

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

	♠ 8		
	♥ K 10 6 5		
	♦ A 10		
	♣ A K Q 10 8 5		
♠ 10 9 7 ♥ Q 4 ♦ K Q 7 5 3 ♣ J 9 4	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	♠ A K Q 6 4 ♥ A 7 2 ♦ 6 2 ♣ 7 6 3	
	♠ J 5 3 2		
	♥ J 9 8 3		
	♦ J 9 8 4		
	♣ 2		

NS 4♥; NS 3♣; NS 1N; EW 1♠; W 1♦; Par +420: NS 4♥=

The bidding is likely to start 1♣-1♠-pass-2♠. North will clearly want to bid again and be keen to get the heart suit into the auction. To double is the most flexible choice as it doesn't preclude defending. If partner bids 3♦, you are no worse placed than you would have been had you bid 3♥ instead of doubling.

South, in fact, will bid 3♥ in response to the double, naturally preferring to respond in their major. Glass half empty types will pass this, glass half full ones will raise to game. This is a tough decision at pairs, but it's worth reflecting that making nine tricks in hearts might win the board simply because you are playing in a major suit fit. Bidding very thin games is not a great strategy at this form of scoring.

In the play, a club ruff provides the entry that allows declarer to take the heart finesse. With West holding ♥Q doubleton, the game rolls home. The defence might even allow an overtrick through if they try to force the North hand to ruff spades twice. Imagine that the ♠10 is led and East plays ♠K and ♠A at tricks one and two, cunningly concealing the ♠Q. West should drop the ♠9 at trick two, the card they are known to hold. Declarer ruffs, plays ♣A, ruffs a club, and runs the ♥9. East wins and plays a low spade as the ♠Q would set up the ♠J and allow eleven tricks to be made. At this point declarer can play the ♠J and also make eleven tricks, but they are likely to play low hoping West was dealt ♠Q109. North is forced to ruff a second time and is down to one trump, the ♥K. The ♥K is cashed, drawing the ♥Q, and clubs run from the top. East will ruff with their last trump as soon as they can, but declarer over-ruffs and plays a diamond to ♦A. They lose a diamond at trick thirteen but that is only their third loser. An early diamond switch fares no better for the defence.

So, on this occasion, fortune favours the brave!

Board 2

East Deals

N-S Vul

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

NS 1N; W 1♠; EW 1♥; NS 1♣; Par +90: NS 1N=

If West leads a heart against 1 NT it gifts declarer a second trick in the suit, but it doesn't actually cost the defence. Declarer does not have time to establish and enjoy more than seven tricks. The favourable lie of the clubs means two tricks can be developed by force, but the defence clocks up six tricks first (two hearts, two clubs and two spades)

If a spade is led instead, the defence comes to a different six tricks (three spades, one heart and two clubs)

Any N/S pair that does better than +90 should earn a very good match point score.

Board 3
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ A 10	♠ Q 6	♠ J 5 4 2									
♥ Q 9 6 2	♥ J 8 3	♥ A 5									
♦ K	♦ A 9 8 7 6 5 3 2	♦ J 10 4									
♣ K Q 10 8 7 6	♣ —	♣ A 9 3 2									
<table style="border: 2px solid green; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto; text-align: center; 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	
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ K 9 8 7 3	♠ K 9 8 7 3										
♥ K 10 7 4	♥ K 10 7 4										
♦ Q	♦ Q										
♣ J 5 4	♣ J 5 4										

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

West will will open 1 ♣, planning a modest show of strength at their next turn. Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the mouth!

North will be in there with a big pre-empt in diamonds, probably 4 ♦ as that bypasses 3 NT and is the bid most likely to leave the opponents guessing.

East is just about worth a double whether that be negative or for penalties. Negative doublers will be hoping to hear 4 ♠ from partner, or a pass, but can bale out into 5 ♣ over 4 ♥.

5 ♣ is a lucky make. On a non-spade lead, the miracle in diamonds means the ♦ J can be established for a spade discard (The defence can lead out two rounds of the suit and the ruff kills one diamond winner, but they are powerless to kill the second) On a spade lead, declarer can win, draw trumps, and lead the ♦ K. The defence can do no better than win and cash their spade trick. Now the ♠ J and ♦ J10 are winners. All three heart losers in declarer's hand go away.

Any pair that finds a way to play in 4 NT over a 4 ♦ pre-empt should get in touch with the selectors, they would love to hear from you!

Board 5

North Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

North will open a weak 2♥ at most tables. When an opponent pre-empts, jump overcalls below game should be strong and highly invitational. It is not a good strategy to pre-empt over a pre-empt! In other words, 3♠ is not an option for East, they must choose between pass and 2♠.

Partner will expect more than 7 HCP for a two-level overcall, but to pass is not ideal either. After a pass, South might raise the ante with a bid of 3♥ and now West has a really difficult problem. OK, they can start with a double, but will they know to pass 4♠? 4NT to show both minors carries you overboard. Well done to E/W pairs that managed to stop in 4♠, it is not a cold contract but it is where you want to be.

There are ten top tricks if spades break 3-2, but there is a problem in getting to the East hand in order to draw trumps. If the defence gets off to a diamond lead they will always collect a diamond ruff to defeat 4♠. A club lead is damaging too, it attacks the entry card (♣Q) before the spades are unblocked. Declarer will run into trump loser regardless of whether they try to access their hand with a third ruff of diamonds or a third round ruff of clubs.

It is quite likely, of course, that the defence will lead hearts and take the first two tricks in that suit. Now declarer has a chance: they must cash the ♠A and try a low club towards the ♣Q. This play wins the contract.

Board 6

East Deals

E-W Vul

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

EW 5♠; EW 5♥; NS 3♦; NS 3♣; Par -500: NS 6♣×-3; NS 6♦×-3

Over 1♠, South will surely pre-empt. At favourable vulnerability 3♦ would be feeble and 5♦ says 'Please double me!' 4♦ feels about right, it's the bid Goldilocks would choose! West will bid 4♠, more in hope than expectation. North does not have much defence to a spade contract and partner has implied an eight-card suit. 5♦ is worth a try, if only to annoy the opposition and give them what might be a tough decision. Indeed it does, it is far from obvious for either of them to take the plunge and bid 5♠, rather than double.

If E/W DO bid on to 5♠, it would not be good bridge to bid 6♦, even though it is right on paper today. The bid has two ways to lose: 1) 5♠ may not be making, and 2) Several pairs may be allowed to play 5♦X

Board 7
 South Deals
 Both Vul

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

E 5N; W 4N; EW 5♣; EW 3♥; E 4♦; W 3♦; NS 1♠;
 Par -660: E 3N+2

North has a weak 2♠ opener, but that should not stop E/W finding a way to 3NT. Overcalling 2♠ with a bid of 2NT is a sensible choice, especially if a 3♦ response to a double would be nebulous regarding strength. Double or 3♣ are the alternative actions. South might raise spades over any of these interventions. 3♠ is more prudent than 4♠ with such a flat and aceless hand. 4♠ will surely get doubled and it goes for -800.

In the play, the defence can do no better than lead spades against 3NT. Declarer wins and runs the ♦ 9. North wins and (probably) clears the spades. Now declarer runs the clubs and South is squeezed in the red suits. Eleven tricks made.

North can break up the squeeze by returning a diamond at trick three, but now declarer establishes the diamonds for the loss of just one further trick in the suit. Again, eleven tricks are made.

Board 9

North Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

N/S are likely to play in 3 NT regardless of whether North passes or opens. A weak 2♦ opening, if available, is nearer the mark than 1♦. Passing is perfectly reasonable, but at pairs scoring it is particularly important to indicate where your strength lies and to do so at a fairly safe level. Always be mindful that your side might not buy the contract, and that any help you can give partner in finding the best lead will be welcome.

The defence can take the first five tricks against 3 NT, but a passive red suit lead allows the contract to make with an overtrick.

Board 10
 East Deals
 Both Vul

♠ K 6 2	♠ Q J 8 7 3	♠ 10 9 5
♥ J 4 2	♥ A K Q 9 5	♥ 8 7 6
♦ 9 7 6 2	♦ K 4	♦ J 8 5 3
♣ 10 9 5	♣ J	♣ A K 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #006400; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A 4	
	♥ 10 3	
	♦ A Q 10	
	♣ Q 8 7 6 3 2	

NS 6♥; NS 5♠; NS 4N; NS 4♣; NS 2♦; Par +1430: NS 6♥=

With both major suits breaking 3-3, N/S do well to play in a major suit game. However, without an eight-card fit in any suit, plenty of pairs are likely to plump for 3 NT. In that contract there is an extra club loser and three losers in total.

By the way, do you and your favourite partner have an agreement about the following sequence: 1 ♣-1 ♠-2 ♣-2 ♥? Is 2 ♥ non-forcing, a one-round force or forcing to game? The mainstream take on this is that it is forcing for one round, but you certainly wouldn't want to make the bid if there is any danger that partner might pass!

It is highly implausible that anyone will declare in hearts rather than spades, but a twelfth trick is available in hearts, albeit on a rather fanciful line of play. The defence must start with a top club, otherwise the club loser in the North hand goes away on the third round of diamonds. East switches to a spade at trick two (best). Declarer wins and ruffs a club, then draws trumps in three rounds, pitching the ♠ 4. Then the K♦ is overtaken with the A♦ (slightly better than a first round finesse of the ♦ 10 as the ♦ J could be singleton offside) another club is ruffed, establishing the suit. Finally, the ♦ 4 is play to the ♦ 10 and all four spade losers in the North hand now go away, one on the ♦ Q and three on the master clubs.

Board 11
 South Deals
 None Vul

<p>♠ J 7 5 3 ♥ K Q 6 2 ♦ 6 4 ♣ 10 6 4</p>	<p>♠ A K 10 9 2 ♥ 8 ♦ A J 9 8 ♣ A J 5</p>	<p>♠ 6 4 ♥ A 10 9 7 5 3 ♦ K Q ♣ Q 8 3</p>	<p>♠ Q 8 ♥ J 4 ♦ 10 7 5 3 2 ♣ K 9 7 2</p>
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NS 4♠; NS 5♦; NS 4♣; NS 1N; EW 1♥; Par +420: NS 4♠=

It is quite a challenge to play in spades rather than diamonds, especially if playing four-card majors. After 1♠-(2♥)-pass-(3♥)-Dbl, it doesn't look daft to bid the five-card diamond suit!

In a spade contract, declarer must be careful not to lose control. If the defence starts with two rounds of hearts it is best to ruff and play on diamonds. A further heart lead can then be ruffed in the short trump hand. Note that declarer can afford to lose a trump trick but cannot afford to run out of trumps. The plan is to cash three top trumps and then run the diamonds, allowing West to take their ♠J when they please.

Note that declarer could have drawn trumps without loss (with an inspired winning finesse) instead of playing on diamonds. However, they would then have no protection against further heart leads after East takes their diamond trick. The best declarer can do is cash out for two down! It is an instructive deal.

In a diamond contract the play is easier, but success less lucrative. The normal play of two finesses in diamonds doesn't look right as East is very likely to have a diamond honour in view of their bid, so no need to cater for KQX with West. Diamonds are played from the top and the contract makes for the loss of one diamond and one heart. The spade suit is easily established and deals with the club losers.

Board 12

West Deals

N-S Vul

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

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

East has the magic 3-1-4-5 distribution and is worth a 'good' raise of diamonds after the auction begins 1♦-1♥. South has a very similar hand in support for hearts: same shape, same nine HCP, same AKXXX in a side suit and no wastage in the enemy suit. Facing a vulnerable overcall it would rude not to jump to game.

West will be tempted to sacrifice, holding six diamonds and no quick tricks outside. If they elect to pass, East has a tricky decision to make. 5♦ is the winning action, but from their point of view defending could easily be right.

Board 13
 North Deals
 Both Vul

♠ K J 8 4 3 2	♠ A Q 6 5	♠ 10 9
♥ 8	♥ A 10 4 2	♥ Q 9 7 6 3
♦ K J	♦ 10 8 7 6	♦ 9 3
♣ K Q 10 8	♣ J	♣ A 9 6 5
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 7	
	♥ K J 5	
	♦ A Q 5 4 2	
	♣ 7 4 3 2	

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

North should pass, opening sub-strength 4-4-4-1 hands is not a good policy. Better to stay quiet and await developments. South will probably open 1♦ in third seat, only ten points but good shape and all the high cards in two suits.

West will overcall in spades and that makes the North hand even better than it already looked. Very enthusiastic support for diamonds is called for, but it is doubtful that many pairs will reach the giddy heights of 5♦. Eleven tricks can be made in a diamond contract. If West does not lead a heart (or switch to one after a top club) declarer can discover a lot about the distribution before committing to a heart finesse. It will become clear that East has the longer hearts and therefore best to play that hand for the ♥Q. If West does lead a heart, there is no guess in the suit but declarer must play two rounds of trumps at once in order to avoid a heart ruff. In that respect, it is lucky that trumps are breaking 2-2 with the ♦K offside!

If North decides to blast 3NT over the spade overcall (not the worse bid ever made) the defence gets two chances to lead clubs and defeat the contract.

Board 14
 East Deals
 None Vul

♠ 9 8 4	♠ 10	♠ A K Q 6
♥ 10 6 5 2	♥ A Q 8 7 4 3	♥ K J 9
♦ J 5 4	♦ K 6	♦ Q 10 9 8
♣ 5 4 3	♣ K Q 9 8	♣ 10 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ J 7 5 3 2	
	♥ —	
	♦ A 7 3 2	
	♣ A J 7 2	

NS 6♣; NS 3♥; NS 2N; NS 2♠; NS 2♦; Par +920: NS 6♣=

N/S can make a slam in clubs but cannot even make a game in 3 NT or 4 ♥.

In a club contract, just two ruff establishes the heart suit. That lucky position, coupled with the 3-2 trump break, means that twelve tricks are there for the taking.

It is possible, however, that clubs won't get a mention at some tables. Suppose that East opens 1 ♠ or a strong 1 NT. South and West both pass and North balances with 2 ♥. South might well pass that, afraid of making a bad situation even worse.

Board 15
 South Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ A 3	♠ 5	♠ K Q 9 7 6
♥ K 9 8 7 6	♥ J 5	♥ 3 2
♦ Q J 5	♦ 9 7 4 3 2	♦ K 10
♣ K Q 9	♣ 10 8 6 4 2	♣ A J 5 3
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ J 10 8 4 2	
	♥ A Q 10 4	
	♦ A 8 6	
	♣ 7	

EW 3N; EW 3♠; EW 3♥; EW 3♣; EW 1♦; Par -400; EW 3N=

Many Souths will open 1 ♠. Only eleven points but nice shape and no rebid problem. However, E/W are likely to reach 3 NT regardless of what South decides to do. (After 1 ♠-Dbl-pass it would difficult for East to pass. They would hardly expect their partner to hold ♠ A3)

Against 3 NT, to the defence needs to establish three heart tricks before declarer dynamites the ♦ A. That prevents the overtrick. This is unlikely to happen, so expect lots of -430s on the traveller.

Board 17

North Deals
None Vul

♠ —	♠ J 6	♠ Q 10 7 4 3			
♥ Q 9	♥ 8 6 5 4 3	♥ K J 2			
♦ Q J 10 9 8 7 4	♦ K	♦ 5 2			
♣ Q 10 5 4	♣ A K J 3 2	♣ 9 8 7			
<table style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-table;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>			N	W E	S
N					
W E					
S					
	♠ A K 9 8 5 2				
	♥ A 10 7				
	♦ A 6 3				
	♣ 6				

NS 5♠; S 5♥; NS 4N; N 4♥; NS 4♣; NS 1♦;
Par +450: S 4♥+1; NS 4♠+1

After 1♥-pass-1♠, West will stick their oar in with a diamond pre-empt. They have great shape, excellent impletion in the diamonds, and they are not vulnerable. This leaves N/S with little room to work out whether it is better to play in hearts or spades.

As it happens, doubling 3♦ for penalties works well if the defence is accurate. It needs a heart to the ♥ A at an early stage, and a club switch. North can then score three club tricks and lead a fourth round of the suit. South can over-ruff dummy with the ♦ 6. This is quite unlikely to happen as North will probably lead a top club at trick one, thereby spoiling the defence. Any West stretching to bid 4♦ will surely go for - 500, which is more than the value of the enemy game.

4♥ and 4♠ can both make with an overtrick if declarer risks the club finesse. In both contracts, declarer loses two trump tricks but nothing else. Extra kudos for those in 4♠ as they run into a 5-0 trump break. No kudos at all for East if they doubled 4♠, thereby tipping declarer off.

In reality, declarers will be happy just to make either contract and +420 should score reasonably well.

Board 18
 East Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ 3	♠ K Q 10 8	♠ J 9 6 5
♥ A Q 7 5	♥ J 2	♥ K 8 6 3
♦ A 4 3	♦ Q J 10 8	♦ 9 5 2
♣ K Q 5 3 2	♣ J 9 7	♣ A 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A 7 4 2	
	♥ 10 9 4	
	♦ K 7 6	
	♣ 10 8 4	

EW 5♥; EW 4N; EW 4♣; EW 1♠; EW 1♦; Par -450; EW 4♥+1

A rare opportunity in this set for an uninterrupted auction! After 1♣-1♥, West is certainly worth more than 2♥. With just five losers, ideal shape and good trumps some might bid game directly. A splinter bid of 3♠ is also a possibility, but that is rather over egging it unless you a clear agreement that it doesn't promise extra values beyond a game raise. The 'room' bid will probably be 3♥. East is fairly minimum, but has two prime cards so should accept the invitation.

With trumps breaking 3-2 the play for eleven tricks is straightforward. Trumps need to be drawn in order to enjoy the five club winners. Two diamonds can thrown from the East hand, but only one of West's diamond losers can be ruffed. Declarer loses one spade and one diamond. Had clubs broken 4-2, ten tricks would have been the limit.

Board 19
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ 9 2	♠ J 10 8 6 4	♠ A K Q
♥ Q 6 4 2	♥ K 5	♥ J 9 8 3
♦ A 10 7 5 2	♦ 9 8 6	♦ —
♣ J 6	♣ 10 7 4	♣ A K Q 9 8 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 7 5 3	
	♥ A 10 7	
	♦ K Q J 4 3	
	♣ 5 3	

EW 5♥; EW 4N; EW 4♣; EW 1♠; EW 1♦; Par -650; EW 4♥+1

Let's assume that South, West and East pass. Most players in the East seat will deem their hand too strong to open at the one-level. If 2♣ is their big bid, the auction will start 2♣-2♦-3♣-3♦.

Some Easts may now bid 3NT, mindful of the dictum of not bidding bad suits with a good hand. South leads the ♦K and declarer makes ten tricks. No more, no less. This might well score very well for E/W.

Other Easts will continue to shape out and bid 3♥ over 3♦, and partner will happily raise to game. Those wearing rose-tinted spectacles may bid on. This is a dubious move as West has implied that their values are in diamonds. These will be entirely useless in a heart contract.

In hearts, eleven tricks is the limit and even that requires a good guess in the trump suit. Ten tricks will be a common result, losing out to the 3NT brigade.

Well done to any pair scoring +650, that should be worth lots of matchpoints.

Board 20

West Deals

Both Vul

♠ K Q 7 6		♠ J 4									
♥ A Q J		♥ 7 4									
♦ Q 7 5 2		♦ A J 8 6									
♣ 5 3		♣ K 10 9 8 7									
	<table><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 10 9 8 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
		♥ K 10 8 6 5 2									
		♦ —									
		♣ A J									
		♠ 5 3									
		♥ 9 3									
		♦ K 10 9 4 3									
		♣ Q 6 4 2									

EW 7♠; EW 7♥; W 3N; E 2N; NS 2♦; NS 1♣;
Par -2210: EW 7♥=; EW 7♠=

A spade contract is superior to a heart contract. In hearts, you need trumps to break 2-2 in order to make all thirteen tricks. In spades, a 3-1 break in hearts does not pose a problem.

Bidding to a small slam in spades should prove fairly easy, regardless of system. After all, the vibe of this session is bid ,bid, bid!

To reach the grand slam in confidence some high level kit to check up on third round heart control would come in handy. Even if the hearts are running there is the question of whether the suit will provide enough discards to dispose of losing clubs in the West hand, but the answer to that is almost certainly yes.

Board 21North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K 9 5 2 ♥ K J 2 ♦ 9 2 ♣ Q J 3 2	♠ A Q J 7 6 4 ♥ A 5 ♦ K ♣ A K 7 4	<div style="text-align: center; border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; background-color: #006400; color: white; display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> N W E S </div>	♠ 3 ♥ 9 7 3 ♦ Q J 10 8 7 6 3 ♣ 6 5
	♠ 10 8 ♥ Q 10 8 6 4 ♦ A 5 4 ♣ 10 9 8		

NS 5N; S 5♠; N 4♠; NS 4♥; S 5♣; N 4♣; W 1♦; Par +660: NS 4N+1

Those with a pathological fear of missing game will open their with their big bid if they don't have a strong 2♠ in their methods. The hand is not really worth it. Benji Acoll players will open 2♣, Acoll with strong twos players 2♠, in both cases to show an eight playing trick hand with spades as trumps. Yes, the hand is worth that! The rest of the world will open 1♠. The final contract will be 4♠ at most tables, regardless of the choice of opening bid.

A heart lead from East holds this to ten tricks, declarer losing a spade, a heart and a club. (Note that declarer can establish the hearts, but the defence will kill the diamond entry before trumps are drawn, so the length winners cannot be enjoyed) On any other lead eleven tricks can be made on a rather double-dummy line. Let's imagine that the ♦ Q is led. Declarer gives up a spade to West and wins the spade return (no other return is better). The run of all of the spades now puts West under pressure. They cannot afford a club discard for three rounds of clubs will then establish the ♣ 7 as a winner and leave West on play to open up the hearts. So West must come down to ♥ KJ and ♦ QJ32. A low club from North now leaves West on play and any card they play will allow access to the ♦ A.

3NT can score eleven tricks even if played by North on a heart lead from East. Declarer immediately establishes the suit, losing the second round (or third if they hold off) to West. A spade is thrown from the North hand. The diamond return is won in the South hand, overtaking the ♦ K with the ♦ A. The penultimate heart is cashed, throwing another spade. Then the last heart is led and this kills West.

If they throw a spade, a club is thrown from the North hand. Declarer can now make four spade tricks and just loses a club at trick thirteen. If, instead, West throws a club declarer throws a spade from the North hand. North is down to ♠ AQJ, ♣ AK74 and West has ♠ K932, ♣ QJ3. Declarer finesses the ♠ J and plays ♣ AK and then the ♣ 4. This establishes the ♣ 7 and leaves West on play, forced to lead a spade.

Any pair preferring 3NT to 4♠ and then notching up +660 is too good for this event!

Board 22
 East Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ Q 10 8 3	♠ A K 7 4	♠ J 9
♥ J 9 8 4 2	♥ 10 5	♥ Q 7 6 3
♦ 7 2	♦ K J 9	♦ 5 4
♣ A 4	♣ K Q 9 7	♣ J 6 5 3 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 6 5 2	
	♥ A K	
	♦ A Q 10 8 6 3	
	♣ 10 8	

NS 6N; NS 6♦; NS 4♠; NS 3♣; NS 1♥; Par +990: NS 6N=

A classic bidding problem arises after the auction starts 1♦-1♠-2♦. North has no ideal bid. They would like to make a forcing raise of diamonds without bypassing 3NT. For this reason some partnerships play 2♥ in this sequence as 'Third suit forcing', artificial and game forcing. On this occasion South would then bid 2♠ and North 3♦ (100% forcing)

A different problem arises if the bidding starts 1♦-1♠-2♠. Raising with three-card support for the major is a popular style. The usual move for North with only four spades is 2NT, in fact players adopting this method often define 2NT as an asking bid. That's all very good, but it wrong-sides the contract if 3NT (by South) is where you need to be. As it happens, South is able to confirm that they hold a fair hand with six diamonds and only three spades. That might be enough for North to agree diamonds and head for a slam.....feeling that the the force is with them!

The room contract will be 3NT, probably reached with a little improvisation! However, both 6♦ and 6NT are better than 50% contracts. Declarer leads a club to the ♣K at some stage (running the 10 on the first round would be poor play) If this hold the trick, they come back to the South hand and lead the remaining club. They cannot go wrong if West was dealt ♣AJ (to any number), ♣JX doubleton or ♣AX doubleton. If West follows low on the second round without hesitation, they play West for the ♣J and East for the ♣A. (It would be gracious to congratulate West if they have smoothly played low twice from a holding headed by the ♣A)

Board 23
 South Deals
 Both Vul

♠ K 9 6 5	♠ J 2	♠ A Q 7
♥ K 9 8 7	♥ A 5 2	♥ Q 10 6 3
♦ 9 5 3	♦ K Q 6 4	♦ A 7 2
♣ A 8	♣ Q 5 4 2	♣ K 9 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 10 8 4 3	
	♥ J 4	
	♦ J 10 8	
	♣ J 10 7 3	

EW 4♥; EW 3N; EW 3♠; EW 2♦; NS 1♣; Par -620: EW 4♥=

If North opens 1 NT, East might scrape up a double and N/S will be grateful if they have an escape mechanism that allows them to find their 4-4 club fit. E/W may now give up on defending and bid to game in either 4♥ or 3 NT. Success in either of these contracts depends on playing the heart suit for one loser, and that may well not happen! It would be fairly instinctive to play North for the ♥ J.

Strangely, East probably does better to pass 1 NT. With a bare fifteen-count and no long suit that is a very sensible option. 1 NT will go three down on a heart lead and E/W collect +300, beating all the pairs their way who go down in game, all that play in a part-score, and any that defend 2♣X down one.

At tables where North opens 1♣ or 1♦, E/W are likely to reach 4♥ or 3 NT. Again, that will earn them a great score if they make it and a lousy one if they don't.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

♠ 5	♠ A 8 7	♠ Q 9 3 2
♥ 10 7 4	♥ A Q 9 8 3	♥ 6
♦ A K 8 7 4	♦ 6 5	♦ Q 10 9 3 2
♣ A K 8 5	♣ Q 4 3	♣ J 9 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K J 10 6 4	
	♥ K J 5 2	
	♦ J	
	♣ 10 7 2	

NS 4♠; NS 4♥; EW 4♦; EW 2♣; Par +100; EW 5♦×-1

Neither side vulnerable is the time to declare, so if in doubt bid on! On this deal no-one is going to stop bidding any time soon. It is likely that N/S will be goaded into 4♥, even if they would never had bid it under their own steam.

Making 4♥ depends on finding the ♠Q. A delicate decision has to be made by West in the defence to this contract. If they win the diamond lead and bash out ♣AK and a third club, declarer will get a good partial count of the hand. West opened 1♦, and shows up with three clubs (probably four given East's carding) and three trumps. East definitely rates to hold the longer spades and declarer will probably make the right guess. On the other hand, if they passively continue diamonds at trick two, declarer might make the right guess anyway and score eleven tricks rather than ten.

In a teams' game there would be a case for a *low* club at trick two, but that is a dubious strategy at matchpoints. Admittedly, it could well work a treat on the actual layout.

E/W can save themselves a lot of angst by bidding on to 5♦. This is just one down (doubled) for -100, beating all the pairs that concede -420, -170 or -140.

Board 25
 North Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ K 9 6 3	♠ J 8 4 2	♠ 7 5
♥ —	♥ Q 9 7 5	♥ A K 10 8
♦ K J 10 6 5 2	♦ 8 4	♦ 9 3
♣ A K 3	♣ 9 6 2	♣ Q J 10 8 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A Q 10	
	♥ J 6 4 3 2	
	♦ A Q 7	
	♣ 7 5	

EW 3N; EW 5♣; EW 3♠; EW 4♦; EW 1♥;
 Par -600: EW 3N=; EW 5♣=

E/W are vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, so they might be nervous about defending 1 NT X or 2♥X and prefer to bid to a game contract. 3 NT is a more attractive spot than 5♣.

South can hardly be blamed for leading a low heart against 3 NT, but it turns out to be a disastrous choice. It gifts East a second entry to their hand and enables them to play the diamond suit for one loser. Declarer emerges with eleven tricks, twelve if South fails to cash the ♠ A.

An initial attack on spades fares slightly better, but declarer can still make ten tricks. Hold up the ♠ K till the third round, two rounds of clubs ending in the East hand, cash one top heart throwing the last spade, and then play the ♦ 9. South is stymied and cannot make more than the ♦ A whatever they try.

The best lead is a passive club. Declarer can do no better than win in hand (either straight away or after cashing the ♣ AK, it makes no odds) and advance the ♦ 9. South hops up with the ♦ A and then locks declarer in dummy. The defence comes to two diamond tricks and two spades tricks, holding declarer to contract.

Board 26
 East Deals
 Both Vul

♠ 10 9 5	♠ A 7 6 4 3	
♥ 9 8	♥ Q 4 2	
♦ 6 3 2	♦ 10 7 5	
♣ J 9 8 6 5	♣ A 2	
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K 8 2	♠ Q J
	♥ A 5 3	♥ K J 10 7 6
	♦ A 9	♦ K Q J 8 4
	♣ Q 10 7 4 3	♣ K

NS 4♠; NS 2N; NS 2♣; N 1♥; Par +620: NS 4♠=

East opens 1♥ and South should pass, the clubs are nowhere near good enough for a two-level overcall and the shape isn't right for a double. West also passes and North balances with 1♠. East might now mention their diamonds and South is worth a 'good' raise of spades, mindful that their partner could hold a weak hand. At most tables the contract rates to be a spade part-score.

As the cards lie, ten tricks can be made in spades. Declarer ducks the ♦ K lead, wins the continuation and cashes the ♣ A, getting the good news. The ♠ A and ♠ K are cashed, it would not be good to allow the defender with two trumps to score a ruff whilst their partner retained a natural trump trick. At this point, North has three small trumps and South one small trump. Declarer is able to score all four of these trumps independently, bringing their total number of trump tricks to six.

Added to the two club tricks and the two red aces that's ten tricks. It is a complete dummy reversal. Poor West ends up having to ruff partner's second heart winner with their master trump.

Board 27
 South Deals
 None Vul

♠ K 9 4 3 2	♠ A 8 5	♠ 10 6
♥ A Q 5	♥ K 8 6 2	♥ J 7
♦ K J	♦ 7 3	♦ A 5 4 2
♣ 8 7 2	♣ J 10 9 3	♣ A Q 6 5 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q J 7	
	♥ 10 9 4 3	
	♦ Q 10 9 8 6	
	♣ K	

EW 2N; EW 2♠; EW 3♣; NS 1♥; EW 1♦; Par -120; EW 2N=

The West hand opens 1 ♠ (playing a strong NT) or 1 NT (playing a weak NT, not wanting to bid a poor suit twice) On paper, E/W do well to stop 2 NT as best defence holds them to eight tricks. But the best defence on this deal requires a difficult to find lead, regardless of whether West or East declares the contract.

Some will reach 3 NT and that will probably make in practice, but even 2 NT needs deft handling against best defence. A key to success is to play the ♣ A on the first round of the suit, or to play low from both hands. That singleton ♣ K must not be allowed to kill the ♣ Q. This is a standard safety precaution. The only time it is right to take a first round finesse of the ♣ Q is when the tactical objective is to take two quick tricks without losing the lead,

If North leads the ♣ J at trick one, thinking it's a fairly safe lead, declarer can play the suit for just one loser, just by not parting with the ♣ Q at trick one! For instance, play the ♣ A, dropping the ♣ 8, then low to the ♣ 7. This sets up a marked finesse against North, who can do no better than play a third club. Declarer now plays on spades, setting the suit up for the loss off just two tricks. (Run the ♠ 10, if it is not covered. If it is covered, play the ♠ K and later lead towards the ♠ 9). Ten tricks made for the loss of just one club and two spades. The opening lead looked attractive but turned out to be a disastrous choice.

Nine tricks is the limit on any major suit lead, assuming accurate defence thereafter. The best lead for the defence is the ♣ 3 (or if South is on lead, the ♣ K) If declarer wins with the ♣ A at trick one, the defence will end up taking two spades, two clubs and one heart If declarer ducks the first trick, South can switch to a heart and the defence will score two spades, two hearts and a club.

As the optimum lead is unlikely to be found, it looks as if E/W will need to be among the pairs that bid and make 3 NT in order to get a decent score.

Board 28

West Deals
N-S Vul

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

NS 4♠; EW 1♦; EW 1♣; Par +620: NS 4♠=

Here is a question for regular partnerships: Do you have an agreement as to what a bid of 3♠ means in response to a take-out double of 1♦?

Is it i) about 6-8 points with a six card spade suit

ii) Four or more spades, inviting game if partner has a minimum double with good controls

iii) Four or more spades and just more invitational than a jump to 2♠ would be

iv) Something else

The play in 4♠ is interesting, hopefully you got there! Note that the heart suit is only worth two tricks unless West leads the suit.

On the lead of the ♣ J, declarer must win with the ♣ A, draw trumps and exit with a diamond. West can cash the other diamond but must then lead a heart or concede a ruff and discard by leading a diamond.

If West leads ♦ AK and then switches to the ♣ J, declarer must win with the ♣ A, draw trumps ending in hand and lead a low heart to the ♥ Q. Then play the ♥ A and exit with a heart. West wins and only has diamonds left, so must concede a ruff and discard,.

On a passive trump lead (unlikely!) declarer has the extra option of drawing trumps and trying a low club towards the ♣ Q. This play wins the contract straight away.

Board 29

North Deals
Both Vul

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

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

A fairly routine 4♥ opener for North (though anyone playing Texas transfers might open 4♣, allowing East an extra way to get into the auction)

Over 4♥, East has a very suitable hand for a double, albeit a tad lacking in high cards. In the modern style this is either pure take-out or 'cards' but not a trump stack. Pass on the rare occasions that you hold strong hearts and hope that partner can reopen with a double.

Should West pull the double to 4♠? In most auctions one would want more than a four-card suit to pull a high level double, at least five and preferably six. However, bidding 4♠ over 4♥ is a special case. Although partner does not guarantee four spades for their double, that is a likely holding. That makes the estimated tally of total trumps eighteen (ten for them in hearts as you place West and South with doubletons in the suit, and eight for you in spades). The maths favours bidding 4♠ if that is the case.

A useful adage is 'If in doubt, bid 4♠ over 4♥' It holds good on this occasion.

Board 30
 East Deals
 None Vul

♠ A K 6	♠ 9 5 2	♠ J 8 3
♥ J 10 3	♥ A K 9 5	♥ Q 8 6 4 2
♦ 6 5	♦ K 8 7 2	♦ A Q J 10
♣ A K 9 8 2	♣ Q J	♣ 5
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 10 7 4	
	♥ 7	
	♦ 9 4 3	
	♣ 10 7 6 4 3	

EW 5♥; EW 4N; EW 3♠; EW 3♦; EW 3♣; Par -450; EW 4♥+1

E/W should brush aside any interference from North and bid to either 3 NT or 4♥. The suit contract is superior. Against 4♥, if the defence leads anything other than a trump it will be possible to ruff a diamond in the short trump hand. If they do lead a trump, two further rounds can be played and that stops the diamond ruff. However, even on this defence, declarer has a play that would not be possible in a no-trump contract. After three rounds of trumps, three rounds of diamond (finessing twice and cashing the ace) and one top spade, South is forced down to six cards:

♠ Q10 and ♣ 10763. West sits over this with ♠ K6 and ♣ AK98.

When East cashes the penultimate trump South has to let another club go, and declarer can throw the ♠ 6. ♣ AK followed by a club ruff establishes the ♣ 9 as a winner. (If South chooses to throw a spade instead, declarer makes both the K♠ and J♠) It is a perfect trump squeeze ending. So, eleven tricks are made in 4♥ on any defence. At risk of stating the obvious, one can't execute a trump squeeze in 3 NT!

In 3 NT, there is no legitimate way to come to more than ten tricks.

Board 31
 South Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ K 6 3	♠ Q J 10 2	♠ A 7 5 4
♥ Q J 9 5	♥ 8 3 2	♥ A 10 6
♦ 9	♦ A Q 10 7 5	♦ K J 6 3
♣ A Q 9 8 3	♣ 7	♣ 6 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 9 8	
	♥ K 7 4	
	♦ 8 4 2	
	♣ K J 10 5 2	

EW 3N; EW 3♠; EW 3♥; EW 3♣; EW 1♦; Par -400; EW 3N=

Over 1 ♣ from West, North might stick in a diamond overcall, possibly prompting East to upgrade their hand and bid to 3 NT rather than 2 NT (showing spades en route).

The cards are lying beautifully for E/W, with all three missing club honours outside being an unexpected bonus. The club suit plays for three tricks despite the 5-1 break. One way or another declarer should emerge with nine tricks an an excellent matchpoint score if they bid to game.

Board 32

West Deals

E-W Vul

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

NS 2♥; EW 1N; EW 2♦; EW 1♠; EW 1♣; Par +110: NS 2♥=

The cards are lying well for N/S, so it is no surprise that the last making contract is for their side, despite a combined holding of only seventeen HCP. That contract is 2♥ and South will be keen to mention the suit, but may be nervous about coming in at the two-level. They will be thinking about it after 1NT (strong)-pass-pass or 1♣/1♠-pass-1NT. The vulnerability may embolden them to do so and partner puts down a perfect dummy. 2♥ is an easy make. On a different day it could go seriously pear-shaped, running into a nasty penalty when the opponents weren't going beyond a part-score contract!

If they take a conservative view and pass, accurate defence holds 1NT to contract. There could be a very big difference in the matchpoint score for collecting +110 rather than conceding-90. This really has been a set for fearless bidders!