



ERIN BERRY ROOKIE/MASTER GAME
CANADIAN BRIDGE FEDERATION
TUESDAY OCTOBER 16, 2024
ANALYST: NEIL KIMELMAN

Erin Berry was developing into one of Canada's best Junior players when she tragically died in an automobile accident in January 1998. The Fall Rookie-Master game is named in her honour. And mark the date of the next Rookie-Master game on your calendar: Wednesday April 2, 2025.

We are very fortunate to have **Neil Kimelman** for his 2nd go around as analyst, providing his insights into today's hands. Neil is a multifaceted bridge personality. An expert player, he is a CNTC-A Canadian Champion, with multiple overall finishes in NABC and CBC events, dating back to being a finalist in the 1979 Reisinger. He was also a finalist in the World Open Pairs Championships, held in Philadelphia in 2010.

Neil is also a critically acclaimed and award-winning bridge writer. His three books on bidding judgement (Improve Your Bidding Judgement; The Thin Fine Line; The Right Bid at the Right Time) are recommended for any player wishing to improve this facet of their game. Neil has written many stand-alone articles for Bridge Canada, The Bridge World and the ACBL Unit 181 website (Manitoba). He is the founder of the Over Confidence Coup.

Finally, he has been serving the CBF Bridge Community since 2010. Twelve years as a Board member, including President, as well as Managing Editor of the CBF Bridge Canada publication, since 2013.

We hope you had a very enjoyable time playing in the 2024 Erin-Berry Rookie-Master game. Neil's goal was to help you review and learn from the hands played in this year's event. What might be the par result, why you scored what you did, and perhaps, what you could have done differently or better. Sit back, relax and let's see what we can learn!

Board: 1	♠AJ1093	
Dealer: N	♥10532	
Vul.: None	♣3	
♠K5	♣J109	♠864
♥AKQ9		♥6
♦K754		♦AJ1098
♣543		♣Q872
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠Q72	6
N 2 2	♥J874	
S 2 2	♦Q62	15 HCP 7
E 2 1	♣AK6	12
W 2 1		

1. South's decision as to whether to open their hand in 3rd seat, will determine the path of the bidding. Even at matchpoints I would not open the South hand. Partner will likely over compete and N-S will usually end up with a minus score, maybe doubled. A 1♣ opening by South will leave West with no really good option. Both 1NT and 1♥ are ok, but I slightly prefer the latter. Pass, although theoretically correct, will make it impossible to find game if East holds 10-11 HCPs.

After a 1♥ overall North will bid 1♠, which should go pass-pass back to West who should double to announce a good hand, and shortness in spades. The par spot of 3♦ should now be reached, down one against any normal defence. East should guess the Q♦, as North has long spades, long hearts and three clubs, ergo short diamonds. Plus, South needs it to have an opening bid.

If South passes, North should show the majors over a 1NT opening by West. Yes, the North hand does not have many points, but partner is unlikely to compete. This should still translate into both

sides competing to the three level. Here, however, South will be sorry if they bid 3♣ as the natural heart lead from both sides will sink this contract and give E-W an average plus score.

Board: 2	♠8754	
Dealer: E	♥KQ2	
Vul.: NS	♦Q976	
♠AK	♣Q4	♠Q932
♥83		♥J10975
♦532		♦84
♣AJ8763		♣52
N ♠♥♦♣	♠J106	9
N 3 2 3 1	♥A64	
S 3 2 3 1	♦AKJ10	12 HCP 3
E 1	♣K109	16
W 1		

2. Whew! Board 1 was a lot of work! I need a break, and Board 2 does meet this need. The 2nd hand is a little more straightforward. A 1NT opening in 2nd seat will likely keep E-W silent. West has enough to bid clubs, especially at this vulnerability, but most partnerships play a 2♣ overall as artificial, usually any one suit, or a major two suiter. North has enough to invite game, usually through Stayman. Here South should accept with their 16 HCP hand. Three 10's and excellent high card structure should make this a no brainer. West has high hopes on defence, but their club start leads to an obvious 9 tricks, with no hope for a 10th. Flattest board of the evening.

Board: 3	♠8653	
Dealer: S	♥Q42	
Vul.: EW	♦K	
♠KQ942	♣J10872	♠A10
♥		♥AJ108
♦Q1097543		♦J6
♣5		♣AKQ43
N ♠♥♦♣	♠J7	6
N 4 5 1 5 3	♥K97653	
E 4 5 1 5 3	♦A82	7 HCP 19
W 4 4 1 5 3	♣96	8

3. Back to work on this very exciting hand. I would open 2♥ with South's hand. Even though the suit is just so-so, the advantages of pre-empting the opponents outweighs any risk of being doubled. Here, as often is the case playing matchpoints, the vulnerability is crucial to decision making. Vulnerable bids that are undisciplined are often doubled. A -200 (or worse) score will usually result in a bottom score. West, despite their 5-7 shape, should pass. This is best whether South opens the bidding or not. Partner will expect more HCPs, and not as much shape for an opener. However, passing does not mean you have to pass on your next turn! West should listen to the auction, and then decide if acting is prudent.

Over pass by West, North should bid 3♥! A raise of a pre-empt is best played as non-invitational, and obstructive in nature. A good strategy at matchpoints, as it rarely doubled, and the opponents have to start one level higher. Whether North bids or not, East's best choice is 3NT. Yes, passing a heart partial will result in a plus. But even down three is only +150, (yes, the vulnerability is once again important) whereas other tables are going to be bidding 3NT, which here, is an easy +630.

Wait!! The bidding is not over! What does poor West do after hearing this auction. Should they bid 5♦? 4♠? 4♥? No, they should pass! Why? Because East could have a variety of hands for their 3NT call. Yes, balanced with a lot of HCPs is one option. But they may have something like ♠xx ♥Kxx ♦Ax ♣AKQxxx. Plus, you are guessing whether your best fit is in spades or diamonds, as well as how high to bid. I agree that it is very sad having to only use the green cards with this exciting West hand, but your partner will thank you for your discipline after.

Board: 4	♠K3	
Dealer: W	♥AQ4	
Vul.: All	♦AJ983	
♠874	♣542	♠QJ1062
♥98732		♥J1065
♦Q1052		♦6
♣6		♣Q97
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠A95	14
N 7 3 3 7 7	♥K	2 [HCP] 6
S 7 3 3 7 7	♦K74	18
E	♣AKJ1083	
W		

4. The bidding should start with North opening 1♦. There is a good argument for treating this as 1NT opener, as this is a 'good' 14 count, with a good five card suit. But I would not do it here. The reason is that you are playing matchpoints, where getting a plus on all boards you can is the key to scoring well. If you open 1NT here partner may bid too much. On the actual hand, the best spot by far is 6NT.

Here is a sample 'good' auction, with meanings of each bid:

North	South	1 Normal.
1♦ ¹	2♣ ²	2 Game forcing.
		3 Much better bid than 2♦. First, you describe the essence of your hand 12-14, balanced. Plus, North will play any notrump contract from the 'right' side, protecting both the ♠K and the ♥AQ.
2NT ³	3♣ ⁴	
3♦ ⁵	4NT ⁶	4 I have long clubs, in an unbalanced hand, and may or may not have slam interest
5♥ ⁷	6NT ⁸	5 I have a good hand for clubs, and am cue bidding my lowest ace.
		6 Great!! I have a really good slam values, and we may even have a grand slam if you have the right cards.
		7 I have two aces (Keycards, but no ♣Q).
		8 Ok, let's play in 6NT. We only have around 31 HCPs, but I have a great source for extra tricks, and I know that my ♥K is valuable as we have all the aces.

Yes 6♣ and 6♦ both will make on good declarer play, but notrump scores the best! This is critical playing pairs, and successful players are always thinking 'should we play this hand in notrump?' 'But wait!!' you say. 'It says on the analysis sheet that 7♣ and 7♦ make! Why should I stop in six?' The reason is that the makeable contracts are based on being able to see all four hands. Bridge doesn't work like that 😊.

The goal should be in bidding to denomination and level that are odds on to be successful. Do not solely rely on the hand records. They are a useful indicator, but only that.

Board: 5	♠108	
Dealer: N	♥A93	
Vul.: NS	♦8542	
♠AJ6543	♣10942	♠K97
♥Q1076		♥K5
♦AK10		♦QJ763
♣		♣J83
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠Q2	4
N 2	♥J842	14 [HCP] 10
S 2	♦9	12
E 6 1 6	♣AKQ765	
W 6 1 6		

5. West should overcall South's 1♣ opener with 1♠. Their hand has a lot to say: two other suits, void in clubs, lots of high cards. But the first message you want partner to hear is 'I have enough to overcall and at least five spades.' This should be followed by pass, 2♠ by East, pass by South. Yes, South has clubs, but partner has passed. He should suspect that E-W may even have a game, and bidding more may encourage them to bid a makeable game. It shouldn't matter, as West

should just bid 4♠. You might wonder what is wrong with making a game try at the three level in a new suit? The answer is twofold. First, game should be close to cold. As little as ♠Kxxx and a doubleton heart gives you 10 tricks. But just as important, bidding a new suit naturally is giving

the opponents potentially valuable info about your hand, which may help their defence. Don't offer information unless you are sure it will be more valuable to your side than theirs.

Board: 6	♠K42	
Dealer: E	♥1095	
Vul.: EW	♦AQ1072	
♠J10865	♣64	♥Q9
♥KQ		♥A876
♦J986	W N E	♦3
♣K10	S	♠AJ8532
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠A73	9
N 1	♥J432	10 HCP 11
S 1	♦K54	10
E 1 1 4	♣Q97	10
W 1 1 4		

6. The early auction should be fairly predictable. East will rebid their clubs, pass, pass to North who should balance with 2♦. East and South should pass. Now, West has to make a decision. Double will only yield +100, not as good as 3♣ making for +110. 3♣ should be the popular spot, likely making three, which should be an average plus for E-W. Doubling a greedy N-S in 3♦ will win all the E-W matchpoints, while N-S will score well playing in 2♦.

One final **advanced** tip: when 2♦ gets passed to West, they should bid 2♠ (or maybe 2NT). Why? 2♠ has to show some club support. Why? Without it West would simply pass or double 2♦ on a known misfit. West is saying, "I want to compete to 3♣, but I have five spades also, in case you think we should play in 2♠, one level lower and a higher scoring denomination to boot!

Board: 7	♠A7542	
Dealer: S	♥8	
Vul.: All	♦AKQ6	
♠63	♣J84	♠J1098
♥743		♥AKJ
♦J108752	W N E	♦93
♣A2	S	♣10653
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KQ	14
N 3 4 3 1 3	♥Q109652	5 HCP 9
S 3 4 3 1 3	♦4	12
E	♣KQ97	
W		

7. With E-W silent, N-S will bid up to 3NT. If South rebids their hearts, they will likely play the contract. If they instead bid their clubs on the 2nd round of bidding, North gets declarer practice in notrump.

Assuming South plays and wins the opening diamond lead with the ace. How should South play? The focus for declarer should be enabling communications between the hands, and that is done by establishing the ♣J as an entry to dummy. This

also builds club tricks. So, at trick two South should play a club to the king, and West's ace. (Cashing the ♠KQ first before playing on clubs is also reasonable.) West does best to continue diamonds. South can now cash off the ♠KQ, club to the Jack, and play the ♠A. When spades don't split, declarer cashes their 3rd diamond. Now they have 7 tricks. And West has shown up with 6 diamonds, 2 spades and 2 clubs. The winning percentage play is to lead the ♣8 to the ♣Q9, and when it goes ♣6, finesse the ♣9. When that works declarer can feel good about navigating 9 tricks on this difficult 3NT declarer play.

Board: 8	♠QJ9642	
Dealer: W	♥432	
Vul.: None	♦64	
♠853	♣42	♠A7
♥KJ7		♥Q9865
♦KJ8	W N E	♦Q73
♠AK108	S	♣J65
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠K10	3
N 1	♥A10	15 HCP 9
S 1	♦A10952	13
E 4 4 2 4	♣Q973	
W 4 4 2 3		

8. This hand is all about rewarding poor bids. Sigh! A standard notrump invitational auction (East should transfer to hearts and then invite game with 2NT). Now, the odds on bid, with a flat hand and minimum values, is to sign off in 3♥. This will make four when the club finesse works. Some greedy Wests will pass 2NT (or worse, bid 3NT), and get rewarded when West leads a spade, but has no entry to run their suit. The same tricks are now available in notrump. Bidding 4♥ may be

worth the risk at IMPs, but not pairs. Even though you bid to the best contract, +170 will score an average minus.

Board: 9	♠AJ83	
Dealer: N	♥Q	
Vul.: EW	♦KQ865	
♠KQ9764	♣763	♠102
♥J10765		♥K932
♦	N	♦AJ2
♣Q9	W	♣AJ85
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠5	12
N	♥A84	8
S	♦109743	HCP 13
E 2 3 4	♣K1042	7
W 2 3 3		

9. North should open 1♦ (yes, I have had better opening bids) and East should pass with no good bid. South has a very good constructive hand in support of diamonds. Actually, it evaluates closer to a limit raise. Once again, vulnerability is a consideration. Vul, I would bid 3♦. At teams I may even treat as a limit raise. But here I strongly recommend a minimum 6-9 raise in diamonds, and then probably bid again with this maximum. Lots of good things could happen: partner may

penalize the vulnerable opponents if they bid. You would not mind this with your two defensive cards. One thing you know will not happen: partner will never play you for much more than you actually hold.

Over the presumed 2♦, West has a problem. They have a great hand distributional hand with modest high card strength (déjà vu board 3). Here I would succumb to temptation and bid. I slightly prefer 2♠. The advantage of staying at the two level and bidding my longest suit, and the one I want partner to lead if North is declarer, slightly outweighs the advantage of also showing hearts. However, the aggressive but reasonable bid of 3♦ by West is the winner on this deal, when East bids 4♥ with their opening bid, which cannot be defeated with South on lead.

Finally, N-S have a good sacrifice in 5♦, down only two for -300. This may be an excellent choice at teams, but is a losing strategy at pairs. The reason? Most pairs will not bid up to 4♥. So, if it makes for -620, or you go -300 in 5♦, both will be close to a bottom, as most N-S pairs will be -140 or -170, or +110.

Board: 10	♠Q6	
Dealer: E	♥62	
Vul.: All	♦105	
♠J1073	♣QJ87642	♠A4
♥J53		♥AK1097
♦KJ87	N	♦AQ643
♣A10	W	♣K
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠K9852	5
N	♥Q84	10
S	♦92	HCP 20
E 6 4 6 6 1	♣953	5
W 6 4 6 6 1		

10. East has a 1♥ opener. This hand is not good enough for a strong 2♣. Not close. Now the spotlight turns to West. Is this good a simple raise or an invitational raise? Partnerships that play constructive raises would likely treat it as 8-10 HCP hand. In any case, all roads should lead to 6♥. The key is for East to bid 3♦, a natural game try. Now West hand re-evaluates upwards: save for the ♠J, all high cards are working, KJxx in partner's second suit and a side ace. The best bid by West is

4♣. This says: 'Pard, not only am I accepting your game try, but I have a super maximum with good fitting diamonds and the ♣A. East can now visualize East's hand, the ♣A, the ♦K, and a heart card. A thinking East will also be able to accurately envision the play of the hand: win the spade lead, cash ♥AK, then unblock the ♣K, diamond to the king, cash the ♣A, throwing the losing spade, give up a heart if the queen has not fallen in two rounds.

The lesson to take away from this hand is, as East, you should not blindly bid 4♥ over 2♥, because partner can easily have the cards to make slam odds on. This is a theme that will reoccur in a few deals.

Board: 11	♠852	
Dealer: S	♥108743	
Vul.: None	♦AQJ	
♠K96	♣K6	♠AQ43
♥K5		♥92
♦K1076		♦54
♣9752		♣Q10843
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠J107	10
N 2 3 2	♥AQJ6	9 [HCP] 8
S 2 3 2	♦9832	13
E 1 1	♣AJ	
W 2 1		

11. Here the bidding should be fairly standard. N-S will bid up to 2♥ by way of 1♦-1♥/2♥-P. East should not enter the auction after 1♥ as they should have at least opening values. Having said that, had East been the dealer, and passed originally, doubling 1♥ would have been appropriate. Over 2♥ East should now balance. West will likely bid 3♣ and North with the extra heart and extra values should bid 3♥. North should not bid 3♦, because that shows 4-4 or 4-5 shape in the red suits, and is passable, which what South would do with long diamonds and only a three-card heart raise. It's hard to envision any result other than 9 tricks for North-South, about an average for both sides.

One fun thing about hand records is to notice other double dummy results. Here it says 3♣ is down two. Why is that, when it looks like N-S have only 5 tricks? The solution is a diamond lead from South. Heart to the ace and two more rounds of diamonds. South wins the ♣J, and plays their 4th diamond, and North ruffs with ♣K. West, as declarer, can also be held to 7 tricks: heart lead to the ace and then three rounds of diamonds.

One fun thing about hand records is to notice other double dummy results. Here it says 3♣ is down two. Why is that, when it looks like N-S have only 5 tricks? The solution is a diamond lead from South. Heart to the ace and two more rounds of diamonds. South wins the ♣J, and plays their 4th diamond, and North ruffs with ♣K. West, as declarer, can also be held to 7 tricks: heart lead to the ace and then three rounds of diamonds.

Board: 12	♠J6	
Dealer: W	♥KQJ6532	
Vul.: NS	♦73	
♠Q52	♣72	♠AK974
♥8		♥94
♦K108		♦A62
♣KQ10864		♣AJ3
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠1083	7
N 1	♥A107	10 [HCP] 16
S 1	♦QJ954	7
E 6 2 6	♣95	
W 6 2 6		

12. How high E-W bids will be determined by what West does as opener. If they pass, North should open 3♥, which gives East a choice of calls. Both double and 3♠ are reasonable. Over 3♠ West will likely raise to game, and that will end the auction. An expert treatment is to play (with West being a passed hand) that a bid of 4♣ not only shows a good club suit, but it also shows spade support. Now bidding slam is possible, as East should cuebid 4♦, and West 4♥.

However, if West opens 1♣, over 2♥ or 3♥ East will bid spades. West will raise and once East finds out about the heart control, confidently bids 6♠ (after Key Carding to ensure sufficient key cards are present).

Things are a little trickier if West opens 3♣. East should respond 3♠ and pass 4♠. By the way this is not a good 3♣ opener. West has way too much defensive strength, and is much closer to opening 1♣.

Board: 13	♠54	
Dealer: N	♥A1042	
Vul.: All	♦1087	
♠K986	♣KJ84	♠Q1032
♥K876		♥Q953
♦A653		♦J4
♣10		♣653
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠AJ7	8
N 3 3 5	♥J	10 [HCP] 5
S 3 3 5	♦KQ92	17
E 1 1	♣AQ972	
W 1 1		

13. South should open 1♣. I try and open 4-5 hands in the minor with 1♣ as much as possible, unless there is a great disparity in high cards between the two suits. Here you have enough high cards to reverse with 2♦ on the next round of bidding. With their perfect shape, West should make a takeout double, despite only 10 HCPs. North bids 1♥, and East is wise to stay silent with their very modest values. As planned South bids 2♦ and North can do no more than 3♣. Yes, they

have a very good hand for clubs, but there is no way to show it below 3NT. 4♣ is a reasonable option, but at pairs, you want to focus first on notrump, not minor suit games. Over 3♣, South

should bid 3NT which will end the auction. On a spade lead (with East unlikely to get in, South should win the ace at trick one) declarer will get lucky when the ♦J falls, and will make at least 9 tricks. +400 or +430 will be a very good N-S score, as not all pairs will get to game, and some will get to 5♣.

Board: 14	♠A102		
Dealer: E	♥KQ1072		
Vul.: None	♦6		
	♣953	♣AK103	♠64
	♥J5		♥A93
	♦875	W N E	♦KJ10943
	♣J8764	S	♣92
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠KQJ87		16
N 6 6 2 4	♥864		
S 6 6 2 4	♦AQ2	2	HCP 8
E	♣Q5		14
W			

14. It's a N-S hand again. East has a picture perfect 2♦ opener. South will bid spades and we turn to North with their rock crusher of a hand. I would take a very simple approach and bid 4NT. North has spade support, a source of tricks in two suits and 2nd round of diamond control. If not now, when? Bidding 3♥, which is forcing, will likely result in not being possible to ask for aces with spades as trump. If you have all the aces and the ♠Q, bidding seven is with the odds. 6NT makes, and is a decent contract, but is a poor gamble at this form of scoring (unless you are playing in a very high-level event). 6♣ will be worth an average plus. Why risk a bottom?

Board: 15	♠A86		
Dealer: S	♥J1032		
Vul.: NS	♦KQ83		
	♣A3	♠Q10	
	♠J95432	♥AQ876	
	♥54	♦94	
	♦J76	♣J984	
	♣K6		
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠K7		14
N 4 2 3 5 4	♥K9		
S 4 2 3 5 4	♦A1052	5	HCP 9
E	♣Q10752		12
W			

15. N-S are getting their money's worth today! Unless playing a weak notrump system, South should open 1♣, and rebid 1NT over 1♥. North will quickly raise to the notrump game, obeying the adage, 'if you know where you want to play, bid it!' The normal spade lead leaves declarer with only 7 tricks, with clubs as the likely source of tricks. Declarer should win the spade lead, and play ♣A and a club to the ten. Then duck the spade return, win the third round of that suit, and give up a club, for 9 tricks: 2 spades, 4 diamonds and 3 clubs. The defence gets 1 spade, 1 heart and 2 clubs. However, there is a fly in the ointment, and that is if West takes advantage of the vulnerability, and makes a weak jump overcall of 2♠ (it is weak!) over the 1♣ opener. The same contract will be reached, but now declarer can do better. Armed with the knowledge that West has 6 spades, there is no need to hold up. The play should go: win the ♠A (for communication purposes), two rounds of clubs losing the 10 the king. Win the 2nd spade, and play two more rounds of clubs. With the ♥A onside, declarer has 10 tricks, good for a top score.

Board: 16	♠KQJ62		
Dealer: W	♥K864		
Vul.: EW	♦97		
	♣95	♠85	
	♠109	♥AQ75	
	♥932	♦Q102	
	♦AJ643	♣Q1082	
	♣A73		
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠A743		9
N 2	♥J10		
S 2	♦K85	9	HCP 10
E 2 2 3 2	♣KJ64		12
W 2 2 3 2			

16. The bidding will likely start off with three passes to South. The rule of 15 (add high cards to number of spades. If the total is 15 or more open. If not, pass) says South should open, and raise 1♠ to 2♠. North is not worth a game try playing matchpoints (remember – plusses!!). This should end the auction as balancing vulnerable, at the three level, is far too risky. The cards sit poorly for declarer, and the contract relies on guessing clubs. If you guess it right, maybe partner will buy

you a drink after the game!

Board: 17	♠J743	
Dealer: N	♥J6	
Vul.: None	♦AQ972	
♠65	♣102	♠AK8
♥A97		♥54
♦J8	W N E	♦K1065
♣AJ9763	S	♣Q854
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠Q1092	8
N 1 1	♥KQ10832	10 HCP 12
S 1 1	♦43	10
E 5 2 5	♣K	10
W 5 2 5		

17. There should be lots of bidding on this interesting deal. East starts off the proceedings with 1♦, South should make a simple 1♥ overcall (too many high cards for a weak 2♥). West is good enough to bid 2♣. It's not perfect, but with two aces and a good 6 card suit you must bid. Although the overcall makes this bid not 100% game forcing, it may still be difficult to stop below game when that is right.

North has a surprising number of values for this auction, and should enter the fray by bidding 2♦. Partner knows you are a passed hand. They should also know you have at least heart tolerance, otherwise North would not enter the auction on a complete misfit. East bids 3♣. Now things get interesting! South should compete to 3♥ with their 6-4 shape and diamond tolerance. Now West can make a master bid of 3NT. They can count 7 tricks, and partner can always pull. Alas, in real life, 3♥ by South will likely go pass, pass to East. A timid East might pass. However, they should definitely compete to 4♣! They have a great hand on this auction: doubleton heart, 4 card club support, and a well-placed ♦K. The expert bid on this hand is actually 3♠, to show this hand type (maximum, with spade values, mild 3NT invite). Now West can bid game in notrump or 5♣. That is the risk of South bidding 3♥. It allows E-W to discover more about the hands, and find a game that they normally wouldn't. Matchpoints at its finest!

Board: 18	♠AKJ83	
Dealer: E	♥1097632	
Vul.: NS	♦	
♠Q107	♣AJ	♠42
♥AQ4		♥K8
♦KJ105	W N E	♦A642
♣Q43	S	♣K10952
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠965	13
N 3 2	♥J5	14 HCP 10
S 3 2	♦Q9873	3
E 1 3 3	♣876	
W 2 3 4		

18. West will open the bidding in 3rd seat with 1♦, which leaves North with a choice on how to show their hand. I like 1♠. You want a spade lead if East is declarer, and you will get a chance to bid hearts. Although a Michaels or other bid to show a major suiter is ok, your partnership will be guessing a bit as how high to bid. Over a Michaels 2♦ bid by North, East can either bid 3♥, a simple raise (a slight underbid), or double to show invitational values. The latter is better. First partner

won't play you for anymore, as you are a passed hand. Also, partner may want to penalize the vulnerable opponent (for example, they may have 4-4-4-1 shape.)

Unfortunately, this will encourage West to bid game with their max, likely 3NT. On a spade lead declarer has only 8 tricks, and will be -50. That is unless North greedily decides not to lead his suit, trying to avoid giving declarer a trick with the ♠Q. They will regret that decision, as now declarer makes 10 tricks!

Board: 19	♠J3	
Dealer: S	♥J963	
Vul.: EW	♦K86	
♠96	♣9765	♠Q874
♥75		♥AKQ84
♦AQ1054	W N E	♦J2
♣K1082	S	♣A4
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠AK1052	5
N	♥102	9 HCP 16
S	♦973	10
E 2 2 3 4 2	♣QJ3	
W 2 1 3 4 2		

19. Three passes to East. 4-5 in the majors is tough to describe. That is why the Flannery convention was developed. Without that weapon in your arsenal, the first two bids are fairly predictable – 1♥ by East and 1♠ by South. Then West has two choices: a negative double and 2♦. Double is a much better choice, as you will not get overboard, as what may happen after 2♦.

North has nothing to say and back to East, who has a difficult rebid. The four contenders: pass, 2♥, 1NT, 2NT. Pass is a poor choice with four weakish trumps.

You may nip it one, but experience has taught me not to be surprised if South makes 1♠. Even down one, doubled, scores only +100 – not good enough! 2♥ may be best, but it does not invite game, or play in your likely best denomination, notrump. 1NT may be the winner. A spade lead will set up South's suit, and you expect that they will have an entry somewhere. I am thinking 2♥ is better than 1NT. However, 2NT is a reasonable evaluation of East's assets. Often players forget to count an extra point for a five card suit when it is a major. I would bid 2NT here. Alas, it is not to be. The diamond finesse, which was a favourite to be onside, is not. Down you go. 4♦ is the actual winner, +130.

Should you have played in diamonds or hearts? No!! Don't 2nd guess good bidding by using the hand records. 25 HCPs, with two good five card suits, with no 8 card major fit belongs in 3NT!! The percentage actions do not always work, however, getting to the best contracts will pay off in the long term.

Board: 20	♠Q96		
Dealer: W	♥AQ		
Vul.: All	♦J32		
♠82	♣AQJ53	♠KJ743	
♥J1094		♥K32	
♦AK5		♦764	
♣K1064		♣92	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠A105		16
N 1 1 1 2 2	♥8765		
S 1 1 1 1 1	♦Q1098	11	HCP 7
E	♣87		6
W			

20. Ok, time to get off my high horse, and look at a more mundane deal. At most tables North will open (sometimes overcall) 1NT which will end the auction. It is a hard deal to determine what will be a good score. East starts off the defence with 4th best from longest and strongest. Declarers will win the spade lead in hand, and does best to lead a diamond. In 1NT a good strategy is to give the defence their aces and kings early. West should win the 1st diamond and

continue partner's suit. A heart shift is tempting, and works here, but the advantage of a spade continuation is the potential to shut declarer out of a 2nd diamond trick, by removing dummy's spade entry.

Declarer ducks a spade, wins the next one...and what is poor West to discard? Without peeking at declarer's hand, it seems odds on to throw away a club. Not a diamond as you need to duck the 2nd round of that suit. Now declarer is at the crossroad. A club finesse, which is indicated, will yield N-S 10 tricks: 2 spades, 5 clubs, 1 heart and 2 diamonds.

Congrats to any West to who found a heart shift at trick 3. I predict that -120 should yield a good E-W score, in a 1NT contract that is difficult to defend.

Board: 21	♠2		
Dealer: N	♥QJ73		
Vul.: NS	♦		
♠63	♣AQJ108542	♠AQJ1074	
♥652		♥AK	
♦J86532		♦Q1094	
♣63		♣9	
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠K985		10
N 4 4 4 4	♥10984		
S 4 4 4 4	♦AK7	1	HCP 16
E 2 3	♣K7		13
W 2 3			

21. What should North open? 5♣ and 1♣ are both reasonable. I prefer 1♣, and listen carefully to what the other three players have to say. After all, partner could have a very good hand, or a long heart suit, or both. Over 5♣ East needs to find a call. I have no problem with double or 5♠, but prefer the former. Maybe you have a big diamond fit (like here). It is important for Souths to double 5♠. First it increases the penalty, and secondly, tells partner not to bid anymore, which

otherwise they might. Getting to, and playing 4♥ on this deal is just not possible. Going plus on this board should score well.

Board: 22	♠K953	
Dealer: E	♥J32	
Vul.: EW	♦74	
♠1082	♣A654	♠Q7
♥7		♥K10954
♦KJ865	W N E	♦AQ92
♣KJ109	S	♣82
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠AJ64	8
N 1 2 1 1	♥AQ86	8 HCP 11
S 1 2 1 1	♦103	13
E 3	♣Q73	
W 3		

22. East has an opening 1♥ bid, albeit a minimum. West will respond 1NT and East will rebid 2♦. So far so good. Now the bidding will take one of two different paths. In the 1st variant South passes. West should now bid 3♦. You might pass, thinking, 'We have no game, and this way we stay low, ensuring a plus.' Although these points have some merit, 3♦ is the correct call. First you may have game if partner has a suitable hand such as ♠x ♥Axxxx ♦AQ9xx ♣Qx. And that is

only a 12 count!! As important, a 3♦ will probably keep N-S from balancing. You may or not make, but you will score well. Keep this strategy in mind when we look at Board 23.

However, this 1st auction should not occur, as South should double 2♦. This sends the message 'I have at least a minimum opening bid, short diamonds, but could not take any descriptive action on the 1st round of bidding.' West should again compete with 3♦. North should be aggressive at these colours, and bid 3♣, which will likely end the auction. 3♣ should go down one. Even if doubled, -100 N-S will score above average for not selling out to 2♦ or 3♦.

Board: 23	♠KQ5	
Dealer: S	♥Q8765	
Vul.: All	♦J104	
♠A874	♣A6	♠J1032
♥J102		♥AK4
♦AQ	W N E	♦85
♣10752	S	♣K843
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠96	12
N 1	♥93	11 HCP 11
S 1	♦K97632	6
E 1 3 1 3	♣QJ9	
W 1 3 1 3		

23. More bidding and decisions on this hand. It starts with South, should they open 2♦? Yes! It reasonably describes your hand, puts huge pressure on the opponents, and partner should know exactly what to do!! Here West should double, but I understand a pass. One of the guidelines in bidding over pre-empts is that the partner with shortness in the preempter's suit should bend over backwards to take a call, as their partner with 3 or 4 small diamonds and an

opening bid will be unable to do so. Whether West bids or not, North should raise to 3♦. As on Board 22, you expect to make or be down one in 3♦, and forces the opponents to guess what to do one level higher.

East is stuck. Many will bid 3♣, but opposite a takeout doubler, 4♣ is a reasonable call. But there is third option, a better one, often only made by very advanced or expert players. Double. This says to partner, 'I have at least invitational points in a balanced hand. West will likely bid a major with a minimum, or perhaps cuebid to create a game force. However here, with minimum high cards and good defence, should convert East's double to penalties. Good defence will hold South to 7 tricks for a top (+200 or +500), as E-W have no game.

Board: 24	♠K65	
Dealer: W	♥53	
Vul.: None	♦AQJ3	
♠942	♣8763	♠AQ73
♥KJ1096		♥AQ
♦75	W N E	♦K1042
♣J109	S	♣K52
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠J108	10
N 3	♥8742	5 HCP 18
S 2 3 1 1	♦986	7
E 3 2 3 1 1	♣AQ4	
W 3 2 3 1 1		

24. This deal again offers challenges in both the bidding and the play. The start of the auction should be fairly universal: With N-S silent, 1♦-1♥-2NT. Now West is looking at their good five count. Should West bid game? NO! Matchpoints - a plus will be a good score. Yes, maybe 1 or 2 pairs may bid and make game. But you are much better off in the long run to avoid trying for sketchy games playing pairs. Assuming you sign off, do you want to play in 3♥* or 2NT? 3♥ may play better, but it is also one level higher. Also....wait for it....notrump scores more than a major.

**How do you get to 3♥ as bidding it directly is forcing? There is a Convention called Woolf, which allows the partnership to sign at the three level after a jump 2NT rebid by opener.*

South will likely make the good lead of the ♠J against 2NT. A good defence strategy against notrump partials is not to give away a trick on the opening lead.

While West is laying down dummy both North and East should be furiously thinking! First North – ‘Do I play the king?’ Yes, as partner can easily hold ♠AJ108 or ♠AJ108x. Now it is East’s turn. Do you, as 95% of Easts in this situation, win the ace at trick one and then start thinking?

It is best to duck the spade king at the first trick! What can North do? If they continue spades you will wind up cashing your 8 tricks, and then lead a club from dummy at trick 10 ensuring one more trick (the play gets complicated as the other three hands have to discard on the run of the hearts, but East should come down to ♦K10 ♣K5). +150 will be likely be close to a top. If you instead had won the 1st spade, what do you do? Run hearts and again lead a club. But likely you will discard a spade, and be lucky to make 8 tricks.

Board: 25	♠93	
Dealer: N	♥106	
Vul.: EW	♦Q10872	
♠K654	♣AQ84	♠AQ72
♥AK53		♥Q84
♦J3		♦A954
♣953		♣62
	N	
	W	E
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠J108	8
N 2	♥J972	11
S 2	♦K6	HCP 12
E 2 3 2	♣KJ107	9
W 2 3 2		

25. East has a rebid choice after opening 1♦, hearing partner respond 1♥, with N-S passing. 1NT shows 12-14 balanced is ok, as is 2♥. But my choice is 1♠. West should invite with 3♠, which East will quickly decline. Three spades should make on the nose. That score should give N-S above average as some pairs may end up in game or another denomination.

Hint: When declaring a suit contract it is best to add up your sure and potential tricks before proceeding with the play.

When you have a 4-4 fit with the top three honours, count 5 tricks. Three for the high honours, pulling trumps and the extra two to ruff losers. Each hand is different, and you may be able to get more or less trumps tricks on a particular deal, but this is a good way to initially count likely trick in this trump suit.

Board: 26	♠Q98	
Dealer: E	♥1094	
Vul.: All	♦10	
♠K5432	♣AKQJ107	♠J107
♥J875		♥K62
♦A83		♦K72
♣2		♣8543
	N	
	W	E
	S	
N ♠♥♦♣	♠A6	12
N 4	♥AQ3	8
S 4	♦QJ9654	HCP 7
E	♣96	13
W		

26. South will open 1♦ in 2nd seat and West should pass. This hand has just enough points to overcall, but with an awful suit it is more prudent to pass. The minimum strength suit I would overcall with is ♠K109xx. South should rebid their diamonds, leaving North with an awkward rebid choice. You want to get to 3NT if partner has a heart stopper. The way to find out is by bidding 2♠. On this deal this works perfectly as partner will rebid 2NT with ♥AQx and you will raise to game.

The play is tricky on a spade lead. Normally inserting the ♠8 from dummy is the indicated play, but not on this hand. Why? If the ♠Q wins you can finesse in hearts to set up a 10th trick. Whereas playing a small spade will force your ace. Now you have only top tricks, and need the heart finesse for nine, which fortunately works. Playing on diamonds allows west to win the ace, and return a small spade, forcing you to make a guess to make your contract.

Board: 27	♠KQ862	
Dealer: S	♥1073	
Vul.: None	♦AQJ8	
♠J103	♣K	♠54
♥AQJ95		♥862
♦9632	W N E	♦K54
♣Q	S	♣A9843
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠A97	15
N 3 1 2	♥K4	
S 3 1 2	♦107	10 HCP 7
E 1	♣J107652	8
W 1		

27. The auction 1♠-2♠ all pass will be standard at most tables. North's ♣K value is questionable, and tips the scales to not inviting game. Balancing with the East hand is too risky, and bidding 3♣ would definitely make South's day!!

What should East lead against 2♠? A primary goal in defending against a matchpoint contract is trying not to give up a trick on the opening lead. For this reason a minor is out.

A heart is ok, but a trump lead is better. First, it is a bit safer than a heart, and secondly it might actually cut down on ruffs in the short trump hand. South should play a heart to the king early, trying to set up this trick and ruff a heart in dummy. This is foiled by a trump lead. A club lead early in the play will simplify making 9 tricks.

A key learning point from this deal as declarer, is not to pull trumps early, as you want to ruff hearts, plus the ♠A is the only sure dummy entry.

Board: 28	♠K4	
Dealer: W	♥987	
Vul.: NS	♦65	
♠107532	♣AK7632	♠A6
♥AK104		♥653
♦Q4	W N E	♦AJ732
♣108	S	♣J94
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠QJ98	10
N 1 2	♥QJ2	
S 1 2	♦K1098	9 HCP 10
E 1 1 2	♣Q5	11
W 1 1 2		

28. This board could be passed out! The closest to an opening bid is North, but vulnerable you want to have full values for your call. The focus then falls on South. Yes, they just meet the rule of 15 criteria we looked at on an earlier board. But holding only 11 HCPs, with only one king and no aces, I would pass. N-S may be able to make something at the one or two level, but it may very difficult to stop that low when partner, could, and here does, have very close to an opening bid of

their own. A plus score will be golden. The only sequence that may get that is 1♦ by South 2♣ by North, all pass.

Board: 29	♠A2	
Dealer: N	♥AK975	
Vul.: All	♦KQ2	
♠654	♣932	♠QJ973
♥82		♥J1064
♦A983	W N E	♦J64
♣KJ84	S	♣Q
N ♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	♠K108	16
N 3 1 3 2 3	♥Q3	
S 3 1 3 2 3	♦1075	8 HCP 7
E	♣A10765	9
W		

29. N-S should get to game on this deal. The only interesting aspect of the bidding is what should North open, 1♥ or 1NT? The prevailing expert consensus is to open 1NT whenever humanly possible. Me, I am not a true believer. I like opening 1♥, but 1NT is also fine. 3NT should be reach at all tables, however who declares will be determined by North's 1st bid.

The natural spade lead from East will give declarer three spade tricks, but communication between the two hands is

tricky. After winning the ♠A, declarer does best playing 4 rounds of hearts, throwing a club and a diamond from dummy. East wins and should shift to a club, not a diamond. Why? Because, despite having a good five card suit in dummy, declarer went after hearts. Therefore, partner rates to have good clubs. If declarer wins the ♣Q, then they are held to 9 tricks, 3 spades, 4 hearts, 1 diamond and 1 club. However, if they duck the club switch, a diamond to the ace will give declarer an extra diamond trick. +430 will be a top for N-S, while not making 3NT will be a bottom.

Board: 30		♠K753			
Dealer: E		♥J642			
Vul.: None		♦105			
	♠102	♣KQ4	♠QJ98		
	♥10983		♥AQ		
	♦K763	W	♦J9842		
	♣987	N	♣A3		
		E			
		S			
N	♠	♥	♦	♣	
N	1	2	3		
S	1	2	3		
E		2			
W		2			
		♠A64			9
		♥K75			
		♦AQ	3	HCP	14
		♣J10652			14

30. Here the bidding will be hectic early, but shouldn't last very long. 1♦ by East, double by South will be the standard start (although 1NT by South is acceptable). West will likely pass with their 3 count (but a preempt raise in diamonds might work). If West passes, North has a tough call. They have a constructive hand, 8-10 or a bad 11, which is usually shown with a jump in their long suit. Here, however, North has two majors. I would jump in one of them, probably

spades, as in that way, I can bid hearts if the opponents compete to 3♦. That should end the auction. Once again, a plus score is king. However, E-W will score well for -50 in a diamond part score. I predict that any N-S pair scoring +120 will get a top.