

HELEN SHIELDS ROOKIE-MASTER GAME WEDNESDAY APRIL 2, 2025 ANALYSIS BY TERRY DU

This year's analysis is prepared by expert player and CBF board director Terry Du, who has had numerous wins and high finishes in national, regional, and sectional tournaments. While teaching science at a university in the early 1990s, he pioneered bridge as an accredited course, integrating its strategic logic into academia. In recent years, he has focused on junior players training and programs development. Terry remains as a dedicated mentor, active competitor, and passionate advocate for the game of bridge.

HELEN SHIELDS

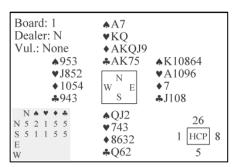
Helen Shields, who died in 1987, was one of the finest players at the Lake Head. She served on the CBF Board of Directors from 1976-1984 and was CBF President in 1981. In her roles on the CBF Board, Unit 228 President and Thunder Bay DBC President, Helen did all she could to encourage and welcome new players to duplicate bridge. Trophies for the National Winners are provided by the Thunder Bay Unit 228 in memory of Helen.

The names of the winners will be posted on the Canadian Bridge Federation website. (Under: Events / Canadian Rookie-Master Games)

NEXT ROOKIE-MASTER GAME

The next Rookie-Master game, the Erin Berry game, will be held on Thursday, October 16, 2025. Mark your calendar, and we look forward to seeing you again there.

I hope you all enjoyed this year's thrilling Rookie-Master Game! May the analysis shared today serve as a valuable tool for refining your strategies in future matches. Keep honing your skills, and I look forward to seeing you shine in upcoming tournaments.



1. North holds a balanced or close to balanced (semibalanced) with 26 high card points (HCP). Natural system bidders would open with 2♣ - strong, followed by a 3NT rebid, or use the *Kokish relay* sequence (2♣-2♦-2♥-2♠-2NT) to show a balanced hand with 24+ HCP. In this sequence, both the 2♥ and 2♠ bids are artificial. Regardless of the method, North-South will likely reach 3NT. The challenging part of this board is the opening lead. A spade lead gives declarer time

to develop three overtricks for a total of 12 tricks, while a heart lead limits North-South to 11 tricks only.

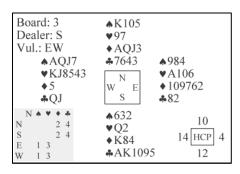
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Board: 2
                ♠K873
Dealer: E
               ♥J6
Vul.: NS
                ♦O95
      ♠Q652
               $10432

♠ J94

      ♥A42
                         ♥K5
                  Ν
                         ♦J1032
      ♦A86
                W
                    F
                         ♣Q986
      ♣KJ5
 N * * * *
                ♠A10
                                6
                ♥Q109873
                            14 HCP 7
               ♦K74
               ♣A7
                                13
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- 2. South opens 1♥ after East passes, and West doubles. North has several options:
- North bids 1♠ (this is also my choice), North-South will likely end in 2♥.
- North passes after West's double, East may bid 2♣, 2♠, or 1NT, but none of these contracts will make without North-South's help. Scores of -50 or -100 are favorable for East-West compared to North-South making 2♥ for 110.

If Norths remain silent in the first opportunity, they should double when 2♣ or 2♦ bid by East is passed to them. This double remains as take-out. If North holds a strong balanced hand without heart support, they should redouble after West's double.

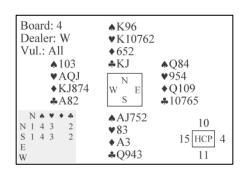


3. West overcalls 1♥ after South's 1♣ opening. North does not have a perfect hand for a negative double, but with 10 HCP, passing is not an option. Most North players will opt to double, particularly in match-point games. A 2♥ raise by East encourages West to compete further, potentially pushing the auction to the 3-level.

At some tables, North-South pairs may choose to take a more aggressive approach by reaching 4♣. For the actual board the

move works out well, as clubs split 2-2, •K is onside. Declarers lose 1 spade, 2 hearts only.

Tips: Do not just count losers, count both winner and loser tricks. For this board, you see 3 quick losers, A, and 2 hearts. Since A is on you left and clubs split 2-2, you have 5 clubs, 4 diamonds and a K, 10 tricks required for your 4 contract.



4. For pairs playing strong 1NT, West hand is perfect for 1NT opening, showing 15-17 HCP and balanced hand. Choosing to open 1 ♦ with this type of hands often leads rebid challenges. For example, if you open 1 ♦ and partner responds 1 ♠, your rebid options become awkward: Rebidding 1NT would indicate 12-14 HCP, while rebidding 2 ♦ typically requires 6-card diamond suit. For pairs playing weak 1NT (12-14), open 1 ♦ is a natural and straightforward choice. In their

system, the sequence 1♦-1major-1NT shows a 15-17 balanced (or semi-balanced) hand.

This board is less favorable to weak 1NT openers, as north-south can easily enter the auction when West opens 1♦. Even if north-south do not reach this lucky 4♠, playing partials in spades will score well. However, some north-south pairs may find themselves shut out by West's 1NT open, their scores will be poor for this board. After a normal heart lead against 1NT, West will quickly secure 2 heart tricks, 4 diamond tricks, and the club Ace, totaling 7 tricks.

It will be useful if you have some conventions to play against 1NT openings (strong or weak), such as Meckwell, DONT, Multi-Landy, Cappelletti.....

```
Board: 5
               ♦Q9654
Dealer: N
               ♥Q1052
Vul.: NS
               ♦96
               *86
                         ♠A10732
     ٨J
     ♥A9764
                         ¥3
                 Ν
     ♦A875
               W
                         ♦KQJ2
                    Ε
     ♣K32
                  S
                         ♣Q94
               ♦K8
                                4

▼KJ8

                            12 HCP 12
               ♦1043
               ♣AJ1075
                               12
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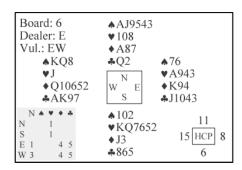
5. Most East-West pairs will overbid this board, possible bidding sequences like:

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1.-2.-3.-3NT or 1.-2.-2NT-3NT.
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For East-West's 3NT, you may count 4 diamond tricks, ♠A, ♥A and one trick in club. That's 7 tricks. It is very hard to develop another trick, unless south leads a club, when 3NT is played

by East. You may see 3NT -1 or -2 on the scoresheet, but 3NT make is very unlikely.

In most bidding systems, 2♥ over 1♠ is game-forcing, pushing East-West into an almost hopeless 3NT. Pairs who stop below 3NT (e.g., by downgrading the hand or playing 2♥ as non-game forcing) will score better.

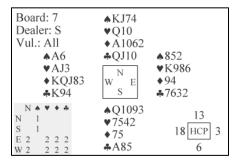


- 6. Even with only 3 spades, West would double South's 2♥ preempt.
- a. If North passes, East has an easy 3♣ bid, showing 8-11 HCP with 4+ clubs. Should the hand have fewer than 7 HCP, East would bid an artificial 2NT (Lebensohl)* relay to 3♣, to show weak hands.
- b. If North bids 2 after West's double, it should not be forcing but act as a lead-directing bid or prepare for further

competition. Most East-West pairs will play 3♣ or 4♣. If they land in 3NT or 5♣, they will likely receive minus scores, though both 3NT and 5♣ can be made on double-dummy play.

*Lebensohl is a convention commonly used in 3 situations:

- Partner doubles opponent's weak two preempt;
- Opponents 2 level overcall to your side's 1NT openings;
- Partner makes a reverse rebid (Also called Ingberman in this case).



unnecessary.

7. North passes after West's 1♦ opening, as the hand shape is not suitable for a takeout double. With an extra point or two, a 1NT overcall would be an obvious choice. 1♦ opening following three passes will be common for this board. On the natural ♣Q lead, the result will be either 1♦ making or with an overtrick, depending on declarer's play. Declarer should test clubs before tackling hearts. If the club suit behaves as 3-3, the 4th club in dummy is set up, and the heart finesse is

Some North players might double West's 1♦ opening, leading to the sequence: 1♦ (X) P (1♥). In this scenario, West can bid 1NT to indicate a balanced 18+ point hand. North's ill-advised double grants East-West a favorable opportunity to score 120 points by making 1NT+1.

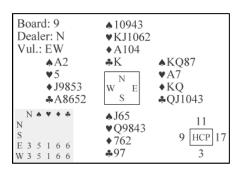
Board: 8 Dealer: W Vul.: None	★ J9732 ♥ KQ7653 ♦ 6 ♣ A W E	AA6 ♥2 ♦10742 ♣J87654
N * V * * N 3 5 5 S 3 5 5 E 2 W 2	♦ K104 ♥ A1098 ♦ AK93 ♣ 92	10 11 HCP 5

8. Traditionally, West's hand might not have been considered strong enough to open 1♣ or 1♠, but modern trends increasingly favor lighter opening style. If West chooses to open 1♣ or 1♠, north can make a direct cuebid, showing a two-suiter hand with both major suits: hearts and spades. This widely used convention is known as the Michael Cuebid. The Michael Cuebid can also be applied when the opponent's open 1 of a major suit. The direct cuebid of the opponent's

major shows the other major suit and an unspecified minor suit.

Partners should discuss and agree on follow-up sequence in advance. On this board, south has options such as bidding 2NT to ask north for more detailed description of the hand or jumping directly to 4.

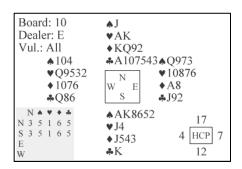
Jumping to 4♥ applies maximum pressure on EW, if they decide to sacrifice in a minor suit, their scores will not be pretty.



9. Despite having only 11 HCP and a singleton ♣K, most North players will open 1♥. East has a couple of options to enter the bidding: double or overcall 1NT. South will jump to 4♥. West has a clear choice of 4NT to show both minors, reaching a comfortable 5♣. For Easts who overcall 1NT over 1♥, West should also bid 4NT after South's preempt of 4♥, assuming they play 4NT as two places to play, not natural. Overcalling 2♣ over North's 1♥ is not a common choice for East, but it

works well for this board.

Playing 5♣ by East is interesting. Looking at the club suit alone, finessing the ♣K is a percentage play. However, the bidding suggests North holds most of the remaining points, especially if North plays the ♥K (normally denying the ♥Q after partner's normal small heart lead). East has a good chance to drop the ♣K to make an overtrick.



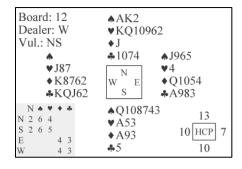
10. With a 6-card spade suit and a 4-card diamond suit, South's rebid choice varies by partnership. Some always rebid $2 \spadesuit$ following $1 \spadesuit -2 \spadesuit$, while others rebid $2 \spadesuit$ and later introduce diamonds.

The success of a diamond slam hinges on favorable distribution. A bad diamond split can be problematic, and even with a 3-2 split, declarer must find an additional trick in the black suits, either from spades or clubs. If clubs are

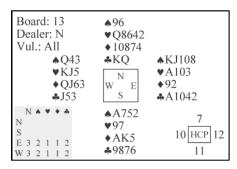
chosen as the source of the extra trick, declarer benefits from good fortune. Pairs that stop at 4. will score well, as only a few pairs will manage to make 6.

Board: 11 Dealer: S Vul.: None AQJ976 \$86 AKQ9	\$852 ♦AK104 ♦J643 \$86 \$10 ₩ E S \$108752 \$KQJ3
N * V * * N 2 2 S 2 2 E 1 2 3 W 1 1 3	♦K43 ♥QJ32 ♦ 16 HCP 6 ♣A109752

11. Another 6 spades and 4 diamonds hand, but West's hand is stronger than South's hand in the previous board. After 1♣-1NT, West may bid 2♠, intending to rebid spades later to indicate a non-minimum hand with 6-4 in point suits (♠&♠). East, with his 6 HCP outside of partner's suits, is likely to pass 2♠. If South reopens with a double, East-West may be pushed to 3♠, and the result remains unchanged, with most tables will score 110 for East-West.

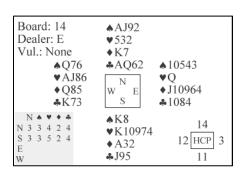


12. Light opening enthusiasts might open West's 10 HCP aceless hand, though most would pass. South's hand justifies a limit raise to partner's 1♥, so if partner rebids 2♥ over south's 1♠ response, which shows extra length in hearts, South's hand is qualified for jumping to 4♥. Some lucky Norths choose to raise spades immediately after 1♥-1♠, and they will play in a better contract of 4♠, or even 6♠, outperforming North-South pairs playing in 4♥.



13. Bidding should be simple: 1♣-1NT all pass. There might some aggressive bidders to bid 2NT (11-12 balance hand inviting 3NT) with West's flat 10 HCP hand, even so, East won't accept game invitation with a minimum opening hand. Favorable diamond layout for East-West allows them to take 9 tricks in no-trump contracts, if they locate the ♥Q. Of course, the normal heart lead makes declarer's life a lot easier. However, reaching 3NT by East-West is unlikely.

Scores of +120 or +150 for East-West are normal for this board.



14. South's 11 HCP hand may or may not be opened, but 4♥ will be played at most tables. North should bid 1♠ over partner's 1♥ open, not 2♠, unless the partnership has a specific agreement to use 2♠ as an artificial game forcing bid. After south rebids 1NT, showing 12-14 HCP balanced hand, north has no reason to bid something else, other than 4♥.

South, as declarer, will quickly discover the unfavorable heart split. However, with a careful play, 4 can still be made,

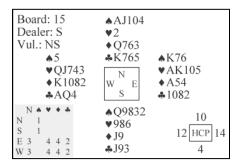
losing only 3 hearts.

With 3 unavoidable losers in hearts, ♣K must be onside. The 3rd diamond can be ruffed by dummy, and then declarer needs to find a place to park his 3rd club. This can be achieved through several lines of play:

- Finessing the ♠Q; Declarer's club can be discarded on ♠J if this finesse works.
- Ruffing out ♠Q; If the ♠Q is held by the opponent with fewer than 4 spades.
- Play West with Kx in clubs.

Some of these chances can be combined to increase the likelihood of success. For example, declarer might combine the assumption of West holding Kx in clubs with either the spade finesse or the squeeze play. This approach maximizes the chances of bringing the contract home.

By endplaying West, South can theoretically make 11 tricks in hearts, but that is a double-dummy play.



15. The Jacoby 2NT response to partner's 1 major opening, showing 4+ trump support and game-forcing values, is widely used. The bidding may look like:

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1♥-2NT-3♠*-4♥
(3♠* = shortness in spades)
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Some play different versions of Jacoby 2NT, but the final contract for this board will be the same: 4♥ by West. There is no clear choice for North's opening lead. A small club lead

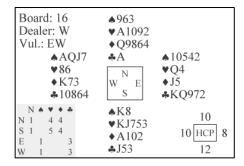
is unfortunate, as it concedes a trick.

West can make 4♥ by leading a small spade from their hand toward the ♠K.

- Scenario 1: If the ♠K wins the trick (North ducked the ♠A), West can turn to the diamond suit. If diamonds split 3-3, or one opponent holds QJ, Q9, or J9 doubleton, the extra diamond can be established for a club pitch. This line of play gives declarer 11 tricks.
- Scenario 2: If North plays the ♠A immediately, East's ♠K is ready for a club discard.

 Declarer may lose 1 spade, 1 diamond, and possibly 1 club, but 4♥ remains safe.
- Scenario 3 (did not occur today): If South produces the ♠A over East's ♠K, the best defense is a small club shift. West can play a small club instead of the ♠Q, and regardless of the club suit layout, declarer has time to set up a diamond trick for a club discard, ensuring 4♥ is safe.

If West carelessly takes a club finesse early, North, after winning the ♣K, can return a club, setting up 2 defensive tricks in clubs. Declarer will lose 2 clubs, 1 diamond, and the ♣A for a poor -50 score.

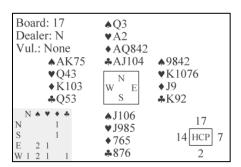


16. After three passes, South opens 1♥, and North either jumps to 4♥ directly or bids via the Drury convention to reach 4♥. North is confident in the overall strength of the partnership's hand, as the hand (already passed for opening) is strong and supportive for a heart contract.

With hearts 2-2 and the A offside, the final score depends on the diamond suit play, which in this scenario, is where the key decision lie.

When analyzing the diamond suit, you are missing the King and Jack, while holding all the other honors along with the 10 and 9. Without additional information from the bidding, opponents' carding, or earlier plays, the percentage play is to finesse twice—leading diamonds from dummy twice toward your hand. If East holds one or both missing diamond honors (K or J), you will lose only one trick in the suit.

Some South players might choose to play the ◆A first and then lead a small diamond from hand toward dummy. In this case, West should smoothly duck the ◆K. This clever defensive play creates an opportunity for South to misplay the suit, potentially leading to an extra trick for the defense. By withholding the King, West introduces ambiguity, making it harder for declarer to accurately read the diamond distribution and execute the correct line of play.



17. North's hand is semi-balanced and falls into a range where two opening bids are possible:

- 1NT: Many players treat a 22(54) shape as balanced, especially if the doubletons contain at least one honor card. For this board, opening 1NT is their obvious choice, as it accurately describes north's strength (15-17 HCP) and close balanced hand.
- 2. 1♦: This is a more flexible bid. Also, it immediately shows the diamond suit. However, it also gives East-West more room to compete.

The choice between 1NT and 1♦ depends on partnership agreements and the specific hand characteristics. Let's explore the implications of each opening bid.

Scenario 1: North opens 1NT

In this case, East-West will struggle to enter auctions because the 1NT opening has limited their bidding space. North-South will likely play in 1NT. However, it is hard to make 1NT, as South is short on entries. North must play everything from his own hand.

Scenario 2: North Opens 1♦.

Here's how the bidding might be:

West becomes a declarer for either 1NT or 2.

Inaccurate defense will help West to make 1NT or 2, otherwise, West will need to read the cards layout perfectly to achieve a plus score.

1NT open generally has an advantage in the bidding competitions by limiting the opponents' options, but for this board, 1♦ open is a winner.

Board: 18 Dealer: E Vul.: NS	AQ643 ♥9832 ♦95 AQ9 W E S
N * * * * N 1 S 1 E 4 7 7 1 W 4 7 7 1	AK1075 ♥4 ◆Q4 AJ106432 8 HCP 19

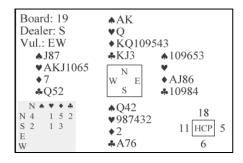
18. West's hand is suitable for supporting partner's 1♥ opening, raising 2♥ is the correct bid. Responding 1♠ instead could create rebid challenges later. As the adage goes: Support with support. Once a fit is established, both partners can reassess their hands. When East sees the 2♥ from partner, it becomes clear that only a little extra from partner could lead a potential slam. For example, if partner holds ♥: J,

♦: AQJ, and either shortness (0-2) or Q in club suit, 7♥

becomes a near-certain grand slam. If most of West's values are in the spade suit, their side might only make 4♥.

To uncover the specifics of West's hand, East can use a splinter bid of 3♠, signaling slam interest and shortness in spades. The bidding sequence would proceed: 1♥-2♥-3♠. While West's hand may not be strong in high card point, and ♠J may seem wasted, the club shortness and 5 card diamond suit are valuable assets. West should cooperate with partner's slam try by cue-bidding 4♠. East can then employ another tool: bidding 4♠ as exclusive RKC, asking for key cards outside the spade suit. Upon learning that West holds the ♠A, East can confidently bid slam, knowing partner must have additional values beyond the ♠A and club shortness to justify the 4♠ cue-bid.

Can EW reach 7♥? Yes, but only with a strong partnership understanding. Grand slam bidding is challenging, even for experienced pairs. Stopping at 6♥ would still get an above-average score.



19. North's hand is too strong for a simple 2 ◆ overcall after West's 1 ♥ opening, so he begins with a double, planning to bid diamond later to show his strong hand. East, with only 5 HCP, should remain silent after north's double, despite holding void in hearts. As the advancer, South has no comfort bids available at this point, he could pass 1 ♥ X, bid 1 ♠, or 1NT, but none of these options perfectly suit his actual hand.

- If South passes partners double, 1♥X could go down 2 with solid defense. +500 for Noth-South, which would likely be a top score.
- If South bids 1NT, north can bid 2 → to complete the strong hand showing with long diamond suit. 2 → could make 3 over tricks, as East does not have any heart to his partner's hand, norths ♥Q can be discarded on the Q.
- If south bid 1NT and North jumps to 3NT, NS would lose 4 heart tricks and ♦A for a one down.

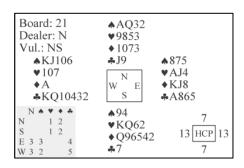
Board: 20 Dealer: W Vul.: All A9764 Q7 1053	♦ KJ ♦ AK9654 ♦ A ♣ AKJ8	♦Q1085 ♥2 ♦KJ984 ♣974
N * * * * N 5 6 1 4 S 5 6 1 4 E 1 W 1	♦32 ♥J1083 ♦Q762 ♣532	8 HCP 6

20. North will be thrilled when he sees his cards. With such a powerful holding, he opens with 2♠, and South responds with 2♠ as a waiting bid. While some partnerships have different agreements for responding to a 2♠ opening, 2♠ as a waiting bid is the most common approach. Most play 2♥ rebid by North as natural, South can raise to 3♥ or 4♥. A jump to 4♥ by South would indicate a dead minimum hand with 4+ heart support.

As mentioned earlier, some partnerships use the 2♥ rebid after a 2♠ opening as the *Kokish relay*, South is required to bid 2♠ artificially as a further waiting bid. At the third round, North can bid 3♠ to complete the description of his hand: 22+HCP, 4 card clubs and 5+ hearts.

North's hand is far too strong to settle for just 4^{\bullet} , so he might explore the possibility of a slam. To make 6^{\bullet} , he needs partner to provide heart support, the ${}^{\bullet}Q$ and the ${}^{\bullet}Q$. If partner has one of the two queens (${}^{\bullet}Q$ or ${}^{\bullet}Q$), there is still a finesse chance to make the slam. Partner has a Queen, unfortunately it is ${}^{\bullet}Q$, which is almost useless for this slam.

The layout is incredibly favorable for NS. Not only is the ♠Q onside, but the clubs also split 3-3. There is no need to guess in spade suit. Declarer can easily collect 4 club tricks, 6 heart tricks, the ♠A and a spade ruff (discarding South's one spade on North's 4th club) for 12 tricks. If you reached slam, you should have no trouble making it.

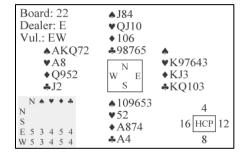


21. When a minor suit fit is established, 3NT is the most common landing spot if there is enough value for a game, but not enough for a slam. However, there are occasions when you need to bid beyond 3NT:

- If there's a chance for a minor suit slam,
- If you lack stoppers in one or more suits.

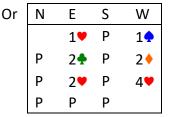
For this board, 3NT is an easy contract for EW, with quick 9 tricks and a good chance to even make an overtrick. If you

play in 5\$\,\text{ by East, it will be defeated on a normal spade lead, losing 2 spade tricks and a spade ruff.}



22. East-West pairs will be in game for this board, either in 3NT or 4♥. The bidding might look like:

N	E	S	W
	1•	Р	1
Р	2 🛡	Р	3♦
Р	3NT	Р	Р
Р			



Declarers in 4♥ will lose 1 heart and 2 minor aces.

Playing 3NT is interesting. If declarers decide to test the diamond suit before touching hearts, they will realize they do not need the heart suit when the ◆10 drops. They have 3 clubs, 3 diamonds, 2 hearts, and 3 spades, losing only 2 aces. Even without establishing the ◆9 as an 11th trick, 3NT+1 still outperforms East-West pairs in 4♥.

Board: 23	\$4
Dealer: S	\$7642
Vul.: All	\$J764
AQ3	\$KQ96 \$A1086
AKQ98	\$V 103
A8	\$V E \$Q9532
J743	\$A10
N * * * *	♦KJ9752
N	♥J5
S	♦K10
E 4 2 4 5 3	♣852 6
W 4 2 4 3 3	HCP 10

23. Overcalling a 5-card suit at the 3-level is not recommended, but West players have no other choices after South's 2♠ preempt. They need to act with this strong hand, but doubling with a 2-5-2-4 shape at this level is awkward, and overcalling 2NT with Qx in the opponent's suit is equally problematic. Thus, a 3♥ overcall becomes the pragmatic choice.

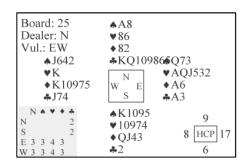
With the spade holding of A1086, East is likely to bid 3NT after partner's 3♥ overcall. On a normal spade lead from South, East has 9 tricks when the ♥J falls. Additional tricks may emerge from minor-suit plays: a small club from West toward the A10 or successful guess in diamond suit.

Board: 24 Dealer: W Vul.: None •6 •Q7652 •10653 •Q93	♦ 532 ♥ K4 ♦ AQJ92 ♣ J52 W N S	AKQJ98 ♥98 ♦K7 &K87
N * * * * N 1 1 S 1 1 E 1 2 1 W 1 2 1	↑1074 ▼AJ103 ◆84 ↑A1064	4 HCP 16

24. This is a borderline opening hand by North. He can also pass and then reopen with 2♦. Considering the quality of diamond suit, opening 1♦ should be a good choice.

East has a strong hand with solid spade suit, he will compete fearlessly and likely play in a 2♠ contract. There is not much to say about the play or defense for this board. With the ♣A on the left and the ♦A on the right, 6 spade tricks, 1 club, and

1 diamond will give East a quick claim.



25. North opens pre-emptive 3♣, East has a few options to enter the bidding:

- Overcall 3♥, a slight underbid. Likely West would pass 3♥,
- Overcall 3NT, not likely but works here, as EW has quick 9 tricks,
- Double, If West does not jump to 4♠, they have chance to get to 4♥ or 3NT. Example sequences:
 - (3♣) X-3♦-3♥-3♠-4♥
 - (3♣) X-3♦-3♥-3♠-3NT.

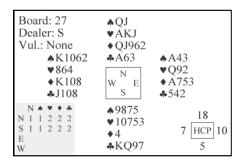
Pairs reaching 4♥ win the board, though the path to the contract remains unpredictable.

Board: 26 Dealer: E Vul.: All A2 VAJ1082 Q82 A642	♣Q1074 ♦643 ♦A43 ♣AQ8 W E	♣ K983 ♥KQ97 ♦ K7 ♣ KJ9
N * * * * N S E 4 3 5 1 2 W 4 3 5 1 2	♣J65 ♥5 ♦J10965 ♣10753	11 HCP 15

26. This appears to be a flat board. The auction begins with East opening 1NT. West employs a 2♦ transfer to show hearts. After East's transfer acceptance. West jumps to 3NT, prompting East - holding 4-card heart support, to correct to 4♥ as the final contract.

◆J will be a normal opening lead card. Upon dummy (West) playing low, North must hold the ◆A to avoid conceding

2 diamond tricks to EW. Declarer should prioritize establishing club tricks over speculative spade plays. With both the ♣A and ♣Q favorably positioned, declarer can limit club losers to 1, by leading the suit from dummy towards declarer's hand twice. This double finesse ensures an overtrick in 4♥, making it the expected result at most tables.



27. With 4-4 in majors, South should respond with 1♥ over partners 1♦ opening. If south has 5-5 in majors, the correct response bid is 1♠, not 1♥. North rebids 2NT to show a 18-19 balance hand. South has no reason to bid more, so 2NT by North becomes a final contract.

When seeking advice from experts on opening lead, you often hear: "I would lead this card, but I am not sure." Selecting an opening lead is often challenging. Against no

trump contracts, standard strategy dictates leading either your longest suit or partner's suit. However, neither applies here. Your partner has not made a bid, and your longest suit (diamond) also happens to be the declarer's opening suit. Leading low spade from Axx is an unusual option. It seems like you are deliberating between a card from hearts or from clubs. You hover over the two suits, and ultimately, your hand settles on a low heart – a choice that backfires instantly. The heart lead surrenders a trick, and the result of -120 score is far from ideal.