

ACBL-wide Charity Pairs Game

#2

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He has won two North American championships as well as EC Mixed Teams and multiple UK titles. As a professional player claims to be the only pro ever to have been shut out by his client from declaring a single board in a session — not for want of trying! At college reached the quarterfinal round of the University Challenge for Queen's Oxford — where he suffered the indignity of losing to Queen's Cambridge — and a team headed by the comedian Stephen Fry. He also claims that his tutors awarded him the title of "The laziest man in Oxford."

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K Q 5 2
♥ K J 10 2
♦ J 7
♣ A 5 3

♠ 8 7 6 3
♥ 9 5 4
♦ K 3
♣ K Q J 4

W N
S E

♠ A J 4
♥ A 8 7
♦ A 10 9 8 2
♣ 9 8

♠ 10 9
♥ Q 6 3
♦ Q 6 5 4
♣ 10 7 6 2

After South opens 1♦ and West doubles, most Norths will bid 1♠, though a 1NT response is also possible. If North introduces his major, South should raise — in the process running into both the worst trump holding opposite, and a bad trump break. A 4-3 (Moysian) trump fit isn't always bad, though: 1NT is held to +90 after a heart lead, if East shifts to spades early. But 2♠ by North, even on a trump lead, can be brought home (at least at double-dummy). North wins the ♠A, plays a club to hand, then a second top club. Eventually, after ducking two hearts, they can squeeze East.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 9 5
♥ A 10 8 6 4
♦ Q 10
♣ K J 6 2

♠ K 10
♥ J 5 3 2
♦ 7 5 2
♣ Q 8 7 5

W N
S E

♠ A 6 3 2
♥ Q 7
♦ A K 9 4
♣ 10 9 4

♠ Q J 8 7 4
♥ K 9
♦ J 8 6 3
♣ A 3

At favorable vulnerability, some Easts will open, while a few will pass. If East acts, West may be tempted to invite game and end up in 2NT, while others may settle for the "sure plus" in 2♠. If East passes, South will bid 1♦, West is going to overcall 1♥, and now a hotly contested partscore auction could ensue. I can certainly imagine a route to end up in all five possible strains. As to par, East can make +110 comfortably enough in spades, with the fate of a ninth trick resting in the defenders' hands. N/S might do well to stay out of the bidding, if they can.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 10
♥ A K Q 9 6 3
♦ A Q 9
♣ 3 2

♠ A 8 3
♥ 8 4 2
♦ K 7 5
♣ K Q J 5

W N
S E

♠ 5 4
♥ 10 7 5
♦ J 8 4 2
♣ 9 8 6 4

♠ K Q 9 7 6 2
♥ J
♦ 10 6 3
♣ A 10 7

When West opens 1♥ and rebids 3♥ over the 1♠ response, East figures to repeat his spades, letting West either raise spades, or cuebid 4♦ for spades. 4♠ on a club lead should see East win and cash three hearts to pitch clubs. Now East plays trumps, and since South can never get in to push a diamond through, declarer will emerge with 12 tricks. After a diamond lead to trick one, best is to finesse the ♦Q. When the finesse loses and a club comes back, East can revert to the original line, but for 11 tricks. An initial club lead holds West to his contract in 4♥.

West Deals
Both Vul

Hand 4

Best Deals

h Vul

♠ 6
♥ A 10 7 5 4 3 2
♦ 8 7 2
♣ 5 2

♠ J 8 4 2
♥ Q
♦ J 9
♣ K Q 9 6 4 3

W N E S

♠ A 10 3
♥ J 9 8
♦ A K 10 3
♣ A J 8

♠ K Q 9 7 5
♥ K 6
♦ Q 6 5 4
♣ 10 7

West's hand does not look anything like an opening bid or preempt to me – others may disagree. After West passes, North might or might not preempt in hearts (again, some will pass, some will open 2♥ or 3♥). If North does act, N/S will declare 4♥. The defenders must lead clubs early against 4♥ to establish their third defensive trick, or declarer may be able to set up a long diamond to pitch his club loser. E/W do have a relatively cheap save in 4♠ doubled, though, which could also persuade the opponents to miscalculate, by bidding on to the five level.

North Deals
N-S Vul

Hand 5

North Deals

3 Vul

♠ A K 7
♥ 9 8 4 2
♦ A K Q 9
♣ 9 5

♠ J 4
♥ A K 10 6
♦ J 4 2
♣ A 8 7 3

W N E S

♠ 8 5 2
♥ J 3
♦ 8 6 5 3
♣ K 6 4 2

♠ Q 10 9 6 3
♥ Q 7 5
♦ 10 7
♣ Q J 10

Facing a strong notrump, South has no reason to invite game, so should transfer to 2♠, planning to pass unless partner shows signs of life. This route may tempt West to balance over 2♠ with a double, after which South can double East's rescue (perhaps to 2NT, to suggest a two-suiter). The final contract rates to be 3♣ doubled by West, unless North – quite sensibly – views his hand as being far more suited for offense than defense, and retreats to 3♠. That would be both reasonable and unlucky: 3♠ loses three hearts and two clubs, while 3♣ doubled can be set 500.

East Deals
E-W Vbl

Hand 6

Best Deals

V Vul

♠ K J 5
♥ K J 10 8 4 2
♦ 8 5 4 3
♣ —

♠ Q 10 9 7 4
♥ A 9 7 5
♦ J 6 2
♣ 7

♠ 3 2
♥ 6 3
♦ A K Q 9
♣ A K Q 6 3

♠ A 8 6
♥ Q
♦ 10 7
♣ J 10 9 8 5 4 2

Diagram: A square with 'N' at the top, 'S' at the bottom, 'W' on the left, and 'E' on the right.

When East opens 1♣, preparing to reverse into diamonds, they may be surprised to hear South exploit the vulnerability to preempt to 3♣. While South can scramble six tricks in clubs, E/W do best to bid to 4♥. This may be easier said than done in competition, though it ought to be manageable if South stays silent and allows E/W a clear shot. 3NT goes down after a spade lead, while 5♦ can be defeated on a heart ruff. Even after a club lead, there are an awful lot of handling charges in 5♦. Thus any West bringing home a game should be very happy with their matchpoint score.

South Deals
Both Vul

Hand 7

South Deals

North Vul

♠ K 9 8 6 2
♥ 6 2
♦ 4 2
♣ 10 9 7 4

♠ J 10 3
♥ 4
♦ A 7 6 5 3
♣ J 8 6 2

W N E S

♠ A Q 7 4
♥ K J 10 5
♦ J 10 9
♣ 5 3

♠ 5
♥ A Q 9 8 7 3
♦ K Q 8
♣ A K Q

One test of when to open 2♣ is whether game will be good if partner passes on a hand with three-card support and a king. Since you need a little more than the ♠K to make game today, I'd open the South cards 1♥, though I understand the other position. A 2♣ call figures to get South to an odds-against 4♥. Even with the ♥K onside, the bad trump break means that nine tricks appear to be the limit. If South opens 1♥, a few Norths will respond, many will pass. Going low lets East pass out 1♥ or balance to 1NT - which may prove surprisingly hard to defeat.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

♠ J 10
♥ Q 2
♦ J 9 5 4 2
♣ K Q 8 7

♠ A Q 9 7 5 2
♥ A 6 5
♦ A
♣ 10 9 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 8 4
♥ K 8
♦ K 10 8 6
♣ J 6 5 4

♠ 6 3
♥ J 10 9 7 4 3
♦ Q 7 3
♣ A 3

After opening 1♠, North is worth a try for game facing a raise (those aces are hugely powerful here). Whatever their methods, South will certainly bid game now, and 4♠ is the likely final contract. Curiously, while 4NT is simple to make, 4♠ on four rounds of clubs is a different kettle of fish. North must ruff the third club high, then play their remaining top trump honor. When an honor drops from West, it is clearly mathematically right (using Restricted Choice) to finesse against the missing honor, and go down in flames. Blame Alan Truscott or Terence Reese, not me.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 7 5 4 3
♥ 5
♦ J 10 8 4
♣ A J 4 2

♠ 8
♥ J 10 7 4 3 2
♦ K 9 3 2
♣ K 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A K Q J 10 6
♥ K 9 8 6
♦ 6
♣ 5 3

♠ 9 2
♥ A Q
♦ A Q 7 5
♣ Q 10 9 8 7

The vulnerability will persuade many a North to open 2♥ (or even 3♥) despite his side defense. If North does act, South will raise to game, which is likely to end the bidding. With the rounded-suit aces onside, North should roll home in 4♥. 4♠ can of course, be defeated on the heart ruff. But there is more to the story: E/W have an unlikely save at unfavorable vulnerability. 5♣ looks to need both minor suits to behave. More crucially, though N/S could now easily misjudge the hand and bid on (imagine the heart and club honors rearranged; now one or both games may make).

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

♠ 8 2
♥ 10 8 7 2
♦ 10 9 8 6 5
♣ K 2

♠ Q 7
♥ A Q J 9 5
♦ K 7 3 2
♣ 7 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9
♥ K 6 3
♦ A Q 4
♣ A J 10 9 8

♠ A K 10 6 5 4 3
♥ 4
♦ J
♣ Q 6 5 4

East has the world's most normal 4♠ opener (doesn't he?). Now if South can double to show cards they will surely do so - whether the emphasis is on takeout or penalty. If the double is optional, North may remove to 5♥, expecting it to make; if the double is penalty-oriented, the doubleton spade argues for defending. N/S do not have to get round to leading trumps early today, because North can overruff dummy, but that will not necessarily be obvious to South. Declarer looks likely to be held to eight tricks in 4♠ doubled; this is the par spot, with 5♥ no play on accurate defense.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

♠ K J 6 2
♥ 10 9 5
♦ A J 5
♣ Q 7 5

♠ —
♥ A K 2
♦ K 10 7 6 4 3 2
♣ J 10 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 9 7 4 3
♥ J 3
♦ Q 8
♣ A 8 4 3

♠ Q 10 8 5
♥ Q 8 7 6 4
♦ 9
♣ K 6 2

N/S rate to have an unopposed sequence here, though will South open the bidding nonvulnerable? Put me down firmly in the passing camp. If South stays silent, N/S figure to play a diamond partscore; if South opens, N/S can hardly avoid ending up in 3NT. North will surely drive to game, since (unless they have an invitational 3♦ jump response available) anything else but a 2♦ response would represent a huge distortion. While both 3NT and 5♦ seem to hinge on bringing in diamonds for one loser - not easy - 3NT by North may be allowed to make on an unlucky heart lead.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ Q 8 3
♥ 9 4 3
♦ K 6
♣ K 10 9 8 6

♠ A K 10
♥ K J 6 2
♦ Q 7 5 4 3
♣ 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 9 7 5
♥ A Q 10 5
♦ A 10 9 2
♣ A

♠ 6 4 2
♥ 8 7
♦ J 8
♣ Q J 7 5 4 2

Some Easts will feel duty-bound to preempt to 3♣ over North's 1♦ opener. If they do so, then they may get in the way of their opponents sufficiently to stop them from contemplating a red-suit slam. N/S do not have the high cards for slam, I admit, but they do have nice shape. Both 6♥ and 6♦ hinge on finding the ♠Q onside, plus limiting the diamond losers to one. So slam is rather worse than 50%; but it makes today. Another way for N/S to get rich is to defend a club sacrifice: 7♣ goes for 1700 against best defense.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ K 9 5
♥ 9
♦ K Q 10 9 7 6 5
♣ Q 6

♠ Q 6 2
♥ A Q 10 8 5
♦ 4 3 2
♣ 8 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 8 4 3
♥ K 3
♦ A J
♣ A K 9 7 3

♠ A J 7
♥ J 7 6 4 2
♦ 8
♣ J 10 5 2

Most Souths will get the chance to open in third seat, with the field split between those selecting a 1♣ bid as opposed to an off-shape 1NT call. In either case, West is likely to preempt to 3♦. That may end the auction if South has bid his suit, but if South has shown a good hand, North might guess to drive his side either to 3NT or 4♥. Neither option succeeds: 3NT takes six tricks – no more, no less. Meanwhile 4♥ may get out for two down. Since 3♦ ought to make nine tricks, any N/S who find a way to escape for minus 100 should score well here.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

♠ 10
♥ A Q 9 3
♦ K 8 5
♣ J 10 4 3 2

♠ A J 9 5 3
♥ J 7 4 2
♦ J 4
♣ K 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 7 2
♥ 10
♦ A Q 10 9 2
♣ A 9 6 5

♠ K 8 6 4
♥ K 8 6 5
♦ 7 6 3
♣ Q 7

As a fan of opener supporting responder's major with three trump in an unbalanced hand, I'd plan as South to open 1♦ and raise spades. Now, how good is North's hand? Optimists may drive to game, while inviting game would see North end up in 3♠. A club lead is best for the defense, but say North plays game after a heart to West's ace. If West shifts to clubs, the only (improbable) way home from here on in is to win the ♣K and ruff a heart, then lead toward the ♦J! Thus coming to 10 tricks seems virtually impossible without a little help from the defense.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 8 7 4 3
♥ A Q J 10
♦ J 2
♣ Q 9 5

♠ K Q 9
♥ 7 4 2
♦ Q 9 6 5
♣ K 10 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 10 6 5 2
♥ 9 8 6 5
♦ A 8
♣ J

♠ —
♥ K 3
♦ K 10 7 4 3
♣ A 8 7 6 4 2

It would be sensible for South to open 1♠ (not 2♠ with two aces) and North has a maximum constructive raise to 2♠. East can overcall 2NT to show the minors (some use 2NT for hearts and a minor, in which case maybe East has to overbid to 4NT?). A few Wests will end up in 5♣ on a spade lead. It seems logical to come to the ♥Q to pass the ♦J, covered all round. Declarer can then ruff a diamond in hand, cross back to the ♥K, and trump another diamond. They can next run the ♣Q, for 11 tricks. Will anyone do this? Watch this space.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

When West opens 1♣, North should overcall 1NT, after which N/S will certainly drive to 4♠, one way or another. Presumably, a transfer to spades will see North break the transfer to show fit, and let South bid game. Yes, we can all see that 12 tricks are cold – but there are some perfect-fit hands where, unless you have peeked at your partner's hand, you won't even envisage the possibility of slam till dummy comes down. After all, at his first turn the South hand cannot initially underwrite that any game will make! +480 looks to represent close to an average result.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

Where Standard American with forcing notrump is in use, West will choose to raise East's 1♠ opener by going through a forcing notrump. Whatever route is selected, though, East will surely either blast 4♠ or try for game by showing the black-suit shape, and leaving it up to West as to whether to put up or shut up. Against 4♠ (quite possibly doubled) South may well lead a low spade. Declarer has four top losers and the ♣J to negotiate; but if they lead out clubs from the top, that problem goes away. A few Easts may even get doubled prematurely in 3♠, I suppose.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

Two boards in a row with 5-0 trumps! When South opens 1♥, I hope few Norths will treat their hand as a limit raise and drive to 3♥. Instead, North should produce a simple constructive raise to 2♥, probably ending the bidding. After the lead of ♦9, declarer is likely to win in dummy to advance a low heart ... oops! 2♥ is certainly going down at least one trick now, and may do even worse. In fact, unless South can open a weak notrump, or North can make a semi-forcing 1NT response to 1♥ and play there, almost every N/S pair rate to end up in a failing spot.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

The South hand might represent an aggressive 3♣ opener for some here. If so North can either raise clubs or bid a tactical 3♥, deliberately overstating his values. Either way, East figures to bid spades, and West will certainly raise to game if necessary. North may save in 5♣ now, down 500 or 800. If South passes initially, E/W are more likely to declare 4♠ or 5♦ – making 11 tricks in either strain. A few N/S pairs may commit grand larceny and buy the hand cheaply, or they could push E/W to a failing slam. Still, +650 for E/W looks normal enough.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q 8
♥ A 8 6
♦ A J 9 6 4
♣ A 10 3

♠ A J 10 9 2
♥ 9 7 5 4 3
♦ 7 3
♣ 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 7 4
♥ K J 10
♦ Q 5
♣ J 9 8 6 5

♠ 6 5 3
♥ Q 2
♦ K 10 8 2
♣ K Q 7 2

When West opens a strong notrump, some Norths will gamble whatever bid they use to show the majors; most would consider this hand far too weak for that action vulnerable. Whatever North does, East will blast out 3NT, against which North should surely lead a spade intermediate. Declarer must win in hand, but now has no fast entry to dummy. If North has shown the majors, West may even disastrously try a heart to the ♥J at trick two. More successful is to lead a diamond to the ♦Q and ♦K, then to play on clubs. However, there are plenty of ways to misguess here.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A K J 9 7
♥ K 5
♦ Q
♣ Q 8 6 3 2

♠ Q 5
♥ A 9 6
♦ 10 7 6 3 2
♣ J 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 6 3
♥ 8 4 3
♦ A K 8 5 4
♣ A 7

♠ 10 4 2
♥ Q J 10 7 2
♦ J 9
♣ K 10 9

East may bid 1♦, but even if they do not, South is unlikely to preempt today. So West can open 1♠ and E/W ought to reach 4♠ painlessly enough. Deep Finesse tells us there are 11 tricks available – but on a low club lead, might declarer fall from grace by playing low from dummy, losing one club, two hearts and eventually a trump? Let the who is without sin cast the first stone! If West has shown his two suits, either the ♥A or a low diamond is a far more plausible lead from North, after which West will probably make the overtrick.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A 9 8
♥ J 10 3
♦ 10 9 6
♣ K 9 8 3

♠ J 5 2
♥ A K 7 6 5
♦ A J 7 3
♣ J

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 10 7
♥ 9 8 2
♦ 4 2
♣ A 10 7 4 2

♠ Q 6 4 3
♥ Q 4
♦ K Q 8 5
♣ Q 6 5

Few will deem the South cards worthy of an opening bid; thus North will get to bid 1♥ in fourth seat. Now N/S have to find their way to their best spot – not at all an easy matter. Against accurate defense, 3NT by South needs both club honors in East while 4♠ is virtually no play, 5♦ has at least three top losers, and 4♥ needs more than a little luck. All of this means that a red-suit partscore will rake in the matchpoints today. Still and all, a combined 26 HCP means that (according to Milton Work) we are legally obliged to reach game – if not make it.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q J 4
♥ A Q 7
♦ K 10 7 5
♣ K 7 5

♠ 7 6 5 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ Q 9 6
♣ A Q 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 10 9
♥ K J 9 6
♦ A J 8
♣ J 3 2

♠ A 8 3
♥ 10 8 5
♦ 4 3 2
♣ 10 9 8 4

A strong notrump sequence should see East drive to 3NT – some via Stayman, some by driving directly to 3NT without any information leakage. North can sensibly lead either major, the four-card suit being perhaps more attractive. After the lead of the ♠7 to dummy's nine, South has several options. They can duck or win, following which they can either continue spades, or shift to clubs. After a club shift at trick two, declarer will need to find the ♦Q to make the overtrick, with little to go on. Close to half a top may rest on their ability to do so.

Board 24
West Deals
None Vul

♠ A 6
♥ K 10 9 6
♦ K 9 5
♣ K 8 7 4

♠ K 9 5 4 2
♥ A J 4
♦ Q J 4
♣ Q 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q
♥ 8 3
♦ A 10 8 7 6
♣ A J 10 9 2

♠ J 10 8 7 3
♥ Q 7 5 2
♦ 3 2
♣ 6 3

When West opens 1♣ and North overcalls 1♠, East has a choice of paths. They can bid diamonds then clubs, or raise clubs via either a cuebid or a splinter raise. If South bounces to game, they may be set 500 – or worse. Against 5♣, North is endplayed at once – a spade lead makes things simple, a top diamond easier still. In each scenario West comes to at least 11 tricks if they find the ♣Q. After an initial trump lead, West needs to draw trumps, eliminate spades, then play three rounds of diamonds to throw North in. This seems an anti-percentage line after the overcall.

Board 25
North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K 10 9 3
♥ A K 7 2
♦ A
♣ K J 6 2

♠ 8 5
♥ 9 6 5 4 3
♦ 5 4 2
♣ A Q 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 6 4
♥ Q J
♦ K 10 9 8 7
♣ 8 7 4

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ 10 8
♦ Q J 6 3
♣ 10 5 3

Unless South acts in third seat, West will get to open 1♣. When East responds 1♦, West can either introduce his hearts or bid 2NT, and perhaps be raised to 3NT. 3NT struggles on a heart lead because of the diamond blockage and entry problems to dummy. If West wins the heart and plays a low spade to the 10, the way to at least eight tricks seems clear enough. But the unfavorable lie of the clubs may still sink them. That said, some will bring home a notrump partscore, while others may be allowed to make their game on soft defense, or an unlucky opening lead from South.

Board 26
East Deals
Both Vul

♠ K Q 9 7 4
♥ A 10 3
♦ A 5
♣ 10 8 7

♠ 8 3
♥ K J 4
♦ J 9 6 4 3 2
♣ K 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 6 2
♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ 10
♣ A Q 9 6 5

♠ A 10 5
♥ 9 8 5
♦ K Q 8 7
♣ J 4 2

With an eight-card fit and only 23 HCP, there is no great reason for E/W to climb to 4♠ here, unless pushed there by opponents preempting in diamonds. Nonetheless, with trumps and clubs behaving extremely well, and the heart suit unfriendly for the defense, it is hard to see N/S collecting more than three tricks against spades. In fact if the defenders get hearts going, they rate to lose their club winner. So there may well be scores of +650, along with the pairs making 10 or 11 tricks in partscore. If N/S stay silent, you'd expect West to play 2♠ ... wouldn't you?

Board 27
South Deals
None Vul

♠ A K 6
♥ 10 9 6
♦ K 9 5 3
♣ K Q 9

♠ 5 2
♥ A J 8 4
♦ Q 10 7
♣ A 6 5 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 9 8 7 3
♥ K 2
♦ A 6 4 2
♣ 4 2

♠ Q J 4
♥ Q 7 5 3
♦ J 8
♣ J 10 8 7

West has no reason to open anything but 1NT. In response, East may transfer to 2♠ planning to pass, or stretch to show an unbalanced invite via Stayman then 2♠, if that is in his armory. Either way E/W will stop in 2♠, sometimes by East, sometimes by West. Game needs 3-2 spades with ♠QJ onside, plus diamonds and hearts to behave. Today, though, any manic overbidders will walk away with +420 – so long as they play for their best chance in spades. I suspect quite a few pairs will disdain the double finesse in spades and end up with just 140 for their pains.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

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

Will there be any Norths foolhardy enough to overcall 2NT over 1♠ at unfavorable vulnerability? I fear there will. Whatever North does, East can make a simple raise of spades, and West does not seem to have enough to drive to game (though they may do so if South competes in a red suit). With eight tricks the limit for E/W in spades, the question is whether N/S can win the auction, and if so, how well they will do. Assuming the club guess, N/S can take at least nine tricks in hearts, and 10 in diamonds. But might anyone find a way home in 4♥ after soft defense?

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

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

The N/S 25-count does not mesh very well, but 3NT by North is playable – and with both spades and hearts friendly, there seem to be routes to nine tricks. In practice, North and South each have slight extras, but not perhaps enough to go beyond the two level. A spade partscore handles decently – indeed, one can imagine the defenders letting 10 tricks through without doing anything absurd. (As the cards lie, a club lead is fatal, while a diamond lead is also not sufficient – though only if South remembers to cover the ♦J with the ♦Q, to prevent an effective trump shift!)

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

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

Is the East hand a 3♥ preempt for you? Remember, you are in the confessional, so your secret is safe with me. I'm too old for that sort of malarkey, but it would be a splendid moment to step out. This is because the sky is the limit for N/S here: 6♣ is a splendid contract – and with the spade finesse working, grand slam is making in three denominations for N/S. N/S should certainly reach slam if left to their own devices, but the task would definitely become far more challenging after a 3♥ preempt is raised to 4♥ by West.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

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

Few Souths will have the methods (or gall) to open here, so North will be allowed to open 1♦. Now N/S can get together in hearts, while E/W may well find their way to at least 2♠ in a hurry. N/S's perfect fit is hard to diagnose, but it means that 4♥ is quite playable, and indeed makeable their way. Still, few will get there if left to their own devices, as opposed to being pushed there by competition from the opponents. 4♠ is an apparently cheap save for E/W; however, diamond ruffs allow the defenders to collect 500.

Board 32West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K Q 6
♥ K Q J 9
♦ A 5 4
♣ K 9 5

♠ J 4
♥ A 8 6 5 3
♦ K 9 6 3 2
♣ 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 9
♥ 10 7
♦ 10 8 7
♣ Q J 8 7 3 2

♠ 10 8 7 5 3 2
♥ 4 2
♦ Q J
♣ A 6 4

I can see no good argument for down-valuing the West cards into a strong notrump. If West opens 1♣, then whether North bids 1♥ or 2NT, you'd imagine E/W would find their way to 4♠ or even perhaps to 3NT. 3NT on a diamond lead appears to need spades 2-2 or the ♠J falling (but to come to 10 tricks one must tackle hearts before spades – scary!). 4♠ is considerably easier today, and with far fewer undertricks if the cards lie poorly. Since a fair percentage of the field may mishandle the bidding or play, making 4♠ should matchpoint satisfactorily here for E/W.

Board 33North Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 9
♥ 10 7
♦ Q 8 6 3
♣ Q J 10 8 7

♠ A J 3
♥ K Q J 3
♦ A K 2
♣ A 6 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 8 7 6 2
♥ 8 2
♦ J 10 7 4
♣ K 9

♠ K 5 4
♥ A 9 6 5 4
♦ 9 5
♣ 5 4 2

This is a splendid pairs deal, because game will surely be bid at every table that plays it, and the whole deal therefore depends on overtricks. Whether North upgrades his hand into a 2♣ opener or can show his values through a 2NT call, you'd assume 4♠ by North after a transfer sequence will be the popular spot. A result of +450 looks to be entirely normal ... but how about 3NT? That contract looks entirely straightforward for 11 tricks on any lead but a club. After a club lead, however, declarer should be held to +430, and what is probably going to be an awful pairs score.

Board 34East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 9 6
♥ A 10 7 4 3
♦ A 8
♣ A K J 10

♠ K Q 5 4 2
♥ 6 5 2
♦ 6
♣ Q 8 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 10 8 3
♥ K 9
♦ J 7 4
♣ 9 7 5

♠ 7
♥ Q J 8
♦ K Q 10 9 5 3 2
♣ 6 4

Given what a preempt at favorable vulnerability often looks like, is East supposed to open 4♦ today? Color me positive. If East goes high, West may raise to 5♦, perhaps more in hope than expectation, whereas they would surely pass a 3♦ opener. As it turns out, the winning initial action for East is to pass, so that his side can bid to 4♥. But maybe those are the broken eggs one must experience in order to make the perfect omelet? 6♦ is no worse than the heart finesse, while 6♥ is likely to need a trump break as well.

Board 35South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 9 4 3
♥ K 5
♦ K 3 2
♣ 8 5 4 3

♠ K 7 5
♥ A 10 7 6 2
♦ J 8 5
♣ A K

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 8 6 2
♥ Q 8
♦ Q 10 9 4
♣ J 2

♠ J
♥ J 9 4 3
♦ A 7 6
♣ Q 10 9 7 6

I'd expect the North cards in third seat to look more like a strong notrump than a 1♥ opener to most of our field. South has enough to at least invite game, while offering a choice of spades and no-trump. If South chooses the invitational route to 2NT, this looks like a simple reversion to 3♠ for North. Nine tricks certainly appears to be the limit of the hand, except on an unfortunate heart lead from East. Since 3NT on a club lead looks nearly hopeless, bringing home a spade partscore should be a respectable result for N/S, I presume.

Board 36West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 8 5 2
♥ K 9 8
♦ Q 9 4
♣ A 9 4

♠ J 9 3
♥ 5 3 2
♦ K 10 8 2
♣ J 7 5

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
♥ J 10 7 6 4
♦ A 7 6 3
♣ Q 8 6 3

♠ K Q 10 7 6 4
♥ A Q
♦ J 5
♣ K 10 2

Almost all roads lead to a mundane contract of 4♠ today – while no one will miss game, you can imagine a few pairs climbing to the five level in an abortive search for slam. It is very hard to see a sensible route to reach 3NT here, don't you think? If East plays 4♠ on a heart lead, the best line is to draw trumps while unblocking hearts, then cash the master heart to pitch a diamond. Next declarer leads a diamond to the ♦J. If the ♦10 were in South, North's defense to hold East to 11 tricks (by flying with the ♦K on the first round) would be truly hard to find.