

The Real Deal

by Larry Cohen



Larry Cohen, a many-time National champion, is a popular writer and lecturer, living in Boca Raton, Florida. Information on Larry's upcoming activities can be found by visiting www.larryco.com.

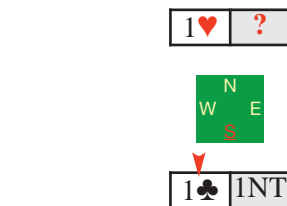
One of Larry's favorite teaching methods is to analyze random deals. He feels that any time you deal out a deck of cards, there are numerous lessons that can be learned.

A quick glance at this deal shows North with 14 high-card points and South with 12 high-card points, so you expect to reach game. The only question is whether that game will be 3NT or 4♥. Let's see how the bidding might go.

South deals and could choose to pass. In the old days, you 'needed' 13 points to open. Nowadays, most players open reasonable 12-counts. This hand qualifies as reasonable. The two 10's are assets, and the ♣K-Q-J-3 holding is also useful—as opposed to the jacks and queens being scattered in suits like J-3-2 or Q-3-2.

If South opens 1♣, North replies 1♥. South has an easy rebid of 1NT. This shows a balanced hand with not enough strength to open 1NT. So, South's rebid shows a 12-14 point balanced hand. What should North do next?

Most players open a reasonable 12-count.



In standard bidding, this is a problem. North, with 14 high-card points, knows the partnership belongs in game—but which game? There could easily be a 5-3 heart fit, and 4♥ could be the right contract. What bid can North make to explore? 2♥ is not forcing—in fact, it would be to play. If North bids 3♥, that shows a six-card suit and is invitational. No good. Guessing to place the contract in 4♥ or 3NT is also unsatisfactory.

THE REAL DEAL

DEAL: 5	NORTH		
DLR: S	♠ K 9		
VUL: E-W	♥ K Q J 8 4		
	♦ J 6 3		
	♣ A 6 4		
		EAST	
WEST		♠ J 8 7 6	
♠ A 4 3 2		♥ 7 3	
♥ A 6 2		♦ K Q 10 4	
♦ 9 7 5		♣ 10 9 8	
♣ 7 5 2			
	SOUTH		
	♠ Q 10 5		
	♥ 10 9 5		
	♦ A 8 2		
	♣ K Q J 3		

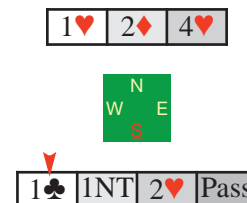
Without a convention, North would indeed have to guess what to do and would probably settle for 3NT. We'll see how 3NT fares in a moment.

I am reluctant—probably the last teacher in the world—to push conventions. But here is an opportunity to introduce you to a very popular one. You all play Stayman after partner's 1NT opening, right? You can also do so after partner's 1NT rebid, as here.

NEW MINOR FORCING

This convention is not "Stayman," but is called "New-minor forcing" (see inset). Note the word 'new' minor. Since South has already bid clubs, North would bid 2♦, the new minor, as a convention. What does it ask for? Not for a four-card major—as in regular Stayman—, since South would have raised to 2♥ with four-card support, or likely have bid 1♠ with four spades. Instead, it asks about three-card support. North is looking for a 5-3 heart fit.

On the actual deal, South bids 2♥ to show three hearts, and now North can bid 4♥ knowing the partnership has a 5-3 heart fit.



THE PLAY IN 4♥

If North becomes declarer in a 4♥ contract, East will lead the ♦K, top of the broken sequence. If South's ♦A wins this trick, the contract will be defeated. When West gains the lead with the ♥A or ♠A, West can lead a diamond, trapping North's ♦J. East gets two diamond tricks to go with the two aces, and the contract is one down.

To make 4♥, declarer must duck the lead of the ♦K! This leaves East on lead. If East continues with the ♦Q, declarer wins the ♦A, and has the ♦J as a second winner in the suit. If East continues with a low diamond, declarer again plays low from the South hand, and wins with the ♦J.

If East shifts to a spade, West can win the ♠A and lead back a diamond, but now declarer can win the ♦A and discard a diamond loser on South's ♠Q.

If East shifts to a heart or a club, declarer will be able to draw trumps. Now declarer can discard a diamond loser on South's extra club winner. So, with careful play, declarer can make 10 tricks in 4♥.

THE PLAY IN 3NT

If North-South don't play new minor forcing, South may become declarer in 3NT. How will that contract fare?

Against a suit contract, West would rarely lay down an unsupported ace, or even worse, lead away from an ace. However, against notrump, it is normal to lead fourth from your longest and strongest—even if the suit contains an ace. So here, West would lead the ♠2. (Sure, looking at *all* the cards, a diamond lead would be more successful.)

The first spade trick goes ♠2, ♠9, ♠J, ♠Q. What should declarer do? Surely work on hearts, knocking out West's ♥A. What will happen next?

That's a bit of a trick question. We need to consider when West takes the ♥A. If West wins the ♥A right away, East has no chance to signal. If West waits until the third round to win the ♥A, East will get to make a signal on the third heart trick.

East would like to suggest that West lead a diamond, but unfortunately, East can't signal with the ♦10, since it is too important a card. Instead, East could throw a low club, the ♣8, or a low spade, the ♠6. However, neither of these spot cards looks very low!

In any event, whenever West wins the ♥A, West should know to switch to diamonds. Why? The clue was at trick one. On the first trick East played the ♠J on dummy's ♠9. That means East doesn't have the ♠10. Holding equals, third hand plays the cheapest card. So, continuing with the ♠A will establish declarer's ♠10 as a winner. Therefore, West might find the 'winning' diamond shift.

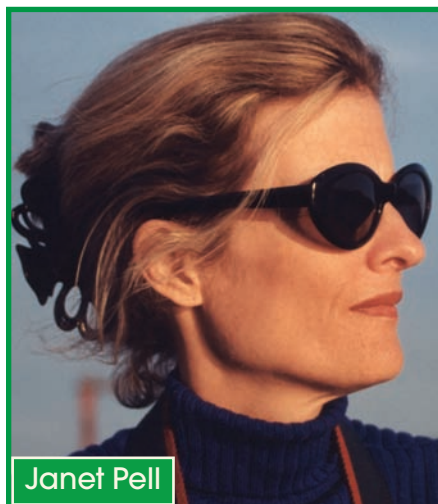
It is 'winning' only in that it holds declarer to ten tricks: one spade, four hearts, a diamond, and four clubs. A spade continuation gives declarer eleven tricks...likely a top board. ♠

New Minor Forcing

Sometimes called 'checkback Stayman,' this convention is used by responder when opener rebids 1NT. So the auction begins:

OPENER	RESPONDER
1 something 1NT	1 of a major ?

If the opening bid was 1♣, 2♦ is the 'new' minor; otherwise, 2♣ is the 'new' minor. Opener can now show three-card support for opener's major or an unbid four-card major. *(There are many possible variations and follow-ups for this convention.)*



Janet Pell

Janet Alexander Pell dealt this Real Deal. Her interests include a passion for writing, good literature, dance, and always humor! The performing arts, travel, teaching, editing, and politics are subjects that she finds irresistible. And you can always catch her scribbling on any scrap of paper whenever she hears a good quote.

Janet has compiled three books of quotes, and she sees them as tiny, dazzling blogs. "A meaningful truism," she says, "can stretch over thousands of years and thousands of miles to touch our hearts and minds and remind us we are all connected." Her books are impressive! The quotes connect Janet with a global audience with similar interests but, as she says, "Not always the same point of view."

Janet's pursuit of bridge started when she was a young married. She took it up again four years ago with lessons at the Dunes Club in Rhode Island. Now she plays in Rhode Island and Florida.

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