

Board #1
Vulnerability: None
Dealer: North

North	
♠	KQ532
♥	A854
♦	986
♣	9
West	East
♠	98
♥	K6
♦	AJ543
♣	8653
South	
♠	T7
♥	QJT932
♦	K7
♣	AQ7
♠	AJ64
♥	7
♦	QT2
♣	KJT42

At Table #1, East (Brandon) opened $1\clubsuit$ in second seat. South (Aslihan) overcalled $2\heartsuit$ which shows a preemptive hand; a $1\heartsuit$ overcall is more accurate for constructive purposes despite the sixth heart. (In general, it is inadvisable to preempt with a hand worth an opening bid.) West (Jeremy) settled for a $3\clubsuit$ raise; while East might hold only three clubs, he probably didn't have too many hearts based on the overcall, leaving more room for clubs in his hand. North (Manoj), holding four trumps and a singleton club, should have bid $3\heartsuit$ if not $4\heartsuit$, but instead passed, as did everyone else.

South led the $\spadesuit 7$. If South wants to lead spades, then the $\spadesuit T$ is the normal card — high from a doubleton — but the $\heartsuit Q$, top of a strong sequence, would be most players' choice. However, the spade lead worked well, setting up a trick for North before declarer could make use of dummy's diamonds. I don't remember how the play went, but declarer eventually went down one. The obvious losers are two trumps, a spade, and a heart; I'm not sure what the fifth loser was. In any case, North/South can make a game in hearts (losing only a spade and two diamonds), so -50 is actually quite a good score for East/West.

Board #2
Vulnerability: N/S
Dealer: East

North	
♠	Q10942
♥	64
♦	83
♣	K543

West	East
♠ J6	♠ AK85
♥ —	♥ A98
♦ AQ75	♦ J642
♣ AQJ8762	♣ 109

South	
♠	73
♥	KQJ107532
♦	K109
♣	—

Excitement early! East (Brandon) opened 1♦ and South (Aslihan) bid 2♥. (Holding such extreme shape and a superb suit, I would have bid 4♥; I'm going to want to compete to that level anyway, so doing it now robs the opponents of the room to exchange information.) As West, I knew we had a game and very possibly a slam, but I wasn't sure whether to play in clubs, diamonds or notrump. I bid 3♣ to show my suit and establish a game-force. East rebid 3♠ and South bid 4♥. With little room to maneuver, and the inference that East had spades under control, I aggressively decided to force to slam by bidding 5♥, which woke everyone up! My intention was for East to pick a minor-suit slam; whether he offered belated club support on something like doubleton king, or chose diamonds based on holding a real suit, he'd be right. Brandon understandably didn't know what I was doing, so he sensibly bid 5♠ to let me clarify (obviously pass was out of the question). I bid 6♦, choosing the known fit as opposed to the unknown one.

South led the ♠7 (the ♥K would have been many players' choice). East won in hand with the ace and led the ♠J. South should have covered with the ♦K, after which her ten-nine would have been worth a trick against dummy's queen. Instead, South played low and the jack held the trick. Declarer continued with a diamond to the queen and cashed the diamond ace, felling the king. This was followed by a spade to the king and the ♣10 passed to North's king; at this point dummy was high and declarer claimed twelve tricks for a fortunate +920.

At the other table, North/South ended up in 4♥ doubled, down two for — — 500. That would not be a disaster at IMPs, since East/West ought to bid and make 5♦ for +400; however, -500 would be quite a poor score for N/S at matchpoints.

Board #3
 Vulnerability: E/W
 Dealer: South

North	
♠	J62
♥	J10753
♦	K108
♣	73
West	East
♠	AQ943
♥	K
♦	653
♣	AK85
South	
♠	K1085
♥	Q92
♦	A97
♣	QJ2

South (Jeremy) opened 1♣. West (William) overcalled 1♠, which elicited a 2♥ bid from East (Tom). This bid really ought to promise five or six good hearts, rather than a moth-eaten four-carder, but East understandably does not want to play in spades and doesn't quite have good enough clubs to bid 1NT (J10xx would be sufficient). West, with substantial extras and a club stopper, invited game with a 2NT bid; East raised to 3NT.

North (Manoj) led the ♥5: four, queen, king. Declarer cashed the ♣A and led a diamond to the jack and ace. As South, I was worried that returning a heart into the ace-eight would help declarer, so I shifted to the ♠5. Declarer successfully finessed the ♠Q and led another diamond, won by dummy's queen. He now played a club to the king and a third club to the nine and my queen, on which North discarded a heart. Since declarer might well have had the ♠AQJ for his overcall, I didn't want to give him a free finesse, so I went back to hearts, leading the ♥2 (the ♥9 would have been better, as we'll see). Declarer pitched a spade and took North's ♥10 with the ace, leaving:

♠ J6	
♥ J7	
♦ K	
♣ —	
♠ A94	♠ —
♥ —	♥ 86
♦ 6	♦ 42
♣ 5	♣ 10
♠ K108	
♥ 9	
♦ 9	
♣ —	

Declarer, who needed three of the last five tricks, now cashed the ♣10 and led a diamond to North's king, but North was able to cash the ♥J and lead the ♠J to the king and ace, so that South's ♠10 took the last trick for down one. In the diagrammed position, declarer can succeed by leading a diamond to North's king. North-South cannot cash two heart tricks (now you see why I should have led the nine instead of the two, so that North would have the good ♥J10 in this position!), so North has the unpleasant choice between leading a spade, letting West score his ace and then lead a club to dummy in order to cash the good diamond, or else cashing the ♥J, smashing his partner's nine and setting up dummy's eight.

Board #4
Vulnerability: Both
Dealer: West

North	
♠	KJ732
♥	QJ2
♦	K62
♣	92

West	East
♠	Q1086
♥	104
♦	AJ108
♣	1085

South	
♠	5
♥	K87
♦	9753
♣	AKJ76

At Table #1, East (Tom) opened 1♥ in third chair. South (Jeremy) overcalled 2♣. North (Manoj) bid 2♠, then raised South's 2NT rebid to 3NT. Both of us had bid very aggressively, and the final contract was not a good one.

West (William) led the ♣5. I could see that I had a lot of work to do. I could hope for five club tricks and could build two hearts, but the eighth and nine tricks were going to be tough. At trick one, I took East's ♣Q with the ace and led the ♥K, which held the trick (East did well to duck). Crossing my fingers, I led a spade to dummy's jack, which forced out East's ace. Now I was up to eight tricks. East cashed the ♥A and led a third heart to dummy's remaining quack, while West discarded a club. I led a club to my king and ran the rest of the clubs, noticing that West pitched the eight and ten of diamonds. I led the nine of diamonds, which West covered with the jack. Without much hope, I played the king. To my amazement, it won the trick (I had thought East, who had opened the bidding, was likely to have the ace) and I cashed the king of spades for my ninth trick and a very fortunate +600.

Even with the best lead, a heart (as indicated by the auction), declarer can make 3NT by playing a spade to dummy's jack early, both to set up a spade trick and to knock out East's ace before the hearts are set up. For example: heart to the ace, heart to the king, spade to the jack and ace, heart to dummy's queen, club finesse, run the rest of the clubs, diamond towards the king to set up the ninth trick.

Board #6
Vulnerability: E/W
Dealer: East

North	
♠	76
♥	QJ
♦	K10873
♣	Q753
West	East
♠	KQJ10
♥	AK854
♦	Q52
♣	A
South	
♠	95
♥	1073
♦	A4
♣	KJ9863

At Table #2, West (Brandon) opened 1♥ in third chair. Two passes followed. South (Jeremy), holding a decent hand and a good six-card club suit, and not wanting to defend against a one-level contract, balanced with 2♣, a decision which turned out disastrously when West jumped to 3♥ (doubling for takeout, planning to bid again, would have shown this hand more accurately) and East (Nicole), who held an absolute maximum for her initial pass (three trumps and an ace yet!) correctly raised to 4♥. This contract made in comfort for +620, declarer losing only a trump and two diamonds. (South made things easy by cashing the ♦A at one point, but it was moot because declarer can always discard a diamond on dummy's fifth spade, and the ♦10 is onside anyway.)

Board #8
Vulnerability: None
Dealer: West

North	
♠	Q1097
♥	J73
♦	3
♣	Q8632

West	East
♠ K3	♠ AJ852
♥ Q10982	♥ A6
♦ 98762	♦ AKQJ5
♣ 5	♣ 4

South
♠ 64
♥ K54
♦ 102
♣ AK1097

At Table #1, East (Jeremy) opened 1♠ in third seat. South (Jeff) overcalled 2♣ and North (Manoj) raised to 3♣. East bid 3♦ (which ought to show 5-5 shape and definite extra strength, since partner has shown no signs of life and the auction is at the three-level). South competed to 4♣, which is rather aggressive with no more shape or strength than already promised. West (Aslihan) bid 4♦, which is on the conservative side. West actually has a great hand, with five-card support for East's second suit and the doubleton king of his first suit (which means no spade losers if East has the ace, as is quite likely), so I'd have bid 5♦ with the West hand. North competed to 5♣ (quite reasonable with a singleton diamond and two more trumps than the 3♣ raise had promised) and East, holding extra strength, bid 5♦.

There was nothing to the play. South led the ♣A and shifted to the ♦2. East won with the five (just for fun), drew a second round of trumps, played king and ace of spades, and claimed eleven tricks on a crossruff (losing only one heart trick).

5♦ is the par spot (i.e., the Nash equilibrium). While North-South have a big club fit, they are missing a lot of top tricks and will go down three, surely doubled, for -500 if they sacrifice in 6♣ (losing two spades, a heart and a diamond).

Board #9
Vulnerability: E/W
Dealer: North

North	
♠ A7	
♥ 962	
♦ AK852	
♣ Q94	

West	East
♠ QJ9852	♠ 103
♥ Q	♥ AK853
♦ Q1073	♦ J4
♣ 105	♣ A863

South
♠ K64
♥ J1074
♦ 96
♣ KJ72

At Table #2, North (Jeremy) opened 1♦ in third seat and East (Tom) overcalled 1♥. South (Jeff) bid 1NT (showing about 6–10 points and a heart stopper) and West (Aslihan) bid 2♠. North, with nothing further to say, passed, and East bid 3♥. It would be better to pass, since West ought to have six spades (or at least five very good ones) for this bid, and East has a very reasonable dummy for spades: two trumps and three top tricks in the side suits. (Bidding 3♥ ought to show something like one spade and seven hearts.) Everyone passed, and 3♥ by East it was.

South led the ♦9 (high from a doubleton) to the three, king and four. Sitting North, I knew that East couldn't have a singleton (since Jeff wouldn't have led the nine from J96), so I cashed the ♦A: jack, six, seven. I continued with the ♦8, leading my highest spot card to indicate strength in spades. I was hoping that Jeff would ruff (or overruff) and play a spade to my ace so I could lead a fourth diamond (I don't mind if declarer trumps, since dummy's diamonds are high; what I don't want is for declarer to draw trumps and *then* discard losers on the ♦Q10.) When I led the ♦8, East discarded a club, and South thought for a while. I was very surprised when my partner discarded the six of spades, letting dummy's ♦10 win the trick.

Why hadn't Jeff ruffed? He knew that dummy's diamonds were high, so he must have a trump holding from which ruffing would cost a natural trick. (Remember, he had bid notrump, so I knew he had to have a stopper.) I tried to work out what that might be. King-doubleton? No, with that, he could ruff small, play a spade to my ace, and score his king on my diamond return. King-jack-third? That seemed more likely, since in view of the singleton queen in dummy, that holding would be worth two tricks without a ruff, and neither ruffing once nor ruffing twice would gain anything. That would give East a moth-eaten suit (ace-ten-sixth), but he had rebid the suit, after all, so I figured he had to have at least six.

Declarer played a club to his ace and led the ♠10. Jeff thought for a minute, hopped up with the spade king, and led the ♥4. Now I was really confused, since that play was inconsistent with my inference that Jeff had started with ♥KJx — leading from that holding would cost a trick if declarer held the ace, as he almost certainly did. Dummy's singleton queen won the trick, and declarer played another spade, won by my ace. I threw up my hands and played a fourth diamond (the ♣Q would have been much better), allowing declarer to discard another club on the ♦Q as Jeff again declined to ruff. The rest of the hand wasn't very eventful: declarer lost a total of two spades, one heart, two diamonds and one club for down two, –200. Had I returned the ♣Q instead of the fourth diamond, declarer would be unable to make use of dummy's now-high spades and diamonds and would have had to lose another club trick for down three. As against that, East should have considered leading the ♦Q at trick four, planning on discarding another club. Declarer has a lot of club losers to handle, and if South has refused to ruff the third diamond, he may also refuse to ruff the fourth one (or he may sacrifice a natural trump trick by ruffing).

Should Jeff have ruffed the third diamond? Yes. His trump holding is worth one trick by itself, so the first ruff won't help. However, he can lead a spade to my ace for a fourth round of diamonds, which will promote a second trump trick for South (details left to the reader). The defense will score two spades, two diamonds, two trumps and an eventual club. On the other hand, Jeff may have thought that declarer had six hearts and two clubs (which, on the bidding, is more likely than the actual layout). In that case, the second ruff wouldn't help, because declarer could discard a second club and the defense would never score a club trick (the diamond play would have the effect of trading a club trick for a trump trick).

Another question is whether either Jeff or I should have doubled, since the opponents are clearly in a bad spot. Probably not. Playing matchpoints, our +200 on defense would already be an excellent score, since at many tables North/South will likely play a notrump partscore for +120 or so. Playing IMPs, doubling the opponents into game has more to lose than to gain: if they are down one or two, we turn +100 or +200 into +200 or +500, but if they make three then we turn $- - 140$ into $- - 730$.

Board #11
Vulnerability: None
Dealer: South

North	
♠	Q52
♥	63
♦	7
♣	AKJ10763

West	East
♠ J9	♠ K64
♥ A.J	♥ Q102
♦ AKQJ954	♦ 10863
♣ Q5	♣ 982

South
♠ A10873
♥ K98754
♦ 2
♣ 4

There was plenty of action at Table #2. South (Nicole) opened with a very odd-looking 3♥ preempt. Jeremy (West), holding a nice hand and needing to make a decision at a high level, took a shot at 5♦. North (William) doubled (questionable, since his extreme club length indicates that someone is likely to be short, in which case the second top club may not cash) and everyone passed.

North led the ♣A. Seeing dummy, I wasn't too happy; I was off three top tricks and might well lose two spades. I got a temporary reprieve when North shifted to hearts, his partner's suit, at trick two. Now I thought I might make the contract. I played dummy's queen to induce South to cover with the king, which I won with the ace. I drew one round of trumps with the ace, cashed the ♥J to unblock the suit, led the ♦4 dummy's six, and cashed the ♥10 (love those spot cards!), throwing away my losing ♣Q. I played a trump back to my hand and led a spade, thinking it likely that North's reasons for doubling had included the ♠A. Unfortunately for me, dummy's ♠K lost to South's ace, and I lost another spade for down one doubled, -100.

At the other table, North-South did not compete nearly as aggressively, and West played 3♦making four for +130.

Board #12
Vulnerability: N/S
Dealer: West

	North	
	♠ AQJ87	
	♥ K	
	♦ AJ65	
	♣ K94	
West		East
♠ 93		♠ K652
♥ J87652		♥ Q109
♦ Q104		♦ 932
♣ J10		♣ Q82
	South	
	♠ 104	
	♥ A43	
	♦ K87	
	♣ A7653	

As West, I decided not to open the ugly West hand with a 2♥ preempt, despite the favorable vulnerability, so North (William) and South (Nicole) easily reached game: 1♠, 2♣, 2NT, 3NT. North's hand is so strong that he is worth a reraise to 4NT, which is not Blackwood, but a quantitative slam invitation showing 18–19 points. There was nothing to the play. North-South ought to take eleven tricks (two hearts, four diamonds on the very favorable layout, four tricks in whichever black suit declarer attacks first, and the other black ace) but took twelve, for +690, when I accidentally revoked on the second round of clubs.

Board #13
Vulnerability: Both
Dealer: North

North	
♠ J10832	
♥ Q753	
♦ 1094	
♣ K	
West	East
♠ AK64	♠ Q9
♥ A10	♥ K984
♦ A872	♦ —
♣ 1086	♣ AJ97432
South	
♠ 75	
♥ J62	
♦ KQJ653	
♣ Q5	

East (Jeremy) opened 1♣ in second chair; even though the hand has only ten high-card point, it has great shape and a long suit. South (Brandon) butted in with a preemptive 2♦ bid. (1♦ is also reasonable, and is probably a better bid had North (Jeff) not passed originally, since the South hand is not that bad. However, since North is a passed hand, a jump-overcall has a wider range, since the preemptive value of the bid becomes more important and the constructive value less important.)

West (William), with the best hand at the table, bid 2NT, which is not forcing. (Instead, West should force to game, either by bidding 3♦ to elicit more information about partner or by jumping to 3NT himself.) East, with a very non-notrump-oriented hand, pulled 2NT to 3♣. West raised to 4♣ (again, not forcing — given a second chance, West should again make sure game is reached) and East, who expected West to hold something like an 11-count with four clubs, optimistically bid 5♣, ending the auction.

On the diamond-king lead, East ruffed and crossed to the ♥A (it would have been simpler just to win trick one in dummy and lead a trump), drew one round of trumps, cashed the ♠Q, crossed to a top spade, and threw all his losers on dummy's high cards; South could take his ♣Q whenever he wanted it. Making six for +620.

6♣ is an excellent contract, failing only when South has all three outstanding trumps. (If North plays low on a trump lead from dummy, East can play the jack to ensure not losing two tricks in the suit. For that matter, declarer can even get away with playing a low trump from his hand: if trumps are 2-1 it doesn't matter, and if North has all three then there is a marked finesse on the second round.)