



The 2023 Charity Challenge Pairs Wednesday 15th March

We are raising funds for two support Charities 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 £5,000 for the two charities we supported in 2022 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.

You may already have heard that in addition to the normal Charity events we run, we have decided to "slot in" one for the **Turkiye – Syria Earthquake Appeal**, which will run for the week beginning 17 April – [click here for more information](#) about this one. Another new one is a charity event run by u3a, so if you know of people who would be interested in that please send them along [to this website](#) for more information.

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 – whether virtually or actually joining in "round the table". We love to have your company.

We do hope you have enjoyed yourselves, and you will know by know whether the commentator has got it right! We are very grateful to Mark Horton for writing the Monday and Thursday commentaries, to Mark Mortimer who penned the ones for Tuesday and Friday and to Brian Senior for doing the mid-week Wednesday commentary. This year the event will again be "hybrid" with some clubs playing face to face and others online, and I suspect that may well continue into the foreseeable future as people find what suits them best and what they are most comfortable with.

Thank you so much for joining us and please do so again in future !

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Board 1. None. Dealer North

<p>♠ 10 4 ♥ A Q 8 3 2 ♦ A K 2 ♣ J 9 3</p> <p>♠ K 9 3 ♥ K 9 7 ♦ Q 9 8 7 5 ♣ Q 2</p> <p>♠ 7 2 ♥ 10 5 ♦ J 6 4 3 ♣ A 8 7 6 5</p>	<p>♠ A Q J 8 6 5 ♥ J 6 4 ♦ 10 ♣ K 10 4</p>
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North will often open 1♥ and East overcall 1♠. After a likely pass from South, West has a simple spade raise. Depending on how aggressive the partnership is in making essentially weak pre-emptive raises, West may feel that he has too much to bid only 2♠, and prefer a 2♥ cuebid. Either way, East will be content to play a safe 2♠ partscore.

Because Love All is the best vulnerability at which to declare on competitive partscore hands – this is because both sides are going down only in fifties – if West's 2♠ comes round to South he may make a balancing double. This doesn't have to work out well for N/S, but matchpoints is a bidder's game, so if in doubt I would veer towards bidding over passing in borderline situations – certainly at Love All.

If South does double, North has no second suit to bid, nor are the hearts long enough to commit to. The solution is an artificial 2NT response, showing two places to play. When South takes that out into clubs, the partnership has stumbled into a contract which cannot be defeated, at least, double dummy, but even one or two down beats the -110 that is N/S's fate on defence to 2♠. And, of course, it is very likely that East will take the push to 3♠, which is easily beaten by a heart lead.

Some Norths will open INT and East overcall 2♠, perhaps via an artificial overcall in some cases. West should not raise. There is no premium on bidding thin games at matchpoints, the main aim when defending against a INT opening being to disturb that contract. Here, a raise would risk turning a plus score into a minus.

Board 2. N/S. Dealer East

<p>♠ K 3 ♥ 8 6 2 ♦ Q 7 4 3 ♣ K 10 9 6</p> <p>♠ A 10 8 ♥ J 10 7 3 ♦ 8 6 ♣ A 5 4 2</p> <p>♠ Q 9 2 ♥ 9 5 4 ♦ A 10 9 2 ♣ J 8 7</p>	<p>♠ J 7 6 5 4 ♥ A K Q ♦ K J 5 ♣ Q 3</p>
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I would expect the vast majority of E/W pairs to get to game on this one. Which game, however, 3NT or 4♠, is less clear.

If East opens INT, West may use Stayman then jump to 3NT, upgrading slightly because of the two tens. If West only invites game, East may go on anyway.

If East opens 1♠, West will show the three-card support either immediately or, if playing Acol, perhaps delaying the spade support until the second round, and now some easts will opt for one game, some the other.

Three No Trump can always be defeated after South's likely diamond lead. Even if declarer gets the spades right by leading low to the eight, the defenders can cash their diamond winners then South leads a club through, and though there are nine winners they cannot be untangled so the contract is down one.

By contrast, 4♠ cannot be defeated, though it may in practice go down more often than not. To come to 10 tricks declarer must get both spades and diamonds right. The latter is a guess, while the former offers a reasonable winning line and, unfortunately, also a reasonable losing line. Low to the eight followed by a finesse of the ten, picks up H9x onside, and also KQ9x unless there is a ruff out. Low to the ten loses to both those layouts, but gains against KQx and Hx onside.

Plus 420 should score very well, with +400 also well above average.

Board 3. E/W. Dealer South

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

If playing a weak 2♠, the South hand seems to be a classic example of the bid, and North will often just blast 3NT and play there. If South is known to open very aggressive pre-empts, North may respond 2NT, asking, then settle for 3♦ when South shows a minimum. Three Diamonds would make an overtrick for +130.

If 2♦ is not an option, most Souths will pass, as the hand is a little balanced for a 3♦ opening. North opens 1♣ and, if given a free run, rebids 2NT over South's 1♦ response. South may pass or may go back to the relative safety of 3♦, ending the auction.

Sometimes, North will open 1♣ and East overcall 1♠. The overcall is far from being obligatory on a jack-high suit and facing a passed partner, to say nothing of the adverse vulnerability. South will pass, West make a courtesy raise just to take more bidding space away from N/S, who are known to have at least half the high-card strength, and North may bid 2NT. South may pass that, convert to 3♦, or make a mildly optimistic raise to game.

Say that East leads a spade against 3NT contract. Declarer wins and plays a diamond. If West wins and plays back a spade, declarer wins and plays a second diamond, which West must duck. If declarer clears the diamonds, playing for the ♥Q to be an entry, the contract is defeated. West wins the third diamond and clears the spades, and East wins the ♥K and has two spades to cash.

When West ducks the diamond, declarer may change tack, running the ♣10. However, East wins, clears the spades, and once again gets in with the ♥K to cash them.

Three No Trump can be made if West misdefends. Say that he ducks the first diamond

rather than the second. Declarer should realise that diamonds are three-one when he holds the first round of the suit, so now switches to the double club finesse. East wins and knocks out the second spade stopper, wins declarer's heart play and clears the spades, but it is too late. A heart to the queen followed by a second club finesse brings in three clubs, three spades, two hearts, and one diamond – nine in all.

Board 4. All. Dealer West

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

Whether West should open a weak 2♥ on that empty suit and when vulnerable is very much a personal style thing. I would open 2♥, arguing that the six-four shape balances out the weak suit, but such an opening doesn't come without some risk. If West does open and East raises to 3♥, South will double and North respond 4♣. South should pass, despite the 18 HCP, as he has a fair number of potential losers. Four Clubs should make exactly for +130.

Where West passes, East will open 1♠ in third seat and, after a double from South, West will probably raise to 2♠. When that comes back to South he will either double again or bid 3♣ to show a hand too good for an initial 2♣ overcall. Will West suddenly introduce the long heart suit? Well, maybe, but all that will achieve is to push N/S to 4♣.

E/W are cold for 3♥ but can be held to seven tricks in a spade contract, so the worst outcome for E/W will be if they end up competing too much in spades and concede – 200. The best should be making 3♥ for +140, and the most common outcome should be N/S scoring +130 in a club partscore.

Board 5. N/S. Dealer North

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

Double dummy, N/S can make 7NT or 7♣, but in real life this will require an unlikely heart play on a non-heart lead. More to the point, is can we get to 6♣/NT without going overboard and bidding the grand slam? Six Spades can also be made, but probably won't be.

Playing Acol, N/S would start 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥. Now what? Three Clubs is not forcing, so the options are 3♦, FSF, jump to 4♠, or jump to 4♣.

I don't like the jump to 4♠ on three low when 3NT rates to be making facing a diamond stopper. If South bids 3♦, and North responds 3NT, that will be that, and the cold slams have been missed. Can North afford a jump to 4NT over 3♦ to show both a diamond guard and significant extra values? Probably not, facing a possible 12-count and with no help in clubs.

I wouldn't be too critical of anyone who bid 3♦ and got to 3NT, which rates to be more secure than 4♠, but the winning action here proves to be a jump to 4♣. North need not worry about the lack of club support, instead focussing on his excellent controls. Which slam will be reached is still not so clear, but some slam should surely be reached from here.

Those playing two-over-one have it a little easier, because South can rebid 3♣ over 2♥. Again, however, unless North takes a risk and jumps to 4NT, natural and plenty of extras, might it not die in 3NT? Maybe South should bid 2♣, then 3♣, then 4♠ over 3NT?

Board 6. E/W. Dealer East

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

If South opens a weak NT, West overcalls 2♥ and that may end the auction. I can see 2♥ being allowed to make, but it can be defeated easily enough via a spade ruff.

North's heart holding may discourage him from competing over 2♥, but there will be some who use Lebensohl to compete in clubs. That puts South at the helm in 3♣, where a heart lead sees East get no fewer than three heart ruffs for down two. More likely is that West will start with a top spade, and now there are only two ruffs and the contract is down only one.

If South opens 1♣, West is likely to compete as far as 2♥, and North to 3♣.

Three Clubs can be defeated without the defence requiring to take any ruffs. Starting with three rounds of spades then playing the fourth round when in with the ♣A sees East get a second trump trick, and the ♥K is now the setting trick.

Board 7. All. Dealer South

<p>♠ Q 7 5 ♥ K Q 9 6 5 ♦ K 9 5 ♣ Q 3</p> <p>♠ A K 8 4 3 ♥ 7 4 ♦ J 6 2 ♣ K 7 6</p>	<p>♠ J 2 ♥ A 8 3 ♦ A 8 7 4 ♣ A 10 8 5</p>
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<p>♠ 10 9 6 ♥ J 10 2 ♦ Q 10 3 ♣ J 9 4 2</p>	
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I know that the majority will probably open the West hand, but I have always had a dislike for 5-3-3-2 11-point hands, particularly when vulnerable. The West hand is essentially a weak NT, but the texture is all wrong for a 1NT opening when most of the hand is in a five-card major suit. But, by its nature, a weak NT doesn't have the playing strength normally expected of a hand that opens 1♠ and rebids 2♠. That is one of the strengths of Acol, that a one-of-a-suit opening is known to have either extra high-card strength or extra distributional strength. This hand has neither.

A 1♠ opening inevitably leads to game being reached, probably 3NT. On a heart lead even spades three-three with the queen onside doesn't allow the contract to be made. Declarer doesn't even have the outside entries to play for the queen to be onside, so can only play for the suit to divide evenly. Three No Trump should fail by a trick.

And 4♠? There is either a loser in each suit or two diamond losers and no club loser – at best! Some may lose both two diamonds and a club for down two.

I know, I know, you can't make a general rule from one example, but those who pass the West hand can then show five spades in an invitational hand, and East can choose whether the final contract should be 2NT or 2/3♠, both of which can be made.

Board 8. None. Dealer West

<p>♠ A J 7 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ K 9 8 4 ♣ 5 4 2</p> <p>♠ K Q 3 ♥ A K J 10 2 ♦ 5 ♣ K J 10 8</p>	<p>♠ 8 4 2 ♥ Q 8 4 ♦ 10 3 2 ♣ A Q 7 3</p>
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<p>♠ 10 9 6 5 ♥ 7 3 ♦ A Q J 7 6 ♣ 9 6</p>	
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Playing five-card majors, West opens 1♥ and East raises to 2♥. West may just jump to game – descriptive invitational sequences help the defenders, so it is often correct to avoid them. If West does settle for a game try, that should be 3♣, and East will be delighted to bid the heart game.

Playing four-card majors, some may still raise to 2♥, putting West in much the same position as before. Others, however, will respond 1NT. West rebids 2♣ (3♣ would be game-forcing so an overbid), East give preference to 2♥ and, as that could be based on a doubleton heart, West completes the picture with 2♠. With nothing wasted in diamonds and a third heart, East has an easy jump to game.

With the spade offside there are three losers. This one should be almost flat around the room at E/W +420.

Board 9. E/W. Dealer North

<p>♠ A 10 ♥ Q 10 6 4 ♦ A K ♣ 9 7 6 5 4</p> <p>♠ 7 3 2 ♥ K J 5 3 ♦ 8 7 ♣ A J 8 2</p>	<p>♠ 5 4 ♥ 9 8 ♦ Q J 10 9 6 5 2 ♣ 10 3</p>
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<p>♠ K Q J 9 8 6 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ 4 3 ♣ K Q</p>	
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If playing a weak NT, that would be my choice of opening with the North cards – can you imagine having to rebid those clubs if you opened 1♣ and partner responded 1♠? One No Trump might well silence East at the prevailing vulnerability and South will drive to

game, probably committing to spades as he will not know that partner has the diamonds well held. There are 11 easy tricks in a spade contract.

Many will have to open 1♣ because they are playing a strong NT. No matter – they will be able to rebid 1NT over the 1♠ response and, once again, the majority of Souths are likely to just bid the spade game.

There will, however, be a significant minority who opt to play in 3NT – the lure of those extra 10 points at matchpoints. After a diamond lead from East, declarer will have time to set up a second heart trick and have 11 in all for an excellent score. A heart lead makes 11 tricks even easier to come by, but a club lead is more challenging, as it establishes West's ♣J as a winner. Eleven tricks are still possible, but it is a little more challenging to get them, and making only 10 tricks will produce a horrible score. See what happens to West on the run of the spades. Eventually, declarer also cashes the top diamonds before throwing West in with a club to lead away from the heart honours, and declarer has no losing guess.

Board 10. All. Dealer East

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

East opens 1♦, West responds 1♠, and North doubles. East rebids 2♣ and, whether or not South introduces his four low hearts, West can jump to 3♠, invitational. That should end the auction.

As it turns out, 4♠ is unbeatable, and no doubt some will get there.

If North leads a heart, West can finesse, cash the ♥A, and come to hand with a diamond ruff to take heart ruff. There are just two spades and a club to be lost.

A club lead sets up a ruff for South, but that comes with a natural trump trick so does not

benefit the defence – indeed, declarer may even come to 11 tricks now.

The ten of spades lead runs round to declarer who returns a second spade. South wins and returns a heart, won in dummy by declarer, who ruffs a diamond to hand to play a third spade. South wins and again returns a heart. With both hearts taken out of the dummy, it might appear that there is a heart and a club to be lost, but not so. Declarer cashes all the spades and that forces North down to ♣QJx, ♥K. The ten of hearts exit now endplays North to open up the clubs, and away goes the club loser.

Board 11. None. Dealer South

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

E/W are cold for 7♠ as the cards lie but, of course, 6♠ is where we would want to be before seeing the bare king appear on our first spade play.

West will open 1♣ and jump to 3♠ over the 1♠ response. East cuebids 4♣ and West 4♦. Whether that is the king or a shortage, it fits East's diamond holding very nicely, so East should have no qualms about going past game. The two low hearts are an obstacle to using any sort of ace-asking bid, but a 5♦ cuebid fits the bill nicely, and West bids 5♥, which should by now be a first-round control.

East is in position to commit to slam now, but can it hurt to make one more try for Seven on the way? Perhaps 5NT, asking for two of the top three spade honours? Even if partner bids Seven on ♠AKxx ♥Ax ♦Kx ♣J10xxx, because he has been asked a simple question, spades two-one and clubs four-three or some doubleton honours brings in 13 tricks.

Board 12. N/S. Dealer West

<p>♠ A Q 10 ♥ A 8 6 ♦ A 8 6 3 ♣ 10 8 4</p> <p>♠ K J 8 7 ♥ J 4 2 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ 7 5 3</p> <p>♠ 9 4 ♥ Q 10 9 5 3 ♦ 7 ♣ A Q J 9 6</p>	<p>♠ 6 5 3 2 ♥ K 7 ♦ K 10 9 4 2 ♣ K 2</p>
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The cards lie so kindly for N/S that they cannot be prevented from making a slam in either of South's long suits. In reality, however, the problem may be to get to game.

Say that North opens a weak NT and South transfers to hearts. When North completes the transfer, the problem is that these days most pairs play 3♣ as game-forcing, and with good reason as this helps on many stronger hands. So South has to make a committal decision and those who opt for pessimism will pass out 2♥ and score +230.

Those playing strong NT are better placed here, particularly if allied to two-way checkback, a very popular method in expert circles. North opens 1♣ and rebids INT over the 1♥ response. Now South can bid 2♣, demanding 2♦ from partner, then go on with 2♥, invitational with five hearts. North has an easy decision and jumps to 4♥.

This method allows game to be invited but to stop at the two level if opener is not interested. If South bids 2♦ instead of 2♣, that would be game-forcing and ask opener to describe his hand further. And if South wants to play in 2♦, he just bids 2♣ then passes the forced 2♦ response.

Board 13. All. Dealer North

<p>♠ 5 3 ♥ Q 9 8 6 4 3 ♦ J 4 ♣ 6 3 2</p> <p>♠ K 10 9 ♥ 10 7 2 ♦ K Q 9 6 ♣ 7 5 4</p> <p>♠ A Q J 8 6 2 ♥ J ♦ A 7 5 ♣ A K 9</p>	<p>♠ 7 4 ♥ A K 5 ♦ 10 8 3 2 ♣ Q J 10 8</p>
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This one doesn't look to be very exciting. At a different vulnerability some Norths might be tempted to open a weak 2♥ but, vulnerable, these will be few and far between. South will open 1♠ and at most tables that should end the auction.

Declarer has eight easy tricks and the board will be all about whether he gets a ninth.

To hold declarer to eight tricks, the diamond ruff in dummy must be prevented. An implausible spade lead then put East in with a heart to lead a second spade through does the trick, while a heart lead and spade switch is also successful. On the more likely lead of the king of diamonds, declarer ducks and can no longer be prevented from making nine tricks.

A club lead makes it interesting. Declarer wins and ducks a diamond, wins a second club and takes the diamond ruff. He can play a spade to the ace followed by the ♠Q, but West wins and puts East in. After cashing the club and heart winners, the thirteenth club promotes a second trump trick for West, holding declarer to eight tricks.

Board 14. None. Dealer East

<p>♠ 9 8 5 ♥ K 8 5 3 ♦ Q 8 ♣ J 10 4 3</p> <p>♠ K 6 3 2 ♥ Q 10 7 6 ♦ K 9 4 3 ♣ 2</p> <p>♠ J 7 ♥ 4 2 ♦ A 10 7 6 ♣ Q 8 7 6 5</p>	<p>♠ A Q 10 4 ♥ A J 9 ♦ J 5 2 ♣ A K 9</p>
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Playing Acol, East might open 1♠, raised to 3♠ by West, and with East going on to game. As the cards lie, there are just two diamonds to be lost. Well, except if South gets off to a low diamond lead to the queen, back to the ace, and a ruff. If he does that – hold your cards closer to your chest in future.

If playing five-card majors, East will open 1♣ and rebid 2NT, 18-19 over the 1♥ response. West should check back for a spade fit and 4♠ is again reached. With the whole room making +450 in 4♠, anyone who fails to find the spade fit and plays in 3NT for +430 will get a deserved near bottom score.

Board 15. N/S. Dealer South

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

Thirty-one combined HCP, yet if we find the spade fit we will sometimes go down in game.

If West opens 1NT, East may use Stayman then do whatever the system demands to invite slam. With a balanced minimum, West will decline, but it may do no good, while any East who just drives to slam will watch partner go down at least a couple.

If West opens 1♣ and rebids 1NT over a 1♦ response, East will check back, find the spade fit, and look for slam. Again, two-way checkback will be useful here as it can begin 1♣ – 1♦ – 1NT – 2♦ – 2♠ – 3♠, forcing and inviting cuebids. Three No Trump by West now would be inspired – if a suggestion to play there – but not many Wests will try that.

Double dummy, it takes the king of clubs lead to break 4♠, but in practice this may not be necessary. Say that North leads a diamond. Declarer may win and cash a top spade, cross to dummy with a heart, and lead the jack of spades, running it when South shows out. Now the club switch would see North get a ruff for the setting trick.

Of course, declarer could have cashed out a red suit for a club discard from either hand before conceding the spade, but plenty won't think of that and, after all, it might not be clubs that North is ruffing.

Board 16. E/W. Dealer West

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

Some will no doubt open the West hand, though fewer than would have done so had they not been vulnerable. An opening bid from West will surely see E/W play the heart game.

Where West passes, most Norths will open 1♣ and East overcalls 1♥. After a pass from South, how West will progress things will depend on his systemic arrangements with East, but ideally he will be able to show a constructive three-level raise with four-card support, and East will go on to game.

South leads a club against 4♥ and North wins and plays a second and a third round. One winning play is to ruff with the ace then lead a heart to the ten and king, but few if any will play it that way. More likely, East will ruff with the nine and be over-ruffed with the jack. He will win the spade return and lead the queen of hearts and run it. A second heart picks up the king, and it is all about the diamonds.

Declarer can cash the spades next and will know that North has six clubs, two hearts, and at least three spades – probably exactly three because South will have shown five by his discarding. North doesn't need the ♦Q for his opening bid. If he doesn't have it, that gives South ♠J9532 ♥J3 ♦Q(10 or x)xx, ♣xx. Might he have bid 1♠ over the opposing 1♥ with that? Maybe, at favourable vulnerability, but the majority would still pass.

It's a tough decision for declarer, and worth a lot of matchpoints.

Board 17. None. Dealer North

<p>♠ J 8 6 ♥ 5 ♦ A K Q J 6 5 ♣ 5 3 2</p> <p>♠ A K Q 9 5 3 ♠ 7 4 ♥ J 4 ♥ A 10 8 7 3 ♦ 10 9 ♦ 7 4 3 2 ♣ K 8 4 ♣ 9 7</p> <p>♠ 10 2 ♥ K Q 9 6 2 ♦ 8 ♣ A Q J 10 6</p>	
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N/S will do well to go plus on this deal after North has opened 1♦. South responds 1♥ and West overcalls, usually a simple 1♠. North rebids 2♦, South bids 3♣, and this would normally be a game-force, being a new suit at the three level when it was not compulsory to bid. However, when North now bids the diamonds for a third time, what game should look at all likely from South's point of view?

North has done nothing to suggest that he holds a spade stopper, even tolerance for hearts, or club support. That only leaves 5♦, and that requires North to hold a very specific hand for it to be a good contract. So, despite the good five-five shape and sound opening values, the odds are heavily in favour of passing out 3♦.

Remarkably, given North's solid trump suit and South's high-card strength, even 3♦ only makes courtesy of that precious singleton eight of trumps in the dummy. Switch the ♦7 and ♦8 round and three rounds of spades sees East ruffing with the eight and leading a club through to establish a fifth defensive trick.

Plus 110 should score very well for N/S, as so many Souths will commit to a doomed game. Meanwhile, an off-centre 3♦ opening runs round to West, who overcalls 3♠ and plays there – down one.

Board 18. N/S. Dealer East

<p>♠ 10 9 7 5 3 ♥ 7 ♦ A J 2 ♣ K 9 8 2</p> <p>♠ A K J 8 6 4 ♠ 2 ♥ J 8 4 ♥ K 10 2 ♦ 5 ♦ Q 9 8 7 4 ♣ 10 7 5 ♣ A J 6 3</p> <p>♠ Q ♥ A Q 9 6 5 3 ♦ K 10 6 3 ♣ Q 4</p>	
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If East opens 1♦, South will overcall 1♥ and West bid 1♠. North has no reason to get involved so passes, East rebids 2♣, and West's 2♠ ends the auction. Declarer may need to get the clubs right to get out for down one.

But not many will open the East hand, so South will get to open 1♥, and West has a book example of a weak jump overcall. That comes back to South. For some, South must reopen with a double because he is short in spades. North will leave that in and collect at least +100. Some will simply pass out 2♠ when holding the South cards, while others will rebid 3♥, not fancying a double being left in or receiving a 3♣ response.

With hearts dividing evenly and the king onside, 3♥ can be made easily enough. Less obviously, 3♦ is also unbeatable, though that takes a little more effort to achieve.

While there will be a few +300s, I would expect +140 to score quite well for N/S, while going minus could score pretty badly.

Board 19. E/W. Dealer South

<p>♠ K 9 8 7 ♥ A 10 5 2 ♦ 9 7 6 ♣ Q 9</p> <p>♠ 10 6 5 2 ♠ Q J ♥ 8 4 3 ♥ 9 6 ♦ J 4 ♦ A Q 8 3 ♣ J 10 8 3 ♣ A 7 6 5 4</p> <p>♠ A 4 3 ♥ K Q J 7 ♦ K 10 5 2 ♣ K 2</p>	
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This looks to be another case of, if N/S can go plus they will score well. Essentially, that means

staying out of their 25-point game with a solid four-four major-suit fit.

If playing strong NT, that is what South will open. North will use Stayman and, on finding partner with four hearts, may just raise to game, though really an invitational 3♥ is sufficient. Back to South, who has no bad high cards such as unsupported jacks or queens (aka quacks), has chunky trumps, and 3-4-4-2 as opposed to 3-4-3-3 distribution. Most Souths will accept the invitation.

Unless there is a pretty serious misdefence, there are two diamonds, one club and one spade to be lost so the heart game is down one. Three No Trump is also doomed on the normal club lead.

Playing a weak NT, South will have to open one of a red suit. Say it goes 1♦ – 1♥ – ?, most Souths will raise to 3♥ and North will go on to game. The best chance of avoiding game is where South opens 1♥, North raises to 2♥, for which he is, of course, maximum, and now South might pass. After all, South is facing a maximum and yet 4♥ needs a miracle – which is not forthcoming.

Board 20. All. Dealer West

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

The bidding is straightforward, West opening 2NT and declaring 4♠ after East has used Stayman.

The play is slightly less straightforward, though West should always succeed. Say that North leads the singleton club – anything else gives a trick in the suit led. Declarer wins and, needing the late entry to dummy with the ♠K, cashes the ace and queen of spades. That discovers the bad news, so declarer plays the other top club. Whether North ruffs now, or discards and eventually ruffs a later club after declarer has crossed to the king of spades, the fact that

he holds all the important red cards means that he is powerless to prevent 10 tricks.

Should East decide to simply raise 2NT to 3NT, North is again in trouble from the start. Anything other than the singleton club lead gives the ninth trick immediately, while it is a trivial matter for declarer to endplay North for that ninth trick even after a club lead.

Plus 620 should score OK because not everyone will find their way home with 10 tricks, and even +600 may not be too bad. If anyone plays 3NT on a diamond lead, they may even manage +630 for a huge result.

Board 21. N/S. Dealer North

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

If East opens a strong NT, West may just raise to 3NT, giving South a blind lead.

On a spade lead, declarer wins the king with the ace and plays the queen of diamonds. Say that goes to the king and ace and declarer continues with a second diamond, North can win and push a spade through and that should collect two spades, two hearts and a diamond, for down one.

I like the spade lead, but some may choose a heart. North wins the king and, if the defence clears the hearts, the same diamond play makes the contract, for an excellent E/W score. North can, however, beat 3NT by switching to a spade at trick two.

Playing a weak NT, East may open 1♣ or 1♠. West has an invitational raise to 3♣ opposite a 1♣ opener, and East will bid 3NT and play there. This leaves the defence in the same position as after a 1NT opening, and the majority should find the defence to beat it.

If East opens 1♠, West has just enough for a 2♣ response. Despite the club support, I would rebid 2NT with the East hand and, that being forcing in modern style, West will raise to

game. The 1♠ opening could well steer N/S away from the required defence and I would now expect a significant number to be allowed to make 3NT.

Board 22. E/W. Dealer East

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

Some will open the East hand with 1♣, some with 3♣, and some will pass.

Playing simple methods, a 1♣ opening will see West respond 1♠ then jump to 3♥ over the 2♣ rebid. If East rebids the clubs again, West will bid 4♥ to show the fifth card and will play there. If East gives preference to 3♠ over 3♥, West may just raise himself to 4♠.

If East opens 3♣, which I confess tempts me greatly, even at adverse vulnerability, West will surely want to play in one his own suits so will bid 3♠ followed by 4♥, and East will decide which major-suit game looks better – 4♥ should surely show five cards here.

And finally, a pass from East sees west open 1♠, rebid 2♥ over the 2♣ response, then 3♥ over East's 3♣ rebid, and east will probably again choose 4♥.

Say that West declares 4♠ and North leads a diamond to the king and ace. West ruffs the diamond continuation and, after drawing trumps, rather than cross to the ace of clubs to lead a heart up, can it hurt to lead a low heart from hand, just in case there is a short honour somewhere? Once the bare ace puts in an appearance the rest is easy.

Similarly, if the contract is 4♥, a low heart at trick three helps to pick up some short honour holdings, while also retaining trumps in dummy to take care of a third round of diamonds, which would otherwise threaten declarer's trump control whenever trumps are not three-two.

So either game can be made on a diamond lead, though many rate to go down, as the low heart play is far from being obvious. A club lead offers a chance but declarer needs to take the finesse to get rid of his diamond loser, otherwise there will be three heart losers and a diamond, as the late entry for the second heart play has been taken out of dummy. It will be very tough to take the finesse at trick one.

Double dummy, the only way to ensure beating 4♠, is to cash the ♥A, lead a diamond to South, who returns a heart honour. North ruffs the jack or king and gets out with a club, and there is another heart loser to come for the setting trick. There is no double dummy defence to beat 4♥.

Board 23. All. Dealer South

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

North will usually open the bidding in third seat. If that opening is 1NT, East will overcall to show spades, or possibly spades and a minor according to agreements.

A simple spade-only showing overcall should see East declare 2♠, while a spades-and-a-minor bid may sometimes see west convert to the minor, the contract becoming 3♣.

Ten tricks can be made in 3♣, while nine are available in 2♠. What declarer in a spade contract must avoid is the error of running the bare ten of trumps and losing to the jack. That results in three trump losers, while leading the ten to the queen holds the losers to two. When North has opened the bidding, to play for the king to be onside is clearly correct.

If North opens 1♣, East overcalls 1♠ and South may make a negative double. West should pass and North respond 1NT. Now East can bid again, probably 2♣ to offer a choice of suits, but to just repeat the spades would be a

reasonable and, as it happens, successful, alternative.

All roads should then lead to either 2♠ or 3♣ by E/W, with +140 scoring well, +130 not scoring badly, and +110 scoring less well.

Board 24. None. Dealer West

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

The most popular auction from N/S is likely to be: 1♦ – 1♥ – 1♠ – 3♦ – Pass. Things could get a bit more complicated if West comes in with a four-card overcall over 1♥, as East can compete to the three level, but that won't happen all that often.

Three Spades can be held to seven tricks, but at this vulnerability (which is part of the attraction of overcalling on the West hand) N/S will need to double for +300, as +100 will prove to be inadequate with 3/4♦ making either 10 or 11 tricks.

A diamond contract can come to 11 tricks if declarer is allowed to either take three spade ruffs in the dummy, or two ruffs but have three club tricks. The former should be preventable, simply by leading a couple of rounds of trumps. The latter requires that East duck the first round of clubs as there will then be no entry to the third club winner after using two of South's trumps for spade ruffs.

Board 25. E/W. Dealer North

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

North opens a weak 2♥ and East doubles. Yes, it would be nice to have a fourth spade, particularly when holding only minimum high-card strength for a double, but the hand with shortage in the opponents' suit has to get into the auction even if the hand is not perfect to do so.

Assuming that South passes, West may be tempted to pass and play for a penalty – you wouldn't risk it at teams, but it's a plausible option at matchpoints. Probably most will respond 3♦, however. If playing Lebensohl, this shows values but not sufficient with which to force to game, describing the West hand perfectly. Looking at a minimum for the double, East will pass and, unless South competes, that will be that.

The normal outcome in 3♦ is to come to 10 tricks. Say that North leads a heart; declarer can win, cash the top diamonds, then play three rounds of clubs. If South doesn't cover the third round, run the nine, discarding a spade, then lead a fourth round to ruff out the jack.

If North is the kind of player to always have six cards for a weak two bid, South may compete with 3♥. Double dummy, this can be doubled for down two and –300. That, however, requires a quite unlikely defence, and eight tricks can normally be made if declarer gets the trumps right, as he would, for example, if West had left in a take-out double or later made a penalty double himself.

Board 26. All. Dealer East

<p>♠ —</p> <p>♥ J 10 7 5 2</p> <p>♦ 8 7 6 5 4</p> <p>♣ Q 9 4</p> <p>♠ K Q 10 9 8</p> <p>♥ A Q 9 3</p> <p>♦ A 10</p> <p>♣ K J</p>	<p>♠ A J 6 3</p> <p>♥ K 6</p> <p>♦ K Q</p> <p>♣ 10 7 6 5 3</p>
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<p>♠ 7 5 4 2</p> <p>♥ 8 4</p> <p>♦ J 9 3 2</p> <p>♣ A 8 2</p>	
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East opens 1♣, West responds 1♠, and East raises to 2♠. How West will proceed from here is unclear, and will depend on whether he has any artificial options available to him. Sooner or later, however, I would expect the vast majority to get tired of messing about and ask for key-cards then bid the spade slam on finding that only one is missing.

West will be disappointed to find that dummy's clubs are so poor such that he has a critical guess in the suit to decide the fate of the contract. No doubt South should duck smoothly when a club is played off the dummy but he will feel under some pressure and may rise with the ace, fearful of a stiff king in declarer's hand. The more South knows about declarer's hand the easier it will be for him to duck in tempo. It follows that declarer should not touch the red suits before playing on clubs, after all, what extra information is he going to gain from doing so to help with his guess? No, win the opening lead and cash a top trump then, on seeing the four-zero split, play a club immediately.

If South ducks smoothly, play him to hold the queen rather than the ace. Today that doesn't work, but it is a straight guess, and any slight extra chance that a defender might take away that guess for us is better than nothing.

Board 27. None. Dealer South

<p>♠ 3</p> <p>♥ Q 4 2</p> <p>♦ Q J 5 4</p> <p>♣ Q J 10 7 2</p> <p>♠ Q 7 6</p> <p>♥ K 7 6</p> <p>♦ A K 10 8 6 2</p> <p>♣ 3</p>	<p>♠ A 10 8 4 2</p> <p>♥ J 10</p> <p>♦ 3</p> <p>♣ A K 9 6 5</p>
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<p>♠ K J 9 5</p> <p>♥ A 9 8 5 3</p> <p>♦ 9 7</p> <p>♣ 8 4</p>	
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It is natural for E/W to reach 4♠. West will open 1♦ and East respond 1♠. The majority of Wests will repeat the diamonds, over which East will bid 3♣ and West jump to 4♠, concluding the auction. A minority of Wests will raise the 1♠ response to 2♠, after which East will either bid 4♠ immediately or via 3♣, just in case an unlikely slam is in the picture.

With trumps breaking badly and neither minor splitting as kindly as declarer might prefer, 4♠ is a challenge. It cannot be defeated when played by East, but for a start declarer will need to hold himself to one heart loser. The good news is that there is a fair chance that, looking at such good trumps and having head both minors bid against him, South might kick off with the ace of hearts, probably continuing with a second round after seeing trick one.

This start not only brings declarer's side-suit winners up to five, but also ensures that he has a safe return to hand when he needs one via a heart ruff. Ideally, having won the second heart he would cash the top diamonds just to minimise the risk of someone ruffing them later in the play, then play three rounds of clubs. With a fourth round of clubs to come, there should be no difficulty in coming to five trump tricks so 10 in all.

While declarer still cannot be prevented from making 10 tricks, the play is much more challenging after a diamond lead as declarer does not have a heart winner as yet. He can take a heart pitch on the second diamond, praying that the lead was not a singleton, cross to the ace of clubs and lead the remaining heart up. This establishes the ♥K as a winner, but means that there is one fewer entry to hand for later use. Play the hand through from here,

however, and we see that declarer is still in control.

Board 28. N/S. Dealer West

<p>♠ K 7 6 ♥ Q J 9 8 ♦ K 6 4 ♣ A 6 3</p> <p>♠ J 10 5 3 ♥ 6 5 3 ♦ 10 7 5 2 ♣ 7 4</p> <p>♠ A Q 8 ♥ A 10 4 2 ♦ A 9 3 ♣ K Q 2</p>	<p>♠ 9 4 2 ♥ K 7 ♦ Q J 8 ♣ J 10 9 8 5</p>
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Six No Trump is flat out on the heart finesse, meaning that in the long run we don't care whether we bid it or not. Of course, in the short term we care very much. Six Hearts is marginally worse as, apart from the slim prospect of conceding a trick one ruff, the contract also fails when trumps are five-nil.

If North opens a weak NT, I would be inclined to just raise to 4NT, inviting slam, but no doubt some will use Stayman and find the heart fit. There will be quite a difference in matchpoint terms between +1440 and +1430, of course. Should North accept a slam invitation? It's close. North has 13 good points – no loose quacks – and the heart intermediates could be of value, but 3-4-3-3 shape offers only one potential length trick.

My guess is that there will be more +690s than +680s, with those who find the trump fit more likely to bid slam. However, there may be more +1430s than +1440s for the same reason. Where North's methods require a 1♣ opening, the heart fit will be found immediately, and not everyone will think to convert to 6NT at the end of the slam auction.

Board 29. All. Dealer North

<p>♠ K 2 ♥ Q 8 2 ♦ K ♣ A K Q J 5 3 2</p> <p>♠ Q 9 8 4 3 ♥ 10 3 ♦ J 5 4 2 ♣ 8 7</p> <p>♠ J 7 6 ♥ A K 9 7 ♦ Q 8 7 3 ♣ 9 6</p>	<p>♠ A 10 5 ♥ J 6 5 4 ♦ A 10 9 6 ♣ 10 4</p>
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North is way too good for a gambling 3NT opening – he has the long solid suit but way too much outside the main suit – so opens 1♣. South will respond either 1♦ or 1♥. North can risk a 'clever' bid in a third suit, but the practical rebid is 3NT, which in modern style is always based on a long and strong club suit. Three No Trump will so often be the right spot and, even if partner has no help in diamonds, having responded 1♥, half the time the ace will be on the left and a low diamond lead will be won by the bare king.

Yes, I admit that 4♥ may be safer occasionally when partner has five or more cards in the suit, but how do you propose to explore such a possibility without risk of a disaster?

East is likely to lead the red suit that was not bid over him. If that is a heart, it should tell declarer how to play for four heart tricks and 11 in all. Declarer could gamble by playing the ♦K at trick two and, if the defence fail to take both its aces, there will now be play for 12 tricks. The problem is that West may hold the ♦A and win it and push a spade through, potentially holding declarer to only 10 tricks.

On a low diamond lead, declarer will win the king and rattle off seven club tricks. That will crush East, so that declarer will have four heart tricks and 12 in all for an excellent +690.

Board 30. None. Dealer East

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

West will open 1♣ in third seat, which is actually good news for North. Had North had to start the auction, there would have been the big decision to make whether to open the longer suit, or the higher-ranking one to prepare a rebid and show both suits. Now it is straightforward – North overcalls 2♣, a Michaels Cuebid to show at least five-five in the majors.

If partner's 1♣ opening promised genuine clubs, East can now cuebid to show a good club raise or perhaps jump in support. My personal favourite would be a jump to 3♦, a fit-jump to show the playing strength for a raise to at least 4♣ with a useful diamond side-suit.

South is likely to bid hearts at the level he is forced to, and will often end up declaring 4♥ – North will probably raise 3♥ to 4♥ where necessary because of the sixth heart. Should West go on to 5♣? Well, the ♦Q fits the fit jump, and there will be at most one major-suit loser, so 5♣ might be the best sort of sacrifice – one that makes. Against that, West's spade holding suggests that 4♥ will often be beatable. Still, I think West should bid 5♣ over 4♥ if facing a fit-jump, but maybe not facing a more general club raise.

We can see that 5♣ has three losers, so is it a good save or does it turn a plus into a minus score?

On a non-spade lead, 4♥ is a trivial make – draw trumps then set up spades – but what about a spade lead?

Four Hearts can be beaten – do you see how? Three rounds for partner to ruff is no good as declarer's diamond loser then goes away on the established spades. To come to four tricks, the defence needs a spade ruff while still

retaining control of the spade suit. So, ace then a LOW spade for East to ruff, a diamond back, and there is a diamond to cash when West wins the king of spades. A round of applause for any pair who find that defence.

Board 31. N/S. Dealer South

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

I would upgrade the South 11-point hand to opening strength. The ten of spades may prove useful, while ♦J109 is much better than ♦Jxx, so to me this hand is worth 12 HCP.

If South opens a weak NT, North will use Stayman then settle for 3NT. Knowing that declarer has four spades, and dummy four hearts, West will probably lead safely – a spade – rather than gamble a three-card minor. Declarer will win the ♠A, come to hand with a second spade, and finesse in diamonds, perhaps starting with a sneaky nine – not that that matters. He will be pleased to discover that he has four diamond winners and four spades, so nine in all. Trying a heart to the king without having already collected nine tricks could lead to one down, depending on just how the play has gone to that point.

If South opens 1♣, North may respond 1♦ and East overcall 1♥. When that comes back to North, he can jump to 3NT. On a passive lead play will follow much the same lines as before to a safe nine tricks. A heart lead will give an overtrick, and +630 should score very well.

Board 32. E/W. Dealer West

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

There will be two passes to East, who will open either INT or 1♣ according to system.

One No Trump will usually end the auction and, after a spade lead, the defence has set up its suit and the contract should be held to seven tricks.

Where East opens 1♣, if South passes West will respond 1♥ and pass East's INT rebid. Again, a spade lead holds the contract to seven. However, South will sometimes overcall 1♠, despite the moderate suit in a moderate hand and the fact that partner is a passed hand. West will make a negative double to show the hearts, and East will have an interesting rebid problem. Would you rebid INT with only jack-to-three spades, or would you rebid the moderate five-card club suit?

I would rebid INT, not worrying too much about the spade position – when North fails to raise South's overcall, West is almost certain to have three spades, and more often than not that will mean that we have a spade stopper. Even if not, losing the first five tricks may not be a disaster.

If East were to rebid 2♣, he would find that he had two trump losers and six in all for down one. Two Hearts would be the winning bid, as that contract is a comfortable make, possibly even with an overtrick, but how many will bid a three-card suit in this auction?