

The 70% Solution
by Pamela Granovetter

70% games are difficult to come by, but since we began playing "GUS" (Granovetter Unified System), they come up fairly often for us! We (Matthew and I) decided to track the pair games we play in and the results, beginning in April, 2011.

We played in two pair games at the Ft. Lauderdale Southeasterns Tournament. One was a one-session charity pair game on Monday, April 4, that we won with a 72% score, and the second was a two-session "Stratified AX Pairs" that we won with a 65.36% score (72.32 and 58.15). When we had the 72.32% game, the next highest score our way was only 51.49% When we had the 58.15% game, the next highest score was only 53.70% In other words, the hands were flat, but we managed to achieve great scores anyway!

Here are some examples that illustrate the system itself and the system "style." The hands were from the AX Pair game.

1. "Walking the Dog"

South dealer
East-West vul

You, North, are favorable and hold:

♠ 6
♥ A 10 9
♦ A 10 7 6 5 4 3
♣ 9 3

South opens 2♥ and West overcalls 2♠. Over to you.

The 2♥ opening bid generally shows a good playing hand with 7-12 points. Since GUS is a strong-club system, however, a *one* heart bid itself is limited, so the *two* heart opening bid would be used with the high end of 10-12 points only if the hand was soft and flat, say Qx KJxxxx xx KQx, or the heart suit was poor, or there was some other reason opener wished to limit the hand. With anything better in high cards or distribution, we would open *one* heart.

Even opposite all the wastage in our example hand, you might still make 4♥. Should you bid it? One thing to consider is that at this vulnerability, South could have the same hand without the king of clubs, in which case you make nothing.

One thing is for sure: you do not want to defend a black-suit contract, and a jump to 4♥ with the North hand is equivalent to "transferring" the opponents into 4♠. So you cannot bid 4♥.

What about bidding your diamonds? 3♦ is not forcing, and 4♦ is a splinter bid in support of hearts. So those bids don't work.

Left with no alternative, you bid 3♥. The auction continues:

South	West	North	East
2♥	2♠	3♥	pass
pass	3♠	?	

Nothing has caused you to change your mind that you'd like to avoid defending, so you must take another bid. At this point, it is a good idea to give partner some information about the rest of your hand, so you bid 4♦. If they bid 4♠, partner will know what to do with length in diamonds.

Over your 4♦ bid, partner corrects to 4♥, which ends the auction. 4♥ cannot be beaten and you score a near top when the whole hand was:

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

South	West	North	East
2♥	2♠	3♥	pass*
pass	3♠	4♦	pass*
4♥	(all pass)		

* slowly

East might have bid, but he had a soft hand with wasted heart values. It seems to us that a *four* heart bid by North would have "provoked" East into a 4♠ bid. East thought about bidding a delayed 4♠, but it's very difficult, human-nature-wise, to watch partner push the opponents into a game they weren't bidding and then save over it (particularly vul. vs. not).

2. The "1♦ Could Be Short" Opening Bid

It's very difficult to defend against the short 1♦ opening bid. In the GUS

system, we open five-card majors and a 1♣ opening bid is strong, so the 1♦ opening bid is a catch-all bid. It can show:

- a) a 12-14 weak notrump
- b) diamonds
- c) any three-suiter

With 4-4-0-5, we open 1♦ with no diamonds at all!

We would also open 1♦ with any 4441, or with a 5431 shape that does not include a five-card major.

Sometimes we lose out because we can't compete in the diamond suit effectively, and sometimes we lose clubs with 3-3-2-5 shapes or other hands with a good 4- or 5-card club suit. But just as often, we "steal" the diamond suit from them, or make it difficult for them to defend because they don't know how many diamonds the opening bidder has.

The following hand describes a just-plain-lucky way we got an ice-cold top thanks to the 1♦-could-be-short opening bid:

North dealer
East-West vul

North	
♠ K 8 3	
♥ 5 2	
♦ A K Q 7 5 4	
♣ 9 2	
West	East
♠ A 9	♠ Q J 10
♥ K 10 7 6 4 3	♥ A Q J 9 8
♦ J 9 6 3	♦ 8
♣ 7	♣ K Q 8 6
South	
♠ 7 6 5 4 2	
♥ --	
♦ 10 2	
♣ A J 10 5 4 3	

West	North	East	South
--	1♦	1♥	1♠
4♥	4♠	dbl	pass
5♥	(all pass)		

Opening lead: ♠7
Result: North-South +100, for a top score

Some interesting points:

a) Using a strong-club system, North can afford to bid 4♠. South will not play him for a big hand, because he can't have one. In Standard bidding, North might be reluctant to bid 4♠ because it shows a better hand. North might instead wait for South to come back with a double if South has anything, but in this case the bidding would probably end in 4♥.

b) West should have walked the dog. As usual, a 4♥ bid "transfers" the other side to 4♠. West doesn't not want to defend with his hand.

c) Playing a Standard 1♦ opening bid, South no doubt would be tempted to lead the ten of diamonds instead of a spade. Declarer covers the ten of diamonds with dummy's jack and now 5♥ cannot be beaten (dummy's spade loser goes away on a club). In real life South did not lead a diamond because for all South knows, the diamond suit is East-West's side suit!

d) We once used the "politically correct" idea that 1♦-(1♥)-1♠ denies four or more spades and double shows 4-5 spades. We had to get rid of that because so often it is crucial for partner to know that we have that fifth spade. For this same reason, we gave up using four-card major openings after playing them for decades. Since everybody bids on every hand nowadays, it's crucial to know about that *fifth* card in the major suit! It allows you to raise partner at high levels with only three-card support, as in this case.

e) Admittedly this hand was lucky. All systems have built-in-luck and the key is to play the system with the *most* luck. GUS is such a system.

3. The Off-Shape Notrump

The next hand is also just plain lucky, and could be duplicated by Standard players as well. But you make your own luck, right?

With none vulnerable, what would you open in first chair with:

♠ A 8
♥ 8 2
♦ A 9 6 2
♣ A K J 7 4

In the GUS system, this is a close one: you can open a strong club, or you can open a 14+ to 16 (could be light) 1NT.

If you open with a strong club and partner shows a 0-7 high-cards hand, you can later show a minimum with the minors (if the opponents are silent). Or, if partner has a good hand, partner will show you his strength and shape.

On the other hand, a 1NT opening bid has the advantage of preempting the majors and getting your hand type across in one bid.

Standard players have the option of opening 1C and then rebidding 2D, showing reverse-strength and getting the clubs in the picture.

As luck would have it, 1NT was opened and the final contract became 3NT after partner showed five hearts along the way. The whole hand was:

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

South	West	North	East
1NT	pass	2♣ (1)	pass
2♦ (2)	pass	3♦ (3)	pass
3♥	pass	3NT	(all pass)

- (1) Puppet Stayman (asks for a 5-card major only)
- (2) No 5-card major
- (3) 5 hearts

Opening lead: ♣3
Result: North-South +490

West naturally led a low club and declarer took 12 tricks for a near top (two other players opened 1NT).

Those who opened 1C allowed East to get into the bidding with his spade suit, and now a spade was led against 3NT. Double-dummy you can always take 12 tricks, but the normal line of play is to win the first spade in the North hand and take a club finesse. When that loses and spades are cleared, double-finessing the hearts will cause you to go down in 3NT 75% of the time, whereas a heart to the queen allows you to make 3NT 50% of the time. Obviously, most declarers played to make their game.

In the past, we used to worry about "wrong-siding" contracts by opening 1NT with two small hearts. This could happen, but against that, an off-shape 1NT opening bid preempts the majors and allows your side to reach game when responder has 9+ points, or to avoid getting too high when

partner is weaker and, after South reverses, you cannot stop low enough.

"Right-siding" a contract is a good plan, of course, but bridge is a game of percentages. If a 1NT opening bid with the South hand gains more than it loses, then it is the best thing to do.

4. How Much Will You Bid?

East was dealer and nobody was vulnerable. South held:

♠ A Q 3
♥ 10 4 3 2
♦ Q 8 4 3 2
♣ Q

The bidding went:

West	North	East	South
--	--	pass	pass
1♠	pass	2♦ (1)	pass
2♠ (2)	dbl	pass	?

- (1) 4-card Drury
- (2) minimum

South has to decide how much to bid. If you are going to take only one bid, you should bid 3♦, your best suit and the suit you can stand to be led. If, however, you are going to take two bids, you should bid 3♥ first, planning to bid 4♦ over their expected 3♠.

When this hand was given as a bidding problem, many fine players "went Low" with a 3♦ bid, selling out to 3♠. But the GUS philosophy is to "go High" with hands like this because:

- a) we have a fit in two suits
- b) we have a singleton
- c) we think partner has a singleton
- d) if we push them up to 4♠, we are ready to double

As anticipated, the auction continued:

West	North	East	South
--	--	pass	pass
1♠	pass	2♦ (1)	pass
2♠ (2)	dbl	pass	3♥
pass	pass	3♠	4♦
pass	4♥	(all pass)	

- (1) 4-card Drury
- (2) minimum

The whole hand:

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

Opening lead: ♣A

Result: North-South +420 for a cold top

This hand was a cold top because nobody else got to game with the North-South cards. A few thoughts:

- At some tables, West did not open in 3rd seat and the hand was passed out. Should West open in third seat? Should North open in fourth? We would open with the West hand because it has an ace, a king and a queen, not to mention the boss suit. However, we would *also* open with the North hand in fourth seat. The North hand has excellent support for three different suits and it also has good defense. The GUS system doesn't advocate ultra-light opening bids even in third and fourth seats, but the North hand is much stronger as a playing hand than "nine points." (We would also open the bidding with the East hand!)
- The reason South was able to take two bids is that South did not look at the hand in isolation, but saw how the hand would fit the North hand. In general, with fits in two suits, the hand should be upgraded.
- It is very irritating to push your opponents into game, as East did in this case. Most of the time East would have survived the 3♠ bid because many Souths, with strength in the opponent's suit, would sell out. In general, when in doubt it is better to *bid on*. South should not feel so happy to defend 3♠ because down one (or even two if you don't double) does not rate to be a good result.
- Although 4♥ (or 4♦ had that been the final contract) might go down when 3♠ was failing by a trick, it is very difficult to play bridge when your goal is plus 50. You often have to lead and defend perfectly and you are

at the mercy of a good declarer. When it's close, it's better to declare and let *them* have the leading/defending headache.

5. A Concealed Hand

GUS features many hands where one person opens the bidding and responder just asks questions without revealing anything about his own hand. Here was a such a case:

West dealer
East-West vul

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

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣ (1)	pass	2♦ (2)
Pass	3♠ (3)	pass	3NT
(all pass)			

- (1) 6+ clubs and 10-15 high card points
- (2) Tell me more (promises game invitational+ values)
- (3) I have a 1-3-3-6 shape and a nice hand

Opening lead: ♥4

South won the ten of hearts with the king and played five rounds of clubs. On the fourth club East pitched a spade and on the fifth club East pitched a heart. Declarer also pitched a spade and a heart.

On the sixth club, East was in trouble. If East pitched a second spade, declarer's spades were all high. If East pitched a diamond, declarer had an extra diamond trick. If East pitched a heart, declarer could set up a second heart trick by playing a heart from dummy, and he could reach it with the king of diamonds.

East did not know South's shape and East didn't even know South's strength! South's 2♦ showed only invitational-plus values. For all East knew, South had five diamonds instead of five spades. Perhaps East should have gotten this hand right, and pitched a red card to hold the contract to 12 tricks, but East pitched a second spade and now declarer took all 13 tricks for a cold top.

While it is true that an expert East should pitch accurately because of signaling help from partner, there is no doubt that it's far easier to defend 3N after a natural 1♣-1♠-2♣-3N auction, right?

6. Hoisted with His Own Petard

We had a 72+% game despite the seemingly "flat" boards and also despite being hoisted with our own petard on this one:

What would you lead from:

♠ K 8
 ♥ 10 9 8 6 4
 ♦ 8 5
 ♣ K Q 8 4

after the opponents bid 1NT-3NT? A heart? You just got a zero. Here was the whole hand:

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

North led a heart to the queen. Declarer played a diamond to the king, and had only to cash his hearts and claim nine tricks when the diamonds behaved. -400 was worth zero matchpoints. Obviously, if West opens 1♥, East-West will not reach (or make) 3NT.

The GUS opening bid with the West hand is 1NT and we would have had the same great result they did had we held those cards. (In the GUS system, a 1♥ or 1♠ opening bid denies a 5-3-3-2 shape, so we must open 1NT.) It was fun to see the system work yet again, even though we were the victims this time!