

ACBL-wide Charity Pairs

Thursday, April 30, 2026 (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

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

A provocative set of deals kicks off with a demanding bidding problem for East-West. East will open 1♦, West responds 1♥ and East rebids 1♠. Then West will probably try 1NT, and East must judge. To sit for 1NT doesn't look appealing, though East does hold the ♣K. To bid 2♦ would be reasonable but not certain to produce an adequate plus score. East may be tempted to continue with 2♥, but in theory the belated support would promise a better hand since playing at a possibly weak 4-3 fit might not be best. Moreover, West might bid again and get too high. We confess we aren't sure what East should do, but the winning call is 2♥, assuming West will pass it. West should manage nine tricks for +140, while a notrump partial will yield +120 and a diamond partial +110. Little differences in such results can make a lot of difference in the matchpoint column.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

We expect most Easts to open the bidding, with decent defensive values and a pair of 10s. The length in spades should be an encouraging factor. South will double for takeout. West has enough to redouble, and North might then jump to 2♥, which South should treat as preemptive over the redouble. After two passes, West must act. With a crystal ball he could get a top by doubling 2♥ for +200, but is likely to try 2NT, passed out. After a heart opening lead, West can go after the clubs and finish with eight tricks - four clubs, two hearts and two spades - and +120 to East-West will indeed be the par result. If West instead tried 3♣, East might treat that bid as forcing, and East-West would wind up with a minus score and not many matchpoints. Wests who buy the contract for 2♣ will take eight or maybe nine tricks for a super matchpoint result.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

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

With the spades sitting well for East-West, it's a deal for them to shoot the moon. Depending on style and system, many auctions are possible. We expect a start such as 1♠-2♣ (forcing to game), 2♦-2♠, 3♦ ... Then if West cuebids the ♥A at some point, East can reasonably leap to 5NT, the good old grand slam force, asking West to bid seven with two of the top three honors in the agreed trump suit. West can't oblige, and a small slam will result. North will lead the ♥K, and declarer takes his ace and cashes two high clubs to pitch his last heart. At IMP scoring he might play super-safe for 12 tricks by taking the ♠A and passing the ♠8, but at matchpoints he will probably lead the king and a second trump and claim 13 tricks when South's queen appears. We expect +1460 at many tables and +1470 at a few. If you were North-South and were stuck with -2220, commiserations.

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

West will often open 1NT, and East will respond 2♣. South will double, and West will show the hearts. Then East will raise to 3♥, and West may go on to game because his ♣K will look well placed. 4♥ is a shaky spot but unbeatable with the cards sitting well for declarer. If North leads the ♠K, declarer can take dummy's ace and force out the ♥A. South may shift to the ♣A and ♣Q, and West wins, draws trumps and leads toward the ♠J to land the contract. He will fail if he ducks the opening lead, a play that could be right. If North's opening lead is a club, South wins and continues clubs. West wins and forces out the H*A. He wins South's trump return, draws trumps, runs the diamonds to pitch a spade from dummy and can succeed if he judges the spade position. But if he leads a spade and North does well to play low, West will fail if he puts up the ace, playing South for, say, Q-x. East-West may score well above average for +620.

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

The deal really belongs to North-South, but it's doubtful they will be able to act. East will often open 1♣ in second chair, silencing South. West will scrape up a 1♥ response and try 1NT when East rebids 1♠. All pass. North might lead a low diamond, and the best West can do is win with the ace to pass the ♠J. South takes the queen and continues diamonds, and after West takes three spade tricks, he can turn in his sword. We expect +100 to North-South to be a common result, scoring about average for both sides. North-South could take the same eight tricks on offense, scoring +120 at a low notrump partial for a top, if they could invent a way to enter the auction, but we can see none.

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

East opens 1♠, and many Souths will overcall 2♦. When West raises to 2♠, North will feel compelled to act with two aces and diamond tolerance. A responsive double, showing hearts and clubs, may be a popular action; 3♦ and 3♥ are possible. In any case, East will probably like his hand enough to jump to 4♠, and North-South will subside, passing up the possible (and paying) sacrifice at the five level. Then it remains for East to make the game. If South starts with two high diamonds, East will ruff, draw trumps and lose to the ♣A. When North shows up with that card, it's not certain that East will play him for the ♥A as well. At a few tables, South will lead or shift to a heart, sparing East the guess. We predict that East-West will score 75% of the matchpoints if they are +620.

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

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

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

A potentially volatile board. When South opens 1♥ and West overcalls 1♠, North must choose an action. We wonder how many Norths will judge their shapely hand suitable for a negative double. Depending on system or personal style, North might double or bid a quiet 2♣ or bid 3♣ (preemptive) or pass, intending to act later. Whatever North does, East will jump preemptively to 3♠ or (despite his lack of shape) even to 4♠. If North has doubled, South may introduce his diamonds, but even if South passes, North might back in with 4NT, and North-South will find their diamond fit. It's too much to expect North-South to reach their making 6♦ or lucky 6♣ in the face of an East-West barrage, but if they play at five of a minor, making six for +620, they should get a decent matchpoint result. At a few tables, the contract will be 4♠ doubled by West, down only 500.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

♠ A 9 5 3
♥ 8 3
♦ J 6 5 4
♣ 9 6 3

♠ K 10 2
♥ A Q J 10 5
♦ Q 10 9 2
♣ Q



♠ Q 8 7
♥ 9 6 4 2
♦ 7 3
♣ A J 7 2

♠ J 6 4
♥ K 7
♦ A K 8
♣ K 10 8 5 4

When North opens 1♥, East will usually double for takeout though he will wish for a fourth spade. His ♥K is worth as much as an ace. South will raise to 2♥. Not many Wests will be willing to compete with 2♠ on their loser-filled hand (and in fact East-West can make nothing), so the auction will die at the two level. East will lead the ♦K and, lacking an attractive shift, might try a low club next. North can finesse, but he should finish with nine tricks even if he takes dummy's ace. He can lose a trump finesse, win a trump return in dummy and lead a diamond to his nine, later pitching a spade from dummy on the ♦Q and losing only a spade, two diamonds and a trump. We see little room for variations (though we will be surprised if there are none) and predict +140 to North-South at most tables.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 3
♥ 8 4
♦ A K J 9 7
♣ K Q 8 5 3

♠ J 9 7 6
♥ A K
♦ Q 3 2
♣ A J 10 9



♠ 5 4
♥ Q 9 6 3 2
♦ 10 8 4
♣ 7 6 4

♠ A K Q 10 8 2
♥ J 10 7 5
♦ 6 5
♣ 2

If North opens 1NT, some Easts will pass (for the moment, at least), hoping to run the spades if North is left to play at 1NT. That approach would be better conceived if North-South were vulnerable. South will probably transfer to hearts; his hand may be worthless otherwise. West can bide his time, and when North accepts the transfer, East will climb in with 2♠. We think West is likely to pass that, seeing little chance for game, but East can take 10 tricks with best play. If South leads a heart, North will take the king and ace and, for lack of anything else, lead a trump. Then East will do well to finesse with his 10, banking on North's 1NT opening, draw all the trumps, take the ♦AK, ruff a diamond and lead a club to dummy's king. North can get only the ♣A. We think East-West will pick up most of the matchpoints for +620.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

♠ 4 2
♥ 7 5
♦ K Q 10 9 2
♣ K 6 5 2

♠ K Q 8 7 6 5
♥ A K 10 4
♦ —
♣ J 8 3



♠ J 10
♥ 8 6 3
♦ 8 7 5 3
♣ A Q 10 7

♠ A 9 3
♥ Q J 9 2
♦ A J 6 4
♣ 9 4

East has decent high-card structure, with some of his honors in combination, and will often open 1♦. Then West will support: He might jump to 3♦ as a limit raise, lift gently to 2♦ (standard) or bid 3♦ as a weak, inverted raise. We think the West hand is unsuitable for any inverted raise - which is a problem with that treatment; some responding hands are neither strong nor weak. Whatever West does, North will probably come in with 3♠. With a couple of spade honors, no wasted stuff in diamonds and useful-looking club values, South could reasonably raise to 4♠, but much depends on what he knows of North's style: an active North might not have enough for 10 tricks. As it happens, North can win five spades, two hearts and three clubs, maintaining trump control in the process, and +620 should win North-South most of the matchpoints. East-West might salvage something by saving at 5♦ for -500.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

♠ J 3
♥ 10 8 7 6
♦ 9 8 5 4
♣ 8 7 3

♠ A K Q
♥ J 9 5 3 2
♦ K
♣ K Q 10 4



♠ 8 5
♥ K
♦ A Q J 10 6 2
♣ A J 9 5

♠ 10 9 7 6 4 2
♥ A Q 4
♦ 7 3
♣ 6 2

North-South can make a slam in either minor. Their problem may be to avoid the tempting 6NT with all those high-card points. If the auction starts 1♦-1♥, South has options at his second turn. Some Souths will rebid 2♦, some will jump aggressively to 3♦, some will prefer a flexible 2♣. From there, there may be as many different auctions as tables in the game. Say South rebids 2♦, North tries 3♣ and South raises to 4♣. Then North can cuebid 4♠, and South can reasonably commit to 6♣. A few pairs may attempt 6NT and get away with it, but if South is declarer, East can offer a Lightner double, asking West to lead the first suit North bid. (The double will work well, though not as East expected.) We think North-South will score average for +920 and a bit above average for +940 when East-West fail to cash their ♥A.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

We wouldn't open the North hand, but some Norths will be in there with 1♣, enchanted with their five-card suit and two defensive tricks. East can't act, South will respond 1♦, North tries 1♥, and a 2♦ rebid by South will end the auction. West will lead the ♥J, riding to South's queen. Declarer has options but is sure to end up one trick light even if he guesses the position of the spade honors. At other tables North will pass as dealer, and East will open 1♣. If South overcalls 1♦, West can scrape up 1♠, and East will raise to 2♠, passed out. North will lead his singleton diamond, and South wins with the queen and might shift to a heart: jack, king, ace. West can handle the trumps for one loser, but to make the contract he must guess to play North for the ♣A. As on many partscore deals at matchpoints, plus scores will be useful, but the difference between being +100 and +110 may be significant.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

North's barren assortment doesn't look much like an opening bid, but North will open anyway (and in this age of ever-lighter opening bids, might open with rather less). If North opens 1♣, East can double, and whatever action South chooses, West may insist on 4♥ though his club holding may look like a liability. If instead North opens 1♦, as perhaps more players tend to do with 4-4 in the minors, East will be silenced. But when South responds 1♠, West may come in with 2♥, and East may like his hand enough to commit to game. Even if West doesn't act directly, East-West may back in when North-South stop low, but whether they will reach game then is uncertain. The par result is +650; West can pick up the trumps (perhaps by ignoring the principle of restricted choice). Then the run of the trumps will force the defenders into unpleasant discards, and West can win 11 tricks if he reads the position. East-West may score well enough for +620.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

A memorable board. East will try to get his power across by opening 2♣, though it's unlikely that a 1♦ opening would be passed out. Some Wests will respond 2♥; others would want a bit more in high cards for a positive response. If a 2♥ bid would have some artificial meaning, West will have to bid 2♦. At the vulnerability, North may interfere with 2♠, East will bid 3♦ and South will support with 3♠. Then if two passes follow, East can bid 4♣ and West will try 4♥. East will be loath to pass that, and many East-Wests will land at 5♦, making five, or even at 6♦, unfortunately down one. The winning contract, would you believe, is 5♥. A spade opening lead, forcing dummy to ruff with the ace, will promote a second trump trick for South, but as the cards lie, the defense can take no more tricks. We expect East to fail at a slam at many tables, so East-Wests who stop at a game and make it will win most of the matchpoints.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

A quiet board, perhaps. North will often open 1♣ in third position and raise a 1♠ response by South to 2♠. Then South will do well to pass: His trumps are weak – always a reason to take a conservative view – and his hand is full of losers. West can't balance; North has bid his best suit. If West leads a passive heart, South can win and cash the ♠AK with a happy result. He can proceed to force out the ♦AK, find the ♣A well placed and end with ten tricks. We think +170 to North-South will be a common result, scoring somewhere above average for them. East-West will get a good matchpoint result if West happens to lead a low diamond, and East gets to ruff a third diamond, holding North-South to +140.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

After two passes, East can open 2NT. We are wary of 2NT openings, which are space-consuming actions, and would cheerfully accept opening 1♦. West will transfer to hearts, but what he will do after East's 3♥ acceptance is unclear. (A few Easts may spare West that problem by jumping to 4♥ over the transfer.) If West bids 3NT, East will surely correct to 4♥ with his four-card support and doubleton club. Will East make 4♥? He shouldn't if South leads the ♦K. East can take the ace and cash the ♥AK. Then he loses a trick in each suit. Even if East takes the ♥A, then leads a spade to create an entry to dummy to finesse in trumps, careful defense should hold him to nine tricks. We expect a few Easts to make 4♥ somehow, perhaps when South's opening lead is a passive spade, so North-South should get a strong matchpoint result for going plus.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

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

At the vulnerability, East is likely to open 2♠, weak, in second position. South doesn't have enough to overcall at the three level, especially with the ♠QJ probably wasted for offense, so the auction will expire. South will take the ♥AK and lead a third heart. North ruffs, and the defense will get two more trump tricks plus a club for +50. North-South could actually make a partscore - 2NT by South, for example - for a better score, but they would find it hard to stop that low if South entered the auction. North-South will do well if East misjudges the play at 2♠ and winds up going -100.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

East-West can earn a fine result with good judgment in the auction. After the auction starts 1♦, 1♠-1NT, West will be confident of game, and many Wests will investigate for a spade game. They might try 2♣ - new minor forcing - and when East bids 2♠ next to show three-card support, West may go to 4♠. Alas, North will lead his singleton diamond. West will win and take three high clubs for a heart discard, but when North gets in with the ♠A, he will switch to the ♥J. Then he can get two diamond ruffs, and North-South will be +100. At other tables, West will raise East's 1NT rebid to 3NT, a winning decision on this deal. If East judges the play well (playing low if North leads the ♥J when he takes the ♠A), East will emerge with nine tricks, +400, and most of the matchpoints.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

West opens 1♠, North overcalls 2♥ and East will offer a negative double. Then West's 2♠ rebid will be passed out at many tables for a prosaic +140 to East-West. At a few tables, the auction will be more contentious. North might trade on the favorable vulnerability to bid 3♥ over 2♠, or South might boldly compete with 3♥ if West's 2♠ comes around to him. (North's two-level overcall suggests a six-card suit, and South has Q-x in hearts plus an ace.) North would be down one at 3♥ - only -100 even if East finds a double - so West will need to bid on to preserve a good matchpoint score. We doubt that the par result would occur to many players even with the full deal in view: 3NT doubled by North, down one for +100 to East-West.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

When North opens 1♦, most Easts will double despite the shaky spade support. Then if South passes, some Wests will eye the vulnerability and risk a penalty pass on their broken diamond holding, and North will have no assurance that any other contract will be better for him. As it happens, he might do well to run to 1♠. At some tables, South will act over the double, though what he hopes to gain is uncertain. (Some experts recommend "ignoring the double" in such cases and bidding as you would without it; to us, that seems like ignoring a loaded gun pointed at your head.) What will be the fate of 1♦ doubled? Since we are told that East-West can make 1♦, it seems that if North could emerge with six tricks, but we think he is likely to go down two for -500. Nobody can make much of anything at the one level - East-West could make 1NT for +90 - so even if East-West are only +100 or +200 on defense, they may win most of the matchpoints.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

How should North try to describe his hand? We think (strongly) that he should open 1♣, intending to raise a red-suit response or bid 1NT over a 1♠ response (though he would rather his spade singleton were an honor). We would not open 1♦ and bid 2♣ next; that sequence would not only distort the shape but fail to limit North's strength - a bad idea with a minimum hand. Assuming East declines to overcall with his doggy hand, South will respond 1♥, West will overcall 1♠, North will raise the hearts and East will leap to 4♠. Then North-South must judge quite well to double 4♠ - they can beat it one trick - instead of pushing on to 5♥, down one. (If North stretched to jump to 3♥ over 1♠, North-South would be more likely to go wrong.) We expect a plus score in either direction to be worth a good many matchpoints.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

North-South should reach their best contract of 3NT. A possible auction: 1♣-1♦, 2♣-2♠, 3♦-3NT. Then East will do well to lead the ♥K and ♥A, holding North to 11 tricks. East has little reason for leading a low heart to keep communication since after the strong North-South auction, West is not likely to gain the lead. We hope that +460 to North-South will be the uniform result. Nevertheless, some Norths will be favored with an opening lead that will let them take 13 tricks, and a few North-South pairs will wander into slam and go minus.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

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

This board will be taxing. We expect a contract of 3NT at every table, and the same North-South auction at many tables: 1♥-1♠, 1NT-3NT. The play, though, may be a difficult exercise. West will lead a club - a speculative diamond lead might be a spectacular success - and declarer can win with dummy's 10 and try a heart to his 9, losing to the jack. If West then shifts to a diamond, and East lets dummy's king win, South will go down if he leads a second heart. If instead West continues with a second club, South can win in dummy and try a second heart to his 10. West wins and may shift to a high diamond. East can let dummy win but will have trouble discarding effectively, and South can escape with nine tricks if he judges astutely. We predict twists and turns in the play at every table, but North-South will surely get a good matchpoint result for +600.

Board 24
West Deals
None Vul

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

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

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

When North opens 1♠ in second position, many Souths will pass, and West will reopen with a double. If North then jumps to 3♠, South may raise to 4♠, and if East-West sell out, the contract will prove to be unbeatable, making West regret that he balanced. At other tables, South will respond 1NT or dredge up a raise to 2♠, and West may enter with a passed-hand double. Then North is likely to jump to 4♠, but East, with good cards outside of spades, may undertake to save, and if East-West play at 5♥ or 5♣ doubled, they should be down only one for -100, achieving the par result. We predict that North-South will pick up most of the matchpoints if they reach 4♠ and are allowed to play there.

Board 25
North Deals
E-W Vul

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

	♠ A J 7 5 4 2
	♥ J 6 2
	♦ Q 8 4
	♣ 3

	♠ 10 9
	♥ A 8 7 5
	♦ K 9 6 3
	♣ 10 6 5

North's hand, with 17 HCP, a five-card suit and spots galore, is heavy for a 1NT opening, and some players will quite reasonably upgrade and open 1♣. When South responds 1♥, North will jump to 2NT, showing in theory a balanced 18 or 19 points. South's ace and king are enough to carry on to 3NT. If East leads a textbook low spade, dummy's 10 wins, affording North a dummy entry to pass the ♣10 with a gratifying result. He leads a second club to his eight and ducks a diamond. West takes the jack and returns a spade: king, ace. North wins the next spade, takes three diamonds, picks up the clubs and loses only one more trick for +460. In hindsight, it's easy to question the spade opening lead, but most players will choose that lead, and North can take 10 tricks with any lead except a heart.

Board 26
East Deals
Both Vul

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

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

	♠ K Q 9 2
	♥ J 9 8 6
	♦ A 5
	♣ K 7 6

If South opens 1♣ (a "prepared bid" please, not a "short club"), West will overcall 1♥. North responds 1♠ and South raises to 2♠. Then West might double, and East will advance 3♦ or more likely support with 3♥. If North-South happened to find a double, they would be +200 for a matchpoint top, but lacking a crystal ball, they will be more likely to pass or push on to 3♠. In fact, 3♠ by South is unbeatable, but with North declarer, a club opening lead can hold him to eight tricks: West takes the Q-A, puts East in with the ♥K and ruffs a club, and the defense still gets a diamond. We think North-South will need to be +110 or more to get a decent matchpoint result.

Board 27
South Deals
None Vul

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

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

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

South will open 1♥, liking his 2½ defensive tricks more than the flimsy quality of his heart suit, and North responds 1♠. When South bids 2♣ next, we think North should settle for an invitational jump to 3♥. He has too many soft values to insist on game; none of his four jacks may be significant. As the cards lie, even the three level may prove too high. If West leads a diamond, East can win and do well to return the ♦Q instead of shifting to a club up to dummy's weakness. Later, the defense can force dummy to ruff a diamond, creating a third trump trick for West and five tricks in all for the defense. We expect North-Souths who stay low and emerge with a plus score to win almost all the matchpoints.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

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

A few North-South pairs will endure an embarrassing result: South will open 1♣ after three passes. We can sympathize with that call, but the rest will be silence. Other Souths will open 2♣ and bid 2NT over North's 2♦ response, treating their hand as balanced. North may then use Stayman and locate the spade fit, and South will play at 4♠. With the trumps breaking 3-2 and the ♦ Q onside, South will take 12 tricks. No North-South will reach the lucky slam, but if North-South manage to reach 4♠ and score +680, they should get a good matchpoint result.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

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

A 1NT opening by North will be passed out. East could hold North to seven tricks with a club lead, but the actual lead should be a routine low spade. When dummy's jack holds, North can proceed to force out the ♦ A and, after a club shift by East, end with three spades, three diamonds, a heart and a club. At some tables, North-South's system will let them locate their 4-4 heart fit. Against a heart partial, East is likely to lead the ♣ J. West will win and maybe shift to a spade. North lacks the dummy entries to play the trump suit for one loser, but he should end with eight tricks, maybe when West gets endplayed to concede a ruff-and-discard. We predict that North-South will need +120 to avoid a poorish matchpoint result.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

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

We are not fond of off-shape notrump openings, but the East hand presents no good alternative. It's not quite strong enough to open 1♦ and reverse into hearts next, and breaking system to open 1♥ doesn't work either. West will raise 1NT to 3NT, and South will lead a spade: deuce, queen, ace. Declarer can then take 11 tricks in all, but the play may be a trial. East will start with the ♣ A and a second club. South will duck, and dummy wins. East can then finesse in hearts and duck a diamond. North wins and returns a spade. Declarer takes the ace, goes to the ♦ A, pitches a heart on the ♠ K, finesses in hearts again, takes the ♦ A and leads a third diamond. North wins and must concede the rest. A red-suit opening lead would always hold 3NT to just one overtrick. If you were +660 on this deal, you earned your good result.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

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

East must choose an opening bid after three passes. If he opens 1♥, his longest suit, West will correctly judge his hand as far too strong for a single raise to 2♥; West might issue a Drury response of 2♣. If instead East opens 1♠ - his hand is too minimum in high cards to open 1♥ and reverse into spades next - West will respond 1NT, and when East continues with 2♥, West might try 2NT. Then East will rebid the hearts. We have all been in worse contracts than 4♥, but with the ♠ K offside and South in possession of a trump trick, Easts who reach game will fail and can count themselves unlucky. East-West might stay out of 4♥; East can judge that his minor-suit queens are worth zilch, and West can take an identical view of his minor-suit kings. A score of +140 should win East-West most of the matchpoints.

Board 32West Deals
E-W Vul

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

Another borderline opening bid; West has a six-card suit but minimum high-card strength. We expect most Wests to open 1♠, and East to respond 2♣. Then some Souths will overcall quietly with 2♥ while others will jump to 4♥. In any case, East will commit to 4♠; if he has room, he might cuebid in hearts on the way to suggest slam. At the favorable vulnerability, South may not go quietly. If he pushes on to 5♥, East-West must judge well to go to 5♠ to collect their rightful +650 and avoid a poor matchpoint score. If South knew that North had help in diamonds, he might bid even higher, but we doubt that the par result - 6♥ doubled by South, down three for -500 - will be achieved very often.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

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

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

♠ 8 6
♥ K 8 5 4
♦ 7 5
♣ K 10 6 5 4

As the West players held on Board 32, North has a decent six-card spade suit and borderline opening values. Should he start the ball rolling? Hindsight is 20-20, but if North is willing to open 1♠, he is likely to regret it. South will muster up a 1NT response, and East will double. Then if North indiscreetly rebids 2♠, East will get out the hammer, and if West passes trustingly, North will do well to assemble six tricks for -300. If instead North passes at his second turn, East may still pass for penalty, and South will probably be -500. Some Norths will open 2♠, though many players would decline that call with two aces. They may play there doubled for -500 again. At tables where North passes as dealer, choosing to notice that his spade spots are woeful and his side-suit jacks do not encourage being declarer, West will open 1♦ after three passes. If North makes a remarkable decision to stay out, East-West will probably make a partscore, but their matchpoint score may be poor.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

♠ 7 6 5 4
♥ K 9 7
♦ 9 7 6 4
♣ K 9

East-West may be tempted to bid a slam. A natural auction will start 1♣, 1♦ -1♠, 2♥. Because West has enough ammunition to reach game, he can show his good long diamonds first, saving his major suit for later. The East hand is not quite worth a jump-shift to 2♠, which would commit his side to game opposite any kind of response. Over 2♥, East can continue with 3♣ with his promising five-card suit. When West punts with 3NT, East might like his hand enough to issue a quantitative try for slam with a raise to 4NT, and West will pass. North will lead the ♥Q, and West must struggle. If he wins the first heart, goes to dummy and lets the ♦10 ride, he will be down almost before he gets started. He can take 10 tricks by ducking the first heart and guessing well later. We think East-West will win most of the matchpoints for +430 but may do well with any plus score since many pairs will be minus.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

♠ A 3 2
♥ K Q J 5 4 3
♦ Q 7
♣ Q 8

North-South's key to a top here is to reach an elusive 3NT. When South opens 1♥, some Norths will respond 2♣. If East incautiously tosses in a 2♦ overcall, North-South will surely play at 4♥; nobody has a diamond stopper. If South rebids 2♥ freely, North will raise to 4♥, and even if South passes over 2♦, downgrading because the ♦Q will look wasted, they should get to the heart game. A few Norths will respond with a heavy 1NT, forcing, but the contract should still be 4♥. We think North-South might blast into 3NT if East doesn't bid. If South plays at 4♥, West might lead a club, ducked to the king. East will cash his high diamonds, and South will handle the rest for +420. If West happens to lead a spade, South will need to lead toward the ♣Q early, setting up a second club trick for a spade discard. We predict +420 to North-South at most tables. Any pair who reaches 3NT for +430, by luck or skill, will get an icy top.

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

♠ 9 2
♥ K Q 10 6 2
♦ K Q 8 3
♣ Q 3

The set concludes with a thunderbolt of a deal. North will open 1♣, and East might jump to 2♠ despite being vulnerable. Then if South bids 3♥, West will bid some number of spades - 4♠ maybe - but North can bid a comfortable 7♥. East has an ace and can't act over that - unless he wants to risk a Lightner double, telling West to lead a non-spade. West is unlikely to take a unilateral save, vulnerable, though the par result is indeed 7♠ doubled, -1400. We think North-South will score above average if they buy the deal at 7♥ for +2210, but a few pairs may play at 7♥ doubled and rack up +2470.