Here are the more interesting hands from the Labor Day weekend at Atlanta.

N E S W

 P 1N

2♠  ♠ X

AP

Lead: ♥

After E wins the ♥K, he should realize that the dummy indicates a ♠shift. Declarer, who is sparse on HCP for this auction, will be trying to score ruffs in the dummy. It’s clear that W has some values in♠as well, because it would be more appropriate to bid or pass with, say,♠xx.

It seemed unusual that, out of 13 tables, only 3 pairs managed to bid a slam with the N/S cards! Below are some possible 2/1 auctions.

N E S W

 P

1♠ 2♣ 3♣ 4♣

4♥ P 4N P

5♠ P 6♥ AP



♣♦♥♠

N E S W

 P

1♠ X XX 2♦

3♥ P 4♦ P

4N P 5♦ P

6♥ AP

N E S w

 P

1♠ P 1N P

2♥ P 3♥ P

3♠ P 4♦ P

4N P 5♦ P

6♥ AP

N E S W

 P

1♠ P 1N P

3♥ P 4N P

5♠ P 6♥ AP

N E S W

 P

1♠ P 1N P

4♥ P 4N P

5♠ P 6♥ AP

What the auction comes down to is

* North has to show his two suiter. Opening 1♠ and then jumping to 3/4♥ accomplishes this. One can survive by bidding only 2♥. Even in MP, however, this is a serious underbid. Game makes opposite the the ♠K and ♥xx, in addition to other combinations.
* South has to realize the power of his hand on the auction. The values in the South hand are all controls and mostly in partner’s suits. Despite the lack of ruffing value, South also has a 4th ♥! Slam is a laydown opposite

♠AQJTx

♥AQJx

♦Kxx

♣x

The danger, however, is catching partner with something like

 ♠AQJxx

 ♥AQJTx

 ♦ --

 ♣QJx

The real issue is determining whether there are two ♣ losers off the top. Since N/S are safe at the five level, the application of an ace asking device or control cuebidding is recommended.

I like the last auction presented the best. The first auction, however, is the most realistic.



N E S W

-- -- P 2♠

X 3♠ 4♦ AP

N/S are in 4♦, mercifully undoubled. What ensued makes E’s decision to not hit the contract seem better than it was.

West led the ♠A. What should East play at T1?

Clearly, East would appreciate a ♥ switch. This is the source of tricks that needs to be set up to set the contract. Therefore, it seems like a discouraging signal is in order. Using standard signals, the ♠3 is adequate.

Should West figure out the ♥ switch? It looks pretty obvious. Needing three more tricks, West knows that the ♠ suit is finished. Dummy’s ♣ suit is threatening to set up as well. If declarer has a hand resembling

♠7

♥9543

♦K9653

♣A97

Then there are always 5♣, 4♦, and a ♥. It can be assumed, therefore, that East has the ♣A. Also, by consequence, West cannot switch to a club. This only expedites declarer’s plan to set up the ♣ suit. Notice that there is no potential for a ♣ ruff. Declarer will be aware of this possibility and play three rounds of trumps before going after ♣s.

Through the same logic, leading a ♦ is extremely bad. Not only does it accomplish nothing, it could blow a diamond trick when partner has ♦Jxx!

Therefore, it is clear to lead a ♥.

Unfortunately, West continued a ♠ for a terrible board.

As an interesting point, one expert suggested that discarding the ♠K on this hand would DEMAND a ♥ shift. Unfortunately, East cannot afford this brilliant play, since South just might have ♠Qx. However, if West had advertised a 7 card ♠ suit, playing the ♠K is clear.

South opened 1NT, and everyone passed (only two tables played in ♣ partials). I considered balancing as East, but found the flat shape and vulnerability discouraging.

West led a ♠ at most tables, allowing declarer to wind up with 8 tricks. The next obvious lead, a ♦, holds declarer to making 1. After five immediate rounds of ♥s, however, the ending looks like this:

{Insert DIAGRAM}



When E leads a ♠, declarer is in a pickle. In practice he finesses the ♠, making the hand when it is onside (unlikely as that is, given the bidding and play). Going up only postpones the eventual loss of a ♠ and a ♦. With the ♠K offside, declarer is -1 either way.

I’m not sure what the book Winning Notrump Leads would suggest is the percentage lead from the West hand. However, I do suspect that a ♥ lead is among the top two.

The most interesting hand I will show as a bidding problem.

MP; West V/V

(East) ♠T5 ♥-- ♦AQ653 ♣AQ9653

N E S W

 1♦ 2♦1 ??

1: 5+♠ 5+♥ Unlimited

On the incorrect notion that this was a double fit situation, I bid 6♦. This was doomed for -1 on the lie of the cards.

In retrospect, it should be appreciated that partner will usually have some kind of soft defensive stoppers in one of their majors. Even though slam looks playable opposite the minor suit kings and a favorable lead (or the ♠A), there are ways to still bid it despite preemptive advances by the opponents. The doubleton spade looks like a liability. So 5♦ is enough on this hand. The opponents are not going to get to slam missing two aces and whatever partner’s major suit cards are. Besides that, goading them into a 6M sacrifice is unlikely and unprofitable. +200 (or maybe 500) still loses to the field’s +600 in 5♦. Of course, when 6♦ works, it works very well.

A better bid, however, would be 4♥, suggesting a game forcing ♦ raise with a ♥ void. This can be followed up with a 5♣ bid if available. Should advancer prevent this (via 5♥), 6♣ becomes a descriptive, profitable bid instead.