



**Message from
José Damiani,
President, World Bridge Federation**

It seems incredible that this is the 20th edition of the World Wide Bridge Contest!

Some of you, I am sure, will remember when it all started, sponsored by Epson Computers. There have been many changes since that first edition, mainly owing to the technology that is now available to us.

That first time we had to hear of the high scores via fax and telephone and it was a long time before a full and final result was available as we relied on the postal services to get the information to us for us to re-key all the names and scores - a time-consuming and thankless task.

Now, thanks to the advances we have made, your club can enter their own scores as soon as you finish play, and upload them to the server where they are immediately added to all the other scores coming from clubs all over the world, and re-scored across the whole field. You can watch on www.ecatsbridge.com and have the fun and excitement of seeing the results come in and change as new ones are uploaded and the whole event can be finalised within a very short period.

By the time you read this, the final preparations for the World Championships in Verona will be underway, as the events all start on 9th June, much earlier in the year than normal. You can watch the Vu-Graph presentations of many of the events through internet, as well as getting all the results and the Daily Bulletins - just log on to www.worldbridge.org or www.worldbridgehouse.com for all the latest information, which I am sure you will find interesting.

Now I would like to thank you — the bridge players, who come and play in this event, and enjoy what might be called the "lighter" side of bridge — not a major Championship but a light-hearted and fun event, played amongst your own friends at your own club but competing against the rest of the participating clubs world wide! It just proves that we can all enjoy ourselves while indulging in our wonderful sport of Bridge ... and at the same time, show that we all follow the spirit of the WBF Motto -

Bridge for Peace

José Damiani
President



Commentator:
Eric Kokish

Born:
Montreal, Canada
May 19, 1947

Married Beverly
Kraft, his childhood
sweetheart, in 1986.

Son Matthew, two dogs: Lady (Golden Retriever) and Jackie Robinson (Black Labrador); Kitten - called Kitten!

Residence: Toronto

Eric learned bridge at High School and has been fascinated by the game ever since. He has made his mark on bridge in several areas. He served in administration, as president of Unit 151 (Montreal); as District 1 judiciary chairman in the Seventies and Eighties, as a Canadian Bridge Federation board member and as a member of the ACBL Goodwill Committee.

Eric is a former editor of the Unit 151 newsletter, author of a weekly bridge column in the Montreal Gazette from 1977 to 1997, has been a principal contributor to most world championship books since 1979, directs the Master Solvers Club and Challenge the Champs for the *Bridge World* magazine, has been editor of the *World Bridge News* since 1994 and has contributed to bridge magazines and bulletins around the world as well as doing VuGraph commentary

at many World and International events.

Kokish is also the author of several conventions, including the Kokish Relay and the Montreal Relay. In 1980, he won a Bols Brilliancy prize and the ROMEX award for the best bid hand of the year.

Although he has not played frequently of late, Kokish is still among the top all-time Canadian players. He has won two North American championships – the Vanderbilt Knockout Teams and the Men's Board-a-Match Teams. He has earned two silver medals in international play – in the World Open Pairs in 1978 and the Bermuda Bowl in 1995 and has finished third three times in the Rosenblum Cup.

As a coach, Kokish has earned a reputation as one of the best. His latest success was as coach of the Nick Nickell squad, which won the 2000 Bermuda Bowl in Bermuda and the 2003 Bermuda Bowl in Monaco. In the past year Eric has coached the Russian and Chinese teams and members of the Egyptian team and this year is coaching teams and pairs using the excellent play records from Bridge Base Online, which provide for a whole new and effective coaching environment.

In 1997, after several working visits to Indonesia, he was invited by the Indonesian government to coach the national teams in Jakarta, following which he and Beverly settled in Toronto.

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will be awarded to **100th place** for the 2003 Simultaneous Pairs - see the Master Points Website at:

www.wbfmasterpoints.com

for full details of the awards.

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most lucrative contract. In any suit contract, repeated diamond leads will often present some control problems, and West simply lacks the information to choose the final contract with any degree of confidence. If East would normally raise spades directly with three, he might try 2♠ over 2♥, suggesting 2=5=1=5 or 2=5=2=4 (no diamond guard) with extra values. That's somewhat complex, however, and 3♠ will be the popular choice for East over 2♥.

Here, with hearts three-three and the honours split, 4♥ produces a painless 11 tricks if declarer plays the hand "wide open," accepting forces in diamonds and crossing to dummy twice to take trump finesses. In spades, declarer can be held to 10 tricks on a diamond lead and a switch to trumps or hearts. If South were to persist in diamonds, declarer would be able to come to 11 tricks by ruffing, coming to the ♣J, ruffing another diamond, and leading high clubs through South, over-ruffing appropriately to cash ace-king of trumps, cross to the ♥A, and use dummy's clubs to discard red cards as North follows helplessly to the fourth club while South is out of trumps.

As it's easy enough to miss game and some E/W pairs will go minus, or drift off into notrump, to their detriment, those who manage +620 should score well, +650 particularly well.

Board 36. Game All. Dealer West.

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

The session concludes with a partscore deal that might prove very quiet or a pitched battle. It's E/W's hand for nine tricks in either major as N/S can't make anything higher than 2♦, although they will often compete to 2NT or three of a minor and might even get higher in

certain circumstances (see below)

Many things might happen:

- 1♦-INT///
- 1♦-INT-2♣/2♦ (majors by agreement)-2NT/// ... or West might compete to 3♠, which South might double
- 1♦-INT-2m/2♥ (majors)-Double; 2♠-Pass-Pass-2NT/// or South might double 2♠
- INT-Double-2♥-Double/2NT///
- INT-Double-2♣ (Stayman)-Double; 2♠-Pass-Pass-Double/2NT; Pass-3♣/// or Pass-Pass-3♠-Pass-Pass-Double/Pass
- 1♠-Pass-2♠-Pass; Pass-2NT (two suits)-3♠///
- 1♠-Pass-3♠ (pre-emptive)/// or North might reopen with 3NT (minors), leading to N/S 4♣ or 4♦///

N/S might be disappointed to fail at INT on a major-suit lead, or at 3♣/3♦, but might score quite well for -100 if others fail by two tricks in 2NT, or go -140, -670, or -730 defending 2♠ or 3♠, perhaps doubled. In any case, this deal offers plenty of opportunity to compete effectively and to exercise judgement, a fitting conclusion to a lively session.

Checking your Scores

Please check your scores carefully when they go up on the site at www.ecatsbridge.com and contact your local heat organiser quickly if there are any errors - we aim to finalise the Contest very quickly following the event, and then no further corrections can be accepted.

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Board 1. Love All. Dealer North.

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

Although the North hand contains only 2 controls (ace=2, king=1) and a potentially useless heart holding, most tournament players will open it while the price is right. After 1♣-pass-1♠, it will occur to West that he, too, ought to take some action before the auction gets away from him, choosing from among double, 1NT, 2NT, 2♣ and 2♠, depending on which of these options is available in his partnership. For so-called "standard" partnerships, INT and 2♠ would be natural, 2♣ as likely to be natural as artificial takeout. A bulky jump to 2NT or a 2♣ cue-bid might well silence North, but otherwise he will raise to 2♠ and South will compete to 3♣ (if he devalues his ♥K and inferior minor-suit distribution), or perhaps try for game via 3♥ over a three-level action (3♦ or a mildly ambiguous 3♣ cue-bid or competitive double) by East. That's the best that N/S can do, and plus 140 will be a fairly common result.

However, East has a very good hand opposite a partner willing to introduce a red two-suiter, and might well compete to 4♦ or perhaps double 3♣ for penalty, a much more aggressive move. As West would have no reason to take out a penalty double, there will be some plus 530's in the N/S column. Where East competes to 4♦, South might well double to protect his side's equity in 3♣. In a pure bridge context, passing out 4♦ is not a productive strategy if you believe you can make 3♣: if you feel you have a decent chance to beat 4♦, you should double it, and if you don't, you might as well compete to 4♠ and go down 50 or 100 (doubled), both of which will be better than minus 130. In this scenario, it's more likely that South will double 4♦ than pass or go on to 4♠.

To take nine tricks in spades, declarer might have to ruff a heart high, but it will often not come to that.

The play in diamonds might be much more interesting, depending on whether the opening lead is a spade, a club, or a trump and on North's continuation upon winning an early heart trick. If the defenders never lead trumps, declarer can make all eight trumps separately to go with his two aces. On a club lead, the defenders can take a club ruff and play a trump, but declarer will have time to establish his long heart and draw trumps.

If the defenders start spades, but switch to trumps from the North side (after declarer ruffs and ducks a heart), declarer will have to be very sharp to get home. The successful line is to win an honour in East and play heart ace, ruffing high whether or not North uppercuts with the ♦9. Declarer finesses the ♦10, draws South's remaining trump, forcing North to part with a spade to keep four clubs. By now declarer has a shrewd idea of the distribution, and can get home by playing North for the king, queen and nine of clubs. He must lead the ♣8. North has no good answer: his best play to prevent declarer from taking three club tricks is to play a major honour. Declarer takes the ♣A and leads a second club to the ten. North must duck, but with two club tricks secured, declarer concedes a heart and takes the long heart when he ruffs South's spade continuation.

On a trump lead and continuation, declarer can take one heart ruff in East and start on clubs, and develop a second trick there. He will have time to concede a heart to establish the fifth heart.

It's far more likely that the declarers in diamonds will take 10 tricks than nine, and if I'm right about the strategic considerations, E/W plus 510 (4♦ doubled making) will be more common than E/W plus 130 (or plus 110). If that is so, the N/S pairs who go minus 50 or -100 in 4♠ may not fare too badly.

If North does not open as dealer, there is some chance the deal will be passed out and a greater chance that N/S will buy the contract in 2♠ or 3♠ after South opens 1♠ in third seat

or overcalls a light 1♣ opening by East with 1♠. Should East be able and willing to open a weak notrump in second seat, E/W will first try to stop in 2♥ (plus 110 being the par result in that strain) and then in 3♦ if South overcalls or protects. At these tables N/S are likely to compete to 3♠, where they might well buy the contract. The usual Pairs considerations will apply should they compete to 4♦.

Board 2. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

This is likely to be everyone's 3NT, E/W, whether or not West shows his heart shortness and length in the minors (East's heart holding is terrible for suit play in that context).

Where South leads a high or low heart to North's ace, declarer will lose a diamond and take the club finesse for 11 easy tricks. If North covers the ♥10 with the jack, however, declarer will have to work harder, and may have to find the ♠Q for his eleventh winner. Although North comes under pressure on the run of the diamonds, declarer will not always be able to read the position with confidence.

Not every South will lead a heart from that near-yarborough. Indeed, many will consider the "rote" lead a hopeless proposition; those who look elsewhere will usually choose a spade, preferring a major on auctions that do not involve Stayman. That will make life relatively easy for declarer.

Those unfortunate E/W pairs who manage only plus 430 in notrump or plus 400 in diamonds or (shudder) minus 50 in 5♣ will score very poorly as plus 460 E/W will be by far the most frequent result.

Board 3. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

If North had the ♥10, 6NT would be a highly desirable contract, but without it, N/S need hearts three-three or the ten-nine doubleton, and with only 30 combined HCP and a solid nine-card spade fit, it's hard to imagine anyone thinking seriously of trying for the extra 10 points in notrump. The central issue will be reaching slam.

If South opens 2♣ and North can show an ace (with a control-showing response), five-five in the majors (via Stayman or a transfer sequence after South rebids in notrump), and slam interest, South will drive to 6♠, perhaps with a fleeting but soon-to-be-dismissed thought about 6NT. A positive response of 2♠ will achieve the same result, perhaps via a direct Blackwood.

For partnerships lacking sophisticated machinery over a 2NT "family" opening, all will be well after a simple forcing 3♠ reply, as South will either take charge himself or try an advance cue bid of 4♣ or 4♦, which will extract a 4♥ slam try from North and segue into Blackwood. After a Stayman 3♣ and a 3♠ reply, North will need to do more than raise to 4♠. A popular treatment in North America is to bid 4♥ (which can't be just hearts) to indicate slam interest in spades, but other actions, such as 5♠ or a 5♣ splinter, will also work well.

If South considers his hand too strong for a 2NT rebid over a potentially weak 2♦ response, a jump to 3NT will test the partnership's methods, but it's difficult to imagine North not driving to slam. And those who can describe a balanced game force without going past 2NT will have plenty of room to investigate.

who pass originally will come in with a major-suit takeout bid after 1♦-Pass-INT, and here too the possibilities are similar to what might transpire in uncontested auctions. It's not likely that E/W will stop to double 2♠ (-100, perhaps 300) if given the opportunity.

To make 3NT, declarer must duck the first spade if the scenario materializes. That effectively cuts N/S's communications, and declarer has time for six diamonds and one of each. In some variations, declarer will have time for a second club trick and a spectacular +430. With many pairs bulling their way into game and some playing notrump partscores, the "normal" +130 in diamonds might score disappointingly.

Board 34. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

E/W belong in a partscore in notrump (anywhere from -50 to +150) or clubs (+110 or +90) and will most often get the job done uncontested:

1♣/1♦*/1♥-1♠; INT//,
INT//,
1♣-1♠; INT-2♣/3♣///.

A major variation will occur at some of the tables where West passes East's weak notrump opening and North protects with a bid that shows length in both majors. Whatever South does after that (pick a major or relay with 2♦ for North's longer major after a Landy 2♣), N/S are headed for at least -200, usually -500 or more, depending on E/W's willingness or systemic facility to double two of a major for penalty or convert a cooperative takeout double to penalty. E/W will score well even if they pass out 2♥ or 2♠ in this scenario, but competing to

2NT or 3♣ would not only waste a golden opportunity but would also place them in some modest jeopardy of going minus in their own contract.

With N/S silent, South will usually lead a low diamond against a notrump contract, and declarer will need to get the clubs right to achieve a respectable result. If he does find the ♣Q he will almost certainly come to at least one heart trick, and might even be permitted to take nine tricks.

For example, say that declarer takes the third diamond, picks up the ♣Q, and runs the suit, North discarding a low card in each major. When declarer calls for the ♥Q North must follow with the ten, hardly the intuitive play: if North takes the ♥Q with an honour and switches to a spade, declarer wins in dummy and leads a second heart towards his hand, finishing with two spades, two hearts, four clubs and a diamond for +150.

Any E/W minus score will be dreadful, and +90 might not be good enough, given the number of ways N/S might go wrong in the bidding or play and the real possibility that many declarers will guess clubs correctly.

Board 35. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

Where East is left to open 1♥ in fourth seat, the bidding will develop, uncontested:

1♥-1♠; 2♣-2♥; 3♣-? If East has two spades, West is worth 4♥, with all four of his cards in hearts and clubs and both spade honours likely to be useful, and it's possible that 4♠ would be the best game.

If East is short in spades, however, it's not clear whether 3♥, 3NT or 4♥ would be the

South should give his partner some leeway. If South cue-bids to suggest a fit and at least game-invitational strength (or a game force without support), North should admit to holding opening-bid strength by bidding something other than 2♠. Most N/S pairs will reach 4♠ after this start.

Where West starts with a weak notrump, North will not often pass, and will usually have an appropriate two-suited bid at his disposal. Although North limits his hand by not doubling 1NT, it's common strategy in many countries (although not in the UK) to treat direct actions versus the weak notrump as somewhat constructive, so Souths of that persuasion will either move towards game or bid one (usually 4♠), brushing aside any obstruction in hearts tendered by East.

It takes a heart lead to hold spade contracts to 10 tricks: killing the fast entry to dummy forces declarer to ruff a heart as he can't develop a club winner to discard a heart early enough for it to be useful. Once declarer takes a heart ruff, West can cover the ♠J whenever it is led, and the defence gets two spade tricks to go with the ♣A. On a minor-suit lead, declarer can knock out the ♣A if necessary, cash a club to discard a heart when in dummy with the ♥A, and lead a low trump, playing the ten if West follows low. Later, the ♠A will drop the king, and dummy can be entered with the ♠J, drawing East's last trump. Declarer has time and security to pick up West's ♦K. As the heart lead is quite normal, there will be many more +420s than +450s for N/S.

Although 3NT is a less attractive game for N/S, some pairs will reach that game contract. With hearts six-three, declarer can get home with 10 tricks by playing on diamonds early (managing the internal diamond entries carefully) and guessing spades correctly (low to the ten, but if he places East with six hearts, he could go wrong in spades by leading low towards the jack).

After ducking one round of hearts, declarer will have time for a club trick, late in the day. Should N/S reach 5♦ they will have little difficulty making it, but to score well they'll need to have many of their counterparts miss game.

Board 33. Love All. Dealer North.

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

Even if E/W have the auction to themselves they may not reach their thin but unbreakable 3NT. Stretching to this type of game at Matchpoints is not a winning strategy, as the game bonus is not sufficiently significant to risk going minus rather more often than plus where most will settle for a safe partscore.

After Pass-1♦-Pass; INT-Pass, East will choose from among 2♦, 3♦, and 2♥. Few will pass 1NT, although that might be the winning action. Although East has something in reserve for 2♦, it's practical to settle for the minimum rebid as West will often raise when game is a good contract.

Meanwhile, those who choose stronger rebids are likely to reach game. If East tries 3♦, West will bid either a hopeful 3NT or a careful but not perfect 3♠, stopper showing. In auctions of this type, responder is presumed to have a club guard as he will normally have at least four cards in that suit, so the focus is on major-suit stoppers. East, with hearts stopped, some help for clubs, and fast tricks, will bid 3NT over 3♠. Where East reverses to 2♥, West will bid 2NT or 3NT, according to style and agreement, with the former leaving open the possibility of finishing in 3♦.

Some North players who have an opening bid to show a weak major two-suiter will use their gadget (typically a 2♦ or 2♥ opening). Over East's 3♦, South might risk 3♠, but opposite some of the typical weak openings, pass would be more discreet. West will pass 3♦, take a shot at 3NT, or show his spade stopper, with the same denouement as the one outlined in the preceding paragraph. A few hardy Norths

Although a few pairs will not come to grips with their potential, this is going to be a deal that most N/S pairs will bid to 6♠ for +980. Those who "blunder" into 6NT (for they would not do so deliberately if they could see one another's hands) will score a joint top for +990 and leave their opponents grumbling.

Board 4. Game All. Dealer West.

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

West players who have an opening bid of 2♥ to describe a modest hand with at least five-(four) in hearts and another suit will see this as a good way to start the ball rolling, intending to bid diamonds next at virtually any level. Others will open a natural weak 2♥, a creative 3♥ or 4♥, or settle for a pass, intending to show a two-suiter later.

If West passes, North might do likewise, leaving East to open 2♠ (weak) or a Multi 2♦. South might double either opening, 2♠ for takeout, 2♦ to show at least moderate strength and a relatively balanced hand. Trying to predict what will happen next in these two scenarios is somewhat daunting, but one can imagine North declaring 3NT and making it on a spade lead or defending 2♠ doubled, down 800 West waiting a moment too long to get his suits into the picture.

Ah, but those are obscure scenarios. It's much more likely that West will make a start on his suits and finish in a quiet heart partscore or 4♥ doubled, driven there on momentum if South gets his side into the bidding. Unless the defence gets in two timely rounds of trumps, West gets a diamond ruff in dummy and can come to 11 tricks, provided he doesn't over-ruff the third diamond and lead a heart to the eight. Whether there are more E/W plus 170s, 200s, 620s, 650s, 790s or 990s may vary dramatically

from one venue to the next, and there will also be some plus 850s for 5♥ doubled making.

Less popular will be N/S 5♣ and 4♠, the latter doubled more often than the former. 5♣ can be held to 9 tricks if the defence starts diamonds, takes a spade ruff, and plays a third diamond to kill the heart discard from North. A heart lead allows declarer to draw trumps and take 10 tricks. Spade contracts would seem to be pretty grisly but it would not be surprising for declarer to negotiate eight tricks by cashing three rounds of clubs relatively early and seeing East succumb to a couple of endplays in trumps. Apart from the aforementioned rare plus 600 in 3NT when N/S declare, the scores will include plus 130, minus 100, minus 200, and minus 500.

This deal will inspire plenty of heated discussion in the post mortem, as six-six hands tend to do, and we can expect some interesting tales of woe and psychological coups. Enjoy!

Board 5. N/S Vul. Dealer North.

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

Whether North opens 1♦ or 1♣ will depend on system (strong club) or judgement (particularly high standards for a reverse), but East will overcall 1♠ or 2♠ (intermediate) or perhaps double for takeout, regardless, unless his methods call for a pass or conventional action over an artificial opening bid.

Where 1♠ comes around to North, he'll reopen with a takeout double and East will compete to 2♠ sooner or later, perhaps after a redouble to show his strength. If South is given room to introduce hearts at the two level, his side should be able to resist competing to 3♥, which is a favourite to go two down for a dreadful score even if not doubled. Unless North opens

1♦, N/S will rarely compete to 3♦, which can be set only one trick, an excellent score for the stationary pair unless E/W double: with N/S vulnerable, a sharp penalty double to try for +200 will seem a sensible strategy to E/W to protect their equity of +110.

Where East overcalls 2♠, North's reopening double will land his side in 3♥ or 3♦; if South can scramble with a conventional 2NT, the partnership should finish in 3♦. West might compete to 3♠, which is slated to go one down (there are several likely variations in the play and defence of a spade contract, and declarer can always come to eight tricks but not a ninth) for a disastrous E/W score, whether or not N/S double. If East starts with a takeout double of either minor, he will bid spades later at the one or two level, and hope that West doesn't take him seriously.

A likely scenario features South leading the ♣2 against a spade contract. North wins and switches to a trump to the seven and queen, wins the diamond continuation, and continues with the ♣A. Declarer can ruff high or discard a diamond loser to get home for eight tricks, both plays not particularly difficult to find.

Should E/W find a very rare route to 2♣ (perhaps: 1♦-1♠-Pass-2♣-All pass), best defence holds West to eight tricks for +90. As most E/W pairs will go +110 in 2♠ or at least +100 on defence, those making 2♣ will score poorly.

Board 6. E/W Vul. Dealer East.

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

Thanks to the spectacular lie of the spade suit, there are 11 easy tricks in spades, hearts (if North is left with a high trump, he can ruff in eventually but has no more diamonds and must

lead from the ♠K), or notrump. As virtually no one will bid slam, it might seem reasonable to project +660 as the often-duplicated top E/W score (Pass-3♦-Double-Pass; 3NT-All Pass) and move on to the next deal.

While that might be a practical analysis, it would be incomplete, as a twelfth trick is possible not only in spades (a realistic trump suit that is lying beautifully) but also in hearts (a more obscure strain in which the trumps are five-one). West might reach 4♠ by doubling 3♦ and converting a less-than-enterprising 4♣ response to 4♠, or by overcalling a 4♦ opening with a rather committal 4♠. Finishing in hearts would take a surprising parlay, perhaps East improvising a 3♥ response to West's double of 3♦ with West raising to four.

In 4♠, declarer wins the opening diamond lead with the ace, plays four rounds of trumps and cashes one high heart. He will have a shrewd idea about the diamond layout and might well place North with the ♠K. If North has kept his long heart and discarded a club, declarer plays the CQ and ducks North's king. If North continues clubs, declarer wins, ruffs a club, and returns to the ♥J to cash the established club winner. If North plays a second heart, declarer's communications are disrupted (he could have avoided this by not touching hearts at all), but he recovers by running his remaining major suit winners, squeezing South in the minors; the ♦3 in his hand is the threat card in that suit. If North discards a heart on the fourth round of trumps, declarer plays all his major-suit winners, reducing South to the ♦K and ♣J10. When declarer advances the ♠Q, North, with only clubs remaining, can neither cover (declarer ducks) nor duck (declarer passes the queen). It's worth noting that if declarer places South with the ♠K, he would exit with the ♦3 in this endgame.

The play in hearts is even more interesting (12 tricks can be made even from the East side on a club lead through the queen), but there are too many variations and not enough space available to do the play justice. Anyone taking 12 tricks in hearts without a defensive error is advised to contact his favourite bridge columnist.

N/S can manage seven tricks in diamonds --

issue for him is whether to pass 2♥ and hope to play there, or whether to bid 3♥ (a blocking move) or 3♦ (a game try, in this case feigning strength). Where West passes, North will face a close decision. His hand is not quite worth a second voluntary action, but at Matchpoints no one likes to sell out at the two level when there's any chance of pushing the opponents higher or finding a suitable place to play.

I believe that at the table, a majority of the North players will risk a second double. That will merely have the effect of pushing West to 3♥ over South's 3♣, usually ending the auction, though some aggressive South players might double 3♥ on the strength of their ace in the context of partner's strong bidding. If North treats that double as "values" rather than a trump stack, he might consider removing the double to 4♣ because more than half his strength is concentrated in a suit in which declarer might well be short. That's one way to reach 4♣ -- out of fear that 3♥ doubled might make!

Although E/W +530 in 3♥ doubled and N/S -100 or -50 in 4♣ (doubled or not doubled) will be represented in the frequencies sheets, and a handful of E/W pairs will misjudge their potential and go -50 or 100 in 4♥, there will be sections where the result at virtually every table will be E/W +140.

Board 31. N/S Vul. Dealer South.

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

Wonder of wonders! E/W can make 3NT with a good guess in diamonds and clubs and with the ace-king of hearts in front of the queen. That's nice to know, but completely irrelevant, because not only will E/W never attempt 3NT, but also, they may take no part in the auction.

Although there will be some tables where the deal is passed out, most North players will open 1♣ or 1♥ (or even 1♠) in third seat. After Pass-Pass-1♣-Pass; 1♥, it would not be outrageous for West to double for takeout, but even if West passes, he should reopen with a double if North's raise to 2♥ comes around to him. That might not happen, however, as South might try for game if he can count on North for four-card trump support.

As 2♥ is the limit for N/S, selling out cheaply will not be good for E/W, who can take nine tricks in diamonds or eight in spades by neutralizing South's ♦Q (North might help by leading or switching to his singleton diamond against 2♠).

Where West brings his side into the auction on the second or third round of bidding, South will want to take further action when his opponents try to play in 2♠ or 3♦. While his club fit and chunky hearts speak for competing to 3♥, his balanced hand and general strength suggest that it might be better to try for a plus on defence; indeed, some E/W pairs will play this deal in 2♠ doubled or 3♦ doubled for +470 or -100.

The quiet +110s in 2♥ will score very well for N/S, while those who push or are pushed to 3♥ for -100 will have to hope a significant number of their counterparts double E/W in 2♠ or 3♦ and don't defeat the contract.

Board 32. E/W Vul. Dealer West.

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

After a 1♣ or Precision 1♦ opening by West, North will overcall 1♠, and East will pass. Playing a sound overcall style, South might simply drive to 4♠, but at this vulnerability,

Board 29. Game All. Dealer North.

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

Where East opens a strong notrump in second seat, most West players will invite game in notrump, but some will pass, while others raise to 3NT. When the range is 14-16, however, Easts who do not upgrade their hand to 17 (and start with 1♣) will finish in 1NT.

Where East opens 1♣, natural or strong/artificial, South is likely to introduce spades and North will compete to 2♠, whether or not West finds a call. Where 1♣ is natural, West might try a somewhat atypical raise to 2♣, and some will risk a heart-support-flawed negative double, but pass will be a popular choice. Where 1♣ is strong, West will double to show some non-specific values or make a positive response in diamonds. It's not clear how East will proceed over 2♣ in these different scenarios. The strong clubbers are likely to reach 3NT, but some of the natural bidders might well finish in 3♣.

As N/S are vulnerable, it might occur to E/W to stop to double 2♠, especially if they believe making 3NT their way is a long shot. Best defence against 2♠ is a trump lead by West. Even if declarer calls for dummy's king to freeze the suit temporarily, the defenders have time to arrange a second trump play from West, which will prevent declarer from ruffing a club in dummy. As long as West ducks the ♥K at the relevant moment, South can be held to six tricks. E/W pairs that go +500 or +200 will score very well if most of their counterparts stop in a partscore or go down in 3NT, and 3NT should be defeated much more often than not.

If declarer in 3NT takes North's ♠K with the

ace to play a low diamond (this does not really give up on jack-ten doubleton, as the defence would have to duck the ace twice if spades could not be run), South must duck. Then, if declarer comes to a club to lead a low heart, the defence can prevail whether South ducks or takes the ace, but care is required. Say that South plays low and dummy's ♥K wins; if declarer is sufficiently inspired to work on spades to build a second trick there (simply playing North for the ♠10), South must win the ♠Q to play ace and another heart, taking the ♦A somewhere along the way. If South instead takes the ♥A on the first round, he must resist clearing spades: instead, he must cash the ♦A and play a second heart, which allows the defence to come to two tricks in both red suits and the ♠Q for one down.

As many of these plays by both sides are hardly intuitive (South's activity or silence in the auction will surely be a factor), 3NT will sometimes be defeated when it might have been made, and sometimes be allowed to make when it might have been defeated. That's often the way things go in these 24-point 3NT contracts, which should come as no surprise to anyone who plays an aggressive game.

Board 30. Love All. Dealer East.

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

Par on this deal is 4♣ doubled by N/S, -100. While it's possible that N/S will get together in clubs and do some business, it's not very likely, and at most tables, E/W will buy the contract at 2♥ or 3♥, scoring +140 without incident.

After Pass-Pass-1♥-Double; 2♥-Pass, West realizes that game is beyond reach unless his partnership favours a style that includes raising to 2♥ with two prime cards. The main

eight if the defenders don't find their club ruff -- and will score very well if left to play in three or four diamonds doubled, perhaps even in 5♦ doubled. 4♦-Double-All Pass may prove a popular auction.

South players who consider their hand inappropriate for a second-seat pre-empt and pass will see their opponents reach 4♠. Once South shows up with his pointed-suit honours, declarer will know where the ♠K is located and might just find a way to develop a twelfth trick.

Board 7. Game All. Dealer South.

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

6♥ is excellent for N/S and any sensible line leads to 12 tricks, so the trick is to bid slam. If North responds 1♥ rather than 1♦ to 1♣, as many will (rightly or wrongly), South will raise to 3♥, or (where available) show a similar-strength heart raise with diamond shortage by jumping to 3♦. North has an appropriate hand for Blackwood, especially if his partnership uses a version of Key Card. Here South would show two of five key cards plus the trump queen and North would do the rest: the king-queen of clubs are wasted. Old-fashioned Blackwood would force North to guess the trump situation and so might not be the best theoretical solution, although cue-bidding would also involve some delicate judgement (South should bid slam on the strength of his strong trumps).

Where North responds 1♦ to 1♣, South will rebid 1♥, leaving North with an unusual bidding problem. Old-fashioned Standard American bidders and aficionados of the "Walsh" style (which advocates responding in a four-card major rather than a longer diamond suit with less than opening strength) could jump

to 3♥, forcing, but for everyone else 3♥ would be merely invitational. As 4♥ would suggest a balanced game raise and 4NT would be unduly aggressive, North will have to improvise with 1♠ or 2♠ (different variations on fourth-suit forcing for different partnerships) or try a straightforward, superior 3♠ splinter raise. Once South learns about North's primary heart support and slam interest, he will either take charge with Blackwood or follow a cue-bidding campaign, culminating in 6♥. As this is a slam that nearly everyone will bid, missing it figures to be a matchpoint disaster.

When declarer gains the lead, he should play the ace of trumps, intending to start diamonds next. On hands of this type it's generally best to get the side suit going as early as possible while reserving options on how to handle later ruffs to establish it. When the ♥J appears, he continues with ♦A, diamond ruff with the ♥8, ♥3 to the king, diamond ruff with the ♥Q, (♠A if necessary) spade ruff, and the ♥10 to draw West's last trump. Declarer needs only diamonds no worse than four-two once the ♥J falls, with no need to cash any club tricks with trumps outstanding. The problem in cashing a second high trump (if only small cards appear on the first round) is that it's not clear whether to do so with the king or queen, and either could be wrong. Leaving a high honour in South allows declarer to over-ruff if East is relatively short in diamonds.

Board 8. Love All. Dealer West.

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

Whether West rebids 2♥ or 2♦ in an uncontested auction, it will not be easy for E/W to stop short of game. For example: 1♥-1♠; 2♥-2NT; 3♦ would depict a modest six-

four, but should East pass 3♦ or return to 3♥ (usually the better strategy)? If neither action appeals to him, he might shoot out 3NT as the least-unattractive action with some upside. Or East might jump to 3NT over 2♥, or stall with a forcing 3♣, which would lead to 3♦-3NT.

If West rebids 2♦ rather than 2♥, he is intending to bid hearts again later, but might not do so if East jumps to 3NT, as the strong heart suit and sure side entry might provide plenty of tricks at notrump. As 3NT is neither the world's best nor worst contract, staying out of it would not be a major issue were it not for the comparative-score element: in general, it pays to be in the same contract as the field on routine deals, even if the field's contract of choice is an indifferent one. On a relatively normal club lead, declarer can make 3NT by playing on hearts. Although the defenders clear clubs, declarer is forced to play North for the ♠A to shut out South's club winners, and comes to five hearts, two clubs, a diamond, and a spade. 3NT can be beaten if South stays off the club lead, and at the tables where East bids spades and clubs naturally, South might opt for a passive heart lead, as neither a low spade nor the singleton diamond will seem attractive.

At first glance, it appears that 4♥ will fail on the likely club lead from North, but like 3NT, 4♥ can be made if declarer plays North for the ♠A, something he might well consider more seriously if South volunteers a weak jump overcall in clubs after 1♥-Pass-1♠. To get home, declarer wins the ♣A and starts trumps. When North wins, he continues clubs. Declarer ruffs, finishes trumps, and plays a spade, North playing low. Declarer wins the ♠K and continues spades.

If South wins, he can't play a club with profit, so must lead a spade (declarer discards a diamond and North is endplayed) or a diamond (North sagely puts in the nine, but declarer plays a spade, discarding a diamond); declarer makes 10 tricks in either case. If, instead, North wins the second spade, he can't play a third, as the ♦Q is the entry for a late spade winner, so North must play a diamond. Say that declarer has kept only two diamonds in dummy and

wins with the ♦Q. Now he ruffs a spade and exits in diamonds to collect the ace-jack of diamonds in the end.

Curiously, the only lead to defeat 4♥ legitimately is a diamond. North gives South a diamond ruff when he gains the lead in trumps, and South exits with a spade to the ace. Now a club switch kills the entry to the spades and declarer must lose either a second spade or a diamond.

Those who elect to play in diamonds (there won't be many) can come to nine tricks with careful play and some good guessing, which includes the correct view in spades.

Somewhat unlikely spade contracts can also produce nine tricks, but to achieve that declarer will have to play with considerable inspiration, which starts by winning the ♦A at trick one when South leads his singleton.

If South gets frisky in clubs, E/W may be able to arrange to double for penalties, leading to a 300- or 500-point set, depending on the level of the contract and the defence. Minus 300 might not be too bad if enough E/W pairs bid and make a game, but -500 will be a certain disaster.

This is a complex deal, and although both the most plausible games can be defeated, it's likely that both contracts will be made much of the time, particularly 3NT. As a result, stopping in a successful partscore, while theoretically sound, may yield a poor matchpoint result.

Board 9. E/W Vul. Dealer North.

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

spade. Although that won't happen often, there will be some minus scores for N/S.

Where North declares and receives a diamond lead from the king, it will be easier to negotiate 11 tricks, and a winning view in clubs will produce a twelfth for a N/S top. A passive spade lead will usually lead to a position in which declarer will have to judge whether the third round of diamonds will stand up, and he figures to go wrong.

As many declarers in 3NT will not risk playing for three club tricks once diamonds or spades have been cleared (thus coming to only nine tricks), the declarers in hearts who manage only 10 tricks may not fare too badly, after all.

Board 28. N/S Vul. Dealer West.

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

With the ace-king of hearts in front of North's queen, N/S can make 3NT from the South side even on a passive lead, and West's opening bid should tell declarer how to play the hand. With 24 combined points, they will be thinking about game if given the opportunity to express their values, but with West first to speak, it might not be so easy for N/S to get together in a meaningful way.

Again, West might open in any strain, dictated by system. Where most East players would consider bidding only over 1♠, or perhaps a weak notrump, some would "never" pass any one-bid at this vulnerability. If you're going to respond to 1♣ with the East hand, 1♠ has much more going for it than 1♦: pre-emption, avoiding a second bid after 1♣-1♦; 1♥, perhaps some opening lead considerations.

Will South enter the auction after 1♣/1♦*-Pass-1♠? Risking a strong INT overcall in a live auction is always fraught with danger,

especially vulnerable (when it's so easy to go for 200, even not doubled). If South tries INT, North will invite game or simply bid it, perhaps checking for a four-four heart fit en route. If South passes over the light 1♠ response, West will raise to 2♠. It won't be attractive for South to protect in that scenario, with only three hearts and much of his strength in opener's minor (the nebulous nature of a Precision 1♦ notwithstanding), and 2♠ might well buy the contract. After 1♥-Pass-1♠, South has an attractive alternative to INT in a takeout double, indicating length in both minors. Over West's 2♠, North will have something in reserve for 3♣, but even this humble contract will fail if the defenders find their heart ruff and take two spade tricks. Curiously, N/S can make their thin 3NT, but not their sound 3♣ contract.

Where West starts with a weak notrump, East will pass or do what he can in his methods to wriggle into 2♦ or 2♠. South will double INT, passed around to East, who will escape to 2♦ (although few *delayed* runout methods allow E/W to find their spade fit with any confidence, an imaginative escape to 2♣ might work as long as N/S don't pass that out when they can't make game: when 2♣ is doubled, East can run to 2♦, suggesting diamonds and spades, as with both red suits, he could redouble to ask for a choice between the next two suits - so says my Acol maven).

N/S will be tempted to double 2♦ (down just 100 unless South leads and continues clubs ♠not outrageous♥ or starts with the ♦8 ♠rather more obscure♥) but the vulnerability might well convince them to bid 3NT instead. Reaching game from the right side might not be so straightforward, however, and there will be some N/S -200s gracing the score slips, East leading a realistic spade rather than an optimistic diamond.

As E/W can make 2♠ and N/S can find ways to go minus by declaring, +150 for 2NT+1 might yield a reasonable score. Pairs bidding and making what they might deem a normal 3NT will discover that there are no better scores than their +600. Oh, perhaps a handful of +630s at the tables where West allows declarer to score both the ♠K and the ♥Q.

Board 26. Game All. Dealer East.

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

Although Easts who play strong club systems or favour a very aggressive opening style will open 1♠, or perhaps a specialized two-bid to introduce both majors, at most tables South will enjoy the luxury of opening 1NT, 1♣, or 1♠, according to system. The strong notrumpers will coast into 3NT (North should raise to game on the strength of his intermediates, even with two unexciting jack-third suits). The 1♣ openers will conduct either a quantitative notrump auction (North responding 1NT), or will sort out their stoppers after a club raise, or will bid 1♣-1♦; 1NT (strong)-3NT, North improvising a 1♦ response to simplify the auction when South has a balanced hand too strong for a 12-14 notrump.

The Acol 1♠ openers might have a more difficult time and will certainly be less comfortable, whether North responds 1NT, 2♣, or 2♠. Raising 1NT to 2NT or finding a suitable continuation over a raise to 2♠ will not appeal to South, who will usually pass. I am informed by my Acol guru that 2♣ is the technical response with this North hand, as the criterion for choosing between a two-over-one response and 1NT is whether responder would rather be in 3NT than 1NT facing a balanced 15-16. Even a 2♣ response might create some anxiety: if 3♣ would not show extra values (and it certainly does not in Acol), South would have to rebid 2NT with no semblance of a heart guard, but even if 3♣ would be forcing, imagine how the bidding might continue.

A 1♣ opening will allow (equally) aggressive Wests to enter the auction with a featherweight overcall in diamonds, but North will raise clubs, and even if East joins in with a responsive

double, N/S should find a way to 3NT. It's possible, however, that a few E/W pairs will buy the contract in 2♦ or 3♦ doubled, for +180 or -200, both of which would be very good scores for them.

3NT will not present any problems: with the spade queen onside, declarer has one diamond trick and four winners in each black suit. If the defenders don't start hearts, there will be time to switch later, after winning a diamond trick. Any variation from N/S +600 will produce an extreme result in the scoring.

Board 27. Love All. Dealer South.

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

When we try to sell Bridge to our alien cousins on Pluto, it might be wise not to use the South hand as an example of a straightforward opening bid. Should said Plutonians examine the worldwide bidding records of this deal, they would find votes for one-level openings in each of the five strains and perhaps a few for a conservative pass.

Although there will be a fair number of pairs that prefer to play in 3NT with these two balanced hands, the majority will choose to finish in 4♥, the optimal strain, at least in theory. At double dummy, declarer can always take 11 tricks in hearts by finessing the ♣10, the same technique he can employ to land 10 tricks in notrump. That's easier said than done, especially where South declares and West leads a diamond, ducked to the king. If East has not mentioned diamonds in the auction, declarer may try to cash a diamond to discard a club and so hold himself to 10 tricks when West ruffs the third diamond. In fact, if declarer plays a trump too early, after taking one spade ruff, he might even go set in 4♥ when West is able to clear trumps, leaving South with a losing

Whether South overcalls in spades (the most sensible approach, with such a disparity in suit quality) or prefers a two-suited action to introduce both majors wholesale, North might well get his side to 3♠ at his first opportunity. With E/W able to make 12 tricks in either minor with a winning guess in clubs, N/S have a paying sacrifice at any level in spades, a strain in which they can take eight tricks. It's not clear, however, that they will compete beyond 4♠, especially if they believe they have forced their opponents to guess.

Some expected auctions:

- Pass-1♣-1♠-Double; 2♠-3♠/3♦/4♦-4♠-Pass; Pass-4NT (secondary diamonds)-5♦-end
- Pass-1♣-1♠-Double; 3♠-4♦-4♠-5♦; Pass-6♦-end
- Pass-1♣-2♣ (majors)-Double; 3♠-4♦-4♠-Pass; Pass-5♣-Pass-5♦; Pass-6♦-end
- Pass-1♣-2♣-Pass; 2♣-Double-3♠-4♠; Pass-5♣-Pass-5♦; Pass-6♦-end
- Pass-1♣-3♠-Double; 4♠-4NT-Pass-5♦; Pass-6♦-end

North might reasonably jump to 5♠ in the last of these auctions, and all the auctions ending at 6♦ might as easily conclude at 5♦.

Where North has shown weakness and at least four spades, South might save against slam, but their -800 will not score well unless at least half the E/W pairs bid and make a slam, taking the right view in clubs.

When South shows up with a singleton diamond and the ♣J appears on the first round, those who rely on the theory of restricted choice will finesse against the ♣Q without much deep reflection, but if South doesn't do too much in the auction, declarer might decide that 6=5=1=1 is less likely than 6=4=2=1 or 5=5=2=1 and talk himself into playing for the drop.

As there won't be many E/W minus scores, N/S pairs conceding only 300 or 500 in spade contracts should score very well. For E/W, taking only 11 tricks in clubs or diamonds will make a significant difference, whether that means +600 or -100.

Board 10. Game All. Dealer East.

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

With both spades and diamonds three-two, E/W can take 12 tricks in spades and will do well to reach their 23-point slam. With the ♦Q offside, 6♦ won't make, so choosing the right strain will be very important, whether E/W bid aggressively to slam or stop in game. At most tables, E/W will have an uncontested auction, and will usually begin: 1♦-1NT; 2♠. As East has denied four spades in most standard systems, he can raise to 3♠ to suggest honour-third with this general shape (otherwise, he would prefer diamonds, the known eight-card fit). If West risks Blackwood, he will soon drive to slam. However, as he would prefer to stop at 4♠ if East lacks a second ace, he might content himself with a four-level rebid in a minor or four hearts (with the latter perhaps less ambiguous than the former about which suit is trumps), expecting East to move forward when he holds the ♥A or ♣A.

In some in-tune, experienced partnerships, it would be enough for West to raise himself to 4♠, suggesting six-five with concentrated values, leaving the rest to East.

As 6♠ will not be reached often, declarer will want to take a few extra moments to find the line of the play that caters to as many of the most common distributions as possible. Say that North leads ace-king of clubs. Declarer ruffs and should cash two high trumps in hand before broaching diamonds. If trumps go four-one, declarer can't afford to ruff a diamond in dummy and his best play would be spade to the ace, diamond to the ten. If that holds, he can draw the last trump, cross to the ♥A, and finesse the ♦J if the queen does not appear.

While this line loses to the singleton queen of diamonds, it gains against all other singletons in North. If both follow to the second trump, declarer starts diamonds, ruffing the third with the ♠A if both follow. He can draw the last trump after ruffing himself in with a heart. This line works also when North has queen-fourth of diamonds and three trumps, as declarer will have a proven ruffing finesse.

With everything breaking, taking 12 tricks will not be an issue, so the spoils will go to the 6♣ bidders, with plenty of +680s on the E/W line and a handful of +600s for 5♦.

Any good news for those who go -100 in 6♦? Well, a few will be in 3NT, down 400!

Board 11. Love All. Dealer South.

<p>♠ A K J 9 8 6 5 2 ♥ K Q 10 6 ♦ 3 ♣ ---</p> <p>♠ Q 10 7 4 ♥ 9 5 4 ♦ A J 9 ♣ 7 6 5</p>	<p>♠ --- ♥ A J 7 3 ♦ K Q 7 5 4 2 ♣ J 8 2</p> <p>♠ 3 ♥ 8 2 ♦ 10 8 6 ♣ A K Q 10 9 4 3</p>
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Some South players will not find an appropriate number of clubs to bid and will start with a pass. Many more will open 1♣, 3♣, 4♣, or a Gambling 3NT. Learning that South holds a raft of clubs with little outside will not impress North, who would be thinking fondly of a slam facing a different sort of South hand. At most tables, North will get himself to 4♣, considering this strategy comfortably conservative. Where South starts with 1♣, North might not stop at game and propel his side to 5♣ or even take a wild shot at six. All these players will be disappointed to discover that even eight tricks are not completely secure in spades.

Whether East is willing to show both his suits or merely his long diamonds, it's not likely that his side will get as high as 5♦ or buy the contract at any level. Diamond contracts declared by East can be held to eight tricks,

but after three rounds of clubs, a spade switch, ruffed, a trump to the ace, and a heart, North must not split his honours for the defence to be assured of a fifth winner. If North is not up to this play, declarer can duck the ♥Q, ruff the spade return high, finesse the ♦9, ruff another spade high, and cross to the ♦J, squeezing North in the majors with a late heart finesse to complete the exercise. While that would require some very pretty play, any auction that would land East in 5♦ doubled might tip declarer off to the distribution. It goes without saying that a piece of brilliant declarer play that allows E/W to escape for -300 in this unlikely sacrifice will not be well-rewarded, as at most other tables N/S will be going minus at least 100 and as much as 800 in spade contracts at the four, five and six levels.

In order to come to eight tricks in spades, North will have to finesse in trumps when West overtakes East's ♦K with the ace to switch to the ♠4 to prevent a heart ruff in dummy. But all of this presupposes that the defenders will not concern themselves with those imposing clubs in dummy. If the defence assumes declarer has a club to reach dummy, its strategy will be rather different. One possibility is to cash as many diamonds as possible (perhaps the auction will indicate that the correct number is one), then (have West) play a club, leaving the defender (East) holding two clubs with a trump to ruff the third high club. That defence works particularly gruesomely on this layout, and declarer could even come to 10 tricks by playing clubs without touching trumps. Another approach is to switch to hearts before trying to kill the clubs.

The bottom line is that it's quite possible for the defence to go wrong: if West does *not* play a trump at trick two, declarer could knock out the ♥A, take a heart ruff in dummy, discard his last heart on a high club, and lose only two spades (no finesse or trump coup possible after this start), a diamond, and a heart, for nine tricks . . . and a smaller minus than many of his counterparts will achieve. It's difficult to imagine a final contract lower than 4♣.

Any N/S plus will be excellent, but even a modest minus may be well above average on this distributional deal.

see very often -- playing back a defender's suit, not to establish tricks or to have him squeeze his partner, but to force him to break another suit.

Where East comes in over a 1♥ or 2♥ (or 2♦) opening, his side really has nowhere to land and N/S may not need to double to get a good score; -100 or more seems almost certain.

Where East doubles a weak notrump by North, E/W will have found trouble. That might be INT redoubled by North, making, or some suit contract by E/W at the two level, doubled, down at least two. Ouch!

Board 25. E/W Vul. Dealer North.

<p>♠ 10 8 5 2 ♥ 10 5 3 2 ♦ 8 6 ♣ Q 7 3</p> <p>♠ J 6 ♥ J 7 6 4 ♦ Q 10 ♣ A 10 9 6 5</p>	<p>♠ A 9 7 4 3 ♥ K Q ♦ A 9 4 3 ♣ K 2</p> <p>♠ K Q ♥ A 9 8 ♦ K J 7 5 2 ♣ J 8 4</p>
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Where East starts with a straightforward 1♠, South will most often reject the theoretically sound pass in favour of an ugly 2♦ overcall, a mildly peculiar takeout double, or carefree, under-strength, and generally disgusting INT overcall. Why will South enter the auction more often than not? Because players hate to pass when a bid has even the slightest appeal.

West has a minimum negative double of 2♦, which might convince East to pass as a least-of-evils choice that will work beautifully: South is likely to for 500 in 2♦ doubled. If East does not pass 2♦, he will choose from among 2♠ (an awful bid), 2NT, and 3NT.

Where South doubles 1♠ for takeout, West will try INT or pass. INT will let N/S off the hook and will set a problem for East, who will solve it by passing, raising to 2NT, or introducing diamonds (the middle-of-the-road solution). Passing INT will end the auction but raising to 2NT might lead to

3NT. 2♦ will catch preference to 2♠, which East might pass because of his poor suits and honour dispersion. If, instead, he moves forward with 2NT, West will pass or raise himself to 3NT. Where West passes over South's takeout double North will respond 2♥, which might silence everyone. If East doubles the 2♥ response for takeout, West would do well indeed to pass for penalty, but that might be disastrous facing a more normal double that includes club length and heart shortness. If West takes out to 3♣ or 2♠, both conservative actions, his call will conclude the auction, although it's not difficult to imagine West declaring 3NT or 4♣ after this start.

Although West can hardly underwrite a set, it would be sound strategy to double an overcall of INT to protect his side's equity (a small plus in a successful partscore), and that would work well here, where INT doubled is likely to fail by a couple of tricks and a runout to 2♦ will be treated even more harshly.

South players who stay out of the auction will defend 2♠ by East or 2NT/3NT by West, as after: 1♠-Pass-INT-Pass, etc.

Although communications are tenuous for West in notrump contracts, the defenders will have trouble getting out of each other's way, and declarer will usually find a route to eight winners. Even if the defence can kill the diamond entry to West's clubs early in the play, declarer will be able to develop a long spade or a third diamond.

Although it might seem that East should lose a heart, a diamond, and three spade tricks in a spade contract, one of those trump tricks will often disappear. For example, on a trump lead and continuation, declarer ducks twice. South switches to the ♣J, which runs to the king, takes the ♥Q continuation with the ace, and plays a second club. Declarer wins the ♣A, ruffs a club, cashes the ♥K, and exits with a low diamond. Declarer will be able to reach dummy with the ♦Q to cash the ♥J and lead good clubs to coup North's ten-eight of trumps.

E/W +140 will be a good score and +120 should be over average unless too many Souths enter the auction and incur a significant penalty.

most effective of those approaches, as North, with four-card support for a known suit, might well increase the pre-empt over a double by West. Some auctions we can expect to see:

2♣-Double-3♣-Double; Pass-4♣-Pass-5♣;
Pass-6♣///

2♣-Double-3♣-Double; Pass-5♥-Pass-6♥
(bravely)///

2♣-Double-Pass-3♣ (values, playing
lebensohl) ; Pass-3♥ (forcing)-Pass-4♥;
Pass-5NT (pick a slam, unless likely to
be interpreted as Grand Slam Force in
hearts)-Pass-6♦; Pass-6♥///

2♦-Double-2♥ (Pass or correct)-Pass; 2♣-
Double-3♣-Double; Pass-4♥ (very strong,
after two doubles)-Pass-5♥; Pass-6♥///

Pass-1♥-Pass-1NT; 2♣-3♣-Pass-4♣ (bravely);
Pass-5♣-Pass-6♣///

Reaching hearts at the ideal level with confidence won't be easy with N/S in the auction. If nothing else, this deal may inspire E/W to some meaningful partnership discussion about continuations after a strong hand doubles a weak two-bid for takeout.

N/S pairs who compete busily to 4♣ and are doubled for an 800-point set will have to wait until all the scores are in to discover whether enough E/W pairs bid and make a slam to leave them with an above-average score.

Board 24. Love All. Dealer West.

♠ J 9 ♥ K Q J 9 6 ♦ Q 8 6 ♣ Q 8 7 ♠ 4 3 2 ♥ 10 8 5 4 ♦ A 10 9 3 ♣ 6 5 ♠ K 10 8 7 6 ♥ A ♦ J 7 4 2 ♣ K J 3	♠ A Q 5 ♥ 7 3 2 ♦ K 5 ♣ A 10 9 4 2
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The one-control North hand isn't really appropriate for a 1♥ or weak 2♥ opening or a weak notrump, but that won't stop a large number of North players from opening the bidding in second position. The East hand isn't really appropriate for a takeout double of 1♥ or 2♥ or a 2♣ overcall of 1♥, but that won't

stop a large number of East players faced with an initial action in front of them to enter the bidding. As neither side can make much (even INT by N/S with their combined 23 HCP is touch and go), it will usually be best to let the other guys declare.

Where North passes, East will open 1♣ or a weak notrump. South will overcall 1♣ with 1♣ and North will advance with INT or 2♥. The latter will end the auction, and even if East does not lead the ♦K or a club, there will usually be enough time to arrange two minor-suit ruffs as declarer has no fast entry to hand to draw trumps. This may require some care, however. Say that East leads a trump to dummy's ace and declarer decides to play East for 3=3=2=5 distribution with a doubleton honour in diamonds, and calls for the ♦J.

In order to negotiate the club ruff, the defenders must not take the diamond ruff immediately: West wins the first or second round of diamonds and must switch to a club, East making certain to keep North out of his hand. Now declarer can't stop East from ruffing a diamond and West from ruffing the third round of clubs. Curiously, 2♦, an odious-looking contract that might be reached if South rebids 2♦ over North's INT advance and North gives up, can be made while neither 2♥ nor 2♣ can survive the defenders' minor-suit ruffs.

In diamonds, declarer can play dummy's queen on a club lead from West. If East ducks, declarer is in dummy for a spade play, and if East wins the ♣A to return the suit, declarer wins, unblocks the ♥A and leads the ♦J. Even if both opponents withhold their honours, they won't be able to get out of their way as the play progresses and declarer will scramble home with +90 for a rare "offensive" plus.

Against INT, East leads a club. Declarer wins in South, unblocks the ♥A, and if he's not up to advancing the ♦J, he can continue clubs, East winning efficiently to deprive declarer of an entry to his hand. East can finish the clubs but must then break diamonds or spades, or give declarer his heart winners and an entry to lead spades. That's a technique you don't

Board 12. N/S Vul. Dealer West.

♠ K 3 2 ♥ Q J 10 5 4 3 ♦ 8 ♣ 7 5 2 ♠ A J 10 6 5 ♥ 7 6 ♦ J 9 7 5 ♣ 10 9 ♠ Q 9 8 ♥ A 2 ♦ K Q 10 ♣ A 8 6 4 3	♠ 7 4 ♥ K 9 8 ♦ A 6 4 3 2 ♣ K Q J
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Not every North will open a weak 2♥ or Multi 2♦ at unfavourable vulnerability, but at Matchpoints, doing so will be more tempting than at other forms of scoring. As 2♥ is the last legitimate plus for N/S, South will do well not to try for game. 2♥ declared by North will attract a club lead from East, after which it will usually not matter whether East ducks the ♦A (declarer loses two spades) or takes it (declarer loses one spade, one diamond, two clubs, and a trump).

But many different scenarios are possible. West might reopen 2♥ with 2♣, emboldened by the vulnerability and his passed-hand status. That should get past East but will set a difficult problem for South, who will do best to double for penalty, hardly an obvious choice. Neither +100 nor +50 (for passing out 2♣) will be adequate compensation for the +110 available at 2♥, but taking the push to 3♥ will be considerably worse.

Where North opens 2♦ (Multi), East's defensive methods might permit a double that includes balanced 13-15 HCP hands. Whether South redoubles or bides his time, it's likely that he'll have to make a difficult decision when West's 2♣ comes around to him.

Some Wests will open either a Multi 2♦, or 2♣, whether a natural weak two-bid, or five spades and at least four of a minor. Unless East, in the last of these variations, tries to locate West's minor, those actions are likely to lead to a natural 2NT overcall by South, with North transferring or otherwise finding a way into hearts at the three or four level, where N/S will usually go minus.

If neither West nor North opens the bidding, East will open 1♦ or INT, according to system. South will overcall 1♦ with INT and N/S will reach 2♥ or 3♥, depending on West's inclination to bid spades or raise diamonds and East's willingness to sell out in the latter scenario. Where East starts with INT, South will double, and in all likelihood, the auction will not conclude below 3♥.

Although there are many ways the auction could develop, the odds favour N/S being pushed to the three-level (or getting there under their own steam) and going minus, so plus scores in 2♥ or defending 2♣ or 3♦, doubled or not, will be satisfying for the stationary pairs.

Board 13. Game All. Dealer North.

♠ K 9 8 ♥ A 10 ♦ 9 6 5 4 3 ♣ 10 9 5 ♠ 10 6 2 ♥ Q J 9 6 5 4 ♦ K J 10 ♣ 3 ♠ Q 7 4 ♥ K 8 3 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ Q J 6 2	♠ A J 5 3 ♥ 7 2 ♦ Q 2 ♣ A K 8 7 4
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The popular auction will be: Pass-1♣-Pass-1♥; Pass-1♠-Pass; 2♥-All Pass. Variations will occur when strong clubbers open the East hand with 1♦, 2♣, or INT, with the latter opening up the possibility that East declares 2♥ on a transfer sequence.

As long as declarer takes the right view in trumps by leading towards the length and playing an honour whenever South follows low, he can come to nine tricks, losing only two trumps, a spade, and the ♦A. Plus 140 for E/W is so likely to be the result at every table that any variation is bound to yield an extreme score. And what might such results be? E/W +110 or -50 in hearts for guessing the trumps wrong or for getting too high; E/W +80 or perhaps +110 for playing in 1♠ when West passes East's rebid; E/W -50 or even -100 in INT when West takes a deep position and rebids INT after 1♣-1♥; 1♠.

Board 14. Love All. Dealer East.

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

With hearts three-three and diamonds three-two, N/S can take 12 tricks in diamonds or hearts with one black-suit ruff in the shorter-trump hand. Aggressive pairs that consider slam, once South is able to pinpoint his 4=3=5=1 shape after opening the bidding in second seat, will be thinking fondly of 6♦, a contract that offers the *a priori* possibilities of taking two spade ruffs in the North hand (without a trump lead), ruffing out the doubleton or tripleton ace of spades in West, after leading towards the ♠K and ducking a spade on the way back, or developing a squeeze.

Pairs less optimistic about slam should consider playing in the four-three heart fit to retain some measure of control of the threatening club suit. Rather than play flat out for hearts three-three, declarers in 4♥ might consider ducking a round of trumps altogether, hoping to have time for a spade trick and one timely club ruff to piece together 11 tricks for what should be quite a good score, beating the pairs in 3NT on a club lead regardless of how the hearts break.

Another possibility in 4♥ is to allow the defenders to win the first round of clubs, intending to take one club ruff while retaining the ace to stop the suit, hoping to lose only one club, one trump and the ♠A: 10 tricks in hearts would be a good result with hearts four-two, as the pairs in notrump would then be able to take only nine tricks before the defenders could take at least four (with the ♠A in the hand holding at least four clubs).

Where South opens 1♦ in second seat, the most common auctions will be:

1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣; 2♥-3NT///,
 1♦-1♥; 1♠; 3NT///,
 1♦-1♥; 1♠-2♣; 2♥-2NT (forcing); 3♥-4♦;
 4♥///.

To reach 6♦, North might have to continue with 5♣ in the last of these auctions, and have South cooperate on the strength of his strong diamonds, key heart honour, and appreciation of North's slam-oriented club holding.

The most common score will be N/S +430 in 3NT, but there will be some sensible +450s and +480s in hearts, some +920s in 6♦, and the occasional +420 in 5♦.

Board 15. N/S Vul. Dealer South.

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

What makes 6♦ such a good contract for N/S is South's black-suit holdings: there are three losing spades which be ruffed in the shorter-trump hand, and only three clubs, one of which goes on the ♥A. Give South one more club and one fewer spade and slam is very poor.

The South hand is hardly a classic weak 2♦ opening, with a moderate suit, a void, and a side four-card major, but some who have that club in their bag will unsheathe it here nonetheless. North might simply jump to 5♦ in this scenario, but sophisticated methods might reveal that South has four spades headed by the ace and short hearts, or North might be able to describe (perhaps via a splinter raise) a hand with short spades and slam interest. Reaching 6♦ after a 2♦ opening is conceivable.

Where South passes, West might take advantage of the favourable vulnerability to open a weak 2♠ or a Multi 2♦ or a specialized

Board 22. E/W Vul. Dealer East.

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

Although this is a partscore deal where it could be critical for either side to get to INT before the other, in practice, INT won't often be the final contract. After: Pass-1♦-1♠-double, East will either pass or bid INT. If he passes, South will rebid INT, after which West might volunteer 2♠, an overbid that will have considerable appeal. If West passes, East will consider doubling South's INT for penalty, an action that would probably end the auction, although West might take out to 2♠. However, fearing poor defensive communications with only one spade in his hand, East might, instead, sell out quietly to INT. To defeat INT, West ostensibly must stay off a spade lead, else declarer can take four hearts and one of each for +90 or +180. On a neutral heart lead, the defenders will have time to switch to clubs from either side, and if West doesn't lead spades he might rationally start with the ♣10: on this layout, clubs are easier to negotiate by E/W when they're defending rather than declaring.

Where East tries INT over North's negative double, West will have to decide whether to correct to 2♠, and most will indeed retreat to their long suit. However, as 2♠ has no chance against normal effective defence (a timely club switch by North) while INT has some real potential, this time it will be better to pass INT. Say that South leads a low diamond against INT. Declarer wins with dummy's king and leads the ♣10, intending to pass it. If North does not cover, and South takes the king, declarer will take four clubs, two spades (with the finesse), and a diamond; N/S can cash only four hearts and the ♦A to go with the ♠K. If South follows low to the ♣10, declarer has

every opportunity to go wrong, but he can still get home if eventually drops the ♣K. If North covers the ♣10 from dummy, declarer can get home legitimately only by playing a club other than the queen, which must be counter-intuitive. If he plays the ♣Q, South wins and the clubs are blocked for declarer. The defenders, with careful play, can come to four hearts, a club, the ♦A, and a slow spade trick. If declarer plays low when the ♣J comes up, he can run the suit later by felling the king, but that too is not the natural approach. However, say that declarer plays the ♣A on the first round: remarkably, he can make INT by taking a spade finesse and stranding dummy's spades to pass the ♣8 to South, who can do nothing useful. The defenders can take their four hearts before or after cashing the ♦A, but then must give declarer spade winners in dummy or minor-suit winners in hand. What a peculiar position!

Where South opens INT, E/W are likely to buy the contract at 2♠. As there will be many E/W pairs going minus at 2♠, any plus for that side figures to yield a respectable score.

Board 23. Game All. Dealer South.

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

Both 6♣ (+1370) and 6♥ (+1430) are cold for E/W and N/S don't figure to save against either slam (-1400 if E/W get their diamond ruff, -1100 otherwise). If left to themselves, E/W are likely to reach slam, perhaps via something like this:

1♥-INT; 3♣-4♣; 4♦-4♥; 4♠-5NT (pick a slam); 6♣ or 6♥///

But bridge is rarely that simple. On this deal South will open 2♠ or a Multi 2♦, or at the tables where either of options is precluded by system, will pass and come in with 2♠ at his next turn. The natural weak two-bid will be the

redoubled, yielding +760, 1160 or 1560. Where South runs to 2♠ or North to 2♣, E/W will go plus by defending or competing to 2NT, with their plus scores ranging from 50 to 300.

The E/W pairs who defend 2♣, doubled or not, should find a way to hold declarer to six tricks, promoting a third trump trick for themselves with a third round of diamonds at an opportune moment. 2♠ figures to go one down.

As deals like this one inevitably produce a wide range of contracts and results, serious predictions about moderate scores in each direction are usually presumptuous, so you'll hear no more from me about Board 19.

Board 20. Game All. Dealer West.

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

With spades coming in and diamonds friendly enough, N/S have 11 sure winners in notrump, their likeliest strain, and also in diamonds or (more obscurely, spades). A twelfth is available with a winning play in clubs -- low to the king, assuming West follows low to the first club.

Except where North starts with a strong club, the N/S auctions will be part of the 2NT family, typically uncontested:

2NT-3C; 3D-3NT///,
 2NT-3NT///,
 2NT-3C (Puppet Stayman)-3NT,

or some specialized variation.

Where North opens with a forcing 1♣, East might venture 1♥ or 2♥ to assert his virility. While the intervention doesn't figure to affect the level of the final contract -- N/S are certain to discover that they lack the high-card values and/or distribution for slam and finish in 3NT or 4NT -- there is some chance that declarer

will go wrong in clubs more often than if E/W remain silent. For example, if East takes no action, leads the ♥Q, and shows up with a singleton diamond and long hearts (he'll discard a few on the diamonds), declarer may assume that he would have overcalled had he been dealt the ♣A. Of such slender clues are winning games constructed.

There will be very few slams attempted, so the E/W pairs will find their fate on this deal hanging on declarer's play of the club suit. With very few exceptions, the scores will be N/S +660 and +690.

Board 21. N/S Vul. Dealer North.

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

The vulnerability should convince North to pass as dealer, and South will open in third seat with 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or perhaps a conventional bid to introduce a three-suiter of this strength.

West will double 1♥ for takeout and will try 2♣ over 1♦, but 1♣ will most often silence him. Yes, some will overcall 1NT or a carefree 1♠, but both are deep positions.

As N/S, who are vulnerable, can't make anything (2♦ on a trump lead and accurate defence thereafter, fares particularly badly) and will often be headed for at least

-200, they will usually do best by having their opponents buy the contract. Although club contracts can produce nine tricks, declarer could easily go wrong in the play and finish with only eight. Notrump is the best strain for E/W, and nine tricks are possible if East declares or if North doesn't lead a heart against West. The ♠J is a second entry to pick up the club suit without loss and declarer takes five clubs, three spades and a diamond for +150 (or once in a blue moon, +600).

2♣ to show at least five spades and at least four cards in a minor. North will double 2♣ for takeout, but might have to pass over a Multi 2♦ opening if his methods call for delayed action (presumably a double when West later admits to a weak 2♠). East will raise to 3♠ or 4♠ or show his hearts at the three or four level by bidding the suit or via a transfer. If South jumps to 5♦ or can find a stronger way to reach 5♦, North might add a sixth, but if South's 5♦ is not a jump, it's most unlikely that North will do anything other than pass.

Where East competes only to 3♠, South might take a shot at 3NT, expecting North to provide heart stoppers and slam to be problematical. If he plays there, he will discover that 5♦ would have yielded +620 and 3NT only +600. So much for Matchpoint greed and avarice!

N/S pairs that stop to double 3♠ or 4♠ will rarely be able to prevent their opponents from taking seven tricks (with West declaring, North can lead hearts, and perfect defence thereafter nets two heart ruffs and a late club ruff to hold declarer to six tricks), so a penalty of 300 or 500 won't protect N/S's equity.

Where South and West both pass, East will overcall North's 1♦ with 1♥, 2♥ or 3♥. Where South shows values with some length in spades, N/S might finish in 3NT, but should South focus on diamonds (say, via a fit-showing cue-bid) N/S are much more likely to finish in diamonds and might even reach six for a superb score.

Board 16. E/W Vul. Dealer West.

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

After 1♣-double, a natural, forcing 1♥ by East will work well, locating the partnership's best

strain immediately. If West jump-raises to 3♥, East will go on to game and will chalk up an easy +620, losing only a spade, a heart and a diamond. Should West settle for a gentle 2♥, however, East might not try for game, especially if West might raise hearts with only three trumps (heresy in France or Poland, but quite common elsewhere).

All might not be so comfortable for E/W if East redoubles at his first turn and an enterprising (or rabid) South bounces to 3♦, pre-emptive, or (more realistically) if North raises 2♦ to 3♦ after a pass by West. What can East do? If he doubles, West will pass, and it takes perfect defence (an early spade lead, which yields an eventual trump promotion for the ♦8) to hold declarer to six tricks: a 500-point set is not as good as +620 in hearts, but will beat all the E/W pairs that don't reach game.

Any game? We can see that 4♥ is easy, but what about the 3NT that E/W might stumble into if they miss their heart fit, under pressure? Although on the surface it looks bad for declarer if the defenders get diamonds going effectively (South leading the suit, or North leading the ♦A where West declares), 3NT can always be made if declarer plays North for the ♠A and ♥K but not for the ♠J.

The gist of the play has declarer win his diamond trick on the second or third round, discarding heart(s) from West. After two rounds of clubs, declarer leads a spade to his queen and advances the ten. Say that South and West cover. If North takes the trick, he is end-played immediately, or after cashing his diamond winner (declarer discards a club from the West hand).

If North lets the ♠K hold, declarer plays two more clubs ending in West (having unblocked the ♣9 from East on the second round. North is squeezed, and either will have to give declarer a second heart trick or a third spade trick, depending on how he (North) discards. That's very pretty indeed, but playing double dummy to record +600 in 3NT is a much too difficult way to earn a living, with anyone capable of achieving +620 in 4♥ without raising a bead of sweat.

Board 17. Love All. Dealer North.

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

If North remains silent, E/W will coast into 3NT uncontested via a strong notrump and a Stayman auction, or (for weak notrumpers) via 1♠-2♣; 2NT-3NT (Acol), or 1♠-1♥; INT-3NT (Kaplan-Sheinwold), although West might support clubs along the way. South will lead a diamond and if declarer calls for dummy's jack, he can lead towards the ♥Q to establish three hearts to go with five clubs and three diamonds.

North will get a heart and a spade and declarer will chalk up +460 for an excellent score. If declarer goes wrong in diamonds at trick one, he will take only 10 tricks against best defence, getting back to even with the declarers who get a spade lead from South. This will happen after North mentions the suit (either by opening 2♣: East will overcall 2NT; or by risking a dangerous 2♠ over a Stayman 2♣: a double would hold North to four tricks for an E/W joint top, but many will settle for 3NT instead); East's ♠8 provides a second stopper.

Should E/W stumble into 4♥ (perhaps after North opens a Multi and later shows spades, with West placing East with heart length), they can take 11 tricks, thanks to the friendly lie of the cards. Plus 450 might yield a serendipitously strong score if a majority of the E/W pairs come to only 10 tricks in notrump, but it would be slightly surprising for that parlay to occur. As is usually the case when both hands are balanced, reaching 5♣ for +400 will be a sad result for E/W, not much better than the handful of -50s recorded by the pairs who punt 6♣ once they pass the safe haven of 3NT.

Board 18. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

The South hand is not worth an upgrade to a 15-17 notrump, especially vulnerable, but in 2006, there are more pairs than ever before employing a 14-16 range, and the South hand is appropriate for INT for those favouring 12-14 and 13-15.

Over INT, West's methods and beliefs will determine whether he treats his hand as a major two-suiter or an overcall in hearts (or an unspecified major one-suiter): some will show (artificially) hearts and a second suit, or perhaps even spades and a second suit. North will drive to game in most cases, and might settle for a direct 3NT, giving away as little information as possible. Others will focus on stoppers in suits shown or implied by West while *lebensohl* fanciers will look no further than a forcing 3♣.

Unless West has shown spades, East will take no part in the auction and West will rarely have a strong enough reason not to lead a heart. Alas, that allows declarer to finesse the ♥J sooner or later to finish with six clubs and three hearts for +600, and an excellent score. The defenders have four spades and the ♦A to take but must do so on the go, which will usually be too tough an order after auctions starting with INT.

Where South opens 1♣ or 1♦, West will overcall 1♥. North will introduce clubs, after a 1♦ opening, or cue-bid to show a club raise, after a 1♣ opening, and South will bid 2NT in both cases to establish a touchstone in the highest-scoring strain. Or North might try the effect of jumping to 3NT, the sort of practical action that has special appeal for Rubber Bridge players. While there is some chance at these tables that East or West will lead a spade,

it would be a mistake to bet against declarer making 3NT more often than he goes down.

Those who deem the spade weakness a major flaw for notrump might wriggle into 5♣, or perhaps even stop on a dime at 4♣. To hold club contracts to 10 tricks, West must switch to spades when he comes in with the ♦A. That will be easy if the South hand is dummy but a bit trickier where the North hand is exposed. Say that declarer wins the heart lead in hand with the king and crosses to a high trump in North to lead the ♦2 to the queen. As the diamond count is not going to be important to West, East should play his highest diamond on this trick, trying his best to send a suit-preference message about spades, the higher of the two relevant suits. Otherwise, West is on his own: he might duck the first diamond, expecting East to give him a suit preference signal on the second diamond, but that won't always be so obvious to him. It's worth noting that if declarer plays two rounds of trumps first, East can send his suit-preference message in the trump suit by playing four-three. Partners, no matter how good they are, appreciate all the legal help they can get.

N/S pairs who go set in 5♣ will do worst, but those who finish +130 in clubs may find that they score almost as badly. Although E/W can take eight tricks in hearts or spades (various lines of play require different lines of defence), competing to the four-level will be rare indeed. While finding a 300-point sacrifice against 3NT might not seem such a hot idea when 3NT can be beaten, in this case taking the phantom save will probably produce an excellent score as most pairs reaching 3NT will make it, and most of the field will be in 3NT.

Board 19. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

Where West starts with 1♦, North will come in with 2♣ (or perhaps an ugly intermediate 3♣). Over 2♣, East will have to decide whether to compete with an imperfect negative double or hyper-aggressive 2NT, or pass, hoping it will be better to defend, perhaps doubled. With N/S not vulnerable, it will usually seem more attractive to East to try for a plus by declaring, and double will be the popular choice of poisons. That will set an interesting problem for West, as a case could be made for a minimum bid in each strain but clubs. As it happens, the winning choice (assuming best play and defence) is 2NT, a relatively unappealing choice for West, with a high-card minimum, a dubious source of tricks, and only one club stopper. With spades as they are, declarer can come to eight tricks in notrump by playing North for the ♥Q. There are several interesting variations if North finds the lead of a heart, which gives declarer nothing he couldn't do himself. In one of them, declarer knocks out the ♦K and plays spades himself, and eventually catches South in a strip squeeze in which he must bare the ♠A. Declarer exits in clubs and takes the last two tricks with the ace-eight of diamonds over South's ten-five.

The defence can prevail against 2♦ by West, but if clubs are not broached by N/S, declarer might slip the ♣6 past North's ace and scramble home with a club, three hearts and four trump tricks, South ruffing the fourth heart (or not) while declarer discards a black loser.

2♥ should also fail of natural causes, but we can imagine the defence losing its way on occasion. It would take an imaginative (or masochistic) West to reply 2♠ to a negative double, but it's a very large field and stranger things will happen. But East might not pass 2♠, and here 2NT would work much better.

Where North jumps to 3♣ over 1♦, he might succeed in jockeying his opponents into a minus on their cards, but it's more likely that he will be left to declare 3♣, -150.

Where West opens INT, North should double to show strength rather than think of a way to show his clubs. If everyone sits for the double, as well they might, E/W will be chalking up +380 rather more often than +180, and there may even be a +580 or two.

In fact, the contract at some tables will be INT