

ACBL-wide Senior Pairs—Monday Afternoon, March 7, 2016—Set 126026

Bd: 1 ♠ J 9 5 2
 Dir: North ♥ Q 9 7
 Vul: None ♦ K 10 9 5 2
 ♣ A

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

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

East will have to choose between opening 3♥ and 4♥ — the disciplined action may be the three-level preempt, but these days even Seniors tend to think of a number and add one, don't they. South has an ugly set of options over 3♥ — pass, double or bid 4♣. (Some play the latter call as Non-Leaping Michaels, to show clubs and spades.) A 4♥ opening makes South's decision even more uncomfortable. 3♥ comes home if East guesses which finesse to take, while 4♠ is the cheapest minus score for N/S. Successful contracts will be at a premium today.

Bd: 5 ♠ J 8 4 2
 Dir: North ♥ 9 8 3
 Vul: N-S ♦ A K 8 3
 ♣ 3 2

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

♠ 9 6 3
 ♥ K J 7 4
 ♦ 7 6
 ♣ Q 9 8 6

You'd expect E/W to start unopposed: 1♠ - 1NT - 3♣. West will surely bid 3♦ next, and East can now bid 3NT. After a heart lead to the 10 and jack followed by a switch to diamonds, for North to lead a second heart, West is likely to repeat the heart finesse. South does best to win and exit in hearts. Declarer should now run the ♣J or cross to the ♣10, and then give up a diamond or take a risky spade finesse for +600, Anyone racking up a game will surely score well enough, and an unlikely overtrick ought to earn E/W a great result.

Bd: 2 ♠ 7 6
 Dir: East ♥ —
 Vul: N-S ♦ A J 10 8 7 5
 ♣ K Q 8 5 2

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

♠ 5 4
 ♥ A Q 9 4 3
 ♦ K 9 3
 ♣ A 10 4

Another board, another preempt. Many would open 4♠ as East, exploiting the vulnerability. Now if South passes (a card-showing double looks like an overbid), North is quite likely to balance with 4NT. Over this call, South can hardly do less than bid 5NT to get his side to 6♦. A heart lead lets through the slam, but after the lead of ♠A and another spade, declarer has to take a first-round diamond finesse even to escape for down one. Any N/S pair bringing home +600 will score well, but defeating a doubled spade contract may be an easier way for N/S to go plus.

Bd: 6 ♠ K 3
 Dir: East ♥ K Q 6 4 3
 Vul: E-W ♦ J 8 3 2
 ♣ 9 3

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

♠ A Q J
 ♥ 8 2
 ♦ Q 7 5 4
 ♣ J 10 7 4

This board could be passed out at a few tables (I'm unconvinced West is supposed to open in third seat, as he really doesn't want to ask for a club lead that much). But let's assume this doesn't happen — it is hard to write too many interesting things about that auction, after all. So West opens 1♣, North overcalls 1♥ and East can double. If South bids 1NT, will West dare to compete to 2♠? He should: in for a penny in for a pound. E/W may have only a combined 21-count, but they are cold for +140, and that should earn them a fine score.

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

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

♠ Q 6 5 4
 ♥ A 10 8 2
 ♦ K Q 4
 ♣ 7 6

Most Souths will pass this miserable 11-count. West will open 1♣, and North is surely going to jump to 2♥. East is now almost forced to invite game by responding 2NT, because passing looks too cowardly. Thereafter, E/W will find it very hard to reach a making contract in a minor. Since N/S can make 3♥ on very few high cards indeed, I'd expect the occasional score of +530 for N/S or the like. More frequently, they will be on defense, setting their opponents' high-level contract. Diamonds is the best strain for E/W, but please do not ask me how to get there!

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

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

♠ K Q 7
 ♥ J 9
 ♦ K 10 8 4
 ♣ K 9 5 2

South's minor-suit opening (few will pass this 12-count) allows North to respond 1♠. East should refrain from a preemptive overcall with such a sterile side-suit pattern, and bid 2♥. Now there rates to be a battle of the majors. You'd expect N/S to buy the hand in spades, where E/W might — I emphasize might — take their six top winners. Some defenders will lose one of their club winners by setting up a diamond for declarer. Since East can take a remarkable 10 tricks in hearts, the odd N/S pair are surely going to concede a doubled heart partscore or game.

Bd: 4 ♠ 10 9 8
 Dir: West ♥ 9 4 3
 Vul: Both ♦ A 10 8
 ♣ 6 5 4 3

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

♠ 6 4 2
 ♥ Q 6
 ♦ K Q 7 2
 ♣ A K Q 8

Some Souths will get to open a strong notrump in fourth seat, going no fewer than three down if the defenders avoid allowing declarer's ♥Q to score at trick one. The likely alternative results will come from East opening 1♠ in third seat (we've all done worse, haven't we?). Assuming he doesn't do anything too foolish, he should end up in 2♠, taking eight or nine tricks. But if East finds spades, N/S may get to clubs. Best defense maneuvers a trump promotion for +200 against 3♣, but that is not so easy to do. -100 might matchpoint fairly well for N/S.

Bd: 8 ♠ 7 5 3
 Dir: West ♥ A Q 5
 Vul: None ♦ 10 7 6 5 3
 ♣ 9 5

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

♠ K Q 9 2
 ♥ 6
 ♦ A 9 8 4
 ♣ K Q 8 4

E/W will bid and raise hearts, allowing South to double for take-out. West can now re-raise to 3♥, over which no one has any real reason to compete further. N/S can hardly do better than defend 3♥ for down one, since 4♦ can be set, even after an initial heart lead. North may be allowed to play a club to dummy, followed by ace and another diamond. If so, the defenders must shift to spades to hold him to nine tricks. The par spot for N/S, of doubling 3♥ for +100, should earn them a very reasonable pairs result.

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

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

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

Forcing notrump and 2/1 constraints could require South to respond 1NT rather than bid hearts after North opens 1♠. If so, North may consider repeating his spades; but a simple 2♦ call is preferable. Diamonds is the most lucrative strain for N/S, against best defense, as the highly favorable lie of the hearts allows declarer to come to +150 against any defense. Hearts looks better than spades, but 3♥ can be held to nine tricks after a trump lead, while spades has four top losers. Still, I wouldn't be surprised to see 4♥ let through on a club lead; would you?

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

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

♠ Q
 ♥ Q 10 9 7 6 5
 ♦ 4 2
 ♣ Q 8 7 6

North has an emaciated suit, but who passes 12-counts these days, even those where one may be faced with an inconvenient rebid? East will overcall 1♠ or 2♠ over 1♦, depending on style, after which E/W ought then to find a way to climb to 4♠. They are surely going to guess clubs, and might perhaps guess spades, for +650. A heart sacrifice for N/S at the six level costs 800. But some pairs may conceivably buy the contract in 5♥x, where they can escape for down 500 and a fine pairs result.

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

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

♠ Q 9 4
 ♥ 8 2
 ♦ 8 6 5
 ♣ K 8 7 5 2

While 7NT is cold today on the diamond finesse, E/W may bid unopposed: 1♠ - 2♥ - 3♦ - 4NT - Pass. The jump in notrump is quantitative, because West can set diamonds by raising to 4♦ or cuebidding 4♣ in support of diamonds. Both players may have slightly underbid, as 6♦ is a splendid contract, whereas even 4NT might go down on a club lead, if the ♦K is wrong. Even with the sight of all 52 cards, it is hard to see a convincing auction to get E/W to 6♦; in 6♥ on a club lead you should take a diamond finesse before drawing trumps.

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

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

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

After East stretches to open 1♠, West will bid hearts and finish either in 3NT or 4♥. The defense to 3NT should see North kick off with a club, won by declarer in dummy to play hearts. When North wins, his best shift is to a spade (the more natural diamond shift lets through the overtrick). East must rise with the ♠A and is likely then to cross to the ♦A and run hearts, rather than finessing South for the ♦Q. If West declares 4♥ on the ♦8 lead, he should cover in dummy. He can next cross to the ♠A to start trumps, later conceding two club tricks to make his game.

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

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

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

South's aces and void are flaws for opening 2♠, but non-vulnerable his suit quality argues for action. When West overcalls 3♦, North should jump to 4♠ and forget about slam or collecting a penalty. After a light 1♠ opener, N/S might climb to 6♠. After a diamond lead, declarer pitches a heart on the ♦A. He cashes one of the dummy's high trump and plays three rounds of clubs. When declarer regains the lead, he will ruff his last club in dummy, pull the rest of the

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

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

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

North has a respectable 1♥ opener in third seat, the vulnerability arguing against preempting to 2♥. East will now either double or overcall 2♣ — put me down for the latter, since he can expect to get a second chance to bid spades. After South bids 2♥ or makes a negative double, you'd expect E/W to compete to 3♣. N/S do not really have much reason to bid any higher, with less than half the deck, and just an eight-card fit. +110 is the limit for East in clubs, while N/S can't even manage seven tricks in hearts.

trumps and finesse in hearts for his 12th trick. If declares draws all the trumps after the diamond lead, he will need to lead a club to the eight and later finesse in clubs against East's remaining honor in order to lose just one club.

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

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

♠ A K J 6
 ♥ 10 8
 ♦ 9 8
 ♣ Q 8 5 4 2

After hearing a 1♠ response to his 1♥ opener, North can repeat his hearts, raise to 2♠ or bid 2♦ — to be followed by spade preference — to show this general hand pattern, albeit with extras. The 2♥ option is inelegant, but it gets N/S to a heart partscore, for +170 on a top diamond lead. The spade raise might get you too high in that suit, and the 2♦ call could see South bid 2NT at his second turn, after which it would be hard to see N/S going plus. In summary, any N/S pair who finds hearts should score pretty well.

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

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

♠ 8 6 5 3
 ♥ 7 5 2
 ♦ 10 8 5
 ♣ 7 5 4

West has a 2♣ opener, planning either to rebid at spades or notrump, depending on taste. E/W certainly rate to be able to find hearts, then ask for aces, and diagnose the missing keycard, to stop either in 6♥ or 6NT. Given the club weakness, 6♥ is clearly the top spot, since in the suit contract, West's spade honors can take care of the slow club losers. With the ♥K onside, the ♠J dropping, and diamonds 3-3, those who bid to a notrump slam will score unfairly well; as usual, it is always better to be lucky than good.

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

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

♠ 4 2
 ♥ 8 4 3 2
 ♦ 8 3 2
 ♣ 9 8 7 2

The field will be split between those Easts overcalling 1NT over 1♠ and those bidding 2♣ — and yes, a few outliers might even double. The 1NT call should see West bounce to 3NT. After the probable spade lead, declarer will need to find a favorable lie of the diamonds. As the cards lie he should emerge with 10 or 11 tricks. A heart at trick one would hold East to his contract. If East instead overcalls 2♣, that will be passed round to North, who can double. When South removes to 2♥, West is likely to compete to 3♣, and East will collect an unsatisfactory +110.

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

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

♠ K 5 4 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ A K 10 9 4
 ♣ Q 6 2

N/S have no more than game-going values and only a 4-4 spade fit. Thus the majority of the field are going to settle in 4♠, though some will declare it from the North, some from the South seat. You'd imagine South receiving a club lead to the ace and a club continuation. If declarer wins in dummy and runs the ♠J round to West's bare ♠Q, he is down at once. Frankly, this play in the trump suit looks so normal that few declarers will find a successful way home. It is much easier to bring home 3NT today, but surely that can only be calculated with the sight of all 52 cards.

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

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

♠ Q 7
 ♥ Q 8 5 4
 ♦ A 7 5 4
 ♣ Q 10 3

After East opens 1♠, West will produce a limit or Bergen raise. East really has no great slam ambitions here, so he rates simply to drive to 4♠. South should look no further than a heart or club lead, and the defenders' ruff will be lost for good. Once trumps are 2-2, East can immediately claim 12 tricks. There is no possibility for misguessing trumps (is there?), so it seems safe to predict that any club still using traveling scoresheets will see a nearly unbroken run of +480s for E/W. It looks less impressive on the Duplimates...

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

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

♠ A 8
 ♥ 8 7 4 2
 ♦ Q 2
 ♣ A Q 5 4 2

Sometimes the simple approach works best, but there are times for delicate maneuvering. As North, on hearing East open 1♦ and South stretch to overcall 2♣, wouldn't you seriously consider blasting out 3NT and daring East to find the heart lead to beat you? Today, the defenders have just four hearts to cash, but North has only eight tricks and has no better play for a ninth trick than the diamond finesse. If N/S can put on the brakes in a club partscore, they will be well rewarded for their discretion.

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

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

♠ K 8 5
 ♥ J 8 6 2
 ♦ 9 5
 ♣ Q 8 6 2

Both sides have a double fit, which should lead to a highly contested auction. When E/W find diamonds and N/S find spades, it should be simple enough for West to bid on in the minors to at least the three level. It may well be harder for North to work out that his limited extra shape will allow his side to compete successfully in spades. The very favorable lie of the hearts and clubs allows him to come home with +140, perhaps via a club/heart squeeze. 3♦ requires either the club or diamond finesse, but North may solve declarer's problems on opening lead.

Bd: 23 ♠ A Q 9 4
 Dlr: South ♥ 9 7 5
 Vul: Both ♦ A 7 3
 ♣ 10 4 3

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

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

Few Norths will risk opening 1♠ in third chair, vulnerable, so E/W rate to have an unopposed sequence. After East opens 1♥, he will rebid 2♦, whether West has opted to respond 1NT or 1♠ — and you can certainly see the merit in either call. At his second turn, West should give preference to 2♥ rather than try 2NT, since at pairs one strives to go plus rather than look to go plus. Even though the clubs and diamonds lie very favorably for E/W, making +170 in hearts shouldn't score East too badly, as notrump makes no more than eight tricks.

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

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

♠ A
 ♥ Q 10 3
 ♦ A Q 6 3
 ♣ K Q J 3 2

North has a classical 3♠ opener; not too strong, not too weak, just right. Would you risk a double as East now? Many, including me, would do so, but South can redouble and wait to take West to the cleaners. In clubs, declarer will struggle to amass more than five tricks. And hearts doesn't play that much better. Another disaster E/W could experience is if North opens 4♠. Should East double — aggressive but far from unreasonable — South can redouble. North can then collect +1080. N/S are vulnerable.

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

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

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

West has a choice of minor-suit openings and of rebids over East's 1♠ response. Whatever he does, E/W can play 3NT and make +400 or +430 easily enough when the clubs behave themselves. Equally, 11 tricks should not be a challenge in 5♣, with an outside chance of 12 winners if the defenders aren't accurate. Declarer plans to ruff two hearts while drawing trumps, pitching his remaining heart on the top spades, then will try to guess diamonds. However, after a diamond lead ducked, West has to surrender a defensive ruff or lose control.

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

Many Norths will open 1NT, either because they are in range or stretching. Now will South drive to game, invite game, or play 1NT? It may depend on North's skill level — or South's estimate thereof. After the defenders cash five spades on the go, declarer is still by no means sure to take the rest. If North opens the more traditional 1♦, then East can overcall 1♠ and be raised to 2♠, whether South produces a flawed double or 1NT call, or even passes. 2♠ goes down a trick, but can N/S find their way to 3♦ — and bring in the trump suit for one loser? Watch this space.

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

South's aces and playing strength take him out of the range of a 15-17 notrump. After a 1♦ opening bid and 1♠ overcall from West, North will double and East will raise to 2♠. If South bids either 2NT or a non-forcing 3♣, that might end the auction. It feels better to double for takeout instead and raise 3♣ to 5♣. With the diamond and club finesses succeeding, you can take 12 tricks at clubs, 11 at notrump. Still, with a combined HCP total of 24, a few pairs may grind to a halt in partscore, and record embarrassing numbers of overtricks.

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

When West opens 1♠, he may simply be raised to 2♠ and play there. However, North might conceivably put his life on the line and balance with a double, getting his side into very deep trouble. E/W will not even have to double their opponents in 3♥ to get at least +200. This same lie of the cards makes 2♠ easy for E/W. The defenders have to get diamonds going very early to prevent West coming to +140, and probably an average-plus result. North could avoid later problems by doubling 1♠ — but please don't take that as a recommendation for this call.

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

As West, would you respond 1♠ or 1NT to a 1♥ opener? If your partnership raises freely with three trumps, you might prefer not to introduce such feeble spades. Today there is no penalty for finding the 5-2 heart fit instead of the 4-4 spade fit, since hearts break 3-3. With the ♣K outside, both major suits play for +140. A few E/W pairs may miss both major-suit fits and settle in 1NT. After a diamond lead, West should go after clubs not hearts. Now if the defenders establish the ♦Q for him, West can emerge with an unlikely +150 — and nearly all the matchpoints.

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

The combined E/W assets appear to belong in 4♥, with declarer cross-ruffing the minors and eventually giving up a heart, then taking the spade finesse for +480. If West opens 4♥ he may perhaps settle there, unless South finds an exceedingly gutsy balance of 4NT. Should he do so, North might find himself conceding 800. If West opens at the one level, the final contract still rates to be 4♥. At double-dummy, West can take 13 tricks, but few will find the highly unlikely combination of plays required to do so. Deep Finesse is a harsh task-mistress.

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

The question of whether North can open a not-quite strong notrump or go low with 1♣ will swing a lot of matchpoints. If North opens 1♣, South is going to let him play 1NT, whereas facing a 14+ notrump opener from North, South has just enough to transfer into spades and offer a choice of games with a call of 3NT. There are nine easy tricks in notrump today, whether East leads a diamond or not. In 4♠, N/S can duck a club after drawing trumps, and take +620, which ought deservedly to represent a great result for their side.

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

At teams, you'd want to bid the E/W cards to the unbeatable 3NT. A 10th trick may come from establishing a club winner or guessing diamonds well, which will not be a challenge today. At pairs, the decision is far closer, because 4♠ has 10 easy tricks unless the defenders take a club ruff on the go. They can only do that if South is in inspired form on opening lead! If East shows a very strong hand, South is relatively unlikely to try the ♣K at trick one, for it could so easily blow an overtrick for no reason.

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

The N/S bidding sequence will start: 1♠ - 1NT - 2♦; now what? South might consider passing, and not solely because diamonds may play better than spades. The point is that with such a weak hand South might prefer to stop in 2♦ rather than give false preference to spades and see North bid on. That could indeed be the case today. Will North pass 2♠ at his third turn, or will he try for game? While 2♠ is simple enough to make (especially if East leads away from one of his aces at trick one), recording +110 rates to earn N/S a very respectable result.