

Board 1
 North Deals
 None Vul

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

NS 7♠; NS 4N; NS 3♥; NS 4♦; NS 4♣;
 Par +1510: NS 7♠=

At tables where North decides to open 1♠, the grand slam will be easier to reach. This makes, even on a trump lead. Three losing clubs are ruffed in dummy and one goes away on a top heart. Declarer must hope to get back to hand twice without being over-ruffed, but then the last three tricks are made on a high cross-ruff. Thus the grand does not rely upon the 4-3 break in clubs.

Bidding to just 6♠ should score well, however, especially if it is made with an overtrick. It will be interesting to compare the results from clubs that play f2f with those from clubs that play online. In an online game everyone will play this board first and players are apt to be a little more conservative at that stage of proceedings!

Board 2
 East Deals
 N-S Vul

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

EW 4♦; NS 2♠; EW 2♥; NS 1♣;
 Par -130: EW 3♦+1

East opens 1♦ and partner, with such a flat hand, will probably prefer to respond 1NT rather than raise. The vulnerability will deter North from bidding, even at pairs. East will now make a show of strength: 3♦, 2♥, 2NT or even 3NT. The ten-card fit is bound to result in some pairs getting too high. To be fair though, give West the king of diamonds instead of the queen (and take away the two jacks) both 5♦ and 3NT are reasonable contracts.

The correct play in trumps for six tricks is to cash the ace, winning if either defender was dealt a singleton king. To run the queen only wins if south holds a bare jack. Note that both these plays would be entirely wrong if declarer's aim is to avoid two losers in the suit; the safety play is to lead a low card away from the ace, or low towards the ace and cover cheaply if the next hand follows.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 8 3
♥ K 7 2
♦ 6
♣ A K Q 9 7 5

♠ K 7 4 2
♥ A J 6 3
♦ Q J 10
♣ 10 2



♠ A Q 10 9 6
♥ Q 5 4
♦ 8 7 4
♣ J 4

♠ 5
♥ 10 9 8
♦ A K 9 5 3 2
♣ 8 6 3

NS 5♣; NS 3♦; NS 1N; EW 1♠;
Par +400: NS 5♣=

If South passes, North opens 1♣ and East overcalls 1♠. South will now raise clubs or bid the diamonds, and the spotlight is on West. The four-card support suggests a jump to 3♠ (bidding to the level of the fit), but is that really wise? The lack of shape, the defensive holding in diamonds and the unfavourable vulnerability all argue in favour of a single raise. Note that 3♠ drifts a couple down for -200, with N/S unlikely to bid the lucky to make game at many tables.

If, instead, South opens a weak 2♦, North might try 3♣, especially if it is non-forcing. South is worth a raise and a very optimistic North might push on to game....it is their lucky day!

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ 10 9 6 5
♥ 10 2
♦ A 7 6 3
♣ J 5 4

♠ A K Q 2
♥ A K 8 5
♦ J 8
♣ K 9 7



♠ 7 4
♥ 4
♦ Q 10 9 5 4
♣ 10 8 6 3 2


♠ J 8 3
♥ Q J 9 7 6 3
♦ K 2
♣ A Q

EW 3♦; EW 3♣; S 1N; NS 1♥;
Par -110: EW 2♣+1; EW 2♦+1

West will open 2NT (or rebid 2NT after an artificial opening) and usually will be left to play there. This contract stands no chance of making.

Playing 5-card Stayman as many now do, East might try 3♣, planning to pass (a not unlikely) response of 3♦ (what a HERO!) and also passing 3♠. But, of course, partner might have bid 3♥ or 3NT (that's a ZERO!)


Board 5
 North Deals
 N-S Vul

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

EW 3♠; EW 4♦; EW 1N; EW 1♥;
 Par -140: EW 1♠+2

E/W pairs playing a weak NT with four card majors have the best chance of reaching the optimum spot.
 West opens 1♠ and East raises to 2♠, surely correct with three card support and a singleton. Some Easts might spoil this happy outcome by opening a weak 2♦ in front of partner. Now West might be tempted to bid 3NT, with or without asking for more information. This contract would need some seriously bad defence in order to make. Even if West takes a more conservative view, a diamond part-score loses to the one in spades.

Board 6
 East Deals
 E-W Vul

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


S 5N; N 4N; S 5♣; NS 4♦; N 4♣; EW 1♠;
 NS 1♥; Par +460: S 3N+2

The auction will probably start 1♣-1♦-2♣, though some may stretch to rebid 3♣. After 1♣-1♦-2♣ there are some sophisticated methods available to develop the auction, such as Bourke relays and TSAR, where a bid in the lower unbid suit is an artificial relay. The main advantage of these is that a forcing auction with a known club fit can be established without bypassing 3NT. This can be useful for the purpose of slam exploration in clubs at a safe level. On this deal, though, North only has invitational values and simple methods should result in 3NT. North might advance with 2♠ (third suit forcing and showing at least a stopper), in which case South becomes declarer, or they might raise clubs, in which case South bids 3♥ and North becomes declarer.

There is no particular reason why declarer should guess to take the winning view in clubs, but doing so will result in overtricks and leave opponents feeling slightly aggrieved. (If North is declarer on a spade lead and the defence clear the spades, declarer might judge spades are breaking 6-3, especially if West conceals the deuce. In that case there is a case for the safety finesse in clubs). Expect anything from 8 to 12 tricks to appear on the score sheet!

Board 7

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



♠ K 8 7	
♥ K Q J 10 2	
♦ Q	
♣ 7 6 5 2	

EW 6♦; EW 2N; NS 2♠; EW 2♥; EW 3♣;
Par -1100: NS 6♠×-4

North opens 3♠ and South might raise to game, bidding to the level of the fit and thinking the opponents will bid and make 5♣ or 5♦ given some space. Alternatively, South might pass, optimistically hoping they settle in 4♥!


After 3♠-pass-pass, West is likely to try 3NT. This doesn't make, so East does best to remove. Some pairs have methods for this situation, such as a Baron style 4♣, and this uncovers the diamond fit.

After 3♠-pass-4♠, West will no doubt double and again East does best to pull, even though it is not clear to do so. 4NT (two places to play) would get the job done.

If 5♦ is reached declarer needs to win the opening heart lead (if a pre-emptor leads a side suit it is likely to be a singleton) but then twelve tricks roll home due to the extremely fortuitous lie of the club suit. Both heart losers can be discarded on the master clubs. Will anyone actually bid the slam?

Board 8

♠ A 9 7		
West Deals ♥ 3		
None Vul ♦ A J 6		
♣ K J 10 9 8 2		
♠ 10 6 2		♠ K 8
♥ K Q 6 2		♥ A J 9 7 5 4
♦ 10 4 2		♦ K 9 7 3
♣ A Q 3		♣ 5




♠ Q J 5 4 3	
♥ 10 8	
♦ Q 8 5	
♣ 7 6 4	

EW 4♥; EW 2N; NS 2♠; W 3♦; NS 3♣;
E 2♦; Par -300: NS 4♠×-2; NS 5♣×-2

The auction is likely to start Pass-1♣-1♥ overcall -1♠. There are two schools of thought as to whether 1S promises five or more cards in the suit but 'Yes!' has become the mainstream view. West is good enough for an unassuming cue-bid to show a high card raise of hearts and North is worth a raise of spades. The winning action for N/S is to save in 4♠ over an enemy 4♥ contract, but this is a difficult call to make for either player. South's hand is full of losers and North has prospects in defence.

There is a well known adage that says, when in doubt, 4♠ over 4♥. It holds good on this occasion.

Board 9
 North Deals
 E-W Vul

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

EW 2N; NS 2♠; EW 2♦; EW 2♣; EW 1♥;
 Par -100; NS 3♠×-1

North opens 1♠ and East is too strong for a 1NT overcall so doubles. South probably passes and West bids 2♣, wishing they were somewhere else. North will definitely rebid the spades, and if East tries 2NT they get lucky. With the diamonds playing for four tricks and the lucky position in the black suits this contract makes.

North does best to bid spades a third time, but it is hardly clear to do so.. East may double out of frustration but only gets to collect +100. Note that on this auction it should be fairly easy to do the right thing in hearts and establish the king as a winner.

Board 10
 East Deals
 Both Vul

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

NS 5♥; EW 4♠; N 4♣; S 3♣; NS 1♦;
 Par +200; EW 5♠×-1

If the auction starts Pass-Pass-1♠-2♣-2♠ South might stretch to double, showing both red suits and (ideally) club tolerance. They really shouldn't on just a five count but it's the winning action today! With a seven card suit West may blast to 4♠, but North now wins the board by bidding 5♥. This contract makes if declarer guesses the trump suit, but even one down doubled should score reasonably well as 4♠ is an easy make.

Board 11

South Deals
None Vul

♠ J
♥ K Q 6 5
♦ A 10 6 5
♣ A Q 6 4

♠ K 9 8 4
♥ J 10 8 3
♦ 7 3
♣ J 10 8



♠ 7 6 5 3 2
♥ 9 7 4
♦ Q 9 4
♣ K 3

♠ A Q 10
♥ A 2
♦ K J 8 2
♣ 9 7 5 2

S 6N; NS 6♦; NS 6♣; N 5N; NS 5♥;
NS 2♠; Par +990: S 6N=

South will play in 3 NT at most tables, via Stayman if playing a weak no-trump. It will be natural to play the diamonds for four tricks, finessing into the safe hand (West cannot attack spades) However, declarer will need a crystal ball to play the club suit for one loser! It might just happen if West chooses to lead a passive Jack of clubs at trick one. Judging the king to be offside declarer doesn't allow that card to kill the queen.

If both minor suits are guessed correctly there are eleven tricks even without the benefit of a spade lead. A twelfth follows as West is squeezed in the majors when the last minor suit winner is cashed....Ouch!

Board 12

West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 6
♥ 7 6
♦ A Q J 8 7 6 4
♣ Q 7 3

♠ Q 8 5 4
♥ A 8 4 2
♦ 3
♣ A J 8 5



♠ A K 7 2
♥ K J 9 3
♦ K 10 2
♣ 10 9

♠ J 10 9 3
♥ Q 10 5
♦ 9 5
♣ K 6 4 2

EW 4♠; EW 4♥; EW 2N; EW 3♣;
Par -420: EW 4♥=; EW 4♠=

Opening sub-strength 4-4-4-1 hands is not a good tactic, so most Wests will pass. 3♦ rates to be a popular choice on the North cards and East should pass (though it's a safe bet that some won't!) This comes back round to West, who has a perfect take-out double: a maximum passed hand with ideal shape. Rather than guessing which major suit game to bid East should pass the buck with 4♦. The double doesn't guarantee four cards in both major suits! West will probably opt for 4♥.

Declarer can finesse twice in clubs and pitch a losing spade. The contract makes for the loss of one trump, one diamond and one club.

Board 13 ♠ 8 5 4 2
 North Deals ♥ Q J 10 9 7 4
 Both Vul ♦ 10 4 3
 ♣ —

♠ K 10 9 7	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; font-size: 0.8em;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; font-size: 0.8em;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ 3	
♥ A 6 3 2		♥ 5	
♦ Q J		♦ A K 8 7 5	
♣ K Q J		♣ A 9 8 5 4 3	

♠ A Q J 6
 ♥ K 8
 ♦ 9 6 2
 ♣ 10 7 6 2

EW 6N; EW 6♣; W 5♦; E 4♦; EW 1♠;
 NS 1♥; Par -1440: EW 6N=

North has a three-count, yet it looks tempting to open 2♥, even though vulnerable and with four spades on the side. If they do, it is probably easier for the opponents to bid a slam. East's hand looks good for 4NT (both minors) and West will fancy 6♣.

If North finds a disciplined pass in first seat, East has a tough decision. Open 1♣ and rebid 2♣? That hardly describes the hand very well. Open 1♣ and reverse into diamonds? Partner will think they are facing more than eleven points. Open 1♦ and then bid clubs? It will difficult to persuade partner that you have six clubs. The slam is excellent, but after any of these starts the auction may peter out in 3NT.

Board 14 ♠ 4
 East Deals ♥ A 8 6 4 2
 None Vul ♦ 8 5 2
 ♣ A Q 6 5

♠ K 10 9 5	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; font-size: 0.8em;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; font-size: 0.8em;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ Q J 6 2	
♥ K 5 3		♥ Q 10 7	
♦ A K 9 7 6 4		♦ J	
♣ —		♣ J 10 9 4 2	

♠ A 8 7 3
 ♥ J 9
 ♦ Q 10 3
 ♣ K 8 7 3

EW 3♠; EW 3♦; EW 1N; NS 2♣; S 1♥;
 Par -140: EW 3♠=

The bidding will probably start 1♦-1♥-Dbl, with the double showing precisely four spades. What happens next will depend on whether West's glass is half full or glass half empty! Choose between:

- 2S: Only 13 points and the king of hearts is under the ace.
- 3S: Let's make partner decide and take the blame if it is wrong.
- 4S: Only five losers so let's go for game
- 4C: I think I am worth 4♠ so why not splinter on the way?

The conservative bidders should win the day as the bad trump break scuppers the game, but some declarers may benefit from less than perfect defence and emerge with ten tricks.

Board 15
 South Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ 7 4 2		
♥ Q 8 7		
♦ K 5 3 2		
♣ 4 3 2		

♠ J 8 5	<table border="1" style="background-color: #006400; color: white; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 10 9 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A 6 4 2		♥ 10									
♦ —		♦ A Q J 10 9 8									
♣ A K Q 10 6 5		♣ J 9 8									

♠ A K Q 3
♥ K J 9 5 3
♦ 7 6 4
♣ 7

EW 4♣; EW 2N; NS 2♥; EW 2♦;
 Par -130: EW 3♣+1

A fierce part-score battle is likely on this deal. N/S should score well in 3♥ (provided they are not doubled) as there is no defence to 4♣ by E/W. In fact, it takes a spade lead to defeat 5♣ and a few pairs may even bid it, West reasoning that heart losers can be safely ruffed in dummy.

Board 16
 West Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ 10 5 2		
♥ K 10 3		
♦ 10 9 5 3 2		
♣ K 5		

♠ 9 7 4	<table border="1" style="background-color: #006400; color: white; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A J 8 6
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 8 7 2		♥ A 9 5									
♦ 8 6		♦ Q 4									
♣ A Q J 7 4		♣ 9 6 3 2									

♠ K Q 3
♥ Q J 6 4
♦ A K J 7
♣ 10 8

NS 4♥; NS 4♦; NS 1N; NS 1♠; NS 1♣;
 Par +420: NS 4♥=

This is a bad hand for the strong no-trumpers! South opens 1NT and is left to play there, losing four clubs and the major suit aces. Those playing a weak no-trump and four card majors open 1♥ instead. North should raise to 2♥ with three card support and a ruffing value. With the fortuitous lie of the cards ten tricks roll home.

Board 17
 North Deals
 None Vul

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

Board 18
 East Deals
 N-S Vul

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

EW 6♦; EW 6♣; EW 4N; EW 1♠; EW 1♥;
 Par -920: EW 6♣=; EW 6♦=

NS 7♠; NS 7♦; N 5N; S 4N; EW 1♥;
 N 1♣; Par +2210: NS 7♠=

Some may open light with the North cards and give East a chance to show their hand with one bid. If North passes, East opens 1♦ and West will advance with 1♠ (Playing inverted raises, 2♦ is a good option if it doesn't deny a four card major in your methods) After 1♦-1♠, 2♣ is less clumsy than 3♣. West can now set up a game force with 2♥ and East shapes out with 3♣.

Question for regular partnerships: At this stage, what is the difference between 3♦ and 4♦ by West?

One way or another, the eleven card trump fit together with lots of controls in the side suits should result in a slam at plenty of tables.

East will be deciding whether to open 1♥ or 4♥, blissfully unaware that the opponents can make a grand slam in two denominations! At pairs, there is a lot to be said for the latter choice. With little bidding space, N/S will do well to bid a slam, especially if it is 6♠ rather than 6♦. All thirteen tricks can be made routinely in diamonds, but in spades it is necessary to reverse the dummy and score three heart ruffs in the long trump hand. Declarer makes seven trump tricks and six diamond tricks, picking up West's trumps with two finesses. (Note that ruffing two clubs in dummy fails!) Just making twelve tricks in spades should score well however, as it beats 6♦+1.

The Law of Total tricks is often inaccurate when both sides have a massive fit, but it is spot on here. 20 total trumps (10 D and 10 H) and 20 total tricks (13 for N/S and 7 for E/W)

Board 19
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ Q 10 8 5 4			
♥ K 8 7 3			
♦ 5 4			
♣ 5 2			

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

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

NS 4♠; EW 4♣; EW 2♥; NS 2♦;
 Par +200: EW 5♣×-1

South opens 1♠ and sets West a tricky problem. It would be good to double in order to get the hearts into the auction, but what if partner responds 2♣? Some partnerships play what is called 'Equal Level Conversion'. In this method, to bid 2♦ after partner's 2♣ does NOT promise extra values, it simply implies five diamonds and four hearts and asks for preference. Without this agreement you might choose to double anyway, but must pass a 2♣ response and hope it's a playable spot, for to bid 2♦ traditionally shows a very strong hand.

North will make a pre-emptive raise to at least 3♠, probably 4♠ at the vulnerability. 5♣ is surely a more sensible choice for East than 5♥ and the best that South can do is double and collect +200

Board 20
 West Deals
 Both Vul

♠ A K 8			
♥ K Q 6			
♦ A K Q 7			
♣ A J 8			

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

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

NS 5N; NS 4♠; NS 4♥; NS 4♣; NS 3♦;
 Par +660: NS 3N+2

Most Norths will open with their biggest bid and bash 3NT at the next go. Those playing the Kokish convention will take a couple of extra rounds to get to the same spot, boring their opponents in the process!

This method uses puppet bids (2♣-2♦-2♥-2♠) to allow the opening bidder to call 2NT with around 25-27 points. It has the advantage that responder can explore the best contract at a safe level using the same favourite methods that they employ after a 2NT opening.

In the play, the defenders are unable to shut out the club suit so eleven tricks in 3NT are made without much sweat. Any pairs playing in 4M or 5♣ can expect a poor score.

Board 21
 North Deals
 N-S Vul

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

EW 4♥; W 2N; EW 3♦; E 1N; W 1♠;
 S 1♣; Par -420: EW 4♥=

E/W should find a way to 4♥ regardless of whether North opens the bidding. After 2♠-pass-pass a bid of 2NT in fourth seat is best played as strong and balanced. Now East can transfer into hearts and West super-accepts.

With careful timing, declarer can ruff two diamonds rather than rely on a ruffing finesse against South's queen.

The key is to prevent North obtaining the lead after the two top trumps have been cashed, for they would then play the queen of hearts and cut down the ruffs. So duck a spade lead, establishing a safe passage to the East hand. Then, as soon as you get the lead, cash the AK of trumps and set about the diamonds.

Board 22
 East Deals
 E-W Vul

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

♠ J 10
 ♥ K 9 8 6 5 4
 ♦ J 10
 ♣ 10 7 5

EW 5♠; EW 4♣; NS 2♥; NS 3♦; EW 1N;
 Par -500: NS 6♦×-3

This hand plays absurdly well in spades for E/W, despite their combined 17 count. There is a total lack of wastage in diamonds so it is effectively a 30 point pack. (Four small cards opposite a small singleton is a dream holding in a side suit.) On top of that, trumps break 2-2 and the club suit plays for one loser without any guesswork.

Do you remember that advice to bid 4♠ over 4♥ when in doubt? It certainly holds good here. In fact, it is even right to bid 5♠ over 5♥! However, East has a two-count and at adverse vulnerability it will be far from clear to compete so vigorously. If E/W elect to 'take the money' by defending 4HX they must find the diamond ruff to get the contract two down and even then it won't be nearly enough money!

Note that N/S actually do better to 'save' in diamonds, for there is no adverse ruff to take a diamond contract an extra trick down. Hugely well judged to any N/S pairs that allowed their opponents to play quietly in a part-score!

Board 23

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

♠ J 9 3	
♥ Q 10 8	
♦ A Q J 7	
♣ 9 7 2	

EW 4♥; EW 2N; EW 1♠; EW 1♦;
Par -620: EW 4♥=

E/W should sail into 4♥ whatever methods they are pursuing. This contract can make on any lead (on a diamond lead from North declarer must play low from dummy) After finding out that South has a certain trump trick, the black suits are eliminated and a trump exit forces a favourable diamond return.

A diamond lead helps declarer do the right thing as it gives the heads up that the ace is over the king. On a different lead declarer might decide to play North for the ace diamonds and that is 4♥-1!

The elimination play is not sure to work as South may have a safe exit in clubs, West being out of trumps, and declarer could end up one down when the ace of diamonds was well placed all along.

Board 24

♠ 5		
West Deals ♥ 10 8 7 3		
None Vul ♦ Q J 9 8		
♣ 10 8 4 2		
♠ A J 3		♠ K 10 9 6 2
♥ K Q J 6 5 4		♥ 9
♦ 2		♦ A K 10 6
♣ J 9 3		♣ K 7 6

♠ Q 8 7 4	
♥ A 2	
♦ 7 5 4 3	
♣ A Q 5	

EW 4N; E 4♠; W 3♠; EW 2♥; EW 1♦;
EW 1♣; Par -430: EW 3N+1

4♠ by East is the most likely contract and the defence should come to just three tricks, one way or another. Ten tricks can also be made in a no-trump contract, but only by way of a double-dummy play in hearts: low to the honours (South ducking) and then a LOW heart, watching the ace fall on air.

Board 25
 North Deals
 E-W Vul

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

♠ A K 4						
♥ A J 10 4		<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ —
N						
W E						
S						
♦ A			♥ K 9 5 3			
♣ A K 8 7 6			♦ K J 8 4 3			

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

EW 7N; EW 7♥; EW 7♣; EW 5♦; EW 2♠;
 Par -2220: EW 7N=

Given a free run, E/W shouldn't have too much difficulty bidding to 6♣. The higher scoring 6♥ is harder to reach, well done if you managed it. All thirteen tricks can be made in either contract with a good guess in hearts.

At favourable vulnerability, South might fancy a frisky third seat pre-empt in spades, and North will join in the fun. If E/W decide to double 4♠ and defend, the penalty that they take will not be enough to compensate for missing a cold slam.

Board 26
 East Deals
 Both Vul

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

♠ 4						
♥ A J 10 7 5 2		<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ K 10 9 7 3
N						
W E						
S						
♦ A 9 7 6			♥ Q 8			
♣ 9 4			♦ 10 5 4 2			

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

NS 3N; NS 5♣; NS 2♠; NS 1♥; NS 1♦;
 Par +600: NS 3N=; NS 5♣=

3NT and 5♣ are good spots. After 1♣-1♠-3♣ or 1♣-1♠-2♦ North might bid a slightly clumsy 3♠ and now there is a danger of South raising. Memo to East: If the oppo DO bid to 4♠ just be grateful, leave that red card in the box!

At some tables South may not open 1♣. 5♣ lands on a biscuit and speeds up the game. 2♣ (either Benji or Big) could end up anywhere but probably 5♣, with no space to ask for aces once trumps are agreed, unless using 4♦ as Blackwood. Until recently, it was illegal to open 2♣ on this hand and call it strong as with fewer than 16 points you needed 5 controls. The EBU have sensibly amended that law and the current requirement is that on hands with fewer than 16 points you need 13 points in two suits with at least 10 cards between them. Thus this hand qualifies.

Board 27 ♠ 7 2
 South Deals ♥ A K Q 5
 None Vul ♦ 10 7
 ♣ A J 9 6 4

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

♠ J 10 5
 ♥ 9 6 4
 ♦ Q 9 5 4
 ♣ 8 3 2

EW 2N; EW 2♠; EW 2♦; EW 1♥; NS 1♣;
 Par -120: EW 2N=

A brief auction should end with East declaring 2 ♠, making exactly eight tricks. Eight tricks are also available in no-trumps, despite the lack of a heart stop. Any East that decides to overcall 1 NT rather than the obvious 1 ♠ will earn a great matchpoint score, so long as partner only raises to 2 NT. It looks a bit eccentric to call 1 NT and its success will probably depend on whether partner's tricks are ready to cash (as here) or need to be established. At pairs, there is certainly a case for 1 NT, but no-one should seriously criticise a spade overcall.

Board 28 ♠ J 10 6
 West Deals ♥ K 3
 N-S Vul ♦ 9 7 6
 ♣ 10 7 5 4 2

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

♠ K 9 5
 ♥ A 8 6
 ♦ A K 3
 ♣ K Q 9 8

NS 3N; NS 4♣; NS 1♠; EW 1♥; NS 1♦;
 Par +500: EW 4♥×-3

Every time you've held a decent hand during this session a pesky opponent has stuck their oar in! South is just double checking that there aren't quite enough points for a 2 NT opening when East opens either 1H or a strong 1 NT in front of them. Over 1 ♥, South will double and West will raise hearts, likely to the three level. South may double again but North probably bails out into 4 ♣. They can hardly be expected to pass (a good option as it happens) as partner may have nothing in hearts. 4 ♣ makes if declarer guesses to finesse against the jack of clubs. If North is brave (or foolhardy?) enough to bid 3 NT that also makes if the clubs are played for one loser.

Over a strong 1 NT, South will double if it just shows a strong hand, but will be very frustrated if it is conventional and shows a one suit suited hand or something else. After a double, E/W do best if they can wriggle into hearts and then N/S need to bid on into clubs or no-trumps.

There is plenty of scope for both pairs to get into trouble and it wouldn't be surprising if any plus score for either side scored reasonably well.