



**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.

WBF Year Points

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.

Certificates will be sent to your National Bridge Organisation for them to send on to you.

The truth is that N/S simply don't belong in game, and some who get there will go wrong in the play in a different way by running the ♠9 on the first round and leading the ♠8 to the king on the second round. Although East can give his side its best chance for a plus by leading spades rather than clubs, for the most part, their fate is in the hands of N/S on this deal.

Where N/S play in notrump, they will rarely come to more than seven tricks without some help from their opponents ... although ... spade lead, ♠9 to the ten, then diamond to the jack later, or club lead to the queen, ♥AK, diamond to the jack, play for hearts three-three.

Where South passes as dealer, West should pass too, and N/S will bid: 1♥-1♠; 2♦-2NT. North will pass or try to sign off in 3♦, the second plan working much better, as South will convert to 3♥ or take a shot at 4♥.

With N/S results sure to include -100, -50, +140, +170, and +420, the extreme results and -50 will produce predictably bad or good scores, but we'll have to wait until all the results are posted to see how +140 and +170 will fare.

Board 36. Game All. Dealer West.

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

At many tables, South will be left to open in fourth seat. While some will throw it in because of the relative spade shortage combined with modest point count, others will be more optimistic and try 1♥, 2♥ (or a Multi 2♦), or 3♥. The lower actions will get N/S to 2♥, and a 3♥ opening will end the auction. A black-suit lead will hold South to seven tricks in hearts (of the realistic choices for East, only a trump lead will

be bad for the defence where North declares 2♥ after a Multi 2♦ opening), but the trump sequence will have plenty of appeal for West, and so 2♥ will be made with some frequency. Otherwise, declarer has two diamonds, a spade, and at least three trumps to lose.

At other tables, West, North, or East might open the bidding despite their vulnerability. As E/W can make 3♣ or 2NT, opening the bidding needn't work badly for them, although they might not find it easy to deal with a 2♥ overcall or competitive 2♥ bid after a 1♠ overcall by North). If North starts with 1♠, South might well drive to game, and will certainly go to the three level in hearts, which is -200 territory.

All the people involved in creating and organizing this event are delighted that so many of you competed this year, and hope you found the deals both challenging and instructive. We hope that you will tell your friends about this international competition and the opportunity to become a true World Champion. We look forward to having you all with us again in the first week of June, 2007.

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

The two money contracts on the opening deal of the session are 3NT and 6♦. The former starts with 10 tricks on a heart lead and continuation, leaving declarer to decide whether to take the spade finesse for 11 if his clubs aren't all winners in the endgame. By the time he needs to make up his mind, both defenders will be forced to part with all their hearts, North reducing to three spades and the jack of clubs, South to two clubs and two spades, with declarer's last four cards the ace-nine-seven of clubs and a spade.

Everything will point to leading a spade to the queen, and there will be many more E/W +460s than +430s. In 6♦, declarer will make his contract on any sensible line. With the ♥A onside, he can discard a club from East on the ♥K, cash ace-king of clubs, and take two club ruffs, but that will involve the slight risk of clubs five-one once trumps are three-zero and declarer can't afford to draw all three rounds. As the spade finesse is too risky, declarer might try to ruff out king-third of spades before trying to take his club ruffs. No one will fail in 6♦ so +920 will be a joint (and several) top.

With those results against which to compare, there will be little attraction at Pairs to play in 5♦, but those who try for slam and decide not to bid it will score dreadfully for +420, surprising not even themselves.

The bidding might be quite peaceful for E/W if South takes no part in the auction, but if East does not open 2♠ or a Multi 2♦ in second seat, South will surely open 1♥, 2♥ or 2♦ in

third. West will double for takeout, overcall in diamonds, jump to 3NT, or perhaps (over 1♥) jump to 2NT (minors), intending to convert clubs to diamonds to show great strength with longer diamonds than clubs. North will compete to 3♥ or 4♥, after which East will often introduce his spades. Where West converts 4♠ to 5♦ East will punt 6♦, but where West converts 3♠ to 3NT, East will most often pass. If West takes out 3♠ to 4♦ (forcing), East should bid 4♥ to suggest his suitability for diamonds. West will use his favourite form of Blackwood or simply jump to 6♦. Where East opens 2♠ and West forces with 3♦, East can do something good for his side by jumping to 4♥, a splinter raise. West will do the rest.

N/S pairs who buy the contract in doubled heart contracts no higher than four will take eight tricks and score very well. Those who save at higher levels will have to hope for lots of E/W 920s.

Board 2. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

At nearly every table, N/S will reach 4♠ and make five, losing only two heart tricks. With trumps two-two and the king onside, nothing fancy is required in the play.

Most Easts will open 1♥ rather than 2♥ or a Multi 2♦. Only those who believe it's essential to hold four spades or a huge hand to double 1♥ will overcall 2♦ or pass. Everyone else will double, and whether West mentions clubs, bids INT, or passes, North will commit to 4♠, perhaps cue-bidding first. Although E/W have the vulnerability in their favour, it won't pay for them to sacrifice at 5♣, as the defenders

need only clear trumps relatively early to hold declarer to seven tricks and an 800-point set.

Where South overcalls 1♥ with 2♦, North will advance with 2♠ or perhaps cue-bid 2♥ (where 2♠ would be non-forcing). South should raise 2♠ to three or even four (a matter of style) so game will not be missed at any of these tables. Where South passes over 1♥, a very conservative approach, West will respond INT or perhaps 3♣, where that is treated as weak. North hasn't got much and his heart holding is suspect, but in practice, everyone will overcall 2♠ in this scenario, and South will raise to game.

That weak jump response of 3♣ will really put it to North, and might even steal the pot for a complete top. Souths who would not come in over 1♥ might well not come in over 3♣, and if North doesn't risk 3♠ in that sort of partnership, it could be lights out, party over.

Board 3. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

The par contract on Board 3 is 3NT for N/S, +430: declarer must take a trick with one of his side kings to go along with eight diamond tricks and the ♣A.

Meanwhile, in 5♦ (or any other number of diamonds), a trump lead or ♥A and a trump switch, limits declarer to 10 tricks: he must score the ♠K eventually. However, that defence is not so easy to find, and on a spade lead, for example, East must switch to a heart to hold declarer to 11 tricks. On a trump return, declarer takes the ace, unblocks the ♣A, ruffs a spade, and discards his heart loser on the ♣K for +420.

E/W, who have a nine-card spade fit, nearly half the high cards, and some distribution, can take only seven (or perhaps eight) tricks, and will do well not to get too exuberant at the prevailing vulnerability.

The South hand is not an easy one to bid in standard methods, as there is no accurate rebid after starting with 1♦, and although there are only four losers according to the Losing Trick Count, it's not a Goren strong two-bid. It's an Acol two-bid, however, and pairs who have this treatment available will use it. Strong clubbers will solve their rebid problems by starting with their forcing opening.

After 1♦-1♥-Pass-1♠, many South players will settle for 3♦, but others will take a shot at 3NT, hoping North will be kind enough to table a heart guard and that diamonds will run, not too much to ask. Some scientists will jump to 3♥ to ask for a heart stopper, or cue-bid one of the majors at the two level. Reaching 3NT is not at all out of the question. West will raise spades through the three level, and might even save hopefully at 4♠ over South's gambling shot of 3NT. Ouch!

So many things can happen on this one that it's pointless to make too many strong statements about where the bidding will end most often, but N/S pairs going +430 figure to score handsomely, although there will be some juicy penalties incurred by E/W. 5♦ will be made more often than it is defeated, and probably more often than it produces an overtrick, and will not often be doubled.

Board 4. Game All. Dealer West.

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

Board 34. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

At some tables, North will be permitted to open 1♦, 1♣ or INT in fourth position, and N/S will reach 2♠ (or perhaps a more obscure 2♥ on a scrambling Stayman auction). Although the defence can negotiate two red-suit ruffs, or a heart ruff and three natural diamond tricks to defeat 2♠ two tricks for a wonderful 200, there are certainly ways to go wrong, and N/S -100 or +110 (no heart ruff, no timely diamond switch from West, diamond discard on the ♣K) will be achieved with significant frequency.

West might protect against 2♠ with a "minors" 2NT if the auction comes up right for him (e.g. Pass-Pass-Pass-1♣/1♦; Pass-1♠-Pass-INT; Pass-2♥-Pass-2♠, passed around to West), and that will work well, locating the club fit, in which E/W can take 10 tricks for +130 by guessing clubs correctly and taking the diamond finesse, if required. If 3♣ gets N/S to 3♠, so much the better for E/W, who will usually get at least 200 and might manage as much as 800 if they double.

At other tables, East might open 1♣, 1♦, 1♥, or INT, after which their mission will be to find clubs and stay out of game. As notrump can be held to seven tricks by leading or switching to spades in time, E/W will find that +90 doesn't compare favourably with those +100s achieved by their counterparts defending 2♠ only slightly imperfectly.

Where West opens 1♣ in third position, some North players will risk an ugly takeout double, which will convince South to get his side further involved through the two level. That could lead

to N/S playing 2♠ doubled, but will more likely result in West declaring 3♣, the contract E/W will usually reach if North remains silent. A 1♦ opening by West might lead to: 1♦-1♥; 2♣-3♣///, but East might advance with a flawed 2NT instead, or force with 2♠, which (though not game-forcing by a passed hand) might get his side too high on momentum. Where West stretches to open a weak notrump, East will pass or get his side to 2NT. North will have two chances to get around to spades, so +90 or -50 will be the normal consequences of the imaginative INT opening.

Whether E/W +130 turns out to be merely good or very good for E/W will depend on how many N/S pairs get into trouble to the tune of -200 or more.

Board 35. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

There will be some who pass the South hand, but not many, the lack of intermediates in the long suits and doubleton ace-king being balanced by the three honour tricks. After 1♠-2♥, South will rebid 2♠ or (ugh) 2NT, and over 3♦ by North, give preference to 3♥. When North offers a choice of games by continuing with 3NT, South might do the right thing (opposite this North hand and on this layout) by converting to 4♥. With the ♣K aside and trumps three-three, declarer can make 4♥ by leading towards the king-jack of diamonds twice and clearing that suit before leading the third round of trumps. Establishing the red suits in the wrong order would make a difference if the defence leads and continues spades and leaves East with a second diamond entry, as there would be a spade to cash in that variation.

five-fives will feel that their strategy is best, regardless of this deal, but here they can point out that 1♠ often keeps the opponents out of trouble while 1♣ invites them into the auction to meet their doom.

Board 33. Love All. Dealer North.

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

Left to themselves, N/S will start: 1♥-1♠; 2♦-2♥, or 1♥-2♥. In the first variation, North might well pass 2♥, as South's bidding will suggest two-card support, about 5-9(10) points, or, more rarely, three trumps and a poor hand. In the second, however, some will jump to 4♥, while others will try for game, using their favourite scientific approaches, finishing in 3♥ or 4♥, depending on whether North's trial bid creates a favourable impression; virtually no one will pass 2♥. It's interesting that an apparently innocuous choice like the one between responding 1♠ and 2♥ can logically lead to such different continuations, but it highlights the importance of responder confirming genuine trump support to permit opener to revalue his hand accurately.

Despite the bad breaks, the trump spots are favourable for North, and most rational lines of play will lead to nine tricks and +140 or -50.

On a trump lead, declarer must play accurately, however, taking a diamond ruff without releasing his second high honour, and leading towards the ♠K. Although West can lead a second trump, declarer finesses, cashes the ♠K and his red winners, and (if West has not ruffed the ♦K) and throws West in with the ♥K. West tries to exit with a high spade,

but declarer discards a diamond loser, and West eventually gives South a black winner to discard the last diamond from the closed hand.

But, how often will N/S be left to themselves? East might commit an Unusual 2NT, which should cause even a West familiar with his partner's tendencies to do a lot of bidding. Where it will end after this start is difficult to project because South might raise hearts voluntarily and North might keep bidding, but final contracts of 3NT, 4♣, and 5♣ by E/W will grace the frequency sheets, as will 4♥ doubled, N/S. None of these will be successful, as E/W shouldn't take more than eight tricks in clubs and N/S nine in hearts. If East resists the temptation to come in over 1♥, West will sometimes try 1NT over a 1♠ response by South.

When North introduces diamonds, some of East's optimism about finding a profitable part-score will be diluted, and he should pass 2♦ rather than open a can of worms by doubling. East will face a more meaningful decision when South's preference to 2♥ is passed back to him. Although East doesn't have much, he has some playing-trick potential and is not vulnerable. If N/S can make 2♥, as they figure to do if they have eight trumps, despite West's notrump overcall, it will be worthwhile to compete, and I suspect that more Easts will bid 3♣ than pass out 2♥, especially with neither side vulnerable. The next decision in this scenario will be N/S's, as either (or both) will surely consider 3♥. The bidding should get no higher than 3♣ or 3♥ at these tables.

After 1♥-Pass-2♥, the fact that West has no perfect way to enter the auction will not prevent some of them from doubling, overcalling 2♠, or venturing a natural 2NT, where that treatment is part of the partnership arsenal.

At some of these tables, North will bid game or try for it and get there, and East might be convinced to sacrifice at 5♣ or 5♦ (after a takeout double by West) via a two-suited 4NT. N/S will like that.

We've all been in worse contracts than 6♣ (N/S), but those who take the push once they go past 3NT in search of six, figure to be disappointed, as the ♥Q is offside and a spade loser can't be avoided. Defeating 6♣ looks easy enough for E/W: East must take the ♠A early and wait for his heart trick. Straightforward though that might seem, looking at all 52 cards, imagine that North's ♥4 were a third small spade and that North declares 6♣. East leads a diamond to the jack and king, and North soon leads the ♠8 towards the queen. If North has that hypothetical hand, East must not rise with the ♠A, lest he give declarer two spade tricks, the second providing a discard for dummy's third heart. If East does not take the ♠A on the actual lie, however, declarer wins the queen, draws trumps, taking a diamond ruff in hand, cashes a high heart, and exits with the ♠K. East wins the ace and must lead from the ♥Q or give declarer a ruff and discard. He ruffs in hand, throwing a heart from South, and can claim the rest: +1370.

If North opens 2NT, South will either raise to 3NT or try for slam via an aggressive 4NT, or perhaps by looking for a minor-suit fit, methods permitting. North will accept all slam tries relating to clubs, and might well accept an invitation in notrump. 6NT will go one down on a neutral lead when the heart finesse loses, but two down if the defence starts with ace and another spade.

Where North opens with a natural 1♣ or a strong club, East will overcall 1♠ or 2♠. If South shows roughly a limit raise in clubs or his approximate strength and distribution, North will either settle for 3NT or push to slam, as 5♣ will hold little appeal at Matchpoints.

The play in 3NT might prove very interesting, as East is unlikely to lead ace and another spade. Say that he leads the jack, ten, or a lower spade. The queen wins, and West should give count. If East discards a heart without pain and West keeps all his hearts, declarer will be sorely tempted to take the heart finesse, holding himself to eight or nine tricks, depending on whether declarer cashed only

one or both diamond honours after running clubs and playing off one high heart. If East keeps all his hearts and does not keep a low spade to reach his partner (who must keep both remaining spades), East can be end-played in spades to lead from the ♥Q after taking two spade winners: +660.

Board 5. N/S Vul. Dealer North.

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

E/W would like to play in 3NT, where there are 10 tricks available for +430, but that might not be so easy to do with N/S competing to 3♠. Some will reach 5♣ and make it for +400, but it's possible to go down in 5♣ in certain variations by mis-guessing hearts and that will happen with mild frequency, particularly where North opens with a weak 2♠ or Multi 2♦. But the best scores for E/W will come from doubling N/S in 3♠ or higher and collecting at least 500 points.

Where North opens 2♠, East will choose between 3♣ and an enterprising 2NT. When South raises to 3♠, West will have a difficult bid in the first variation, choosing between 4♥, a craven 4♣, 5♣, and a hopeful responsive double, the latter working particularly well while 4♥ will fare particularly badly as it is bound to fail. Where East overcalls 2♠ with 2NT, West will almost always bid 4♥, and East will bite the bullet and pass. If South does not raise to 3♠, West will be able to show his hearts cheaply and sit for 3NT (after a 3♣ overcall) or offer a choice between 4♥ and 3NT (after a 2NT overcall). It's not clear where it will end after a Multi 2♦ opening as South figures to compete with a pass-or-correct 3♥ at unfavourable vulnerability, and doing so might allow West to

double to show his hearts and then respect East's retreat to 3NT.

Where North passes as dealer, he will overcall 1♠ or perhaps an aggressive 2♠ (whatever that might mean after not opening a weak two or equivalent as dealer) after 1♣-Pass-1♥. East will handle this scenario in different ways, depending on the level, but will most often be able to avoid 4♥ and reach 3NT, as West will be able to rebid hearts at the three-level and pass East's 3NT without guilt.

This can be a tricky deal for E/W and +430 should be very good, with +400, -50, and +500 occurring less often, in that order.

Board 6. E/W Vul. Dealer East

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

Although 6NT is a poor contract at single dummy -- to make it declarer needs two heart tricks, or three diamond tricks (without losing one) -- in practice, 12 tricks will often be made ... if the slam is bid.

Where East starts with a 15-17 notrump, West will often drive to 6NT, either directly, or after a Stayman probe reveals that there is no four-four spade fit, or after a specialised balanced-hand treatment such as CONFIT (invented by George Rosenkranz to explore for an eight-card fit only after determining that the partnership has at least 10 of the 12 controls (where an ace=2/king=1). If West settles for an invitational sequence, East, with dull pattern and a high-card minimum, will decline, but where 1NT was 14-16, East might co-operate if he can do so without committing to six himself. The same sort of

development will occur where the bidding begins: 1♣-1♠; INT, E/W using 12-14 INT openings.

Say that East declares 6NT on a spade lead. He wins with the queen, unblocks clubs, and comes to the ♠J, North showing out, discarding a club (better than a heart, which would give the impression of being "safe from five"). Declarer cashes two more clubs, discarding diamonds while South discards a diamond (by keeping the long spade he prevents declarer from cashing the last spade before attacking hearts, but by discarding a diamond, there is some danger that he will help declarer to work out the diamond layout) and North parts with a heart. If anyone is short in hearts now, it will be South, so declarer could lead a heart to the queen, and a heart back, ducking to the blank ace.

But if North has five hearts headed by the ace and the sole diamond guard, the winning line is to force North to take a heart honour with his ace, after which he can be squeezed in the red suits. On this layout, North would duck if declarer led the ♥K from hand, and force him to guess the endgame correctly, so leading towards the ♥Q is the better play for declarer in both layouts where hearts are five-two. Imagine for a moment that you led a heart to the queen, which held. You would play South for the doubleton ace, playing a second heart on which North played the jack; you would duck, of course, getting a chill when South followed low. But the biggest chill would come when North continued with ... the ♥A.

Okay, so it's all a bad dream! By sharing it with you, I hope to convince you that things at the bridge table are not always what they seem.

Playing in 3NT, there will be many declarers who do not play on hearts for two tricks and concede a diamond early, hoping to steal a heart trick for 12. Those who are held to 11 tricks will beat only the pairs going down in 6NT (or perhaps 6♣). Where West declares, North might lead a diamond honour to his

the jack, normal enough, so far. Now declarer might pass the ♣Q to determine whether he can afford a fancy play in trumps, but he might not want to open up possibilities for a needless ruff, and try a trump towards dummy. When East follows with the nine, declarer must not only play the king, but also continue with a second trump from dummy, ducking to the ace. He can safely ruff a spade later, and with the ♣K right, take the rest of the tricks. If declarer does not risk a second trump (East might have ace-jack-third, with the ♣K wrong, and declarer will have a losing spade at the end), East can ruff in with the ♥A on the third round of spades, and West gets a second trump trick with the jack-eight over dummy's ten.

It's actually a subtly dangerous hand to play because any play in trumps could go wrong, and declarer doesn't mind losing the ♥K to the ace if trumps are three-two. His plan is to gain the lead, and cash the ♥Q. If the jack doesn't drop, he will continue with the ♠A in case the king (surprisingly, as the ten was not covered) drops, ruff his spade loser, ruff himself in, and take the club finesse. He could go down if the club finesse is wrong and West has the high trump and a long card in diamonds or spades to cash.

Some will lead an early heart to the ten and make five in some comfort on the lie of the cards. No one will make only four, so the frequency chart should include a raft of 650s, some 680s, and a smattering of 200s and 230s for pairs missing game.

Board 32. E/W Vul. Dealer West

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

Opinion will be divided about whether the West hand is best opened with 1♠ or 1♣ (with a few votes for a strong club thrown in for good measure). 1♠ will lead to (with North silent): 1♠-1NT; 2♣-2♦. West will choose from among pass, 3♣, and 2♥, where the latter depicts three cards in hearts and extra values. 2♦ will yield six or perhaps seven winners if declarer guesses reasonably well; 3♣ has an outside chance to make (again, a series of good reviews would be required) if North leads anything but a trump, but North's natural lead on this auction would be a trump; 2♥, if East passes, can always be made, at least in theory, but it's sure to involve some complex play, starting with North's very difficult opening lead. Any trump, perhaps?

In some modern systems (American Two-over-One, for example), responder's 2♦ over 2♣ would be artificial, so to show diamonds, he'd have to bid three. N/S won't have to double that to score well, as they'll be +200 or 300.

Where West begins with 1♣, North will overcall 1♠ or double for takeout, depending on how he learned the game and perceives this issue in 2006. East has a negative double of 1♠, which West will pass for penalty. If North sits for it, he will take five or six tricks, with the latter more likely. Should North try to improve the contract, he'll do better escaping to 1NT (probably down only one) than to 2♥, which leads to no satisfactory conclusion for his side. The main piece of good news for N/S is that they are not vulnerable, and those who find a resting place that costs only 100 points might survive with a 20-25% board.

If there's one word to describe the many different lines of play and defence on this part-score deal, that word would be "scrambling;" for each side will be doing its best to single in as many trump tricks as possible and avoid having its side aces and kings ruffed. Trying to project what will happen would be particularly unproductive.

Those who prefer to open 1♣ with black

nine tricks, while a red suit lead gives declarer time to establish a second heart trick and draw trumps, ending in dummy. It won't pay to let N/S play in 3♣, but if West doubles again (an overbid in terms of defensive strength), it will seem more than reasonable to East to pass. It won't pay to let N/S play in 3♣ doubled, either. The winning strategy for E/W is to find a way to 3♦, which can be made by establishing spades. That could be achieved by East taking out a second double to 3♦, or by West reopening with 3♦. It will be interesting to see how often this happens.

Not every North will raise to 3♣, however, and East will rebid 2♠ or 2♦, according to partnership policy or individual style. Not every North will protect with 3♣, either, so East will declare 2♠ with some significant frequency. As the defenders can't lead trumps with profit against 2♠, the contract will most often be made. If E/W stumble into 2♥, they can make that too, so there is great potential for +110 in both directions.

Because E/W can successfully outbid their opponents, the N/S plus scores figure to be particularly good. It won't take +670 for N/S to do well.

Board 30. Love All. Dealer East.

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

This is a deal on which very little can be made. With the points nearly evenly divided and no eight-card fit for either side, the most anyone can muster is +110, E/W, in 2♠.

Either side might declare INT, but only E/W, with their combined 19 points, have a legitimate shot at making it. It's not likely that either side will finish in INT, however.

Some likely auctions:

Pass-Pass-1♦-Pass; 1♠-Pass-INT/2♣-Pass;
2♥-Pass-2♠-All Pass
Pass-Pass-Pass-INT; 2♣(majors)-Pass-2♦(no preference)-Pass; 2♠-All Pass
Pass-Pass-Pass-1♣/1♦; 1♠-Double-Redouble-INT; All Pass

Or East might open a Multi 2♦ (treating his hand as a weak 2♠) and convert the 2♥ reply to 2♠.

Or East might have a pet convention to show a weak hand with both majors, which might land him (or rather West) in 2♥.

Less likely:

Pass-Pass-Pass-INT; All Pass ... well, maybe
Pass-Pass-Pass-1♠; Pass-INT-All Pass

It's not easy to give East a rough ride in 2♠, as the defenders will set up West's diamonds or establish at least one club trick for declarer, or break hearts or trumps. If the defence gets too busy, East may shorten his trumps and come to nine tricks on a trump coup. N/S will just hate that.

Board 31. N/S Vul. Dealer South.

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

Although N/S don't have all that much in high cards, nearly all will reach 4♥. The cards are friendly enough to offer a play for 12 tricks, but the winning line requires playing for this precise trump position, which requires both inspiration and courage, as playing to make six might lead to going set in four.

Say that East leads a diamond. The ace wins and declarer passes the ♠10, and leads a spade to

chagrin. If declarer can sneak a heart past South, he can take one heart and four of each for all 13 tricks.

Board 7. Game All. Dealer South.

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

To hold N/S to +140 in hearts, E/W have to avoid leading from the ♠K and cash their two diamond tricks once declarer has established a second club winner. In most cases, this should not be especially challenging, but there will surely be some +170s gracing the frequency charts.

Where West opens a natural 1♦, East will show his spades over North's 1♥ and compete to 3♦ after South raises to 2♥. If N/S sell out to 3♦ without doubling the final contract, declarer has a lot of work to do (although North has a difficult lead to make), and will do well to get out for one down; -100 will be a superb result, but -200 a very poor one.

It's more likely, however, that South (fourth trump, high-card maximum despite the dubious pointed-suit values) or North (strong trumps, 5/4 shape, relatively pure values) will compete to 3♥. At these tables, East will lead a diamond, and even if West plays the ace at trick one, the defence should come to four tricks easily enough.

Where West opens a catch-all 1♦ or 1♣, East will have to double 2♥ or use an artificial "minors" 2NT to get his side to the right minor, and some will sell out to 2♥ rather than get involved at the three level.

If West starts with a weak notrump, North will usually have a bid to show length in both majors,

and South will play in 2♥ or 3♥, unless East can compete with a takeout double. Although West does not have an easy lead against a heart contract, it will eventually become clear that diamonds must be played, so +140 is likeliest.

Where West passes in second position, N/S will attempt to play in 2♥, but East will protect with a double. At these tables, if North doesn't bid 3♥ over West's takeout to 3♦, South might not reopen, fearing a shaded third-seat opening.

Board 8. Love All. Dealer West.

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

Lots of different things could happen on this one, but much will depend on East's opening bid.

Where East starts with INT (12-14, 13-15, 14-16, and even a pushy pairs-influenced 15-17), South will not always have an easy way to show his clubs. If South passes, INT will often be passed out. In the movies, South leads the "attitude ♦8 to North's ace, and a timely club switch leaves declarer two down, -100, and more than a little grumpy. In real life, however, South will lead a club and declarer will take four spades, three hearts, and the ♣K for +120.

If West moves forward with Stayman, South might well come in with 3♣ over East's 2♠ reply. West will bid 3♠ or 4♠, depending on the partnership range for INT and perhaps some intangibles. If South leads his singleton heart, declarer can draw trumps and lose two diamonds and two clubs, finishing with nine tricks for +140 or -100. If South leads the ♣A, he must find the diamond switch to deal North a ruff and hold declarer to nine tricks. The best

lead is a diamond, which would enable the defenders to take two diamonds, a diamond ruff, and two clubs for -50 or -100.

South might be able to introduce his clubs cheaply via a natural overcall or conventional double of INT, and others will try 3♣ over INT. In both cases, West will compete with a negative double when part of the system, cue-bid 3♣ when legal, and choose between 3NT and a penalty double of 3♣ when forced to guess. As 3♣ is quite cold, doubled or not (indeed, it takes an early trump play by the defence to save the overtrick at 3♣), buying the contract there will be excellent for N/S.

Where East opens 1♦ or 1♠, South is likely to take some action. After 1♦, West will compete with a negative double over 2♣ or 3♣ and North will raise to 3♣ or perhaps 4♣. E/W must avoid getting to 4♣ (unless South leads the ♣A and shifts to a heart, or continues clubs) or avoid going minus at 3♣ in order to achieve a modest score. There won't be much difference between 4♣ -50 and -100.

A 1♠ opening by East will improve West's hand, but not enough to stretch to game, and at these tables, with diamonds not bid, there is perhaps more chance that South will lead a diamond against the probable final contract of 3♠.

Board 9. E/W Vul. Dealer North.

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

This should be virtually everyone's 3NT, N/S, whether or not West volunteers a hair-raising 1♠ overcall, perhaps mis-guessing the vulnerability.

West will lead a spade, and the fate of the deal will turn on declarer's play to trick one, the central issue being which opponent to play for shorter diamonds.

If declarer calls for the ♠A to play a diamond from dummy, he's betting that East has honour-doubleton or both high diamonds. Here that would be fatal: West wins the first diamond and continues spades, and whether declarer plays off the ♦A or overtakes the ♥Q to take a second diamond finesse, he will finish with only eight tricks.

The winning line, which will have more appeal if declarer places West with long spades (and therefore shorter diamonds than East, whose hand contains more empty spaces), is to win the spade lead in hand to lead a low diamond towards dummy. If West wins the queen, declarer will later finesse against East's king and use dummy's fourth diamond as the entry to cash the ♥K after unblocking the ace and queen. If, instead, West plays low on the first diamond without giving away the position, declarer might still go wrong by playing East for KQ7 and using the ♠A entry to finesse in diamonds.

Even if declarer goes wrong and plays the ♠A from dummy at trick one to lead a diamond to the jack and queen, West must be careful with his discards after declarer clears diamonds. West must discard a spade on the third diamond, and after East plays a third spade to establish West's long card, must discard that winner on the fourth round of diamonds after declarer unblocks hearts.

If West fails to do so, blanking the ♣A, declarer can leave the king-ten of hearts in dummy and exit in clubs. West cashes his spade, but must then lead from the jack-nine of hearts to dummy's tenace at trick 12. Indescribable pain! Of course, declarer might simply cash the ♥K, especially if West false-card with the nine on the second round, or if declarer plays West for a second club honour, particularly if West has overcalled.

will have good reason to play ♣A, club to the ten somewhere along the way. That's 10 tricks for declarer, and West must keep two hearts and two spades in the endgame to avoid giving declarer an eleventh.

There are always intangibles on deals like this one. For example, South might go down in 3NT if he gets both minors wrong on a spade lead. If that happens too often, the hapless N/S pairs that double 2♠ and beat it one trick could score quite well for +100. Or N/S might reach an undignified 6♦. Or stop at 4NT or 5♦ after deciding that 6♦ was not worth bidding, with both contracts likely to fail. Or N/S might stumble into 4♥, down, after: 1♦-Double-1♥-2♠/3♠ (pre-emptive), when South is unwilling to choose notrump with only one spade stopper (some will be able to double 2♠ to show a good hand and bid 3NT later to suggest only one spade stopper). If you don't think all these things will happen somewhere in the world in this session, I'd take the other side of any wager to that effect.

Board 28. N/S Vul. Dealer West.

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

At most tables, N/S will reach 4♥, usually by North, but sometimes by South, where North opens a Flannery 2♦, showing 4♠/5♥, 11-16 HCP. East will overcall in spades at all levels through four, which might open up the possibility that N/S reach 3NT, a contract more likely to be made than the more popular 4♥, particularly on a spade lead. North might take as many as 10 tricks in notrump after this start. Or N/S might defend 3♣ or 4♣ doubled, with accurate defence holding declarer to six tricks, down

500 or 800. Even 300 will be decent for N/S if most go down in 4♥.

If East leads the ♣10 against 4♥, declarer must take dummy's ace to avoid a defensive cross-ruff that leads to two down if West gives East his ruff before switching to his spade. Now East can play ♠A, spade to over-ruff dummy, and score the ♥K on a third round of clubs.

Depending on how many spades East bids, South will start to develop his hand by introducing clubs, making a negative double, or supporting hearts. It's really only where N/S open four-card majors and South tries a negative double of a 3♠ overcall that N/S might come to rest in 3NT, South passing North's conversion to 3NT.

The best lead against 3NT is the ♦Q, after which declarer will need to play with supreme inspiration to get home -- conceivable only if declarer assumes the ♦Q is from length and also places East with the ♥K. Declarer must duck the first diamond, win the continuation, cross to the ♥A, lead the ♣Q to dummy's ace, cash the other high diamond, and pass the ♥10 to East's king. East, out of everything but spades, must exit with a middle spade, but declarer wins, finishes hearts, and leads the ♣J. If West ducks, that's declarer's ninth trick. If he wins and cashes a diamond, he gives dummy the last trick with the ♣9. Take a bow if you got that one right without the benefit of super powers.

Board 29. Game All. Dealer North.

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

The bidding will often start: Pass-1♠-2♣-Double; 3♣-Pass-Pass-? If West sells out and leads the ♠10, declarer covers and comes to

more likely to entice East to compete to 2♠, where N/S can double him to their advantage, perhaps we shouldn't be too quick to think unkindly about North's trying to play in a suit contract.

Board 26. Game All. Dealer East.

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

If E/W play in notrump from the West side, or avoid a diamond lead by South if East declares, they can take 12 tricks with strong play. Assuming North does not lead a diamond, that would involve running the ♣J without first cashing an honour in West (essential on this layout to make four club tricks, and the correct technical play, losing only to singleton queen in North), taking all winners outside diamonds (unless North blanks the king-queen), and end-playing North in diamonds to concede a second trick in that suit. The unfortunate diamond lead by North will have plenty of support from the field, as it's the easiest route to defeating 3NT, the people's choice of contracts.

Where the defence leads spades, declarer should win in West and pass the ♥10 if it is not covered, keeping communications as fluid as possible. Although cashing a high club is the wrong way to play the suit, many will make this play and discover that they can no longer bring in the whole suit, after which declarer won't come to more than 10 tricks as long as North hangs on to his third spade and three diamonds.

Where East opens 1♣ or 1♥, aggressive South players might be willing to try 1♠ or 2♠, but these are not actions to attract heavy support from the field. West has a promising hand if

East has a real club suit for his 1♣ opening, but this time it will be a good idea to avoid any thoughts of slam and perhaps finishing in 5♣ when the values aren't there for 12 tricks. 3NT is where E/W want to be. If it starts 1♣-Pass-2♣ (inverted), North will at least consider taking some action, which may have an effect on the opening lead and perhaps on declarer's play.

Weak notrumpers will bid INT-3NT, depriving N/S of any temptation to enter the auction, and East is more likely to finish with 11 tricks than any other number.

Board 27. Love All. Dealer South.

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

N/S will usually play in 3NT, South declaring. The most common auction will be uncontested: 1♣/1♦-1♥; 2NT-3NT, but at some tables, West will chip in with a takeout double of South's 1♦ opening, finding his classical pattern irresistible. If North redoubles, East might jump to 2♠ to jam the auction (with the agreement that this is a weak action, of course). N/S will have to sort that out and reach 3NT from the South side to have a chance for a decent score, and must definitely avoid doubling 2♠, which can be beaten but might be allowed to make on (say) the lead of the ace of trumps.

The danger on this deal in doubling 1♦ with the West hand, is not that E/W will go for a number, but that declarer in 3NT will have plenty of evidence to help him do the right thing in both minors. Say that West leads a spade to dummy's jack. By starting diamonds with the ace and taking the ♦J at its face value, declarer can finesse twice against East's ten-eight, and

Board 10. Game All. Dealer East.

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

Left to themselves, strong notrumpers will bid the N/S cards: INT(N)-3NT. East will lead a spade and declarer will take a losing club finesse and go one down, taking the diamond finesse; -100. As E/W are vulnerable, there will be many tables where neither of them will take any action, but the game has become much more aggressive in the past 20 years, and there will be Easts who open a featherweight 1♠, or 2♠, or a Multi 2♦ as dealer, and some Wests who try 2♥ or a rather light 1♥ in third seat. Those actions won't matter if North finds a way into the auction that describes his hand fairly well, as N/S will fetch up in 3NT and go one down like their less-obstructed brethren . . . unless South declares and West happens to lead a heart, which would give away the contract.

Where North is permitted to open 1♣ in fourth position (weak notrumpers), East will overcall 1♠ and South will raise clubs directly or via a cue-bid, according to method. Where West has the opportunity to double a spade bid by South, East will know what to lead against 3NT, but in practice, it won't matter, as declarer has no ninth trick with the cards as they are, and should not take less than eight tricks . . . unless East leads the ♥J, ducked all around, and switches briskly to spades. We won't see that parlay very often.

Less common auctions will include:

- 2♣-Pass-Pass-2NT; Pass-3NT-All Pass
- Pass-Pass-2♥-Double; Pass-2NT-Pass-3NT; All Pass

- 1♠-Pass-INT-Double; Pass-Pass(?) -2♦ or 2♥ or 2♠-Pass; Pass-Double-All Pass
- 1♠-Pass-INT-Pass; 2♣-Pass-2♦/2♥-All Pass

E/W can take seven tricks in either red suit, or six in spades, but any minus their way figures to be terrible, with most of their counterparts going plus against 3NT. N/S pairs who manage to stop in 3♣ will learn that they can't make that either, despite their 25 HCP and comfortable trump suit.

Board 11. Love All. Dealer South.

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

E/W have nine tricks in notrump as long as they don't risk the heart finesse after the defence leads spades, and 11 tricks in clubs with the safe heart finesse to try for 12. They will certainly face some obstruction from N/S, who can take eight tricks (or perhaps nine, with imperfect defence) in spades tricks and seven in hearts.

Where South opens a weak 2♥ or a Multi 2♦, North will not introduce spades so readily over West's 3♣ overcall, as 3♠ would normally be interpreted as forcing. If North passes, East will wonder whether he should be concerned about his unstopped suits and potential for a high club contract, but in the end he will usually bid 3NT and convince himself that it would be a mistake to do otherwise at Matchpoints. If South leads his long suit, East will know that bidding notrump was a good thing to do: +430 will be a joint top. If South looks elsewhere with his opening lead, the defence should be able to avoid handing declarer a tenth winner.

Where South opens a light 1♥, North will

compete with 2♠ (particularly if that would be non-forcing) or a skewed negative double over 2♣, after which E/W are likely to reach 5♣ rather than 3NT, and a few pairs might reach 6♣ after East cue-bids 2♥ (over double) or 3♥ (over 2♠). Where South passes as dealer, perhaps reluctant to open a weak two with a poor suit, good support for the other major, and a maximum in high cards, North will overcall 2♠ or perhaps even 3♠ (trading on the extra playing strength often produced by the six-four shape). Even if South supports spades, East has too many clubs to defend 4♣ doubled. In fact, it's difficult to construct an auction where 4♣ doubled will be the final contract, and N/S won't bid any higher than that, so E/W +400 will be by far the most common results, with a smattering of +430s and -50s.

Board 12. N/S Vul. Dealer West.

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

As dealer, at favourable vulnerability, West players whose methods endorse a 1♥ opening should be sorely tempted to strike the first blow with that call. 1♥ would silence North, and E/W are likely to buy the contract in 1NT, 2♥, or 2♠, down 50 or 100, with minor chances for +90 or +110. A Precision 1♦ opening by West will generally lead to similar developments. Where West opens 1♣, North has an easy takeout double, and contracts after this start will include 1NT, 2♦, and 3♦, N/S, and 2♠, 2♣, and 3♣, E/W. A weak notrump opening by West will usually silence everyone.

If West passes, different Norths will open with four different one-level calls, most often leading to 1NT or 2♦ by N/S.

Anyone managing +110 in either direction will score very well, and the results on this deal will turn on a variety of random factors, including system, style, the opening lead, and declarer's current proclivity for guessing well -- finding the ♦Q, guessing which heart to play from East on the lead of the ♥6 against West's 1NT, leading the ♣Q to pin North's doubleton ten, whether to lead a low spade to the ten or to play low towards the queen. Minus 50 might be good or quite bad in either direction.

I'm curious to see the frequencies on this quietly dangerous deal.

Board 13. Game All. Dealer North.

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

Although the North hand is not a classical vulnerable weak two bid (modest suit, suitability for play in two other strains, side ace), most players whose methods include a weak 2♥ or a Multi 2♦ will not be dissuaded from opening at the two level at Matchpoints. It's easy to imagine 2♥ ending the auction, although many Wests will protect with a double.

Against 2♥ by North the defenders needn't do anything fancy to hold declarer to eight tricks, and will come to a spade, two trumps, and two diamonds unless they allow declarer to ruff a diamond in dummy, or ... lead the ♠J (which will not be as unpopular as it should be; a club lead is considerably more attractive). Where South declares 2♥ after a Multi 2♦ opening by North, West will often lead a diamond to East's ace, and to prevent a ninth trick, East must switch to a trump, which is not an easy play. There will be some N/S pairs in 3♥, pushed there by the opponents, or when South raises 2♥ to 3♥ as

doubles for takeout, it's not likely that he will buy the contract in 4♥. Once West opens the bidding, East, though aware he might not make 5♦, is going to bid it.

After that, N/S might well sell out quietly, but some will go on to 5♥ freely (or much less often, 5♠), or double 5♦. A double by North would send the message that his 4♥ was based on a strong hand, and South will either convert to 5♥, or pass, without much conviction.

As there's really nothing to the play in 5♦ (+400, or +550, doubled), let's look at 4♥ for a moment. 4♥ can't be beaten unless East leads the ♣Q and declarer takes the trick, which is the intuitive play. In that scenario, declarer plays a spade honour at trick two. West wins and can give East two spade ruffs, or (more teasingly), switches to a trump, which declarer must duck. Now, a club over to West nets East a spade ruff. However, if declarer ducks the ♣Q, wins the second club, and plays a spade honour, West has no good answer. Declarer will drop East's ♥K after East gets an over-ruff in clubs, or can force an entry in trumps if West does not shorten East's trump holding; in either case, declarer can finesse against the ♠10 at a suitable juncture in the play.

Where N/S compete to 5♥, E/W must resist taking the push to 6♦ to avoid going minus. Although that would be an E/W disaster, collecting 50, 100 or even 300 from 5♥ or 5♠ (N/S might reach a spade contract if North's initial action is a takeout double) won't be that much better, because most Norths will not compete to the five level unless they've been raised in hearts or believe South can control the play in 5♠ doubled.

1♣-Double-1♦-1♠; Pass-4♠-5♦-Pass; Pass-5♥-Double-All Pass,

is a possible auction, but North may prefer to focus on hearts in a variety of ways, and in those cases the spade fit will rarely come to light.

Board 25. E/W Vul. Dealer North.

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

While Pass-1♠-1NT-All Pass is a reasonable auction, there will be plenty of variations, the most frequent being a transfer or takeout to 2♥ by North, which could buy the contract, or lead to East bidding 2♠ once N/S limit their hands. North, expecting to make a low part-score, might well double 2♠, as a one trick set would be 200, more than adequate compensation for his side.

Indeed, 2♠ will go one down with normal play and defence, down two if declarer gets the clubs wrong when it comes to that. Minus 100 should be reasonable, -200 or 500 disastrous. East will have to determine in each case whether he can get away with a second bid against the opponents at his table.

In 1NT, declarer can negotiate two spades, a heart, a club and four diamonds on the normal spade lead for +120, but will have some guessing to do if West divines to lead a club. The winning line for eight tricks involves ducking the first club, playing the jack on the club continuation, taking West's queen with the ace to block the club suit, playing a heart to knock out West's entry, and making sure to lose a diamond to East. If anyone manages that, he deserves our joint and several admiration.

N/S can make 2♥ only if the defence doesn't get around to clubs in time or (in certain variations) leave West with a small trump to kill South's second spade winner or a long diamond. Passing 1NT would be a much more successful decision for North, at least in isolation. However, as converting to 2♥ is

create some problems for E/W. A prepared 1♣ or Precision 1♦ will not prevent West from overcalling in hearts, but if East advances with INT rather than 2NT or a cue-bid, he might play right there. A 1♥ opening will silence West, and if North musters up a 1♠ response, East's takeout double and South's raise to 2♠ will leave West with an awkward problem: Neither a cue-bid with no clear direction nor 3NT with such a thin spade stopper will seem comfortable, but 2NT would be an underbid, so West might try a responsive double as least of evils. There will be some that miss game in this scenario.

Over a 1♠ opening, not everyone would consider a 2♥ overcall reasonable. North will raise to 2♠ whether or not West overcalls, and there will be some N/S pairs buying the auction at 2♠, theoretically two down for -200. A very light weak notrump might steal the pot for -300 or so, but if E/W double INT and/or 2♠, N/S -500 and -800 will enter the equation.

Where N/S start spades against 3NT, declarer can lead clubs toward East's honours twice to develop a ninth trick. That will be the attractive line of play if declarer concludes that spades are four-four, because it will rarely lead to defeat. If South wins the first club and switches to a low heart in this variation, declarer intends to rise with the ace to play another club, as allowing the defenders to take an early heart trick permits them to revert to spades to defeat the contract.

If declarer feels that spades are five-three, however, playing on clubs will not work if the hand with the shorter spades wins the first club, preserving his partner's club entry for the long spades. On such a layout, declarer must play on hearts to have a chance: win the first or second round of spades (ducking one round), in East, and run the ♥9, playing South for an honour-ten combination. As this line will produce at least one overtrick (with no spade duck) if South started with honour-ten-small, it will appeal to many declarers, regardless of

their assessment of the spade distribution. The fact that this line will lead to defeat in 3NT on the actual layout will not trouble them unduly, as the chance for overtricks at Matchpoints is always an important consideration.

Note that South, with honour-ten-small, might play the honour on the ♥9, trying to look like a player with KQx. The other side of this coin is that when an expert South follows low to the ♥9, declarer must decide whether that precludes his holding honour-ten-low, from which he would "normally" play the honour.

As there are elements of bluff and double bluff in the handling of this card combination, declarers faced with the appearance of an honour from South on the first round of the suit will have to choose between backing their assessment of this particular South's inclination to play an honour from each of these holdings and the straight percentage play, which is: win the ace, finish diamonds, and lead to the ♥8. As South could play either honour randomly from KQx, but only the one he was dealt with honour-ten-small, the theory of restricted choice favours taking a losing line in hearts, whether South splits his honours or not.

As there will be some E/W minus scores and some missed games, and only a few 800s, the straightforward +600s will be above average.

Board 24. Love All. Dealer West.

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

Whether North overcalls 1♣ (or a natural 2♣) with a minimum number of hearts or 4♥, or

an obstructive move. Most of those pairs will go minus.

Where West reopens 2♥ with a takeout double, East will face a difficult decision. If 2NT is natural and constructive, that will be his choice, as 3♣ or 3♦ would not suggest any values. 2NT would end the auction unless South competes to 3♥, which would be a questionable decision if 2♥ is acceptable with the North cards. With lebensohl in place, however, 2NT would be a puppet to 3♣, to show a weak hand with clubs or diamonds, an invitational hand with an appropriate number of spades, or certain game-forcing hands (when East continues with 3♥ or 3NT over 3♣), so East will either commit to 3NT or settle for a constructive 3♣ or 3♦.

If E/W buy the contract in one of these variations, they can't make anything and will be in danger of going -200 whether or not South doubles. With best play and defence, clubs plays a trick better than diamonds, as there is no club ruff for the defence when that suit is trumps.

Perhaps the most interesting contract is 2NT by East. Say that the defence clears spades, declarer winning the third trick in dummy, parting with a club. If he takes the diamond finesse, he will lose the seven obvious tricks for two down and a poor score. If he leads a club to the king, however, and discards diamonds from both hands on the run of the spades, the defence cannot get its diamond trick: on a heart switch, declarer takes the ace and leads towards the ♥Q, and can neutralise South's ♣J after rising with the ♦A when North switches. On the lead of the ♥J, declarer can get out for down one in similar fashion (no diamond finesse) if North takes the ♥K immediately, but if North ducks the heart lead to the queen, it's a bit more complicated than that. Declarer must play on clubs, finessing against South's jack.

When South wins the ace and clears hearts, declarer finishes the clubs. North can't blank the ♠A if declarer reads the position correctly and ducks a spade to establish the king, so

North releases a spade and two diamonds to keep his hearts. Declarer cashes the ♦A and exits with a heart, and North must concede a trick to the ♠K in the end.

That's an awful lot of work to escape for -100 in 2NT, but there will be a big difference in score between -100 and -200, and anyone finding one of these "winning" lines is eligible for a pat on the back from his partner.

Board 14. Love All. Dealer East.

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

North has the best hand at the table and his side has a double fit of sorts and the preponderance of the high cards, but E/W, playing in their best trump suit, can take the largest number of tricks, thanks to their two voids and 10-card fit. With the ace-king-third of spades ruffing out tripleton, declarer (after losing an early diamond ruff) can combine a cross-ruff with an eventual ruff of East's fourth spade with the king of trumps and a late finesse of the ♣10 to draw North's trumps and cash the ♠Q at trick 13. But E/W will rarely buy the contract in 4♣, as N/S will generally reach 4♥.

Where E/W have located their club fit, West might not be as keen to defend 4♥, doubled or not, but this would appear to be one of those situations in which it pays to take some action: if 4♥ can be beaten, it should be doubled; but if it can't, then 5♣ will be a cheap sacrifice. The fact that West can't be certain which of these conditions exists should not prevent him from backing his judgement. Indeed, that's one reason that Bridge is so challenging, and so much fun.

Either East or South might open the bidding with a weak two-suited bid, but if both pass, West might do likewise in third seat, rather than open a light 1♣ or 1♥ and hope East doesn't bid spades. Where North opens a strong notrump in fourth position, East will come in with a conventional bid that shows (or might show) his two-suiter, a DONT 2♣ (clubs and another) being particularly attractive. In some of these auctions, South will show his majors, or use a form of Stayman, and will invite game or bid it should the heart fit be revealed. The N/S pairs who are able to buy the contract at 3♥ should fare well in the scoring, especially if declarer makes his contract, something he can do by refraining from playing trumps too soon. Say that the defenders lead two round of clubs, ruffed in South.

It's important to play spade through West, who can't ruff in without telescoping his partner's spade trick and one of his trump winners. West discards, and three rounds of diamonds follow, South ruffing to lead another spade. Again, West can't ruff with profit, and he will eventually have to concede a ruff and discard or sacrifice one of his trump tricks. If the bidding suggests that West will have at least three hearts and/or that East has at least four spades, declarer should avoid playing trumps prematurely.

Where North opens 1♦, 1♥, or a strong club, East players whose methods do not include two-suited options may not get their clubs into the picture in time, and West will usually sell out to 4♥ and go plus.

Board 15. N/S Vul. Dealer South.

♠ K J 9 ♥ Q 4 ♦ J 10 8 6 ♣ 10 7 4 2 ♠ 10 6 ♥ A K J 8 6 3 ♦ K Q 4 ♣ A 8 ♠ A 5 3 ♥ 10 5 2 ♦ 3 ♣ Q J 9 6 5 3	♠ Q 8 7 4 2 ♥ 9 7 ♦ A 9 7 5 2 ♣ K
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The vulnerability should talk South out of pre-empting in clubs, although many will come in with 2♣ after Pass-1♥-Pass-1♠, feeling their initial pass gives them some security . . . from partner, if not from the opponents. That should rarely have an effect on E/W's choice of final contract, and 4♥ will be considerably more popular than 3NT.

We can see that declarer can take 11 tricks (or 13 on the "blind" lead of the ♦J) by dropping North's queen of trumps, but with nothing to go on, declarer will often do worse, winning the club lead in dummy to lead a heart to the jack (he can't afford the luxury of one high heart first, because crossing back to the ♦A blocks that suit, so that even if the ♥Q were onside tripleton and diamonds running, declarer would not enjoy dummy's diamonds to discard spades): +420.

And if North starts with the ♦J where South hasn't bid clubs, perhaps the play would proceed: ♦Q, ♥A, ♣K, heart finesse . . . diamond ruff, ♠A, ♠K: -50. Or, dramatically differently: ♦Q, ♥A, ♥K (fearing a ruff), leading to E/W +510.

In notrump, there is no danger of a ruff, but if declarer loses a trick to the ♥Q, North can switch to the ♠J to surround West's ten to hold declarer to nine tricks quickly rather than slowly.

The most common auction will be: Pass-1♥-Pass-1♠; (2♣/Pass)-3♥-Pas-4♥. When South mentions clubs, declarer may try to drop the ♥Q, reasoning that South would be less inclined to overcall, missing ace-king of clubs, with a horrible heart holding like queen-third in front of West's heart suit.

Although results will range from N/S +50 to E/W +510, E/W +420 and +450 will be much more frequent, with +450 producing an excellent score.

the queen, and West switches to clubs. It's much less comfortable for declarer now, and the best he can do is concede a spade to build a second winner for himself; he'll lose a trick in the wash after this defence for +600. On a club lead, declarer takes two spade finesses and comes to nine tricks.

Plus 630 is sure to be superb for N/S, but +600 might be respectable too if there are enough N/S pairs doubling 2♣ for inadequate compensation for the vulnerable game.

Board 22. E/W Vul. Dealer East.

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

At virtually every table, West will declare 4♠, most of the time uncontested, ideally (for his side) without mentioning his second suit. We can see that N/S are entitled to three tricks, but if they don't cash their second club trick, declarer may draw trumps, play hearts from the top, discard clubs from dummy, ruff two clubs, and lose only a club and a diamond, for a strong +650.

Why should North switch to a club with no help from West's bidding? Well, South might stick in a bold 3♣ overall after passing originally, when East raises 1♠ to 2♠, but that's not everyone's cup of tea. Or North might overcall a strong club by West with 1♦, after which South might risk mentioning his clubs at the two level for the lead, but how often will that happen?

It's perhaps more likely that West, intending to bid game, will try the effect of a "need-help" trial bid in clubs, which might serve to blow off the club lead or club switch, after North cashes one high diamond and gets a count signal from

South. If North leads or switches to a heart, declarer will draw trumps for +650.

But how should declarer play 4♠ after a neutral trump switch? If the ♥J isn't going to capitulate, the club honours are divided, and trumps are three-one, declarer can't afford to draw trumps, as he's not quite cold for four in that scenario. In some variations, declarer would plan to play four rounds of hearts, discarding clubs -- the last a loser-on-loser play -- as North, out of trumps, is permitted to win the fourth heart with his jack.

Declarer's best play for four "natural" heart tricks is to take a second-round finesse through South, a spectacularly unsuccessful line on this layout, but the one offering the best chance for 11 tricks if declarer gets a trump shift and plays a second round. As the declarers (all right, there won't be many of them) who talk themselves into this line will be -100, the +620s will fare a bit better than otherwise. Those +650s might be more popular than they should be and will yield terrific scores, whatever else happens.

Board 23. Game All. Dealer South.

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

Left alone, E/W will reach 3NT via:

- 1♥-2♦; 2NT-3NT, or
- 1♥-2♦; 2♥-2NT; 3NT, or
- 1♥-2♦; 2♥-3NT, or
- 1♥-2♦; 2♥-3♣; 3♦-3NT, or
- INT-3NT.

However, South might overlook his vulnerability and open the bidding in any strain, which might

Board 20. Game All. Dealer West.

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

After 1♣-Pass-1♠, should South double for takedown facing a partner who could not act over 1♣? That burning question will be answered with different degrees of conviction by experts and social players all over the world. Some would argue that it's safer to bid early than late, while others believe that doubling in a live auction should show either more strength or more promising honour location.

If South bids immediately, West might jump to 3♣ if he is confident his partner won't play him for a strong hand (no redouble, or -- by agreement --no bid in one of South's suits). If North has a responsive double in his arsenal, he should unleash it, hoping South will have five cards in at least one of the red suits. That will get his side to 3♦, which can be defeated with careful defence, which includes taking a spade ruff and not breaking hearts. E/W can make 4♣, even on a trump lead or switch, if declarer leads a heart to the king, then ducks hearts twice to catch the ace, so N/S will score well for -100, but East might double 3♦, and -200 will not score well at all for N/S.

If South passes on the first round, he will surely reopen with a double when West's 2♣ rebid comes around to him. West will try 2♥ (or perhaps 3♣) and it will be awkward for N/S to bid again, so West will declare 3♣ most of the time: +130. We can imagine some Wests rebidding 3♣ and East taking a shot at 3NT for -50, but that won't happen often.

Although N/S can scramble eight tricks in

any suit but clubs and might even manage nine in spades despite the five-one trump break, they will rarely buy the contract unless they're doubled at the three-level or higher, so it will be difficult for them to do as well as -100.

Board 21. N/S Vul. Dealer North.

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

The normal contract on Board 21 is 3NT. North will declare more often than South, although North players out of range for INT will start with 1♣ or 1♦, making it easy for West to overcall 2♠ over a 1♥ response. This scenario will lead to South playing any notrump contract for his side. West is less likely to come in after INT-Pass-2♣, but many will do so at the favourable vulnerability. N/S will do well to bid their vulnerable game rather than stop to double 2♠, as West, by playing high spades to the first two rounds of that suit, can take four spades, a heart, and a club, for -300.

In 3NT, declarer will take at least nine tricks, and South has a good chance for ten on a spade lead. If West leads low, declarer wins cheaply, and can come to a diamond to lead a low heart. Whether West plays the queen or the five, declarer can take two heart tricks while losing only one, and will have time for four diamonds and two of each. On a high spade lead, declarer wins the ace and can play the same way, although in both cases, he might not do so, using his entry to take the club finesses (or his entries to take two club finesses if East ducks the first).

Where North declares and East has been tipped off to lead a spade, declarer ducks to

Board 16. E/W Vul. Dealer West.

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

Single dummy, the place you'd like to be with the E/W cards is 6♠ (conveniently by East in this case), which offers a safe play for seven, as South can't lead a club. On a hypothetical club lead, declarer would win, take two high trumps in dummy, discard clubs on diamonds, and pass the ♥9. Not quite cold, as there could be a heart ruff with the outstanding trump. In 6NT, an adverse ruff is not a factor, but on a club lead, playing for the overtrick is risky business: should the heart finesse lose, the defence may be able to cash a club.

After a strong notrump by West, East will start with a transfer or his partnership's version of Stayman, eventually showing six-four and a strong hand. West would prefer to have more strength in the majors on this type of auction, but he can cover all East's minor-suit losers and the ♠10 and nine-eight of hearts are plus values. He will cooperate with a slam effort and there is some chance that the partnership will reach a marginal grand slam if West never makes a regressive move.

With North on lead against 6♠ after a transfer sequence, South would like to double to suggest that he can ruff something, but (a) a club ruff might not set 6♠, and (b) doubling might chase E/W to a cold 6NT. South should be anticipating this scenario a bit earlier in the auction, in order to avoid sending unauthorised information to his partner by giving the matter visible thought before passing, but not everyone can manage that at the table. Would

North normally lead the ♣K anyway, or would a diamond or heart lead be worth considering instead? Much would depend on the nature of E/W's bidding, but let's hope this issue is never raised. Holding 6♠ to 12 tricks on a club lead should be very good.

Where West starts with 1♣, out of range for INT, he will rebid INT over 1♠, allowing East to slow down the auction in many cases with an artificial inquiry (2♦ or 2♣). Others will have to jump to 3♥ to create a force, which is less comfortable, as West won't yet know about East's sixth spade.

If West rebids 3NT, East can continue with 4♣, and despite having half his strength in East's short suit, West will like his hand for 6♣. If East can count on West for two spades (hardly automatic in many modern partnerships), he will eventually convert 6♣ to 6♠, but there will be some pairs in 6♣, down. 7NT will be the E/W top, with 7♠ (by East) inches behind, but taking 13 tricks in 6NT will also be excellent. The pedestrian +1460 might be adequate if enough E/W pairs take only 12 tricks in spades or notrump (in six or seven) and more pairs miss slam than bid and make seven (don't count on that happening).

Board 17. Love All. Dealer North.

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

N/S can take 12 tricks in hearts, diamonds and notrump, with the aid of the diamond finesse, but it won't be easy to reach any of these 50% (a bit less for 6♥ by South, which could run into a ruff) slam, as East will jam the auction in spades over North's opening bid.

Where East opts for 4♠, South can hardly do anything but double, whether his partnership defines that as penalty, negative, or “cards.” If North passes, the defenders have plenty of time to arrange a club ruff for South, holding declarer to six tricks for four down, -800. Nice result for E/W if enough N/S pairs bid slam, but looking at the full deal, it’s more likely that the guys getting +800 will score better than their opponents, worldwide.

Might North take out a double of 4♠? Certainly, if the double suggests so-called transferable values -- cards good for both declaring and defending, with not too much in spades. 5♥, if South suggests heart length, is possible, and might catch a hopeful raise to six. 4NT, initially diamonds with secondary length in clubs or hearts, would produce 5♦ from South (whose double just suggested useful cards), which North would have to pass.

But 4♠ is a lot of spades at the prevailing vulnerability, and 3♠ figures to be a more popular choice. South could double (same possible meanings as a double of 4♠) or take a wild stab at 4♥, but 3NT would be quite a reasonable choice. Would North move over 3NT, a bid that covers so much ground when there is no room to explore? Some will advance with 4♥, 4♦, or 4♠ (perhaps even 4♣ - natural), but most will pass; +490 might score very well, although even +520 is possible if East optimistically ducks the spade lead. Where South’s double of 3♠ is negative, North will feel that 4♥ doesn’t do his hand justice, but will be reluctant to do more. There will be plenty of +480s after East’s 3♠ overcall.

I can’t think of anything nice to say about a weak jump overcall of 2♠, but 1♠ is certainly a viable alternative to the bigger pre-empts. The danger in not bidding more may become apparent where South tries 2♥ and North essentially drives to slam once he discovers that South has two aces. Better to be lucky than good on this deal. If South starts with a negative double, N/S will finish at 4♥.

Board 18. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

6♥ is excellent for E/W, but with trumps four-one, declarer will have some anxious moments after taking two diamond ruffs, perhaps playing one round of spades in the process. All will be well if North takes the ♠A on the first round, but if he ducks, declarer will need to fall back on clubs three-three with the queen onside in order to get home. If, instead, he plays a second spade while there’s still a trump in dummy, the defence gets a spade ruff to set the contract.

As declarer can play “straight up” (taking two diamond ruffs and drawing trumps) if trumps are three-two, many, if not most declarers will not leave themselves with the alternative line of playing on spades in time, which would require only the club finesse (and not also the three-three break) to get home. Here, however, the winning line will require playing for all five club tricks. Indeed, if North correctly withholds his ♠A when declarer plays the suit early, he will lose it, declarer taking one spade, four hearts, the ♦A, two diamond ruffs, and five club tricks: +1010.

Where East describes his hand accurately with a relatively early notrump bid, West will use Stayman, learn about the heart fit, and either take charge with an appropriate key card ask, drive to slam, or (better) make a slam try. For some that would be an artificial 3♠ over 3♥; for others, West will have to stall with 4♣ or perhaps splinter to 5♦. East, with a high-card minimum, but excellent trumps; a

second potentially useful four-card suit; and respectable controls, should co-operate with a slam try that agrees hearts.

The danger in 4♣ over 3♥ is that this sequence suggests clubs and spades, and West may not have time to cancel that message. Without some fairly sophisticated methods in place, West will often have to bid aggressively to reach this worthwhile slam.

Where East starts with a strong club, West will make a positive response in clubs and show secondary hearts. If the bidding goes well, West might be able to show a diamond control while denying a spade control, and the slam might be reached more convincingly.

There will be more pairs missing slam than going down in one, but both those events will improve the score of those who bid and make six. Plus 980 should be well above average.

Board 19. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

At many tables, South’s strong notrump opening will be passed out. West’s natural lead is the ♦2, but with such a weak hand, a case could be made for one of the other suits, hearts combining safety with aggression, clubs having more merit where a 2♣ reopening by East would have been artificial. As it happens, spades is the most promising suit for the defence ... of course!

Although declarer can come to seven tricks

easily by playing the nine from dummy on a low diamond lead, it’s more flexible, and an application of the theory of restricted choice to play low, which leaves a third-round finesse if West has led from the ten or jack. If declarer wins in hand and plays on clubs, he can survive a spade switch and continuation from West, coming to two clubs, three diamonds, and a trick in each major, while the defence comes to three spades, two clubs, and a heart.

Where declarer plays the ♦9 from dummy to lead a heart, he will make a precious overtrick, as East can neither duck nor rise with the ace to switch to the ♠K with profit. If East ducks, declarer wins, unblocks diamonds, crosses to the ♠A, cashes the ♦K, and leads another heart: East gets three spades, a heart, and a late club: +120.

The nature of the game being what it is today, many Easts will protect when INT comes around to them, unleashing his side’s bid that shows or might show both majors. It’s not just the idea that disturbing the opponents’ notrump in general has become increasingly fashionable, but also, there is a greater awareness that it pays to take some chances when the notrumper’s side is not vulnerable, as two down, not doubled, will not give the defenders as good a score as they’d get for making two of a major or three of a minor.

The odds change when E/W are vulnerable and guess wrong, because they might go -100 by bidding when they might have been -90 by defending. Not to mention the dread -200 against at best a part-score. As in this case, where E/W will finish in 2♥ or 2♠, which won’t produce more than six tricks without a lot of help from the enemy. And North might double on the strength of his high cards, hoping to turn 100 into 200 with a chance for 500 rather than 200.

As is often the case, despite what you might read in various hot-selling bridge books, it would be best to defend INT. Accurately.