



The 2026 Charity Challenge Pairs Monday 9th March

We are raising funds for two support Charities again this year - [Mind](#), that wonderful charity supporting people with mental health problems, and [Macmillan Cancer Support](#) ... the work they do is just amazing. Please help us raise lots of lovely funds for them.

Last year you managed to raise over £11,000 in total which was just amazing and incredibly generous of everyone. If you haven't already done so, please [click here to go to the page](#) that gives you all the information. And if you want to send a cheque or pay by bank transfer please note the change of bank account !

July sees our [Summer Charity pairs](#) for Kidney Research UK and the British Heart Foundation and then of course there will be the [Children in Need Pairs](#) in November – well we couldn't NOT run that could we !

Do join us for some of these events if you can – it's lovely to see lots of people joining in and we love to have your company.

We do hope you have enjoyed the event - thank you so much for joining us and please do so again in future !

Board 1. None Vul. Dealer North

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

After two passes, many Souths will open a strong NT and West use whatever bid his methods demand to show both majors. The most popular such method is a 2♣ Landy overcall. North has the values to raise to game, but may be slightly concerned that the heart suit might be wide open.

This is really just a matter of having clear agreements as to what immediate and delayed doubles mean. North may start with a value-showing double of 2♣, and when East shows preference with 2♥, follow through with either a take-out double or, more straightforwardly, with a 3♥ cuebid. The take-out double merely delays the cuebid by one round, as North then follows up with 3♥ over South's 3♦ response to the double.

If playing a weak NT, South will open 1♦. If West overcalls 1♠, North can bid 2♣ then raise South's 2NT rebid to game. North could bid NT himself, but that could see a heart lead through a vulnerable holding in partner's hand. If West prefers to double 1♦, North starts with a redouble and South knows that his side have the values for game.

It seems that most roads lead to 3NT, played by South. If West leads his longest suit, a spade, that should see declarer held to nine tricks. However, on auctions where East has shown heart preference, some Wests may choose to lead a heart. That will give the overtrick and a lot of matchpoints.

Board 2. N/S Vul. Dealer East

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

If playing a weak NT, East will open 1♦ and West respond 1♥. The North hand is a little stronger than a normal weak jump overcall but North is vulnerable, and facing a passed hand it is permissible to make such a bid on a wider range than would otherwise be the case. My vote goes to 2♠, getting the hand off my chest in one bid. And with a double being take-out, that will silence East and end the auction.

With or without a club ruff, East has a third trump trick, but three spades and two top clubs is all, so 2♠ is just made.

If playing a strong NT, that would be my choice on the East cards, both doubletons containing honour cards, as this gets the general strength and hand type across. West will transfer to hearts and North overcall 2♠. East will again have to pass over 2♠ and, while West might like to be able to compete with 3♣, that will sound stronger to partner than the actual hand, so is too dangerous. In fact, double dummy it is N/S who can make 1♣, while neither side can make 1♥. Any competition from E/W risks a significant penalty.

Board 3. E/W Vul. Dealer South

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

If South opens a strong NT, he will often play there, as the West hand doesn't fit comfortably into most pairs' defensive methods. Actually,

that is good news for E/W because, even after a diamond lead, the defence should prevail against INT, while seven tricks is the limit in any E/W red-suit contract on accurate defence.

Those who will be able to compete will include those playing double as showing four of a major with a longer minor, or perhaps one of the Asptro family of defences, where 2♣ would show hearts and another suit.

If N/S are playing a weak NT, South will obviously have to open one of a suit. Many Acol pairs will open 1♠, which West may double for take-out, converting a 2♣ response to 2♦ – equal-level conversion need not show a strong hand. It is entirely possible that it will be South who becomes declarer in a diamond contract. If he opens 1♦, who is going to bid? And finally, if South's methods require a 1♣ opening, West will overcall 1♦ and that too may be that.

It is always difficult to say how many tricks will be made in these awkward little partscores. Double dummy, E/W make 1♦ or 1♥, and nobody can make anything else. In reality, the defence will not always be spot on and declarer will come to an extra trick at a fair number of tables. After a low diamond lead, for example, South in INT would be successful if he played a low spade at trick two. E/W in a heart contract may scramble an eighth trick, particularly if the defence cashes two club tricks early in the play, thereby establishing the jack as a trick for declarer.

Overall, going plus should not be too bad for either pair.

Board 4. All Vul. Dealer West

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

Unless playing weak two-suited openings, West will pass and North open 2NT or, if 22 HCP and a five-card suit looks just too good for that, 2♣ with the intention to follow up with 2NT on the next round.

That judgement, or perhaps the precise range played for a 2NT opening, will be crucial. A 2NT opening will normally be passed out. After a club lead round to the jack, declarer will get hearts right because the last thing he wants is to risk losing the lead to West who can lead a diamond through the king. That should mean 10 tricks.

However, if North treats his hand as being too strong for a 2NT opening, South will then have sufficient to raise to game. He will do so via whatever version of Stayman the partnership uses, and that should see North become declarer in 4♥.

East may lead a club against 4♥, which gives the tenth trick immediately – assuming a winning trump play from declarer. Double dummy, there is the possibility of an overtrick now, East being thrown in with the fourth round of clubs after the top spades have been cashed, and now either a fifth club or a diamond return gives the eleventh trick.

On a passive trump lead, declarer draws a second round of trumps and, though he loses a club trick, can then get his spade loser away on the ten of clubs, thereby coming to 10 easy tricks.

The fact that those playing a 19-21 2NT opening get to game by opening 2♣, while those playing 2NT as 20-22 do not, is one of the little random factors in this game of ours – there being no particular long-term advantage to playing one range rather than the other.

Board 5. N/S Vul. Dealer North

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

If playing a strong NT, that would be my opening bid on the North hand. No, it isn't ideal, with a weak doubleton and slightly off-shape, but the alternative is having to deal with opening 1♣ and finding a rebid if partner responds 1♠. This hand is not worth a reverse,

yet rebidding a quiet 2♣ is also rather unattractive. At least opening 1NT gets the strength of the hand across.

Say that North does open 1NT; East may feel that he is a shade too weak to get involved, so the bidding will go round to West. If he has a way to show spades and another, or more specifically five spades plus a second suit, he should compete. If the methods only permit a simple natural 2♠ overcall, well, it is only matchpoints, and West is non-vulnerable, but it is much less attractive to bid if he has to pin all his hopes on that ropery spade suit.

Any auction in which West shows spades is likely to see East raise to 3♠, but West will not go on to game.

Now, suppose that North opens 1♣, promising at least four cards as in Acol. East should overcall 1♠ and South can compete in clubs. Two Clubs really doesn't get the job done. It allows West to make a 3♣ cuebid to show a constructive raise to Three or more spades, then to trust partner's sign off in 3♠. That is exactly where E/W want to play the hand, while if North competes to 4♣ West can double and collect +200 on a partscore board – the kiss of death for N/S.

But suppose that South makes a pre-emptive raise to 3♣. That takes West's invitational sequence off the table for him. Given the choice between a purely competitive raise to 3♠, and a jump to game, wouldn't you pick the jump to game? I know I would, and that leads to an E/W negative score in 4♠ down one.

Board 6. E/W Vul. Dealer East

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

Not everyone who bids to 4♠ on the N/S cards will necessarily make it, though the fact that West holds both top club honours and East only one entry means that it cannot actually be

defeated. Nor, I suspect, will everyone get to the spade game.

West will open 1♥ in third seat and North double. When South responds 1♠, North will bid 2♦, showing a hand that was too good for a simple 2♦ overcall. That being the case, South has just enough to owe North another bid. Should that be a repeat of the spades to show the fifth card, or should I be a diamond raise? Either way, North's next bid might be 3♠, invitational with three spades. It's very close now whether South should bid on to game. If he had the other red queen, for sure he would have a 4♠ bid, but on the actual hand I would be inclined to pass. There is no premium to bidding thin games at matchpoints, and on this deal I doubt that +170 will be a terrible result. It would be a different matter, vulnerable at teams, where there most definitely is a premium on bidding thin games, and now this South hand might be worth a shot at game.

Board 7. All Vul. Dealer South

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

This should be one of the flattest boards of the night. I know – famous last words.

If West can open a weak NT, that is what he will do. North will compete in hearts, and West just jump to 4♠, ending the auction. Unless South leads an unlikely five of diamonds, or North wins two hearts then switches to a low club, also unlikely, there should be 10 tricks available, no more and no less.

If West has to open 1♣/♦, North will again overcall in heart. East may only start with a simple 1♠ but, when the auction comes back round, 4♠ looks to be the practical call, once again ending the auction.

Board 8. None Vul. Dealer West

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

Nobody quite has an opening bid on this one. Not that I expect it to be passed out all around the room – far from it. There will be plenty of tables at which someone scrapes up a bid, but the majority will probably regret it as they go minus on a board which would have been passed out had they not admired their own declarer play so much as to see an opening bid where one did not exist.

West has an obvious pass. North has 11 HCP, but it is not a good 11 points, with 4-3-3-3 shape, a weak main suit, and lack of honour combinations. Still, some will open the hand and quote the fact that Love All is the best time to declarer a competitive partscore deal. If North does open the bidding, the partnership will do very well to stop below 3♠ – which is a level too high.

If North passes, so will East, leaving it up to South. If South opens 1♠, North will raise to the three level and, once again, that will be a level too high. Ah, you say, but we play Drury, so could stop in 2♠. Well, perhaps you do, and if left to yourselves perhaps you can. However, West can double a 1♠ opening and East compete to 3♦. We can see that 3♦ is doomed to be down one, but who is ever going to defend 3♦ when having a nine-card spade fit?

South has 11 HCP but two of those are a bare queen. The main suit is weak and, while a spade fit exists on the actual deal, what happens when North does not raise spades but instead responds 2♦? Yes, we have to rebid that rather fragile looking spade suit. So, when we have a spade fit we get too high, when we don't have a spade fit we often still have to play a spade contract – starts to look less like an opening bid the longer you think about it, doesn't it?

Board 9. E/W Vul. Dealer North

<p>♠ 9 7 5 4 3 ♥ 6 4 ♦ K 7 2 ♣ 4 3 2</p> <p>♠ A J ♥ A 9 7 3 2 ♦ A 8 6 ♣ K Q 9</p> <p>♠ K 8 6 ♥ Q J 8 5 ♦ Q 4 3 ♣ J 10 7</p>	<p>♠ Q 10 2 ♥ K 10 ♦ J 10 9 5 ♣ A 8 6 5</p>
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At most tables there will be three passes to West, who will open 1♥. If playing Acol with a weak NT, East will respond 2♣ then raise West's 2NT rebid to game. If playing strong NT, East may respond INT. West raises to 2NT and East goes on to game. System, then, will affect who becomes declarer, but the final contract should always be 3NT.

Say that East is declarer. With hearts bid by dummy, South is likely to lead the jack of clubs. If declarer plays to split the hearts, the four-two break should hold the contract to 10 tricks. If, however, declarer plays for the double diamond finesse, there are 11 tricks, the successful spade finesse providing the second overtrick.

If West is declarer, North will usually lead a spade. Again, declarer can come to 11 tricks by playing on diamonds. If he plays on hearts, however, South can win the third round and, if he managed to play low at trick one, can now continue with the second low spade to bring down the ace and establish the king. There are still 10 tricks to be had by clearing the hearts, but that play is not without danger – if someone started with king to five spades, the defence will have three spades to cash for down one. A few declarers may therefore prefer to try to split the clubs – North is likely to have discarded a club on the third round of hearts, making this more likely to succeed – and cash out for nine tricks. With the bulk of the field coming to overtricks, +600 should score very poorly.

Board 10. All Vul. Dealer East

<p>♠ 10 9 7 ♥ A 6 4 2 ♦ 9 6 2 ♣ Q 10 6</p> <p>♠ K 5 4 2 ♥ Q 9 3 ♦ A 10 4 ♣ J 4 2</p> <p>♠ A 6 ♥ J 8 5 ♦ K J 5 3 ♣ A K 9 3</p>	<p>♠ Q J 8 3 ♥ K 10 7 ♦ Q 8 7 ♣ 8 7 5</p>	
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The contract should be an almost universal INT, played by South. Either South opens a strong NT and plays there, or opens 1♣/♦ and rebids INT over North's 1♥ response.

As an opening lead round to a strongish balanced hand, king to four does not particularly thrill me – it can often cost a trick. However, none of the other suits is even as attractive as king to four, so I would expect almost everyone to lead a low spade, which is, of course, the best lead for the defence on this particular deal.

Declarer might as well win the first trick as ducking will achieve absolutely nothing. He cashes three club winners, ending in dummy, and is pleased to see that the nine will be a fourth trick in the suit. Now comes the key moment in the play, the diamond guess. If declarer leads to the king, he will lose to the ace and the defence can knock out the ♥A to set up two tricks for themselves there and the contract is down one. If, on the other hand, declarer's diamond play is low to the jack, the king will be his seventh trick.

Is there a clue to help declarer to get the diamond right? Not really. After trick one the spade situation is as likely to be as it actually is as anything, while the club position is known. Give each defender one heart honour and one diamond honour, and still neither has an opening bid, so the auction is of little help. When you are on form you'll tend to get this right, when off form you'll tend to get it wrong.

Board 11. None Vul. Dealer South

<p>♠ A 6 ♥ K 9 8 7 3 2 ♦ J 8 ♣ A 5 3</p> <p>♠ 3 ♥ J 10 6 5 ♦ A 9 7 3 2 ♣ J 10 7</p> <p>♠ K Q J 10 9 ♥ Q ♦ K 6 4 ♣ K 6 4 2</p>	<p>♠ 8 7 5 4 2 ♥ A 4 ♦ Q 10 5 ♣ Q 9 8</p>
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N/S have a combined 26 HCP yet no making game, at least in theory. South will open 1♠ and rebid 2♠ over the 2♥ response. Most Norths will force to game now, following the old idea that an opening bid facing an opening bid should get to game.

The hearts are a little thin for the bid, but some will rebid 3♥, over which South may raise to 4♥, or may try 3NT. Others may prefer a 3♣ no trump probe. That might continue: 3♦ (4th-suit forcing) – 3♥ – 3NT, or South might just try 3NT over 3♣. What he really ought not to do would be to commit to clubs by raising the suit.

Three No Trump played by South is easily defeated. West leads a low diamond to jack, queen and king, and just needs to hold on to the rest of the diamonds until East gets in and returns the suit – down one. A heart contract can be held to eight tricks, though there will be nine if East leads a diamond, the contract being doomed by the loss of three trump tricks. As for spades, nine tricks are easy enough, declarer playing three rounds of clubs to set up the thirteenth card as an extra trick, and also setting up a heart winner. But unless the defenders present him with a diamond trick, there is no hope of a tenth.

N/S plus scores should be few and far between, hence scoring very well where they do occur.

Board 12. N/S Vul. Dealer West

<p>♠ 10 8 2 ♥ J 8 5 4 2 ♦ J 8 4 2 ♣ K</p> <p>♠ K Q 3 ♥ K 9 7 6 ♦ A K Q 3 ♣ 7 6</p> <p>♠ A 7 6 5 4 ♥ Q 10 ♦ 10 9 ♣ J 9 8 4</p>	<p>♠ J 9 ♥ A 3 ♦ 7 6 5 ♣ A Q 10 5 3 2</p>
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If playing a strong NT, that will be West's choice of opening, and East will raise straight to game. North is likely to lead a heart and declarer will run this to the queen and king to preserve a dummy entry to get at what he hopes will be several club winners. Having won the ♥K, declarer will play a club and, when the king appears, win the ace and cash the queen in hope that the king was doubleton. Alas, not this time and, with only one dummy entry remaining, clubs must be abandoned.

Declarer switches his attention to spades, where two tricks can be had. If North has retained all three spades, South can duck twice to retain communications with his partner, and now all declarer can do is to cash out for +400.

North will quite often throw a spade on the second club, however,. If South now ducks twice, declarer will get his two spade tricks then abandon the suit, and South will never come to the ♠A. Declarer can now cash the ♥A and play four rounds of diamonds. North wins the last of those but must then concede a trick to declarer's nine of hearts for the overtrick. If South does win the ♠A, the endplay against North is still a possibility.

If playing Acol with a weak NT, many will open 1♥, then rebid 2/3NT over the 2♣ response. This could well dissuade North from leading a heart. Whether North's choice is a diamond or a spade, the same considerations as before will lead to nine or 10 tricks.

Board 13. All Vul. Dealer North

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

There will normally be three passes to West. Some will open INT and play there. On a spade lead they will put up the queen and the winning club finesse will mean nine tricks. On a club lead, declarer should win and play the five of spades at trick two. This is much safer than playing ace and another, which could work out rather badly were the defensive spade holdings to be switched around. North will have to win the ♠K and find the diamond switch to hold the contract to eight tricks.

Others will open 1♥, either because they are not playing a strong NT, or because they judge the hand, with 17 good points and a decent five-card suit, to be too good for INT.

One Heart will be passed out occasionally, and there are nine tricks courtesy of both black kings being well placed. More often I would expect South to balance with a double, even though knowing that he and his partner are both passed hands. That will see N/S compete as far as 2♠, but E/W should be able to locate the heart fit and take the push to 3♥, just making. If N/S are left to play a spade contract, they should come to seven tricks. Minus 100 should be very good, minus 200 very bad.

Board 14. None Vul. Dealer East

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

Many Wests will open INT in third seat, and North overcall whatever number of spades takes his fancy. East has an easy take-out double – I would strongly advise that double should be played as being for take-out whether the overcall is 2♠, 3♠ or 4♠.

If the overcall was at the two or three level, West will probably respond 3NT to the double. If the overcall was at the four level, West should pass and collect whatever is available on defence. If the defence leads only red suits, the amount available on defence to 4♠ doubled should be 500. A black suit lead costs a trick and, with a non-vulnerable game possible on the E/W cards, the difference between +300 and +500 could be quite substantial in matchpoint terms.

If playing weak NT, West will have to open one of a minor. Quite a few Norths are likely to overcall 4♠ now, but may regret it. East has just enough for a take-out double and, with a strong balanced hand, West has a routine pass. Other Norths will overcall 1♠, or even start with a double, then bid again at their next turn. That will tend to see West becoming declarer in 3NT.

Three No Trump is a lucky make – if played properly. If North leads a spade he establishes his suit but at the cost of allowing a trick to the king; while if he does not lead a spade West has time to set up a club winner. Either way, that leaves declarer needing eight red-suit winners. The even heart split provides four, and there are three top diamond winners.

Now, look at the diamond suit, and bear in mind that North will have shown long spades during the auction, suggesting that he may have shortage elsewhere. With North very unlikely to hold four or more diamonds, there is no benefit to starting with the ace or queen. If North has a bare honour, starting with the king is fine, as after playing a second round to the ace declarer has a heart entry to dummy to take the marked finesse on the third round. But what about the actual position, with South holding all five of the suit. Now it is essential to start with the king, retaining both the top honours that are sitting over the jack and ten. Careful play sees declarer bring in four diamond tricks and nine in all.

Four Hearts can also be made if played by West, though that is an improbably contract to reach.

Board 15. N/S Vul. Dealer South

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

Some Norths will open 1♥ in third seat and that will see East double then follow through with 2♠ at his next turn if that is still a sufficient bid. If South has raised to 3♥, however, the East hand is a little balanced for a 3♠ bid and he may prefer to double again – not that this will be a success when West responds to the double with 4♦. That may be down two, while 3♠ would make at least eight tricks and, on a heart lead, nine.

Other Norths will not strain to open when vulnerable so that East will be left to open 1♠. That will be passed out at some tables, while at others North will make a balancing double. East can redouble to show strength, then bid 2♠ when South's 2♥ comes back to him.

A spade contract can be held to eight tricks by a trump lead or a diamond, while nine are easy on a heart lead and there may also be nine if South starts with a top club. Meanwhile, N/S can be held to seven tricks in a heart contract, making over-competing an expensive business.

Board 16. E/W Vul. Dealer West

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

At many tables there will be two passes to East, who will open 1♦. Some Souths will overcall

INT, some double. My personal preference is for double, but I can understand the INT overcall, which does have the merit of describing the strength and hand type pretty well. I just feel that a non-positional diamond stopper in a rock-bottom minimum for INT is better to make an alternative call whenever there is one available.

If South overcalls INT, West will presumably compete with 2♦ and North with 3♣, possibly via Lebensohl. It is hard to see E/W's spade fit coming to light in this scenario, but East might compete to 3♦, which makes exactly. Three Clubs, meanwhile, is dependent on a successful spade guess.

What if South makes a take-out double of 1♦? Now West might get spades into the game and North compete in clubs. I know that some would bid the major, but really, do you think is is sound to bid ten-to-four ahead of ace-jack-to-six? Just imagine partner's majors being switched around. Once spades are in the game, E/W are going to discover that they have a double fit, and are likely to compete as far as 3♠ if necessary, which will score very well for them. And that, perhaps, is a hidden benefit of the INT overcall – it shuts out an opposing spade fit.

And finally, before leaving this deal, I know a fair few people who would open 3♣ on the North hand at this vulnerability, even in second seat. That should buy the contract. It would be very optimistic of East to come in at the three level facing a passed partner, while it would be equally pushy for South to try 3NT, for all the 15 HCP. Remember, there is no premium on bidding thin games at matchpoints.

Board 17. None Vul. Dealer North

<p>♠ K Q 7 4 3 ♥ K 10 ♦ Q 10 6 ♣ J 4 2</p> <p>♠ 9 6 2 ♥ 9 6 4 2 ♦ K 2 ♣ A 9 5 3</p>	<p>♠ 10 ♥ A 8 7 5 3 ♦ 9 7 4 3 ♣ K 10 6</p> <p>♠ A J 8 5 ♥ Q J ♦ A J 8 5 ♣ Q 8 7</p>
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N/S have a combined 26 HCP and a solid nine-card spade fit. Four Spades, then, will be the

almost universal contract. There are three top losers plus the losing diamond finesse, so 4♠ should be down one at virtually every table.

North has a borderline opening bid and, in line with the modern aggressive approach to the auction, I expect the majority to open, either 1♠ or possibly a weak NT.

A 1♠ opening should see South use whatever version of Jacoby the partnership has agreed to show constructive raise to game. Looking at a complete minimum opening with no aces, North should jump to 4♠ in most versions of the convention to show a bad hand, and that will be that.

If North opens 1NT, which would be my preference if playing a weak NT due to the soft values and general lack of playing strength, South will use Stayman and raise the 2♠ response to game. Yes, I suppose South could just raise 1NT to 3NT and hope that, particularly after giving East a blind lead, there may be the same tricks available in NT as in spades (if there is a spade fit), but East has an obvious heart lead and that establishes four heart winners for the defence and, if declarer takes the diamond finesse for his contract, he could be as many as three down for a horrible score.

Board 18. N/S Vul. Dealer East

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

If playing strong NT with five-card majors, I would open the East hand with 1♦ with the intention of rebidding 2NT over a 2♣ response. Playing Acol with a weak NT, however, a 1♦ opening and 2♣ response would leave East with no good rebid, being too weak for 2NT or a reverse into a major, so being left with only a repeat of the four-card diamond suit. Playing Acol, the normal opening is 1♥, the middle of three touching suits, with the intention of rebidding 2♦, for all that bids faults

– it implies a fifth heart – if partner responds 2♣.

Whichever red suit is opened by East, South has the wrong shortage to make a take-out double when close to minimum for the call. I'm sure that some will double anyway, but North's 2♠ response leaves them a bit stuck, as any further bid from South suggests a stronger hand than this one.

South does best to pass over 1♥ or 1♦. In the case of 1♥, North has just enough for a balancing double, while 1♦ may be passed out as North too has the wrong shortage to double on minimal values for the call.

The big winner for N/S after an opposing 1♥ opening is for South to pass, North double, and South to leave it in for penalties. I like that auction, as all N/S's actions look to be sensible choices, and 1♥ doubled can be taken down two for +300.

A 1♦ opening is much more likely to just be passed out. While it too should be defeated, that may be by only one trick and, with N/S having a number of possible making partscores, +50 may prove to be an inadequate score for them.

Perhaps the most likely N/S contract is 2NT by South, after East opens 1♥ and North makes a balancing double. If South doesn't fancy defending, he may jump to 2NT on his sound 13-count, and that will conclude the auction. Even a spade lead does not defeat 2NT if declarer gets the play right, while the more likely heart lead makes eight tricks easy to achieve – two hearts, two diamonds, three clubs and one spade. Plus 120 should score well enough.

Board 19. E/W Vul. Dealer South

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

South will pass as dealer and West open 1♦. Many Norths will overcall 2♣, which offers

both lead-directing and pre-emptive benefits, and East will pass.

South must bid something now as the 2♣ overcall shows opening values and game could be cold on the N/S cards. South is too good for a simple raise to 3♣, but has three plausible calls from which to select – 2♦, 2♠ and 2NT.

South's diamond holding will be stronger if South becomes declarer so that it is guarded from the opening lead. That, for me, pushes the 2♦, constructive raise cuebid, down to the bottom of the pecking order of bids as it leaves North to declare the hand. Two No Trump expresses the strength of the hand pretty well, and much of its strength is in the opponents' suit, and, of course, North cannot get over-excited and expect more for the bid as South passed as dealer. Two Spades also protects the diamond position and a spade contract could easily be the best if North can support the suit. It's a close call. Two Spades works best on the actual deal, as North is very happy to pass it out and eight tricks should be made as the cards lie. The downside of 2♠ is that it tends to rule out 2NT as a possible contract should North be short in spades, as North is unlikely to have an independent diamond stopper. It makes for a good bidding problem.

Today, 2♠ is the big winner, and should see South scoring +110. Two No Trump will also end the auction and, though West's diamond lead costs a trick, it also begins the process of establishing three defensive diamond winners and should see the defence prevail by a trick; –50. And if South shows a good club raise? West may double the cuebid, but East is unlikely to be very interested in competing when holding just one king, and that in the opponents' suit. North will become declarer in 3♣ at many tables, and the diamond lead through the ace-queen will start the process of beating that contract fairly comfortably. Three Clubs can be defeated by two tricks, the worst of the three results available to N/S when they declare the hand.

I have tended to ignore the possibility that E/W will play the hand but, if they do compete to the three level, it is possible to come to nine tricks in either red suit, and that will top anything they can achieve on defence, short of doubling 3♣ for down two. This is an

interesting competitive partscore deal and I can see several possible outcomes.

Board 20. All Vul. Dealer West

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

West opens 1♣ and rebids 2♣ over the 1♠ response. Does your partnership play a 2♦ bid from East as a one-round force now? I favour that approach, and play that 2♦ need not deliver a genuine diamond suit. The benefit of this is that there is no need to jump around merely to confirm game values, leaving more room for proper exploration of the best contract, and also that when East does jump at his second turn it can have a more specific meaning.

Say that 2♦ is a one-round force as I have just recommended, West can now bid 2♠ to show the spade tolerance and East, knowing that this will frequently deliver only doubleton support, can bid 3♥, fourth-suit-forcing, to find out whether West has a third spade or, perhaps a good heart holding. That gets 3NT from West, and East accepts that as the final contract.

Yes, I agree that simple methods would have reached the same conclusion, East jumping to 3♦ over 2♣ and West closing proceedings with 3NT, but on another day it would have been nice to find out about the spade tolerance, or for East to be able to show a genuine 5-5 or better two-suiter.

Whichever red suit North chooses to lead, West can win and knock out the ace of clubs. It is possible to go down by getting the heart situation wrong, but I would expect the majority to come home with nine tricks.

Board 21. N/S Vul. Dealer North

<p>♠ 7 2 ♥ Q J 7 6 ♦ A K Q 10 8 ♣ A 5</p> <p>♠ 8 6 5 ♥ 4 ♦ 7 6 3 2 ♣ Q 10 9 7 6</p> <p>♠ A J 9 4 ♥ 3 ♦ J 9 5 ♣ K J 8 3 2</p>	<p>♠ K Q 10 3 ♥ A K 10 9 8 5 2 ♦ 4 ♣ 4</p>
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N/S can make game in either NT or in diamonds while, for all its potential, the East hand cannot even make 1♥ on accurate defence.

If North opens 1♦, some Easts will overcall 4♥, others a simple 1♥. Either will see South make a negative double.

If it is 4♥ doubled which comes round to North, he will surely pass and wait to see what size of penalty can be collected. The answer should be +800, but the defence will need to be careful not to slip a trick, as +500 will not be sufficient if others are chalking up +600 in game.

If it is 1♥ that is doubled, North will bid INT if that would show 15-17 in his methods. East is very likely to repeat the hearts, but possibly with some degree of caution now that RHO has shown a strong NT including a heart stopper. If South makes a second take-out double, North will bid NT for a second time and eventually declare 3NT. Though declarer is likely to play on clubs, which achieves nothing on this lie of the cards, he will have time to recover and set up a second spade trick to ensure the success of the contract.

North has a slightly awkward rebid if INT would be weak. Probably, he will judge the slight stretch to jump to 2NT the least of evils – that strong diamond suit is certainly worth an upgrade on the raw 16-count. Unless he opts for the serious underbid of 2♦, the final contract should be the normal 3NT.

Any East who is doubled in 3♥, which costs at most -500, should score very well, as will those who escape for down three in 4♥ doubled.

Board 22. E/W Vul. Dealer East

<p>♠ K Q 9 8 7 4 3 ♥ J 5 ♦ 8 6 ♣ K 3</p> <p>♠ J 2 ♥ A K 10 8 ♦ J 10 9 7 5 ♣ 9 5</p> <p>♠ A 6 ♥ 9 7 6 3 2 ♦ Q 3 ♣ Q J 7 4</p>	<p>♠ 10 5 ♥ Q 4 ♦ A K 4 2 ♣ A 10 8 6 2</p>
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If playing a weak NT, that is what I would open on the East hand – it has pre-emptive effect, making it harder for the opposition to find a major-suit fit than would a 1♣ opening, and the hand looks more balanced than single-suited. One No Trump would go round to North, who has an easy 2♠ overcall, and that in turn runs round to West, who may make a take-out double.

Let's say that it does begin that way; how should East respond to the double? He could, of course, bid his longest suit, 3♣, like a simple soul, and there is nothing wrong with that if the methods offer nothing better. Personally, I like to play that 2NT here is not to play – with good spades East might pass the double – but rather shows two places to play. West will give preference between the minors, in this case by bidding 3♦, and that will do East very nicely, thank you very much. Of course, knowing that South must have some high-card strength, North might repeat the spades, given his seventh card. Three Spades would be down one, while 4♦ is making, subject to playing diamonds in normal fashion and so dropping the queen. However, it will be tough for E/W to bid to 4♦, particularly when vulnerable.

If playing a strong NT, East will have to open something else. There is a style in which players open 1♦ on this hand type, then rebid 2♣ to get both suits into the game. Possibly this style is more prevalent in North America than in the UK or Ireland? Anyway, while it does indeed get both suits into the auction, it makes it difficult for partner to know which of the suits is longer. My own preference is therefore to open 1♣, intending to rebid INT. Having said which, opening 1♦ makes life much easier for E/W on this particular deal – so what do I know?

The diamonds could easily get lost if East opens 1♣ and West has to respond 1♥ – a very popular style – and now North jumps in spades.

Plus 130 should score very well for E/W, while any minus score will be very bad.

Board 23. All Vul. Dealer South

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

When North opens 1♦ after two passes, East has an awkward decision to make. Double gets hearts into the game but risks seeing partner bid spades, while a 2♣ overcall is safer but risks losing the hearts, at least for now.

If East overcall's 2♣, South might ignore the spades and make the bid partners always most want to hear, showing support for diamonds. West is hardly going to bother with the weak four-card heart suit when holding such excellent support for clubs, and will only be a matter of how many clubs to bid. The limit is Four, with one loser in each side-suit, but there will surely be some going down in game.

If East doubles the 1♦ opening, some Souths will again raise diamonds, while others will bid 1♠. Either will see North compete in the known fit, but the big question will be whether E/W can find their way to the making heart game.

If South supports diamonds, West might make a responsive double and East bid hearts, West going on to game. If South bids 1♠, some pairs play that a double now shows spades, and those Wests will have to decide whether to bid a weak four-card major or a strong five-card minor. Particularly as, with the singleton diamond, West is probably worth a jump bid in whichever suit he chooses, it will take a brave player to choose to bid the hearts. Those who play that a double of 1♠ is responsive, suggesting the two unbid suits, will have a much more comfortable time of it. If West doubles

to show interest in both clubs and hearts, East will be able to bid the major and West will at the very least invite game.

N/S can make either 2♦ or 2♠, but E/W make 4♥, and +620 will be a pretty good score, I would think.

Board 24. None Vul. Dealer West

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

Five Diamonds is where you would want to be just looking at the E/W hands, and it should not be too difficult to get there. Alas, with all three trumps offside, the contract is doomed to fail by a trick.

West will open 1♦ and East respond 1♥. South should make a pre-emptive jump overcall in spades now. Two Spades may be the popular choice, and I cannot say that this would be wrong. My own inclination, however, would be to overcall 3♠, really putting on the pressure on a deal which surely belongs to the opposition. Anyway, nobody can make a penalty double these days, so even when they should defend 3♠ doubled they may not be able to do so.

If South overcalls 2♠, West can double for take-out. East would jump in diamonds now except that the spade honours look to be very badly placed so that 3♦ may seem sufficient. No matter, West is going to bid on, probably with a 3♠ asking bid, and now East has a close decision between a jump to 5♦ and a simple 3NT.

If South leads a spade, 3NT might make despite the bad diamond position. That would be very good for E/W.

If South overcalls 3♠, West will be bullied into bidding 3NT. The spade lead from North should ensure that 3NT is defeated. A triumph for the bigger pre-empt.

Board 25. E/W Vul. Dealer North

<p>♠ K 10 5 3 ♥ 9 8 6 ♦ A K 6 5 4 ♣ 2</p> <p>♠ Q 9 4 2 ♥ K Q 4 ♦ 10 7 3 ♣ 10 8 7</p> <p>♠ A J ♥ 10 2 ♦ Q 9 8 2 ♣ Q 6 5 4 3</p>	<p>♠ 8 7 6 ♥ A J 7 5 3 ♦ J ♣ A K J 9</p>
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After a pass from North, East opens 1♥ and West responds 1♠ if playing Acol, but 2♥ if playing five-card majors.

If the response is 2♥, North might double, planning to convert clubs to diamonds if necessary to show five or more diamonds and four spades. If the response is 1♠, North may overcall 2♦.

South will be very happy to see partner show diamonds, and will be happy to support the suit, though possibly only as far as the three level, given North's passed hand status.

N/S can make 10 tricks in a diamond contract, though this will usually require declarer playing West for the queen of spades, as he is unlikely to be permitted to take three ruffs in the South hand. Meanwhile, E/W should be held to eight tricks in hearts, losing three spades and one trick in each minor.

Plus 130 should be very good for N/S, with +110 possibly also being above average, as some will fail to compete at all, while others will defend 3♥ undoubled down one.

Board 26. All Vul. Dealer East

<p>♠ 7 6 5 ♥ K 10 4 3 ♦ J 10 5 ♣ 10 9 7</p> <p>♠ A 9 3 ♥ Q J 9 7 5 ♦ 3 ♣ Q 8 6 4</p> <p>♠ K Q 2 ♥ A 8 6 ♦ A 8 7 4 2 ♣ A K</p>	<p>♠ J 10 8 4 ♥ 2 ♦ K Q 9 6 ♣ J 5 3 2</p>
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South opens 2NT and North, realising that the three tens and ♣9 are all potentially helpful

plus features, will go on to game via whatever version of Stayman the partnership is using.

If West is not put off the normal heart lead by the use of Stayman, the lead of the ♥Q is nearly fatal to the defence. Declarer wins the ♥A, plays a heart to the ten, then leads the jack of diamonds to queen and ace. A second diamond to the ten, and East is held to just two diamond winners. Declarer has three tricks in each red suit and three in the blacks – except that East can lead a spade through on winning the second round of diamonds, and that establishes three defensive spade tricks, so the contract is down one.

If West is dissuaded from leading a heart, the alternative is presumably a club. Declarer can win, duck a diamond, win the club continuation, and lead a heart towards dummy with the intention of leading the second diamond honour in hope of pinning the doubleton nine offside. This is the best shot for the contract, but will probably lead to down two as West will be able to set up a heart winner after cashing the clubs – even supposing that he split his honours on declarer's heart lead, what is declarer supposed to discard on the two defensive club winners? Declarer would be better placed had he led the second diamond towards dummy, giving up on the doubleton nine position and, in the process, giving up on attempting to make his contract. That looks to hold the result to down one.

Board 27. None Vul. Dealer South

<p>♠ 6 3 2 ♥ A Q J 10 ♦ 5 ♣ A K J 9 7</p> <p>♠ J 9 ♥ 7 5 ♦ A 9 7 4 ♣ Q 10 8 3 2</p> <p>♠ K Q 7 ♥ K 6 4 3 2 ♦ J 8 6 2 ♣ 6</p>	<p>♠ A 10 8 5 4 ♥ 9 8 ♦ K Q 10 3 ♣ 5 4</p>
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There will be two passes to North, who opens 1♣. East overcalls 1♠ and South doubles – the hand is not worth a 2♥ bid, even though that would be non-forcing, being by a passed hand. The problem with 2♥ is that when partner is short in the suit he may have to rebid 3♣, which would not be good news from South's perspective.

If the negative double guarantees at least four hearts, North can just jump to the heart game.

With hearts two-two, there is no problem in coming to an overtrick for a solid +450.

Board 28. N/S Vul. Dealer West

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

Most Wests will open 1♥, though it would hardly be a crime to pass the empty 11-count. Four trumps, an ace and a side doubleton is worth a single raise to 2♥ and now South must decide whether a simple 2♠ overcall is sufficient when holding 18 HCP, or whether he should double, thereby committing himself to bidding spades at the three level over North's response.

Eighteen points is all very well, but the South hand also contains a lot of losers, and the queen of hearts is of questionable value. I would content myself with 2♠, and now it is North's turn. As I have written on many occasions, there is no premium on bidding thin games at matchpoints – we should only want to bid those which have an at least 50% chance of success. I think North should pass, just being happy to have trump support for partner's bid. In the event that someone competes in hearts, North can always then take the push to 3♠.

West will lead a heart against any spade contract, and declarer will win the jack, draw trumps and take the diamond finesse. At this point West should know that his partner has nothing in hearts, nothing in spades, and nothing in diamonds. Playing him for the ace of clubs should not then be too taxing a defence to find. A low club to the ace and a club continuation sees the defence take three club tricks for down one.

If North raises to 3♠ immediately, South will go on to game and collect a minus score, while even if North later bids 3♠ in competition, his hand will have been sufficiently limited that

South will have no reason to bid on. Of course, 4♠ might have been making – it needed two of the ♥K, ♦K and ♣J to be onside – but South could have been a shade weaker and still gone on to game facing the immediate raise – ♣J104 instead of ♣Q104, for example, and now game would have been well against the odds.