

Unit 191/119 Mentor-Mentee Game January 21, 2026

4 Tables

Boards 1-5 Glen Anderson

Board 1 neither vulnerable, North deals

At all four tables, South opens 1NT and plays that contract at three tables. At one table, West bid 2H and played 2NT after East bid 2S (although a pass is the recommended action by East). If South plays 1NT, West will lead a heart honor or 4th best and can expect the defense will take 8 tricks (4 hearts, one spade, one diamond and two clubs although one trick may go away if East jettisons a diamond on the run of the hearts. West should make 2H as long as the 9 of diamonds is inserted on the second round of diamonds.

Board 2, NS vulnerable, East deals

After East passes as dealer, most Souths would also pass and West would open 1H, North overcalls 1S and the spotlight is on South. At three tables, South raised to 2S, recognizing that most of her high card points are not pulling their weight. An optimistic South might try a 2H cue bid, which would lead to a contract of 2S. At one table, South bid 1NT and that closed the bidding for a poor matchpoint score when East-West cash diamonds and the ace of hearts, whereas 2S is making 10 tricks, even after a

low heart lead and a ruff. A strong pair could test declarer to make 10 tricks with the following defense: low heart to the Ace, high heart to suggest a diamond return, heart ruff, and an underlead of the Ace of diamonds. If declarer is not careful to ruff the heart return with the Jack of spades, East will be able to overruff North's low spade. Once North ruffs with the Jack of spades, North must hope for West to have Kx in spades to make ten tricks.

Board 3, E-W vulnerable, South deals

In 3rd seat, North opens 1H, East overcalls 1NT showing 15-18 HCPs and South will raise to 2H, ending the auction (although North raised to 3H at three tables). As West has no entries, the defense will be limited to three tricks as a losing club can be discarded on the King of diamonds (three Aces).

Board 4, both vulnerable, West deals

West opens 1D, East bids 1S, West bids 1NT and East should jump to 4S (although only two East-West pairs reached game). The play is straightforward – East should only lose the Queen of spades and the Ace of clubs.

Board 5 N/S Vulnerable, North deals

After North passes, West opens the bidding with 1D, honor). South should pass with a balanced 11 count and two diamond tricks. N-S are vulnerable and North has already passed, and South has a balanced hand without

four hearts or spades. Try to play 1S doubled by North. At three tables, the bidding went 1D-Pass-1H-pass-2C, then three West bidders went in different directions. At one table, West bid 2S (Fourth Suit Forcing) with a hand short at least 5 HCPs. At another table, West jumped to 3D. This hand is clearly too weak for a 3D bid and East could have only 4 diamonds with five clubs, but as it turns out, 3D will make despite two diamond losers. At the third table, West made the recommended bid of 2D. Now East can bid 2H to bid out shape (denied four hearts with the 2C bid) and show a little extra in HCPs. Knowing that East likely has a singleton spade (hopefully an honor), West should pass 2H. With a more useful spade holding such as Q109x, 2NT would be the call over 2H and East would likely raise to 3NT. As the cards lie, East-West can make 3D or 3NT. 2H is a Moysian fit and there are several ways to play the hand. Assuming North leads the singleton diamond, one line of play is Diamond King, three rounds of trumps, diamond to the Ace, diamond to South's Jack. South will likely lead a spade to the single ace and West can lead a diamond, ruff the Queen and lead a club to the 9 or 10. West will lose two clubs, one diamond, and a spade (as the cards lie), making nine tricks, but this is a tricky hand to play.

Boards 6-10 John Cobb

Board 6 E/W Vulnerable, East deals

East passes and South with a balanced 16 count opens 1NT. While West has 14 HCPs, they are vulnerable and

lack a 5 card suit and should pass.

North has invitational values (if opener has 16 or 17 then they have 25+ combined HCPs) and a 4 card major. The way to show this hand is bid Stayman and, if a major suit is not found, rebid 2NT. Here opener will show 4 spades (and deny 4 hearts since hearts was cheaper to show), and then will accept the invitation with 16 HCPs, a stray 10, and a spade suit with several honors working together.

The simplified auction, repeated at 3 of our 4 tables, with E/W passing is:

1NT - 2C

2S - 2NT

3NT - All Pass

What should West lead? With AKQ in clubs, it make sense to lead a Club and take a look at dummy. Which Club? There are two schools of thought on an Ace vs. King lead against a notrump contract. One lead should ask partner for attitude, the other lead asks partner to unblock (if possible) and give count if there is no card to unblock. You can see the final section of [this article](#) for a discussion. Since you only have 4 cards in the suit, you definitely don't want partner to unblock a Jack from Jxxx, so you should lead the card asking for attitude. We will assume here that it is the Ace (Ace for attitude, King for Unblock/Count). Here partner will give you a negative attitude card from their holding of 76 (although it may be

difficult to read) and you will need to decide what to do next.

Let's start by listening to the auction and counting points. With an invitational sequence and an acceptance, you expect N/S to have a combined 25 or 26 HCPs. Adding that to your 14 HCP and that leaves at most a Jack in your partner's hand. Your only real hope for a fifth and setting trick is for clubs to be split 3-3-3 amongst the other players, or for partner to have 4 clubs including the Jack. You can see 3 clubs in dummy and perhaps partner has something like J86 or 876 where (assuming you are playing standard signals) the 6 would be consistent with that holding. I would go ahead and cash the other two clubs, which in this case does not work. It sets up the Jack of Clubs in South's hand, but this is a redundant trick. You take your Spade Ace and South makes his contract taking exactly 9 tricks.

Board 7 All Vulnerable, South deals

South is Vulnerable, has 10 HCP, 1.5 Quick Tricks, and a good 6 card heart suit. The hand does not meet the [Rule of 20](#) or the [Rule of 22](#), so I would open this hand with 2H. This is about as good a hand as you could have to open 2H instead of 1H.

West has a 6 card spade suit, but not enough strength to enter the auction Vulnerable. North, with only 2 card trump support and not a strong hand has no reason to advance the auction. East has 16 HCPs, but with 5 cards

in suit bid by South, should Pass as well. This auction happened at 2 of our 4 tables. South will play 2H facing a very bad trump break.

West will likely lead the 10 of Spades, which turns out to be favorable for declarer as it will quickly set up declarer's K. East wins the Ace of Spades at trick 1 and has to decide whether or not to play Ace and another heart to stop potential Spade ruffs in dummy. It turns out that stopping the spade ruff will cost a trump trick in the long run, so the decision is a wash. On the lead of the Spade 10, South should eventually come to 8 or 9 tricks.

Board 8 None Vulnerable, West deals

West has a balanced 16 count and should open 1NT, not 1D. 1NT is a much better description, has preemptive value, and gets across lots of information with a single bid. North passes and East has to decide how to move things forward. With 9 HCP and a 4 card major, you can take the same approach as we did on Board 6 - Bid Stayman looking for an 8-card Heart fit and if you don't find it, rebid 2NT invitational, asking opener to go to 3NT with a non-minimum. Here, with 3-4-3-3 shape, East could also take a position to ignore the 4 card heart suit and just bid 2NT invitational. The reasoning is that you don't really have any ruffing value and that at Matchpoints it may score better to play 3NT instead of 4H, even with an 8-card Heart fit if the hands are very flat. Note that this only because of the 3-4-3-3 shape - with any other shape you should prefer to check on the Heart fit. In this

particular hand, West does not have 4 hearts, so it doesn't matter which approach you choose. With 16 HCP and a reasonable 5-card Diamond suit, West should accept the invitation and raise to 3NT.

North should lead a club, but which one? If the suit was headed by QJT or QJ9, they could lead the Queen as top of a sequence. In this hand, with QJxxx, they should lead a 4th best 4 of Clubs. South wins the Ace and returns the 10 of Clubs. If West ducks, North should overtake with the Queen or Jack and play a third round of Clubs to clear the suit.

Whether the contract makes or not depends on how declarer decides to play the Diamond suit. Since South is out of Clubs and it isn't clear who has the Ace of Spades, a case can be made for taking a Diamond finesse into the South hand, keeping the dangerous hand off the lead. If it loses, maybe South has the Spade Ace and there is no entry to the North hand to take the setting tricks. Another take on the hand would be to play South for longer diamonds since they only have 2 Clubs and thus more room for Diamonds. This may help you pick up an all-important extra trick in Matchpoint scoring, but risks going down in a making contract. These are the types of tough decisions you face in a Matchpoint game.

The winning play on this hand is to take a first round finesse in Diamonds by leading to the Diamond Jack. This wins, and you note that South plays the Diamond 9, which looks like it could be a

singleton. Declarer should get back to their hand with the Heart Ace and then lead the Diamond 10. Whether North covers with the Queen or not, you can now take 5 Diamond tricks. After that Declarer cashes a third round of Hearts hoping they break 3-3, but they don't. Now you can lead the spade Queen, hoping South has the Spade Ace, which they do. South can win the Spade Ace and cash the Heart Jack, but declarer will win the 13th trick with the Spade K, for a total of 10 tricks. 3NT making 4.

If declarer instead took the aggressive approach of playing South for the Diamond Queen, North will get in with the Queen, cash the remaining clubs and then play to the spade Ace. Declarer will be down 2 on this line of play.

Board 9 EW vulnerable, N deals

North passes and East opens 1D. South has 13 HCPs, but with no 5-card suit and without an appropriate shape for a Double, should pass. West has the perfect bid to describe their hand. 2NT shows 11-12 HCPs and denies a 4-card major, so 2NT it is. East has 14 HCPs and a balanced hand and is happy to raise to 3NT.

North will likely lead a Club and declarer will win the Ace. Declarer has 9 tricks off the top with the only real hope of an extra trick being the fourth round of Diamonds if they either split 3-3 or the opponents discard poorly. Declarer should cash 4 rounds of Spades first hoping for someone to discard a long Diamond. South can see 4 Diamonds in dummy and that should be

sufficient reason to not discard one (keeping parity with dummy, see [this article](#)). After cashing the spades and the other winning Club, they tackle the Diamonds and are disappointed when they don't split. However, 9 tricks have been taken and the contract has been made.

Board 10 both vulnerable, E deals

East has 11 HCPs, but is Vulnerable and amazingly only has 0.5 Quick Tricks. This is the definition of a "quack" hand (full of Queens and Jacks). The hand does not meet the [Rule of 20](#) or the [Rule of 22](#), and should be passed.

South has 10 HCPs and 1.0 Quick Tricks. Vulnerable and not meeting either the [Rule of 20](#) or the [Rule of 22](#), South should pass.

West is third seat, where the opening rules are relaxed. See [this article](#) on third seat bidding from Larry Cohen for more information. However, Vulnerable with only 8 HCPs and not a great plan for what to do after partner likely responds 1S, I would pass even in third seat.

That brings us to North in 4th seat. A good guideline for whether or not to open in 4th seat is the Rule of 15. See [this article](#) for a good description. North has 11 HCPs (along with 2.5 Quick Tricks) and a 4 card spade suit, so it definitely meets the Rule of 15. North opens 1D.

East would like to get in the auction now with their 11 HCPs, but with no 5 card suit and QJ9x in the suit North

opened, passes again. South has an easy 1H response.

West has a mediocre 6-card club suit and has already limited their hand with the previous Pass as a positive for bidding, but is Vulnerable and has AT98 in the suit South just bid as negatives. I would expect some votes for both 2C and for Pass. Let's look at how the auction would likely go in each case. If West bids 2C, North will take the opportunity to Pass. East will likely raise to 3C (no reason to do more here since both East and West passed last time and know that game possibilities are remote). South will now either Pass or risk 3D, and that will likely end the auction. If West chooses to Pass instead of bidding 2C, North will bid 1S, East will pass, and South will likely bid 3D invitational ending the auction.

If E/W play a 3C contract, the cards sit very well for them and they will make the contract with a possible overtrick. If N/S play a 3D contract, the cards sit very poorly for them and they will likely go down 2 tricks Vulnerable for -200 and a very poor matchpoint score.

The Rule of 15 did not work out very well on this hand and, only looking at results, passing the board out was North's best chance for a non-negative score. The board was passed out at one of our four tables, with N/S getting a top for that result. Bridge is a tough game - making good bids doesn't always get you a good result...

Boards 11-14 Eric Hamilton

Board 11 neither vulnerable, S deals

South naturally opens 1S, and in our game most wests overcalled 2H. East raises to 3H and it's up to South, who can settle for defending 3H by passing or double for takeout to look for something better.

Generally in an auction like this (opening bid, overcall, partner passes, back around to opener) opener with shortness in their suit will double unless there's a good reason not to. There's no reason to think that partner is broke; more likely they couldn't make a negative double. And here South has substantial extra values and the heart void is useful on offense. There's only so strong the opponents can be after east couldn't bid 2S. Overall, it's more likely that NS are being robbed than that it's not their hand. And sure enough....

If South doubles, North might try 4D which makes for +130.

Or North might try 3S which makes for +140.

Or North might pass for penalties and collect +300.

Any of those outcomes are better than selling out to 3H and settling +100 on a deal that we own.

A group of strong players worldwide presented with exactly this problem voted unanimously for doubling. One British expert's comment pretty much says it all: "Double is risky but so is Pass."

Board 12 NS vulnerable, W deals

If we just look at the results in our game, this one is too boring to write about. North opens 1S, south raises to 2S with three-card support and 9 HCP, north with no extras is happy to play 2S which (as the cards lie) can neither be beaten nor make overtricks and passes. And that's what happened at all four tables.

So we score up a NS +110 average both ways and move on to the next board?

No. No, no, no. It is almost never right to let the opponents play two of a major when they have an eight-card fit and want to be there.

When 2S is passed around to east they should not be thinking "I have only 6 HCP, nothing for me here, obvious pass". Instead they should be thinking that defending 2S will be an average result at best, NS don't want to go past 2S so only have 20ish HCP between them so partner must have a fair amount, our hand will be a great dummy in any of the other three suits, and even if we're down two for -100 that's better than -110 for letting 2S go by without a fight.

So instead of selling to 2S east doubles for takeout. West should not be excited by this. Instead they should understand that the better their hand is the worse east's hand will be and make one minimum action, then be silent. Here west will bid 3D which is down two, better than defending 2S. And note that this is pretty much the worst case: west found doubler's worst suit and 3C would have been much better (it actually makes for +110).

But we all know what will really happen. NS will bid 3S over 3D (wouldn't you?), that will go down one, and east's enterprising double will have turned -110 into +100 and a top board.

And this is why it is almost never right to let the opponents play two of a major when they have an eight-card fit and want to be there.

Board 13 Both vulnerable, N deals

East's 13 HCP and two quick tricks make for an opening bid; the long solid spades mean that hand will be worth much more when spades are trump than anything else. The way to bid these is to jump directly to game if partner make any non-forcing response ("partner, there's nothing to talk about here - spades are trump") so east opens 1S planning an auction like 1S-1N;4S-P. (If partner can't scrape up a bid over 1S, we probably don't want to be in game).

That plan is foiled when south interferes with 2H leaving west with no good bid, and instead the auction will proceed 1S-(2H)-P;2S-3S;4S-P. But one way or another east should end up playing 4S.

Suppose that south starts with a diamond (their best lead, anything else gives declarer a chance for an overtrick). Declarer plans the play: one diamond already lost, two heart losers in hand, and the two black kings - five potential losers when we can only afford three. We

can't do anything about the second round of hearts, but we might be able to ruff the third round in dummy; and of course we can hope that one or both black kings are finessable.

So we have Plan A: Draw trumps starting with a spade finesse, then try the club finesse making if both finesses work; and Plan B: ruff a heart in dummy, then draw trumps and try the club finesse making if either finesse works.

Plan B is clearly better, so that's what we do: ruff the second round of diamonds in hand, ace of hearts and duck a heart, win the return, ruff the last heart in dummy and only now do we finesse the spades and draw trumps.

Board 14 Neither vulnerable, E deals

Does east open 1D (meets the rule of 20 and two quick tricks) or preempt (not a lot of points and nothing but diamonds)?

Most strong players will choose 1D because this hand would make a superb dummy in a heart contract... so why not explore that possibility before committing to diamonds? And the hand is appreciably better than the average first seat preempt - if we open 3D west won't appreciate how little is needed to make game. (On this deal 3N makes if west's hearts are AJT instead of AT9 but no way is west imagining that after a 3D opening).

Nonetheless, it's not exactly wrong to preempt with the

east hand. Just be aware that you're taking a glass-half-empty position in a game in which the scoring generally rewards glass-half-full thinking.

On this particular deal on this particular day the half-empty crowd wins: a 3D preempt will be passed around to north who will be sorely tempted to take a chance on 4C. That goes down and the foul spade break dooms any spade contract so east-west end up with a plus score. Meanwhile the 1D bidders are disappointed that west has neither hearts nor values for a NT game, so subside in 3D - a sensible auction might be 1D-P-1S-X;2D-P-P-3C;3D-P-P-P. Now EW are down after south leads the singleton club: the first three tricks are two clubs and a club ruff, and there are still two hearts to lose.

Boards 15-18 Michael Lavine

Board 15 NS vulnerable, S deals

Bidding: After South passes, West will either pass or open 2 spades. Personally, I would open 2 spades, especially at this vulnerability where we want to be most obstructive. If W opens 2s, should E bid on? East can picture a typical 2s hand for West, say AKxxxx in spades and nothing else. That would give EW six spade tricks, 1 heart, and 1 club, for only 8 tricks. Therefore it's risky for E to bid. But a chance of game might still make it worthwhile for E to bid. Is there a chance of game? Where would two more tricks come from? West might

hold an outside honor, there might be a club ruff, or the heart ace might be onside. So yes, there's a chance of game. Bidding on is a close call, but if East does decide to bid on it should be with an invitational call; East should not bid 4s directly. See <https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/responding-to-weak-2-bids?p=true> for responding to partner's weak two bid.

If West does not open then East will open 1 diamond and the bidding should proceed 1d-1s; 1n-2s. West has a minimum hand and should not venture beyond 2s. East does not have enough strength to invite game opposite West's minimum.

Observe that the EW pairs who bid game went down while those who played a part score made it.

Play. The spade suit is A98xxx opposite Qxx. How should it be played? This is a specific instance of the general question of how to play various card combinations. See <http://www.rpbridge.net/4a00.htm> and https://www.bridgehands.com/S/Suit_Combinations.htm for help with many specific combinations. A general principle, expressed at <https://lajollabridge.com/LJUnit/Education/Teaching-Points/how-to-play-different-card-combinations.htm> is "*Do NOT lead a lower honor toward a higher honor (hoping opponent will "cover an honor with an honor") unless YOU or dummy hold the appropriate lower honors or spot cards to promote.*" On this hand you do not hold the Jack, so leading up to the queen is better than leading the

queen.

Board 16 EW vulnerable, West deals

Bidding: One of our Wests chose to open 1 diamond. That's an offbeat opening, as West does not have the strength to justify an opening bid. At most tables there were, correctly, three passes to South. The usual opening with South's hand is 1 diamond, which puts South in a great position if North responds with 1 of a major. It's also possible for South to open 1 notrump, which accurately describes the strength and still allows for North to find a 4-4 major suit fit if one exists.

If South opens 1 diamond, should North respond? I think five hcp including an ace, three tens, and a doubleton, justify responding 1 heart. Then South raises hearts. Bidding 2h shows 12-15 points; bidding 3h shows 16-18; and bidding 4h shows 19+. With 17 hcp and a singleton, I think South should bid 4h. In practice, 4h is an inferior contract, though it would have chances to make despite North's terrible minimum.

At the table where South opened 1 notrump, North bid 2 clubs, Stayman. That's unjustified because Stayman promises at least an invitational 8-9 points, unless North plans to pass whatever South rebids.

Play: If North plays in hearts then I expect East to lead the club King. North will expect a 3-2 trump break, so should try to use South's two little hearts for ruffing clubs. In

diamonds, I would try to lead twice from North and finesse against the Queen and Jack. If East holds either card (75% chance) then I can hold the diamond losers to two. There are very few entries to the North hand so the play will be quite difficult. This time the hearts do not break well and the diamond Queen and Jack are both offside, so NS will not do as well as they might expect in a heart contract.

Board 17 Neither vulnerable, North deals

Bidding: The bidding starts 1d-p-p-? What is West supposed to do?

<https://larryco.com/bridge-articles/balancing-on-the-1-level> explains: "A jump to 2NT in balancing seat is not the Unusual Notrump. It shows 19-21 balanced with a stopper(s) in the opponent's suit."

Board 18 NS vulnerable, East deals

Bidding: South opens 1 heart and North should immediately think of slam. Two Norths bid Jacoby 2nt. That's a good bid if your partnership plays it; see https://www.bridgebum.com/jacoby_2nt.php if you don't. That page also describes how opener should rebid when responder bids 2nt. One North bid a game-forcing 2 diamonds instead of 2 notrump. That's fine if your partnership doesn't play Jacoby 2nt. One North bid 4 hearts. That's a misdescription. 4H shows a weak distributional hand with 4 or more hearts. See <https://www.larryco.com/uploaded/product/a3c380a3-9899>

-4268-9a68-01ee854de330.pdf.

Play: There is almost nothing to the play of the hand. South will pull trumps and use dummy's third club to discard a losing diamond. If trumps break 2-2, South will be able to ruff two spades in dummy. If trumps break 3-1, South will either ruff two spades in dummy before pulling all the trump or else ruff one spade and take a spade finesse for the 13th trick.