



Message from
José Damiani,
President, World Bridge Federation

2007 is the 21st birthday of the World Wide Bridge Contest!

I remember when it all began, sponsored by Epson Computers, when the height of technology was the fax machine and results were relayed to Paris using that or the telephone. In those days it was several weeks before a full and final result was available, while we waited for the post to bring us the paper results that we could then key into the computer – hundreds of names and scores, a task that was all too time consuming.

Today things are very different - 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 it all happening at 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.

These advances in technology mean that most of us have access to Internet, and can find information in a way that is unprecedented. You can find out about events that are going to happen – events like the 2007 World Championships in Shanghai for example, with its exciting World Transnational Teams. Or about the first World Mind Sport Games to be held in Beijing in 2008. You can discover so much about the bridge events that are happening: their results, online vu-graph, daily bulletins and so forth. And of course you can play bridge on line at one of the many “online clubs” that are now available. So much that was unthought of 21 years ago.

But today you have gone to your local club, and 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

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'José Damiani'.

José Damiani
President

**Find the results from this exciting competition at:
<http://www.ecatsbridge.com>**

Board 1. Love All. Dealer North.

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

After two passes, South has a solid 1♠ opening bid, and West is strong enough to act. Even though we all prefer to have two stoppers in the opening suit for a INT overcall, the ♠10 adds some reassurance that the contract will not be wrong-sided. The only alternative – a takeout double – isn't really tempting with three spades and only three cards in the unbid major.

If West overcalls INT, North is a little too weak to act without a fit, so we move over to East.

What to do with 5-3-3-2 distribution and a five-card major when your partner opens or overcalls INT is an oft-debated question amongst experts. A good rule of thumb is to transfer to your major (or take out to two of your major if you don't employ transfers) if your hand is weak or the long suit is fairly strong. With a little more strength in the short suit, pass would be tempting for us, but here, it's a toss-up between passing and converting to hearts. With spade length, a heart contract is more likely to run into spade ruffs and/or North having long or strong hearts. As you can see, both risks materialize here.

If East passes, we are back to South. With a strong hand to his left, some players may give up, which won't give them a good score, but with extra distribution it looks right to act with both 2♣ and 2♠ finding acolytes. North will have to guess over 2♣ holding two spades and three clubs. If South is 5-5, clubs may be

much better than spades, but if South is 6-4, spades will be better. For those reasons, and the simple fact that the majors yield 30 points a trick and minors only 20, South may bury his clubs and rebid 2♠. If he shows his second suit, though, he will be rewarded with +150 if North passes; if North raises clubs, N/S have a chance of reaching 5♣ for a near joint top.

If West is left to declare INT, the likely result is one or two down, but the contract might come home on a diamond lead to the jack followed by a heart. The defense must not be too quick to cash their club tricks or South will have to give declarer a trick with the spade ten late in the play.

If East prefers to take out INT to 2♥, N/S can take seven tricks on defense: the ace of spades, two spade ruffs, two club tricks, the ♥A, and either the ♥J by means of promotion or (more likely) a late diamond trick. Doubling 2♥ will net N/S plus 300 and a great score. More likely, South will bid 2♠ over 2♥ (or 2♦) and play there; plus 140, unless the defense starts with three rounds of diamonds and South immediately plays ♠A, spade. Then, a fourth diamond from West gives the defense a third trump trick. To make sure of nine tricks in this variation, South must win the ♦Q and lead trumps, covering East's card. Then he can over-ruff East on the fourth diamond, which restricts the defense to two trump tricks.

Board 2. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

In these days of light opening bids, virtually every East would open this hand with its three

quick tricks and promising distribution, with 1♦ the popular choice. South has a little less than his share of the deck, but with length in the boss suit, well-placed honors and shortness in opener's suit, a 1♠ overcall is clear over 1♦.

West will compete with a negative double, a once-radical convention that has gained nearly universal support in the modern game. North, with the best hand at the table, will either redouble to show strength, or show his spade support naturally or artificially. While a jump to 3♠ or 4♠ would not be the popular choice in these days where most jumps in partner's suit are preemptive, there is much to be said for a simple 4♠, which may prevent E/W from finding a profitable save in hearts.

If North redoubles or cue-bids 2♦, East will be grateful for the space and show his hearts cheaply. Where North has shown support, South will bid 2♠ or pass, depending on the meaning of those bids, but if North redoubled South will pass 2♥, or double for takeout (if that is an option) to bring clubs into the picture. North is likely to bid 4♠ at his next turn, but if he bids only 3♠, South might carry on to game, picturing North with short hearts.

The play in a spade contract is likely to yield 10 tricks. Should West find an unlikely club lead, South has to be careful. If he wins and plays trumps from the top, then leads a heart, East might bravely follow low, permitting West to win and cash his trump. A second heart leaves South with two more red losers for one down; a terrible score for N/S. As the club lead is unlikely to be a singleton, given East's length in the red suits, South should win the opening lead in dummy and play a heart, arranging for two ruffs in dummy and ten tricks.

It's unlikely that East-West will save in 5♥ over 4♠, but if they do, they can escape for two down (although they will often lose one more trick in the wash, with two red singletons out). Whether -300 or -500 will be a good result for E/W will depend on the

field's willingness to bid 4♠.

The West players who can't double 1♠ for takeout might try INT, which will turn out badly if N/S play in spades as South can take 11 tricks by finessing West for the ♠Q and leading diamonds towards dummy to set up his eleventh trick in that suit whether West ducks or goes in with the king. +650 will be close to a top for N/S, losing only to those fortunate pairs, who are doubled in spade contracts; +200, for a spade partial making five, will save a few points by beating the +170s.

If South doesn't overcall, West will respond 1♥, but N/S will find spades anyway after North doubles for takeout. South has enough for 4♠ and may even bid 5♠ if E/W compete to 5♥.

Some four-card majorites would open the East hand with 1♥; then, 1♠-4♥-4♠-All Pass, will follow with no one certain whose hand it is.

Board 3. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

At most tables, North will open 1♠ in third position and South will raise to 2♠. West has the right shape to double for takeout, and after his limiting initial pass, East won't expect much more, especially in partnerships that believe the hand with the right shape should strain to act. That strategy resolves some close decisions, but vulnerable, at pairs, West may decide to remain silent to avoid exposing his partnership to the dread "kiss of death" - minus 200 on a part-score deal. Indeed, that is a real possibility here, even if N/S don't double E/W's contract.

If East employs a “scrambling 2NT” in reply to West’s takeout double, West will bid 3♦ and can take eight tricks if he makes all the right moves. Two down will be horrible for E/W, of course, but even one down might be dismal if many N/S pairs fail at 2♠. If E/W do not have the methods to scramble into diamonds, they may end in an undistinguished 3-3 club fit and go down a bunch; South will like that, and might do best not to double, lest E/W escape into diamonds, a strain that would be less obvious to double. If East declares 2NT he can be set at least two tricks.

If North is allowed to play in 2♠, he will take seven or eight tricks. Most East players will lead a club honor, advancing the play favorably for North. On a trump shift, declarer wins in hand and leads a second club. The best E/W can do then is cash their minor suit winners and exit passively in a minor. Even if North plays for trumps to be 4-1, he hasn’t the entries to pick up the trumps and dispose of his heart losers on dummy’s high clubs. So he has to be content with +110.

Should East prefer a trump lead, which is quite reasonable (on the part-score level there is no hurry cashing your top tricks, and leading the top card from a short suit is often dangerous), North can still take eight tricks if he goes after clubs. But a more likely line is to lead a heart towards the queen at trick two – and then E/W can defeat the contract. The winning defense is to cash ace-king of both minors, then put dummy on lead in either minor. East’s ♠10 will eventually take the setting trick. Although the heart suit is theoretically “frozen” for the defense, declarer might do the wrong thing in the suit if East leads it early in the play.

This is a deal where there will be small plus results in both directions. It is barely possible that the deal is passed out, or that North downgrades his diamond honors and passes, permitting East to open a four-card 1♠ in fourth position, catching a 1NT response for +90 and a great score.

Board 4. Game All. Dealer West.

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

With a long, powerful suit like West’s diamonds and limited high-card strength, some will take the bull by the horns and open with 5♦, but as that seems a little wild, the majority choice will be 1♦.

With his nice hearts, North will probably risk a light overcall, and East will bid his long suit. South has a full opening bid with nice distribution and a huge fit for hearts, so he will get his side to at least 4♥. If he bids it directly, West simply has to do something. For pairs whose negative double shows four spades, that 1♠ bid promises at least a five-card suit, so with king third of partner’s major, West will be thinking about bidding 4♠, although he can envision complications in the play if East has only five spades. As the legendary Al Roth once said, “If you table an eight-card suit, you are committing a bridge crime.” If West puts his faith in his long suit, he will rebid 5♦, not 4♠.

South will double 5♦ on the way out, but if North doesn’t lead a club, E/W will go +750 on the deal as long as West does the right thing in spades – which the principle of restricted choice suggests – i.e. plays for South’s spade jack to be singleton, not from queen-jack doubleton. The fact that North is short in diamonds, thus long elsewhere, makes that argument even stronger.

If West chooses 4♠ instead of 5♦, East will have an easy time if he is allowed to play there and South leads from his diamond sequence. If declarer doesn’t think the lead is a singleton, he can ruff a diamond at Trick Two to establish

the suit, cash the ace and king of trumps and then play high diamonds forever. That will give him an overtrick unless North ruffs in early and leads a club through the king.

A heart lead against 4♣ is more demanding. Declarer can still find his way through the maze if he ruffs, draws trumps with the aid of a second-round finesse through North, discards a heart on a high diamond, ruffs a diamond and leads towards the club jack. There are other winning lines, but it is easy to mis-guess and go down, so +620 should be a very good score for E/W.

More so, since N/S have a cheap save in 5♥. South isn't likely to go so high, but North may do so if South's fist bid (after 1♦-1♥-1♠) is a fit-showing jump to 4♣, showing a raise to 4♥ with length and strength in clubs. The double fit may be enough to convince North that 4♣ is a make and 5♥ is a cheap save. As it is, West's jack of clubs is the card that stops N/S from making 5♥.

Should South go more slowly after 1♦-1♥-1♠, perhaps with a 2♦ or 2♠ cue-bid or with a splinter bid of 3♠, West gets the chance to do a two-step by rebidding his diamonds before going to 4♣ over the inevitable 4♥. If 4♣ (doubled or not) becomes the final contract after South shows spade shortage, East will appreciate South's bidding during the play

Board 5. N/S Vul. Dealer North.

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

Unless the lack of spot cards, short club honors, and unprotected jack of spades convinces East to downgrade his hand to 17 points, naturalists

will open 1♦ or 1♥ and jump to 2NT over West's 1♠ response to show 18-19 HCP. Although West only has 6 HCP, his wealth of intermediates and two four-card suits might well convince him to bid 3NT. And if he does, East may very well take nine tricks.

Given West's spade bid, South's opening-lead choice lies primarily between a passive club and a more hopeful low heart. Although the ♦A would net the defense six easy tricks, South is unlikely to find that, even where East has opened 1♥ or a strong club . . . unless North has doubled a negative 1♦ response to show lead-worthy diamonds, or unless North has opened with a weak two diamonds (leading to 2NT-3NT, or 2NT passed out). In the strong-club scenario, E/W would be punished in an unusual way for not using standard methods. As some of those strong clubbers will stop in 1NT where East's 1NT rebid has a maximum of 18 or 19 points, the possibility of E/W +90 has to be factored into the equation.

On a club lead, declarer will unblock his club honors and play a spade. South has a difficult chance to shine by going up with the king to switch to diamonds, but is unlikely to find that play unless North has been able to suggest that defense by using his club spots for suit preference purposes (hardly routine even for pairs whose carding is heavily oriented in that direction). If South withholds the ♠K, North's entry disappears too soon. He can push through the ♦Q, but as North may have opened the bidding holding the ♠A and a diamond suit headed by ace-queen-jack,

East shouldn't be tempted to cover the first diamond, and if he also plays low on a diamond continuation, declarer will come to nine tricks by knocking out the ♠K, as South will have to give declarer two spade tricks or lead from the ♥Q. Should East go wrong by ducking once and covering the second diamond honor, he will come to only eight tricks unless South breaks hearts. Should North, after winning the first diamond trick with the queen, shift to a heart, East has to

guess well to manage a ninth trick (he has to play South to hold the ♥Q, the ♠K and the doubleton ♦A).

Where South leads a heart declarer will get a third heart trick early, but if declarer unlocks clubs to play a spade South has a more realistic chance to rise with the ♠K to switch to diamonds. If that doesn't happen, declarer will scramble home with nine tricks as long as he doesn't cover the first diamond when North switches (perhaps to a cunning jack or ten rather than the descriptive queen).

As there will be few contracts other than E/W notrump games and partials, their relative frequency and those variations in the play and defense will determine how well E/W will score for plus 90, 120, 150 and 400, and how badly they'll score for minus 50 and 100.

Board 6. E/W Vul. Dealer East.

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

North has 22 HCP, but with his possibly valueless heart quack, only two aces and one king, it would make sense to downgrade the hand to the 20-21 HCP range. For many pairs that means opening 2NT rather than 2♣. Here, it really doesn't matter what North does, because South has no ambitions beyond 3NT opposite 20-21 or 22-24.

Even though N/S have a combined 30 HCP, they can't be sure of making a game. 3NT, the nearly- universal choice, will fail on a heart lead if hearts are five-three with the ♥10 in the long hand, or when hearts are six-two, unless ace-king are doubleton or the ten is in the short hand.

If North declares 3NT, as he usually will, East will most likely lead a top heart. If West can convey that his enthusiasm for hearts is based on ten-fourth and not queen- third (a good layout for count signalers), East will continue with a second high heart. After cashing four heart tricks, North claims the rest. Should East prefer to lead a low heart or a club away from the king, both extremely dangerous at Matchpoints, North will score a precious tenth trick.

If South is declarer, the outcome isn't so clear. On a heart lead, the same thing happens, but on the most likely alternative lead of the ♠10, declarer faces a classic Matchpoints problem: he can cash out for nine tricks, but if the ♠K is onside he can make two or three overtricks by finessing, while if he takes the losing club finesse, he may go down. If the North hand is concealed, such a strategy has more appeal, but here it isn't: East can count declarer's tricks, so even if he has only one heart honor he will know to shift to that suit if he wins a trick with the ♠K.

Although where North declares it's less likely that East will prefer a passive spade lead or that he will cash one high heart, misread the position, and switch to a pointed suit, declarer will face the same sort of dilemma: cash out or go for the maximum. The clues (high heart from a modest holding, no switch to dummy's weakest side suit) point to rejecting the club finesse.

At some tables, the opening bid will be 1♣ (strong) by North. If East thinks a 1♥ overcall is in order, he will live to regret it. N/S will then realize that they have no heart stopper and will look elsewhere for a game. Most likely, their choice will be 4♠, a contract that will give N/S 10 tricks and a probable big score after the normal defense of three rounds of hearts.

If 4♣ is reached in some other way, and West chooses a passive opening lead, say a trump, a devious East may fool declarer. South can't draw trumps then finesse in clubs (he'll lose three heart tricks), so he has to take the club

finesse while dummy still has trumps. The best line then, is to cash ace-queen of spades, lead a diamond to the ace and a club to the queen. If East wins and leads three rounds of hearts, South has the club ten as an entry to draw trumps. But if East ducks the ♣Q, South may elect to go for the maximum by drawing trumps and taking a second club finesse (instead of settling for ten tricks by cashing diamonds to discard a heart from hand), and will lose three heart tricks in the process for one down. But, as +420 is better than +400 (or -50), South should realize that he is in an excellent contract where no overtricks are needed. For once, playing safe at pairs is indicated.

Another way to go down in 4♠ after two rounds of trumps and a diamond to the ace, is to pass the club ten. East wins and plays three rounds of hearts. North is then stranded in dummy, forced to give one of the defenders a ruff. How embarrassing!

Board 7. Game All. Dealer South.

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

Although N/S have just a bit more than half the deck, only a nine-card fit, and no special distribution, 4♥ is a reasonable contract, needing either the spade king or the club queen onside, with the defenders unable to arrange a ruff (imagine a diamond lead to East and a spade back if the ♠K is with West and spades are four-two or five-one). At IMPs, you want to be in 4♥; at Matchpoints, it isn't nearly as attractive.

On the actual layout, West will lead a top diamond and has to decide what to do next. As it is, his choice doesn't matter if declarer tries

for ten tricks. The worst case for declarer is if West shifts to a spade (the ten is a particularly dangerous choice that works well here but may hand declarer a trick on other layouts), declarer tries the queen and sees the king: should he settle for at most nine tricks (by conceding two spades before starting trumps in case they go four-two and he needs two black-suit ruffs in dummy) or try for ten (with the club finesse) when a losing finesse leads to only eight tricks? The answer depends on the level of the contract. If South is in 4♥, he should not expect that to be the plurality choice, so the difference between -200 (when both finesses fail) and -100 (when you don't try to make your contract) is sure to be far smaller than the difference between +620 and -100.

In 2♥ or 3♥, it is more difficult. If you can make +170 by taking the club finesse, but play as safely as possible to secure nine tricks for +140, how bad will that be? Even if West doesn't switch to spades, declarer will play the suit himself, for if West holds the ♠K, it will often not be necessary to risk the club finesse. There is enough uncertainty to suggest that predicting declarer's inclination to take the club finesse will not be a fruitful undertaking.

Although West has a fair five-card suit and three quick tricks (a full opening bid for many), it's dangerous to overcall 2♦ vulnerable on a balanced hand with very weak diamond spots. With A10x of spades and two low hearts, a takeout double would be a somewhat attractive alternative, but with the actual West hand, the "conservative" pass is the technical action. We expect a significant number of Wests to enter the auction, however, just because it's more fun to bid than to pass. If West overcalls 2♦, and East competes to 3♦ over North's raise to 2♥, E/W are slated to go two down for -200 if left to play not doubled, which is dramatically worse than defending against a heart partial. However, with diamond shortness, South will probably either compete to 3♥ or invite game with a "maximal overcall" double. If North converts the double to penalties, N/S collect +500, and if instead North jumps to 4♥ (his

main alternative), his side will get +620. Both results will be excellent for N/S, which suggests that overcalling 2♦ on that West hand may not be so wise.

If West passes and North raises to 2♥, should South try for game? With seven losers and a couple of potentially useful jacks, it's a borderline case, but passing 2♥ is the indicated action at Pairs. For pairs whose raise is "constructive" (say, 8-10) inviting game is more tempting.

Pairs relying on the Law of Total Tricks will force the bidding to the three-level (typically via an artificial four-trump "mixed raise"), a strategy that may convince South to go on. But if the methods permit South an artificial last-minute game try, North, with mostly minor honors and average strength for his raise, might well sign off at 3♥.

Board 8. Love All. Dealer West.

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

At single dummy, N/S's combined heart holding would point you towards a high diamond contract rather than 3NT, but with East having all the middle heart spots, the defense can't take more than four tricks against the wretched 3NT because the hearts are blocked. There is some justice, however, because those whose bidding reveals the heart situation will usually manage 11 or 12 tricks in 5♦ or 6♦ and fare no worse than the notrumpers.

At most tables, South will open in fourth position. Even if 18 HCP isn't too much for a 1NT opening in N/S's system, this South hand is too strong. After 1♦ and a pass by West, what should North do? Some will consider

2♣ a slight overbid; 2♦ is right on values, but short on diamonds (especially if South might be 4=4=3=2), and a 1NT response with a singleton in one of the majors may either wrong side the contract or lead to an inferior partscore. Therefore, some may improvise with a 1♠ response, hoping South won't get too enthusiastic about spades (but even if he does, the Moysian fit may play very well).

Over 1♠ South will jump to 2NT, and North, perhaps satisfied with having placed the declaration in the strong hand, might simply raise to 3NT. West will lead a heart, North will table the dummy, South will do his best to appear confident while silently uttering some unprintable words, and will soon claim nine tricks when the defenders are unable to cash a fifth heart trick.

If North raises to 2♦ (a more attractive choice in a four-card major system), N/S may find the top spot: South rebids 2NT (18-19 HCP); North bids 3♣ (natural, longer clubs, doubt about strain), South bids 3♠ to show his stopper(s); North knowing that his singleton is very valuable, will choose between a raise to 4♠ and a 4♥ cue bid, the latter prompting South to consider jumping to 6♦.

If North responds 1NT, South will raise to 3NT. With East on lead, the ♠J will be a popular choice, and North will see 10 immediate tricks as long as diamonds run. When he cashes the ♣K and East drops an honor, the theory of restricted choice (at first glance) would indicate that the odds are roughly two-to-one that the honor was singleton. However, as East may have played either honor from QJx to create a losing option for declarer, and as North should be happy to have avoided a heart lead, he should not finesse. When he plays the ♣A on the second round he is rewarded with four overtricks rather than one. So, the second best result for N/S accrues from declaring the wrong game from the wrong side. Strange game – bridge!

After a strong club opening by South and a game-forcing reply that shows clubs, South

will do well to rebid in diamonds rather than notrump. North will raise to 3♦, and South will try to get to the best game by showing his spade stopper. North knows that his hand is golden (shortness in the suit where his partner is weak), and 6♦ will often be reached after this start. If South rebids 2NT over (say) a 2♣ response, North can rebid his club suit. When the heart weakness comes to light, typically after a natural 3♦ from South and 3♠ from North, clubs may be chosen as trumps. Most of the time, that would be a bad choice, but here declarer can take 12 tricks in clubs – if he plays them from the top.

Board 9. E/W Vul. Dealer North.

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

This is the kind of deal on which declarer wishes for x-ray vision. There are decisions in the bidding (4♥ or a pushy 6♥?), in the trump suit (finesse or play for the drop?) and in clubs (finesse through South or North, and precisely which cards to play in the suit?).

Most pairs will stop at 4♥. A popular route will be for East to open 1♥ and West to use an artificial forcing game raise, most often a version of Jacoby 2NT (showing prime heart support, usually in a balanced hand). East has prime cards and a little extra in distribution but his hand is still a minimum, and he will show it directly or indirectly.

South has a difficult lead against 4♥. The ♠A ace (or a low one) gives declarer a diamond discard on the ♠Q; a trump solves declarer's problem in that suit; and either minor is potentially dangerous. We would lead a diamond and expect to be with the majority, but every field

is unique, and we know there will be votes for a lead in each suit. Zia Mahmood, Benito Garozzo, and their admirers would think fondly of the four of hearts, hoping North has jack doubleton and East ace-king, with declarer seduced into a second-round finesse through North. Well, maybe not!

East will win the diamond opening lead with the ace and start trumps, going with the odds to play the ace on the second round, dropping South's queen. Even if South shows out, declarer hasn't relinquished the lead and will still have time to play on clubs to develop a timely diamond discard. It might seem that locating the ♠Q is a pure guess, but perhaps it isn't. If East places South with the longer diamonds, he may play North for the greater club length and finesse through him. But there are also clues from South's diamond lead. Suppose South had something like: Axxx, Qx, K10xx, xxx. would he not lead a club rather than a risky diamond at Matchpoints, where safety is such an important concern? So, the lead itself might tip declarer toward playing South for the ♠Q.

If East guesses clubs correctly, he can dispose of dummy's diamond loser and emerge with twelve tricks for a nice score. If he finesses through North instead (king, then jack once the eight appears from South), he will have chosen the percentage play (when North has four clubs to South's two, the queen will be with North twice as often as with South), but most of the matchpoints will go to N/S. Unfair!

Board 10. Game All. Dealer East.

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

Although modern three-bids have taken a sharp

turn for the worse, second-seat vulnerable remains a “classical” position and nearly everyone would consider the South hand appropriate for a 3♦ opening. The alternatives -- 1♦ (only seven losers!), 4♦, 3NT (Gambling), and Pass -- have little to recommend them, so 3♦ seems to be a standout, and in practice should fare quite well.

West will overcall 3♦ with 3♠ and North will usually pass, although some will gamble on running diamonds and shoot out 3NT. Although East has a collection of slow honors and his doubleton diamond doesn't figure to be an asset, his trump support, promising source of tricks, and high-card strength will generally convince him to raise to 4♠. This time the conservative pass would be the winner (-100) while the more popular raise will lead to -200, or -500 if North risks a penalty double.

At the (few) tables where South passes, West will open either 1♠ or 1♣, according to system or belief. For those with a flexible approach, 1♠ will be the popular choice, and East will usually raise to 2♠, even playing four-card majors. When South comes in with 3♦, West will face a decision. With two unattractive diamonds, jumping to 4♠ is too much, and with so much distribution pass is too little. For most pairs, 3♠ is just competitive, so West may want to try for game, with double and 3♥ the only available calls for that purpose. For pairs who do not treat double as penalty, one idea would be to use 3♥ to focus on hearts, double to focus on clubs. In that scheme, West would double and East's hearts would lose some of their luster. That should lead to 3♠, but some Easts will bid 4♠ anyway, and regret that decision.

Where South opens 1♦, North will join in the bidding and if E/W reach 4♠, might well double for an excellent score. As N/S can make 3♦ and North believes that to be the case, he might even double 3♠ to protect his presumed equity of +110.

If South upgrades his diamonds and calls them “solid,” he might just get away with a swashbuckling gambling 3NT. If left to play there,

he will have no reason to get the diamonds wrong and so will probably come to nine tricks for a spectacular +600 and a huge score. West is more likely to compete over 3NT, however, and might be doubled in 4♠ after this start.

A 4♦ opening is likely to jockey West into 4♠, and a penalty double would improve N/S's already good score. Lots of potential in this one!

Board 11. Love All. Dealer South.

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

When the British Acol system conquered the world, light opening bids were an integral part of the package. This six-loser nine-point South hand would have been (and in many modern versions continue to be) considered an opening bid of 1♥ due to its good distribution and well-placed honors. Today, many strong-club systems, in which the maximum for a one-bid is considerably lower than for a standard opening bid, would also open, but for the rest of us, this is not a one-bid, so we pass and hope we can show our hand later.

Other systems can open the hand with a specialized two-bid to show a hand in this strength range with either one or two specific suits, some of them endorsing five-four shape but more of them promising at least five-five. As it's desirable to open such hands without overstating their defensive potential, those who favor such two-bids will have an advantage when they come up.

If South has such a two-bid available and uses it, West will overcall 2NT unless South has shown clubs explicitly, and North might well try to

guess South's minor if he believes West will have hearts well held. There's some psychology and deductive reasoning involved here, but the extent to which North will allow these factors is not at all clear.

If South passes, E/W are likely to play the hand in 3NT. But will they make it? The answer is that it depends on the opening lead, and only a club beats it. Otherwise, declarer can knock out the ♠A and take at least 10 tricks (11 if North fails to lead a club after winning the ♠A). If South elects to double a Stayman inquiry after West's INT opening, E/W are doomed. Whether South should double in that scenario is another matter. Here, the club lead is fine when dummy has king third, but if North were intending to lead a heart from, say, ten fourth, with good effect, South's double might get North to pick a worse opening lead.

If West opens 1♦ and East responds 1♠, South will show his two-suiter by doubling, bidding INT or 2NT, or by cue-bidding one of the opponents' suits according to partnership agreement. That might attract a club lead as often as a heart lead, and would add the possibility of East declaring 3NT, leaving South to guess which suit to lead.

Meanwhile, a light 1♥ opening on South's cards will make it more or less impossible for North to find the killing lead – unless West overcalls INT, North passes, and East explores for other contracts via a Stayman 2♣, which South can double.

Board 12. N/S Vul. Dealer West.

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

East doesn't need much to make game, and West happens to have just what is needed. The normal contract is 4♠, which makes easily enough, even on a diamond lead through the queen, as East can draw trumps in two rounds and work on hearts, establishing his tenth trick in that suit without letting South in. The third trump acts as an entry to the ♥K.

If North opens the bidding with 1♦, East may try his luck at 3NT. If South leads a diamond, declarer will take nine tricks, but a club lead or a heart lead and club return will scuttle the contract.

If East blasts into 3NT over 1♦, South knows that the bid is probably based on a diamond stopper and long, solid suit. A surprise attack is often a good idea, and the clubs look promising. Which club should South lead?

Here, it doesn't matter, but we don't have to change the deal very much for South's choice to become critical. If West holds jack third of clubs, while North has ace doubleton (or East the ace singleton), only a low club from South works. At IMPs, a low club may very well be the best lead (only losing when North has three little clubs and E/W's clubs are 2-2), but at Matchpoints, defeating the contract isn't necessarily the primary goal. Therefore, the king of clubs may very well be a good compromise. As South "knows" East's long suit is a major, 3NT may be the wrong game (which it is here), and if that is the case, all you have to do is avoid handing declarer undeserved tricks. Holding 3NT to nine tricks on a high club lead is better for N/S than conceding 10 tricks at 4♠, even if 3NT could be beaten with a low club on the go. For that reason, the king of clubs is probably the best lead against 3NT ... at least at Matchpoints.

Where North opens INT, East will start with a double. South might bid a lot of clubs immediately or adopt a slow route to at least 4♣. While E/W will usually reach 4♠ at these tables, it's possible that N/S will go on to 5♣, where they can take 10 tricks for an excellent score whether or not E/W double.

Another reason to compete to 5♣ is that E/W may misjudge and take the push to 5♠, which would turn a very poor score (+100 or 200 vs 5♣) into a shared bottom. The same sort of situation will accrue, perhaps more often, at the tables where North's systemic opening bid is a "natural or balanced (with or without a strong option)" 1♣.

Board 13. Game All. Dealer North.

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

E/W are slightly stronger than N/S, they have the spade suit and three of the four aces – and still, the hand belongs to N/S, even though North's club honors are useless to South. As is so often the case, distribution is more important than high-card strength.

N/S can easily take ten tricks in diamonds, but they can also make 4♥ by guessing the jack of hearts, thanks to the even breaks in the red suits.

E/W can only take eight tricks – and to get them, declarer has to do some fancy footwork. It looks like the defense should come to six tricks on a heart lead from South. Declarer has one spade loser, two heart losers, one diamond loser and two club losers, but there is an endplay coming if declarer times the play correctly. Say that he gets a heart opening lead and goes up ace to block the suit. North's best try is to throw the king, so that South can hand North a heart ruff after the ace of spades. But when North gets out with a high diamond, East wins, draws trumps, cashes the ace of clubs and exits in diamonds, endplaying either defender for an extra trick. If he doesn't cash the ♣A, he can still prevail by letting North hold the first

club trick when South switches to the suit.

If North opens the bidding with 1♣, should East overcall? The strength and spade length are right, but there is much to be said for the conservative pass, as the poor spade suit and balanced hand type make the hand better suited for defense than offense.

At the tables where East overcalls 1♠ (and most Easts will not pass), South will probably make a negative double (if he has one available) or introduce one of his long suits. West will issue a strong raise to 2♠, and if the bidding becomes competitive, he will at least think about competing to the three-level.

If the bidding starts 1♣ – 1♠ – DBL – 2♣ (strong spade raise); pass – 2♠, South won't pass. But what should he do: A second takeout double? 3♦? 3♥? An artificial "takeout" 2NT? This is a murky area for many pairs, not only for casual partnerships. South knows there probably is no nine-card heart fit (as North would have bid 2♥ over 2♣) so he may simply compete with 3♦. If he does, and West bids 3♠, North may like his red honors and three low spades enough to take the push to 4♦, as doubling 3♠ really isn't an option; although N/S have the potential for +140, +170, or +200, chalking up +130 may be an above-average result for them if enough of their counterparts are going only +100 against spade contracts.

Board 14. Love All. Dealer East.

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

Should you play in the longer, stronger trump suit or the shorter, weaker one? Most of us would select the safety of the stronger, longer

suit, but here the choice is irrelevant – both 4♥ and 4♠ produce ten tricks; 3NT only leads to nine tricks.

The play in 4♥ is uninteresting, but in 4♠ declarer has something to think about. On a heart lead, declarer leads a trump and is thankful that West's lowest spade wasn't the eight (when the defenders could get three spade tricks and a heart ruff).

A club lead is more challenging, but South survives that too by simply leading trumps. With the actual layout of the black suits, there is nothing the defense can do. But had West been dealt three spades and five clubs, a second club (from East) defeats 4♠.

E/W also have one nine-card fit and one eight-card fit – but can't take as many tricks. Against a diamond contract, N/S can take five tricks by arranging a club ruff in the North hand (or six if North is brave enough to underlead his heart honors after getting the first ruff to obtain a second!), and against a club contract, N/S can take no more than five tricks. Curiously, the shorter fit takes one more trick than the longer, but in any case, the potential for eight tricks does not merit saving at the five level against the opponents' major-suit game at equal vulnerability.

Board 15. N/S Vul. Dealer South.

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

Although 14 HCP and a strong five-card suit will convince many players to upgrade the South hand to a strong notrump, that doesn't make INT the best bid. With two wide-open suits and suit-oriented values, naming the main

color, even in a world of depreciated club suits, must be an attractive option. Curiously, weak notrumpers may also elect to upgrade this hand, but they would do so in order to open 1♣!

N/S can take nine tricks in notrump when everything is friendly (provided declarer guesses spades correctly). It is possible, even likely, that if South opens INT (especially if it is 12-14 HCP), North will respond 2♣, Stayman, and pass any response. This reasonable strategy is close to a disaster for N/S when South responds 2♦ and is left to play there. Instead of +120 or +150 in notrump, South has to struggle to make +110 if he can hold his losers to three trumps and the ♥A.

If South opens with 1♣, North will often respond 1♦. Although South may still feel he is too strong to rebid INT (12-14 HCP) – opposite as little as 3-3-4-3 with king-queen of spades and a red ace, there are often nine quick tricks, and North won't consider moving above INT with so little – he made his bed when he opted for 1♣ rather than INT, and it would be somewhat bizarre to go to great lengths to describe the South hand as other than balanced. Nonetheless, some will rebid 2♣, which is a more positive rebid than INT (as it strongly implies at least six clubs). But that will end the auction, producing +110 or +130 (depending on whether declarer guesses spades correctly). Other individualists might try to buy time with an improvised 1♠ rebid. That will fetch a raise to 2♠, which happens to be a decent partial. If declarer guesses correctly he will take nine tricks, for +140 and a good score; and if the defense slips slightly, South might even manage a spectacular +170.

As the "Walsh" approach to responding 1♣ is very popular and transfer responses to 1♣ have gained significant support, we expect 1♣ to be the more popular response with the North hand, and South has a happy three-card raise. At double dummy, the only defense that stops North from making 4♠ is a trump on the go to stop the diamond ruffs. If declarer wins in dummy and leads a heart, West can go

in with the ace and shift to a club (to stop that suit from producing five tricks). Even with less interesting defense, declarer will often come to only nine tricks, but +140 should still produce a good score for N/S.

Board 16. E/W Vul. Dealer West.

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

If East opens a strong notrump after two passes (despite his weak doubleton and suit-play-oriented values), West has enough for a raise, and with a shapeless junky nine-count, should settle for an invitational sequence, particularly at Matchpoints probably invite with 2NT (or perhaps via 2♣, if 2NT has an artificial meaning). East will decline the invitation, and as N/S can take the first five tricks, that looks like a winning decision. Right?

Well ... not so fast! If South leads a diamond honor that asks for an attitude signal, North will encourage, and South will continue with a low diamond to hold declarer to eight tricks. But will South lead a top diamond, regardless of its message? If North has two diamonds and a quick entry (or the diamond queen doubleton), it may be essential to lead low, not high. Assume that South leads a low diamond.

East has no real hope for a trick in the diamond suit, but there's no harm in calling for dummy's jack -- and suddenly North has a problem. East's 15-17 HCP will usually include a diamond honor; if that honor is the king, and South has five diamonds, playing the queen gives East two tricks in the suit; one more than his entitlement. If North decides that layout is

likely, he will withhold his queen. East cashes his winners and ends with +150, a good result for E/W, but perhaps not quite as good as it will seem at the table. After winning a surprise trick with dummy's jack, East may even take a tenth trick if the defense errs again. Say, that South discards a spade and a heart on the run of the clubs, and East then cashes ace-king of hearts. If South discards a diamond (a second spade is best), and East exits in diamonds, South must duck. If, instead, he wins and cashes two more diamond tricks (he discarded one), E/W keep all spades, and South has to break spades -- handling declarer an extra trick in that suit if he plays for split honors. Ten tricks.

If East opens 1♣ (systemically or as a matter of judgment), South will overcall 1♦, creating a modest problem for West, who has no majors to bid, no diamond stopper for notrump, but fair values. Weak notrumpers will double with this hand type to show both majors or neither in an attempt to get back to even. Without that sort of agreement, West's best choice is 2♣, which may end the auction or attract a raise to 2♦ from North. East may double 2♦ (various meanings possible) or compete to 3♣. The club partial produces nine tricks for +110. If West passes a competitive double of 2♦, South will be -100: he will work on hearts, and there's no stopping him from taking seven tricks. Whether those small plus scores produce respectable matchpoint results for E/W will depend on whether their counterparts are in 2NT or 3NT and whether N/S find a way to take five tricks against the game contracts.

Board 17. Love All. Dealer North.

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

With two decent suits, even fairly conservative North players will open their 12-point hand with neither side vulnerable. In a five-card major framework with strong INT openings, he will choose 1♣, which lets East into the auction cheaply with a 1♦ overcall. Although some would treat a 1♠ advance as forcing while others would not, everyone will bid 1♠ with the West hand. With a partial spade fit, a double stopper in clubs and 14 well-located HCP, East is sure to bid again, but whether he chooses 1NT, 2♠, a subtle (too subtle?) 2♣, or a bold 2NT will depend on style and personality. There will be some variations in the ensuing auction to accommodate East's rebid, but nearly everyone will finish in 3NT.

Where East declares, South has the opportunity to be a hero by finding the heart lead that will set 3NT. If he leads his partner's suit, however, East takes 11 easy tricks, 12 if North takes the ♣A and continues clubs without cashing the ♥A, declarer risking the club finesse. As finding that heart lead isn't easy, +460 and +490 will be common results for E/W. If E/W can arrange for West to declare 3NT, N/S can never take more than their two aces, but +460 may produce a disappointing score for the traveling pairs when too many of their counterparts manage a twelfth winner in the same contract.

Where East is sufficiently concerned about hearts to angle towards a spade contract, West is likely to declare 4♠, a contract that will be held to 11 tricks unless, after a passive lead, North rises on an early club play and doesn't cash the ♥A: declarer will be able to discard hearts and finesse against the ♣Q for 12. +450 will be a good result for E/W only if 3NT has not been bid and made at enough of the other tables, but +480 should score well.

If East upgrades his hand and overcalls 1♣ with INT instead of 1♦, E/W may run into difficulties if they play transfers: West will bid 2♥, and North may double for the lead. If East passes to suggest weakness in hearts (a rarely

discussed treatment) or to deny three spades, West may drive to 4♠ to protect the ♥K. If East instead accepts the transfer with 2♠, the best E/W can do is +420 in spades.

In a four-card major system, North will open with 1♥, which makes it awkward for East to enter the auction. Although he lacks the spade support for a takeout double, he has the values for an overcall, but his main suit is both short and not particularly chunky, and a conservative pass would not be unreasonable. If he decides to pass, E/W still figure to get to game, but strain will be an issue. If South passes 1♥, West protects with 1♠ and if East forces with a cue-bid, E/W will reach 3NT from the right side. Where South scrapes up a raise to 2♥ with obstruction on his mind, West will overcall 2♠. For many pairs, this is defined as a "pre-balancing" bid (perhaps the same hand without the ♥K), so it is possible that East will pass 2♠. More often, however, East will take some constructive action, with a cue-bid 3♥ getting his side to the perfect contract, played from the right side (3NT by West). Souths who believe a preemptive jump to 3♥ would be appropriate with the South hand will jockey E/W into 4♣ from the West side, and if North takes his aces he will justify South's bravado.

A few enterprising Souths might try to jazz things up by responding 1♠ or INT. If West decides to pass, N/S might actually steal the hand or see E/W stop in a partial, but if West acts directly, EW will probably reach game.

Where North starts with a weak notrump and East doubles, South will be well advised to seek greener pastures. If N/S can locate their heart fit, they will have found a safe haven, and E/W will have to avoid doubling prematurely (2♥ will cost no more than 300) and playing in the wrong game from the wrong side. They will be doing well to achieve an above-average score in this scenario. Although there will be a few N/S pairs in INT doubled, down 1100 or so, there won't be enough of them to have much of an impact on the more common results.

Board 18. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

Even if it is acceptable in your partnership to open INT with a five-card major, this East hand doesn't really match the prototype, with its strong spades, prime honors outside, and weak doubleton. If you don't open INT with balanced 16-point hands, however, you will have to overbid (2NT), underbid (pass), or misbid (2♦) at your next turn over a non-forcing INT response, which is one of the most likely scenarios.

Over a 1NT opening, South has a hand type that poses a problem in most notrump defenses, which cater to one- or two-suited hands, but generally offer no pure solution for three-suiters. One possibility is to pass 1NT, hoping to have the opportunity to make a takeout double of spades later; another is to enter the auction with a two-suited action, hoping that you don't bury the suit in which you belong.

If South passes 1NT, West, with only 7 HCP, may well pass unless his notrump engine permits a stop in 3♣ after trying for spades. Opposite the wrong hand, that plan may work badly, but here it strikes gold. After 1NT – 2♣ – 2♠, South will gratefully double for takeout, and West must decide whether to raise directly to 3♠, or 4♠, or whether to pass and compete to 3♠ later. If he follows the last of these strategies, it won't be so clear for East to bid 4♠.

If East opens with 1♠, South has a perfect

takeout double. West will choose a spade raise that appeals to him with a hand that doesn't lend itself to easy description – even a conventional “mixed” raise won't feel just right. East will bid game if West shows some sign of life, invite game over an inaccurate 2♠, but might pass over a preemptive jump to 3♠ that would typically be quite a bit weaker.

South will probably lead a top club and shift to the ♦K. Assuming that South has the other high club, declarer should unblock the ♥A, draw trumps, pitch a diamond loser from dummy on the ♥K, then lead a club up.

If, instead, South leads the ♦K, the outcome should be the same, but East mustn't be too quick to draw trumps. If he wins the opening lead, cashes the ♥A, draws three rounds of trumps, pitches a diamond on the ♥K, and leads a club, South can hold declarer to nine tricks by winning and playing high diamonds (or a high heart), forcing dummy to use its last trump before the club queen has been established and leaving declarer with a red-suit loser. There are many ways to avoid this trap, the easiest one being to duck the opening lead, win the second diamond, cash the heart ace, play a trump to hand, cash the heart king, discarding a diamond, ruff a heart ruff, cross in trumps, and ruff a diamond.

As N/S are vulnerable, they must exercise some caution once they enter the auction. At the partscore level they won't get hurt if they play in their longest fit, hearts, where there are eight tricks available. It looks like nine tricks, but proper defense nets E/W five tricks – thanks to East's nine of hearts. One possible defense: ♠A, club to the ace, trump to the ace, spade ruffed. Duck both the king and queen of diamonds, winning the third round. Cash the heart king, play a spade. South has only clubs remaining and the ♥9 is promoted. 4♥ doubled down two is the best result for E/W, but it will not happen often.

Board 19, E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

With diamonds behaving, N/S can make 6♦ easily – unless the contract is played by South and West finds the devastating lead of a low club, South mis-guessing. But that scenario is just as unlikely as a club underlead; if N/S finish in diamonds, North will surely be the declarer.

At most tables North will be permitted to open 1♥ in third position and South will respond 1♠. While some Norths will rebid 3♦ whether that is forcing or merely invitational in their methods, most will content themselves with 2♦, as the jump-shift rebid would create a game force. When South raises 2♦ to 3♦, North will have a difficult decision. If 3NT is the right contract (and he has the strength and club stopper to think this might be so), it's up to him to bid it. At Matchpoints it can so easily be fatal to go past 3NT in search of a minor-suit slam when it will be necessary to stop in a low-scoring minor-suit game when slam proves undesirable. That's why some poor 6♣ and 6♦ contracts are reached at pairs: once past 3NT, the temptation to try for the brass ring can be overwhelming.

But should that be true in this instance? North's fifth diamond and weak hearts suggest that there may be several extra tricks in diamonds than in notrump – picture South with a singleton heart, for example. If there is a weak spot for notrump in any suit but diamonds, reaching 5♦ may be the sensible thing to do. With the actual club layout, 3NT would indeed go down if diamonds are three-one, and so would 6♦. But 5♦ would be easy to make and bring in a big score if everyone else went high

or low, following traditional wisdom.

With diamonds two-two, however, North has an easy task both in 3NT and 6♦, so getting to 5♦ will give N/S the “usual” bad score. But it would be cruel to suggest that N/S deserve their poor result, as 5♦ would produce a magnificent score not only half of the time (when diamonds are three-one) but also the 10% of the time diamonds are four-nil (and no game makes). 5♦ “loses” only when the diamonds are two-two. So if you reached 5♦ you have our sympathy, but your opponents have all the matchpoints. In case you didn't know it: at times, there is no justice.

Board 20. Game All. Dealer West.

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

The West hand is not quite right for a 2♥ or a 3♥ opening, but with a fair seven-card suit hardly anyone will pass. These days many players are willing to take immediate action with imperfect hands because they believe that by setting as many problems as possible for their opponents, there will be more than enough successes to make up for the times when their side gets the worst of it.

If West opens with 2♥ or 3♥ and North enters the bidding with a spade overcall, South has a difficult call, but pass is pessimistic and we expect South to advance with 2NT over 2♣ and 3NT over 3♣ – batteries not included. If North starts with a takeout double, South is more likely to commit to a high club contract.

Left to themselves, N/S will most often finish in 3NT (1♠-1NT; 2♦-2NT; 3NT-Pass; 1♠-2♣; 2♦-2NT; 3NT, for example), but if West was willing

to pass originally, it was with the intention of coming in later, and it's almost certain that he will try 2♥ over a 1NT, and at least even money that he will risk 2♥ over a 2♣ response as well. After Pass-1♠-Pass-1NT; 2♥, North will double for takeout if he has that club in his bag; if not, he will choose from among Pass, 2NT and 3♦, none of which will delight him. 2NT will work best as South will raise himself to game. Where South responds 2♣, North will have an awkward bid over 2♥, with 3♣, 3♥ and a forcing pass the main candidates, depending on the nature of the two-over-one response. If South gets a chance to double 2♥ (where North does not bid in front of him) he figures to do so, hoping for that precious Matchpoints commodity – the 200-point set (or more, of course). If West is left to declare 2♥, doubled or not, he will have to play the ♥A on the first round of trumps to avoid losing more than six tricks, and he is unlikely to play hearts that way, especially if South has doubled.

But whether +200 or +500 are above average for N/S depends on whether the field is reaching game and making it. 3NT, which yields at least nine (and usually more) tricks, may not be so easy to bid where West passes initially, because where he comes in later and North is able to suggest heart shortage, South will expect a low singleton heart (or possibly the ace) and aim for 5♣ instead. After a heart lead and continuation against 5♣, the defenders come to a third trick by means of a trump promotion, but even if West leads a different suit, 5♣ will usually fail as declarer can't draw trumps without losing two hearts and the ♠A.

West will nearly always lead a low heart against 3NT, and the sight of East's queen will give South at least mild cause for concern. If it is a technically correct unblocking play from Qjx or Qx, the contract is in danger. South may decide his best chance for some points on the board is to run for cover by cashing as many tricks as possible before relinquishing the lead, taking the diamond finesse along the way. In the end, East, on lead with the ♠A, has

no hearts left, so the contract is made, possibly with two overtricks. The “big” play of finessing the ♦9 on the first round after the ♥K wins Trick One would allow South to take 12 tricks, but it's difficult to imagine more than one or two inspired (?) desperadoes finding that play with 10 or 11 tricks on the horizon if the ♥Q is singleton.

Board 21. N/S Vul. Dealer North.

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

E/W are on a finesse for 4♠, but as it is through the opening bidder, 4♠ is where you want to play – even though as a strategy it doesn't pay to push too hard at Matchpoints.

Where North opens 1♦, East will overcall 1♥. Many Souths won't be able to act over 1♥ without overstating their values, but others will have a non-forcing 2♣ or a preemptive 3♣ available, while some will risk 2♣ as a one-round force, planning to follow up with 3♣, overbidding by about a queen. None of these campaigns by South will prevent West from introducing spades, and where East expects his partner to have at least six spades, he will raise, in some cases to game.

If the defenders start by cashing two club tricks, they must play a diamond next to kill the late entry to East's fifth heart (on a trump switch, for example, declarer wins in hand, finesses the ♥Q, ruffs a heart, crosses to the ♠K, and ruffs out the ♥K). West can play out his trumps, hoping that North has five diamonds (then he is squeezed for 11 tricks), but if South keeps his diamonds North can hold declarer to ten tricks by protecting hearts.

+420 will be a more frequent result than +450, and it is likely to be above average for E/W as a significant number of pairs won't reach game. Say that the bidding starts 1♦-1♥ and South decides to pass. If E/W don't have a bid to show the equivalent of a preemptive three-level opening (which would simplify matters), West will advance with 1♠ and rebid 2♠ over East's INT rebid. East might let that go. If the bidding starts, 1♦-1♥-2♣-3♠ (preemptive), East may expect a weaker hand (perhaps QJ10-seventh of spades and out) and pass.

Board 22. E/W Vul. Dealer East

♠ 10 9 8 5 4 ♥ J 8 ♦ Q 2 ♣ Q 4 3 2 ♠ A Q 3 2 ♥ 5 ♦ K J 10 6 ♣ K J 7 5 ♠ K J ♥ 9 7 6 4 ♦ 8 5 4 3 ♣ 10 9 6	♠ 7 6 ♥ A K Q 10 3 2 ♦ A 9 7 ♣ A 8
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With close to eight playing tricks and excellent controls, some would consider East's hand too strong for a 3♥ rebid when the auction starts 1♥-1♠. But if not 3♥, how should East proceed? A game-forcing jump shift to 3♦ with a balanced hand and only three diamonds is too big a distortion. 2♦, even in systems in which a simple change of suit would be a one-round force, will not make it easier to describe this hand on the next round. 4♥, though a strong action, would suggest longer hearts and less in high cards. Perhaps closest to the mark would be 3NT (big heart suit, side stoppers, but usually short spades), or 2NT (18-19 balanced)?

East will have an easier time if West starts with a 2♣ response in a strong two-over-one system. East can choose between a simple 2♥ to leave West a comfortable rebid, and a more descriptive jump to 3♥, depicting a solid or one-loser suit with extra values.

Strong clubbers will have no major problems either, if West can get his strength and

distribution across (which many strong club systems can). The central issue for these pairs will be to have West declare a notrump contract to protect his tenaces. In some artificial systems, there is sometimes a random effect that could misplace the direction.

After 1♥-1♠; 3♥, West is under pressure. If he bids 3NT, he will be left there, missing an excellent slam in the process. There is a strong case for treating a jump to 4NT as natural, as with heart support you can control-bid 4♣ or 4♦ before bidding a Blackwood 4NT, but not everyone would treat 4♣ or 4♦ as advance cue bids and even long-standing partnerships might not have a firm agreement in this situation. Over a natural 4NT East has an easy raise to 6NT.

However, as 3♥ needn't be this strong, West might well downgrade his hand because of the singleton heart and settle for 3NT, which is high enough opposite something like Kx, KQJxxx, AQx, xx; if East has such a hand, even 4NT may be too high.

If North leads a spade or a club against a notrump contract, West has 12 tricks on top when the ♥J capitulates, and he will take a thirteenth trick if he finds the ♦Q.

As many will miss slam, play in hearts rather than notrump, or take only 12 tricks, +720 might well be over average. It would be disappointing for +1430 to be below average, but that could happen if the E/W field is inspired.

Board 23. Game All. Dealer South

♠ A K 8 5 3 ♥ 3 2 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ 10 8 6 ♠ 10 7 4 ♥ 9 6 ♦ 9 7 5 3 ♣ A K 5 4 ♠ 6 2 ♥ A K 10 8 5 4 ♦ A 2 ♣ Q J 2	♠ Q J 9 ♥ Q J 7 ♦ K Q 10 8 ♣ 9 7 3
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South has a decent opening hand, but he is not strong enough for a 3♥ rebid after 1♥-1♠.

He will rebid 2♥ and play there. If South uses dummy's entries to finesse in trumps, he will take 10 tricks.

With a sure diamond loser, 4♥ depends on hearts three-two with both honors outside and no club or spade ruff. The odds for this game are far too low at any form of scoring, especially matchpoints.

West will probably lead a top club, get a discouraging signal, and shift to diamonds. After this start South may not pin his hopes on East's having queen-jack-third of trumps. Leading a spade to dummy and a heart to the ten loses against West's singleton honor, and may run into a ruff if trumps are three-two and West has at least one of the honors. So, if South decides to play trumps from the top, he will score +140 and regret not playing for the overtrick.

Some players will treat the South hand as a 15-17 INT opening, something which may turn out badly if North transfers to 2♠ and passes (careful play lets declarer make nine tricks). However, the imaginative notrump opening will turn out spectacularly well if North, after transferring to 2♠, rebids 2NT and South goes on to 3NT, hoping his long suit will take six tricks. On best defense, South will take one less trick in notrump than in hearts, so to get a good board playing in the highest-scoring strain, he probably has to be in game!

Board 24. Love All. Dealer West

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

If West opens the bidding with 1♦, North will generally overcall 1♠, although there will

be some who prefer 2♠ . . . intermediate or preemptive – that's just the way the game is played – from different perspectives. Where the heavy preemptive 2♠ would probably end the auction, the simple 1♠ overcall will elicit an advance and might lead N/S to 3NT with South declaring.

Against 2♠, East will lead his partner's suit, and West will play four rounds of diamonds. To make 2♠ on that defense, North has to ruff with the ten, finesse in clubs through East and lead a spade to the queen.

Should North get clubs right? We think so. If East pitches hearts on the third and fourth rounds of diamonds, North can be almost certain that East didn't start with a doubleton club (as he would have discarded those instead as the most promising line of defense). If North takes that inference, a club finesse through East is much better than a 50-50 shot, but it's easy to imagine North going wrong.

That's all very interesting, but if North, after ruffing the fourth diamond with the ten, plays a club to the ace then a trump to the queen, he will still make his contract. After cashing the ace of spades and leading another, West takes his two trump winners but has only hearts left, so North gets two discards on the ace-queen of hearts and makes 2♠ with an endplay!

Can it be wrong to ruff with the ten? Yes, but only if West's spades are J-9-8 or J-9-8-x. Then, East over-ruffs with the king, leaving West with one (or two) sure trump trick(s). If that is the actual layout, the winning line is to ruff with the six or seven, later finessing the ten. Ruffing with the ten is essential if East has two or three trumps headed by the nine or the eight. It's close, but in view of the opening bid, the winning play is the indicated one.

If the bidding starts 1♦-1♠, some Easts will double, to show hearts, while others will pass, bid a non-forcing 2♥, or jump to 3♥, depending on E/W's agreements. We've seen this scenario before, for N/S on Board 21. If East passes, South can choose from among 1NT, 2NT (or even 3NT), and 2♣. If East bids hearts, South

will bid notrump at the minimum required level. Dangerous bids, to be sure, but so is passing – as Bobby Wolff would say. West may well compete to 4♥ over South's 3NT, down 300 when N/S double. The sacrifice would show a profit if declarer were to make 3NT, but as it is far from clear that 3NT will be bid and made often, N/S should score well for +300.

On a high diamond lead and a heart shift, South's best play in 3NT is a spade to the queen, followed by the ace of spades and a third spade, pitching a heart and a diamond. When West turns up with four spades, South can expect the club length to be with East and finesse through him. That line leads to nine tricks and an excellent score for N/S. If South decides to bid clubs rather than notrump, North will surely prefer a club contract, but N/S will take at most 10 tricks on a diamond lead and continuation.

Board 25. E/W Vul. Dealer North.

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

Hands with four diamonds, five clubs and not enough values for a reverse are difficult to handle in any system. One solution in a natural system is to open 1♣ and rebid 2♣ if the response is in your short suit. Another solution is to open 1♣ and rebid 1NT, feigning a balanced hand. A third is to open 1♦ and rebid 2♣, showing both suits. Responder won't know which suit is longer in this scenario, so you may occasionally end up in the wrong strain at a low level. An advantage is that if you open 1♣ and rebid 2♣, you are far more likely to have at least six clubs because you "can't" have a broken five-card suit with four diamonds on

the side. Hands with four hearts and five clubs, however, are still in the mix unless you rebid 1NT over a 1♠ response with them.

Here, South has a seven-card major, so it doesn't matter how North plans his bidding. Unless South can make an immediate jump to 2♥ or 3♥ to show this type of hand, he will bid and rebid his hearts, leaving North to judge whether to raise, the form of scoring suggesting caution. South will be more likely to accept the invitation if North has shown both minors, as he will like the ♦Q and North's "potential" spade shortness. A difficult decision for South, perhaps, but with an extra heart most players would bid the game despite the minimum high-card strength.

As North has a solid spade stopper, some promising intermediates, and a bit in reserve, he might stretch to continue with 2NT over 2♥, but South won't like that much, and will retreat to 3♥. If South expects a doubleton heart for 2NT, however, he might jump to 4♥, but that won't happen often unless South falls in love with his diamond holding where North has opened 1♦.

If you only look at the N/S cards, you don't mind stopping short of game, as there are many possible losers, but in the end, what counts is the actual lie of the cards, and on this one, South figures to make a ton of tricks. To the brave will go the matchpoints. If West leads the ♠A, declarer can win the second trick and discard his last spade on the ♣A, later playing diamonds for one loser -- readily achieved without pain by leading the first diamond from dummy -- for 11 tricks. Here, the best chance for the defense to win a third trick is for West to underlead the ♠A, which is actually fairly attractive against both 4♥ and a heart partial. In 4♥, when declarer plays low from dummy he is in effect pinning his hopes for making his pushy game on finding the queen of hearts doubleton. If the ♥Q is well guarded, assuming that West has not led low from the queen-jack, the only chance in 4♥ is that West has the ace of spades. It's interesting to speculate on the relative chances of those two possibilities: ♥Q

doubleton versus the underlead of the ♠A. If South puts up the ♠K at Trick One and East has the ace, 4♥ may go down an extra trick when West has made a normal lead from the queen or jack of spades and there is a trump loser. Worse: if the heart queen is coming down, playing West to have underled the ace will lose the contract, perhaps turning a joint top into a bottom. Furthermore, if one of the defenders has three spades and the singleton queen of hearts, there will be a trump promotion if the defenders can win three spade tricks and play the last spade, ruffed by the queen of hearts.

Board 26. Game All. Dealer East.

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

True Matchpoints aficionados will consider East's spades a suit worth mentioning at some stage, although probably not immediately. And as 1♦, 2♦ or 3♦ will not be popular actions, South will most often be left to open with 1♣ (or, for Precisionists, 2♦ or 2♥ – three-suiter short in diamonds, usually leading to North declaring 3♣).

West will usually pass over South's 1♣, but some players will mention their hearts, while the level is low. If West passes, North will support his partner (with a 3♣ limit raise or an inverted 2♣), stay low with 1♦, or ignore the spade flaw to respond 1NT or 2NT.

If North responds 3♣ East may be tempted to act but will probably be cowed by the vulnerability. Over 2♣, however, he might try a lead-directing 2♠ bid, with a potential escape into diamonds up his sleeve. Dangerous? Sure, but as 2♠ might well direct partner to the winning opening lead, talk N/S out of a routine

3NT when they have nine winners (say) three low spades in each hand, or find a profitable strain in which to compete, enterprising Easts will consider 2♣ well worth the risks. If East takes the plunge with a bold four-card overcall, South will bid 3♣ over 2♣, ending the auction . . . unless West thinks competing to 3♣ is in order. South will double that on the way out, and careful defense will net N/S seven tricks, for a wonderful +500, but even +200 will be great when N/S have no game.

When South is allowed to play 3♣ at these tables, the defense will start with two spade tricks and a heart back. Even if East has concealed his ♠Q, South should know that the ♥K will be with West, so there is a clear risk of a ruff if he ducks. However, playing the ♥A can turn out badly if hearts are four-two and clubs three-one, in which case 3♣ might fail or produce only nine tricks. When clubs are two-two, South can take 10 tricks if he wins the ♥A, draws trumps, and leads a heart towards dummy, finessing the eight if West plays low (though West will often go up king and solve declarer's problems, as East's return of the ♥2 could have been from J92); if West does place South with four hearts, and ducks smoothly, South may put up the queen and hold himself to nine tricks. So declarer's Trick-Three problem is genuine and if he gets it wrong, perhaps that 2♣ overcall would be entitled to some of the credit (as West might lead a heart without it).

Where East overcalls in his long, topless suit, instead of his strongest (2♦ after Pass-1♣-Pass-2♣*) South may try 2♥ or simply compete with 3♣. If West elects to remain silent, North will try 2NT over 2♥ but will pass South's retreat to 3♣, as he would a direct 3♣. If West leads the ♦A, he will hate it when South ruffs, but although that sets up two tricks in dummy, West will be pleased to learn that his opening lead didn't cost his side any genuine tricks – N/S still take only ten tricks. If West competes to 3♦, North will pounce on his vulnerable opponents. The defenders have five sure tricks and if they get around to spades early, it looks like North can get a ruff in that

suit too. But that isn't so. As long as East plays a heart early, South has to take his ace or lose it; and then the defenders have to cash their two club tricks or lose them. With no entries left to South, there is no ruff. So, East will escape for one down in 3♦ doubled and "only" -200. Not much of a triumph!

Where West overcalls 1♣ with 1♥, North will often try 1NT or a mildly aggressive 2NT rather than focus on clubs. Over 1NT East will introduce diamonds or perhaps double for takeout if that's a partnership treatment. Whether East declares 2♦ doubled (+180 or -200) or N/S play in clubs or notrump (where the defense can take six tricks) is difficult to predict with confidence, but on a deal that looks like a simple partial in clubs, there will be many variations. It's likely but hardly certain that a plus score in either direction will be above average.

Board 27. Love All. Dealer South.

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

With a diamond discard available on South's third club, 7♥ is easy to make, but not that easy to bid as the distribution (the fitting black doubletons) and not just the high card values produces the thirteenth trick in hearts.

The bottom line is that reaching a grand slam with confidence or knowing when to stop in six on these cards is more than counting points or trumps or controls. So if someone tells you it is easy to bid 7♥ on this deal, nod sagely and walk away. This really is a tricky deal.

Furthermore, at matchpoints, it is always tempting to try for the extra 10 points in

notrump, but here there is no vital ruffing trick, and with the queen of diamonds well protected, 7NT goes down. Right?

Well, normally, that would be true, but not on this remarkable lie of the cards, on which West must also guard spades, so if South simply cashes the ace-king of diamonds and runs his rounded-suit winners, he just needs to watch to see whether the ♦Q has appeared. If it hasn't, his last discard from North will be the ♦J, and the ♠6 will either be high or it won't be. Bingo! If West has preempted in spades, South knows that the squeeze will operate if West has the ♦Q, but if East has it South can make sure of his contract if he guesses who has the diamond ten. If South plays East to have it, he can take a double finesse in diamonds, but if he thinks West has it, the winning (esoteric) line is to lead the diamond jack from dummy, forcing a cover. That transfers the diamond protection to West, and on the run of winners, West is squeezed between the ♦10 and his spade guard.

In practice, South will open with a strong bid: 2NT (if the strength is right), otherwise a strong and artificial 2♣, 1♣, or 2♦. 2NT may silence West, but over a lower opening, West will often bounce to 3♠, creating serious problems for N/S. It is unlikely that they can bid a grand slam after that start, and South will be worried that his king of spades may be a questionable asset. Imagine: 1♣-3♠-3NT-Pass, or 1♣-3♠-Double-Pass. In our travels we've seen a lot of schemes dealing with competition versus strong club openings, but no one's produced the definitive manual to comprehensively counter simple actions like a natural 3♠ overcall. If North tries 3NT, South will pick an appropriate number of notrump, after which the heart fit will come to light if North introduces the suit in time. If North tries to stall with double (which might deliver as few as eight points with indifferent distribution) South might content himself with 3NT or 4♥. It's easy to say that North will move on in those scenarios, but it's not unrealistic to accept that he might not. Indeed, if both North and South take conservative actions, they may

even stop in game, for a terrible score.

Note also that West is well advised not to do too much. If he jumps to 4♠ and is left to play that contract doubled, N/S get +1100, which beats all pairs in a small slam.

Board 28. N/S Vul. Dealer West.

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

N/S have no shortness, no long suit and only 23 HCP, yet 4♠ only depends on picking up trumps and not suffering a diamond ruff. North's ♥J, normally a bit player at best in a suit contract other than hearts, may play an important role this time, if East leads a heart against a spade contract.

With eight combined cards in both spades and diamonds, N/S aren't likely to get anywhere near 5♦, but if they do, they can take 11 tricks if they find the spade queen. With two discards available on North's spades, the four-four fit produces one more trick than the five-three fit.

Are N/S likely to bid game on these cards? And if they do reach 4♠, are they more likely to fail than succeed. If North opens 1♠ in a five-card major system, South's hand could be considered either a maximum single raise or a minimum three-card limit raise. If South settles for a constructive or "not terrible" 2♠, North won't be tempted to move at pairs. Souths starting with a 1NT response, whether forcing, semi-forcing, or non-forcing, will see their hand improve (at least in theory: forcing notrumpers might be facing three low diamonds) when North rebids 2♦, but should not do more than jump to 3♠. While North might well raise or try 3NT at IMPs, it's much closer at Matchpoints,

and with nothing in reserve in terms of high cards and distribution, passing 3♠ is the normal action.

The best approach to the spade suit with all things being equal is to finesse West for the queen, which best accommodates the four-one-splits. However, the play begins with East having to find an opening lead with little to guide him. His realistic choice is between clubs and hearts, and only a club will hold declarer to nine tricks, assuming North takes the wrong view in trumps. We believe that East will lead a heart more often than a club, which should cost the defense at least one trick: declarer ducks in dummy, unblocks the ♥J under West's queen, wins the club switch, finesses the ♥10, discards his club loser on the ♥A, and stops to consider the trump position. North knows that East led a heart from the king, a somewhat dangerous choice when the opponents may have no values to spare. If declarer deems it likely that East chose a heart because he could not safely lead a trump, he may back his judgment, go against the a priori percentages, and play East for the ♠Q, coming to 11 tricks for an excellent score, whether he's in game or a partial. That will provide him with a good story for the post-mortem and earn him his partner's respect for at least a few moments.

Where North passes a raise to 2♠, a significant number of Easts will feel it is their duty to take some risks to avoid allowing N/S to play in their seemingly comfortable low-level partial. If East doubles and South redoubles, West will pass, bid 3♣, 3♥ or 2NT (scramble) to try to find their best trump suit, according to agreement and style. E/W are booked for at least -200 and a probable poor score wherever they alight, and a penalty double will start the clock at -500. If N/S elect to defend they will do better than most of their counterparts who stay out of game, and if they push on to 3♠ they won't be any worse off than they would have been at the two level, so students of the game might wish to track the effects of marginal actions like East's reopening double of 2♠ to whether it pays in the long run to make them.

Board 29. Game All. Dealer North.

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

Is the 11-point East hand, with its five-card suit, two aces, wealth of intermediates, worth opening with both sides vulnerable after a pass by North?. Striking the first blow is often important, so there is much to be said for opening 1♣ or 1NT, and Precisionists will surely open 1♦ if they're out of range for 1NT. If East passes and South resists the urge to get busy in third seat, West will open 1♦ or various brands of 1♣.

Where East starts with 1♣, West will be thinking of slam from the outset. If a direct 3♥ splinter raise (despite the four-card spade suit) is an option, East would be able to steer away from notrump, and all his honors working, he will move towards five or six clubs; West will do the rest. Where West can agree clubs immediately in a different way and show his heart shortage early enough, E/W should also reach 6♣, but where West's initial response is 1♠ or 1♦, East will rebid 1NT, and depending on the degree of sophistication in the partnership methods or West's inclination to use brute force, E/W may finish in 3NT (it's Matchpoints, after all) rather than 6♣; 5♣ will not be a viable option for anyone once East opens the bidding.

If East starts with a weak notrump, the partnership will need some sound machinery (something to show a three-suiter short in hearts, a game-forcing inquiry, or some relay structure) to find the club fit and pinpoint the mesh in hearts and control situation. East's who start with a Precision 1♦ will rebid 1NT

over 1♠, and again, the partnership's methods will determine whether West can unearth the club fit and show his heart shortness.

Where East passes initially, E/W might have a smooth auction to slam if West opens with a natural 1♣, East uses an inverted raise and West can show his heart shortage, perhaps with a direct jump to 3♥. If West opens 1♦ instead, East will choose from among 1NT, 2NT, 2♣, and an imaginative 1♥. West may be able to bid around his heart shortness or raise clubs with a splinter raise, but the road to 6♣ may be a bumpy one and the final contract will often be 3NT. A strong club opening should make it easier for E/W if East shows a club positive and West splinters.

6♣ is an excellent contract, but will it make? At first glance, there are 12 tricks with two heart ruffs in West. But a deeper look reveals danger, as declarer might run into a diamond ruff or permit South to score the ♣J on an endgame promotion.

Declarer can avoid that promotion, but he has to be careful. Say that East gets a diamond lead and reasons along these lines: "I can win the lead and cash ace-king of clubs. If they break two-two, my problems are over. If North has three trumps, I should be able to play ♥A, heart ruff, ace-king of spades, spade ruff, heart ruff, then ruff the last spade and draw trumps. But if South has three trumps, including the jack, I may need a second entry to hand for drawing trumps. Therefore, I'd better win the opening diamond lead in West to preserve the ♦A as a late entry." That seems like a sound plan.

But as you can see, that well thought-out plan will backfire when South ruffs the ♦A along the way and North takes a diamond trick to set the contract.

East may change tack, however, if the play suggests that North is long in diamonds. Suppose North signals with the ♦Q at trick one, then carelessly discards a "safe" diamond on the second club. Now, East may place him with all missing diamonds and try to reach his

hand with a second spade ruff in the end. If East plays that way, North can expect to receive a thank-you card in the mail for helping him to find the winning line. South might have a different reward in mind.

There are 10 top tricks in 3NT. As the notrumpers can't do anything about the 6♣ bidders, their main mission is to make the maximum in their contract, so the battle for an eleventh trick will be the central issue at those tables. South will lead a heart against 3NT and East will duck a couple of times and win the third round. The run of the clubs will squeeze North in spades and diamonds, but declarer will have to play South for the ♠Q and North for the ten to benefit from the position (the third diamond in the East hand is the threat in that suit). It does not help the defense to switch to diamonds after one or two rounds of hearts as long as declarer forms the correct opinion about the spade honors.

Bidding and making 6♣ will be superb, of course, but as many will reach slam and fail on the threatening lie of the cards, +660 will probably be respectable, and if the E/Ws bid well but fare badly in the play, even +630 might score well for E/W.

Board 30. Love All. Dealer East.

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

Some deals are easier than others, and this one should be everybody's 4♠, played by East.

The defenders have two aces, and if South leads from his sequence, which he usually will, N/S will establish a third trick. +420 will be the normal result.

But at some tables, North may have indicated a top honor in hearts, perhaps after 1♠-2♥-3♥ (invitational-plus spade raise)-Double. That might convince South to lead the ♦A, with the intention of continuing the suit, winning the first trump and putting North in with the ace of hearts to obtain a third-round diamond ruff. He still has time to switch after seeing dummy, however, and if he thinks it more likely that the ♥A is with East, he will turn to hearts, which loses nothing even if North has the ♥A if North also has five or six diamonds, as there will be no diamond ruff coming. But North will not necessarily give a count signal on the ♦A (and it won't be clearly legible even if he does) as South will normally be looking for a suit preference signal when he's led the singleton ace.

Whether his lead-directing double of 3♥ should preclude the need for strict suit preference and whether in that context he should express interest only when he has specifically the ace are issues any serious partnership will want to consider, and the matter is complicated further by the need for North to play a card after the commonly accepted 20-second Trick One pause.

In the actual case, where 4♠ appears to be the normal contract and dummy has diamond length, South should probably change tack and switch to the ♥Q, getting back to even with most of the field rather than play for a top or bottom. However, if South stubbornly continues with his original plan and plays a second diamond, East will win, knock out the ♠A, and get rid of his heart loser on one of dummy's diamonds. +450 should be at least 90% to E/W.

N/S have neither enough distribution nor enough power to bid more than 3♥, but it is possible that North tries to take away bidding room for the opponents with a 4♥ bid. Most of the time, it won't cost him anything, as East will probably go to 4♠. But if East doubles, and West sits for it, N/S will regret it, as -500 won't get them many matchpoints, if any.

Board 31. N/S Vul. Dealer South.

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

When the strength is evenly divided between the sides, and there are no good trump suits, the contract will usually be INT. And as it's often easier to declare than defend, you would normally prefer to declare.

Here, though, it's theoretically better not to declare. The reason is that N/S are vulnerable, and that it is easy for E/W to take eight tricks on defense when North is declarer and East starts clubs. But if E/W declare INT, best defense holds declarer to seven tricks. So, +90 for E/W compared to +200.

But the defense to hold E/W to seven tricks in notrump is difficult to find. If West is declarer, and North leads his partner's first-bid suit, diamonds, South wins the trick and has to shift to a low spade. If West plays low, North wins and gets back to diamonds, South establishing his fifth diamond (so that he has a winner to cash if West later leads towards the spade king). If West goes up with the ♠K, N/S have six top tricks to cash when they gain the lead. On any other defense, West takes eight tricks; +120 most of the time, which is important, as low club partials yield nine tricks and +110.

South will open 1♦ and West will pass, but North is likely to respond 1♥. When South rebids 1♠, North should be content and pass. If East also passes, and West leads a club (the unbid suit), 1♠ can be made. East wins the ♣A and shifts to either of his trumps, dummy's queen will be permitted to win. Declarer crosses to a diamond to play a second club. West wins the

king, and plays ♥K, heart. East wins and plays a second trump through, and South ducks the six but covers the eight with the jack. West wins, but can't do anything: a trump gives up a trick in that suit, and a diamond lets declarer ruff a diamond in dummy and cash the club jack. A third round of hearts from East does no better. To defeat 1♠ legitimately, West's opening lead has to be a diamond or the ♥K, with the latter a more attractive choice.

But should East let South play 1♠? He could reopen with 2♣, but a double, which would suggest fair values with length in the unbid suit, clubs, and the one bid on his right (hearts). This East hand is perfect for that sort of double. When East is really lucky, West has enough in South's suits to pass for penalty, opening up the possibility of a 200-point Pairs windfall. The actual West hand has length in spades and diamonds, as expected, and is very close to passing. Indeed, some will do so, and there will be some +160s for N/S but also a few -200s. It's more likely that West will try INT, however, and finish +120 more often than +90, as North is more likely to lead spades than diamonds.

Board 32. E/W Vul. Dealer West.

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

West has play for game opposite nothing more than the ♣J or five small clubs, so in terms of playing strength his hand is well worth a strong, forcing opening. Indeed, some will open an Acol 2♠, others 2♣ or 2♦ (In France, both are used as strong openings – one a one-round force, the other a game force). In strong-club systems, 1♣ is an easy choice, but in standard systems in which 2♣ is the only force, it's at

least mildly dangerous to use that opening with only one ace and potentially very little overall defense. Many will start with 1♠ and hope that the bidding doesn't die right there inappropriately; it seldom does, when West has so much distribution.

Here, East responds INT, and if South passes, West will consider his hand too strong for a jump to 4♣ and force with 3♣ (or perhaps an artificial 2♣ or 2NT in some modern systems). Over 3♣, the bidding will continue: 3♦-3♠; 3NT. When West learns that East will have some wasted strength in hearts, he should content himself with 4♠. When there are no bad breaks and no defensive ruffs, the play is straightforward, West losing to the ♠K and the ♣A, but nothing more.

Should South venture a 2♥ overcall over East's INT response, as many will, West can't bid clubs conveniently without special arrangements, as 3♣ isn't forcing, and 4♣ would suggest at least five-five, so he will either force with a 3♥ cue bid, settle for 4♠, or perhaps test East with 4♥, which he hopes will be recognized as an "autosplinter" (short hearts, long, strong spades, slam interest). East will not be interested in going past game, and the auction will finish in 4♠.

If the bidding starts 1♠-p-INT-2♥; 3♥, North may be tempted to raise to 4♥ to make it more difficult for E/W to find their best spot, but if he does, East will double. At the prevailing vulnerability and such great playing strength, including that heart void, it won't be easy for West to pass the double at Matchpoints, when 4♠ is sure to be the "field" contract. If West takes the "safe" action and removes to 4♠, he will discover that he passed up a chance for a lucrative penalty. Against 4♥ doubled, the defenders can start with two diamond tricks, the ♠A, a spade ruff, and switch to the ♣J. With no entry to dummy, to pick up the trumps, South will lose three more tricks, for four down and -800, an extreme score.

Board 33. Love All. Dealer North.

<p>♠ J 8 6 3 2 ♥ Q 9 8 ♦ A K J ♣ 6 4</p> <p>♠ A K 10 ♥ 6 ♦ Q 8 4 3 2 ♣ K J 10 5</p>	<p>♠ Q 5 4 ♥ 10 5 4 3 ♦ 10 ♣ 9 8 7 3 2</p> <p>♠ 9 7 ♥ A K J 7 2 ♦ 9 7 6 5 ♣ A Q</p>
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Where North declines the opportunity to open the bidding, South will open with 1♥ after two passes. West's hand is perfect for a takeout double (even die-hards who "insist" on four-card support for the unbid major will see no advantage in passing or overcalling 2♥) North will redouble, bid 1♠, or use an artificial heart raise of some sorts. Whether East mentions his clubs will depend on style and personality, but if North gets to show his heart support and general strength, N/S will reach 4♥ or 3NT. If North opens a light 1♠, South will respond 2♥ and West might well remain silent as his side figures to be outgunned. North will raise and South will continue to 4♥ or try 3NT.

With hearts four-one, diamonds five-one, and the club king offside, it looks like nine tricks is the maximum for N/S in hearts or notrump, but there are 10 tricks available in hearts if declarer guesses how to play; and there will often be 10 tricks for South in notrump when West leads his side's longest suit, clubs. In fact, N/S will be held to nine tricks in notrump only if East can lead a club through the king early, a most unlikely scenario.

The best start against 4♥ by South is a diamond, threatening a ruff. If declarer wins the ace and cashes all five of his trumps, West will come under unbearable pressure. He must keep four diamonds and two clubs, so he has to pitch a spade on the last trump. If he parts with the ten, declarer takes the diamond finesse, cashes the ♦K and exits with a spade, forcing West to lead a club from the king after he cashes his diamond winner and the other high spade. If, instead, West throws a spade honor, South's

spade spots allow him to set up at least one spade trick whether West plays high or low on the first round of spades. But, the winning line in 4♥ after a diamond opening lead is somewhat obscure, and if South deviates from it at any time, he will come to only nine tricks.

As West has ace-king of spades, however, most players will lead one of them, and then it's considerably easier for declarer. In fact, it's so easy that after that start there is no way E/W can stop declarer from making an overtrick. If East encourages, West will continue the suit, after which South can draw trumps, ruff out spades if he has not yet done so, and finesse in diamonds for the overtrick. But this is a situation in which East should encourage only with a doubleton spade or with four sufficiently strong cards to avoid setting up tricks in dummy. In essence that translates to simple count. With three spades, the correct thing for East to do at Trick One is to follow low, which acts as a discouraging signal. If West shifts aggressively to a club (if South has accepted a game invitation he will have a black queen and a club switch will be necessary if it's the ♣Q), South gets his overtrick easily, so this time a diamond switch is best. South wins, draws trumps in four rounds and leads his last spade. If East wins it with the queen and shifts to clubs, South will take 10 tricks if he finesses, 11 if he goes up ace, finesses in diamonds and ruffs out the spades. As you can imagine situations in which East would like to gain the lead on the second round of spades and would like to encourage West to underlead his remaining spade honor rather than switch disastrously to another suit, the attitude idea has some seductive attraction. Unfortunately, there is no way to combine count and attitude, and in some of the cases in which East shows three spades West will find the low-spade continuation if he considers finding East with the queen, the best chance for the defense. Here, even the lead of the ♠10 on the go will not defeat 4♥, and West will do well to lead his longest suit rather than his strongest. Where East has bid clubs, many West players will lead clubs at some point, which will speed up the play and usually give South an eleventh trick.

E/W have only three losers in a club contract, but best defense nets N/S a fourth trick. If the defenders lead hearts at every opportunity, West will be forced to ruff three times, promoting South's queen of clubs. But if North happens to be on lead against a club contract (most unlikely) and can't resist the temptation to lead a top diamond to hold the lead after seeing dummy, it will be too late for the heart force. West ruffs the second heart, ruffs a diamond and leads a club up. He has time to draw trumps and set up his diamonds. There won't be many club sacrifices, though, so N/S +300 and +100 will make only rare appearances on the score sheets.

So, lets see . . . if South plays a heart contract West is advised not to lead from ace-king-third of spades; and if West plays a club contract, North is advised to not lead a diamond from ace-king- third. Can we learn something from that, or is it just a coincidence?

Board 34. N/S Vul. Dealer East.

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

With 30 HCP, two balanced hands and no eight-card major-suit fit, this should be nearly everybody's 3NT E/W. The vulnerability does not favor action by either North or South, but we know lots of players who proudly proclaim that "vulnerability is for children." If South commits an Unusual 2NT overcall or a weak jump overcall in clubs with his six-five hand, he will probably suffer a significant penalty. But as East's opening bid will be 1♣ much of the time, South may not be able to get involved at those tables. Lucky for him!

How many tricks will E/W take in a notrump contract? Suppose East is declarer and South

leads the diamond ten. West wins the queen, plays a spade to the king, finesses in clubs, unblocks the club ace, cashes the spade tricks, leads a diamond to the ace and cashes the club king. If he has kept all of dummy's hearts, he can lead a low heart to the ten (or the queen), endplaying North. So, if declarer plays with inspiration, he will take eleven tricks. That inspiration will come more readily, of course, if South has revealed his distribution.

Where there is less information available to declarer, it's more likely that he will go after hearts at an earlier stage, and if he does so when North has safe exit cards, he will do very well to take more than 10 tricks, with nine a live possibility.

Board 35. E/W Vul. Dealer South.

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

With two balanced hands and a five-three fit in a major suit, 3NT is often a better game than four of the major if all suits are stopped. If West gets to open the bidding with 1♦ and North overcalls 1♥, South will probably show his heart support and a maximum pass with a 2♦ cue-bid. If North shows extra values with 3♣ or 3♦, South may suggest 3NT, and North may well sit for it. Otherwise, the final contract will be 4♥. Declarer can take 10 tricks in both hearts and notrump.

If West leads a low diamond against 3NT, declarer can take more than the obvious ten tricks. He cashes three heart tricks, ending in hand, to lead a club towards dummy. When West turns up with four hearts and pitches a diamond on the last heart, and another one on the queen of clubs, it will be attractive for

declarer to play him for both spade honors (3451 shape is more likely than 2461 and West might have doubled 2♦ with a sixth diamond). If South backs his card reading he will exit in diamonds, forcing West to break spades. That will produce an eleventh trick, +460, and a shared top for N/S.

West will do better to lead three rounds of diamonds against 3NT, which will preclude declarer negotiating his endplay. However, if West leads a high diamond, he might switch to the ♠Q, after which declarer can come to 11 tricks via four spades, five hearts, and two clubs, or three spades, five hearts, one diamond, and two clubs.

In 4♥, the opening lead will come through South's diamond honors. If West takes an honor with the king and shifts to the ♣K, declarer can execute the same endplay as in the 3NT scenario, but as he doesn't get a diamond trick then, he will only score +420. It's interesting to speculate on what might happen if East leads the ♦3 or ♦5 and North calls low from dummy. If West wins an honor declarer can build a tenth trick in diamonds and would take 11 tricks by ruffing out spades after discarding a spade on a diamond winner, but the four-one trump kills that as declarer can't draw trumps ending in dummy. How insidious! And there is another endplay, leading to the same 10 tricks, if North simply draws trumps, cashes the ♣Q (optional) and spade king, and ducks a spade to West.

Board 36. Game All. Dealer West.

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

Where North opens the bidding with 1NT,

South will usually locate the four-four heart fit via Stayman. With a junky nine-count, he is more likely to invite 4♥ than blast into it. If he invites, some Norths will count to 15 and pass, but others will feel that the strong trumps, prime values, and potential ruffing value in diamonds merit continuing on to game. Game needs plenty of luck, but on this deal, the last of the session, the optimistic approach should pay off.

If East and West were allowed to trade hands, even 2♥ would be too high (on a diamond lead and a club back, the jack of hearts can be promoted for E/W's sixth trick), but when all finesses are on for N/S, 4♥ will often make. Not always, because if declarer draws trumps early and guesses to play a diamond to the king (or East grabs the ace and North doesn't finesse later) he may find himself one trick short (two spades, four hearts, two minor-suit kings and one ruff in dummy). He either has to manage two ruffs in dummy or play East for both diamond honors.

Accurate play will produce 10 tricks in hearts for the most common result on this deal, but it's less clear how many N/S pairs will be in game. There will be more than a handful of +140s and -100s to go with the +170s and +620s.

With so many minor honors, some South players will prefer a raise to 2NT or 3NT rather than use Stayman. 3NT will also make, but will probably yield only nine tricks. The pairs in hearts have the potential to do a trick better, but while some of the declarers in hearts will take only nine tricks, those in notrump will rarely take fewer than nine.

Let's look deeper into the play at notrump to verify the "probable" nine-trick result. On a club lead from East, the defenders have four quick tricks, but if East leads from his strongest suit, North has a real chance for 10 tricks if he plays West to have the other key honors (except the ace-queen of diamonds). He can win the opening lead with the ♦J, play a heart to hand and lead a second diamond. Let's say East

wins the trick and shifts to a club: jack, queen, king. When North cashes his heart tricks and the ♦K, West has to make two discards. And if they aren't one spade and the nine of clubs, declarer can engineer an endplay against West, forcing him to lead away from the ♠K. East can help West to find the right defense, by playing the eight of clubs to the first trick (showing the seven, but no higher clubs) . . . unless E/W use reverse signals and the eight would be consistent with a holding of eight-low-low!

If a 1NT opening shows 13-15 HCP, or 14-16 HCP, South is likely to pass the opening bid. On another day, that would be the winning decision, but here we'll have to wait and see how many N/S pairs go minus or achieve only +140.

We hope you enjoyed yourselves and look forward to seeing you again tomorrow.

Commentator:s
Eric Kokish & Anders Wigren

Eric Kokish 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.

Anders Wirgren, of Limhamn, Sweden was born in 1951, is married and has three children (two girls, 14 and 12, a boy 10). He started as a promising chess player, winning the Swedish championship for juniors in 1968, but took up bridge a few years later, eventually making that his favorite pastime. Today, two players have won the Swedish championship in both chess

and bridge. Anders is one of them (chess: three titles, bridge: eight titles).

Together with Mats Nilslund and Magnus Lindkvist, Anders started Scania Bridgekonsult in 1986, a Swedish publishing house, specializing in bridge literature. Since 1998, Anders is running the company by himself. So far, Scania Bridgekonsult has published 19 book titles (five of them in English), and Anders has been author or co-author of nine of them. He has also written two chess books and one book in collaboration with Mike Lawrence: *I Fought the Law of Total Tricks* (a critical study of the so popular *Law of Total Tricks*). Scania Bridgekonsult is found on the net on <http://www.scaniabridge.com>

Anders has worked full time with bridge for the past 25 years, writing weekly columns for many different Swedish newspapers during that time. He also writes for the two Swedish magazines *Bridgetidningen* (where he is co-editor) and *Bridge* (the membership magazine of the Swedish bridge federation). He often contributes to international magazines like *The Bridge World* and *Bridge Today*, and has twice won the International Bridge Academy's award "Best Theoretical Article of the Year".

Other interests besides bridge (and chess) are literature, history, philosophy (which he studied at the University) and music. He used the play the classical guitar in younger days, and still loves the fragile tone of the instrument. In the classical genre, Bach and Ravel are some of the favourites, while Bob Dylan and Leo Kottke are on top of the modern list. His wife and children are all musically talented, so it would be possible to give a family concert with piano, flute, guitar, cello and drums.

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