

ACBL-wide Charity Pairs Game #1

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Analysis by Barry Rigal



Barry Rigal is a player, author, commentator and syndicated columnist. Born in London in 1958, he has been a professional bridge player since moving to New York in 1994. Rigal has written many books as well as magazine and newspaper columns and has contributed to the world championship books for two decades. He has also served as the Chief Vugraph commentator for the World Bridge Federation for 10 years.

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

♠ A 9 6 5 3
♥ A 5 2
♦ Q 9 7
♣ 8 6

♠ Q 8 2
♥ 8 6
♦ J 10 4
♣ K 9 7 3 2

N
W E
S

♠ K 10 7 4
♥ K J 10
♦ K 5 2
♣ J 10 5

♠ J
♥ Q 9 7 4 3
♦ A 8 6 3
♣ A Q 4

After West overcalls 1♠ over South's third-seat 1♥ opener, North would be wise to pass, rather than double or respond 1NT. East will make a cuebid raise of spades, letting West sign off in 2♠. South may consider stretching to balance with a takeout double, but even if he does, West rates to buy the hand in 3♠ and receive a heart lead. Declarer should guess trumps by cashing the ♠A and finessing, using the Principle of Restricted Choice. He can then strip off hearts and exit in clubs. When the defense continue clubs, West is left with two eventual diamond losers.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 3
♥ 10 7 6
♦ J 7 4
♣ A 9 8 6 3 2

♠ 4
♥ A Q J 9
♦ Q 10 5 3
♣ Q 10 7 4

N
W E
S

♠ A 10 6
♥ K 8 5
♦ K 9 8 2
♣ K J 5

♠ K Q J 9 8 7 5 2
♥ 4 3 2
♦ A 6
♣ —

Once East opens a minor, South will surely bid 4♠, and (where East's methods constrained a 1♣ opener) a few Wests might sacrifice in 5♣. Spade contracts are likely to take 11 tricks — bonus marks if you spot the double-dummy defense to hold South to 10 tricks. (All right, I'll tell you: E/W play on hearts at every turn to kill the discard.) In 5♣ doubled on a top spade lead, East has five club winners, a spade, and a heart on top. Declarer should be able to scramble his way to an eighth trick, so long as he does not misguess diamonds by leading to the ♦K.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K 10 7
♥ K 9
♦ 9 7 6
♣ K 9 8 6 3

♠ Q 9 5 4
♥ 7 6 3 2
♦ 8 4 3
♣ 7 4

N
W E
S

♠ A J 6 2
♥ J 10 8
♦ A Q J 2
♣ A J

♠ 8 3
♥ A Q 5 4
♦ K 10 5
♣ Q 10 5 2

Some Souths may open here (there is no accounting for tastes) but most Easts will be allowed to bid 1♦ in fourth seat and raise West's 1NT response to 3NT. If so, a spade lead will see West win cheaply in hand. Now he can settle for a safe +600 by taking the diamond finesse. If the finesse holds, West might score a goal by playing the ♣A then ♣J next. Should declarer take the club finesse at trick two, (not silly at pairs) a low heart shift rates to beat him. If South does open 1♣, North might pick a great moment to respond 1♥, after which E/W will find it hard to reach 3NT.

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

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

When West opens 1♥, North will be torn between bidding 1♠, 3♠ or 4♠. Vulnerable, with the ranking suit, I'd go low. East ought to bid to 4♥ if he can, but might make a card-showing double of a 4♠ overcall rather than risk the five level on a balanced minimum opener. If West declares 5♥ on top spade leads, he might well draw trumps then start diamonds by playing up to the queen. Even if he runs the ♦Q initially, he can set up a discard for his club loser by later leading low to the ♦9, after North has followed to two clubs. 5♠ doubled escapes for -500, the par spot today.

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

Are you a man or a mouse? When as West at favorable vulnerability you see North open 1♦ and South bid 2♣, do you pass meekly, or leap into the stratosphere with 3♥? Left to their own devices, you'd assume N/S would reach the laydown 6NT, or 6♦ – which survives today because West has short diamonds rather than a singleton spade. Maybe a preempt from West will not get in the opponents' way – but it can hardly hurt. And because E/W ought to find their way to at least five tricks in hearts, N/S are unlikely to be able to extract a satisfactory penalty from West.

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

When East opens 1♣, most Wests are going to respond 1♥. Some Easts will rebid 1♠ now, others 1NT – I have no dog in this fight. Either way, E/W are likely to end in 1NT, but if declared by West, North rates to kick off with a top club. Declarer can win and come to the ♦K, then lead a club up, and duck North's jack. The defense can cash four spades, but the club finesse should see West collect +120. 1NT by East, on a spade lead from South, should see the defense get round to hearts before declarer can get the clubs going. That holds East to +90.

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

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

I suspect South's hand will not correspond to an opening bid for many in our field. If he passes, then East will be allowed to open in fourth seat, though the field may be split between those who choose 1♦ and those who opt for 1NT (and yes, I'm in the 1♦ group). If East prefers 1♦, South might try 2NT to show hearts and clubs, and get his side to the three level. 3♥ can be defeated on an unlikely club ruff, while 3♦ by East can be made on a club or heart lead, but defeated on the somewhat improbable lead of ♠J.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

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

West's hand seems too strong for 3♠, and inappropriate for a 4♠ call, so most will open 1♠. North has to pass, and when East responds with 1NT (be it forcing or nonforcing) West's 2♠ rebid ought to end the auction – unless South balances with an unusual 2NT. 2♠ can be set on a heart ruff – easier said than done. Meanwhile, E/W can take eight tricks in hearts or notrump. That leaves club partscores for N/S: if North is declarer, he can certainly come home in 3♣ with +110, for a splendid matchpoint score, since E/W have only one spade ruff coming.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

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

There may be tactical reasons for North's opening 1NT rather than 1♣, to try to keep E/W out. After a 1♣ opener, East will overcall 1♦, South will bid 1♥ and West must bid 1♠. North can make a support double, but East has enough to bid game (perhaps via a 4♣ splinter?). N/S have no reason to bid on over 4♠. The defenders can arrange a trump promotion against 4♠ or set up a heart – but not both. After a strong notrump from North, E/W might lose spades altogether and sell out to 3♥ for -140 – especially if East cannot show his hand-type over 1NT.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

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

When East opens a minor, South has nothing like a vulnerable overcall or takeout double. Accordingly, E/W rate to buy the hand in 1NT or a club partscore. If North does get diamonds into play after East has opened 1♣, then E/W may instead declare 3♣, for a comfortable +130. Against 1NT, the defenders must set up hearts rather than diamonds. Assuming best defense, then with clubs 2-2 East can come to eight tricks if he guesses clubs, but he might do far less well if he does not!

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

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

Despite the vulnerability encouraging action from everyone, you'd expect East to get to open 1NT. If so, there is little reason for South to act, with a balanced hand and decent defense. West will transfer to 2♠ and pass, or if feeling aggressive, he may be able to invite game, via Stayman then 2♠. 2♠ by East sees South endplayed at trick one. A trump lead figures to work best: it loses a tempo, rather than a trick. N/S might still manage to score a club trick and hold East to 110, if declarer does not work out how to set up diamonds. The ninth winner will be very valuable here.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 10 8 2
♥ A K 6 5 3
♦ 9
♣ A 4 3

♠ A 6 5
♥ 9 8 4
♦ A Q 8
♣ K J 8 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 4 3
♥ 10 7
♦ 10 5 3 2
♣ 9 6 5 2

♠ Q 9 7
♥ Q J 2
♦ K J 7 6 4
♣ Q 10

With a combined 23-count and only an eight-card fit, there is no obvious reason for E/W to reach 4♥. If East invites game, having shown his diamonds, West may not be interested. But if East goes through a forcing 1NT to invite, as many will, West's extra shape might tempt him to take a shot at game; and the favorable diamond lie means he will come very close to making it. On North's trump lead, West wins in hand and leads a diamond. North must take this, then shift to a low spade to South, for the killing club shift. If anyone finds this, please let the ACBL Bulletin know!

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ A J 6 5 2
♥ Q 10 7 4
♦ 6
♣ 10 8 6

♠ 8 7 3
♥ A 8 6 3
♦ 7 5
♣ J 9 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 10 9
♥ —
♦ K Q J 9 8 3 2
♣ K 5

♠ 4
♥ K J 9 5 2
♦ A 10 4
♣ A Q 7 3

When East opens 1♥ in second seat, South must plan his campaign here. Should he double, preempt or overcall? And in the latter case, at what level is he going to introduce his spades, if at all? You'd imagine that in many cases West will bounce to 4♥ at once – only a slight overbid. If so, declarer will have to find a way to hold his club losers to no more than two (and to remember not to draw trumps) if he is going to make his contract. A diamond sacrifice by South on a heart lead may prove more expensive than his opponent's game.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

♠ 7
♥ K Q
♦ A 9 6 3 2
♣ A Q 9 7 2

♠ A
♥ A J 8 7 6
♦ 10 7 4
♣ J 5 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 9 8 6 3 2
♥ 10 9 3
♦ K Q
♣ 8

♠ Q 10 5 4
♥ 5 4 2
♦ J 8 5
♣ K 10 6

The South cards look like a nonvulnerable 3♠ opener to me; but after this start, West has a vicious problem. Optimists will bid 4NT for the minors, or double – but without a clear escape route should East produce the predictable 4♥ response. Pessimists will pass, or bid one of their suits and hope to guess well. The bad trump break defeats even 3♠, while E/W can take nine tricks in either minor, but only if they time the play well. All told, you'd envisage that the standard traveler will have remarkably few plus scores from making contracts on it.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K Q 10
♥ A K 9 5 4
♦ 10 3
♣ J 3 2

♠ 9 8 4
♥ 6
♦ Q 9 8 7 6
♣ K 10 8 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7 3
♥ Q 10 8 7
♦ 4 2
♣ Q 9 7 4

♠ J 6 5 2
♥ J 3 2
♦ A K J 5
♣ A 5

When West opens 1♥, his side ought to have an unopposed auction. There seems no obvious reason to eschew the 5-3 fit and play 3NT here, especially when East can envisage that he may be offering his partner a ruffing value. Still, the bidding could go: 1♥-1♠; 1NT-3NT. If it does, then after a low diamond lead, declarer sets up diamonds and spades, and rakes in 10 tricks. Against 4♥, the 4-1 trump break means that a club lead might well see West misjudge the position and go down. The safety play of ♥A and low towards the ♥J will not suffice if dummy gets tapped.

Board 16West Deals
E-W Vul

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

In third seat most Easts will get to open 1♦ and hear South overcall 2♣, planning to come again in spades. West has at least a limit raise of diamonds, and now no matter what South does, you would assume E/W would reach game. Having said that, I do not know how E/W can possibly work out to play 3NT. 5♦ loses just two spade tricks and will probably matchpoint well enough. Still and all, maybe N/S might get richer from defending an unwisely high club contract by their opponents?

Board 17North Deals
None Vul

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

Another immensely challenging hand for E/W, who again need to get to 3NT, this time despite their eight-card spade fit. Even on an unopposed sequence, 1♠-2♦-2NT, West may not envisage that he wants to get to 3NT, when his partner might have only a single heart stopper. It is East's weak trumps that make 4♠ awkward, and with trumps not breaking and the club finesse losing, game looks unmakeable. And, of course, even 3♠ is challenging on a club lead. I must admit I have no idea how to solve this problem at the table, so I won't try to suggest an answer!

Board 18East Deals
N-S Vul

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

Despite the five-card major, those West cards represent a strong notrump for all but the most antediluvian of bidders. With stoppers in each suit and a weak major, it seems logical to settle for getting your hand off your chest at your first turn. Now some Norths will stay silent, others will come in to show diamonds, or even a minor-major two-suiter, if that is what they believe they have. E/W should manage to find spades, but at what level? 4♠ is a horrific contract, needing two finesses and the singleton ♠K; but today the optimists would win the lottery.

Board 19South Deals
E-W Vul

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

North's hand looks best treated as a 2NT opener. With South having honors in his short suits, he may simply bid 3NT, losing the 5-3 heart fit. That leaves East on lead; starting with a low spade looks risky at pairs, since it could so easily give up a cheap trick. A top spade lead blocks the suit (in theory) but North can't read that. He will duck the first spade and win the second, then play two rounds of hearts ending in dummy. Now what? I suspect I'd cash out then advance a top diamond, and hold myself to +430, rather than risking my game by leading up to the diamonds twice.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A K 3
♥ J 5 2
♦ K 10 7 4
♣ 10 7 4

♠ Q 6 5 2
♥ A Q 3
♦ A 8 6 2
♣ A 6

W N E S

♠ 4
♥ K 10 7 6 4
♦ J 9 3
♣ Q 8 5 2

♠ J 10 9 8 7
♥ 9 8
♦ Q 5
♣ K J 9 3

North's strong notrump will see few Easts overcall. South plans simply to transfer to 2♠ and pass the response, despite his sound intermediates. But if North breaks the transfer to 3♠, South may well award him a fourth. East has no safe lead: a heart is both unlikely and fatal. However, E/W can in theory survive anything else (I'd guess to kick off with a trump – but anyone who has seen my opening leads knows to ignore this comment). Nonetheless, imagine a trump lead and heart shift ... might North duck this smoothly? Now East may press on with hearts, which would be fatal.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K Q 4 3
♥ A 2
♦ K Q 7 5 2
♣ K Q

♠ A 9
♥ J 7 6
♦ 8 6
♣ 10 8 7 6 4 3

W N E S

♠ J 7 6 5 2
♥ 8 5 3
♦ A 9 3
♣ J 9

♠ 10 8
♥ K Q 10 9 4
♦ J 10 4
♣ A 5 2

Most seasoned pairs players will open the South hand 1♥ or 2♥; there are decent arguments for either action. In either case, West will double, following which E/W should find their way to 4♠, generally declared by East. After a top heart lead, N/S ought to be able to cash out and hold East to 420. I suppose a small number of E/W pairs might do the wrong thing in the auction, while, equally, a few defenders may let through the overtrick by failing to find a heart lead. All things considered, this feels as close to a damp squib that we have seen this set.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A 9 6 5 2
♥ 10 9
♦ Q 9 8 7 5
♣ 6

♠ 4
♥ Q J 7 6
♦ K 10 4 3 2
♣ K 5 4

W N E S

♠ Q 10 7
♥ A K 8 4 3
♦ J
♣ J 9 7 3

♠ K J 8 3
♥ 5 2
♦ A 6
♣ A Q 10 8 2

You'd expect many Easts to pass initially, after which one can imagine N/S ending up in a notrump partscore and doing very nicely, thank you. According to Deep Finesse, 3NT can be made; but few will get there. Of course some will open the East hand 1♥, forcing South into an inelegant if practical double. West will respond 1♠, and probably end up in a spade partscore, against which a trump lead may be necessary to hold West to six tricks. E/W might go plus against a diamond contract, if North overcompetes.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

♠ 7 5
♥ 5
♦ K Q J 10 5
♣ A K 5 3 2

♠ —
♥ K 8 4 3
♦ A 7 6 3 2
♣ J 9 7 6

W N E S

♠ Q 10 9 8 6 4
♥ 10 6 2
♦ 9 8 4
♣ 8

♠ A K J 3 2
♥ A Q J 9 7
♦ —
♣ Q 10 4

A 1♠ opener by South lets West come forth with a textbook 2NT overcall for the minors. North might double to show cards, and when East bids 3♦ I'm sure South will bid hearts (and maybe even jump to 4♥?). The defenders can take their club ruff against 4♥, but after that, nothing should stop South emerging with 10 tricks. A small minority of E/W pairs will wander into 800 territory in diamonds. However, in practice, +620 is likely to represent something fairly close to an average.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

♠ J 10 8 4
♥ 10
♦ A K J 3
♣ A K 9 5

♠ A 7 6 3
♥ A Q J 8 7 6 5
♦ 5
♣ 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 5 2
♥ K 9 2
♦ 10 9 6 4 2
♣ Q 10 8

♠ K Q 9
♥ 4 3
♦ Q 8 7
♣ J 7 6 4 2

West ought to open 1♦ both to simplify his rebid, and to get East to lead the right thing if his side end up on defense. When North jumps to 4♥ (as almost everyone will?) East has no reason to do anything further. West can now reopen with a textbook takeout double, thereby setting East a vicious problem. His trump holding argues for defense, but he does have five-card support for West. Today it looks right to defend (but only just), since both 5♦ and 4♥ go one down. You'd imagine any plus score will not be terrible, while any making contract should hit the jackpot.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 10 9 7 2
♥ K J 8 2
♦ K 3 2
♣ 9 3

♠ K J 5
♥ 6
♦ A Q 8 7 6 5
♣ 8 7 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q
♥ A Q 7 5 4 3
♦ J 10 9
♣ Q 4 2

♠ A 8 6 4 3
♥ 10 9
♦ 4
♣ A K J 10 5

The auction rates to start: 1♦-1♥-1♠ around the table. West can then preempt to 3♥ or if he prefers (and has the appropriate agreement) he can bid 3♦ to show a mixed raise - 6-9 HCP and 4+ trumps. One way or another, you'd expect N/S to find their way to 4♠, which looks quite high enough. Repeated heart leads might see the defenders score two trumps and a heart, unless declarer is truly inspired. Paradoxically, though, as the cards lie, it is relatively easy to make the highly unlikely slam of 6♣ by taking advantage of the minor-suit finesses.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

♠ 6 4
♥ 9 6 4 3
♦ J 9 7 4
♣ 10 6 4

♠ K Q 8 3
♥ —
♦ A 8 6 5 3
♣ Q 9 8 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 7 2
♥ A K J 8 2
♦ Q 2
♣ K J 7

♠ J 10 9 5
♥ Q 10 7 5
♦ K 10
♣ A 5 2

The vulnerability will see most Wests pass their partner's 1♥ opener, and North can double, letting East rebid 1NT to show 18-19. What then? N/S can compete in spades, though there seems no reason for them to reach game. If they declare a partscore, then on a mundane heart lead South should set out along crossruff lines. He ought to emerge with 10 tricks if he plays it carefully. Maybe N/S might get richer defending a heart partscore. East will struggle to take even seven tricks in hearts, if he misguesses clubs.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q J 6 4 3
♥ K 9 5
♦ A 10 5 3
♣ 8

♠ A 7
♥ 10
♦ K J 8
♣ A Q 10 6 5 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 10 8
♥ A J 8 7 3 2
♦ 6 2
♣ 9 7

♠ 9 5 2
♥ Q 6 4
♦ Q 9 7 4
♣ K J 3

In third seat North can open 1♣, and hear East preempt to 2♥, raised by West to 3♥, or even to 4♥. Whatever West does, North must rebid clubs, letting South raise to 5♣, if given the opportunity. E/W can set 5♣ by force, by getting spades going before declarer can develop diamonds ... but will they? Conversely, in 4♥ the heart position does not appear favorable for East, particularly if the defenders force the dummy. A declarer with remarkably good peripheral vision could still bring in hearts for no loser, though. Not that he would ... but he could.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

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

The West hand falls into the strong notrump range, but I'm told Dante has reserved the third circle of Hell for those who open 1NT with five of major and four of a minor. Assuming West opens 1♠, East will stretch only a little to make a Jacoby 2NT raise, and South now has to weigh up the unfavorable vulnerability in deciding whether to compete (or even jump?) in hearts. Whatever he does, E/W had better be careful. On a heart lead, the limit of the hand in spades by West is 10 tricks – and even that is by no means assured. In fact, some pairs may well go down in game here.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

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

When West doubles South's 1♥ opener, North will show a weak raise to 2♥. Depending on the partnership's lower threshold for that action, South may simply drive to game now, or make a long-suit try. 4♥ by South is going to be reached at most tables, and West will have to choose between leading a top club or top spade. After a top club lead and spade shift, declarer rates to win in hand and ruff a diamond, then pass the ♣Q, pitching a spade. This allows him to win the spade return and advance the ♣10, transposing into a crossruff, for at least 10 tricks.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

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

Looking at the E/W cards it is easy to see that slam has no chance and notrump (preferably played by West) is the ideal landing spot. Alas, 20-20 hindsight is a terrible – though depressingly common – thing. After East bids both his suits, West may be able to extract club tolerance or preference from East, when he will surely try for slam. 5♣ on a trump lead should see declarer win in dummy and set up the hearts for 11 tricks. Indeed, he might even be allowed to come to 12 tricks. Still, with 430 in notrump the par result, it is hard to predict how well 420 will score.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

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

Is South worth a vulnerable 3♠ bid? Your liking for that action may vary in inverse proportion to your age and experience. East might balance over either action with a jump to 6♥, or a cuebid followed by a jump to slam. Alas, though West has the ♠A, the foul club break means East will not be able to come to 12 tricks on the lead of the singleton club. (Declarer can make slam after a diamond lead, or any spade lead bar the king). After a club lead, East can come home in 5♥, either by playing a high or low club next. A low club is the safer option I believe.

Board 32West Deals
E-W Vul

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

West's hand is an ugly opening at any level, but passing doesn't look like winning bridge either, so most will opt for 1♦. That path leads almost inexorably to 3NT by East. The unfortunate lie of the diamonds means N/S can prevail (especially if North finds an aggressive lead-directing double). But say South kicks off with the unbid suit, clubs. If N/S play three rounds of that suit, declarer's safest line is to unblock hearts, then cross to a spade and put the ♥10 on the table. This line works unless the ♥Q and ♦A are badly placed, and the defense are fully on the ball.

Board 33North Deals
None Vul

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

It is hard to see any reason why N/S should not bid unopposed to 4♠, declared by South – though that may simply be a failure of imagination on my part. After the routine top heart lead from West, you'd expect declarer to take ruffs in North. He cashes North's side-suit winners, then comes to the ♦A to pitch the club loser and ruffs a club with an intermediate trump. That lets him lead a spade to the ♠10, then ruff a heart. He can eventually repeat the spade finesse and emerge with 12 tricks. Few will consider slam here, so +480 will surely represent an above-average result.

Board 34East Deals
N-S Vul

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

Unless East uses an opening 2♥ as hearts and a minor, South will get to open 1♦. If so, perhaps East will get the chance at his next turn to overcall 1NT, to show hearts and clubs. E/W should now find clubs, and if they do, the defenders need to lead trumps to hold declarer to eight tricks. Meanwhile, N/S can do surprisingly well in spades, despite the 5-1 break. This is a splendid partscore deal, with every trick vital, where I suspect +100 either way will represent a fine result.

Board 35South Deals
E-W Vul

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

While a few Souths may open 1♣, most will prefer to bid 1♠, letting West double. North's constructive raise to 2♠ figures to end the auction. West does best to cash his two spades and play a diamond. If East can work out to put up the ace and then take his ♠Q and exit in diamonds, then, whether South has unblocked in diamonds or not, the defenders should prevail. Note: West will need to win the first heart – by no means obvious! While some N/S pairs will get too high under their own steam, any pair who defeats 2♠ here in this way ought to feel proud of themselves

Board 36West Deals
Both Vul

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

I know the East hand has 20 HCP, and that makes it a 2NT opener for many, if not most. Since this lets West raise to game, after which East can wrap up at least nine tricks with the minimum of inconvenience, I suppose I shouldn't complain too loudly about the call. However, if the 2NT opener didn't work, I'm sure I'd go on about how much East's hand looks like a 1♦ bid, followed by a reverse into hearts. Today that might mean missing game, so it may seem illogical to try to make that point too loudly. Winning ugly is still winning, they say; but don't expect me to like it!