



Canadian Bridge
Federation

Erin Berry Rookie-Master Game

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2026

Analysis by Danny Miles

Welcome! I'm Danny Miles and I'd like to thank the Canadian Bridge Federation for running the Erin Berry Rookie-Master Game, and for allowing me to provide you with my thoughts on the deals you played. I was a friend of Erin's back in the late 90s - she was bright, charismatic, and loved bridge. We lost a gifted young woman far too early. I vividly remember hearing the shocking news that sombre January day in 1998. Her parents, Larry and Carole, generously established the Erin Berry Memorial Fund, which is still running today to help Canadian junior bridge players with expenses for travelling to tournaments and camps. May Erin Rest In Peace.

[\(Erin Berry – Her Life and Memorial Trust Fund\)](#)

Winners' names will be posted on the Canadian Bridge Federation website under **Play Bridge → Rookie-Master Games**.

The CBF hosts two Rookie-Master Games each year. Save the dates for 2027: Helen Shields on Wednesday, April 21, and Erin Berry on Thursday, October 21.

Board 1

Board: 1	♠62	
Dealer: N	♥K93	
Vul.: None	♦J54	
♠AT754	♠J8765	♠KQ9
♥6		♥J85
♦QT87	N	♦K62
♣A32	W	♠KQ94
	S	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠J83	5
N 1	♥AQ742	10 HCP 14
S 1	♦A93	
E 5 4 3	♣T	11
W 5 4 3		

1. An early test for East-West. After East opens 1♣, South pipes in a 1♥ overcall. 2♥ is possible but the hand is a bit strong for that action - you may still have a game, and partner may erroneously sacrifice over a contract you can defeat. West's 1♠ promises 5, as they would make a negative double to show exactly 4 spades. This allows East to comfortably raise to 2♠ with 3 card support. West should appreciate the value of their 5th spade but more importantly, their singleton heart. They are worth at least a try for

game - after a major is bid and raised, a try for game should be made in a natural and descriptive way - not just bidding 3 of the major. Here, West could try 3 of either minor. East has a maximum with little wasted in hearts, so will surely bid 4♠. While 11 tricks are possible, normal play will result in NS taking a heart and 2 diamonds for 10 tricks to EW.

Board 2

Board: 2	♠J	
Dealer: E	♥KT964	
Vul.: NS	♦Q75	
♠9872	♠AQ92	♠AT
♥852		♥Q7
♦4	N	♦T9863
♠T6543	W	♠KJ87
	S	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KQ6543	12
N 6 5 6 5 1	♥AJ3	0 HCP 10
S 5 5 6 4 1	♦AKJ2	
E	♣	18
W		

2. NS are put to the test here. The South hand is a 1♠ opener - while the playing strength is impressive, this hand may be too difficult to describe if you open 2♣. North, with 12 HCP facing a second seat vulnerable opener, which should be sound, has enough to force to game with 2♥. South should raise immediately to 3♥ (North's 2♥ promised 5+ hearts), leaving room for exploring loftier intentions below game. North won't use that room however, with a dead minimum and singleton in opener's suit, and should

simply bid 4♥. South probably won't stop, and has a tough way to continue. How does partner know that the ♦Q is gold, while the top clubs are useless?

Blackwood with a void is frowned upon, since you won't know if one of the aces/keycards partner is showing happens to be the Ace of your void. I would not blame South for blasting 6♥. This is a reasonable contract, needing to find the trump Queen. The natural way to play the suit is cashing

the Ace and then running the Jack, which wins when there is a singleton Queen, or West has the Queen even with 3 little ones. Cashing the King then finessing through East will not work if East has four hearts to the Queen. Hence, it is better to finesse through West. Today that might be doubly unlucky; if East led a high diamond at trick one, then continue diamonds after winning their trump Queen and give partner a ruff for down two!

Board 3

Board: 3	♠AT942	
Dealer: S	♥AQ74	
Vul.: EW	♦Q	
♠K653	♣K76	♠J7
♥K3		♥JT986
♦AJ965		♦4
♣92		♣AQJ85
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠Q8	15
N 1 1 1	♥52	11 HCP 9
S 1	♦KT8732	5
E 1 3 2	♣T43	
W 1 3 2		

3. A partscore battle with the points evenly split, but the cards sit more favourably for East-West. If South opens an aggressive weak 2 diamonds (not crazy, given the favourable vulnerability), that throws the deal into the old Bingo ball spinner. West and North should make disciplined passes, and East, the one with shortness in the opponents' suit, can balance. There is no two-suited bid available to show hearts and clubs after 2♦, so a simple 2♥ balance is likely best. West has a close decision to invite with

2NT or let 2♥ go. If they try 2N, East should bid 3♣ and now West is in an uncomfortable position and should just go back to 3♥ (some may try 3N). 3♥ can make (East's heart spots are pulling their weight) and declarer can get home with careful (and lucky?) play, losing only 2 hearts and 2 spades. If South passes as dealer, EW should stay lower, after 1♦-(1♠)-Double. West rebids 1NT and East decides whether to pass, retreat to 2♥, or try 2♣ (which may not be natural and may show a better hand).

Board 4

Board: 4	♠Q76	
Dealer: W	♥K42	
Vul.: All	♦8643	
♠A942	♣Q83	♠KT8
♥QJ83		♥A97
♦95		♦AQT2
♠AK5		♣T76
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠J53	7
N 3 4 4 3 3	♥T65	14 HCP 13
S 3 4 4 3 3	♦KJ7	6
W 3 4 4 3 3	♣J942	

4. It's always risky to make predictions in a bridge game, but we may see nearly every EW pair end in 3NT. West has a clear 1♣ opener, and East can't be blamed for jumping to 3NT. However, there is something to be said for responding 1♦. This is natural(ish) and forcing, and you find out more about opener's hand. Perhaps they are distributional with 6 clubs and 4 diamonds, and 6♣ is a great contract (making with Ax x KJxx KQJxxx while 3NT goes down!). After a 1♦ response,

whether West bids 1♥ or bypasses their majors (the more modern treatment) with 1NT, East will have an easy 3N bid. The play will be a battle; a key theme will be North must not cover the first heart honour led by West, which would allow declarer to pick up the heart suit for 4 winners. This is easier when the West hand is displayed as dummy.

Board 5

Board: 5	♠K4	
Dealer: N	♥AKJ97	
Vul.: NS	♦8762	
♠T98	♣KT	♠AQJ53
♥T82		♥Q543
♦JT53		♦K4
♣J82		♣Q5
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠762	14
N 2 1 4 3 4	♥6	2 HCP 14
S 1 1 2 3 4	♦AQ9	10
E	♠A97643	
W		

5. A tricky combination for NS - some Norths may open 1NT - the hand is strong enough in trick taking potential (prime 14 with a good 5 card suit) but traditionalists will insist on bidding their shape with 5-4 in hearts and diamonds. A 1NT opener will get NS too high, as a spade lead defeats 3NT. After 1♥-(1♠)-2♣, North will likely introduce their ugly diamond suit, putting South in a tough spot. Bailing out in 3♣ is the winner. If North rebids 2NT over 2♣, South will be confident in bidding 3♣, as only an ugly 4-5-3-1

shape will lead to an inferior strain. Note that with East on lead, the only game NS can make it 4♥ (!) in the 5-1 fit. But not recommended. 😊

Board 6.

Board: 6	♠72	
Dealer: E	♥A8654	
Vul.: EW	♦A5	
	♣KT43	♠KJT65
		♥KQ7
♠984		♦T
♥J2		♣QJ76
♦QJ8632		
♣85		
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠AQ3	11
N 2 1 4 3 3	♥T93	
S 2 1 4 3 3	♦K974	4 HCP 12
E	♣A92	13
W		

6. More fun for NS, although this game is more difficult to reach. After 1♠ by East, South may elect to make a takeout double - not crazy with a prime 13 HCP including AQ of spades - almost a certain two tricks - and being not vulnerable. If they do make a takeout double, North should appreciate their fifth heart and prime values and two doubletons to jump directly to 4♥. If South passes 1♠, however, it is trickier after North balances with 2♥. South can cuebid to show a good hand with support, but NS may not be able

to diagnose their combined strength. Note however tempting it is to try Notrump from the South hand with balanced shape and two spade stoppers, they will not have the timing to setup hearts before East establishes and cashes their spade tricks. Hearts is the best strain today. If East hits upon the unfortunate lead of the ♣Q, careful play by North will score up an overtrick in 4♥.

Board 7

Board: 7	♠98632	
Dealer: S	♥QJ4	
Vul.: All	♦7	
	♣JT98	♠J
		♥T872
♠AKQ54		♦AKJ3
♥965		♣7642
♦Q96		
♣KQ		
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠T7	4
N	♥AK3	
S	♦T8542	16 HCP 9
E 3 1 1 2	♣A53	11
W 3 1 1 2		

7. Even in the old days, when bidders were more sound, the South hand was a clear opener with Ace-King-Ace. West will overcall South's 1♦ opener with 1♠ (1NT is not crazy, but could easily miss a 5-3 or even 5-4 spade fit). East has just enough to try 1NT (this should be a sound 8-11 or so opposite a one level overcall). West has far more than they might have for 1♠ and will probably just jump to 3NT. Fortune smiles today, as the well fitting ♠J and ♦Q, combined with a 3-3 heart break, allows 3NT to make comfortably

- note that EW must setup their one club trick before cashing 4 spade winners, otherwise the defence can take 1 club, 3 hearts and 1 spade. I like a high heart lead from South against 3NT. So often leading from AK-third strikes gold against 3NT. But today there is no defence.

Board 8

Board: 8	♠AT9763	
Dealer: W	♥A5	
Vul.: None	♦KJ5	
	♣98	♠Q82
		♥432
♠K4		♦6432
♥Q98		♣KJ4
♦Q97		
♣AQT53		
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠J5	12
N 1 4 3 1 1	♥KJT76	
S 1 4 3 1 1	♦AT8	13 HCP 6
E	♣762	9
W		

8. Another split-deck deal. West has an easy 1♣ opening, and North will overcall 1♠. East should pass with their flat, spotless (unless you like 2♠ and 3♠!) 6 count. South is probably not quite worth 2♥ and will bid 1NT (who needs a stopper in clubs?). North will repeat their spades and South should probably pass - if North had enough for game, they would have jumped to 3♠. As we can see, game is very lucky (nothing wasted in clubs, and the 10-9 of spades are pulling full weight). Still, North must guess the play

with only two entries to dummy - they need to take two finesses in spades and one in diamonds. Some may use both entries to finesse spades and then finesse diamonds the other way. Not unreasonable. I expect lots of 140s to North-South, with 170 scoring well.

Board 9

Board: 9	♠96	
Dealer: N	♥AK9	
Vul.: EW	♦Q9743	
	♣KQJ	♠KJ8
		♥752
♠AQ742		♦J52
♥QT		♣9732
♦AK8		
♣T84		
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠T53	15
N 3 2	♥J8643	
S 3 2	♦T6	15 HCP 5
E 1	♣A65	5
W 2		

9. North has an easy 1NT opening, which will allow South to transfer to 2♥. West has a decision to make right away. I'm not a huge fan of overcalling 2♠ directly with Qx of hearts, a flat hand, no spade spot cards, and being vulnerable. Picture North with KJTxx Ax Qxxx AQx - it won't be pretty - in fact it is probably two down for 500 just with North's cards alone. However, if West passes and the auction comes around to him with South passing 2♥, now it's safer to act as partner is marked with some values

(but the opponents do not necessarily have a fit so still tread carefully!). If West bids 2♠, that will push North-South to 3♥ (North must bid 3♥ - they know they have an 8+ card fit, and know the opponents almost certainly have 8+ spades since South didn't use Stayman). There is little to the

play - EW will collect 2 diamonds and 2 spades; even if they force North to ruff the third spade, the QT of hearts come tumbling down. If East West fail to cash both spades, they will get discarded on North's diamonds.

Board 10

Board: 10	♠T32	
Dealer: E	♥32	
Vul.: All	♦J7	
♠AK987	♣KJT952	♠QJ5
♥AT54		♥KQJ6
♦A4	N	♦KQ9
♣74	W	♣A83
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠64	5
N	♥987	
S	♦T86532	15 HCP 18
E 7 7 7 3 2	♣Q6	2
W 7 7 7 3 2		

10. Now we get some excitement! East opens 1♣ planning on rebidding 2NT to show a balanced 18-19 HCP. West has a normal 1♠ response. North could throw a wrench into the proceedings but vulnerable, flat, and holding opener's suit isn't ideal for a preempt. East follows through with 2NT and West sees stars. It would not be crazy to just jump to 6NT, trusting the 33-34 HCP to produce 12 tricks even if there is a major suit fit or two. But exploring for a fit (via a natural 3♥ or an artificial bid such as 3♦ to

check for 4 hearts or 3 spades) produces a hit. Whether East shows their 3 spades or 4 hearts, West will have to take charge and probably use Blackwood. The laydown, no finesse, grand slam is difficult to reach. If you play in spades, you must find East with the right queens. If you play in hearts, then a 3-2 heart break would allow you to make all 13 tricks even without the ♦Q (5 spades, 2 diamonds, 1 club, 3 hearts, and 1 ruff in each hand). This does illustrate the advantage of a 4-4 fit over a 5-3 fit in some cases, namely when you score a ruff in either hand. I would expect about a 50/50 split between 1460s and 1470s, with the odd pair languishing in game and the odd pair going for glory and reaching 7.

Board 11

Board: 11	♠AT65	
Dealer: S	♥AT52	
Vul.: None	♦K7	
♠87	♣K97	♠QJ4
♥QJ		♥98764
♦A864	N	♦Q3
♣QJ832	W	♣AT4
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠K932	14
N 1 3 1 2	♥K3	
S 1 3 1 2	♦JT952	10 HCP 9
E 1	♣65	7
W 1		

11. NS own half the points, but more importantly, they own the spade suit. After 1♣ by North, East has a decision whether to overcall 1♥ or not. The suit is terrible and the hand is flat - many bad things can happen by overcalling (such as partner leading a heart from say, Kx, against the opponents' contract). In either case, South will show spades and NS should rest in 2♠. The ♣Q lead likely holds declarer to 8 tricks, while a heart lead opens the door to making as many as 10 tricks.

Board 12

Board: 12	♠AT6	
Dealer: W	♥T	
Vul.: NS	♦A83	
♠KJ752	♣987652	♠Q9843
♥875		♥J92
♦KQ96	N	♦J2
♣Q	W	♣KJT
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠AKQ643	8
N 3 1 4 2 5	♥T754	11 HCP 8
S 3 1 4 2 5	♣A43	13
E		
W		

12. We should see a variety of results on #12. West has the first interesting decision, whether to open 1♠ first seat favourable vulnerability. I would. East would then preempt the auction, by showing some type of constructive raise with 4+ trump (such as Bergen) or even jumping straight to 4♠ (don't like that with such a flat hand but you are not vulnerable). South must grit their teeth and bid, with solid hearts and a spade void. In fact, NS will get lucky if South is forced to bid at the 4 level, since with careful play,

4♥ may actually be made. Hearts breaking 3-3 and the second defensive diamond trick being isolated from the hand with the club entry is quite fortunate, of course. But some days you get lucky! If NS are able to double 4♠ should EW carry on, they will score very well for +500. The well-fitting NS hands make 5♣ the best contract, and even 6♣ isn't the worst contract we've ever been in (but won't make today, of course).

Board 13

Board: 13	♠83	
Dealer: N	♥T4	
Vul.: All	♦KQJ87	
	♣AQT74	♠6
	♥QJ75	♥A9832
	♦92	♦AT64
	♣93	♣AT2
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KJ952	9
N	♥K6	
S	♦53	9 HCP 12
E 2 2 4	♣QJ74	10
W 2 2 4		

13. The auction at virtually all tables will start Pass-1♥-1♠. Here is where things may diverge. West has a close decision, whether to pass and await partner's reopening double and try for penalties. The spade spots and vulnerable opponents make this quite an attractive option. Even +200 may be a great score if no game is available. However, there is a huge drawback. The 4 card heart support is a major negative when it comes to defending. Some days we may take no heart tricks on defence (today we will take

1). If West decides to bid, showing a limit raise or better in hearts is clear - you have a fourth trump and the spades are likely onside. East has only 12 HCP but 3 aces, and a singleton in South's suit may persuade them to take the push to 4♥. A spade finesse and 2-2 hearts are necessary to make 4♥; one of those is almost a sure thing, the other is pure luck. Today EW's luck is in, as they will take 10 tricks in hearts.

Board 14

Board: 14	♠3	
Dealer: E	♥AK763	
Vul.: None	♦AQ74	
	♠JT	♠A9875
	♥QT95	♥842
	♦8532	♦K6
	♣T83	♣975
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KQ642	14
N 5 4 3 5 5	♥J	
S 5 4 3 5 5	♦J9	3 HCP 7
E	♣AKQ64	16
W		

14. Danger! Danger! NS both hold great hands, but an important skill in Bridge is recognizing during the bidding if your hand is getting better or worse. Fortunately, they may get "endplayed" into staying low and avoiding trouble. 1♠-2♥-3♣ (in 2-over-1, this shows either extra strength or extra shape). Now North should start to realize this deal may be a complete misfit. Partner is showing the black suits so it is very unlikely we have a fit (only if South is 5-1-3-4 or an unlikely 5-0-4-4). North probably just bids

3NT and South should make a disciplined pass. To bid further they need a bit more strength and should also recognize a potential misfit. In addition, if partner is short in spades (likely) then they would much rather hold the Ace instead of King-Queen. Staying in a safe 3NT is best today, taking 5 clubs, 4 diamonds, and 2 hearts for 11 tricks (the opponents get 1 spade and 1 diamond).

Board 15

Board: 15	♠T9654	
Dealer: S	♥QJ4	
Vul.: NS	♦K93	
	♠J32	♠A7
	♥A5	♥KT98732
	♦T85	♦A7
	♣AK982	♣J3
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KQ8	8
N	♥6	
S	♦QJ642	12 HCP 12
E 2 1 5 3	♣T754	8
W 2 5 3		

15. Most EW pairs will arrive in 4♥ after East opens 1♥ and West forces to game. East will repeat their hearts (at least once more!) and West will bid game. A top spade lead will be met with the unfortunate sight of the Jack in dummy. It will be a simple matter for East to pull trumps, hoping for a 2-2 break. A 3-1 break means there is a heart to lose. East will play their remaining spade (do not give the opponents their trump trick or they may lead a diamond). Now the Jack of spades will be setup to discard a

diamond. Note that even if South does not lead a spade, declarer can still make 5 (albeit a bit "double dummy"). I'll leave it to the reader to figure out how.

Board 16

Board: 16	♠86	
Dealer: W	♥J94	
Vul.: EW	♦AK82	
	♠QT953	♠AKJ2
	♥K3	♥A87
	♦Q9543	♦J
	♣4	♣KQJ75
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠74	12
N	♥QT652	
S	♦T76	7 HCP 19
E 3 5 1 3 4	♣T63	2
W 3 5 1 3 4		

16. North will open 1♦ and East is too strong to overcall, even if they had a 5 card major. With this shape I would make a takeout double even if minimum. Here we want to make a "power double", doubling then bidding again, usually 18+ HCP. Partner will make it easy for us, however, by jumping to 2♠. They would bid 1♠ with no points so they must show some life with a 5th spade, a singleton, and 7 HCP. Bidding 1♠ and hoping to catchup later works today, but it won't always. Over West's 2♠, East has an easy drive to

game, but there is just enough room for partner to have enough for slam – Qxxxx Kxx xxx Ax, for

example, is an easy 12 tricks. An expert bid by East over 2♠ would be 4♦ - a splinter - showing shortness in diamonds, a fit, and a big hand. West will signoff over that, holding a wasted ♦Q. If West does try a 4♥ cuebid, West may launch into Blackwood and put on the brakes in 5♠ when two aces are missing. Notice if East's clubs were AQxxx instead of KQJxx (the same 6 points), slam would be very playable.

Board 17

Board: 17	♠QT652	
Dealer: N	♥K9	
Vul.: None	♦Q75	
♣K7	♣J94	♠J9843
♥QJ3		♥A865
♦A8		♦T632
♣KQT862		♣
	♠A	8
	♥T742	15 HCP 5
	♦KJ94	12
	♣A753	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		
N 1	1	
S	1	
E 1 1 1		
W 1 1 1		

17. A good deal to stay low! Nobody can make anything. West, despite the 6 card club suit, has an easy 1NT opener.

Unfortunately they are not put to that test, as South will open 1♦ in front of them. West now has a 2♣ overcall and North may choose to make a very light negative double at the 2-level (the hand is not strong enough to bid 2♠). East passes and prays to not end here. If South had one less heart and one more spade, they may pass the double, but here they should bid 2♥. Now North must follow

through with their plan (they can't pass and end in a known 4-2 fit) and bid 2♠, showing a hand too weak to bid a direct 2♠. South is now the sad one. They may pull to 2NT. Wherever NS end up, they are very unlikely to make it. The lead of a high club from West won't hurt declarer, but suits are not breaking and they have no fit and exactly half the deck in high cards. Not a good recipe to be declaring 2NT3 or anything at the 3-level.

Board 18

Board: 18	♠KT84	
Dealer: E	♥J63	
Vul.: NS	♦A764	
♠A52	♠82	♠J63
♥2		♥AQ7
♦KQ9		♦T852
♣QJ6543		♣AT
	♠Q97	8
	♥K9854	12 HCP 11
	♦J3	9
	♣K97	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		
N 1	1	
S	1	
E 2 1 2 3		
W 2 1 2 3		

18. Another tricky one for EW. East may open not vulnerable with just 11 HCP and that may get them in trouble. After 1♦-(1♥)-2♣-(2♥), East should pass (any time you have a minimum balanced opener and no fit for your partner's response, and the next opponent bids, you should pass at your second turn). West will reopen either with Double, 3♥ or 3♣. Over 3♣, East should resist the temptation to bid 3NT as 3♣ could be bid on a bit less. 3♣ will make in comfort. 3NT from East's side will likely make on a heart

lead into the AQ (declarer should play clubs immediately from hand - they may not have the entries to dummy for a finesse, then to return after unblocking the club Ace). If West doubles, East will pass and declarer will have to guess well to go down just 1.

Board 19

Board: 19	♠82	
Dealer: S	♥KQJ974	
Vul.: EW	♦K2	
♠QT94	♠A83	♠AKJ65
♥6		♥853
♦AQJT		♦953
♣6542		♣J9
	♠73	13
	♥AT2	9 HCP 9
	♦8764	9
	♣KQT7	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		
N 1	4 4	
S 1	4 4	
E 3 1		
W 3 1		

19. A familiar theme in matchpoint bridge - each side has a major suit fit and the battle is on! After North opens 1♥ in third seat, and East overcalls 1♠, South must decide if they are worth showing a limit raise with 2♠ (which forces their side to the 3 level) or a simple 2♥. I don't mind 2♠, as you are willing to compete to 3♥ over 2♠ anyway. Regardless, West will cuebid hearts (if available) to show a good hand with spades - they have a very good hand – 9 HCP, 4 trumps, a singleton in the opponents' suit and beautiful

diamonds which are good for at least 3 tricks, maybe 4. In fact I would not fault West for going directly to game. If North hears South make a limit raise, they will likely bid 4♥. 4♥ will make with the Diamond Ace onside. EW have a rare vulnerable against not profitable sacrifice in 4♠, which will drift only one off (and NS may not be able to double). Still, +200 to NS may end up being a good score, as 4♥ is not trivial to bid.

Board 20

Board: 20	♠Q872	
Dealer: W	♥42	
Vul.: All	♦J432	
♠95	♣J92	♠A4
♥AJT963		♥87
♦98		♦AKT765
♣T64		♣K85
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KJT63	4
N 3 2	♥KQ5	5 HCP 14
S 3 2	♦Q	17
E 2 2	♣AQ73	
W 2 2		

20. Just like #19, we've got a major suit battle on our hands. West has a classic weak 2♥ opener (don't let "only 5 points" scare you - your intermediate spots in hearts will help in a heart contract to avoid a large penalty). East might raise (or might even explore game). Raising a weak 2 on a doubleton is an underused strategy; it makes life quite difficult for the next opponent. If East does raise to 3♥, what does poor South do? 3♠ on only a 5 card suit? 3NT with a 5 card major and a singleton? Double with only 1 diamond? 3NT

could get ugly - on the ♥J lead, declarer is forced to duck (else the defence will take 1 spade, 5 hearts, and at least 2 diamonds). Even after ducking, they are still off 5 top tricks and might lose more.

Board 21

Board: 21	♠KQ873	
Dealer: N	♥A9	
Vul.: NS	♦J2	
♠AJT96	♠8754	♠5
♥542		♥J87
♦Q6		♦AKT97
♣QT9		♣A632
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠42	10
N 1 1	♥KQT63	9 HCP 12
S 1 1	♦8543	9
E 1 3 1	♣KJ	
W 1 3 1		

21. Proceed with caution should be the East-West mantra on this one - they have no fit and 21 HCP. Diamonds is their best strain but not so easy to reach. East opens 1♦ and South has a featherweight vulnerable 1♥ overcall. West bids 1♠ to show 5+ spades (exactly what both North and East want to hear! Sarcasm font for one of them). If North bids 1NT, East may choose to pass, as their partner is likely at least 5-3 in the majors, leaving less chance at a minor suit fit. In 1NT, EW have a shot at +200. If

North passes, and/or East bids 2♣, West takes a "false preference" to 2♦ - you can still have a game if partner has 16-17 points, but that's becoming less likely when both opponents enter the auction. The diamond suit lies favourably for EW, as do the clubs. The defence should score only 3 hearts and a club for 110 to EW.

Board 22

Board: 22	♠AJ32	
Dealer: E	♥J865	
Vul.: EW	♦Q765	
♠T84	♣K	♠K6
♥KQ72		♥AT
♦K82		♦AT94
♣A65		♣T9743
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠Q975	11
N 1	♥943	12 HCP 11
S 3 1 3 3 3	♦J3	6
E 3 1 3 3 3	♣QJ82	
W 3 1 3 3 3		

22. Technically East-West can make a game in Notrump, using the rare strategy of never attacking their side's longest fit. The red suits can be played for 7 tricks (not easy, but not impossible either), plus the Spade King and Club Ace gets us to 9. East might make a thin opening bid in first seat vulnerable. Note they should open 1♣, planning to rebid 1NT. Never distort your shape if you can help it. If you were 1-3-4-5 with terrible clubs, then 1♦ followed by 2♣ may be the lesser evil. West likely forces to game opposite

a vulnerable opening bid. If West gets to open, North makes a takeout double and East can start with redouble, planning on bidding clubs next. If EW stop off to double 2♠, their +300 should score well. Otherwise, +120 or +150 in Notrump will be a common score. Should East end in 3NT, there may be some unlucky Souths who lead an unfortunate ♣Q.

Boards 23

Board: 23	♠K85	
Dealer: S	♥AT964	
Vul.: All	♣JT982	♠AQJ92
♠6		♥AK9832
♥QT64	N	♦3
♦875	W	♣Q
♣AK653	S	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠T743	8
N 1	♥J75	9 HCP 16
S 1	♦KQJ2	7
E 2 3 6 2	♣74	
W 2 3 6 2		

23. A wild one, for a change! Two passes to North, who is dying to open. It turns out opening 1♦ or 2♦ may help East describe their powerhouse in an easier fashion. If North passes, East should start with 1♥. This hand is definitely strong enough to “reverse” into spades, should the opportunity arise. West has a phenomenal hand opposite a fourth seat 1♥ opener. A singleton, a fourth trump (the fourth trump is massive, especially with an accompanying singleton), and a potential source of tricks. There are a few options

- A Drury bid (2♣ after a third or fourth seat 1-Major opener) shows about 8-11 points and 3+ card trump support; A jump to 3♣ if you play this as “fit showing” - 9+ cards in clubs (5+) and hearts (4+) and forcing; or a splinter to 3♠ if you play that. Any of these will get East excited - the Spade splinter probably the most - picture x, QTxx, Axxx, Axxx - now a grand slam in hearts is very good. East likely just uses keycard at some point, arriving in 6♥ when discovering a keycard is missing (they may not even both asking about the ♥Q, since West is a big favourite to hold either the Queen or 4+ hearts).

After South’s normal ♦K lead, declarer can almost claim 6♥. If trumps were 2-1, they would have 6 hearts in hand, 3 top clubs, 1 spade, and 2 spade ruffs in dummy. Looking at it another way, declarer sets up their hand - they discard 2 spades on the top clubs and ruff the Queen-Jack of spades in the dummy. However, a 3-0 heart break puts a fly in the ointment. Now declarer must be a tiny bit careful. All reasonable lines of play will work, including drawing all 3 trumps and taking a spade finesse, then ruffing out the King. A stronger line is draw just one trump and then get working on spades. When the King falls, you are easily home.

Boards 24

Board: 24	♠KT87	
Dealer: W	♥AK7	
Vul.: None	♣KT872	♠Q6
♠A953	♣7	♥Q84
♥J5	N	♦AJ94
♦Q3	W	♠KQJ6
♣T9543	S	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠J42	13
N 1	♥T9632	7 HCP 15
S 1	♦65	5
E 1 3	♣A82	
W 2 1 1 3		

24. It will be difficult for EW to reach their best strain after North opens 1♦, but as we shall see, alls well that ends well. East likely overcalls 1NT (minimum, but good diamond spots, working honours in clubs, and no one vulnerable makes competing attractive). West may make a hungry invite (going through Stayman on the way) but the soft doubleton honours would persuade me to stay low. South does well to lead their longest suit (leading partner’s minor vs 1NT is a dicey proposition unless you

have length in it). Clearing hearts while South holds the Club Ace will hold declarer to 8 tricks. Only a very unlikely spade lead from South leaves declarer with no winning option at trick 1 and holds East to 7 tricks (try it!).

Boards 25

Board: 25	♠T75	
Dealer: N	♥Q974	
Vul.: EW	♦AJ6	♠843
♠J962	♠AQ9	♥K6
♥JT82	N	♦KT972
♦8	W	♠T65
♣KJ83	S	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠AKQ	13
N 4 3 3 3 2	♥A53	6 HCP 6
S 4 3 3 3 2	♦Q543	15
E	♣742	
W		

25. This one should be short and sweet, North opening 1♣ and South responding 3NT. There is something to be said for responding 1♦, as positionally notrump may be better declared from partner’s side, protecting their club and heart honours. In addition, picture North with a singleton heart. Now we may belong in a minor, and it’s possible we can make slam in a minor while going down in 3NT (picture xxx x Akx KQJxxx). Jumping to 3NT almost certainly ends the auction. Despite 28 combined HCP,

should West hit on a spade lead, declarer may actually go down. A more likely lead is the ♥J, given the stronger intermediates. However, this won’t work out so well with dummy’s moderate spots. Declarer may take 3 heart tricks if they sniff out the whole suit, while taking 2 is trivial given the lead. NS may be disappointed if they only record +400, but that should still score close to average in my estimation. Note we never talked about East and their diamond suit. Overcalling 1♦

takes away no room, and gives the opponents clues if they play the deal. It should deliver a stronger hand (and certainly a stronger suit) than East holds. A vulnerable EW will suffer a huge penalty should they enter the auction and NS are able to double them.

Boards 26

Board: 26	♠652	
Dealer: E	♥J7	
Vul.: All	♦QJ9543	
♠K8	♠J8	♠JT973
♥AQ92	♥8543	♥AK32
♦AT87	♦Q4	
♣Q4		
N ♠♥♦♣	N	E
S 1	S	
E 3 5 6 2		
W 3 5 6 2		

26. Potential slam alert! South opens 1♣ and while West has a really nice hand, starting with 1♥ is normal. East's hand grew up tremendously. They have some options but one thing is certain - they should not make any bids below game that could be passed - they need very little to make 4♥. If East shows a limit raise in hearts (by bidding 2♣), West will simply bid game, as they cannot envision a slam opposite a passed hand. Many tables will end up seeing declarer take 12 tricks with the fortunate heart position.

Starting with a heart to the Jack is possible. Should North lead a diamond, a daredevil West will be disappointed to be just one entry short in order to ruff 3 diamonds, pull trump, and squeeze south in the black suits (!!) for all 13 tricks.

Boards 27

Board: 27	♠T7	
Dealer: S	♥Q73	
Vul.: None	♦AQ97	
♠QJ83	♠KJ83	♠9542
♥J84	♥AT52	♥8632
♦T5	♦T	
♣AQ75		
N ♠♥♦♣	N	E
S 3 1 2 3 4	S	
E 3 1 2 3 4		
W		

27. We should see most tables playing in 3NT NS after a 1♣ opening by South. North should be in no rush to jump in notrump, given the lack of a spade stopper. Best to start by responding 1♦. South has an easy rebid of 1NT and now North may just invite with their balanced 12 count. Whether they try 2NT or 3NT, South will certainly bid 3NT with their maximum.

The opening lead will be critical - almost every West will lead a spade. If they had QJ9x, the Queen is usually best. But QJ83 is a guess whether to lead the Queen or low. Either could be the winner on any given day. Today, a low spade lead allows declarer to hop up with the ten to get off to a great start. Coming to hand with a diamond in order to lead clubs, West should follow low. South may guess to put in the 8, losing to the singleton ten (ouch). If South guesses to play the Jack, they will garner 3 club tricks. A lucky South can emerge with 11 tricks on a low spade lead and good (lucky?) club guess. An unlucky South may fail in 3NT, losing 2 spades, 2 clubs and the heart Ace.

Boards 28

Board: 28	♠A	
Dealer: W	♥2	
Vul.: NS	♦QJ98742	
♠952	♠KQ54	♠KQJ8643
♥AT76	♥KQ43	♥J2
♦AKT63	♦6	
♣6		
N ♠♥♦♣	N	E
S 1 2 4	S	
E 5 3		
W 5 3		

28. West has a clear opening bid, especially not vul vs vul (5-4 with Ace-King-Ace and a singleton). North has a tricky call and may choose to jump to 3♦ (preemptive) despite that being West's suit and being vulnerable. 7-4 is powerful shape. So the auction may take two possible paths - if North passes, East has an easy 1♠ response and West has a tricky rebid. We're taught we need a balanced hand to rebid notrump; we need 17+ points to "reverse" (into 2♥ in this case); we need a sixth diamond to rebid 2♦.

So what's left? I would raise 1♠ to 2♠ every time with this hand. Even if you reach a 4-3 fit, the hand will not be a disappointment to partner - 3 tricks in top cards and the ability to ruff some clubs in your hand with the weak trumps for extra tricks. Most pairs also play some asking bid after a raise to 2♥ or 2♠, to ask if opener had 3 or 4 trumps. East has an easy 4♠ bid. Slam is probably a bit of a reach although East could try a natural 3♥ on the way. Turns out the Ace-King of diamonds are useless. Even if South leads their singleton, declarer can't discard both clubs right away. If North tries to give their partner a trump promotion after winning the spade Ace, declarer simply ruffs high, draws the last trump and takes the rest. Note that declarer should start hearts with the King and Queen, noting North's discard and then taking the marked finesse

against South's Jack. Unfortunately South can't really play anything to indicate they need a club played rather than a diamond, since they cannot score a trump trick with only Ten doubleton. 4♠ making 5 or 6 should be recorded at most tables.

Boards 29

Board: 29	♠K952	
Dealer: N	♥T753	
Vul.: All	♦AJ74	
	♣7	♠A7
♠JT84		♥Q8
♥A6	W N E	♦K2
♦T83	S	♠KQJT542
♠A863		
	♠Q63	8
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♥KJ942	9 HCP 15
N 2 3	♦Q965	8
S 2 3	♣9	
E 4		
W 3		

29. East will open 1♣ (I actually don't mind a 1NT opening, crazy as it seems - protecting the honours in each of our short suits and some nice trick taking potential. In fact, the hand may even be slightly too strong for 1NT). South overcalls 1♥ and West makes a negative double, showing exactly 4 spades. North has an interesting hand – 8 HCP but 4 trumps and a singleton in opener's suit is great most days - but today South has a matching singleton, not ideal. Jumping to 3♥, or 3♣ (showing a "mixed" raise of 7-

9 HCP with 4 trumps) may not do the hand justice, but does make it very difficult for EW to reach the winning contract of 3NT. East can't really bid 3NT on their own with Qx of hearts. I expect to see some +100s EW defending heart contracts, a few +130s in 3 or 4 clubs, the odd -140 defending hearts if the defenders break spades. Notice how easy it is to get to 3NT if East opens 1NT - maybe not so crazy after all!

Boards 30

Board: 30	♠Q4	
Dealer: E	♥T6	
Vul.: None	♦AT8	
	♠KJ9863	♠AT8653
♠KJ97	W N E	♥K3
♥A987	S	♦KQ95
♦63		♠4
♠AQT		
	♠2	10
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♥QJ542	14 HCP 12
N 5	♦J742	4
S 6 2 5 1	♣752	
E 5 6 2 5 1		
W 5 6 2 5 1		

30. Another slam opportunity for EW, and this one is stone cold as long as you don't lose a trump trick with 10 cards missing the Queen. East opens their 12 HCP hand 1♠, and when West bids Jacoby 2NT, showing a game forcing hand with 4+ spades, the East hand becomes enormous. When you are 6-4 and find a fit, the hand is much stronger than its pointcount suggests. Here, it would not be crazy for East to just launch into keycard blackwood - we care only about 3 aces and the ♠K. We don't really care how

many points partner has. Following traditional Jacoby 2NT methods, East would bid 3♣ showing a singleton club. That's good news and bad news for West - the CA is golden, the CQ is not so important, but the doubleton diamond suddenly looks great as East likely has some length there. One thing West should not do is jump directly to 4♠. That shows a hand that wants to give up on slam because the 3♣ bid did nothing to improve prospects. I prefer 3♥ over 3♣, showing some heart stuff. This is probably enough for East to bid keycard Blackwood, a round later than they might have. Upon finding 3 keycards opposite (West will show 0 or 3, but they can hardly have 0 on the auction) East just bids 6♠. No need to ask about the ♠Q, because you know you are in a 10 card fit at least. If you lose to 3-0 spades and guess the wrong way to play them, that is just unlucky. The play is trivial. With spades 2-1, both losing diamonds can be ruffed in dummy. If they were 3-0, you may need the ♦A onside or some careful play. All in all, an excellent slam that will get rewarded with a good score to those who bid it.

Boards 31

Board: 31	♠964	
Dealer: S	♥AJ52	
Vul.: NS	♦Q86	
	♣J98	♠A73
♠KQT5	W N E	♥T6
♥KQ98	S	♦T973
♦A54		♠KT73
♠54		
	♠J82	8
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♥743	14 HCP 7
N 1	♦KJ2	11
S 1	♠AQ62	
E 2 1 1 1		
W 2 1 1 1		

31. Back to the partscore battle. South's hand would be a featherweight opening at other vulnerabilities and shapes; this one is too weak for me - 4333 distribution, vul vs not, and no spot cards. West has a clear 1♦ opener (or 1♣ if 1♦ promises 4) and East is a bit stuck; raising diamonds on 4 little isn't so appealing (especially when opener may have only 3, as here). 1NT with two little hearts would be my choice. That should end the auction.

South has a tough lead - when the opponents bid 1NT over 1♦, that is almost like they are bidding clubs (they don't have a 4 card major and didn't support

diamonds. What's left for them to have?). I would "punt" with a major suit lead. A spade gives nothing away, while a heart builds a second entry to partner to start leading clubs through. The recap says EW can't make 1NT but it will take pinpoint defense to defeat it (East's ♣7 even comes into play as a very slow stopper). The best result for EW is if they somehow scramble into spades.

Boards 32

Board: 32	♠AQ32	
Dealer: W	♥J86	
Vul.: EW	♦73	
♠T95	♣K954	♠64
♥KQ9753		♥2
♦J94		♦AKQ86
♣8		♣AJ732
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KJ87	10
N 1	♥AT4	
S 1	♦T52	6 HCP 14
E 2 4 1	♣QT6	10
W 2 4 1		

32. Final deal on the sheet. West has a fairly routine 2♥ opener, even vul vs not, and that is the likely final contract. East should make a disciplined pass. Yes, sometimes partner is 6-4 with a 4 card minor and you can make a lot (xx Axxxx Jxxx Kx, for example) but partners tend to disappoint when you play them for a perfect hand. It is important that South passes it out - sometimes you may balance with 10 HCP but you really need short hearts for that. Your partner is likely short in hearts and could not act (it's the

player who is short in the preempting suit that should act more aggressively to get your side into the bidding). If your partner has a decent hand, they will have heart length and you are better off defending. It is also important that East is able to pass somewhat smoothly. If they think forever before passing, South will read that East has a good hand and be less likely to enter and get in trouble (note: ethically you are allowed to read into your opponents' hesitations and mannerisms, but not your partner's; also, you can not fake a delay to try and fool your opponent). On the surface, 2♥ looks like it has only 4 losers – 2 spades and 2 hearts, or if the defenders draw dummy's lone trump, 3 spades and 1 heart. But careful defence will score 5 tricks - South must play low on the first trump lead, whichever player leads one. Declarer will be unable to draw trumps and take discards on diamonds - they can only do one or the other.