

ACBL-wide Charity Pairs

Wednesday, March 25, 2025 (morning or afternoon)



Analysis by Frank Stewart

Syndicated columnist, author and contributor to the Bridge Bulletin since 1981, Frank Stewart analyzed this set of deals, directing his comments toward advancing players.

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

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

An entertaining and demanding set of boards kicks off with a relatively tame board. We expect South, with decent defensive values and length in the boss suit, to open 1♠ in third position. West doesn't have enough to overcall at the two level. When North responds 2♥, South should hit the table gratefully, having found a spot that should produce a plus score. East might lead the ♦10, and North can win in dummy and start the trumps, leading the ♥10. West needs to cover with the queen to promote East's seven into a trick. The defense should wind up with a spade, a club and two trumps. We expect +140 to North-South to be a common and perhaps average result.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

6♣ is a fine contract, and we think East-West should get there. East opens 1♦, and West responds 2♣. The East hand is nicely oriented for clubs, with good three-card support, a singleton heart and primary values in the other suits. If West then bids 3♥, East can continue with 3♠, suggesting his 4-1-5-3 pattern, and West has the right cards to move strongly toward slam. Alternatively, East might bid 2♠ at his second turn and support the clubs next, and West will be similarly encouraged. We believe East-West should score only about a 75% board for +920. Boo on pairs who are fixated on playing at notrump and get bogged down in an auction that misses the good slam.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

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

When West opens 1♥, East will issue a forcing raise, often an artificial 2NT response. In conjunction with that, West may rebid 3♣, showing a singleton club. Then East will like his hand but would prefer that his ♣K were a "working" ♠K. He will probably sign off at game but might try 3NT with his stout club holding. West could trustfully accept that contract - a winning decision - or might ease out to 4♥. In fact, the defense must be careful lest declarer have a shot at winning 11 tricks at either hearts or notrump. If East plays at 3NT, South must find an unlikely diamond lead to hold him to four, otherwise West can, if he guesses the position, squeeze South in the minors. If West declares at 4♥, North can lead either minor effectively, but with a spade lead, West can win 11 tricks again. We think East-Wests who take 11 tricks at any game will get a matchpoint top.

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

West's hand is overweight to open 1NT; West may have seven tricks in his own hand. Still, many Wests will choose that call because no option is seductive. If South also passes, North might lead the ♦8, and declarer will race off with eight tricks for +120. (The best play for five tricks with that diamond holding is to go to dummy and pass the 10.) At some tables, South will balance bravely with 2♥ despite being vulnerable. He would score well if he escaped for down one, -100, but may come to grief instead: The defense can take two diamonds, two clubs, a club ruff and two spades for +200. At tables where West opens 1♦ and East passes, South will reopen with 1♥ or perhaps with a double. Then the outcome is uncertain, but as usual with most partscore deals at matchpoints, any pair who obtains a plus score should do reasonably well in the matchpoint column.

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

East's 1♠ will end the auction at many tables. South lacks an attractive opening lead and will do well to find a low heart. Then East will lose two trumps, a diamond, a heart and two clubs, scoring +80. Against a different defense, he will emerge with eight tricks and +110. At other tables, West will respond 1NT, if for no other reason than to keep North-South from entering the auction easily (though why West would fear that North-South could make much of anything is a mystery). Then some Easts will rebid 2♦, passed out, and others will lift 1NT to 2NT, also passed out. A diamond contract could be held to eight tricks for +90 (better than +80 at 1♠). Wests at 2NT will struggle to hold down the penalty after a club opening lead, and some East-Wests will be -200 for a matchpoint zero.

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

If West opens 1♦ in third position, North may double for takeout, not vulnerable, though his diamond honors are certainly not worth 5 points. East will support the diamonds. No bid is exactly on target, but East might bid 2♦ or 3♦ (preemptive) or 2NT as a conventional limit raise. A few Easts may try 1NT. South has enough to compete with 2♠ over 1NT or over a raise to 2♦, but whether he will act over 3♦ or 2NT is unclear. Wests who play at a diamond partscore can emerge with eight tricks in theory but must guess to play North for the ♦KQ, no easy task if North doubled 1♦. Souths who play at spades should be held to seven tricks, but some will be allowed to win eight somehow. We think North-South's best shot at a top is for East-West to bid up to 3♦ and go -200 there.

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

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

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

When North opens 1♣, South has reasonable options: a 1♦ or 1NT response, a conservative raise to 2♣ (but not, we think, if North-South employ inverted minor-suit raises) or an aggressive limit raise to 3♣ - unless 3♣ would be weak and preemptive. (One problem with the inverted raises is that some responding hands are neither strong nor weak and awkward to describe.) After a 1♦ response or a club raise, North-South will usually play at a club partial where North could emerge with as many as 10 tricks and +130. A 1NT response by South may pick up the chips. Everyone will pass, and West will lead a low spade. Then South can finish with nine tricks: two spades, four clubs, two hearts and one diamond. No North-South pair will reach game, but pairs who play at notrump and take nine tricks for +150 should win most of the matchpoints.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

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

This board should see action. Most Wests will be willing to open 1♣, liking their good long suit more than being concerned about the borderline high-card strength. Then we think North should prefer a 1♥ overcall to a double, getting his good long major suit into the game. East can bid 1♠. Even if South is reluctant to introduce his diamond suit at that point, West will rebid 2♣ or raise to 2♠, and North can double. Then if South bids only 4♦ - his hand is really worth 5♦ - North can try 4♥, and South can accept the major-suit game. East can cash the ♠KA, but North can handle the rest, scoring +450. At some tables, East-West may press on to 4♠. North-South could double and be +500 with inspired defense, but we suspect they will bid on and score their normal +450 or +400.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

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

Every North-South should play at a notrump game. When South opens 2NT, North tries Stayman and settles into 3NT when South shows spade length. If East doubled the Stayman response, West's opening lead will be a club. South wins and can take two overtricks with a crystal ball. He can lead toward the ♠J, finesse in diamonds and judge how play the hearts for four tricks. All of that is speculative; South will be nervous about having East get in to take club tricks and may not play to best advantage. North-South's best chance to be +460, for a top, may be for East to neglect, or to not be given the chance for, the lead-directing double. If West's opening lead is a major suit, South will have an easier time winning 11 tricks.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

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

We doubt that any East will open 1♣ despite the spectacular lack of defensive tricks (and we hope no East will), but nothing is certain now that discipline and soundness have become less common traits in bidding. Assuming East passes, South may open 2♠ despite the threatening vulnerability and a broken suit. Then North is likely to insist on game; he will be encouraged if he responds with 2NT, asking for a feature, and South bids 3♥ to show one. As it happens, 4♠ is unbeatable with the ♦A in the West hand. South will lose only a diamond, a heart and a trump. On another day, East would hold the ♦A and South would lose four tricks, so pairs who stop at a spade partial need not fault themselves. We predict that North-South will score at least 70% of the matchpoints for +620.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

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

The most frustrating board of the set. If South opens 1♥, West will overcall 2♣. When North passes, the East hand is mighty good to pass opposite a two-level overcall; game is possible. East might try 2NT, and West might raise to 3NT. At some tables South will open 2♦, the Flannery convention. West will try 3♣, and East-West may again reach the notrump game. If West is declarer, a heart opening lead from North will surely sink the contract. If East is declarer and South leads a low spade, won by dummy's king, declarer can succeed with your play and mine, letting the ♣7 ride! If instead he leads a diamond from dummy, North can beat 3NT by rising with the ace for a heart shift; if North plays low and East follows with the 10, South can prevail (at double dummy) with the difficult play of ducking. Few East-Wests will score game. All we know for sure is that there will be weeping and teeth-gnashing when the cruel club break shows up.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 10 5		♠ AKQJ87
♥ 10 9 7 6 4		♥ Q
♦ Q 6 4 3		♦ J 7 2
♣ 10 9		♣ A 8 2
		♠ 6 4 3
		♥ AK 5 3
		♦ AK 10 9
		♣ 6 4

When East opens 1♠ after two passes, South might well double for takeout despite his deficient club support. North advances 2♣; his club suit is impressive, but he lacks the high-card strength for a game-invitational jump to 3♣. East will rebid 2♠, and after two passes, North will compete with 3♣. After that, the players' judgment will take over. If East soldiers on to 3♠, South may well double with all his defensive strength and beat the contract one trick. (The "par" result is +100 to North-South.) North-South will do better if they buy the contract at 3♣; North can be held to nine tricks only if West gets to uppercut with his ♣10, promoting East's 8 (or if East finds the unlikely way to get a heart ruff). We predict that pairs with a plus score will do reasonably well in the matchpoint department.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

This board should produce results approaching unanimity, at least in theory. East will usually open 1NT, and West will use Stayman. When East bids 2♠, West may invite slam with a quantitative jump to 4NT, but East won't be having any. There are 11 tricks - no more, no less - and +660 should be the result. We can foresee a snag if East-West have no agreement about whether West's 4NT bid is quantitative or ace-asking after East has shown a major. (In the final of the 1981 Life Master Pairs, your analyst had a costly misunderstanding over that very issue). East-West pairs who go minus will be stuck with a miserable matchpoint result. Any Easts who happen to open 1♦, for whatever reason, should have an easier time going plus.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

We expect as many different auctions as tables in the game. We think the best way to deal with the East hand is to pass and come in later, perhaps with a bid that shows both of the long suits. If South also declines to open, West will start with 1♣. If North stays out, East will respond 1♠, and West will rebid 2♣. Then East might bid 2♦, and West can try 2NT even though East is a passed hand. East should want no part of game or notrump and should run to 3♦, which West should respect as a sign-off and retire. With the trumps splitting but the ♠K offside, East will take 10 tricks. We think East-West will score well for +130 at 3♦. They can't make much of anything else, and if North-South happen to get into the auction and buy the deal for 3♥ or 4♥, they can be either +140 or -50.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

Many Souths will open 2♦, weak, though the hand is quite suitable for play at a spade contract with the good three-card support and a side-suit singleton. After two passes, East will reopen with a double, and when West advances with 2♠, East will continue with 3♣ to show the extra strength. West may or may not be encouraged enough to try 3NT, but if North leads the ♦9 against that contract, West's mighty seven becomes a factor. West can set up dummy's clubs and probably lose only three tricks in all. At tables where South can't or won't open 2♦, East-West should have an easier time bidding 3NT, played by West, after East is able to open 1♣. Then North's opening lead may be the ♥J, and declarer may win with dummy's queen. He can attack the spades next and wind up with 11 tricks for +460 and a matchpoint top.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

We suspect that many West players will be enamored by the quality of their heart suit to open 1♥ despite the borderline high-card values. North will double. If East passes, South will advance 1♠, and the auction may subside there. Even if East bids 1NT to show a few values, South may still like his hand enough to compete with 2♠, passed out. If West starts the defense with three high hearts, South is sure to go down at least one. At tables where West reasonably passes as dealer, North will often open 1NT. South may well risk using Stayman despite being short in high cards. He will run to 2NT, passed out, when North can't admit to a four-card major. Even after a helpful diamond lead, North will be down two for -100. But East-West will get a top if West somehow plays at 2♥. He can assemble eight tricks there for +110.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

No player has an attractive opening bid. East may be reluctant to open 2♥, weak, when he has good spade support, and the South hand is lacking in defensive values. North might like his shape enough to open, but he could more than reasonably pass and hope to come in later if the opponents bid hearts. Despite all that, we don't expect the deal to be passed out often. In fact, if North-South start the auction and locate their diamond fit, they can take 11(!) tricks for +150, and even an unlikely black-suit partial will do well. At tables where East is willing to start with 2♥, North will reopen with a double after two passes. South will do well to bid diamonds again, but he may try 2NT (perhaps a bad idea with only one heart stopper and no aces). If he plays there, best defense will beat the contract one trick for a likely top to East-West.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

After three passes, North's hand is heavy for a 1NT opening, with 17 prime high-card points plus a five-card suit and a pair of 10s. The auction at some tables may be a reasonable 1♦-1♥, 2NT-3NT. Other Norths will open 1NT, and North-South should reach game anyway because South has enough to invite, using Stayman in the process. We can easily imagine 3NT going down. East leads the ♠7 - a high spot to deny strength in the suit - and West takes the ace and shifts to the ♣Q, giving the defense four club tricks and five in all. But it's also possible that East will lead a club, giving the ninth trick, or the ♠2, misleading West. Moreover, if East leads a heart, declarer may win and, not knowing the lucky heart position, may try to steal a spade trick before running the diamonds. We think North-South pairs who register +600 on this deal can count themselves lucky.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

West's 15-point hand, with three 10s and three aces, is well worth opening 1NT. East will usually transfer with a 2♦ response and pass West's 2♥. If West were allowed to play there, he would lose a spade, two trumps, two diamonds and a club for -100, an acceptable result for North-South at IMP scoring. At matchpoints, South may boldly balance with a double when 2♥ comes around, and North will take out to 2♠. East-West can't afford to act again; they would risk being the dreaded -200 on a partscore deal. But at spades, North will lose only four tricks: one in each suit. North-South may score well above average for +140 but below for +100 defending against 2♥. They might do best if East decides to pass 1NT, but we think West may be able to get out of that mess for -100.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

There will be differing opinions about South's proper opening bid after three passes. Some Souths will open 1♥ to get the strong five-card major into the game without delay. Others will start with 1♣, hoping to continue with two heart bids to suggest the 5-6 shape in the rounded suits. (If North responded in spades, such a sequence would be a reverse that in many partnerships would suggest more in high cards. The shape certainly offers compensation; still, to overbid your high-card points is asking for trouble.) Here, North-South can make no game. Their best result at double dummy is to stop at 4♣ and make that for +130. We think they will win some matchpoints if they achieve a plus score. At some tables, East-West will be in the auction. If they get as high as 3♠, North may get out the hammer - and will be chagrined to find that nine tricks are unstoppable with best play.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

When North opens 1♠, the East hand is too junky to act, especially with the ♠Q probably wasted for offense. South's hand is too heavy for a single raise to 2♠. South might respond 1NT (forcing) and raise the spades next. In a "standard" framework, South might respond with 2♣ or 2♦ and follow with a spade raise. West is likely to interfere with a heart preempt, but North should still play at 4♠ at every table. East will lead the ♥K and a second heart, and North can ruff and draw trumps. He may win a diamond finesse with dummy's queen, then lose a club finesse with his jack, making five for +650. But if declarer possesses a crystal ball or remarkable card sense, he can take the ♦QA and ruff a diamond, leaving East with the only diamond guard. Then the run of the trumps will squeeze East in the minors, and North will take two overtricks if he places East with the ♣Q. Any North who is +680 should score all the matchpoints.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

The vulnerability should stifle any third-seat adventures by West, so North will open 1NT. Then South faces the old dilemma: Use Stayman or not? Though South's hand is as flat as a pancake, North's hand need not be; still, many experts would say that South must bid his own hand, not speculate about what shape North may have. If South raises to 2NT (in some partnerships, that bid would be conventional), North will go on to 3NT. East will lead the ♣10. Ten tricks are possible, but North may exert himself to take nine. He can duck the first club, win the second in dummy and finesse in diamonds, losing. He wins the next club and cashes his diamond winners, then plays the ♥A and a second heart probably to dummy's 10. When West takes the king, he must lead from the ♠K, and North ends with two spades, two clubs, three diamonds and two hearts. We predict that North-South will score somewhere above average for +400.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

Views will vary about West's best opening call after South passes. There will be votes for some number of spades from one to four. No call is clearly correct. The West hand has imposing playing strength, so opening 4♠ might work; the hand also has two defensive tricks, so if East has some values but no spade fit, defending at some level might result in a plus score. As it happens, the trick is to reach 4♠ somehow - and make it. (It's uncertain whether East would act over a rather bizarre 2♠ opening or raise a 3♠ preempt to 4♠.) If North finds a trump lead, declarer is prevented from ruffing two clubs in dummy and will need a second diamond trick to make the game. (He could risk a finesse with the ♦Q, cash the ace, ruff a diamond and make an overtrick!) We think East-West will score decently for + 620. A couple of pairs may register +790. North-South could save some matchpoints with an unlikely save at 5♥, doubled but only -500.

Board 24
West Deals
None Vul

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

	♠ A K J 9 5 3	
	♥ K 7 2	
	♦ 9 8	
	♣ 7 5	

Many results are possible. A few Norths will open 1♥, and then East will overcall 2♦ or try an Unusual 2NT bid. Over 2♦, South can comfortably bid 2♠ and North-South will reach their spade game; over 2NT by East, the route to game is less clear, but we think most North-Souths will cope. At tables where North passes in second seat, East has options, but South will be able to introduce his spades, and North-South should manage to reach 4♠ again. If West leads a diamond, declarer can take the ace and cash the A-K of trumps with a happy result. He can set up dummy's hearts, ruffing the fourth round, and get back to dummy with a trump to cash the good fifth heart, making five. North-South should score a bit above average for +450, but some East-Wests will compete and wind up sacrificing at 5♦. If North-South fail to go to 5♠ - not an obvious judgment - they will be +300 for a poor matchpoint score.

Board 25
North Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

Here's a volatile board. At the "green" vulnerability, South will bid a large number of hearts in third seat. Many Souths will pull out all the stops with a 4♥ bid. West may double, a questionable action when he would prefer more high-card strength and isn't eager for East to pull a double to 4♠. East is likely to pass for penalty - running to five of a minor would be quite speculative - but with the spade finesse working and the trump situation delicious, South will wrap up the contract for +590. If instead South opens 3♥, West is more likely to double. East may despair and pass for penalty again, and North-South will be +630. But some North-Souths may reap a huge number on defense for an even better matchpoint result. If East-West land at four of a minor, North can find a penalty double and collect a telephone number. At one or two tables, East-West may play at 3NT and escape for a small penalty, winning a lot of matchpoints.

Board 26
East Deals
Both Vul

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

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

We expect most Easts to start with 1♣; the hand's strength is borderline, but the length in spades is an encouraging factor. A few Souths who were absent when fear was passed out will overcall 1♥. North has a promising hand and could reasonably jam it into 3NT. Dummy will be a disappointment, and the result should be down one. If North prefers to exercise some discretion, he will start with a 2♣ cuebid, then support the hearts. South may wish he hadn't overcalled, but they should rest at a heart partial, usually scoring +140. At other tables, South will decline the skimpy vulnerable overcall. West is likely to dredge up a 1♦ response, and when East bids 1♠ next, West will retire. The play may be complex; East is a favorite to go down one, -100. But North might balance with 1NT and play there. He should assemble eight tricks, and +120 should be a fair result for North-South.

Board 27
South Deals
None Vul

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

	♠ 6 2	
	♥ K 3	
	♦ A 9 7	
	♣ A 10 7 6 5 3	

Many Souths will like their Quick-Trick structure and long suit enough to open 1♣. If North scrapes up a 1♥ response, East can enter with a takeout double. Then South will do well to pass with his minimum hand. If instead he rebids 2♣, West can lower the boom, and East-West will be +500 for a matchpoint top. (If South declines to open the bidding but later climbs in with a 2♣ overcall, he may be nailed again.) East-West might actually be +500 against 1♥ doubled as well, but West will be less inclined to defend against hearts and will probably take out to 1NT and play there. With all the cards lying well for his side, West may find himself winning 10 tricks at notrump, and +180 to East-West is a possible result. We think East-West will score most of the matchpoints if they find a route to 3NT on their combined 23 HCP and make it.

Board 28
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

With the vulnerability enticing, some Wests will open a (strikingly) weak 2♥. East will surely have thoughts of slam and might even take the bull by the tail and jump straight to 6♥. If he bids 2NT to investigate instead, South may climb into the auction, and East may then settle for game; he may be concerned about a spade opening lead through the king. East-West should buy the contract at some level because the unfavorable vulnerability will discourage North-South from competing. (North-South could take nine tricks at diamonds but only seven in spades.) 6♥ is by no means a terrible spot but is sunk by the unlucky 4-0 trump break. 6♣ anyone? We suspect that if we sat North-South, our opponents would roll into the club slam, played by East no less, and score it up for a frigid top.

Board 29
North Deals
Both Vul

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

Too strong for 1NT, most Norths will open 1♦. When South responds 1NT, some Norths will lift boldly to 3NT. Others will settle for an invitational raise to 2NT, and then South's decision is close. Whether he will go on to game is uncertain, but we expect North-South to reach game with their 26 points at more tables than not. West will lead a low club even though South's 1NT response suggests club length. South wins with the 10 and lacks a clear path forward. He might try a diamond to dummy's jack and next the ♦A and ♦2. Then he has eight tricks - three diamonds, two hearts, two spades and a club - and even if the defenders don't give him an additional trick in clubs, he can establish a third trick in hearts. We expect +600 to score only a bit above average for North-South.

Board 30
East Deals
None Vul

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

Playing a five-card-major style, South will often hold his nose and open 1♦ - a necessary evil only with 4-4-3-2 shape. Some North-Souths will employ inverted raises in the minors, and North can raise to 2♦, forcing. (Inverted raises have benefits and drawbacks, but this is the type of situation they were devised to handle.) South will bid 2NT next, and North will gratefully go on to 3NT. West will probably lead a low spade, and declarer wins with dummy's 10, takes the ♠A, comes to the ♥A and tries a diamond to dummy's 9, forcing East's king. South has four diamonds, four spades, two hearts and a club for +460 and most of the matchpoints. If North-South don't use inverted raises, North is stuck. (Any system must include some way to force in a minor.) North might despair and jump to 3NT, letting East lead the ♣J. Then the contract is still makeable with double-dummy play, but North is likely to fail, giving East-West a matchpoint top.

Board 31
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

Unless South or West is of the persuasion to open balanced 11-point hands, East will be left to open 1♦ in fourth position. West will respond 1♥ and try 2NT after East rebids 2♦. East has enough to go on to 3NT. North has a choice of leads: try the long club suit or the chunky four-card major? Say North leads the ♣J. Declarer wins with the queen and leads a diamond to dummy's jack and South's queen. If South returns a club, declarer can win and lose a diamond to the ace. Then if South bravely underleads the ♥A, West will take nine tricks or 11 depending on whether he puts up the king. If instead North's opening lead is the ♥Q, and South withholds the ace, West must play low to avoid going down. It's similar if North leads a club but South shifts to a low heart when he takes the ♦Q. We think East-West will score well if they bid and make a game here.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

East-West may sniff at slam. We expect the auction to start 1♠-2♣, 2♥. Then some Easts will continue with 3♦ and others will try 2NT, forcing. When West rebids 3♥ to complete his pattern, East will certainly like his hand, with fitting major-suit honors and minor-suit aces, but no good trump fit is assured, nor has West promised any extra high-card strength. Even if East bids 3♠ at his third turn, West can't make a slam move, and we predict the auction will expire at 3NT at most tables. As it happens, no slam is makeable unless the defense goes astray. We predict that East-West will score well in the matchpoint column if they play at 3NT and register +660.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

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

North holds two-and-a-half Quick Tricks and length in the boss suit, and some Norths will open 1♠. (We would pass.) If South passes, West will reopen with a double, and when East advances 1NT, West can raise to 2NT because he would have balanced with a weaker hand. East will go on to 3NT and will make an overtrick if the defense starts with three rounds of spades instead of a heart shift by South at the third trick. (In theory, even +430 might not be a good result for East-West; they could be +500 against 2♠ doubled.) At tables where North doesn't open, West must choose an action after three passes. We personally think 1NT is deplorable, but we admit that East-West will then reach 3NT with no sweat, while if West opens with 1♣ or 1♦, they may languish at a partscore.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

At the favorable vulnerability, some Easts will open 2♠, weak. South might risk a 3♦ overcall, but West will put it right up to 4♠. North may think fleetingly of sacrificing at 5♦, which could be right even at the "red" vulnerability, but he will usually pass. (As it happens, 5♦ doubled could be too expensive.) Against 4♠, South will lead a high diamond and shift to a trump. East can push diamond intermediates through South to build a diamond trick, winning 11 tricks in all. But if South happens to lead a trump (or leads the ♣A and shifts to a trump), he can hold East to just 10 tricks, and North-South may get a good result if they are only -420.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

A heart slam is makeable on the East-West cards, but we doubt that anybody will get there. If West opens 1♥ in second seat, East will respond 1♠ and West may jump to 4♥. That is a strong bid, not a sign-off, but East can't go anywhere. They might reach slam if West opens 2♣ - East has a few scattered values - but we think not. In fact, 12 tricks are not certain. But if North leads a passive high diamond, West will take dummy's ace; he can count 12 tricks if the clubs produce four. West will then run the trumps, forcing the defenders to discard. At the end, he might judge that North has had to save length in clubs, take the A-K and, when South's 10 falls, lead to dummy's 9, making six for +680. We seriously doubt that the "par" result - +1400 to East-West defending against 6♠ doubled, will be achieved at any table.

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

When East opens 1♠ in third chair, South will double, and West will jump to 3♠, preemptive. North can't act at the four level - his spade honors are no good for offense - but East may well go on to 4♠ even though the values of his queens are somewhat diminished by South's double. Sure enough, South will start with the ♥AK and a third heart. East will ruff and take the ♠AK with no success. He can ruff two diamonds in dummy and win a club finesse with the queen, but South will get a club trick and North will get a trump for down one. We predict +100 to North-South at many tables; East-West pairs who judge well and emerge with +140 will pick up a good matchpoint result.