

Swiss Match
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Finally it's Sunday. You've been in town for only a month, and this is the first Swiss for you here. You hooked up with partner by way of your comparable scores in last year's Master Solvers' Club and some roundabout emailing. He has provided the teammates. But yesterday's warmup in the pair event did not go well. Too many of your close decisions went awry, and you're worried that partner may have lost some confidence despite your assurances that you would have done things differently in a team game. Now it's time to put up. Let the real bridge begin!

For the first match, you have drawn a pair whom partner describes as aggressive, almost maniacal, in their competitive style. Their teammates are said to be rather staid. The big decisions are likely to arise at your table.

Board 15.

South dealer
North-South vulnerable

You, South, hold:

♠AJ ♥QJ1093 ♦Q84 ♣983

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass
?			

What call do you make?

NORTH

♠Q64
♥K6
♦AJ72
♣KQJ5

WEST

♠752
♥742
♦K1096
♣762

EAST

♠K10983
♥A85
♦53
♣A104

SOUTH

♠AJ
♥QJ1093
♦Q84
♣983

Beware the obvious! The routine action with this hand is to transfer, planning to follow with three notrump. But it is just those hands containing a doubleton heart that will prove difficult to play in notrump. If dummy's sure entry is punched out, the heart suit may wither. And even if the entry proves impregnable, notrump may be awkward.

The alternative is to determine to play in four hearts. That contract is likely to have play whatever partner has. The defining characteristic of this class of hands is a semi-solid five-card suit that may be valueless unless the suit is trumps. Modern bidding systems are designed to find eight-card fits, with notrump as the fallback strain when the search fails. Suit quality is generally not a consideration.

This layout is a typical one favoring the suit contract. Note that the location of the spade king does not affect whether three notrump makes (although it would go down more if dummy were killed early), nor do the locations of the defenders' aces.

Results: If you transferred by bidding four diamonds, plus 420. If you transferred by bidding two diamonds, minus 50.

Board 16.

You are the dealer
Your side is vulnerable

LHO (*dummy*)

♠A
♥K9764
♦KJ98754
♣--

You

♠76
♥5
♦AQ2
♣KQJ9532

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>
1♣	2NT	Double	3♦
4♣	4♦	5♣	Pass
Pass	5♦	(All pass)	

What is your opening lead?

The singleton heart stands out. True, it's often dangerous to lead the opponent's suit. Here, though, with trump control, all you need is for partner's marked club ace to win a trick. In fact, maybe you were cowardly not to double!

Heart five, six, jack, *ace*.
Diamond 6, ?

Plan your defense.

NORTH

♠J8532
♥QJ832
♦--
♣A84

WEST

♠A
♥K9764
♦KJ98754
♣--

EAST

♠KQ1094
♥A10
♦1063
♣1076

SOUTH

♠76

♥5

♦AQ2

♣KQJ9532

Plan A is not going to succeed. What is Plan B? If you win the diamond ace, you can lock declarer in dummy with either a spade or a club and thereby assure that the diamond queen wins a trick. But that's only two tricks for the defense. What will be the third?

Partner has dummy's heart suit fairly locked up, although the spot cards are ominous. Declarer preferred diamonds with only three small, so he will not have ace-third of hearts. The worry is that declarer will be able to ruff a heart in his hand at an opportune moment and cash spade winners. For example, suppose you grab the diamond ace and play a spade. Declarer will next cash the heart king. If you trump that, declarer win any return, draw your last trump, ruff a heart and cash two spade winners.

If you refuse to trump the heart king, the position is fascinating. Dummy will lead a heart spot that partner must cover. Declarer will ruff. If you overruff that, declarer can win any return and get to his hand with a trump. And if you don't overruff, declarer can finesse your diamond queen, draw the last trump and concede a heart.

To avoid all this agony with the red spots, what you would like to do is get the trumps drawn, even though that seems to be declarer's goal. If you duck this trick, declarer is done in by the bad trump break. You still have to be careful. If the trick is won in dummy and the heart king is played, you must not ruff. If instead declarer floats the diamond six and then plays another one, you must rise and sacrifice your queen. It's a very strange hand. Declarer wants to draw the trumps so he can cash his major suit winners; but if he does, he can't survive.

Note that declarer chose an inspired line when he played a trump at trick two. He recognized your lead as a singleton, of course. Had he gone after hearts right away, you would have defeated the contract easily by ruffing and getting out with a black card. Cashing a spade first would not have helped, as you could still pin the dummy with a club exit.

Results: If you ducked the diamond and resisted temptation afterward, plus 50. If you took the diamond ace on the first round, minus 400.

Board 17.

North dealer
Neither side vulnerable

You, South, hold:

♠-- ♥J1094 ♦KJ985 ♣A1084

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♦	1♠	?	

What call do you make?

NORTH

♠52
♥AQ85
♦AQ1074
♣K6

WEST

♠AQ1064
♥732
♦6
♣J975

EAST

♠KJ9873
♥K6
♦32
♣Q32

SOUTH

♠--
♥J1094
♦KJ985
♣A1084

If you start with a negative double, it seems very likely that lefty will be raising spades to a high level. If he bids four spades, you will have little option but to bid five diamonds without having described your offensive power very clearly. If you choose a splinter response, such as three spades, you can comfortably leave the driving to partner. Three spades is likely to work well when partner has wastage in spades – you will pass three notrump.

What about four spades? If that call shows a void, it will make it easier to reach slam when partner's values are elsewhere. If partner has nothing in spades and extra values, either splinter will work. But maybe four spades isn't a splinter! There are experts, even Bridge World Editors, who think four spades should be natural. What does partner think? On the basis of your limited system discussion, you can't be confident of being on the same wavelength. Bidding three spades constitutes an auction safety play.

Results: If you double or bid any number of diamonds, plus 420 in five diamonds. If you bid three spades, plus 920 in six diamonds. If you bid four spades, you get the 920 plus a lot of sweat (partner's spade doubleton is sufficient for him to recognize your intention).

Board 18.

You are the dealer
The opponents are vulnerable

RHO (*dummy*)

♠KJ106
♥102
♦J5
♣A9865

You

♠942
♥J9875
♦K1082
♣2

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>
Pass	1♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT

(All pass)

Diamond four, jack, *king*, three.

Plan the defense.

NORTH

♠Q83
♥A64
♦Q964
♣J104

WEST

♠A75
♥KQ3
♦A73
♣KQ73

EAST

♠KJ106
♥102
♦J5
♣A9865

SOUTH

♠942
♥J9875
♦K1082
♣2

Defensive prospects look abysmal. Dummy has extra high cards and a fifth club, and spades look well placed for declarer. In this desperate situation, perhaps misleading the world about the even diamond split may be forgivable.

As it happens, declarer has only eight top tricks. If you routinely return the diamond deuce, he will win the third diamond, cash the clubs, and knock out the heart ace. But if you cunningly return the diamond ten, declarer has a chance to go wrong. He will play the hand as described, but then will have to decide whether your partner, who presumably has five diamonds and who has signaled positively in hearts, also has the spade queen. Be sure to discard hearts on the clubs, so that your diamond skullduggery is not revealed.

Results: Justice triumphs if you returned the diamond ten; declarer plays you for the spade queen and you are plus 100. If you returned the diamond deuce at trick two, minus 600.

Board 19.

You are the dealer
The opponents are vulnerable

RHO (dummy)

♠84
♥AQ6
♦AKQJ95
♣75

You

♠J1063
♥K52
♦J32
♣KQJ

<i>You</i>	<i>LHO</i>	<i>Partner</i>	<i>RHO</i>
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	3♦
Pass	3NT	(All pass)	

Partner leads an ambiguous club ten.

Plan your defense.

NORTH

♠A97
♥1084
♦106
♣109864

WEST

♠KQ52
♥J973
♦84
♣A32

EAST

♠84
♥AQ6
♦AKQJ95
♣75

SOUTH

♠J1063
♥K52
♦J32
♣KQJ

We're hoping partner is clever enough to have been dealt five clubs. He either has the ace, or he doesn't. If he does, the order in which you play your clubs is irrelevant. If he doesn't, then your objective is to induce declarer to duck your honors until the suit gets unblocked. The ace of spades, a card which partner must have if the defense is to triumph, will provide the entry to the setting tricks. Declarer will be hoping for you to have the spade ace or for your partner to have the heart king, but neither of those hopes will be realized.

So how do you persuade declarer to cooperate? Not by playing the jack followed by the king. You are trying to look like someone with either king-jack third or queen-jack third. Probably the most convincing sequence is king followed by jack.

Results: If you played the king of clubs followed by the queen, minus 600 (declarer knows you have the jack, so he wins the second trick and knocks out the spade ace). If you played the jack followed by the king, declarer similarly plays for the blockage and you are minus 600. If you played the king followed by the jack, or the jack followed by the queen, declarer misguesses and you are plus 100. If you shifted to a spade at trick two, minus 600.

Board 20.

West dealer
Both sides vulnerable

You, South, hold:
♠10864 ♥K52 ♦65 ♣A874

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♥	Pass	2NT*
Pass	3♦	Pass	?

Your 2NT bid was an artificial negative, denying five spades and denying a game-going hand. Partner's 3D shows a minimal reverse and can be passed.

What call do you make?

NORTH
♠Q75
♥AQ72
♦KQJ102
♣K

WEST
♠KJ3
♥964
♦A9
♣QJ1095

EAST
♠A92
♥J108
♦8743
♣632

SOUTH
♠10864
♥K53
♦65
♣A874

Partner's limited auction places his hand in the strength range of a strong notrump, albeit with a slightly higher maximum. He is likely to be short in a black suit, but you don't know which one. Let's consider your options.

Passing is a possibility, since three diamonds could well be the limit of the hand. Partner might have a hand on the order of ♠Kxx, ♥AQxx, ♦AQxxx, ♣K. Still, you have a maximum negative, and game may not be so far away.

So should you bid a game? Three no trump will surely end the auction. It could be a reasonable spot, but it also might have no play – and could go down many. If

partner has something like ♠Ax, ♥AQxx, ♦AQ10xxx, ♣x, then five diamonds is worth a shot.

The cooperative call that preserves all of the game options is three hearts. Any bid expresses your strength. Three hearts must show four-three in the majors, and accordingly, moderate length in clubs. Partner will be in a position to take a chance on finding a useful card in either diamonds or clubs, perhaps, but he will not expect you to cover problems in both minors as you would certainly try three notrump with that sort of hand. Three hearts is passable, and could be an adequate spot if partner has good hearts and moderate diamonds.

Results: If you passed or bid four diamonds, plus 130. If you bid three notrump, a lucky plus 630. If you bid a careful three hearts, plus 630 with full honors. Remember, you're not just playing to win the match, but to establish a name in this town.

Board 21.

North dealer
North-South vulnerable

NORTH
♠ 874
♥ 863
♦ AJ5
♣ AKJ10

SOUTH
♠ KJ9
♥ AQ10
♦ K73
♣ 7654

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♣	1♥	3NT	(All Pass)

Spade three (fourth best), four, five, ?

Plan the play.

NORTH
♠ 874
♥ 863
♦ AJ5
♣ AKJ10

WEST
♠ AQ1032
♥ 52
♦ 9642
♣ 82

EAST
♠ 65
♥ KJ974
♦ Q108
♣ Q93

SOUTH
♠ KJ9
♥ AQ10
♦ K73
♣ 7654

You can make a deceptive play in spades if you want to, but the lie of that suit is probably clear to everyone. If East gets in, he will shoot a spade through and you will go down. Your first move should be to lead a club to the ace, hoping for the queen to

tumble early. Next, try a heart to the ten so that you can see how many tricks are needed in the other suits. When that wins, try a club to the king. No luck there, as both opponents play small. A second heart finesse reveals that West began with a small doubleton.

Now you may consider surrendering a club to West, thus scoring three clubs, three hearts, two diamonds, and one spade. However, that line fails if East has the missing club. And isn't East's most likely shape 2=5=3=3? If East has the diamond queen as well, he is in line for an uncomfortable endgame. Exit with a spade, breaking the opponent's communications. West has can either cash out the suit, squeezing his partner in the minors, or get out with a diamond, in which case you will eventually throw East in with a club and wait for a diamond into the AJ.

Results: If you took a club finesse or played three rounds of clubs, minus 100. If you finessed hearts twice, won two high clubs and exited in spades, plus 600.

Post-Mortem

On Board 15, where you had to make a unilateral decision about whether to play four hearts or three notrump, your counterparts were complaining about bad karma. “Twenty-six high, all suits double stopped, all finesses on. How could 3NT go down?”

North–South minus 50.

On Board 16, where you had to peer deeply into the complexities of the trump suit to defeat five diamonds, it seemed from the bidding chart as though they played a different board across the street:

NORTH			
♠ J8532			
♥ QJ832			
♦ --			
♣ A84			
WEST		EAST	
♠ A		♠ KQ1094	
♥ K9764		♥ A10	
♦ KJ98754		♦ 1063	
♣ --		♣ 1076	
SOUTH			
♠ 76			
♥ 5			
♦ AQ2			
♣ KQJ9532			

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♣	1 ♦	Double	2 ♦
3 ♣	3 ♦	5 ♣	Double
(All pass)			

What do you think of these bidding decisions?

North’s five clubs seems well judged. He was justifiably unhappy when South’s side cards proved to be valueless diamonds. West settled for what had to be a small penalty when his pair’s cards provide adequate play for slam. It doesn’t seem fair that with accurate card play, West gets a good result and North a bad one. Perhaps that’s part of the charm of the game.

North–South minus 200.

On Board 17, where a splinter would get you to slam, the auction did not afford North any certainty of whose hand it was:

NORTH
 ♠52
 ♥AQ85
 ♦AQ1074
 ♣K6

WEST
 ♠AQ1064
 ♥732
 ♦6
 ♣J975

EAST
 ♠KJ9873
 ♥K6
 ♦32
 ♣Q32

SOUTH
 ♠--
 ♥J1094
 ♦KJ985
 ♣A1084

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1♦	1♠	Double	4♠
Pass	Pass	5♦	(All pass)

Does it pay to give up on the heart suit?

Since you are so likely to have to ascend to the five-level in the face of competition, there is only marginal value in playing the major. By immediately showing both trump support and a spade control, you allow partner to evaluate his hand much more effectively when the inevitable blast occurs. Even when partner opens a mere one diamond, that suit is likely to be his longest.

Five-five fits are extremely powerful. Note that six diamonds would be excellent even if North were lacking both red queens.

Is it all South's fault?

Certainly an offshape notrump opener by North would not have led inexorably to slam. As the auction proceeded, North might have doubled four spades to show strength; that would have elicited five diamonds from his partner, and there matters would rest. If North had chosen five hearts instead, South would have bid six diamonds. That might have been a reasonable option; the opponents' bidding suggests that all of South's cards would be working. These auctions are much easier when someone bids his cards rather than leaving them for his partner to infer.

North-South plus 420.

On Board 18, where a deceptive return from K1082 gave the defense a chance against three notrump, the defender with your cards never considered returning anything but fourth best. Your teammate scored up his game without anyone noticing that this was an exciting hand.

North–South minus 600.

On Board 19, where you could set three notrump only if you induced declarer to allow the club suit to be unblocked, the same contract was played from the other side of the table. Your teammate holding

♠84 ♥AQ6 ♦AKQJ95 ♣75

committed the most egregious offshape notrump opening I have ever seen, but it worked like a charm. After a Stayman auction, your counterpart led a spade, and the game was never in doubt. The discards even made it safe for declarer to add insult by endplaying the leader for an overtrick.

North-South minus 630.

On Board 20, where you had to decide whether and how to invite game after a reverse and artificial negative, your teammate had previously determined that the opposition played most low-level doubles for takeout. This “safety” inspired a bold overcall. Holding extra values along with club shortness, North felt as though the deal was designed to showcase his methods. South knew of no eight-card fit, and decided to go for a low-risk penalty. The defense kept finding safe exits, so eventually West lost a spade trick and was thereby limited to six tricks.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
2♣	Double	(All Pass)	

NORTH

♠Q75
♥AQ72
♦KQJ102
♣K

WEST

♠KJ3
♥964
♦A9
♣QJ1095

EAST

♠A92
♥J108
♦8743
♣632

SOUTH

♠10864

♥K53
♦65
♣A874

North-South plus 500.

On Board 21, where you had to develop a fratricide squeeze to make three notrump, your teammate holding
♠65 ♥KJ974 ♦Q108 ♣Q93
did not overcall. After the spade lead, South took a club finesse after cashing the ace, and went down when a spade came through. While the overcall may be debatable, it need not have given you the chance to find a spectacular ending. If West had dutifully led his partner's suit, you would have had no chance.

North-South minus 100.

With all the unorthodox defensive maneuvers and cooperative bidding you had to do in this match, there were opportunities to impress. Partner seems not to have gone astray, so maybe you've found someone worth pursuing (thanks, Master Solvers' Club!). Your teammates bid a little erratically in this match, and you may want to discuss other options with partner after you see how the rest of the day goes. Will he be interested in having the conversation?