

ACBL-wide International Fund Game #3

Tuesday Afternoon – Dec. 10, 2024



Analysis by Frank Stewart

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

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K J 5
♥ K 10 7 3 2
♦ K J 10 5
♣ 4

♠ Q 8 7 6
♥ Q 4
♦ 8
♣ 9 8 6 5 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 4 3 2
♥ 6 5
♦ 7 4
♣ A K Q J

♠ 9
♥ A J 9 8
♦ A Q 9 6 3 2
♣ 10 7

Most East-Wests will arrive at 4♠. East opens 1♠, South overcalls 2♦ and West should bid instead of “headhunting”: pursuing a penalty against 2♦ when he has game possibilities to explore. If West responds 2♥, East will rebid 2♠, and West will probably raise to 4♠ despite the risk of a diamond ruff or ruffs. If South indeed leads the ♦A and a diamond, North ruffs and returns a heart to the ace. If South leads another heart, East takes the king but must then guess the ♠Q to make his game. East-West’s top spot is 3NT, where 10 tricks are available, but we see no obvious way to get there. West won’t have time to bid notrump when he has spade support to show, and East, with the clubs well stopped, has nothing in diamonds. Still, we think East-West may score above average for +420.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A 7
♥ A Q 10 9 3
♦ 8 4
♣ A Q J 3

♠ J 8 6 5
♥ —
♦ J 9 6 3 2
♣ 8 7 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 10 9 4
♥ K J 8 6
♦ K Q 10 5
♣ —

♠ 3 2
♥ 7 5 4 2
♦ A 7
♣ K 10 9 6 2

When East opens 1♠ and sees West’s 2♥ response, East should deem a raise to 4♥ inadequate. A flimsy West hand such as ♠A 7 ♥A Q 10 9 3 ♦J 4 ♣9 8 7 6 will offer a play for slam. Some Easts may jump to 4♣, a splinter bid to show a heart fit, club shortness and slam interest. (Some pairs allow splinters with voids as well as with singletons.) Others will go slow with a forcing raise to 3♥ or bid 3♦, then support hearts. West won’t need much encouragement. Over a 4♣ splinter, he could bid 5♥, asking East to go to slam with a control in diamonds, the unbid suit. East can bid 6♥. Or West could cuebid his ♠A, and East could jump to 6♥. Though 6NT makes with crystal-ball play, 6♥ is the correct contract, and we expect West to handle the annoying 4-0 trump break and win 12 tricks. East-West should score about average for +980.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 8 7 4 3
♥ J 4 3
♦ Q 10
♣ Q 9 8 5

♠ J
♥ A K 7 2
♦ 6 5 4 3
♣ A 7 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 2
♥ Q 10 9 5
♦ A J 8 2
♣ K J 10

♠ K Q 10 9 6 5
♥ 8 6
♦ K 9 7
♣ 6 2

This is a trappy deal for East-West. South has a textbook weak 2♠ opening, and North should pass smoothly. Then East will reopen with a double. That action is clearly indicated and would often be a winner, but here, West will take out to 3♣, and if North sniffs out a good penalty double, East-West will be in the soup. North can lead the ♥AK and a third heart, and South ruffs and leads the ♠K. West must lose six tricks in all. North-South will surely get a top for +500. Some Norths will let West play 3♣ undoubled (perhaps because North can’t rely on South for a disciplined weak two-bid), and some Souths won’t open 2♠ for some systemic reason. Then North will open 1♣ or 1♦ in third seat. Even if East puts his neck on the block with a 1NT overcall 1NT, South may try 2♠, passed out and making three for only +140.

Board 4
West Deals
Both Vul

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

When West opens 1♥, North is light in high cards to overall, vulnerable, and his spades are ragged, but his singleton heart suggests aggression. If North enters with 1♠, many Easts will raise to 2♥, South will bid 2♠ and West will compete to 3♥ as his six-card suit demands. East should treat West's bid as competitive, not a try for game, and pass. If North-South also pass, the defense can take the ♠AK and exit with a trump, but West can get home by leading a diamond to his 9. Some East-Wests may have a partnership agreement that lets East boost the bidding directly to the three level over North's 1♠. Then if South bids 3♠, it may not be clear to East-West that they need to double to protect their +140 at hearts. They can get a club ruff to beat 3♠ one trick but may score below average for +100.

Board 5
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

After South opens 1♦ in third chair and West bids 1♠, many auctions are possible. North may make a negative double though he would not welcome a 2♦ rebid by South. Then if East passes, South will bid 1NT, and West may try a bold 2♠ with his six-card suit. Even though North has a natural trump trick, he will lead his singleton diamond: jack, queen, king. West can crank out the ♠A and a second spade, but South takes the 10 and gives North a diamond ruff. The defense also gets the ♠K and ♥A, holding West to +140. At tables where North passes over 1♠, East may try 1NT, and West's 2♠ rebid will end the auction for the same +140. East-West can get a top if after 1♦-1♠-Dbl-Pass, 1NT-Pass-Pass, East respects his partner's overcall and risks a penalty double. After a spade opening lead, East-West may be +500.

Board 6
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

This deal is hard to predict because personal style and judgment will matter. After two passes, we would be nervous about opening the junky West hand when vulnerable; a possible result would be getting too high and suffering a 200-point penalty on a partscore deal. Still, many Wests will open 1♣, and North will double. East has options, and Pass, 1♥, 1NT and 2♣ would receive votes from a panel of experts. We think East-West may come to rest at a makeable 2♣, and then North will refuse to let his opponents play at the two level and back in with 2♦. If the auction ends there, North should take seven tricks, and -50 will be better for him than -90. North-South could make 1NT and, with double-dummy play, 2♥ or 2♠. As in many partscore deals, any pair with a plus score will win some matchpoints.

Board 7
South Deals
Both Vul

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

If South opens 1NT, West must not double despite his 16 points; he has no assurance of beating 3NT, much less 1NT. North will respond 2♥ as a transfer, and when South accepts with 2♠, West may judge correctly that North is about to pass and "pre-balance" with a double. Then East-West may bid to 3♦ or 3♥, but North should compete to 3♠, and West will have to be satisfied to have pushed his opponents to the three level. At 3♠, South should be +140. East-West can get only four tricks, but if West leads the ♣Q, South must take care to duck, else West can get a club ruff. At a few tables, East-West will compete to 4♦. If South doubles to protect his likely plus at 3♠, the result should be down one even if North doesn't lead a heart to get a third-round ruff, and North-South will get a top for +200.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

♠ J 7 2
♥ 9 8 7 3
♦ Q J 7 5
♣ A 9

♠ 5
♥ 10 5
♦ A 8 3 2
♣ Q 10 7 6 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 4
♥ A Q J 6 4 2
♦ 6 4
♣ K J 2

♠ K Q 10 9 8 6 3
♥ K
♦ K 10 9
♣ 8 3

When East opens 1♥, South will often settle for 1♠. West will raise to 2♥, East may try for game with 3♥ or 3♣, and West may well accept. If South leads the ♠K against 4♥, East must produce an inspired guess to drop the singleton ♥K to make the game, and he might do just that if he trusts South to have a decent hand to overcall. (East could make an even more inspired decision to bid 2NT at his second turn. If East-West managed to reach 3NT, South would lead the ♠K, and East would make his contract even if he lost a heart.) The result may be quite different if South jumps to 3♠ over 1♥. West doesn't have enough values to bid 4♥, and if East also passes conservatively, South should go peacefully down one. Since some East-Wests will fail at 4♥, East-West may win some matchpoints for +50.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 9
♥ K J 10 7 6 4
♦ A K 5
♣ 8 5

♠ J 10 8 6
♥ A 5
♦ J 10 8 2
♣ Q 10 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 7 5 4
♥ 8
♦ 7 4 3
♣ K J 9 6 4

♠ A 3 2
♥ Q 9 3 2
♦ Q 9 6
♣ A 3 2

After two passes, South may open 1♣, not vulnerable, despite holding only a barren assortment of high cards. West overcalls 1♥, North makes a negative double and South bids 1NT. If all pass, South's grungy opening bid may come home to roost since if West leads a high heart (or leads a high diamond and shifts to a high heart), East-West figure to beat the contract two tricks for +100 - or +300 if they find a double. Despite the vulnerability, some Wests will risk 2♥ over South's 1NT, passed out. North will lead the ♠J, ducked to the queen, and West can try a club to dummy's jack. South takes the ace and leads a diamond. From there, West has routes to eight tricks, including letting dummy's ♥8 ride, but many Wests will go down one. We think East-West will need +110 to do well in the matchpoint column.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 10 9
♥ —
♦ Q 10 8 7
♣ K Q J 9 6 3

♠ K J 7 6 4
♥ A K 7 2
♦ J 9 3
♣ 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 3 2
♥ Q 8 5 4 3
♦ 6 5
♣ A 8 7 4

♠ Q 8 5
♥ J 10 9 6
♦ A K 4 2
♣ 5 2

If West opens 1♣, North can double to get all three unbid suits into the game or overcall 1♠ on his five-card suit. Expert opinion would differ, and the type of scoring and suit quality might be factors. We favor the overcall to avoid missing a possible 5-3 spade fit. If North doubles here, North-South may miss spades. If he overcalls, East may make a negative double, and South can cuebid 2♣ to show a spade fit and a maximum pass. West will compete with 3♣, and if North goes to 3♠ due to his singleton club, East might push on to 4♣. North-South had better not double that since West would be +710. North-Souths who play at 3♠ should make it unless East's opening lead is a heart: West scores two ruffs plus his ♠A, and the defense also gets a club and a diamond. North-South should score well for +140.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

♠ 6 2
♥ 9 8 5 3
♦ J 8 3
♣ A 10 5 3

♠ K Q 5
♥ A K Q
♦ Q 10 2
♣ K 8 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 8 7 4
♥ 7 4 2
♦ 9 7 6
♣ Q 7 6

♠ J 10 9 3
♥ J 10 6
♦ A K 5 4
♣ J 9

North-South will reach 3NT on a routine point-count auction. North will open 1♣ and jump to 2NT over South's response, and South has an easy raise. If East happened to lead a club, he would hold North to one overtrick and win almost all the matchpoints, but East more likely will lead his fourth-highest spade or a passive diamond or heart. North can win a spade lead and return the suit. If East wins the third spade and exits with a diamond, North can run the diamonds, cash dummy's good spade and courageously lead a club to his king. He risks disaster but will finish with 11 tricks, and North-South should get a top for +460.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

When North opens 1♠, some Easts will eye the vulnerability and preempt with 3♦. South would stretch his values to support the spades at the three level, but his actual hand is way too weak; his ♦J may be a wasted card for offense. But after West passes, North's 17 points are too many to go quietly; he may reopen with a double, and then South's 3♠ will be passed out. If East leads the ♣9, West wins and returns a club, ruffed. The defense also gets the top trumps, but North will make his contract. Easts who happen to buy the deal at diamonds should be held to eight tricks. When South leads a spade, East takes the A-K, ruffs a spade in dummy and leads a trump. North wins, and a fourth spade promotes a trump trick for South's jack. North-South should win 75% of the matchpoints for +140; some pairs will fail at 4♠.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

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

6NT is cold and would be icy if North had only five hearts. Can North-South reach slam? North will open 1♥, and if in North-South's style a 2♣ response is game-forcing, South can bid 2♣ and raise North's 2♥ rebid to 3♥. Then North can cuebid 3♠, and that should be enough impetus for South to drive to slam (or to issue an invitation North should accept). Other pairs may reach slam if South jumps to 3NT over 2♥, a sequence that suggests about 16 points. Still, we have seen 2/1 run aground on deals such as this when the auction is 1♥-2♣, 2♥-2NT, 3NT-Pass, neither player having shown extra strength. An old-fashioned "Standard" auction might succeed: South responds 3NT to 1♥, and North moves on. For a good matchpoint result, North-South must appreciate their trick-taking power and bid slam at notrump.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

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

North-South have 11 HCP opposite 11 and will struggle to reach game. Many Souths will open 1♣, though they would rather their long suit were a major. If West overcalls 1♦, North can try 1♠, and when South rebids 2♣, West might double for takeout. Then North is worth a jump to 3♠ to invite game, but South will reject. At tables where South declines to open, West may start with an off-shape 1NT; he might face rebid problems after opening 1♦. If North passes, East can avoid a huge penalty with a transfer to hearts, and then North will likely bid 2♠ and play there. North-Souths who get to 4♠ will make it. If East leads a heart, North wins, leads a trump to his king and tries leading the ♦K. If West ducks, North goes to the ♣A to lead a second trump. He will score a fortunate +420 for a fine result.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

After 1♥-2♣ (game-forcing), 2♥, North may go slow with 2NT. If South raises to 3NT, North can try for a slam with 4NT or risk bidding 6NT himself. We admit to being a bidding dinosaur, but we think North's first call should be 3♣. (Strong jump-shifts can facilitate slam bidding.) Then if South bids 3NT, North can raise to 4NT. If North plays at 6NT, East will lead the ♠J. North could take 13 tricks if he knew about the club situation. As it is, he will duck the lead to West's ♠K and wind up finessing with the ♣J later for +1440. A few pairs may reach 6♥, where 13 tricks are possible but unlikely. Other pairs may reach 6♣, and East will lead the ♠J. North can succeed by grabbing the ♠A, finessing with the ♣J, cashing the ♣AK and starting the hearts, but North-South may score below average for +1370.

Board 16West Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

It's a slam-fest! This time East-West are on for 7NT, and we think they should get there without difficulty. If West opens 1♣, East responds 1♠ and West "reverses" to 2♥, promising substantial extra strength. (In some styles, opener's reverse is forcing to game.) Then East can take control with Blackwood, and when West shows two aces and then two kings, East can reasonably bid 7♥. Because West has his running clubs as a source of tricks, he should correct to 7NT. (If East-West employ key card Blackwood, West's response will show three key cards, the ♥K included, and East won't need to worry about whether the partnership might lack that card.) Some Wests may open 2♣, and then East will probably want to bid 8NT. We predict that East-West will score only a bit above average for +2220.

Board 17North Deals
None Vul

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

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

South and West will have visions of making a high-level contract, but the lie of the cards is foul. If South opens 1♥, West has options but will often start with a double on his potent hand. North raises to 2♥, and South jumps to 4♥. Then if West were to try 4NT for the minors, East-West would pay a four-figure penalty. More likely, West will double again, and East may take out to 4♠. In theory, nobody can make much of anything, but complex play is possible. South should be down one at 4♥ after West leads the ♠K and shifts to clubs, but if South takes the ♣A and lets the ♦10 ride to the queen, ruffs the club return and leads the ♦K, he can take 10 tricks if West's ace covers. East should be down two at 4♠ but might manage nine tricks. The best results will go to pairs who discern a successful penalty double.

Board 18East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

East-West may start 1♠, 2♥-2♠, 3♦-3NT, Pass. If South leads the ♣J, East can win in dummy, unblock the ♠A, come to his hand and lead the ♠K and a third spade. He has 11 tricks: five spades, a heart, two diamonds, three clubs. At other tables, East may rebid 3♠ over 3♦. (His 2♠ may not have promised a six-card suit, though some pairs do have that agreement.) Then West may raise to 4♠. If South leads the ♣J, East has enough dummy entries to set up and cash the fifth heart, making six. A trump lead won't hold 4♠ to five: East can play along the same lines and squeeze North in hearts and diamonds. It looks as if South could hold 3NT to four with a heart opening lead, but East can duck twice and eventually squeeze North in diamonds and spades. East-West may need +480 for a good matchpoint result.

Board 19South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

Some Norths will pass South's 1♠. A few Easts will balance with a double, South can redouble and North-South are likely to play at a spade partial. Other Norths will dredge up a response to 1♠. A 2♠ raise would be psychologically too encouraging with North's junky hand, but he might try 1NT. Then South will jump to 3♣, North will go to 3♠ and South may bid 3NT (not expecting three-card spade support). East-West can hold 3NT to nine tricks if East leads a club or the ♥A, but North will often make an overtrick. Souths at 4♠ will go down only if West leads a diamond, ducked by East. Then South must draw trumps to avoid a diamond ruff and four losers, but careful defense can restrict him to nine winners. North-South should score well for +420. Tops will go to pairs who nail overactive East-West for +500 at 2♥ doubled.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ K Q J 8 5
♥ 10 4
♦ K 9
♣ 7 6 5 3

♠ 3
♥ A J 6 2
♦ 10 8 4 2
♣ K J 8 2



♠ A 10 7 6 2
♥ Q 9 7 3
♦ 6 5
♣ A 4

♠ 9 4
♥ K 8 5
♦ A Q J 7 3
♣ Q 10 9

When East opens 1♦, many Souths will be deterred by the vulnerability from overcalling. West responds 1♠, and East rebids 1NT. If West passes, South will lead a heart, and North takes the ace and returns the jack. East wins and leads a spade to dummy's king but can then only cash his diamonds for seven tricks, +90. The defense has three hearts, the ♠A and the ♣AK. At other tables, West will correct 1NT to 2♠, making South happy he didn't overcall. Despite South's spade holding, down only one is likely, +100 to North-South. At tables where South risks a 1♠ overcall, West will bide his time. North will do well to advance with 1NT, and if South tries 2♥ next, North-South will survive. If West leads the ♠K instead of a trump or the ♦K, South can with astute play win nine tricks for +140 and a top.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ Q 6
♥ A 7 4
♦ A K J 10
♣ Q J 7 2

♠ 9 2
♥ K 3
♦ 8 7 3
♣ K 10 9 8 4 3



♠ A 8 4
♥ J 8 5 2
♦ 6 5 2
♣ A 6 5

♠ K J 10 7 5 3
♥ Q 10 9 6
♦ Q 9 4
♣ —

East should avoid a second-seat weak 2♠ opening (yes, like the plague) with four cards in the other major, tolerance for a diamond contract as well, and a side-suit void that West could never visualize. If West is left to open 1NT, East can try Stayman, as his side might do better at a 4-4 heart fit than at a 6-2 spade fit. When West can't admit to a four-card major, East will settle for 4♠. Other pairs may reach 4♠ played by West after a transfer sequence. Against 4♠ by East, South will probably lead a passive red suit, but declarer will lose two tricks on any lead. We predict that East-West will score only slightly above average for +450; a couple of pairs will wander into 3NT, down against best defense.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 4 2
♥ A K J 7
♦ K 8 6 3
♣ A Q 5

♠ K J 9 6
♥ 10 8 6 5
♦ Q 7 2
♣ 9 8



♠ Q 5 3
♥ 9 4 2
♦ A 5
♣ J 10 7 6 2

♠ A 10 8 7
♥ Q 3
♦ J 10 9 4
♣ K 4 3

West will play at 3NT, usually after a 1NT opening and Stayman. If North knows from the bidding that East has four spades, North may lead a heart or club. West wins in dummy and passes the ♦J to North's queen. Then if North exits passively, West can force out the ♦A, winning two diamonds, three clubs, four hearts and the ♠A. To avoid -630, North must find an inspired spade shift when in with the ♦Q. If North's opening lead was a heart, he might place West with the ♥AK, ♦K or ♦A, and ♣A, but West could hold the ♠Q instead of the ♣Q. If North's lead was a club (with South signalling with the deuce), North might give West the ♠AQ, a high diamond and some heart honors, but a spade shift will still be unclear. Norths who locate the best defense, for whatever reason, and are only -600 should score well above average.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 10 8 7 6 3
♥ Q 8 5 4 2
♦ 7
♣ 3

♠ 4
♥ A K 9 6
♦ A Q 9 5 2
♣ 10 8 6



♠ J 9
♥ —
♦ J 8 6 3
♣ A K Q J 7 5 4

♠ K Q 5 2
♥ J 10 7 3
♦ K 10 4
♣ 9 2

If South opened a "Gambling 3NT," promising a solid seven-card minor and no outside strength, North could jump to 5♣. But most Souths will open 1♣, and West may try 2♣, Michaels, showing both majors but usually a hand with playing strength but limited defense. North can double, and East might jump to 3♠. If South rebids 4♣ freely, North might bid 6♣; indeed, slam would be cold if South's ♦J were the ♦K. If North-South stop at 5♣, West will lead the ♦7, but South can diagnose the lead, put up the ♦A and draw trumps for +400. Some East-Wests will compete vigorously and play at 4♠ doubled. With West declarer, North-South can pick up an easy +800: ♥KA, heart ruff, ♦A, heart ruff, club cashed. But if East declares, only double-dummy defense will produce down three, and East-West will score well for -500.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

♠ A Q 6 3
♥ Q 9
♦ J 10 9 3
♣ A 8 7

♠ 9
♥ A 7 6 2
♦ A 6 4
♣ Q 10 6 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 5 4 2
♥ K 4
♦ K Q 8 7
♣ K 5

♠ 10 8 7
♥ J 10 8 5 3
♦ 5 2
♣ J 9 2

This board should be tame. With natural bidding methods, we expect 1♦-1♠, 2♠-4♠. South will lead the ♥J, and whether North takes his ace immediately or ducks, the defense will inevitably get their red aces. We expect +450 to East-West to be a dead-average result.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ —
♥ 10 9 5 4
♦ A K Q 10 5 4
♣ Q J 8

♠ A J 8 7
♥ Q 6
♦ 8 7 6
♣ K 6 5 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 6 3
♥ A K J 8 3 2
♦ 2
♣ 10 9 7 4

♠ K Q 10 9 5 4 2
♥ 7
♦ J 9 3
♣ A 3

Unlike the previous board 24, this one may be anything but tame. East can reasonably open with a weak 2♥ despite the threatening vulnerability, and when South overcalls 2♠, West has tactical options. If he settles for a jump to 4♥, North will probably bid 4♠ as a make-or-save action, and after two passes, West will take the push to 5♥. That action is wrong in theory: South could be down one at 4♠, losing three diamonds and a heart, while 5♥ will go down one if South leads the ♣A and obtains a third-round club ruff. We think West might instead jump straight to 5♥, and force North-South to take a position at the five level. If all pass, South will probably lead the ♠K, and East will take 13 tricks for +710. In fact, we won't be surprised if some East plays at 6♥ doubled, making seven for a gaudy +1860.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

♠ K J 10
♥ Q 8
♦ A 6
♣ A K Q 10 9 2

♠ Q 4 3
♥ K 10 9 7 3
♦ K 10
♣ 8 7 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 5 2
♥ J 6 5 4 2
♦ J 9 8 7 3
♣ —

♠ A 8 7 6
♥ A
♦ Q 5 4 2
♣ J 5 4 3

East-West may reach some unhappy contracts. If West opens 1♣, East faces an agonizing decision. If he passes, West may play at a ludicrous contract, down several; if instead East bids, he may see West bid to the skies for an even worse result. East's winning action here is pass. South is likely to pass also - he has no good balancing call - and West will struggle in with seven tricks with his 19 HCP and chunky suit. Easts who judge to respond, say with 1♥, may see West jam it into 3NT next. North may lead a spade, East will apologize when he tables the dummy and West will probably go down two. Some Wests will open an off-shape 2NT. That undisciplined action may come to grief when East transfers to hearts; East-West may be -200 again. East-Wests who are a modest +70 at 1♣ may get a matchpoint top.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

♠ 9 8 2
♥ A 10 6 2
♦ K 10 5
♣ Q 5 4

♠ K Q J 6 4
♥ 9 8 7 5
♦ J 2
♣ J 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 10 3
♥ Q 3
♦ A Q 4 3
♣ A K 3 2

♠ 7 5
♥ K J 4
♦ 9 8 7 6
♣ 10 9 8 7

We prefer to open 1♣ with East's shape, but expert views vary, and judgment is allowed. After West's 1♥ response, East will jump to 2NT, showing about 19 points, balanced, and West will raise to 3NT. Say East has opened 1♦, and South leads the ♣10. East can win in dummy and try a heart to his queen. South wins and leads another club, and East can proceed to finesse with dummy's ♥10 and finish with four diamonds, three clubs, two hearts and a spade. We expect +430 to East-West to be a common result, but at a few tables, North will toss in a featherweight 1♠ overcall, and South will lead a spade against 3NT. (North might concede only -300 at 1♠ doubled.) Then East may hold himself to nine tricks. Moreover, some North-Souths may conspire to let East win 11 tricks, +460, by squeezing North in the majors.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

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

When North opens 1♠, some Souths will pass. West may reopen with 2♥, and North's 2♠ rebid will end the auction. West's brave balancing bid could produce a plus score since good defense will beat 2♠. East leads the ♥A and a heart, and West wins and leads his ♥3, "suit preference" to show club strength. If North ruffs high, he loses two trumps and the minor-suit aces; if he ruffs low, East overruffs, cashes his ♦A and leads a club to West's ace, and a fourth heart promotes a second trump trick for East. At tables where South scrapes up a 1NT response to 1♠, North could jump to 3♠, but since his pattern is semibalanced, a raise to 2NT will appeal to many players. Then South can sign off at 3♦. East-West could beat 3♦ with a red-suit lead, but some Souths may score +110 and pick up most of the matchpoints.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

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

North-South have ample strength - 32 HCP - and plenty of trick-taking power but are off an ace. In such cases, the best slam is often 6NT. When North opens 1♣, we think South should flash an immediate slam signal with a strong jump-shift to 2♦. When North bids 2♥ next, South continues with 3♣, suggesting that his slam interest was based on club support. North cuebids 3♦, and South can take control with Blackwood and place the contract at 6NT when North has only one ace. (Since North has never bid notrump, South might place him with no ♠K, hence strength in hearts.) Pairs who are saddled with weak jump-shifts should still reach slam. A notrump slam played by South is cold, and North-South should get a good result for +1440. Pairs who languish at six of a minor may score poorly.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

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

With neither side vulnerable, some Easts will open a light weak 2♦. Then South must not jump to 3♠; there are no "preempts over preempts," and any number of spades would suggest high-card values. (If South did jump to 3♠, he could be nailed for -800.) If South passes, West will respond 2♥; most pairs treat a new-suit response to a weak two-bid as forcing. Even if East raises only to 3♥ - a 4♥ bid would be defensible since his hand is terrific in support of hearts - West will bid 4♥. Though some Wests will take only 10 tricks, 11 are possible against any defense (and also at notrump; if East passes as dealer and South opens 3♠, West may bid 3NT and play there). In some play variations, North will be squeezed in the minors. We expect that East-West must be +450 to avoid a poor matchpoint result.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

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

At matchpoint duplicate, most pairs use a range of 15-17 HCP for a 1NT opening. Duplicate players open many balanced 12-point hands - to avoid missing out on any makeable contract - and a 1NT rebid that might show 12 to 15 points (a four-point range) would be unwieldy and would impede accuracy. West's 1NT opening will be passed out. North will lead the ♠2: 4, jack, king. 1NT can be a tough contract to play and defend, and West will consider various lines of play. Most lines seem to lead to down one, and we expect North-South to be +50 at many tables. At some point, however, North may need to find a good shift to hearts, else West may set up a seventh trick one way or another and be +90.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

Most Wests will open 1♥, though in first seat at unfavorable vulnerability, we would accept a solid weak 2♥ opening. If East responds 1NT, South can come in with 2♠ or maybe a 2♥ cuebid to show length in spades and a minor; if East responds 2♦, planning to rebid 3♦, South can double. In any case, North should like his good spades and ♣Q and commit to 4♠. If North-South reach 4♠, they will take 10 tricks for sure and will make an overtrick if South is declarer and West leads a trump or an unfortunate ♥A. No East-West will attempt a 5♦ sacrifice at the vulnerability, but North-South would have to defend well to be +500 against that contract. (The ♦A lead and a club shift, for instance, would work but not the lead of the ♠A.) North-South should score a bundle for +450.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

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

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

Every North-South should reach 4♠. When North opens 1♣, South may respond 1♦ and bid 1♠ when North rebids 1♥. Then North will raise to 3♠ or 4♠. Other Souths will respond 1♠, and North will raise to 3♠ or jump to 4♦ to show spade support and diamond shortness. If West leads a club against 4♠, South can win 12 tricks: ♣J, ♣A, ♥A, club ruff, ♥K, heart ruff, diamond ruff, heart. If East ruffs, South overruffs with the queen, takes the A-K of trumps and loses only one trump to East's jack. If instead East discards on the fourth heart, South ruffs and scores five more tricks on a crossruff. South may make six if West leads a high diamond. But if West's opening lead is a trump or heart, South can make only one overtrick. We predict a score of 450 will be average.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

♠ 10 7		
♥ J 9 7		
♦ 10 7 3		
♣ 10 9 8 3 2		

East will open 2♣ on his eye-popping hand. If West responds 2♥, natural and positive, East rebids 3♦, West tries 3♥, and East bids 4♣. Then if West goes to 4♦, East can wheel out Blackwood, find West with an ace and a king, and count 12 tricks. Since West should have the decency to provide one more - he may have the ♥Q or ♣J or three cards in clubs - East can hardly not try 7NT. (Complications may arise if a 2♥ response by West would be an artificial second negative, and problems may set in if North ignores the vulnerability and interferes with a spade bid.) East-West should get a 75% board for +1520. A few pairs will suffer the misfortune of playing at 7♦, doubled by North for an unusual lead. South can find a club lead for +100.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

If West opens 1♣, North may take advantage of the vulnerability and leap to 4♦. East might bid 3NT if the rules allowed, but as it is, he will double - probably for penalty; many pairs would treat a double as negative only though the three level. If West passes, the defense can win three spades, a heart and two trumps for down three. Still, +500 may not be a satisfactory result for East-West since they can take vast numbers of tricks at hearts or notrump. The only lead to hold East to 11 tricks at notrump is a club, removing a vital entry to his hand. If East played at 4♥, South could hold him to +620 by leading the ♣A and a club for North to ruff. (Even with a diamond lead, East would have to start the trumps by leading the ten to make an overtrick.) We believe East-West will need +660 for a strong matchpoint result.

West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

The auction should be prosaic: West opens 1♣, East responds 1♠, West rebids 1NT and all pass. North will lead the ♥5. If South cashes the K-A and leads a third heart, West takes the queen and leads a spade toward dummy's honors. The defense will get the ♠AK and another heart, and East-West will be +120. West can do no better by guessing the ♦Q - he will still have only eight tricks - but South might produce a sixth trick for the defense. He can tell from the heart spots that West has three hearts, so South can (and should) win the first heart with the ace and return the three to give West a mighty tough guess. North-South should get an excellent matchpoint result if they hold West to seven tricks.