

# Kibitzer

Official Publication of the Chicago Contract Bridge Association February/March, 2026

## The San Francisco NABC - November/December, 2025

Local experts, **Ralph Katz** of the Nickell team and **Bryan Platnick** of the Rosenberg team persevered through the first five days of the Soloway Knockout Teams to finish tied for 5th-8th. The Nickell match was particularly exciting on the 5th day when it came down to the last board to determine the qualifying team.

Katz's teammates, Hampson and Greco, were N/S, defending 5D from East. The lead of a high heart defeats the game, breaking up the major suit squeeze on South... but Greco, hoping that his partner held the CA, chose to lead his singleton club! Schaltz rose with the ace in dummy and played off all of his diamonds. Greco was miserable. This was the position on the last diamond:

The hand:

Greco was forced to concede an 11th trick to East.

Game making and along with it, a sad loss for the Nickell team.



Platnick's team was playing 4-handed, never an easy feat in an event that lasts for many days... and to make things even more tiring, in the Round of 16, in regulation, they found themselves tied! This forced an already exhausted cast of characters into an added 8-board playoff.

Rosenberg's squad failed 114-134 on day five, losing to Patty Cayne's team. The result in Rosenberg/Cayne was math before the last board.

Following two days off, both teams entered the Reisinger Board-A-Match on the final weekend of play.

(NABC highlights continued on page 2)

Coming into the final day of the Reisinger, the Nickell team was in first place after Katz's teammates put together a whopping big set in the second session of the semi-final, scoring 20.5 wins! Unfortunately, the team was not as lucky on the final day.

Katz and Nickell held a really interesting hand with the chance for an endplay in the trump suit.

The hand:

Hand layout for the first session:

- North (Ron Gerard):** ♠4, ♥Q1063, ♦J974, ♣Q862
- South (Nick Nickell):** ♠76, ♥AK42, ♦A10, ♣AJ974
- West (Mark Lair):** ♠QJ983, ♥9875, ♦K85, ♣5
- East (Ralph Katz):** ♠AK1052, ♥J, ♦Q632, ♣K103

Score table:

	W	N	E	S
1♠	P	1♠	P	P
2♣*	P	2♦	P	P
3NT*	P	4♣	P	P
4♦*	P	4NT*	P	P
6♣	P	P	P	P

2C=2+  
3NT=15-17  
4D=RKC for clubs  
4NT=2 without the queen

The D7 was led. Nickell played small from dummy. South ducked and Nickell won the DT.

HA and a heart ruff was followed by a diamond to the ace, another heart ruff, a diamond ruff, and a club to the king. The DQ was ruffed in declarer's hand.

Nickell was at the crossroads. To succeed, he MUST cash the HK to strip the heart from North's hand to force Ronnie Gerard into position for the endplay.

The five card ending:

Hand layout for the five-card ending:

- North (Ron Gerard):** ♠4, ♥Q, ♦—, ♣Q86
- South (Nick Nickell):** ♠76, ♥K, ♦—, ♣AJ
- West (Mark Lair):** ♠QJ98, ♥8, ♦—, ♣—
- East (Ralph Katz):** ♠AK1052, ♥—, ♦—, ♣—

Score table:

	W	N	E	S
1♠	P	1♠	P	P
2♣*	P	2♦	P	P
3NT*	P	4♣	P	P
4♦*	P	4NT*	P	P
6♣	P	P	P	P

At the table, Nick played the CA! He continued with the HK but it was too late. He played a spade to the ace and king. Gerard ruffed the SK and cashed the CQ for down one!

Had Nick cashed the HK first, he could play a spade to the ace followed by the SK, leaving this position:

When Gerard ruffed the spade off dummy (and he would have no choice since he's down to all trumps), he would be forced to lead a club from the Q8 into Nickell's AJ, allowing Nick to score up the slam!.

The Nickell team finished 6th, still a good showing in a premiere event!

Hand layout for the alternative five-card ending:

- North (Ron Gerard):** ♠—, ♥—, ♦—, ♣Q86
- South (Nick Nickell):** ♠7, ♥—, ♦—, ♣AJ
- West (Mark Lair):** ♠QJ9, ♥—, ♦—, ♣—
- East (Ralph Katz):** ♠K105, ♥—, ♦—, ♣—

Score table:

	W	N	E	S
1♠	P	1♠	P	P
2♣*	P	2♦	P	P
3NT*	P	4♣	P	P
4♦*	P	4NT*	P	P
6♣	P	P	P	P

Unit 123 NABC  
masterpoint  
winners  
continued on  
page 3!

**Unit 123 Board of Directors  
With Contact Information  
EC indicates Executive Committee:**

**President Loring Knoblauch EC**

Loring.knoblauch@me.com

**Vice President Bob Maxson EC**

bishopmaxson@yahoo.com

**Secretary Jan Churchwell EC**

jan8242@gmail.com

**Treasurer Missy Ravid EC**

mravid2@gmail.com

**Suzi Subeck EC**

stansubeck@prodigy.net

**Craig Allen**

nellagiarc@aol.com

**Bill Anspach**

billanspach@gmail.com

**Phyllis Bartlett**

bartlett.phyllis@gmail.com

**Adrienne Cohen**

dolly370@aol.com

**Steve Donahue**

spd47@aol.com

**Betsy Downs**

loverofbeagles@gmail.com

**Steve McConnell**

stevemac@sbcglobal.net

**Frank Pancoe**

fpancoe@comcast.net

**Jamie Rubenstein**

jamierube76@gmail.com

**Mark Stein**

markstein@sbcglobal.net

The Kibitzer is published six times per year by the Chicago Contract Bridge Association (CCBA).

Opinions of columnists are their own and may not represent those of the CCBA.

For more information, go to [www.bridgeinchicago.com](http://www.bridgeinchicago.com) or call the CCBA at 630-235-4718.

**Interim Acting Kibitzer Staff:**

CCBA Communications Committee:

Suzi Subeck, Editor

Jan Churchwell

Jamie Rubenstein

# Unit 123 Masterpoint Winners at San Fran NABC

- 1 160.00 Ralph Katz, Burr Ridge IL
- 2 142.68 Wenfei Wang, Northbrook IL
- 3 89.83 Brian Platnick, Evanston IL
- 4 58.45 David Yang, Darien IL
- 5 57.27 Aleksandar Lishkov, Chicago IL
- 6 55.99 Daniel Zagorin, Chicago IL
- 7 53.02 Yizhou Liu, Chicago IL
- 8 36.77 Zhaofeng Wang, Evanston IL
- 9 32.60 Judy Zhu, Romeoville IL
- 10 26.19 Mark Pinkowski, Chicago IL
- 11 22.33 Ron Smith, Glenview IL
- 12 20.77 Nic Hristea, Chicago IL
- 13 18.83 Cheri Bjerkan, Elmhurst IL
- 14 17.98 Ben Fisk, Chicago IL
- 15 16.06 Mark Stein, Skokie IL
- 16 14.89 Tom Conaghan, Palatine IL
- 17 14.85 Dorie Isaacson, Northbrook IL
- 18 12.80 R E Stern, Chicago IL
- 19 12.47 Alec Sun, Chicago IL
- 20 9.38 Nicole Qian, Evanston IL
- 21 8.97 David Fritzsche, Kildeer IL
- 22 8.75 Arnold Grant, Glenview IL
- 23 7.97 Kaining Sheng, Northbrook IL
- 24 7.45 Martha Katz, Burr Ridge IL
- 25 5.38 Lonnie Kepley, Naperville IL
- 26 5.38 Gail Kepley, Naperville IL
- 27 5.08 Graham Meyer, Chicago IL
- 28 5.08 Zinnia Meyer, Chicago IL
- 29 3.59 Steve Garner, Chicago IL
- 30 2.31 Joseph Stokes, Chicago IL
- 31 2.16 Dick Bruno, Des Plaines IL
- 32 1.84 Linda Martin, Winnetka IL
- 33 0.77 Robert Maxson, River Forest IL



Total Masterpoints reported: 937.89  
33 players from Unit 123 attended the NABC.  
There were 3,356 players in total!

**John Vincent**, 80, former member of the CCBA Board of Directors, passed away on November 29, 2025. John played golf, basketball, and of course, bridge. He loved hunting and fishing. And, in his "real life," John was a Special Agent with the FBI. John leaves behind his wife, Ramona, two daughters and a grandson. He will be missed by his many bridge friends. Sincere condolences to his family and friends.



**John Vincent**

## RIP John

## The 1 No Trump Structure – Part II by Jim Diebel (Part 1 in the December/January Kibitzer)

### B. Jacoby and Texas Transfers:

Before you can totally appreciate why we choose to treat some of the following sequences as we do, you will need a rudimentary understanding of two different principles that we will discuss in more depth later: (1) The Principle of Fast Arrival, and (2) The Law of Total Tricks. In most basic terms, **The Principle of Fast Arrival** states that *when we know where we are going, we go there immediately*. It is a logical corollary of Bidding Commandment #1, “do not ask a question that we already know the answer to”. **The Law of Total Tricks** is more complex, but in simplest terms states that *when our side has a fit, the other side does as well*. We will learn that *when both sides have a fit*, and approximately half of the points, it will be a losing strategy to pass out the auction below the level of 2NT. Using these two unrelated principles in tandem, we will learn that it will often be winning strategy to get a minus score. Additionally, we will learn that against better competition, you will need to voluntarily bid high enough to go down, before the opponents can evaluate their assets accurately enough to compete to their best spot.

### Jacoby Transfers:

On the surface, there seems to be little to discuss in the way of strategy involving this convention. Responder’s hands invariably fall into 4 categories: Part Score, Invitational, Game, and Slam.

A.	♠ T75	♥ K9752	♦ J6	♣ T94
B.	♠ KQT75	♥ 973	♦ KT8	♣ 94
C.	♠ KQT75	♥ K97	♦ 83	♣ Q94
D.	♠ K97	♥ KQT75	♦ A8	♣ Q94
E.	♠ KQT75	♥ A97	♦ 8	♣ KQ94



On hand (A), Responder has a dreadful hand but has every reason to believe that 2 hearts will play better than 1NT, thus he transfers and passes. On hand (B), Responder has a typical invitational hand. He transfers to spades, and then rebids 2NT to leave the final decision up to Opener. On hand (C), Responder has a minimum game forcing hand with a weak holding in a side suit. He transfers to spades, and rebids 3NT. Opener will correct to 4S when he holds 3 spades. We’ve seen hand (D) before. Responder with a flat hand and no weaknesses should not use the transfer bid. Instead, he bids 2C, and the partnership only will play in hearts if it has a 9 card fit – otherwise 3NT should be the better contract. On hand (E), Responder has a strong hand that might even make a slam. Responder starts with 2H, (transfer to spades) and then rebids 3C, which is natural and **game forcing**. With wasted strength in the red suits, Opener may bid 3NT, but he has been warned. With a 3 card spade holding, soft values for his No Trump opening, and some wastage in the red suits, Opener may jump to 4S (**fast arrival**) but with good controls and minimal red suit wastage, opener should simply bid 3S, keeping the auction lower and promising a better hand.

### Blackwood:

Just like with Stayman, after a Jacoby Transfer, (say to spades) a jump to 4C (Gerber) should be the Ace-Asking convention. If Responder transfers to a major and then jumps to 4NT, this should be a **quantitative** raise asking opener to pass, or correct to either 6S or 6NT, depending on his spade holding and point count.

### Super Acceptance Bids:

Of those who play Super-Acceptance bids over Jacoby Transfers, Nearly all fail to use this gadget to maximum profit. The overwhelming majority will only Super Accept with 4-card support and a maximum (usually 17). While this works fine in the local club game, it won’t get you very far against the next level of competition. Since we’ve seen that it’s generally wrong to allow the opponents to play in their comfortable contracts below 2NT, strong opponents will rarely allow you to play 2H or 2S when you have a 9-card fit. How do they know? First of all, they won’t have many cards in that suit, and secondly, the weaker Responder’s hand is, the more points they will hold to be able to re-open the auction. Why not find out whether or not they balance and then bid to the 3-level if they come in? The problem with this strategy is that once the opponents find their suit, they may discover that their fit is as good as yours. On the hands where you can only make 2 Hearts with a 9-card fit, it is a virtual certainty that they can make 9 tricks or more in their best suit. Frequently, there will be hands where your side can make 3H, and their side can make 3S or even 4 of a minor! Even if they can’t make 3S, they may bid it, and you will collect +50, or +100, when you could have made +140 for playing 3H unmolested. As we will see, unless you are playing

(Wimpy, Continued from page 4)

against weak opponents, it will be a winning strategy to go down in 3H holding a 9-card fit, rather than risk defending a 3-level contract by the opponents. For that reason, **we will Super-Accept on all 4-card holdings!**

**When partner transfers to a major and we hold 4 cards in that suit:**

With a minimum hand (15 pts)

**Jump to 3 of the major**

With a non-minimum 4-3-3-3 hand

**Bid 2NT** (this is forcing to at least 3 Spades)

With a non-minimum 4-3-3-2 hand

**Bid your doubleton as cheaply as possible.**

These highly descriptive bids make it relatively easy for Responder to evaluate his strengths and weaknesses, and perhaps re-evaluate a hand that initially he would have passed out on the 2-level. Furthermore, we've seen that when this jump to the 3-level results in our side going down, it will be a victory against all but the weakest fields.

### Texas Transfers:

When we are only interested in game, the longer our suit is, the fewer high card points we need to make 10 tricks. A Texas Transfer (4D to 4H, or 4H to 4S) shows a 6-card or longer suit, usually with no interest past game. Since we know where we want to play this hand, (remember **fast arrival**?) why give the opponents the convenient opportunity to make their lead directing (or save suggesting) bids? Suppose you are East as South bids 1NT and North transfers with 2D (to Hearts). You hold:

♠ KQT97

♥ 7

♦ 8

♣ KJT864

With either equal or favorable vulnerability, you almost certainly will bid either 3C, 2S, or 2H (suggesting a 2 suited hand with spades and a minor). On the right day, you might even catch your partner with the hand you need to either make 10 or 11 tricks or a cheap sacrifice. How sad for North who held:

♠ 3

♥ AQJ9753

♦ 642

♣ 93

who had intended to jump to 4H after the transfer. His space conserving call allowed the opponents to climb into the auction and find an unbeatable 4S contract. How different it might have turned out if North instead had bid 4D instead of 2D. Now East has the same options available, but none of them look quite so attractive. A 4H cue bid could propel the partnership into 5C or worse and go for a huge number. The general rule will be, **the weaker your hand, the quicker you need to get to your final destination**. Once again, it's that pesky **fast arrival**. TX Transfers are additionally very useful when the opponents interfere. Suppose your partner opens 1NT, RHO bids 2♥ (Hearts and a minor), and you hold:

♠ KJT752

♥ 94

♦ 8

♣ KQ94

Now YOU know what the minor likely is, and it's even possible that the opponents have a profitable sacrifice in it if they can find it. Why give them the chance? Bid 4H (TX Transfer) and let Lefty decide whether he wants to gamble on the chance that he has a big diamond fit with his partner or not. TX Transfers are **ON** over interference as high as 3C. For interference of 3D or higher, transfers are **OFF** – you need to have 2 suited cue bids available.

### Slam Bidding:

Now that you understand when to use Texas Transfers, it stands to reason you need to know when **NOT** to use them. Suppose partner opens a strong 1NT and you hold:

♠ 3

♥ AKQ9753

♦ K42

♣ 93

Immediately, you envision a slam, but asking for aces will not be sufficient. Partner may have 2, and you won't know which ones they are. You could easily be off the cashing Ace-King of clubs. The solution to this dilemma is to transfer to **TWO HEARTS** and then jump to **4H** on your next call. Since you clearly always intended on going to 4H, this sequence must necessarily imply something different than an immediate jump to 4D. Opener will recognize this sequence as **slam invitational**. Opener does NOT count his points. Instead he looks at his side suits. With no worse than a King in every side suit, Opener may proceed. Therefore, with the minimum hand:

♠ AJ5

♥ 84

♦ AJ86 ♣ AJ53

Opener will leap to slam, knowing that he almost certainly has the cards you are looking for. With the Maximum

♠ KQJ9 ♥ J84 ♦ QJ7 ♣ AQJ or ♠ KQJ9 ♥ J4 ♦ AQJ7 ♣ QJ8

he will pass 4H. Note he has 15 points in the hand he accepts the slam invitation and 17 points in both of the hands he declines. In both hands that he refuses, he holds a suit with two top losers. If Opener has the requisite controls, but is still unsure, he can Blackwood or cue bid. One further point: When Responder makes a Texas Transfer and then bids 4NT, it is **Ace asking, not quantitative**. If Responder is so strong that he knows he wants to try for slam no matter what, he must **NOT** use the slam **invitational** sequence. Commandment #1: Don't ask a question when you already know the answer!

Jim Diebel serves on the BOD of District 13. He runs a successful club game in the Western suburbs. In his "free time," he gives bridge lessons on and off line. For more information, you can reach him at [wimpy@wimpy.biz](mailto:wimpy@wimpy.biz).

# District 13 2025/2026 Grand National Teams

Saturday, February 21, 2026, 11:00 and TBA & Sunday, February 22, 2026, 11:00 and TBA



Rank Advancements  
Through December 6, 2025

**Good Hope School, Room #26, 2315 W Good Hope Rd, Glendale, WI**  
**(directions on back of flyer)**

Championship Flight, Flight A, & Flight B take place over 4 sessions and will be concluded in a single weekend.

Flight C will be a two-session Swiss Team event played from start to finish on Sunday only.

There will be no competition among flights. Players must choose the flight in which they plan to play.

Flight	Masterpoints	Club Qualifying
Championship	Unlimited	Determined by Unit
Flight A	Fewer than 6000 points	Determined by Unit
Flight B	Fewer than 3000 points	Determined by Unit
Flight C	Non Life Master and fewer than 750 points	Determined by Unit

Flight eligibility is established by ACBL's September 2025 masterpoint cycle. This information was produced on August 6, 2025 in Horn Lake, MS. Masterpoints won after this cycle will not impact flight eligibility.

Each member of the team must be a paid member in good standing with the ACBL, residing in District 13. Club qualifying games are permitted at Unit discretion but are not required at any level of competition. Flight B or C teams may qualify under the rules of any Unit where a plurality of team members reside.

In addition, players who are currently, or have ever been in the past, members of another bridge organization, whether domestic (e.g., American Bridge Association) or foreign (e.g., Polski Związek Brydza Sportowego), must submit information on their past and/or current ranking in that organization to the GNT Co-Ordinator. Submissions must be in writing (email is fine) and must be received by the District GNT Coordinator or at the time of registration for the event. The information submitted may be used to assign a conversion to ACBL masterpoints for purposes of verifying flight eligibility.

**\*\*An entry in the CHAMPIONSHIP Flight is a commitment to play in the National Final. Entries in lower flights may play to conclusion before declaring intent. We understand your reluctance to commit in advance.\*\***

### GNT Coordinator:

Suzi Subeck  
847-509-0311      stansubeck@prodigy.net

One team will qualify in Championship and Fl. A

In the event that there are 8 or more teams in the District Final of Flight B &/or C, that flight or flights will qualify the 2 top teams.

Any teams representing D13 at the National Event will receive a stipend paid at or just after the NABC.

### Registration:

**PRE-REGISTRATION IS REQUIRED FOR THIS EVENT.**  
All teams wishing to enter must provide notification by noon on February 12, 2026 by contacting:

Suzi Subeck, District 13 Director, (847)-509-0311 Home, (708) 927-6819 Cell, stansubeck@prodigy.net.

*Entering teams must receive confirmation response by email. A team without such a confirmation should not assume that entry has been verified. It is important to know in advance the teams entered. Captains should bring the confirmation with them to the site and be prepared to present it when purchasing an entry.*

Tad	Andracki	Junior Master
Jim	Ehrenreich	Junior Master
Nancy	Hughes	Junior Master
Michael	Smith	Junior Master
Kelly	Anderson	Club Master
Alex	Jablonski	Club Master
Llyn	Longwell	Club Master
Ron	Attreau	Sectional Master
Martin	Devine	Sectional Master
Carole	Jaacks	Sectional Master
G Peter	Shugart	Sectional Master
David	Brown	Regional Master
Marilynn	Sparacino	Regional Master
Sadaf	Quas	NABC Master
Alec	Sun	Adv NABC Master
Kunal	Pujara	Bronze Life Master
Sue	Lies	Silver Life Master
Doug	Scofield	Ruby Life Master
Joan	Shafer	Ruby Life Master
Michael	Sittinger	Ruby Life Master
Kay	Whitman	Ruby Life Master
Julie	Woods	Gold Life Master
Robert	Maxson	Sapphire Life Master



Rank Advancements  
Through January 6, 2026

First Name	Last Name	New Rank
Mary Ann	Apostolos	Junior Master
Jeffrey	Appel	Junior Master
Dane	Meade	Junior Master
Hannah	Sheats	Junior Master
Elizabeth	Engbrecht	Club Master
Larry	Fisher	Club Master
Judy	Nigro	Club Master
Gertraud	Stupec	Club Master
John	Walton	Club Master
Clea	van Voorhi	Sectional Master
David	Brown	Sectional Master
Loretta	Cooney	Sectional Master
Alex	Ding	Sectional Master
Dan	Ehrmann	Sectional Master
Ann	Ernst	Sectional Master
Kevin	Mistrik	Sectional Master
Sandeep	Raje	Sectional Master
Christophe	Staszak	Sectional Master
Kathleen	Vondran	Sectional Master
Sandy	Boles	Regional Master
Julian	Oettinger	Regional Master
Nicole	Qian	Regional Master
Michael	Adami	NABC Master
Gail	Kepley	NABC Master
Lonnie	Kepley	NABC Master
Zinnia	Meyer	NABC Master
Susan	Salek	NABC Master
Anthony	Veeneman	NABC Master
Gerry	Yeggy	Adv NABC Master
Jane	Bell	Life Master
Jane	Bell	Bronze Life Master
Michael	Dunn	Silver Life Master
Barbara	Ehrmann	Silver Life Master

**Save the Dates:**  
**CCBA Windy City Regional**  
**June 3-7, 2026**  
**Eventz, 1100 American Lane, Schaumburg, IL**  
**Tournament Chair: Betsy Downs**  
**More Info in an**  
**Email Blast will follow shortly!**

# "Hand"y ... Dandy!

Dealer South. Both Vul.

♠ 5	♠ J 6 2
♥ J 10 9 3 2	♥ K Q 8 6 5
♦ 6 4 2	♦ 9 8
♣ K 10 4 2	♣ J 9 6
♠ A K Q 9 8 4	
♥ A	
♦ A K Q	
♣ A Q 3	

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♣	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♠	Pass	6♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

North's three-club rebid was a second negative. Next, South bid what he thought he could make. His leap to six spades may have been a trifle optimistic, although South thought that North had to have had some good reason to remove three notrump.

West led the jack of hearts and declarer received a decent dummy. After winning the first trick with the ace of hearts, declarer decided to rely on a two-two trump break to make his contract. So, he cashed the ace and king of trumps, but they proved to be three-one. Declarer continued by playing his three top diamonds. All would have been well if East had ruffed in, but he found the good defence of discarding a heart. Declarer drew the last trump but eventually he had to concede two club tricks to finish down one.

North was not impressed and said so in the post-mortem. "After the defenders followed to the first round of trumps, the contract was all but certain. Instead of cashing a second round of trumps you should have played your three top diamonds. What

can East do? If he ruffs in, the defence is finished on this layout. You would be able to win the return, cash the king of trumps to draw the last trump and cross to dummy with a trump to the ten. Dummy's diamonds would then have taken care of you club losers."

North continued, "Of course, East might have found the good defence of not ruffing the third diamond. You would have countered this by leading the nine of trumps to dummy's ten. When East took this with the jack and played a heart you would have ruffed it high. You would then have crossed to dummy by playing the four of trumps to dummy's seven. Dummy's diamonds would then have taken care of your club losers."

Dealer North. EW Vul.

♠ Q 7 4	♠ 3
♥ J 6 5	♥ 8 7 4 3 2
♦ 9 6 4	♦ A Q 7 5 2
♣ K 10 5 3	♣ 6 2
♠ A K 9 6 2	
♥ A 9	
♦ J 10 8	
♣ A Q 8	

West	North	East	South
—	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	1NT	Pass	2NT
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

North made what turned out to be a winning decision when he bid three spades over two notrump, for three notrump would have failed on the normal lead of the five of diamonds.

West led the king of hearts against the final contract. If trumps had been three-two, declarer would have needed four tricks in clubs to make the contract. What



Being called a "dummy" Feels so Crummy!

if trumps were four-one! The only hope would have been if he could have cashed four clubs to discard a heart, then taken a couple of heart ruffs in hand.

That possibility was firmly in mind when declarer won the opening lead with the ace and cashed the ace-king of trumps. When East discarded a heart on the second trump, declarer put his reserve plan into action, playing the ace, queen and another club. When West followed with three low clubs, declarer saw that a three-three club break would not help his cause since West would ruff the fourth club and cash three red-suit winners. So, declarer finessed the ten of clubs. East discarded an encouraging diamond, but it was too late. Declarer played the king of clubs and threw the nine of hearts from hand. After ruffing dummy's low heart in hand, declarer returned to dummy with a trump to the queen to ruff the jack of hearts. When this was not overruffed, declarer had ten tricks: five trumps, a heart and four clubs.

**Dealer South. Both Vul.**

♠ K Q  
 ♥ 6 5  
 ♦ K J 5 3 2  
 ♣ Q 9 4 3

♠ 10 8 5 4  
 ♥ J 10 9 7  
 ♦ Q 10 8 6  
 ♣ K

♠ J 9 7 2  
 ♥ Q 8 4 3 2  
 ♦ 9  
 ♣ A J 2

♠ A 6 3  
 ♥ A K  
 ♦ A 7 4  
 ♣ 10 8 7 6 5

<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
—	—	—	INT
Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			

West led the jack of hearts from his better major suit. Declarer counted seven top tricks, so he would need two more tricks, and really the only viable source of those was the diamond suit. Declarer saw that he could play the diamond suit for five tricks by cashing the ace and finessing the jack. If diamonds were three-two and the finesse won he would make ten tricks.

However, this declarer was a little more cautious than most and decided to aim for nine rather than ten tricks. After winning the first trick with the king of hearts, his next move was to cash dummy's king and queen of spades. Then he led a low diamond to his ace then played a second diamond. When West played a crafty queen of diamonds, declarer made sure of his contract by calling for a low diamond from dummy – if he had taken the queen with the king he would have been restricted to three diamond tricks and the contract would have failed.

West exited with the ten of hearts, which was taken by declarer's ace. After cashing the ace of spades, declarer claimed three diamond tricks. He made three spades, two hearts and four diamonds for nine tricks and his contract.

Note that if declarer had played on simple lines by winning the heart and immediately playing ace and another diamond to the jack, he would not have been able to unscramble his winners.

**Dealer North. Both Vul.**

♠ K 5 2  
 ♥ A 10 9 2  
 ♦ K 6 3  
 ♣ 6 5 2

♠ 10 9 8 6 4  
 ♥ 8  
 ♦ 10 8 2  
 ♣ 9 8 4 3

♠ A Q 7  
 ♥ K 7 6  
 ♦ J 9 7 5  
 ♣ Q J 10

♠ J 3  
 ♥ Q J 5 4 3  
 ♦ A Q 4  
 ♣ A K 7

<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>
—	Pass	1♦	INT
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

West led the two of diamonds, which declarer placed as either a third-highest lead or a singleton. Declarer was a little chagrined about the final contract, since the (he thought) obvious advance on the North hand was three notrump rather than two clubs: there would have been nine easy tricks notrump, just as there were in hearts. Declarer's problem was to conjure a tenth trick and that could only come from spades. Furthermore, spades had to be worked on before the defenders attacked clubs.

Declarer decided to play East for four diamonds in a balanced hand. If that were the case, East should have at least 12 high card points – almost all of those outstanding, including the ace and queen of spades. So, declarer took the opening lead in hand with the ace of diamonds, led a heart to dummy's ace and then a low spade toward his hand. East rose with the queen of spades and shifted to the queen of clubs, taken by declarer with the ace.

Declarer continued with the jack of spades to East's ace and took the club return with his king. After crossing to dummy with a low diamond to the king, declarer threw his remaining club on the king of spades. When this passed off successfully, declarer led a trump from dummy. East rose with the king of trumps and tried to cash a club. However, declarer ruffed this with his jack of trumps and claimed ten tricks: a spade, four trumps, three diamonds and two clubs.

Board 21 North dealer, NS vul

S 65  
H AKQT83  
D AJ  
C Q87  
S A83  
H 7  
D T9653  
C KJ43

**George Klemic** is an excellent player from the western suburbs. He has represented District 13 in the GNT's and scores well in any event he enters. "Listening" to what he writes is guaranteed to improve your game! Thanks George for this excellent article.

# "Listening..."

## Two Hands from the Invitational Pairs

### by George Klemic

West	North	East	South	
	1C	1NT	DbI	
2S	3H	Pass	3NT	all pass

Playing late in the barometer finals, I was sitting south and found Kibitzer regular Jim Diebel on my left in the west seat for a two board round. I ended up declaring the first board in 3NT on an auction that will require some explanation. We were playing a strong 1C system, hence the 1C opening despite the long heart suit. 1NT was alerted as showing a two suited hand with two suits of the same shape...a shortcut for meaning either the combination of spades and diamonds, or hearts and clubs. Double was just a general values showing bid of no particular shape. 2S was natural but a "pass or correct" bid, meaning if partner actually had the other two suits, the good fit should be safe at the 3 level. 3H and 3NT were natural bids.

The opening lead was the S4. Looking at the dummy, there is clearly work to do...even if there are 6 heart winners, we only have 2 aces outside of the club suit and will need to win at least one club trick. In situations like this, we need to make some assumptions if the contract is to make. First, we need either spades 4-4, or if they are 5-3, we need the club ace in the other hand. Regardless of which case it is this time, it's a good idea to duck two rounds of spades. The play started with east playing the 9, then continuing with the queen. When this was ducked, west overtook with the SK and continued with a third spade (the DJ was discarded from dummy). This play strongly suggested that the spade suit was divided 5-3.

The first order of business now was to tackle the heart suit. In a vacuum, with AKQTxx facing a small singleton, the best play for 6 tricks is roughly even between taking the finesse or playing from the top down, hoping to drop the jack. However, when there has been a two suited call, the odds change quite a bit, and I decided that the best play was to take the finesse. I was rewarded when west held four to the jack and the entire suit cashed out. The only thing left to do was to hope that west also held the CA. As luck would have it, they did, and there were 10 tricks.

This was the full deal:

	S 65	
	H AKQT83	
	D AJ	
	C Q87	
S K74		S QJT92
H J962		H 54
D K2		D Q874
C A952		C T6
	S A83	
	H 7	
	D T9653	
	C KJ43	



(Klemic, Continued from page 9)

+630 scored 11 out of 12 matchpoints. Jim did lament not switching to the DK after the second spade as it would have saved the overtrick, but this may be wishful thinking and take a very specific read of the cards. That switch would have saved a couple matchpoints but would have still scored below average. The bigger pickup would have been if east had never bid...now, without any information to go on, I would need to guess how to play the heart suit and may well have gone wrong. Sometimes a little information goes a long way. We got the better of it on this board, but Jim had his revenge on the final board...

Board 22 East dealer, EW vul

S AK842		S JT963	
H KJ8		H 7653	
D AKQ5		D T8	
C 6		C 92	
West	North	East	South
--	--	Pass	Pass
1S	3C	3S	Pass
4S	Pass	Pass	5C
5S	All Pass		

**As mentioned earlier, these hands are from the Unit 123 Invitational Pairs that was held during the 2025 Labor Day Sectional. The Invitational Pairs is Chicago's premier event. Any Unit member with 1300 masterpoints or more is qualified to play... or ...one can qualify by playing in and winning any event in one of the Unit 123 tournaments between Labor Day and Windy City... either a sited Sectional or one of the two Regionals: Central States or Windy City. Your last chance for this year (remember the year is defined as September to September) is at the Windy City Regional in June in Schaumburg. Make your plans now!**

This auction requires no explanation, outside of perhaps checking with east to ask where their high card support went. Despite the lack of honor strength though, there is play for 11 tricks. However, that will be the limit as right out of the gate, the play begins with the CK lead, overtaken by the CA, followed by the HA (north followed with the H9) and the H4. The fate of this contract lies in your decision here, so what do you do?

Jim was faced with this problem and took some time to consider what might be going on. N/S were playing upside down carding, so on the surface the 9 is discouraging, but 1) they might not have a choice, and 2) at this point in the hand, there is little to be gained from an honest signal. There was a lot of other information to factor in as well...why the delayed raise to 5C? What might south hold, given they were known to be playing an aggressive system?

In the end, Jim eventually decided to win the HK, finding that the queen dropped behind the king. Now, it was easy work to draw trumps (they were 2-1) and claim up the hand. +650 scored 11.5 matchpoints, so despite the poor first board, they came out on top ever so slightly.

This was the full deal:

	S Q	
	H Q9	
	D 9762	
	C KQJ743	
S AK842		S JT963
H KJ8		H 7653
D AKQ5		D T8
C 6		C 92
	S 75	
	H AT42	
	D J43	
	C AT85	

(Continued on page 11)

In the post mortem, someone brought up the idea that, rather than leading the ace of hearts at trick 2, I should have led a low heart. Though that was a consideration, one of the keys to winning defense is to consider hands where the defensive play makes a difference. With nothing to go on but seeing trick #1 play out, I considered this very distribution as highly likely, and the high cards exactly as they were. If this was the case, then I knew that, as long as west guessed to play the HK on the lead of a low heart, it didn't matter which heart I played. Let me run through how the play would go, to illustrate the funny position that occurs:

- 1) CK lead, CA wins
- 2) H4 lead, HK wins
- 3) SA lead, both follow with the SQ dropping
- 4) SJ wins in dummy
- 5) C played off the dummy, trumped
- 6-8) D A-K-Q played, discarding a heart on the last one
- 9) D5 lead, trump in dummy, leaving this four-card ending:



	S	
	H Q	
	D	
	C QJ7	
S K8		S T9
H J8		H 76
D		D
C		C
	S	
	H AT2	
	D	
	C T	

When a heart is led from the dummy, South has no good play. If the ace is won, the queen will drop, making the jack good. But, if it is ducked, now north wins the queen but has nothing left but clubs to play, conceding a ruff-sluff for making the contract. All of north's discards are forced, with the only option to discard the HQ rather than one of the extra clubs during the play, but then declarer simply leads towards the HJ and will win it safely.

I saw that this was not going to work, and as a result, I decided to give Jim a different problem. I had already assumed that he would work out that the only reason that I would make a delayed raise was that I was not sure that he would bid game or not, and that could only be with likely tricks, i.e., aces.

So, those cards were already known, but the HQ might not be so clear. Even though he did not say so after the hand, I think that Jim likely realized that I had a chance to have bid before his 1S opening, and had I also held the HQ, would have been very close to an opening bid playing Precision. This is reminiscent of the Sherlock Holmes situation of "the dog that didn't bark". I decided leading the HA and a heart was the best chance to induce a mistake, as I was certain that he would be up to the play I detailed above had I led a small heart at trick 2.

All bridge players start their decisions about bidding with their high card points (HCP). But whenever considering your value when raising partner, it is critical to consider your distribution, both in terms of long suits and short suits, and positional values when your secondary honors are located behind your opponents. These clues to good hand evaluation occur in partscore decisions, game decisions and slam decisions. Look at the following:

1. <u>E</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>North</u>
	1♥	1♠	2♥	♠ 75	♠ K42
P	3♦	P	4♥	♥ AKJ105	♥ Q983
P	P	P		♦ J642	♦ 3
				♣ AQ	♣ J10963

Many players look at North's hand and see 6 HCP, consider it a minimum and cannot look further. In reality, North's hand has a K behind the ♠ bidder, a singleton in South's game try suit to help eliminate losers, and 4-card trump suit, not just 3-card support. That singleton becomes worth 3 points with the 4<sup>th</sup> trump, so this hand is a maximum worth 9 points supporting hearts. When South makes the game try, accept by jumping to 4♥. With careful play, South will likely lose just 1 spade, 1 diamond, and maybe 1 club to make 10 or 11 tricks.

2. <u>E</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>South</u>	<u>North</u>
1♣	1♠	P	4♣	♠ KQT874	♠ A962
5♣	6♠	P	P	♥ -	♥ A9762
P				♦ AQJ92	♦ K64
				♣ A6	♣ 4

This hand was played on BBO the other day at my teaching table. North has such a good hand that even if South had overcalled on some 8-10 point 1♠ overcall, North wants to be in game. Rather than jumping to game, North made the excellent splinter bid of 4♣. This unusual double jump to the 4-level in any new suit shows game values, 4+-card support for partner, and a singleton or void in clubs. On most hands, partner will settle for game. But on this hand South had a terrific hand and might have even started with a double and bid spades to show the big double. When East sacrificed with 5♣, South could not use 4NT. But with North's good 4♣ splinter raise, she knew there were no ♣ losers and even in the unlikely event North did not have the ♠A or the ♦K, she could pull trump and finesse in ♦ through the opening bidder and probably make 12 tricks. South bidding the 6♠ slam was a great decision and with North's great fitting hand, there were 13 tricks.

Know your system agreements and always consider your distribution when deciding your best bid. Extra trump length, fitting distribution and good controls can often lead to great contracts on fairly minimum HCP hands.

**Jeff and Ginny Schuett—bridge teaching, directing, play**  
**Email: [jgschuett2@comcast.net](mailto:jgschuett2@comcast.net)**  
**Phone: 847-308-2393**

