play a heart to the 10 in complete confidence. The established diamond will be the game-going trick.

Board 30
East Deals
None Vul

♠ K 9
♥ 7
♦ J 9 5 2
♣ A J 10 9 8 2

♠ 10 8 6 3 2
♥ 6 5 2
♦ K Q 10 4
♣ K

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7 5
♥ A K
♦ A 8 7 3
♣ Q 7 6 5

♠ Q J 4
♥ Q J 10 9 8 4 3
♦ 6
♣ 4 3

At tables where East preempts 3♥ and South overcalls 3NT, the auction will likely end there. Double dummy, the defense can prevail by cashing the ♣A on the go and continuing with the ♣J. But many Wests will obediently lead the singleton heart at trick one, giving declarer a (slim) chance to bring the contract home, one that hinges on a particular layout of the spade suit. After winning the ♥K, declarer ducks a round of spades. If West wins the king and then tries the ♣A and the ♣J, declarer wins the queen, cashes the ♠A and plays another spade. East wins the trick perforce and has no entry to West's hand. Yes, it's all a bit double dummy, but it works if West started with the ♠Q 9 doubleton, too. Why shouldn't declarer cash the ♠A at trick two? Because it gives West the chance to drop the ♠K. Should West find that play?

Board 31
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 3
♥ A K 10 8 2
♦ 7 5 3
♣ K Q 7

♠ A K 10 7
♥ J 6 5 3
♦ 8 6
♣ J 6 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 8 4 2
♥ Q 9 7
♦ J 9
♣ A 8 4 3

♠ 9 6 5
♥ 4
♦ A K Q 10 4 2
♣ 10 9 2

Pairs who play 2/1 game forcing will have auctions that begin 1♥ by West followed by a 1NT response by East. If 1NT is forcing, West will continue with 2♣, allowing East to finally get diamonds into the auction. (Even those who play 1NT as semi-forcing might continue with 2♣ too.) Standard American bidders might try an immediate 2♦ over 1♥, and if West raises to 3♦, pass. There's not much to the play in a diamond contract, as declarer has just three losers. There will be lots of +130s on the scoresheet.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 9 7 4 3 2
♥ A 6 2
♦ 2
♣ K J 10 4

♠ K Q J
♥ Q 7 5
♦ A Q 9 8
♣ Q 9 8

N
W E
S

♠ A 10 5
♥ J 10 8
♦ J 5 4 3
♣ A 5 3

♠ 8 6
♥ K 9 4 3
♦ K 10 7 6
♣ 7 6 2

At every table where N/S play strong notrumps, the auction will be 1NT-3NT. But the flat nature of both hands renders the contract unmakeable.

Absent a Stayman inquiry by N/S, a major-suit lead by East is logical. Many will choose a low heart. The defenders can clear the suit in three rounds, and when East eventually gets back on lead with the ♦K, the good heart can be cashed. The defense will still get a club trick in the ending, holding declarer to eight tricks.

Minus 50 for N/S will be the typical result.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

♠ A K 8 6 3
♥ 8
♦ Q J 10 2
♣ A K 9

♠ Q 9 7
♥ A 9 6
♦ K 9 8 3
♣ Q 10 3

N
W E
S

♠ 10 5
♥ K 10 5 3 2
♦ A 5
♣ J 5 4 2

♠ J 4 2
♥ Q J 7 4
♦ 7 6 4
♣ 8 7 6

After West opens 1♠ in fourth position, the other players may have nothing to say. After passing initially, North might risk a takeout double (even with the less-than-ideal shape), which will get N/S to 2♥, their top spot. But if North passes a second time, West has too poor of a hand to raise spades, and South doesn't have the tickets to get in to the auction either. 2♥ at this point would just be blind gamble.

There are seven tricks available in 1♠ (four spades, two clubs and a diamond), so +80 E/W will be a common result.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 8
♥ J 10 9 5 2
♦ A 6 4
♣ 8 7 4 2

♠ 10 9 6 5
♥ 6 3
♦ 9 7 3 2
♣ Q J 6

N
W E
S

♠ Q J 3 2
♥ A K 8 7 4
♦ J 8
♣ A 10

♠ A K 7 4
♥ Q
♦ K Q 10 5
♣ K 9 5 3

Over East's 1♦ opening, South may choose to overcall 1♥. When this is passed back to East, a textbook takeout double will be next, one that West may well decide to convert to penalty. This contract rates to fail by two tricks, provided West refrains from a club lead. With no entry to dummy, South must lose a club trick in the play as long as the defense never touches a club while on lead. But there are other subtleties.

The best lead for the defense is a low trump. The idea is to prevent declarer from ruffing any losers with his low trumps. South can win and try the ♠Q, but this rides to East who then cashes the ♦K and continues with a low diamond to West's ace. Sticking to the plan, West exits with the ♥J. South wins and plays the ♠J, but this is simply ducked all around. If another spade is played (what else?), East wins and plays the last spade, allowing West to score his low trump. The ♥10 9 are next followed only then by the last diamond. Declarer ruffs, but is left with only the ♣A 10 and must surrender another trick.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K 9 2
♥ K
♦ A J 8 5 3
♣ A 8 6 2

♠ A J 10 7 5
♥ Q J 10 6
♦ K 7 6
♣ 5

N
W E
S

♠ Q 3
♥ A 9 8 7 4 2
♦ 10 9 2
♣ Q 10

♠ 8 6 4
♥ 5 3
♦ Q 4
♣ K J 9 7 4 3

With two doubleton queens and an unimpressive suit, preempting 2♥ with the South hand is a not a great plan. So West will get to open 1♦ at many tables (1NT is possible, too), and North will overcall 1♠.

When East passes, South can try a natural 2♥ which will be enough to N/S to game. Making 11 tricks will require declarer to guess the heart position. If West leads the ♦A, cashes the ♣A and exits with a low diamond, dummy's king wins the trick. Does South know enough at this point to drop the singleton ♥K? Probably not, but it still looks right to play the ♥Q to the ace as a test: If the king doesn't drop, then the ♠Q can be run through West in the hopes of getting three spade tricks for a diamond discard. That plan works like magic when the king does drop and the ♠K proves to be onside. In fact, if West fails to cash the ♣A before playing a second diamond, declarer will take 12 tricks.

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ K 9 4
♥ K 10 4 3
♦ 10 6 4
♣ 9 7 3

♠ A J 10 7
♥ Q 9 7
♦ Q J 8 7 2
♣ K

N
W E
S

♠ 8
♥ A 8 2
♦ K 9 3
♣ J 10 8 6 5 4

♠ Q 6 5 3 2
♥ J 6 5
♦ A 5
♣ A Q 2

If North opens 1♦ and East overcalls 1♠, what should South do? Some will pass because no call is exactly right. A negative double is off-kilter with this pattern, while a diamond raise carries its own risks. Some West players will raise spades with this rock-bottom hand, and North will certainly pass 2♠ if South did not act initially. But when 2♠ comes back to South, both a balancing double and 3♣ are possibilities, as is passing. Of these choices, those where N/S elect to defend are best, as East will lose three spades, two hearts, a diamond and a club for down two vulnerable on most lines of play.