

ACBL-wide International Fund Game #2

Wednesday Evening – Sept. 27, 2023



American Contract
Bridge League



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

♠ A Q 6
♥ 7 5 3 2
♦ J 9
♣ J 10 9 7

♠ J 10 3
♥ A 8 4
♦ 10 7 5 3
♣ A 8 6



♠ K 9 5 2
♥ J 9 6
♦ A K 8
♣ K 5 3

♠ 8 7 4
♥ K Q 10
♦ Q 6 4 2
♣ Q 4 2

The set gets off to a mundane start. If South opens 1♣ in third seat, North will respond 1NT and play there. East will lead the ♥K, a low diamond or a passive high spade, and North will have time for eight tricks – perhaps winning two in each suit. The only opening lead to hold him to seven tricks is a club – quite difficult to find after South bid the suit. We expect most Norths to be +120, scoring a little above average. At a few tables, North-South may be treating a 1NT opening bid as 12 to 14 points or 14 to 16 points, and South will declare at 1NT. Then West will lead the ♣J, probably holding South to +90 and delivering most of the matchpoints to East-West.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 9 5 4
♥ J 10 9 6 2
♦ J 10 8 5
♣ 10

♠ A K Q J 8 2
♥ K 4
♦ Q 7
♣ Q J 7



♠ 7 3
♥ Q 7
♦ K 9 6 3 2
♣ K 8 4 2

♠ 10 6
♥ A 8 5 3
♦ A 4
♣ A 9 6 5 3

Few players are willing to pass a hand with three aces, and East will often open 1♣. If West passes, North's hand is a bit too heavy to reopen with 2♠ – “intermediate” in the passout seat, suggesting a strong six-card suit and 15 or so points. If North starts with a double, some Souths will advance 1♦. Then North can jump to 2♠, and if South tries 2NT, North might bid 4♠, reaching the best theoretical contract. There are plenty of pitfalls: for instance, some Souths might bid 1NT over North's double, and then North might reasonably raise to 3NT – down two when West's opening lead is the ♥J. At some tables, West may panic and respond to 1♣, and then North-South may stop below game. Although 4♠ looks good, the defense can beat it two tricks with club ruffs. But if East leads a trump, North will make the game. North-South should get a top for +620 but may score above average if they get a plus score.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 6 3
♥ K 8 5
♦ 9 6 5
♣ Q 10 7 6 2

♠ Q 7
♥ 10 4 3
♦ A K 10 8 7 4
♣ 8 4



♠ A K 10 5 4 2
♥ Q J 7 2
♦ 2
♣ A 9

♠ J 9 8
♥ A 9 6
♦ Q J 3
♣ K J 5 3

This deal may not prove to be as easy as it looks. North-South can take 11 tricks at spades without difficulty, but reaching game may be taxing. Suppose North-South use a 2/1 approach, South opens 1♠ and North responds 1NT, forcing. If South rebids 2♠, North has adequate support and a possible source of tricks and can raise to 3♠, and South should bid 4♠. If, however, South rebids 2♥, North will return to 2♠, and whether South will move over that is unclear. If instead North can respond 2♦, North-South are likely to roll into game on momentum. A few Norths may respond 3♦, invitational, to 1♠. We strongly dislike that treatment; too often, opener will have no idea whether he should continue, and that is the case here. We predict that North-South pairs who handle the deal accurately and score up +450 will win about 75% of the matchpoints.

Board 4West Deals
Both Vul

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

This may be a stressful deal for North-South, with twists and turns possible in the play. If North opens with a “prepared” 1♣ bid (please, not a “short club”), South will respond 1♠, and North’s 1NT rebid will end the auction. East will be hesitant to lead a club when North’s bid has suggested club length; East may try a heart. North takes the queen and might lead a diamond to dummy and a spade back to his jack, losing to the dry king. Then if East leads another heart, North will take only six tricks. A club opening lead looks good for the defense, but assuming North plays the same way, East will have trouble exiting after he runs the clubs, and North will probably end with seven tricks. North-South should score well for +90, but woe to any East who enters the auction, especially with a (shudder) 1NT overcall. Then East-West will take a big minus and will be stuck with a matchpoint zero.

Board 5North Deals
N-S Vul

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

North opens 1♠, and after two passes, West will reopen with a double. When East responds 2♥, West should act boldly since he would have balanced with a much weaker hand. We think he should raise to 4♥, counting on East for a few points since neither North nor South has shown much sign of life. If West raised only to 3♥, it isn’t clear that East would go on to game. After the defense takes two spades, East can claim the rest. We hope for +450 at almost every table and average scores across the board.

Board 6East Deals
E-W Vul

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

Most Easts will open 1♣. East has only 10 HCP but the ingredients to open: adequate defensive values, a source of winners and an easy rebid. South will overcall 1♠, and North will advance with 2♥ (if a bid of a new suit is forcing in his partnership) or cuebid 2♣ and bid hearts next. South should show heart support when given an opportunity, and North-South should reach their 26-point game. Alas, the cruel 5-0 trump break plus best defense will sink the contract. East will cash two high clubs, and West will discard a spade (or maybe a helpful encouraging diamond). Then East must find the shift to a diamond. If instead he leads a third club or exits with a spade, North can avoid a diamond loser and lose only a trump. The only makeable game contract is 3NT. A contract of 4♠ by South fails if West leads a heart. We predict that any North-South pair scoring game will pick up almost all the matchpoints.

Board 7South Deals
Both Vul

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

Many Wests will open 2♥ despite having far more points outside their long suit than within it. North might scrape up a takeout double though his hand really lacks the shape and high-card strength to compel South to “advance” at the three level. Then if East passes, South bids 3♦ and two passes follow, East should compete with 3♥. We doubt that North-South will go any further; South’s ♥K will look wasted to him for offense. Declarer will lose two trumps and two clubs, making three. At tables where North-South are able to buy the contract at 3♦, only a hot defense will beat it. West leads the ♠K and a second spade to East’s ace. He ruffs the third spade with the ♦A, and East still gets the ♦Q – an unusual variation of a trump promotion – plus the ♣A. We predict +140 to East-West at most tables, scoring somewhere above average for East-West.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 6 3
♥ J 8 7
♦ 9 8 5
♣ K 8 7 2

♠ A 8 2
♥ A K 5 3 2
♦ A K 10 7
♣ 3



♠ Q 9
♥ Q 6 4
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A Q 10 9 6

♠ K J 7 5 4
♥ 10 9
♦ Q J 2
♣ J 5 4

When North opens 1♥, South's 1♠ will improve the North hand, making it worth a game-forcing jump shift to 3♦. South should take a 3♥ "false preference," and when North continues with 3♠, South can go to 4♠. If West leads a helpful trump, declarer can draw trumps, take the ♥AK, ruff a heart to establish the suit and finish with 13 tricks: five spades, four hearts and four diamonds. West could save his side a good many matchpoints by leading a club - and perhaps he should since he can see that dummy's hearts may set up and diamonds may also provide some winners. Slam is not a good proposition, needing a finesse in trumps plus a 3-2 break, but a few pairs may stretch to get there. They will pick up most of the matchpoints for +980 and a top for +1010.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A 3 2
♥ K 10 2
♦ A K J 5
♣ J 9 3

♠ J 9 8
♥ A J 9 7 6
♦ Q 10 9
♣ K 4



♠ Q 7 6 4
♥ Q 8 4
♦ 4 2
♣ Q 8 6 5

♠ K 10 5
♥ 5 3
♦ 8 7 6 3
♣ A 10 7 2

A few hyperactive Norths will open 1♥, emboldened by the vulnerability. When South responds 1NT, West may stay out despite his 16 HCP because his heart holding under the heart bidder will be discouraging. If 1NT isn't forcing and North passes, the defense may struggle in vain to beat the contract; South may take as many as eight tricks. (If South leads a heart from his hand at some point, West may do well to play "second hand high" with the king.) If South's 1NT is forcing, North may rebid 2♦ and go minus there. At most tables, we think West will be left to open 1NT, passed out. The play may be complex. North can always beat 1NT with a heart opening lead (or with a spade lead), but if he leads a heart, it must be the nine! If he leads low, declarer can win with dummy's eight and lead a club from dummy to his nine effectively. All we can say with assurance is that East-West pairs with a plus score will do well in the matchpoint column.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

♠ A K 9 4 3 2
♥ 6 4
♦ 9 5 4
♣ 9 7

♠ Q J 8 6
♥ A Q 8 3
♦ A Q J 6
♣ 10



♠ 10
♥ K J 10 9
♦ K 7 2
♣ A K Q 5 3

♠ 7 5
♥ 7 5 2
♦ 10 8 3
♣ J 8 6 4 2

East's hand is hard to describe. If the hearts and diamonds were reversed, East might survive distorting his pattern by opening 1♦ and bidding 2♣ next, but opening 1♥ on a four-card suit, even one as stout as K J 10 9, won't appeal to many Easts. The alternatives are to open 1♣, then over a major-suit response "reverse" to 2♥ despite borderline high-card strength for that action; or jump to 3♣ (which is right on strength but should deliver a longer suit). Opening 1NT with a singleton below the rank of a queen is prohibited and subject to an adjusted score. Suppose East opens 1♣, West responds 1♠ and North enters with a double. If East passes, South will want to borrow a call from chess - "Resign" - but if he grits his teeth and bids 2♦, West will surely rebid 2♠. Then East will do well to pass, and West should take eight tricks. East-West may score well for +110, though some North-Souths may get too high and take a significant penalty.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

♠ J 10 3
♥ K 8 5 3
♦ Q 7 3 2
♣ 6 5

♠ A 9 7 4
♥ 9
♦ J 6
♣ A K J 8 3 2



♠ K Q 8 6
♥ A J 2
♦ 8
♣ Q 10 9 7 4

♠ 5 2
♥ Q 10 7 6 4
♦ A K 10 9 5 4
♣ —

There may be as many different auctions as tables in the game, but we think North-South could reach their best contract of a diamond partial. Maybe the best way to handle the South hand is to pass and hope to come in later with a bid to show length in both red suits. If indeed the auction starts with two passes and 1♣ by North, East can't act (unless he indulges in a four-card 1♠ overcall). South will have to decide which red suit to show. A possible auction is 1♣-1♥, 1♠-2♦, 3♣-3♦ ... and North should give up. If West leads the ♠J - a trump lead is no better - South can take the ace, pitch a spade and a heart on the ♣AK, and lead a heart. If East rises with the ace to lead a trump, South can win, ruff a heart in dummy and later draw trumps and lead the ♥Q, squashing East's jack to make the contract. It won't help East to duck the first heart. North-South may score well for +130 or any plus. They will do less well if they land at clubs or notrump.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

West has a sound weak 2♠ opening. If East passes, some Souths might risk reopening with a double to get hearts into the picture. Then North should bid 3♣ - as it happens, West could win eight tricks at spades - and South will have to guess how to proceed. We think South's hand is too wild for a double; North might pass for penalty when North-South could make a grand slam. South will wonder how many diamonds to bid, and either 5♦ or a gambling go at 6♦ might be a winning call. It looks as if a trump opening lead would scuttle a diamond slam, but South could win in dummy, finesse with the ♥Q and lead a club to the king. When East takes the ace and doesn't have a trump left, South can ruff one heart in dummy and discard one on the ♣Q for 12 tricks. We predict +620 to North-South at many tables. North-South will surely get a top for +1370.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

We think 1NT by East will be the invariable contract. East will open 1♦, and West will respond 1♠ and pass East's 1NT rebid. A few Souths may overcall 1♥ despite the threatening vulnerability, and then West will offer a negative double to show four cards in spades and pass East's 1NT. The play to the first trick may be ♥10, jack, queen, king. East can win a third spade trick with the queen onside and lead successfully toward the ♣Q to make the contract on the nose. At double dummy, he could play low from dummy on the first heart to block the suit, take two spade tricks and lead the ♦A and a second diamond. The defenders' winners are tangled up, and East can win an eighth trick. (The only opening lead that always holds him to seven is a club.) We expect +90 to East-West to be a common and about average result, but a few Easts may be +120 for a top.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

When East opens 1NT, West must judge. Because West has a topless spade suit and some high-card strength, a case exists for passing. A contract of 2♠ might fail when East-West have enough high-card ammunition to win seven or eight tricks at notrump, or East might have a long suit to establish. Nevertheless, we expect most Wests to transfer to 2♠ and pass East's acceptance. Which action by West is best? One deal proves nothing. Here, the theoretical winning action is to pass. At spades, East can take just eight tricks, but only if South's opening lead is a heart (or a trump), letting the defense set up a heart winner before East can arrange a heart discard on a high diamond. East can always assemble eight tricks at notrump, losing four diamonds and one spade. We think East-West will need +140 for a strong matchpoint result.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

We don't expect much variation here. A likely East-West auction is 1♦-1♥, 1NT-2♣ (maybe "new minor forcing"), 2♥-4♥. Lacking conventional methods, East can force with a natural jump to 3♣ at his second turn, and go to 4♥ with West shows heart support. South will probably lead the ♦9, and East will take dummy's ace, cash the K-A of trumps and start the clubs by leading low to his nine. Later he will lead low to his queen with a similar lack of success but will lose only two clubs and a trump. We expect +420 to East-West at almost every table for an average result all around.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

Many contracts and results are possible. When West's 1♥ opening is followed by two passes, South will usually balance with a double. Then for West to bid 2♦ is questionable: the deal probably belongs to North-South, and for West to show his second suit may only help declarer judge the play if North-South declare. If West passes, North's 1♠ advance may be passed out, but East may compete with 2♥. Then either South or North will probably act again, and North-South may play at spades, clubs or notrump. A trump opening lead by East (or the ♦K) will beat 2♠, and a heart opening lead to West followed by a passive black-suit exit will beat 3NT by North. A club partial by South should produce +110. We predict that North-South will score above average for any plus. They had better not double West for penalty at 2♥ since that contract will prove to be unbeatable for +670.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

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

A vigorous competitive auction is possible. When North opens 1♣ and East overcalls 1♠, South lacks the high-card strength for a 2♥ bid but can make a negative double. Then West will have options depending on his temperament and partnership style, including a gentle raise to 2♠, a bid of 2♦ with the intent to support the spades later, or a "fit-showing jump" to 3♦. Any diamond bid will surely excite East, but even if West merely raises to 2♠, we think it's quite possible that East-West will bid to 4♠ even if North-South don't compete to 4♥. If South leads a heart, North can take the ace and switch to his singleton diamond. When he gets in with the ♠A, he leads a club to South and ruffs the diamond return for down one. East will be dismayed to go down, but East-West may win some matchpoints for -50 since 4♥ by North-South is unbeatable if North diagnoses the club position.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

We think East-West can reach this good 31-point slam. If the auction begins 1♠, 2♥ ... the East hand is strong enough for a "high reverse" to 3♦. (For some 2/1 partnerships, 3♦ will not promise extra strength, but it will in "Standard" methods and does in "Bridge World Standard," a system based on polls that determined an expert consensus.) When West shows support with 3♠, East can continue with a 4♣ cuebid to suggest slam, West can cuebid 4♥ in reply, and East can try 5♣ or 5♦. Then we believe West should bid 6♠ since his trump support includes the ace. East-West may get bogged down only if East is worried about his ragged spades and fears losing more than one trump trick. We predict that East-West will win 70% of the matchpoints for +980.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

As on Board 11, differences in system and style make this deal nigh-impossible to predict. South will often open 2♦, weak. (Some players doubt the efficacy of a weak two-bid in diamonds and treat the bid in some other way - as, say, Roman, showing a minimum three-suited hand. That convention we happen to dislike.) West's hand isn't worth a two-level overcall. If North passes - a 2♥ response would probably be forcing and would ask for trouble - East might stretch to reopen with 2NT, and West might raise to 3NT. If South leads the ♦Q, declarer wins and plays off four rounds of spades. North's 10 wins, but whether he takes the ♥KA and leads a third heart or shifts to the ♣9, East has a route to nine tricks and a magical +600. East-West could also reach 3NT on other auctions: if for example West stretched to overcall 2♠, or if South passed as dealer and North opened 2♥. We're sure East-West will get a top if they score game.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

North's hand is imperfect for any opening bid: too many hearts for 2♥, too much outside stuff for 3♥, too few high-card points and defensive tricks for 1♥. We advocate passing when no bid is reasonably descriptive, but many Norths will find a different call. If North opens 2♥ or 3♥, East can stretch a bit to double, and West may land at 2NT or 3NT. If North opens a free-spirited 1♥, East will double, and South will bid 1♠. West will compete with 2♦ or 1NT - and he may play there since South may be reluctant to rebid his suit when the auction suggests that North's hand is short in spades. At tables where North passes in second seat, East will open 1NT. After two passes, North will show his hearts, maybe with a conventional call. West shouldn't sell out to 2♥ and might compete with 2NT, passed out. We don't expect East-West to reach 3NT often, but that contract is cold for +600. So the "par" result is 4♥ doubled by North, down two for -500.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

We believe an opening bid should comprise some playing tricks, not merely a barren assortment of high cards. Still, few players will be willing to pass a hand with three aces, and North will usually open 1♣. South will respond 1♦, North rebids 1♥ and South's 1NT ends the auction. West will lead a low spade, and East takes the king and returns the jack. Declarer wins in dummy, passes the ♦8 to West's jack, wins the next spade, goes to the ♣A and leads a second diamond: queen, king, ace. He has three diamonds, two spades, two clubs and a heart for +120. We think that result will occur at some tables, but West can save his side a bundle of matchpoints if he finds the good shift to a heart when he wins the first diamond, holding South to seven tricks. Wests with a crystal ball will find the double-dummy opening lead of the ♣Q(!) that actually beats 1NT.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

Assuming South isn't inclined to open his 10-count, West will start with 1♥, East responds 1♠ and West rebids 2♣. Then East is certainly worth a raise to 3♣, but West can't justify another bid with a minimum. If North leads a diamond, declarer will lose the finesse, and South will shift to a trump or maybe to his heart singleton. It seems that West is destined to take nine tricks, though in some variations of the play, he may have to squeeze North between hearts and the ♦J. A few Wests may rebid 2♥, straining to play in the higher-scoring spot at matchpoints; West can indeed take eight tricks. Some Easts may stretch to try 2NT over 2♣, and West may well raise, hoping the hearts will run. East will be favored with a diamond opening into the A-Q, but when the hearts are foul and the club finesse loses, the contract should fail. We predict that tops will go to East-West pairs who are +120 at 2NT.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

Many Souths will preempt. If South opens 3♥, West will overcall 3♠, passed out. The defense should collect six tricks for +200. A few Souths will open 4♥. If West stretches mightily to bid over that, North might sniff out a penalty double for +800 or more. If South is allowed to play at 4♥, he will surprise North, and maybe himself, by making it. If the defense starts with two high spades and shifts to a diamond, South can take the ace, lead to the ♣Q and return the ♥Q, winning. He ruffs a spade, leads to the ♣J and continues with the ♣A. East can ruff, losing his trump trick, or discard and watch declarer unload his diamond loser. Some Souths will open 1♥. The South hand has only nine high-card points but the ingredients to open: two Quick Tricks, some winners and an easy rebid. After that, East-West will compete in spades, and at some tables they may buy the contract at 3♠ undoubled for -200 and a reasonable matchpoint result.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

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

We foresee a North-South auction beginning 1♦-1♥, 1♠-1NT, 2♦ ... and sometimes South will retire. If East leads a club, many lines of play are possible, but declarer may take the ♠A, crossruff spades and clubs, and try to guess the hearts. He will be assured of at least nine tricks and may end with ten or even 11 (with double-dummy play ending with a trump endplay against East). At some tables, North will encourage game by jumping to 3♦ at his third turn, and South will try his luck at 3NT. If West leads a spade, declarer can win a finesse with dummy's queen, but he can't be expected to guess the diamond position and will lead to the ♦A next. Then the contract becomes unmakeable in theory but the winning defense is demanding, and many Souths will wind up with nine tricks. North-South should score almost all the matchpoints for +400.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

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

After two passes, South will open 1♠, and North will respond 1NT. If 1NT is forcing, even by a passed hand, South will be obliged to rebid 2♣ systemically, and North's 2♠ false preference will be passed out. If instead North's 1NT is not forcing or semi-forcing, South will tap the table. Against 2♠, West will probably lead the ♣KA and a third club. We expect declarer to lose three trump tricks and the ♥A besides for down one. Against North's 1NT, East will lead a heart. That lead appears to benefit declarer by guessing the jack for him, but the play may still be stressful. Declarer captures West's jack, unblocks the ♦AQ and leads the ♥K, East will duck, but declarer can either continue with a third heart or lead dummy's ♠Q. He should come to seven tricks one way or another, and North-South should score well for +90. What this deal says about the desirability of playing 1NT forcing at matchpoints, you can decide.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

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

When South opens 1NT, West will wonder how many spades he should bid. 3♠ may be a popular choice, and East will only rarely be inspired by his harem of queens to raise. Some Wests may settle for 2♠, but a few will boldly leap to 4♠, and when dummy produces trump support plus ♦Q6, 10 tricks will roll home. Many Wests will be using a conventional gadget over 1NT to show a one-suited hand. For instance, a double may ask East to bid 2♣, after which West shows his suit. With that scheme, West could jump to 3♠ to invite game, but whether East would accept is uncertain. We predict that East-West will score a little below average for +170. Is it possible that some West will pass over 1NT and wind up +200 on defense?

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

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

Assuming South passes as dealer, West will open 1NT, and East will respond 2♣, Stayman. South can issue a lead-directing double. When West bids 2♥, East will probably raise to 3♥, and West will surely go on because his ♣K will look well placed. Alas, the cards don't mesh well, the values are skinny and 4♥ is a poor spot. If North leads a club, South will take the ace and shift to his singleton ♦10. If declarer plays low, North can win and give his partner a diamond ruff or sit back and wait for his second diamond trick. The defense will also get a spade for down one. But if South returns a club at trick two, declarer could maneuver an endplay to win ten tricks. At tables where South opens a lusty 3♣ despite holding four cards in spades, East-West will still reach game: West will double, and East will cuebid 4♣. We predict that +50 to North-South will be a common result. Kudos to East-West pairs who judge to stay out of game.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A K 10 2
♥ 5 3
♦ Q J 8 3
♣ 5 4 3

♠ 8
♥ 10 8 7
♦ K 9 7 6 5 2
♣ 9 7 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 9 5 4
♥ K Q 9 6
♦ —
♣ A Q 10 2

♠ 7 6 3
♥ A J 4 2
♦ A 10 4
♣ K J 8

If East opens 1♣ after two passes, South will overcall 1♠. At the vulnerability, West might pass that, hoping for a reopening double by East and a hefty penalty, but East is not obliged to reopen with a minimum hand and some spade length. Souths at 1♠ will struggle but should escape for down one, -100. Some Wests will bid 1NT over 1♠. Then after two passes, South may refuse to go quietly despite the threatening vulnerability and try 2♥, and West might risk a double based on his spade holding. If he correctly leads a trump, the defense should eke out a one-trick set for +200. At tables where West plays at 1NT, he will probably finish with eight tricks since South will have trouble discarding on the diamonds and will be subject to an endplay. East-West may score quite well for +120.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

♠ 6 2
♥ A K 6 5
♦ K Q 10
♣ A 10 6 5

♠ K J 10 3
♥ Q 10 8 4
♦ 8 4 2
♣ Q 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A Q 9 5 4
♥ J 7 2
♦ 9 7
♣ 9 7 4

♠ 8 7
♥ 9 3
♦ A J 6 5 3
♣ K J 8 3

We expect 1NT-3NT. At matchpoint scoring, East can't afford to look for a minor-suit contract and would not do so even if his hand were more distributional. That will leave it up to North to find the killing opening lead. There is a case for a heart lead, suggesting that the ♠K is more likely to be an entry to established hearts than the ♥Q would be an entry to established spades. Maybe that reasoning leaves something to be desired; it certainly would here since with a heart lead declarer will win and race off five diamond tricks. He is likely to guess the ♣Q as well for 11 tricks in all. But since North's spades are stronger, a spade lead is beyond reproach, and if North leads a spade, the defense will run the suit for down one. North players, either you did or you didn't.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 5 4
♥ 10 7
♦ 10 7 4 3
♣ K 6 5 2

♠ J 8
♥ A K J 9 4
♦ K 2
♣ A Q 10 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 9 7 6 3
♥ 8 6 2
♦ J 9 6
♣ 9 8

♠ A K 2
♥ Q 5 3
♦ A Q 8 5
♣ J 7 3

A 1NT opening by East will be passed around to North. If East-West were vulnerable, North might judge that his best chance for a good result would be to pass and let declarer struggle to avoid -200 or more; dummy might provide him with no entries to lead toward high cards in his hand. As it is, North is likely to act. He might risk a double (penalty in his partnership), bid 2♥ or employ a conventional gadget - perhaps 2♥ to show hearts and a minor. As it happens, no action by North is sure to get him a plus score. At 1NT, East can always take seven tricks with best play (admittedly not a sure thing), and best defense will defeat North at 2♥. If East leads the ♠K, he can prevail by leading a low spade or a trump(!) next. If instead he leads the ♠A and a third spade, North can ruff but must lead a diamond next to take eight tricks. We expect a recap sheet full of +50 or -50.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K 9
♥ 8 2
♦ Q 8 6 5 2
♣ A 9 8 7

♠ A J 8 6 5
♥ Q 7 6 3
♦ K
♣ K Q 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10 4 2
♥ A K J 4
♦ A J 7
♣ 10 6 3

♠ Q 7 3
♥ 10 9 5
♦ 10 9 4 3
♣ J 5 2

South may hold his nose and open 1♣; some Souths will open 1♦, the "better minor," though North is more likely to raise diamonds than clubs. In any case, North will respond 1♠, South will rebid 1NT, and North will force with a jump to 3♥ or, more likely, bid 2♣ as "new minor forcing." Then South should show his good hearts, and North-South will land at 4♥. The opening lead from either defender is likely to be a diamond. Declarer can win, draw trumps and start the spades by leading low from the South hand. With the friendly lie of the suit, he should lose only a spade and the ♣A. We expect +650 to North-South at most tables. We see no obvious way they can reach the magic contract of 3NT, which produces the same 11 tricks for +660.

Board 32West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K 7 6 2
♥ 4
♦ A 9 8 6
♣ K J 8 6

♠ 10
♥ K J 10 9 8
♦ 7 5 3
♣ A 5 4 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q J 8 5
♥ Q 7 6 3
♦ Q J 4
♣ 10 2

♠ A 9 4 3
♥ A 5 2
♦ K 10 2
♣ Q 9 7

Hands with some 4-4-4-1 shape can be awkward to describe, and West might pass as dealer, hoping to hear an opponent bid hearts so he can double for takeout. If there are three passes to South, though, he will open 1♣. North will respond 1♥. Then some Souths will follow through with 1♠, while others will want a more distributional hand and will rebid 1NT. Over 1NT, North may rebid 2♥, and after two passes, West may balance with a double. Will any contract succeed? North can make 2♥ but is likely to fail; East-West can make 2♠. North-South might make 2♣. Plus scores will be golden. At tables where the players believe in bidding when it's their turn, West may open 1♦, North may overcall 1♥ and East may dredge up a negative double. Then South may bid strongly - and go minus, handing East-West a good result.

Board 33North Deals
None Vul

♠ J 10 8 2
♥ Q 10 9 3
♦ A 10
♣ 10 9 4

♠ A 9 5
♥ A 7 6 4 2
♦ Q 8 3
♣ A 8

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 3
♥ K J 8
♦ K 7 6 4 2
♣ Q 7 3 2

♠ K Q 7 6 4
♥ 5
♦ J 9 5
♣ K J 6 5

When South responds 1♠ to North's 1♥ opening, we would raise to 2♠ as North, suggesting a possible trump suit. A 1NT bid will be reasonable, but then South will bid 2♣ (natural or more likely a conventional inquiry), and North will show spade support. In any case, South will have to judge whether to try for game. North will cooperate with any try, and the contract at many tables will be 4♠. If West leads the ♦A and ♦10, he can ruff the third diamond but with a natural trump trick. Declarer should manage the rest. If instead West leads the ♣10, South can win with the jack and take 10 tricks via three high clubs, a club ruff in dummy, the ♥A, three high trumps and two heart ruffs in his hand. We predict that North-South will earn a 75% result for +420. They will score slightly below average for +170 and poorly for +140 or for a minus.

Board 34East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A K 10 8 2
♥ J 8
♦ K J
♣ Q 10 6 5

♠ 6
♥ Q 9 7 6 5
♦ 9 8 3 2
♣ K 8 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 7 5 4
♥ A 10 3
♦ A 5 4
♣ A 7 4 2

♠ Q J 9 3
♥ K 4 2
♦ Q 10 7 6
♣ J 9

Another hand with three bare aces, as North held on Board 21. If East starts with 1♣, West responds 1♠ and East bids 1NT. Then West will be reluctant to raise to 3NT (though that could be a winning call on this deal) and will jump to 3♣, if that bid is forcing and not invitational, or maybe use a gadget such as 2♦, "new minor forcing." When East dutifully shows his three-card spade support, West is likely to place the contract at 4♠, thought it would be quite reasonable for him to bid 3NT, offering a choice of games, or show his club support. Against 4♠, North may lead a diamond, and when West's jack wins, he has a heart discard available on the ♦A. He may cash the ♠AK next, though, holding himself to 10 tricks. Even if he judges, for whatever reason, to double-finesse in spades, he will need remarkable guessing to make an overtrick. We expect +420 to East-West. Tops will go to pairs who land at 3NT and win ten tricks for +430.

Board 35South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A K Q 5
♥ K J 7 6
♦ 9 5
♣ A 7 4

♠ J 10 8 7 6
♥ 10 2
♦ K 8 6
♣ Q 10 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 2
♥ A 5
♦ Q J 4 3
♣ K 6 5 3 2

♠ 4 3
♥ Q 9 8 4 3
♦ A 10 7 2
♣ J 8

At almost every table, West will open 1NT and East will raise to 3NT. North will lead the ♠J. Declarer can win and duck a club to establish the suit. He wins the spade return, runs the clubs, takes the ♥A and bravely leads a heart to the jack for 10 tricks: four clubs, three spades and three hearts. He might even make a second overtrick if South pitches one heart too many. We predict +630 at most tables. No North will find the double-dummy opening lead of a diamond, which holds declarer to his contract.

Board 36West Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 9 8 4 2
♥ Q 10 9
♦ J 3
♣ K 7 3

♠ K Q 10
♥ K 8 6 3
♦ 9 4 2
♣ Q 10 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 5
♥ A J 7 2
♦ K 10 8 7
♣ J 8 4

♠ 7 6 3
♥ 5 4
♦ A Q 6 5
♣ A 9 6 5

An unexciting deal finishes out the set. We think East will invariably play at 1NT after 1♦-1♠, 1NT. South may lead a low club, and North takes the queen and returns a club to the ace. Declarer wins the third club in dummy and lets the ♥Q and ♥10 ride. Next he may pass the ♦J. South can take the queen, cash his good club and shift to a spade, and East will win only six tricks. A few Wests may land at 2♠ one way or another, but the result should be down one again. Any East-West pair that somehow manages a plus score should win almost all the matchpoints.