

ACBL-wide Senior Pairs—Monday Afternoon, March 27, 2017—Set 126572

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

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

♠ K 6
 ♥ Q J 10 8 4 3
 ♦ 6 5
 ♣ K 6 5

South's third seat 2♥ preempt will be doubled by West, not because he wants to, but because he must compete in this position and at this vulnerability. When North raises delicately to 3♥ — passing would be wet, and driving to game too trusting of partner — East has three possible options. Just like Goldilocks and the three bears, 4♠ would be too hot, 3♠ too cold, double (if it means a game try in spades, or both minors planning to correct to a spade call) just right. When West bids 3♠, East can call it a day, and collect +140 for his side.

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

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

♠ 5
 ♥ A J 10 2
 ♦ Q 7 6 4 2
 ♣ 7 4 2

Are you someone who believes minor suits are for children? Here, E/W can bring home 6♣ in a canter, but 3NT loses the first eight tricks — and maybe even the first nine, if declarer plays to make his game. I have absolutely no idea how to bid the E/W cards to slam if East does not open 1♣. Yes, that would be my choice, as well as that of any decent results-merchant, though that doesn't make it right, just successful today. The point is that East has no sensible action if he passes and hears partner open 1♠, since Drury gets in the way.

Board: 2 ♠ J 10 4
 Dlr: East ♥ J 6 4
 Vul: N-S ♦ Q 6 5 4
 ♣ 9 7 2

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

♠ 7
 ♥ A Q 7
 ♦ A J 10 9 7 3
 ♣ Q 4 3

West should overcall 1♠ over 1♦, and hear partner raise to 2♠. If the ♦K were the ♦A, you'd be worth a cuebid raise to 2♦. Now West's extra shape makes him worth a shot at 4♠. If he tries with 3♥, East might well reject, despite holding a near-maximum in HCP. In 4♠, declarer ought to duck the diamond opening lead in dummy. If South wins the ♦J then plays a heart, the hand will be over when West puts up the ♥K. If South continues diamonds, declarer might consider ruffing in and running the ♣J, holding himself to 10 rather than 11 tricks.

Board: 6 ♠ Q 6 2
 Dlr: East ♥ K Q 9 8
 Vul: E-W ♦ 6
 ♣ A K J 8 7

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

♠ J 8 3
 ♥ J 6 4
 ♦ A Q 9 7 5 4
 ♣ 10

Plenty of Souths will open their hand 2♦, conveniently ignoring how playable they are in both majors. With preempting, thrice blest is he who gets his blow in first, and some (fans of Flannery?) may even opt for 3♦. At double-dummy, South can come home in 2♦ via a trump endplay, but few will manage that. By contrast, if West is allowed to open 1♦, North will double. Now E/W might go down in diamonds or spades, or N/S could end up in a low-level partscore in notrump or hearts. Any plus score should be a reasonable result here, especially for E/W.

Board: 3 ♠ Q
 Dlr: South ♥ 7 6 5 4
 Vul: E-W ♦ J 8 7 3
 ♣ J 9 7 5

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

♠ A K 7 6 2
 ♥ Q 3
 ♦ Q 10 5
 ♣ A K 2

The message on this next deal might be "A little learning is a dangerous thing." South must open 1♠, passed round to East, who will surely balance with 2♥. Now some Souths will pass, expecting their partner to balance if they have spade fit. A more educated South might stretch to double for takeout; but North rates to pull the double to 2NT (pick a minor) and despite all the three-three breaks, the defenders can cash the first six tricks in the red suits against 3♣. 2♥ looks likely to make after South's normal top spade lead, doesn't it?

Board: 7 ♠ A Q 8 6
 Dlr: South ♥ Q 8 4 2
 Vul: Both ♦ 8 2
 ♣ Q J 8

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

♠ 9 4 3
 ♥ K 5 3
 ♦ K 7 6 5
 ♣ K 9 7

All the one-level contracts come home here, one way or another, according to Deep Finesse, but I'm betting most tables will find it hard to stay that low. It can be done, though; after North opens, East might overcall 1NT, or East might take a pessimistic position to open 1NT, and play there. But since North might open any of three suits (and even 1♦ perhaps, if using a strong club?) predicting where the music will stop is a fool's game. All right, because you asked so nicely, I'll guess N/S +100, defending diamonds or notrump.

Board: 4 ♠ K 9 8 6 5
 Dlr: West ♥ 9 8 2
 Vul: Both ♦ 4 3
 ♣ Q 9 2

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

♠ A 7
 ♥ K Q J 10 4
 ♦ A K J
 ♣ 8 7 3

The world is divided into those Wests who open 2♦, and those who won't risk losing a major-suit fit by preempting when they have a decent four-carder on the side. If N/S are left to their own devices, you'd expect them to get to 4♥, and even after a diamond lead they seem to have too much work to do there. If South gets to double 2♦, then rebid 2NT, he may play there or in 3NT. After a diamond lead he has nine tricks, but the defenders have six — if they can cash them. However, many Easts will fail to find the club shift at the critical moment.

Board: 8 ♠ J 10 9 8
 Dlr: West ♥ K 10 9
 Vul: None ♦ K 8 7
 ♣ Q 6 3

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

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

Are you a man or a mouse? When East opens 1♣ in third seat, should South come into the auction to show his hearts or even make a takeout double? Personally, I'd stay silent for fear of tipping off declarer to bad breaks; today, that might well be the best policy. If South passes, E/W should locate their 10-card club fit and play 5♣, or perhaps end up in a very delicate 3NT. On the lead of a top diamond against 5♣, East must duck, to freeze the suit. Now he has time to guess trumps, and ruff three times in the West hand, while taking the trump finesse along the way.

Board: 9 ♠ A J 10 4
 Dlr: North ♥ 4 2
 Vul: E-W ♦ A J 10 9 7 4 2
 ♣ —

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

♠ 5 2
 ♥ K 9 5
 ♦ K Q 8 5 3
 ♣ J 8 6

North has more than a minimum opener, of course, with his builders in spades and diamonds giving his hand huge offensive strength. After a 1♦ opener and East's 2NT overcall for hearts and clubs, it will be a case of waiting for the music to stop, as both sides have such a big fit that no one can judge defense accurately. With the heart finesse working, E/W can come home in 6♣ but not 6♥. Meanwhile, N/S might bid 6♦ to make, but whatever their motives, their sacrifice costs less than the opponents' game.

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

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

♠ J 5 2
 ♥ Q 8
 ♦ A Q 10 4 3
 ♣ 9 7 4

After South's response of 1NT to 1♥, North would need the ♦A rather than the ♦K to be worth 3♥. Though N/S appear to belong in partscore, the friendly lie of the cards gives them some prospects of making 4♥, which comes home easily on a spade or heart lead. After a diamond lead, might North win in hand and try a heart to...the eight? The play in 2♥ is far from straightforward, since declarer's target is not at all clear. After a diamond lead North might rise in dummy with ♦A, pitch a club on the ♦Q, and take the heart finesse.

Board: 10 ♠ J 8 4
 Dlr: East ♥ K 10 9 6
 Vul: Both ♦ A Q 9 8
 ♣ Q 6

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

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

You'd expect every West to open 1♣ in third seat, and North will double, East will probably bid 1♠ rather than redouble, and now South should compete to 2♥. (Double by South would not be takeout here, but show spades; with one or both red suits, you bid hearts, then bid again, or double if appropriate.) On the actual hand, E/W seem likely to end up in spades more often than not. The hearts provide a home for the slow club loser, and the diamond ruff in West represents a safe enough route to nine tricks.

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

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

♠ 8
 ♥ A K J 10 8 4 2
 ♦ 2
 ♣ 8 7 6 3

Will East follow Terence Reese's principle that 5-4-2-2 is best for play at suits, especially when he can open 1♦ with an easy rebid? Or is it better to open 1NT to protect the tenaces? Whatever you do, South rates to bid 3♥, and when West passes, East will have to decide whether to balance or sell out. Discretion is the better part of valor today, as making 3♦ requires careful handling. Still, since 3♥ on a non-club lead is extremely hard to defeat, if declarer somehow guesses spades, it might be better to go down in diamonds than defend.

Board: 11 ♠ J 5 2
 Dlr: South ♥ Q 8 7
 Vul: None ♦ A J 8
 ♣ Q 10 7 6

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

♠ 8 3
 ♥ K J 10 9 3 2
 ♦ 7
 ♣ K 9 5 2

Most Souths rate to open 2♥, but some will judge their 6-4 shape and good spots makes their hand a 3♥ preempt. The secret for N/S is to try to keep E/W out, while aiming to go plus in hearts, or at least limit their minus score. East is likely to balance with a double over 2♥, and might even double a raise to 3♥, but might be less inclined to come in over 4♥. Today, E/W can make 4♠, maybe with an overtrick, if they can guess diamonds. So if N/S concede 50 or 100 in hearts, that should matchpoint well enough.

Board: 15 ♠ A Q J 9 8 5
 Dlr: South ♥ A Q
 Vul: N-S ♦ 10 7
 ♣ A Q 6

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

♠ 10 6 4
 ♥ K 9 3
 ♦ 9 8 3 2
 ♣ K 9 4

After two passes, a few Norths might go the whole hog and risk opening 2NT ("Sorry partner, I had two spades in with my diamonds"). Most will settle for a mundane 1♠ opener. Either way, North should play game, and 4♠ is the top spot in theory, because 12 tricks are a virtual certainty on a non-diamond lead. But against 3NT East will surely kick off with a heart. If declarer wins ♥A, crosses to ♣K and runs ♠10, he will emerge smelling of roses with +690 and almost all the matchpoints. No one ever said that pairs tactics involved playing beautiful bridge, did they?

Board: 12 ♠ 4 3
 Dlr: West ♥ A 6 2
 Vul: N-S ♦ K 9 4
 ♣ A K 10 6 3

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

♠ K Q
 ♥ Q 8 3
 ♦ A Q J 10 8 7 5
 ♣ 9

For some, most 14-counts can be upgraded to a 15-17 notrump. North's hand might be suitable for that action, though the small doubleton spade suggests partner should declare notrump, and opening 1NT increases the risk of going overboard in spades. Whatever the merits of this argument, today 6♦ is a fine contract — easier to reach after a 1NT opener. It goes down because of the 5-2 club break, which prevents North being able to pitch all of South's heart losers. After the ♣Q lead, declarer can try to set up the suit, but an alert East will stop him from doing so.

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

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

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

The textbooks require North to open 1♣, though you could understand opening 1♥ planning to pass a forcing or semi-forcing 1NT call. A normal sequence will see South respond 1♥ to 1♣ and jump to 4♥ at his next turn. Some shows-offs sitting West may lead ♦K, after which the deal is over. But even if he doesn't, South can win the club or heart lead and finesse for the ♦K. Then he cashes ♦A and draws trump, discarding dummy's clubs on the diamonds. Having said that, I'm sure recording +420 will produce a decent score for N/S.

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

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

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

When South hears two passes to him, it would need stronger restraint than I possess not to consider opening 2♥ when non-vulnerable. Is that a good idea? Maybe not, since E/W are on a finesse for 6♦, but if left to their own devices might well settle in 3NT, down on repeated heart leads. Assuming N/S pass throughout, a sequence such as: 1♦-1♥-2♠-3♦-4♦-4♥-4♠-5♦-Pass gets E/W to their best spot. But an easier way for them to get a matchpoint top is for N/S to bid too much in hearts, and get doubled for -500 or worse.

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

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

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

The ACBL has confirmed that opening 1NT with an awkward hand including a singleton honor is now kosher. Whether the consequences of this deal will reinforce your preconception that this is a bad idea is up to you. After North's 1NT opener, N/S rate to subside in 2♠, down at least two tricks on the bad break. But compare what would happen if North instead opens 1♦: N/S should find their nine-card diamond fit, and cannot be prevented from taking 10 tricks on careful play. There again E/W do nicely in clubs.

Board: 18 ♠ Q 10 5
 Dlr: East ♥ Q
 Vul: N-S ♦ K J 5 4
 ♣ K 9 7 6 3

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

♠ K J 6 4 2
 ♥ A 8
 ♦ A Q 8 3
 ♣ J 5

East has a full opener of 1♠ in my book, with an easy rebid and useful intermediates in all his long suits. If he opens 1♠, then some Souths will pass discreetly, others will overcall 1NT. It is exceptionally curious that 4♥ is at worst on a trump guess, and might make on a crossruff (for example) if a trump is not led. Conversely, N/S's contract of 4♠ is not without play on a low heart lead from West. Declarer drives out ♠A and draws four rounds of trump then runs diamonds, eventually losing two clubs for down one.

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

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

♠ 8 7 6 5 4
 ♥ A K J 4 2
 ♦ 7 4
 ♣ 6

South has no sensible opening call in second seat. When West bids 1♣, as most will, North should overcall 1♦. Now after East raises to 3♣ rather than introduce his hearts, South can double for takeout, and North's best call is to gamble out 3NT. After a club lead, declarer can only make an overtrick if he ducks two rounds of clubs, and West then fails to cash out his spades. If N/S find their eight-card spade fit they might play 4♠ instead. The favorable lie of the cards means the defense cannot stop N/S coming to 11 tricks, for an excellent result for them.

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

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

♠ 6 5 2
 ♥ 7 4 2
 ♦ 9
 ♣ A Q J 4 3 2

At any form of scoring, opening 3♣ is a mainstream action these days for South. But what North is supposed to do is far from clear. If you play sound preempts, using "Poor Man's Blackwood." (4♦ with responses: 0/1/1 + ♣Q, 2, 2 + ♣Q would be possible.) However, with a void in hearts and a partner whose preempts might be much weaker, you could understand North preferring a natural and forcing 3♠ call. East will surely overcall 4♥, and now N/S might not find a scientific way to get to 6♣, a fine contract, but one which is challenging on a heart lead. In fact, declarer might need to take the diamond finesse to succeed.

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

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

♠ 8 7 4
 ♥ 8 5
 ♦ J 5 4 3 2
 ♣ Q J 2

Deals like this are too hard for even the expert partnerships. Imagine that East's ♦7 was the ♣7. Were that so, then you'd need the spade break to make 12 tricks here. On the actual lie of the cards, 13 tricks in hearts are a formality, with the club ruff in the short hand providing the extra winner. After a Jacoby 2NT response, current expert thinking is that West needs to be able to show a minimum first, then emphasize good trumps. That still won't be enough to help East explore scientifically, though. Only the relay systems will score a goal here with confidence.

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

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

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

This time a marginal overcall from West may get his partner to do the right thing. If West as a passed hand comes in over 1♣, he may not stop the opponents from reaching 3NT, but he will direct East to the best lead. E/W have to be rather careful on the run of the clubs, but so long as East keeps diamonds, declarer will be held to +630. By contrast, after the lead of ♦Q, North can win in hand and finesse in diamonds, then play on clubs. The fall of the queen-jack gives him a safe route to 11 tricks as the cards lie.

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

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

♠ Q J 9 8
 ♥ K 7 6 2
 ♦ J
 ♣ K 7 5 4

North has what looks much more like a 1♦ opener with a 3♦ rebid than a 1NT opening; there again, beauty and strong notrumps lie in the eyes of the beholder. Whichever route North chooses, and whether East shows majors or bids hearts, or even stays silent, you'd somehow expect N/S to play 3NT. If the defenders attack hearts, and East ducks first, declarer's red-suit spots are too weak to let him establish his ninth trick. But it is easy to imagine the defenders leading the wrong major, or not appreciating the point of the defense.

Board: 25 ♠ 7 6 5 4
 Dir: North ♥ J 8 7 3
 Vul: E-W ♦ K J
 ♣ A K 8

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

♠ 9
 ♥ A Q 6 5 4
 ♦ A 9 7 6 5
 ♣ 10 2

North's 12-count may be dull, but he has no real reason not to open 1♣. East should double rather than overcall 1♦, which lets South bid hearts and West show his spades – a call of 2♠ looks about right. When South hears his partner raise hearts, he will go on to 4♥, the par contract. If West leads his singleton diamond, South ought to win in hand and cross to dummy to try a heart to the queen, then must revert to diamonds rather than draw a second trump. Now even if East gets in on the spades to play the ♥K, declarer can still single in all his trumps separately.

Board: 29 ♠ K J 4
 Dir: North ♥ A K 10 9 5
 Vul: Both ♦ A 4
 ♣ K 9 3

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

♠ 8 7 5 2
 ♥ Q 7
 ♦ Q 9 5
 ♣ A Q 8 4

An unopposed N/S auction to 3NT is going to be absolutely normal. You'd expect a sequence like 1♥ - 1NT - 2NT - 3NT, and for West to have to guess well on opening lead to get his side's two tricks. A passive club is best; declarer will go after hearts then clubs, before needing to negotiate spades for +660. Some Wests might try a diamond lead and concede the 12th winner, some Wests will experiment with a low spade. If this goes to the jack and ace, the defense has to be just a little careful to avoid conceding the 12th trick via a squeeze.

Board: 26 ♠ K J 10 6
 Dir: East ♥ A Q 5
 Vul: Both ♦ K J 4
 ♣ K J 2

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

♠ A 9 5 4
 ♥ K J 8
 ♦ 7 3 2
 ♣ Q 9 6

In fourth seat North has what looks like a strong notrump, despite its 18-count and respectable honor structure. The 4-3-3-3 pattern is a strike against it, and protecting the tenaces looks a good idea so long as your notrump range includes good 17-counts. Today the downgrade works well if partner simply drives to 3NT, since East is quite likely to lead ♠7 against this contract, solving a critical guess. After four rounds of spades, declarer can then develop his 10th trick from diamonds eventually. Plenty of pairs will take only nine tricks. Equally many will go down in 4♠ by South here.

Board: 30 ♠ 10 2
 Dir: East ♥ K J 9
 Vul: None ♦ A 10 8 7 5 3
 ♣ A K

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

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

After East opens 1NT and West transfers to hearts you'd expect North to join in with 3♦. East should surely pass now, with a square minimum and uninspiring red-suit holdings. If so, East will have to find a lead against 3♦; I'd try a low trump. North is likely to emerge with 10 tricks after guessing hearts, if necessary. Any East who competes to 3♥ might escape a double, but it will be hard to escape for even -150 in that strain. Pride of place goes to the N/S pairs who can find a way to 3NT somehow — don't ask how!

Board: 27 ♠ A 8 6
 Dir: South ♥ 8 7 4 3
 Vul: None ♦ A Q J
 ♣ 10 8 7

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

♠ K 10 4 3
 ♥ A Q 5 2
 ♦ 6 5
 ♣ 6 4 3

Would you open the North cards in third seat — and if you do, might you prefer 1♦ for the lead, to 1♣? I would. If North opens 1♦ then South will respond 1♥ and North may judge to pass now. When East balances with a double, as he should, N/S might well buy the hand in 2♥, a contract that is somewhat unlucky to go two down. If North passes initially, West probably gets to declare 1NT on a heart lead and is likely to come to eight tricks now. The defense does best to go after spades, which holds E/W to his contract.

Board: 31 ♠ 5 3
 Dir: South ♥ A 10 9 8 6
 Vul: N-S ♦ A Q 7 5 2
 ♣ 3

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

♠ A K 10 6 2
 ♥ Q 3 2
 ♦ 8 6 3
 ♣ Q 5

The South hand will be a clear-cut opener for some, an equally clear pass for others. As usual, this isn't about right or wrong, it is about partnership agreement. Opening does not figure to work well today, since West may come in with 3♣ and N/S might now find their way to 4♥, with just over half the deck between them. The unlucky break in diamonds is bad news. After a club lead to the ace and diamond shift, the 3-3 spade break will not avail declarer much. If South passes, might West open 3♣? From that point on it would be hard for either side to play a making contract.

Board: 28 ♠ A 4 3
 Dir: West ♥ A K 9
 Vul: N-S ♦ J 9 4
 ♣ Q 7 5 3

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

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

The North hand can by no stretch of the imagination be upgraded into a strong notrump. After a 1♣ opening, you'd expect to see North rebid 1NT over 1♠, and play there on a heart lead. The defenders will not find a diamond shift easy to come by, and declarer can come to no fewer than 10 tricks when the spades break miraculously favorably. Of course, the defenders do have four diamonds and a club to cash, but taking all their winners should score E/W surprisingly well.

Board: 32 ♠ A Q J 3
 Dir: West ♥ 8 7 6 4
 Vul: E-W ♦ 8
 ♣ J 9 4 3

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

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

How would you evaluate the South cards after hearing 1♠ to your left, 1NT to your right? Don't worry, there isn't a right answer. An imaginative jump to 3NT will get you to a playable contract but you would need to guess diamonds to make your game or finish a lot down. Conversely, if you declare 5♦, you are always going to bring home 11 tricks, though bringing home the 12th via the trump guess will be beyond most declarers. Anyone who manages to bid slam should be more than capable of making it, though.