

MICHAEL CODA CUP 2016

Commentary on Hands

Hand 1

				♠ 543
Dlr: North				♥ 764
Vul: None				♦ QJ654
				♣ KQ
♠ K102	W	North	E	♠ J976
♥ AKQJ93	e	1	a	♥ 1085
♦ A	s		s	♦ 1032
♣ AJ3	t	South	t	♣ 1092
				♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
8				N - 2 - - -
22	1			S - 3 - - -
9				E 1 - 5 3 2
				W1 - 5 3 2

Immediately, we have an interesting problem with regard to bidding styles because it will be difficult for W to persuade E that his hand is of any value at all, even less that he has two crucial entries that allow game to make! Assuming there are three passes to him, the first decision for W is whether he has a game-going hand or not. If he decides he has, then 4H will be the contract, but it is not even that simple because those with a 2D game-force opening may not want to see partner as declarer as he inevitably would be via a 2H response, so may decide to open 2C, Benji-style, anyway.

Personally, I am only partly convinced that it is a game-going hand, so maybe a good compromise would be to open 2C, get a 2D response and bid 3H to show a solid suit; now E should realise he has the odd entry and would bid game. I hope, in any case, that nobody plays an abominable form of Benji that allows the sequence 2C – 2D – 2H to be passed! In the play, N might make life easy by leading KC: now declarer can use the dummy entries to play spades and will make a comfortable 11 tricks, but, on a red suit lead, declarer will need to choose use the entries to play spades rather than clubs to obtain his maximum and that is not at all obvious. I am sure that the odd West might gamble on 3NT, and will come undone on a diamond lead!

Hand 2

♠ A94
Dir: East ♥ A873
Vul: N/S ♦ Q2
♣ J976

♠ K1073	W	North	E	♠ J2
♥ K4	e	2	a	♥ J10
♦ A1084	s		s	♦ KJ65
♣ Q102	t	South	t	♣ AK543

11	♠ Q865	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12	♥ Q9652	N - - 2 - -
13	♦ 973	S - - 2 - -
4	♣ 8	E 4 5 - 2 2
		W 4 5 - 2 2

EW will probably have a free run in the bidding and might well reach game via 1C – 1D – 2D – 3NT, as W's three 10s justify 3NT rather than a mere 2NT. Unfortunately, this contract will almost certainly be defeated; I do not like leading an Axxx suit against NT, but there is no attractive alternative here (it is much easier for S to lead a heart if E happens somehow to be declarer). Once the club suit fails to break, the best declarer can do is hope to guess the diamonds correctly to make 8 tricks, and I might well even get that wrong, as N is known to hold more clubs and therefore fewer diamonds. Hence I expect to see many 50s or 100s in the NS column; EW pairs stopping in a diamond part-score will probably score best.

Hand 3

♠ 8752
Dir: South ♥ A1092
Vul: E/W ♦ 104
♣ 754

♠ Q4	W	North	E	♠ A1093
♥ J74	e	3	a	♥ K65
♦ AKJ73	s		s	♦ 95
♣ 862	t	South	t	♣ Q1093

4	♠ KJ6	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
11	♥ Q83	N - - 1 1 1
9	♦ Q862	S - 1 2 1 1
16	♣ AKJ	E 1 - - - -
		W 1 - - - -

If S opens a strong 1NT, it will probably be passed out. If playing a weak NT, S will open 1D and that could be passed out, though many, myself included, would double protectively as E; W will be looking forward to passing this for penalties, but S should protect against this by bidding 1NT which W might still be tempted to double. The hand, though, is very difficult for EW to defend and 1NT will make more often than not, provided S plays on hearts; even 1D might scrape home. Either side will be happy with a plus score.

Hand 4

		♠ K76	
Dlr: West		♥ AQ765	
Vul: All		♦ 103	
		♣ AK7	
♠ AJ943	W North	E	♠ Q852
♥ 1084	e 4	a	♥ KJ92
♦ K4	s	s	♦ A62
♣ QJ10	t South	t	♣ 65
16	♠ 10	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N	
11 10	♥ 3	N 3 3 - -	
3	♦ QJ9875	S 3 3 - -	
	♣ 98432	E - - 2 2 3	
		W - - 2 2 3	

Although some might open 1S or a weak 1NT as W, I do not like it as a vulnerable opening hand, so I would see N open 1H, passed round to W who would reopen with 1S. E will raise, probably as far as 3S if S decides to compete in the minors. NS should defeat 3S because N should lead AC and switch to AH, then give partner a ruff, and still have KC and KS to come. However, as NS can make 3D, it may not be a disaster for EW to concede 100.

Interestingly, if W chooses to open 1S, E will make a game try, so the result will still be 3S – 1. If W opens 1NT, N should double and E may decide to stand it, but now S will escape into the safe diamond contract.

Hand 5

		♠ 73	
Dlr: North		♥ KJ10952	
Vul: N/S		♦ 62	
		♣ AK8	
♠ 1062	W North	E	♠ A9854
♥ Q43	e 5	a	♥ A
♦ J95	s	s	♦ Q107
♣ J943	t South	t	♣ Q765
11	♠ KQJ	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N	
4 12	♥ 876	N 1 4 5 - 3	
13	♦ AK843	S 1 4 5 - 3	
	♣ 102	E - - - -	
		W - - - -	

Over N's 1H, E will probably bid 1S, though some may prefer to double. S will double the 1S overall, N will bid 2H and S will bid 4H. If E chooses to double the opening bid, S will redouble and the same bidding will follow. Some players in the S seat might, at Pairs, opt to try 3NT rather than 4H. Assuming that, on the bidding, declarer in either contract should guess the heart correctly, 11 tricks will be made in 4H and also in 3NT on a spade lead, but a club lead against 3NT will hold declarer to 9 tricks.

Hand 6

♠ A2
 Dir: East ♥ AK9642
 Vul: E/W ♦ 65
 ♣ 754

♠ K943	W	North	E	♠ QJ86
♥ 5	e	6	a	♥ Q73
♦ Q842	s	s	s	♦ AK973
♣ AKQ9	t	South	t	♣ 8

11	♠ 1075	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
14	♥ J108	N - - - -
3	♦ J10	S - - - -
	♣ J10632	E 2 5 1 5 3
		W2 5 1 5 3

The likely bidding seems to be 1D – pass – 1S – 2H – 2S – pass – 4S, making an automatic 11 tricks on the likely AH lead. A 5H sacrifice, even at the favourable vulnerability, will prove too expensive. Some may find their way to 5D, making the same 11 tricks but thereby scoring less well; it might be tempting to investigate a slam, but finding two aces missing will quickly dampen enthusiasm.

Hand 7

♠ 876
 Dir: South ♥ J864
 Vul: All ♦ J1085
 ♣ J3

♠ A95	W	North	E	♠ KJ1032
♥ 102	e	7	a	♥ AQ93
♦ KQ64	s	s	s	♦ A92
♣ KQ65	t	South	t	♣ 7

3	♠ Q4	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
14	♥ K75	N - - - -
9	♦ 73	S - - - -
	♣ A109842	E 3 5 4 6 5
		W2 4 4 5 5

Over a weak 1NT by W, E will use the partnership methods to show 5 spades and 4 hearts in a game-going hand, and the contract of 4S should be reached. Those playing a strong NT will start 1D – 1S, but should still end in the same place. Just one heart ruff is needed to ensure that 10 or 11 tricks are made, depending on the spade view taken by declarer. Some may end in 3NT, this being Pairs, and the use of the double heart finesse can also yield the same tricks for them, so they may score well.

There are those (not many vulnerable I hope!) who might choose to open 3C as S; they will get their just deserts if this is passed to E, who should double, allowing W to pass and collect 1100.

Hand 8

♠ KQ5
 Dlr: West ♥ Q105
 Vul: None ♦ KJ6
 ♣ AJ84

♠ A10864	W	North	E	♠ 93
♥ A73	e	8	a	♥ 94
♦ Q109	s	s	s	♦ A8743
♣ K5	t	South	t	♣ 10932

16	♠ J72	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
13 4	♥ KJ862	N 2 - 3 1 3
7	♦ 52	S 2 - 3 1 3
	♣ Q76	E - 2 - - -
		W - 2 - - -

If W chooses to open a weak 1NT (as I would), N should double and E will escape to 2D; S will presumably compete with 2H and there it will rest. If W opens 1S, N will overcall 1NT and S should transfer to 2H and neither partner has enough to try for game. Particularly if N is declarer (but also if S is declarer and W leads a diamond), E can lead his doubleton spade to obtain a ruff and hold a heart contract to 9 tricks. The computer claims that 3NT can be made (which, of course, it can), but I have my doubts if it will be if E and W are prepared to hold up all their three aces till the third round of the suits; it requires declarer specifically to play W for CKx, rather than playing E for the K.

Hand 9

♠ 8
 Dlr: North ♥ K653
 Vul: E/W ♦ AQJ94
 ♣ Q75

♠ AQ5	W	North	E	♠ 763
♥ QJ1042	e	9	a	♥ A8
♦ K732	s	s	s	♦ 86
♣ J	t	South	t	♣ AK8642

12	♠ KJ10942	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
13 11	♥ 97	N - - - - -
4	♦ 105	S - - - - -
	♣ 1093	E 3 1 2 1 3
		W 4 1 3 1 3

N will open 1D and E will bid 2C (some players may be able, and choose, to bid 3C, though I would not, even if I could, at this vulnerability). Over 2C, S may be able to bid 2S, if playing it as a weakish non-forcing bid, but should otherwise pass. W should feel that 2NT is sufficient opposite an overcall, but E will raise to 3NT with his good suit. Assuming that N leads QD, declarer should duck once and, with the aid of the two major suit finesses, that will be enough to ensure the contract, given that he will safely have lost the third round of clubs to S.

Hand 10

♠ QJ763
Dir: East ♥ 9873
Vul: All ♦ A743
♣ --

♠ K9852	W	North	E	♠ A4
♥ AK6	e	10	a	♥ J52
♦ Q52	s	s	s	♦ K86
♣ 64	t	South	t	♣ AKJ107

7	♠ 10	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12	♥ Q104	N - - - -
16	♦ J109	S - - - -
5	♣ Q98532	E 2 2 2 2 3
		W 2 2 2 2 3

EW should bid unopposed to 3NT (eg 1C – 1S – 1NT – 3NT, playing weak NT, or 1NT – 2H – 2S – 3NT, playing strong NT). S is almost certain to lead JD and declarer immediately has to take a view. Most will run it to KD, cross to AH and take a club finesse, ensuring 8 tricks; S will now continue with 10D. The successful declarers will cover this, see S win the third round and will then be able to cash their black suit winners, before throwing S in with the 5th club to lead away from QH. Unsuccessful ones might hope that N holds QH and, instead, throw him in with a spade. There seems to be little evidence to suggest which is the better play! Certainly, simply cashing winners, and hoping QH will drop, is not a recipe for success.

If the play goes this way in the early stages, N can, in any case, defeat the contract by switching to a heart, rather than playing a third diamond, when in with AD. On the other hand, declarer can ensure success by playing QD at trick one (and end-playing S later), but I would say that line is generally against the odds.

Hand 11

♠ A103
 Dlr: South ♥ KJ32
 Vul: None ♦ 65
 ♣ Q974

♠ KQ86	W	North	E	♠ J5
♥ 10864	e	11	a	♥ AQ7
♦ K9	s		s	♦ Q107
♣ AK5	t	South	t	♣ J10632

10	♠ 9742	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
15	♥ 95	N - - - -
5	♦ AJ8432	S - - - -
	♣ 8	E 3 1 3 3 4
		W 3 1 3 3 4

EW should again find their way unopposed to 3NT, via 1NT (strong) – 3NT or, if playing weak NT, 1H – 2C – 2NT – 3H – 3NT. In the latter sequence, N may find the most worrying lead of a diamond, which may leave declarer wary of taking too many chances of letting S in, though – as the cards lie – he has no need to worry. The strong NT sequence gives less away and is more likely to attract a helpful club or heart lead; if declarer reads a club lead, he should not block the suit by playing an honour from dummy, but should cash AK and clear the suit, which is the best play in any case.

The contract should always make but those avoiding the diamond lead are more likely to take the chances of making an overtrick.

Hand 12

♠ AJ652
 Dlr: West ♥ AQ953
 Vul: N/S ♦ 108
 ♣ K

♠ K107	W	North	E	♠ 9
♥ 82	e	12	a	♥ K764
♦ J6	s		s	♦ KQ432
♣ Q109765	t	South	t	♣ 432

14	♠ Q843	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
6	♥ J10	N - 2 4 4 4
12	♦ A975	S - 2 4 4 4
	♣ AJ8	E 1 - - - -
		W 1 - - - -

Assuming W passes, NS should reach 4S without too much difficulty. Without KD lead, this contract will make 11 tricks, losing a spade and a heart, but the diamond lead prevents an early discard on AC and should hold the contract to 10 tricks.

There are those who might chance to open 3C as W at the favourable vulnerability. NS should still bid to 4S, but E might choose to sacrifice in 5C, which is an interesting contract to play and defend; it is very possible that EW might manage to concede just 500 for a good result.

Hand 13

♠ 1065
 Dlr: North ♥ J843
 Vul: All ♦ 643
 ♣ A42

♠ J72	W	North	E	♠ AQ3
♥ 10	e	13	a	♥ KQ6
♦ 109872	s		s	♦ AK5
♣ 10965	t	South	t	♣ J873

	♠ K984	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
5	♥ A9752	N - - 1 - -
1 19	♦ QJ	S - - 1 - -
15	♣ KQ	E 3 2 - - 1
		W 2 2 - - 1

If E opens a 19-20 2NT, it is difficult for S to say anything and it will probably be passed out. On the other hand, if E opens 1C, S is likely to get involved; I prefer 1H to a double. N will support and E is likely to lose out in the bidding, though EW can make a low minor-suit contract.

The lack of entries to the N hand means that a heart contract is unlikely to go well, maybe making 7 tricks at best. Equally, on the natural heart lead and despite the favourable lie of the diamond suit, E should struggle in 2NT provided N is prepared to overtake in clubs to play a heart back through. Anyone making a contract can feel very happy!

Hand 14

♠ K32
 Dlr: East ♥ 532
 Vul: None ♦ KQJ9
 ♣ 542

♠ J85	W	North	E	♠ A104
♥ AJ1098	e	14	a	♥ K764
♦ A3	s		s	♦ 10764
♣ 1097	t	South	t	♣ J6

	♠ Q976	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
9	♥ Q	N 3 2 - 2 -
10 8	♦ 852	S 3 2 - 2 -
13	♣ AKQ83	E - - 3 - 1
		W - - 3 - 1

The natural start is 1C from S and 1H from W; N should now double despite not having 4 spades. E should bid 3H pre-emptively and S might now be tempted to try 3S! I cannot then see the bidding progressing any further. EW will make at least 8 tricks in a heart contract, but should be held to that unless NS unwisely open up the spade suit.

NS can make 3C in comfort, but should not be allowed to play there. A heart force will make 3S difficult to control, despite the favourable trump break, so 3S should be defeated by 1 or 2 tricks. Certainly 3H – 1 by EW would seem to be the par result. (Absolute par is achieved if NS double).

Hand 15

♠ AK1053
 Dlr: South ♥ QJ65
 Vul: N/S ♦ K2
 ♣ 83

♠ Q862	W	North	E	♠ 74
♥ 43	e	15	a	♥ 109
♦ J9	s		s	♦ AQ10764
♣ KQ1076	t	South	t	♣ J95

	♠ J9	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
13	♥ AK872	N - - 6 5 5
8 7	♦ 853	S - - 5 5 1
12	♣ A42	E 1 1 - -
		W 1 1 - -

Whether S opens 1H or an off-centre weak 1NT, NS should make their way comfortably to 4H and W seems likely to lead KC. This makes it too dangerous for declarer to finesse in spades (he could go down if the finesse is wrong, a club is played and then a diamond comes through the King), so he will probably play to ruff out the suit and finish up making just 10 tricks. There is, though, no harm in leading JS on the first round, tempting an unwise W to cover; if he does so, then 11 tricks will be made.

Hand 16

♠ A863
 Dlr: West ♥ 109853
 Vul: E/W ♦ A4
 ♣ KJ

♠ J954	W	North	E	♠ KQ2
♥ A42	e	16	a	♥ QJ
♦ Q10973	s		s	♦ KJ8652
♣ 9	t	South	t	♣ 108

	♠ 107	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12	♥ K76	N 5 - 3 - 4
7 12	♦ --	S 5 - 3 - 4
9	♣ AQ765432	E - 4 - 1 -
		W - 4 - 1 -

N has a horrible opening bid of 1H, but the alternative of a weak 1NT with nine cards in the majors feels even worse! E will probably overcall 2D and S can bid 3C. W should now bid at least 4D (surely 5D at any other vulnerability) but S will inevitably try 5C and now W will have to decide whether to bid 5D or hope to defeat 5C. As the spade loser disappears on AD, the heart position makes 5C a comfortable make, so – rather unusually – on this occasion, it will pay to make the vulnerable sacrifice of 5D, which is only one down. Thus the par result is 5D* - 1 for 200 to NS.

I wonder, though, how many Souths will gamble on 6C and how many Wests will give away the contract by leading AH!

Hand 17

♠ K7
 Dir: North ♥ QJ7
 Vul: None ♦ Q875
 ♣ KJ32

♠ 954	W	North	E	♠ Q3
♥ A93	e	17	a	♥ K6542
♦ KJ102	s		s	♦ A96
♣ AQ10	t	South	t	♣ 976

	♠ AJ10862	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12	♥ 108	N - - - 2 -
14 9	♦ 43	S - - - 2 -
5	♣ 854	E 1 2 2 - 1
		W 1 3 3 - 1

N has an automatic weak 1NT which S would transfer to 2S; this would be passed round to W and, with a flat hand and not holding 4 hearts, I would be reluctant to make the reopening double, though – as it happens – it could prove a good decision to double, as E will bid 3H. NS should always make 2S, given the favourable club position, but seem unlikely to make more. Playing in 3H, E should guess the diamond correctly, given that N has opened, and could therefore make the contract, even if S finds the best lead of a club; if S is an enthusiastic leader of doubletons, he will make life easy for declarer! Strong no-trumpers will open 1D as N and the bidding would then proceed 1S (S), 1NT (N), 2S (S) and probably stop there. EW's best chance of finding a heart contract will be if E chooses to overcall 1H, which does not seem a great idea with that anaemic suit; it hardly seems right for W to double after 1D – 1S.

Hand 18

♠ KQJ
 Dir: East ♥ 765
 Vul: N/S ♦ 103
 ♣ AQ652

♠ A1053	W	North	E	♠ 9876
♥ 32	e	18	a	♥ J10984
♦ K9875	s		s	♦ J6
♣ 109	t	South	t	♣ 87

	♠ 42	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12	♥ AKQ	N 5 3 2 2 5
7 2	♦ AQ42	S 5 3 2 2 5
19	♣ KJ43	E - - - -
		W - - - -

Those who choose to open a 19-20 2NT as S will find it easy to stop, even if N tries a quantitative 4NT. On the other hand, those who open 1D as S and get a 2C response could easily find themselves heading for the doomed 6C slam; as the contract only requires the diamond finesse, they can regard themselves as a little unfortunate. I hate hands like this, which are effectively, down to sheer luck on a 50% chance; it also means that those in 5C – a vastly inferior Pairs contract to either 3NT or 6C – will score better than those in 6C!

Hand 19

Dlr: South ♠ 10
 Vul: E/W ♥ 74
 ♦ A8742
 ♣ QJ1094

♠ AJ8763	W	North	E	♠ KQ95
♥ J82	e	19	a	♥ A93
♦ 95	s	s	s	♦ KQ103
♣ 87	t	South	t	♣ 53

7	♠ 42	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
6	♥ KQ1065	N 4 2 2 - -
13	♦ J6	S 4 2 2 - -
	♣ AK62	E - - - 3 1
		W - - - 2 1

S opens 1H and W, if playing them, will make a weak jump overcall of 2S; N can just about justify a double at this vulnerability, and would certainly double if W has only bid 1S. E will then show a spade raise to whatever level he feels appropriate, possibly even 4S. As S, I would bid 4C over 3S but not bid 5C over 4S. There is an obscure defence – N leads a heart and S underleads CAK to allow N to lead another heart (!) – that secures five tricks, but I expect that 4S – 1 will be the most common result, and probably a fairly average result, given that NS can make 4C.

It is possible that W will pass over 1H; now N should bid 1NT but W can now compete with 2S at his next turn, as he certainly will if S passes the 1NT reply, and this gives EW the best chance of a plus score in a spade part-score. On the other hand, do you have a partnership agreement for what 2NT by N would mean in that sequence? If it means the minors, NS will now find their club fit.

Hand 20

♠ AQJ10754
Dir: West ♥ KJ94
Vul: All ♦ 62
♣ --

♠ K3	W	North	E	♠ 9862
♥ AQ32	e	20	a	♥ 65
♦ K97	s		s	♦ AQJ
♣ Q832	t	South	t	♣ 9754

11	♠ --	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
14	♥ 1087	N 1 2 2 1 1
7	♦ 108543	S 1 2 3 1 1
8	♣ AKJ106	E - - - - -
		W - - - - -

If EW are playing a weak NT, the bidding will surely go 1NT by W – 3S by N, all pass. E has two lead options – a club, allowing two diamond discards and a comfortable 10 tricks (losing a spade and two hearts) - or a heart, which should defeat 3S by two tricks, the defence making 2 hearts, 2 diamonds, KS and a heart ruff. The heart seems a reasonable lead, hoping for a ruff, given W's 1NT opening; a club could be better if looking at your four trumps and hoping to set up a force, but that is hardly realistic when declarer must have seven trumps.

The bidding could be far more interesting if EW are playing a strong NT and 5-card majors. W will open 1C and N is good enough to double with the intention of bidding spades later; life gets complicated if E now bids 1S! S will pass and W will bid 1NT; N will surely still bid 2S to play there. Now E will need to avoid bidding 3C, which S would double, while licking his lips!

Hand 21

	♠ KJ10			
Dlr: North	♥ KQ103			
Vul: N/S	♦ AK985			
	♣ 7			
♠ Q763	W	North	E	♠ 985
♥ 9762	e	21	a	♥ A854
♦ 104	s		s	♦ Q63
♣ 1065	t	South	t	♣ Q42
16	♠ A42		♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N	
2 8	♥ J		N 6 5 6 6 6	
14	♦ J72		S 6 5 6 6 6	
	♣ AKJ983		E - - - -	
			W - - - -	

This is the kind of hand that Victor Mollo would construct for his menagerie, where NS can make a slam (the computer is, of course, correct) in every denomination except their longest combined suit!! The bidding should start 1D – 2C; now, I prefer 2NT as N, rather than reverse into 2H with a singleton in partner's suit, provided I am playing 3C by responder as a check-back which would locate a 4-4 heart fit if there was one. Once S knows that N holds 15 – 17 at most, he should settle for 3NT, which, courtesy of the fortunate club position, will duly make 12 tricks.

If N does choose to reverse into 2H, S can either bid 3C, to show his good suit, or select a 2S, fourth suit, bid. Either way, N would settle back into NT. A possible danger of the reverse, though, is that S might continue to look for a slam via a 4D bid over 3NT; now there is the possibility of finding the only non-making slam in 6D! Those finding 6NT will get an undeserved good score; it is a terrible contract.

Hand 22

	♠ J106			
Dlr: East	♥ J1065			
Vul: E/W	♦ QJ73			
	♣ AQ			
♠ 742	W	North	E	♠ A
♥ 93	e	22	a	♥ AKQ842
♦ A84	s		s	♦ K9
♣ J8752	t	South	t	♣ 9643
11	♠ KQ9853		♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N	
5 16	♥ 7		N - 1 - 3 -	
8	♦ 10652		S - 1 - 3 -	
	♣ K10		E 4 - 4 - -	
			W 4 - 4 - -	

E will open 1H and S will bid 1S or 2S, according to style. E seems unlikely to compete beyond 3H on his own, so it is a question of whether NS can stop in 3S, as N will surely at least make a game try. The brave Easts who choose to bid 4H on their own (but why would they?) will be lucky to discover that it makes, courtesy of the 2-2 club break, and despite the 4-1 heart break. NS, though, can only make nine tricks in spades. Looked at in the abstract, 4S* - 1 is the par score because 4H makes, but I think it will score poorly because relatively few auctions will go beyond 3S.

Hand 23

Dlr: South ♠ K43
 Vul: All ♥ 53
 ♦ --
 ♣ KJ1097532

♠ AJ2	W	North	E	♠ Q965
♥ A109	e	23	a	♥ Q642
♦ K109872	s		s	♦ AQ543
♣ 6	t	South	t	♣ --

		♠ 1087	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
7		♥ KJ87	N 4 - - - -
12	10	♦ J6	S 4 - - - -
11		♣ AQ84	E - 5 2 4 -
			W- 5 3 4 -

I would not open the S hand but would open 1D as W. N should now bid 4C (a really red-blooded N might bid 5C opposite a passed partner). A simple 5D by E is probably now best (with poor holdings in the majors), though a pushy E might bid 5C. Despite holding the major aces, W should be wary of his minimum opening bid, knowing that E must have a lot of major suit cards if he is short in clubs. However, S should join in with 6C, and EW need to 'take the money' by doubling for two down and a 500 penalty, which could be 800 if declarer makes the wrong heart guess. There is no heart guess for EW in 5D because there is a discard on the 13th spade. Thus 500 is the par score, so EW can be pleased if they are allowed to play 5D and NS can be pleased if EW push to 6D.

Hand 24

Dlr: West ♠ AJ102
 Vul: None ♥ AJ83
 ♦ 65
 ♣ AJ4

♠ Q9743	W	North	E	♠ K85
♥ 105	e	24	a	♥ 742
♦ Q2	s		s	♦ A1074
♣ KQ87	t	South	t	♣ 962

		♠ 6	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
15		♥ KQ96	N 2 4 4 1 3
9	7	♦ KJ983	S 2 4 4 1 3
9		♣ 1053	E - - - - -
			W- - - - -

NS should reach 4H via 1H – 3H – 4H (or the equivalent), or via Stayman if playing a strong NT. On a safe trump lead, declarer has to work hard to get the diamond suit going, but should still manage to scramble 10 tricks by doing so. A club lead, the only likely alternative, will give declarer a slightly easier ride. There seems to be little room for much variation on this hand.

Hand 25

♠ Q732
 Dlr: North ♥ 852
 Vul: E/W ♦ A432
 ♣ 64

♠ 10	W	North	E	♠ K854
♥ AQ10	e	25	a	♥ K94
♦ J86	s		s	♦ KQ
♣ AKJ982	t	South	t	♣ Q1053

6	♠ AJ96	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
15	♥ J763	N - - - -
13	♦ 10975	S - - - -
6	♣ 7	E 5 - 2 1 3
		W 5 - 2 1 2

If playing a weak NT, this is a routine 1NT – 3NT for EW, as W is not really strong enough to look for a club slam. I would probably lead a diamond, which will concede 11 tricks if N routinely returns the suit, but an alert N can hold it to 10 tricks by returning a small spade, and 9 tricks by returning QS. If S leads a spade, declarer will routinely make 10 tricks without risking playing on diamonds. A heart lead allows declarer to play on diamonds, but that, in turn, allows the defence to find the spade play. Those playing a strong NT will start with 1C as E but, despite West's astonishment, should still settle in the same 3NT, once E rebids NT at the minimum level.

Hand 26

♠ 87
 Dlr: East ♥ A8642
 Vul: All ♦ AKJ42
 ♣ 7

♠ J5	W	North	E	♠ A94
♥ QJ107	e	26	a	♥ K953
♦ 108	s		s	♦ Q753
♣ KQ932	t	South	t	♣ 104

12	♠ KQ10632	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
9	♥ --	N 1 2 - 4 1
9	♦ 96	S 1 2 - 4 1
10	♣ AJ865	E - - 1 - -
		W - - - -

Both N and S have potentially good hands in isolation, but the bidding should soon identify the misfit and follow a sequence such as 1S – 2H – 2S – 3D – 3NT. It would now be a good decision for N to bid 4S, but many may choose to pass 3NT. On a heart lead, 3NT might make by leading twice towards the spades from dummy; best defence is KC lead, ducked by declarer, and followed by a heart switch, which will certainly beat the contract.

The best defence against 4S is two rounds of spades, after which declarer can only make the contract by playing AC followed by JC to drop the 10, and now his intermediate clubs produce the 10th trick; some may unfortunately think that the diamond finesse provides a better chance. A lead such as QH will give declarer an easy ride in 4S by playing to ruff clubs and losing just two trumps (one as an over-ruff) and a club. Making either game should be a good score.

Hand 27

♠ A852
 Dlr: South ♥ A7653
 Vul: None ♦ J
 ♣ K94

♠ K964	W	North	E	♠ J10
♥ J42	e	27	a	♥ K98
♦ 985	s		s	♦ AK10763
♣ 862	t	South	t	♣ J7

	♠ Q73	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12	♥ Q10	N 4 - 4 3 2
4 12	♦ Q42	S 4 - 4 3 2
12	♣ AQ1053	E - 1 - - -
		W- 1 - - -

S has an opening weak 1NT, over which N should use the partnership methods (eg 1NT – 2D – 2H – 2S) to show 5 hearts and 4 spades in an invitational hand, after which S will do well to sign off in 2NT. W has a choice between a MUD lead in either minor suit; the choice of a diamond will give declarer his 8th trick but will ensure he makes no more, whereas the choice of a club leaves declarer having to decide which major to play for his 8th trick, but he should still get home safely even if he takes the wrong view to play a spade or a heart to the 10 initially. 3NT should certainly not make and 4H will probably not make either, though it could just do so on JS lead, covered by Q, K and A (or ducked to A), if declarer now chooses to play a heart to the Q, rather than the 10.

A strong NT sequence could start 1C – 1H – 1NT – 2NT, with the same options in the play, though W now has a spade lead as an option, which will give declarer an easy ride.

Hand 28

				♠ 106	
Dlr: West				♥ KQJ1098	
Vul: N/S				♦ 8	
				♣ KQ103	
♠ AKJ9	W	North	E	♠ 875432	
♥ 764	e	28	a	♥ 5	
♦ AKQ103	s		s	♦ J52	
♣ J	t	South	t	♣ 752	
				♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N	
11				N 5 - 5 - -	
18	1			S 5 - 5 - -	
10				E - 3 - 5 -	
				W- 3 - 5 -	

There is nothing in the play here, as EW automatically make 11 tricks in spades and NS automatically make 11 tricks in hearts. The interest lies in the bidding.

W opens 1D and N bids 1H or 2H according to style; much will then depend on whether E is intrepid enough to bid 1S (presumably not 2S over 2H!). S is good enough to bid 4H directly over a strong jump overcall of 2H, but would temporise with a 2D unassuming cue bid over 1H, which will give W the opportunity to introduce spades if E has not already done so. It is an interesting question whether W should double after the sequence 1D – 2H – pass – 4H; this could well provoke E to find the winning 4S bid, but W would be distinctly less happy if E had a hand on which he might bid 5C! There is a case at the vulnerability for E bidding 4S even if W does not find a double.

I will be surprised if the strict par contract of 6H* - 1 is achieved anywhere, as I expect the bidding to die at the 4 or 5 level.