



# The 2026 Charity Challenge Pairs

## Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> 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. Dealer North

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

If the auction commences 1♥ – Pass – 2♥, West will come into the bidding. While the modern style is to overcall in a five-card major rather than double for take-out, that is more geared to one-level overcalls, where there is plenty of scope for later further action. This West hand is a three-suiter and is only worth one bid – it can't really bid 2♠ then double if 3♥ comes back to it from an opponent – and a double is the stand-out action.

North will probably redouble now and East leave it up to partner to pick a trump suit (unless, of course, to pass would show a desire to defend 2♥ redoubled, when East will have to guess to take out into either 2♠ or 3♣. North will bid on over either and should be down in 3♥.

If North opens INT, South will transfer to hearts and West pass for now. However, North is worth a transfer break and can jump to 3♥ to show a decent opener with four or more-card support. When that comes round to West, he can double for take-out, knowing that East must have some values as the opposition have stopped short of game.

East, of course, knows that the double is for take-out, but should leave it in, expecting two trump trick most of the time, and 3♥ doubled duly goes one off for –100.

The E/W limit is eight tricks in a spade contract, though in practice North may try to cash the ace of hearts on opening lead, and the two heart winners that establishes may permit West to come to more than eight.

### Board 2. N/S. Dealer East

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

E/W have nine top tricks in a NT contract and the same nine tricks if playing in spades. The trick, therefore, will be to get to 3NT, which I expect to be beyond the large majority of pairs. As for how to achieve this feat, the most likely route is if East opens 1♠ and raises the INT response to 3NT, gambling that his probable eight top tricks will see the contract home before N/S can come to five tricks.

More often, East will either open 4♠ or open 1♠ then rebid 3♠ or 4♠. West should pass any of those spade bids and, with many pairs going down in game, +140 should score OK.

It only, of course, requires that the defence play one round of trumps to leave declarer with a second heart loser.

### Board 3. E/W. Dealer South

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

There will be Souths who open a weak NT. It isn't that it is a particularly good 11-count, justifying an upgrade, but getting in the first blow is a style which attracts many players. West overcalls 2♥, North competes with 2♠, and East bids 3♣. Expecting, correctly, that 3♣ will be making, South may compete with 3♠ despite his minimum, and that is the limit of what anyone can make. In fact, even 3♠ requires a successful spade guess, leading low to the king so that East's heart ruff comes with a trump trick, and +200 should score pretty well for N/S.

Where South passes, West has a weak two opener and North passes. If 3♣ would be forcing, East too has to pass, and so will South. With only one club winner standing up, 2♥ can be held to six tricks easily enough.

Of course, if East can bid 3♣, non-forcing, he will surely do so. If left to play there, 3♣ is a routine make, but when 3♣ comes round to North he can make a take-out double and South respond 3♦. Played by South, 3♦ can be made on any defence.

### Board 4. All. Dealer West

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

Famous last words, I know, but this one should be played in 4♠ at every table.

West opens 1♠ and rebids 2♠ over the 2♥ response. As that will not promise more than five spades for most partnerships, East may make a probing 3♣ bid, with West bidding spades for a third time and being raised to game.

There are other routes to the spade game, but West's suit will play opposite a small singleton at a pinch, so he should say so.

Four Spades is, of course, quite cold, and will come to an overtrick if the defence fails to find its club ruff. That should not be too difficult to achieve. As North has trump control via the ace, to lead the singleton looks completely normal and, when he wins the ace of spades, dummy's minor-suit holdings make it clear to try to put partner in with a diamond rather than a club.

And when South wins the diamond? South might be tempted to try to cash a second diamond but, if he thinks back to the opening lead of the ♣2, he should see that this must be a singleton and give North the hoped for ruff.

I'm sure that a significant number of N/Ss will fail to take their ruff and, with only two plausible results on the board, -620 and -650, that will cost them half a top compared to what they would have scored for -620.

### Board 5. N/S. Dealer North

♠ K 4 ♥ A J 6 3 ♦ K 5 ♣ J 10 9 6 3 ♠ A Q 10 3 ♥ K 10 8 ♦ Q 10 9 4 ♣ 7 5	♠ 2 ♥ Q 7 4 2 ♦ A 8 3 2 ♣ A Q 8 4 ♠ J 9 8 7 6 5 ♥ 9 5 ♦ J 7 6 ♣ K 2
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If playing a weak NT, that is the best opening with the North hand, the alternative being to open and rebid a five-card suit headed by the jack. Most Easts will not be able to bid over INT but, when South transfers to spades and North bids 2♠, as requested, the East hand is ideal for a take-out double.

West can think about responding 3♦, or 2NT if that would be natural and not two places to play, but the practical action is to pass out 2♠ doubled and play for a penalty. With N/S vulnerable, even one down beats all possible partscores, while two down will beat an E/W game. West turns out to have three trump tricks, and 2♠ doubled should be a minimum of two down.

A 1♣ opening from North will also silence East. South responds 1♠ and North will often rebid INT, South correcting to 2♠. Again, East can double for take-out and collect the juicy penalty.

Another possibility is for North to open 1♣ and South to respond with a 2♠ weak jump shift. Once again, that runs round to East, who doubles, and West leaves it in.

There seem to be a lot of different routes to 2♠ doubled, suggesting that those E/Ws who fail to collect a penalty could score quite poorly.

### Board 6. E/W. Dealer East

♠ 6 ♥ A K 9 7 ♦ A 6 5 2 ♣ A Q 9 5 ♠ A Q 10 9 4 ♥ 3 ♦ 10 8 7 ♣ K 8 3 2	♠ J 7 5 3 2 ♥ 5 ♦ K 4 3 ♣ J 10 7 4 ♠ K 8 ♥ Q J 10 8 6 4 2 ♦ Q J 9 ♣ 6
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After a pass from East, South opens 3♥, West passes, and North must decide whether to try for slam.

If a new suit response would be read as natural, I think North has to just raise quietly to 4♥, as there is no intelligent way in which to explore slam possibilities without risking getting too high. Some, however, will play that, while a 3♠ response would be natural and forcing, four of a minor is a cuebid. If North has that understanding with partner, a 4♣ response is attractive as it expresses slam interest without going past game.

South has nothing to be ashamed about, so would be worth a return cuebid below game if he had a diamond control, but with no key-cards the hand is not worth a cuebid above game, so he signs off in 4♥ and North should not risk a further bid.

Slam has play, just looking at the N/S hands, but it is well against the odds to succeed, and on the actual layout is down one, so those who gamble will not gain their hoped for reward.

### Board 7. All. Dealer South

♠ A 10 6 2 ♥ 2 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A 10 8 4 3 ♠ 5 ♥ A J 10 8 7 ♦ 10 3 ♣ K J 7 5 2	♠ Q J 9 4 3 ♥ K 9 6 5 ♦ A J 9 ♣ 6 ♠ K 8 7 ♥ Q 4 3 ♦ 8 7 6 5 2 ♣ Q 9
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West is just short of a one-level opening so will pass at most tables. If playing two-suited weak openings the hand is a classic 2♥ opener, North will double, and east have to decide how high

to support hearts. There is no reason to preempt when holding the other major, so East might respond 2NT, asking, just as without the opposing double. West should treat his hand as a maximum and rebid 3♥ (3♣ being minimum with clubs), and East may bid the heart game.

Where West passes, North opens 1♣ and East overcalls 1♠ – the modern style being to show a five-card major rather than double, as the other suits can be brought into the auction later if it still seems appropriate to do so. South may try INT over 1♠, and West can double for take-out or just bid 2♥. Either way, the heart fit should be found, though perhaps it is more likely that E/W stop in 3♥ than that they go on to game.

There is a loser in each side-suit, so to make 4♥ requires that declarer pick up the hearts without loss, but there is quite a bit of other work to be done to come to 10 tricks, though it is possible to do so, whatever the defence.

A second diamond trick is a matter of routine on this layout, while it will be natural to get the club guess right by playing North to hold the ace, but that will still leave declarer with two club losers to dispose of. To do so without suffering an over-ruff will require that declarer take one club ruff with a low trump, and one with the king. After that, he can run the ♥9 followed by the remaining heart to the eight, cash the ace, and that is 10 tricks.

Is that a bit of a double dummy line of play? Well, if North has bid clubs naturally, declarer can certainly find a reason to take the second ruff with the king, but North could hold the singleton or doubleton trump queen, so the winning line is a bit of a guess. I would expect those who both bid and make 4♥ to score very well indeed, with +170 also well above average.

### Board 8. None. Dealer West

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

Double dummy, N/S can make seven tricks in every denomination but spades, where they

can make eight. Talk of other denominations may be a bit fanciful, as it looks normal for South to either open INT or open 1♣/♦ and rebid INT at every table. The only variation in contract may come if North guesses to use Stayman in response to a INT opening, converting the 2♦ response to 2♥ to show both majors.

Can 2♥ be made, given that there are three trump losers? Well, not at double dummy, but West will often lead the ten of diamonds, and that gives declarer a third diamond trick. A bit of inspiration in the spade suit and eight tricks are possible.

Most Souths will, however, be in INT. If they have opened INT or 1♣, the normal lead will be a diamond, which is a good start for declarer. With the ♥A inside, seven tricks look to be guaranteed now, and a winning spade play would mean an overtrick.

Where South has opened 1♦, West is likely to lead a spade against INT. That guarantees four spade tricks, but is not quite so expensive as a diamond lead, as declarer has no hope of a third diamond trick on a spade lead so should be held to seven tricks.

### Board 9. E/W. Dealer North

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

When North opens 1♦, East has the wrong shape for a take-out double. A four-card 1♥ overcall is a possibility, I suppose, but I'm not a big fan of such bids and prefer a disciplined pass. South responds 1♠ and North rebids 2♣ and, with only one unbid suit, it still looks right for East to pass. South raises to 3♣ in case North is strong, and that is that.

The friendly lie of the clubs and hearts mean that declarer should be able to escape with just four losers, the top clubs and one trick in each major.

Plus 110 should be OK for N/S, though if E/W get involved in the auction they may concede – 200 for a very poor E/W score.

### Board 10. All. Dealer East

<p>♠ J ♥ K J 9 5 2 ♦ A Q 10 9 2 ♣ 3 2</p> <p>♠ 10 8 2 ♥ A 4 3 ♦ K 7 ♣ J 10 9 7 5</p> <p>♠ K Q 3 ♥ 6 ♦ J 8 4 3 ♣ A Q 8 6 4</p>	<p>♠ A 9 7 6 5 4 ♥ Q 10 8 7 ♦ 6 5 ♣ K</p>
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The combination of vulnerability, empty spade suit, four cards in the other major, and so much high-card strength outside the main suit, should dissuade most from opening with a weak two bid on the East cards, leaving South free to open 1♣ and North to respond 1♥. Now East can bid spades. If he opts for a simple 1♠ overcall, South may pass this round to North, who bids 2♦. South raises to 3♦ and now North will go on, perhaps with a 3♠ asking bid. South will respond 3NT to that and, with the minor suits both lying well for declarer, this cannot be defeated.

Particularly if playing a style where the 1♣ opening did not promise clubs, South may rebid 2♣ over the overcall. North will still introduce the diamonds and South still raise to 3♦, so we are back in the same position again and will often get to 3NT.

If North decides that the five-five shape is more suitable for suit play than for NT, he may commit to diamonds. The only way that 5♦ can be threatened is by the lead of the singleton king of clubs, with east getting a ruff. However, this can be overcome by the simple expedient of winning the club and playing on diamonds, which are soon picked up without loss. After two rounds of diamonds, declarer plays the jack of spades and the defence is powerless to prevent 11 tricks.

There will be some pairs stopping off in a diamond partscore and, with both N/S games making, this rates to score pretty badly.

### Board 11. None. Dealer South

<p>♠ K ♥ 10 2 ♦ A J 8 7 6 5 ♣ A 8 5 4</p> <p>♠ Q J 10 2 ♥ 9 6 5 ♦ Q ♣ K J 7 6 3</p> <p>♠ A 8 5 4 ♥ K 8 7 3 ♦ K 10 4 ♣ 10 9</p>	<p>♠ 9 7 6 3 ♥ A Q J 4 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ Q 2</p>
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On this friendly lie of the cards, N/S can make game in either diamonds or NT. However, they do not have the values for game, and will usually declare a diamond partscore.

There will be two passes to North, whose down the middle opening is 1♦, perhaps rebidding 2♦ over the 1♥ response. South can raise that to 3♦, but North has no reason to go on, particularly as the ♠K may prove to be wastepaper.

One Diamond is not the only possible start for North. The North hand is short in both majors and only just has the high-card strength for a one-level opening. Some may try a weak 2♦ or even a 3♦ pre-empt. As it turns out, there is no-one to shut out, as neither East nor West was planning to bid anyway, but it is easy to imagine a deal on which East has a good opening hand and can be inconvenienced by an opposing pre-empt. Today, such an opening just results in a normal diamond partscore being played.

### Board 12. N/S. Dealer West

<p>♠ 7 5 2 ♥ K Q 4 ♦ A 5 ♣ A J 9 8 5</p> <p>♠ 8 3 ♥ 9 8 ♦ 7 6 4 3 2 ♣ K 10 6 2</p> <p>♠ J 9 4 ♥ A 10 6 3 2 ♦ K Q 10 9 ♣ 4</p>	<p>♠ A K Q 10 6 ♥ J 7 5 ♦ J 8 ♣ Q 7 3</p>
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North has the kind of hand with which some players would open 1NT whether playing a weak or a strong NT.

Say that North opens a weak NT and East passes, thinking to run five spade tricks against

a NT contract. South will transfer to hearts and now East may come in with 2♠ as he can no longer run his suit. South can double to show competitive values or better, and North bid hearts. Unless North jumps to game, it is not clear whether game will be reached or not.

If North opens a strong NT, South will, of course, transfer then drive to game or, if East comes in with 2♠, will bid hearts in a forcing manner and be raised to game.

Or North may open 1♣ and East overcall 1♠. If South now bids 2♥, North can raise to game. If South instead makes a negative double, North has to decide what to respond. Two Clubs on a scrappy five-card suit is not that attractive, but neither is INT without a spade stopper. Either way, if South follows through with 2♥, showing long hearts but too little strength for an immediate forcing 2♥ bid, North will raise and game should be reached.

The defence will cash the three top spades, after which East may switch to the five of hearts to the eight and queen. One tempting line is to play for East to hold only two hearts: win the ♥Q and ♥K, then play ace and another diamond, with the intention of ruffing a diamond in the North hand. When the ♦J appears, there is no longer any need for the ruff so declarer wins the second diamond, draws the last trump, and claims. But suppose that East held only two low diamonds; now the third diamond will be over-ruffed and the contract defeated.

Of course, there is an alternative line available to declarer – the minor-suit squeeze. Win the ♥Q, ace of clubs, ruff a club, ♥K, ruff a club, cash the ♥A and, if West is four-four or five-four in the minors, he is squeezed so that the ♦J will come down in three rounds whoever holds it.

### Board 13. All. Dealer North

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

If playing weak NT, that will be a popular choice on the East cards and, after a pass from South, West will transfer to spades then pass the completion.

If East opens 1♥, West will respond 1♠ and East rebid INT. West may now simply sign-off in 2♠ or, if in optimistic mood and with the methods at his fingertips, bid 2♣ followed by 2♠ to show an invitational hand with five spades. With a near minimum, East would probably pass out 2♠.

If South leads the king of clubs, declarer will win the ace and play a spade. A diamond switch from South would enable the defence to take a diamond ruff, but it would be a brave South who would open up dummy's side-suit. More likely, South would cash the second spade and ♣Q, then get out with a heart. That allows declarer to come to nine tricks.

Of course, nine tricks are possible double dummy on any defence, but that involves declarer in taking the right finesse at the right time.

If North is on lead to 2♠, he too is likely to lead a club, so the position will be much the same, except that with the east hand on the table it is a little more likely that South will find the diamond switch, after which declarer will have to read the position well or may miss out on the overtrick.

### Board 14. None. Dealer East

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

East should not be tempted to open despite the six-five shape. A one-level opening would be a bit much on eight working points, while a pre-empt would be a serious distortion and would risk losing the second suit altogether – unless playing weak two-suited openings when 2♥ would be just fine. Otherwise, the best chance to describe this hand to partner will come via a possible two-suited overcall.

South opens 1♦ and West overcalls 1♠. When North makes a negative double, strongly suggesting four or more hearts, East can stop worrying about showing that suit and concentrate on the clubs. East bids 2♣ and South rebids the long diamonds.

West has three-card club support and sound values for the 1♠ overcall so is happy to compete to 3♣, and North, despite having nothing to spare, should compete in turn to 3♦. South's free 2♦ rebid should promise six cards, and The Law says that we should compete to the three level in such cases, certainly at Love All, when both sides are going down only in 50s.

Three Diamonds goes down a trick, assuming that East gets a spade ruff with the singleton trump, but I would expect most Easts to take the push to 4♣ with their highly distributional hand. Four Clubs is an easy make. Indeed, careful play brings home the club game, should anyone get there.

#### Board 15. N/S. Dealer South

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

The likelihood is that South will open 1♠ and West overcall 2♥. North has a big decision now; should he double or should he pass?

Suppose that North doubles; should South bid 2♠ or 3♣? The answer is easy looking at the North hand, with 2♠ much the more successful choice, even though 2♠ should be beaten by a trick. I happen to agree with 2♠ when holding a minimum with a decent suit, but give North four-four or better in the minors and 3♣ could easily work out better.

And what if North passes? South should make a reopening double and North must decide whether that heart holding justifies a penalty pass. If North thinks it does, as do I, 2♥ doubled is down one for +100 to N/S. If North decides to respond 3♦, N/S are in big trouble.

The only way for N/S to go plus is for them to defend against 2♥, doubled or otherwise, while E/W can make nothing at the two level so their fate is largely in the hands of their opponents.

#### Board 16. E/W. Dealer West

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

West opens 1♦ and East responds 1♠. South could overcall 2♥ now, but the suit is an empty one and the opposition have not yet found a fit, so perhaps neither side has one. Anyway, South will get a second chance to bid, so passes to see what is going on.

Many Wests will repeat the long diamond suit, and that will run round to South. I would guess that most will bid 2♥ here, but a take-out double is a plausible alternative – partner may have a real diamond stack or N/S could have a four-four spade fit.

Say that South balances with 2♥; West has an easy 2♠ bid, to complete the picture of a hand containing six diamonds and three spades. North will surely compete with 3♥, and that should end the auction, South appreciating that partner is merely competing the partscore.

It is very easy to let even 4♥ make. If West leads the ace of diamonds, the king will later ruff out to provide two discards for South's club losers, while a spade lead to the queen and ace allows declarer to play a spade straight back to set up discards for North's club losers. In fact, while the king of clubs is not an unattractive lead, I'm betting that 4♥ will be made more often than not once it has been bid.

A few Wests will raise to 2♠ rather than rebid the diamonds. When 2♠ comes round to South he has quite an interesting decision, because there is the prospect of gaining a useful score by defending against 2♠, E/W being vulnerable. Should South judge to go quietly and defend, 2♠ can be beaten by two for N/S +200, which beats all those who do not bid and make 4♥..

### Board 17. None. Dealer North

<p>♠ 9 6 3 ♥ Q 9 5 4 ♦ K 3 ♣ A Q 7 5</p> <p>♠ Q J 10 2 ♥ A 10 ♦ Q 9 5 ♣ 8 6 3 2</p> <p>♠ K 7 4 ♥ K J 8 3 ♦ 10 8 4 ♣ K 9 4</p>	<p>♠ A 8 5 ♥ 7 6 2 ♦ A J 7 6 2 ♣ J 10</p>
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Should the North hand be opened? If it isn't then the board gets passed out at most tables, though I suppose that some will open 1♥ in third seat with the South hand. That rates to get them to 3♥, which should be routinely defeated after the normal spade lead, meaning that the sub-minimum opening is a big loser.

If N/S are playing a 12-14 NT, there isn't really much excuse for an upgrade on a hand with no tens and only one honour combination. Many will pass the hand. It is more likely to be opened by those playing a strong NT, and in particular a 14-16 NT, as they are far less likely to find themselves doubled in INT and in trouble. Indeed, some play a 14-16 NT specifically to allow them to open most 11-counts without having too wide a range (11-14) for their INT rebid, 11-13 being more manageable.

If North opens 1♣, probably not promising four cards in the suit, South can respond 1♥ and North raise to 2♥. As the most likely hand-type for that combination from North is 11-13(14) balanced, South should not even consider looking for game. Sure, there may occasionally be 10 tricks available, but it is far more likely that bidding on will lead to a minus score. With many pairs passing the board out, +110 should score very nicely, thank you very much.

### Board 18. N/S. Dealer East

<p>♠ A K 10 ♥ Q 10 4 ♦ A 9 8 5 ♣ 7 6 4</p> <p>♠ 9 8 7 6 ♥ A 5 ♦ 7 2 ♣ K J 10 8 2</p> <p>♠ 5 3 2 ♥ K J 7 6 3 2 ♦ Q J 10 ♣ 3</p>	<p>♠ Q J 4 ♥ 9 8 ♦ K 6 4 3 ♣ A Q 9 5</p>
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If East opens 1♣, South has an easy 2♥ weak jump overcall – yes, it would be nice to add the ten to the main suit, but the overall hand is OK for the bid. West may compete with 3♣ if the opening bid promised four cards, or may double. It shouldn't matter, as North has enough to go on to 3♥ over whatever partscore E/W attempt to play.

Where East opens a weak NT, I would expect South to overcall 2♥. Yes, the hand is minimum for any action, but the hand with some shape has to take risks occasionally – if South passes, he can't expect North to come in with a flat 13 HCPs, yet the hand belongs to N/S.

North should give South some leeway, appreciating that the first priority is to compete the partscore, not get to game. Three top tricks plus trump support is enough for a raise, but only invitationally, to 3♥, which ends the auction and makes an easy +140.

If East opens 1NT and South passes, we see the importance of South getting involved in the auction. True, 1NT should be down a trick after a heart lead, but this is matchpoints, and the difference between +140 and only +50 could be a substantial one.

### Board 19. E/W. Dealer South

<p>♠ J 8 5 ♥ A J 3 2 ♦ Q 8 7 5 ♣ Q 9</p> <p>♠ 6 4 3 2 ♥ Q 7 6 ♦ 4 3 ♣ A J 7 6</p>	<p>♠ A Q ♥ K 8 4 ♦ A K 2 ♣ K 8 5 3 2</p> <p>♠ K 10 9 7 ♥ 10 9 5 ♦ J 10 9 6 ♣ 10 4</p>
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There will be three passes to East, who opens 1♣ and rebids 2NT over the 1♠ or 2♣ response. As an aside, if playing Acol, where 1♣ almost always delivers at least a four-card suit, raising to 2♣ rather than bidding that puny spade suit is a perfectly sensible option – if opener is strong and has four spades, 2♠ will be his next bid.

Anyway, however the auction has started, when East shows 18-19 balanced, West goes on to game.

South has a normal diamond lead. Say that declarer wins immediately and picks up the clubs without loss – it isn't that the odds are hugely in favour of playing for an even split, but there is nothing about the deal to suggest that declarer should not play in simple fashion.

After cashing some clubs, declarer will play on hearts to ensure his ninth trick, and the defenders are likely to clear the diamonds. Nine tricks cannot be prevented, but neither can declarer force a tenth. That is not to say, however, that nobody will come to an overtrick, as the defenders do have to be careful with their discarding, and South must not be left to lead spades round to the ace-queen.

### Board 20. All. Dealer West

<p>♠ J 10 ♥ A K 5 4 ♦ A 8 ♣ 10 7 5 3 2</p> <p>♠ A Q 7 3 ♥ 10 7 6 ♦ K Q 9 6 3 ♣ 9</p>	<p>♠ 8 4 2 ♥ J 9 3 ♦ J 7 4 2 ♣ Q 6 4</p> <p>♠ K 9 6 5 ♥ Q 8 2 ♦ 10 5 ♣ A K J 8</p>
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West opens 1♦ and North has opening values but the wrong shape to come in – I'm not a fan of four-card overcalls except with exceptional hands.

If East passes, South will double and North perhaps cuebid 2♦ then follow through with 2NT over South's 2♠ response. As that sequence suggests opening values, South will go on to game. A diamond lead establishes the defence's suit immediately, so the contract is dependent on declarer playing for clubs to be three-one. While West is known not to have a balanced hand within his agreed NT range, that is the only clue, and he could certainly be balanced outside that range. It's a guess, and those who get it right and make 10 tricks can feel pleased with themselves.

But suppose that East scrapes up a raise to 2♦, entirely reasonable if the 1♦ opening promised diamonds. South doubles, North cuebids, then bids 3NT over South's 3♠. This may look to be the same situation again, but there is a subtle difference. This time East has admitted to sufficient values to justify a response, yet has not responded in a major. Yes, some might make the kind of weak raise I mentioned on the previous deal, but most players bid a major if they have got one. Think it through; if East has four diamonds but no four-card major, he will have to have three clubs, won't he? Declarer therefore wins the diamond, cashes a top club, then comes to hand to take the almost marked club finesse, and has 10 tricks. It's a case of the dog that didn't bark in the night.

### Board 21. N/S. Dealer North

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

North has one of the more obvious 4♠ openings, and there are two passes to West. With a solid six-card suit and six-four shape, West has to bid something and, while a take-out double is just about a possibility, the practical action is to overcall 5♥. If that turns a plus score into a minus, so be it.

On this occasion, however, 5♥ is very much a winning action. If it ends the auction, there will be two clubs, one spade and one diamond to be lost – South, annoyingly, being able to overruff the fourth diamond.

Minus 300 is a big improvement on what happens if West does not bid, when it takes three rounds of diamonds to prevent the overtrick in 4♠.

Not many will be allowed to play in 4♠, but I wonder how many Norths, with significant extra distribution, will take the push to 5♠ over 5♥? If East leads partner's bid suit, North will get away with it, just losing two diamonds. If East finds the more dynamic but riskier lead of the ace of diamonds, West encourages, and 5♠ is down one.

### Board 22. E/W. Dealer East

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

It is impossible to guess where the bidding is going to stop on this deal, where E/W can make 6♥ but N/S have a cheap save in 6♠

doubled against an opposing game, costing only –500.

East will usually open 1♣, as this hand would be very unwieldy to show after a strong artificial opening. South is three-suited but a bit weak for a double, so may overcall 1♦, and West double to show both majors. That should not dissuade North from introducing his spade suit, and now East has any number of ways forward. That includes the 'clever' bid of 3♠, splinter bid agreeing hearts by inference, but also more mundane bids like 4♥, though the hand is a bit good for that.

The interest in the play comes when E/W get to 6♥. Let's look at it played by East on the lead of the king of diamonds.

East wins the ace of diamonds, no doubt wishing he was playing a level higher, and leads a low heart to the queen, carefully playing a top honour from the hand with two of them to cater to a four-nil split either way round. North discards a diamond.

On many auctions, South will have overcalled 1♦, supported spades, and now turned up with four hearts. There is a serious danger that clubs will prove to be five-nil – as is actually the case. In that case, straightforward play will leave declarer a trick short.

Unable to ruff out the clubs as he cannot first draw trumps, declarer requires a squeeze. He ruffs a spade then gives up a diamond. Say that South wins and plays another diamond; declarer ruffs, cashes the ♥K, then leads a heart to the ten and cashes the queen of hearts. That last heart squeezes North, who is down to five clubs and the ace of spades. Whichever suit he unguards gives declarer the twelfth trick he is seeking.

### Board 23. All. Dealer South

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

There is the potential for back-to-back slams for E/W here, with 6♣ on the diamond guess,

or possibly slightly better on a non-diamond lead.

West will open 1♠ and raise the 2♣ response to 3♣. East bids 3♥ and West completes the picture of his hand by bidding 3NT to show the diamond stopper. Now East is at the crossroads. If playing Acol, the raise to 3♣ implied a near minimum opener, so is a flat 17-count enough to look for slam? At IMPs it would be easy, as East could make a slam try then stop in 5♣ if necessary, but at matchpoints 5♣ could be a disaster with 10 or 11 tricks available in NT. Perhaps the best way forward is to raise 3NT to 4NT, a natural invitation. With a minimum hand, West can pass that out, while if he is suitable for slam he can jump to 6♣ to offer a choice of slams.

After the normal diamond lead, there are 11 tricks in NT, but no prospect of a twelfth as the cards lie. As for 6♣, a diamond lead is normal on the auction and this is a classic time for South to underlead the ace without declarer having any reason to be suspicious. This underlead will be successful far more often than not, while of course leading the ace solves all of declarer's problems.

And if South leads a non-diamond and declarer needs to play on diamonds himself? On an auction which seems to ask for a diamond lead, South would surely have led one had he held the queen and not the ace, so his failure to lead the suit suggests that he has the ace, and declarer should play accordingly.

#### Board 24. None. Dealer West

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

This time it is N/S's turn to have a possible slam.

Playing Acol, it starts 1♠ – 2♣ – 2♥, and South is way too good for a raise to game, but not good enough to take control by asking for key-cards. So it is necessary to go through fourth-suit-forcing, 3♦, and bid 4♥ over North's 3NT response. That shows four-card heart support

in a hand that was too good to bid 4♥ on the previous round. Should North go on over 4♥? Well, he does have three aces, even if the hand is otherwise close to a minimum.

Those playing two-over-one GF have a much easier time of it, with a raise of 2♥ to 3♥ forcing and setting up a possible slam hunt and saving a whole level of bidding for that slam hunt. If we ignore the possibility of playing serious or non-serious 3NT here, just simple cuebidding sees North bid 3♠, South 4♣, and North 4♦. If partner was willing to co-operate and has the spade and diamond aces, South is likely to drive to slam from here.

There are decisions to be made regarding possible finesses in all three side-suits, but one of those may be solved by the opening lead, with East as likely as not to choose the unbid suit, a diamond, which nicely picks up the queen for declarer. With four diamond tricks in the bag, declarer can concede a trick to either black king and have 12 safe tricks.

A trump lead is more demanding, but declarer can still get home. One plausible line is to win the heart and take the spade finesse. That loses to the king, but only one ruff is needed to establish the suit, and declarer is left to guess which minor-suit finesse to take for the twelfth trick.

#### Board 25. E/W. Dealer North

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

With or without a defensive ruff, there are two club losers in a heart contract. However, with the spade finesse working, N/S are cold for 4♥.

The fact that the spade finesse is working for N/S means that the ace is offside for E/W, which means that 5♦ has to fail by a trick. That is OK, however, as even the adverse vulnerability does not prevent this from being a paying sacrifice. And then, of course, there is the possibility that if E/W bid to 5♦ N/S may misjudge and go on to 5♥, when E/W are rewarded with a plus score.

When North opens 1♥, East is some way short of having a vulnerable two-level overcall. Is the South hand worth a splinter bid? It's close and some will certainly make one, particularly if facing a known five-card major.

If South only raises to 3♥, West has an easy 4♦ overcall, and that sees east go on to 5♦ over 4♥.

If South bids a 4♦ splinter, West can double, but will that be sufficient to persuade East to bid 5♦? Maybe not, with two low in each major. After all, the double might be as much about attracting a diamond lead as about a serious suggestion to play in the suit.

And finally, if South raises directly to 4♥, will West have the nerve to overcall 5♦ at this vulnerability? I would not, as two down is very bad and partner does not often have such a suitable hand.

### Board 26. All. Dealer East

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

West's attitude towards east's 3♦ opening will depend to a considerable extent on what he has seen his partner open 3♦ with on previous occasions, allowing for the vulnerability, of course.

On this occasion, East has a near minimum hand for a vulnerable pre-empt, but the hands fit well together and 6♦ is an easy make. On a bad day, 3NT might not be making if the diamonds aren't running.

Nobody has really good ways to explore slam possibilities facing a three-level opening, and certainly not that allow the partnership to stop in 3NT after looking for slam. I think that the practical bid with the West cards is to check that partner does have one of the missing key-cards and, when he confirms that he does, just blast 6♦ and hope for the best. The defender will have a blind lead and, sometimes, even when slam is unsuccessful, 3NT might also be doomed to failure.

### Board 27. None. Dealer South

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

Having held 20 HCP on the previous deal, West follows up with 21 on this one, and duly opens 2NT.

It is far from clear that a five-three spade fit will provide an extra trick, even should one exist – East has sufficient high-card strength that he could even be tempted to just raise to 3NT and forget about a major-suit fit. However, a five-four spade or four-four heart fit will often produce that crucial extra trick, so East should use whatever version of Stayman his partnership favour. If that is simple four-card Stayman, West will respond 3♥ and East raise to game – I would be very concerned about having such a weak five-card side-suit so would not contemplate a slam hunt. If playing five-card Stayman of some kind, West will reply 3♣, showing at least one four-card major. In the version I play, East now bids 4♦, both majors but without slam interest, and West sings off in 4♥.

Despite the combined 30 HCP, there is indeed an extra trick available in the four-four heart fit, 11 as opposed to 10 in NT, so using Stayman is the winning action.

### Board 28. N/S. Dealer West

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

I would not open the North hand with its empty main suit and bare 11-count. Opening 1♥ and sometimes having to rebid that suit is unattractive, while opening a weak NT just looks wrong.

South will open a strong NT if playing one, and North will transfer then jump to 3Nt to offer a choice of games. With every suit covered and no ruffing value, South may judge to play it in 3NT, against which West will, presumably, lead a diamond.

South will regret the decision to play in NT, as it looks as though 4♥ would have been much more comfortable and might have led to an overtrick. There is little point in ducking the diamond so South wins and plays a heart, and the fortunate heart position means that he has five heart tricks and, a little later, he discovers that he also has a fourth club winner. The spade is offside but, unless he gets greedy and finesses the jack and east has bared it to keep a diamond winner, there are 12 tricks and an excellent matchpoint score.

It may seem that the same 12 tricks are also available in a heart contract and, yes, they are, but not everyone will take them.

In 3NT, and with diamonds already established against him, declarer had little option but to get lucky in the heart suit, but playing in hearts, also on a diamond lead, if declarer starts hearts by playing the king, down comes an honour on his right. Is it automatic to cash the ace of hearts next, bringing down the other missing honour, or might some declarers make a safety play to guarantee only one heart loser if West started with honour-nine-to-four, leading the ♥4 to dummy's eight? That would certainly be the correct play at IMP scoring, as it guarantees the contract, and it is by no means a crazy play at matchpoints.