

ACBL-wide International Fund Game #1

Saturday Afternoon – Feb. 17, 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

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

Many results are possible. South will open 1♥ in third seat, and West, with some points and heart shortness, might climb in with a “lead-directing” 1♠ overcall. Whether North chooses a raise to 2♥ or a conventional action to show a better hand, East will place his partner with at most one heart, and a few East-Westes may even get to 4♠ – unfortunately down one when the trump suit fails to cooperate. At tables where West declines to overcall, North raises to 2♥ and two passes follow, West should balance, and East-West will find their spade fit. But North may like his hand enough to respond 1NT, forcing. Since North is a passed hand, South might take a view and pass that, but if he rebids a systemic 2♣, North will jump to 3♥, passed out. Careful defense, involving a trump lead or early shift, will hold South to eight tricks, but East-West may score poorly for +50. For a good matchpoint result, they will need to be +140.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

Though 6♦ wouldn't be the worst contract in history, we expect almost all North-Souths to land at a prosaic 3NT. If the auction starts 1♦-1♥, South will usually settle for a heavy 2♦ rebid; if he had so much as the ♦J instead of the 10, he might jump to 3♦. North will convert to 3NT, passed out. When East leads a club, North can put up dummy's queen, winning. He will take the ♦AK next; he has no reason to reject the percentage play. East wins the next diamond and leads the ♣K, and declarer wins and goes to the ♥A. Then the run of the diamonds will squeeze West in the majors, and North will take the rest, making six. We expect +690 at many tables, but we suspect a couple of Westes will throw in a fatuous 1♠ overcall. North will still play at 3NT, but after a spade opening lead, he may be inspired to guess the diamond position. Then a complex squeeze can materialize, and North can always take 13 tricks for +720 and an icy top.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

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

North-South should reach 3NT without difficulty. After the auction starts 1♦-1♥, 1♠ ... North might jump to 2NT, invitational, which South will raise, or North might shoot out 3NT himself. Many Norths will stall with a “fourth-suit” bid of 2♣, and when South continues with 2NT, North will raise to game. We expect 10 tricks at many tables, but if South is declarer, West will lead a club, ducked to the king. Then if East finds the best shift to a heart – not impossible if the auction suggested that South's hand is short in hearts – West can win and return a heart, and the defense will be sure of four tricks. With North declarer at 3NT, best play will always produce an overtrick. We think North-South will need +430 for a reasonable matchpoint result.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q 8 7 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 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		♠ 9 5 3
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥ 9 8	♥ K J 2										
♦ J 9 7 3	♦ A Q 10										
♣ 5 4 2	♣ Q 10 8 7										
		♠ 6 4									
		♥ Q 10 7 6 5									
		♦ K 8 5									
		♣ A 6 3									

When North opens 1NT, most Souths will judge to commit to game; they will transfer to hearts and bid 3NT next, offering North a choice of games. Because North has 4-3-3-3 shape, he has some excuse for passing, but the striking weakness in diamonds will influence most Norths to go to 4*H. East lacks an attractive lead and might start with a passive ♠9, North wins with the jack and leads the ♥A and a second heart. When the trumps behave for declarer, the defense can get only one more trick with East's ♦A. We expect +650 to be a common result, but a few North-Souths may gamble it out at 3NT. With a likely black-suit opening lead and the ♦A onside, declarer will finish with 11 tricks and almost all the matchpoints.

Board 5

North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A J 5	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 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 7 4
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥ 7 4	♥ K J 10 6										
♦ Q 10 9 7	♦ A K 4 2										
♣ 8 7 4 2	♣ A 9										
		♠ Q 10 9 3 2									
		♥ 9 8 2									
		♦ J 3									
		♣ K Q J									

The East hand is quite a good 18-count, with two aces and three kings, so most Easts - even those using a 1NT opening to show 16 to 18 points - will treat it as too strong and start with 1♦. If West raises to 2♦, East might take an aggressive view and jump to 3NT; if he settles for an invitational 2NT, West may pass. (That West hand illustrates why your analyst doesn't care for "inverted" minor-suit raises; some responding hands are neither weak nor strong and defy description.) South will lead the ♠10 against 3NT, and declarer can win with dummy's jack and lead a heart to his 10. He can run the diamonds, lead a second heart from dummy and emerge with ten tricks. Even if South prefers to lead the ♣K, the defense can win only three tricks in all because the suit is blocked. We predict that East-West will pick up 60% of the matchpoints if they get to game and register +430.

Board 6

East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 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 8 7
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥ 3	♥ Q 8 7 5										
♦ K Q 10 7 4 3	♦ A 9 8 5										
♣ 10 7 4 3	♣ Q J										
		♠ A J 9 4 2									
		♥ A 10 6 4 2									
		♦ J 2									
		♣ 9									

The East hand doesn't look like an opening bid, with few winners, no spots and inadequate defense. But in this "open anything" era, many Easts will start with 1♦. Some Souths will try 2♦ (Michaels), showing length in both majors, but since that bid should ideally suggest playing tricks but limited defense, other Souths will overcall 1♠, intending to bid hearts later. Whatever South does, West might jump to 4♦, preemptive, but North has enough to bid a game, and East-West will have to subside at the vulnerability. When East passes as dealer, some Souths may be willing to open 1♠, and North-South will get to 4♠. If instead South passes, West might look past the vulnerability to open 2♦, weak, and then North-South may not find it easy to reach game. Souths at a game should make it; West can hold 4♠ to 10 tricks by leading the singleton heart; he can hold 4♥ by leading two rounds of diamonds, promoting a trump trick for East. We think North-South will get a 70% board for +420.

Board 7

South Deals
Both Vul

♠ A K J 10 9 8 4 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 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		♠ 5
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥ J 9	♥ K Q 5 3										
♦ A 4	♦ Q 9 8 5 3										
♣ Q	♣ K J 5										
		♠ 7 2									
		♥ 10 8 6 4									
		♦ 10 6 2									
		♣ 10 9 4 3									

West's hand is far too promising for a 4♠ preempt and lacking in sure defensive tricks for a game-forcing 2♣ opening. Most Wests will start correctly with 1♠. If North doesn't like the vulnerability, his wasted ♠Q and his mediocre heart support and passes, East will respond 2♦, or more likely 1NT forcing in the 2/1 style. Over 1NT, West will jump to 4♠, passed out. North will look in vain for an effective opening lead, and no matter what lead he chooses, he will have to help declarer sooner or later and will get only his two aces for -650. At tables where North is willing to double 1♠, East will redouble. West will surely play at 4♠ again but might misguess in trumps. We see no way East-West will reach the magical spot of a notrump game played by West; 11 tricks would come in for +660 and an ACBL-wide top.

Board 8
West Deals
None Vul

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

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

South will usually open 1NT in fourth seat, and North will wheel out a Stayman 2♣ response. When South denies a four-card major with 2♦, North will almost always judge to force to game; if he jumps to 3♠, forcing, South will raise to 4♠. (Some Norths may have conventional methods available to describe the North hand.) With North declarer at a spade game, East is likely to lead a disastrous (for him) ♦Q. North can win with the king, pick up the trumps with a finesse for the queen, lose a heart finesse to West's king and later lead a diamond to dummy's 10, losing only a club and a heart. We predict that +450 to North-South will be a common result, scoring somewhat above average for them. East-Wests who hold their loss to -420, perhaps when East makes an inspired decision to lead the ♣J against 4♠, should win most of the matchpoints.

Board 9
North Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

Open 1♥ or 1NT as East? The maximum in high-card points, strong five-card suit and decent high-card structure suggest upgrading to 1NT. The danger of being transferred into a 5-2 spade fit or otherwise missing a superior fit in hearts argues for 1♥. This time, an aggressive view may fare better. If East opens 1NT, West may discount slam chances and settle for 3NT. That could be a winning decision opposite a weaker East hand, but as it is, East will take 13 tricks. Clearly, East-West are more likely to reach slam if East starts with 1♥. Then West should respond 2♣; since he can commit to game, he can show his hand naturally, bidding his long suit first. (With ♠K 6 5 4 ♥Q 6 ♦7 6 ♣K Q 10 5 3, West would respond 1♠ since finding a fit in the major would be a priority.) If East jumps to 3NT next, West might reasonably take a shot at 6NT or maybe 6♣. East-Wests who judge well to reach any slam will enjoy a fine matchpoint result.

Board 10
East Deals
Both Vul

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

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

Many Easts will look past the threatening vulnerability to open 3♠. Nobody can reasonably act over that, and North-South should inevitably come to two spades, two clubs and a diamond for down one, +100. When declarer plays diamonds, he should start by leading low to dummy's 9, gaining if South has J-10-x(x). The result if East declines to preempt is unclear. South would open 1♣ on his barren assortment of high cards, West might risk a 1♥ overcall, and North might jump to 2NT, inviting game. South would pass. A diamond opening lead would hold North to eight tricks, but a heart lead in deference to West's shaky overcall would let him take nine. We suspect that at a few tables, North-South will be +600 at 3NT for a frigid top. But woe to any North-Souths who land at a club partial and run into a devastating defensive crossruff.

Board 11
South Deals
None Vul

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

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

This is a taxing deal. After three passes, East will open 1♦ and issue a game-forcing jump-shift to 3♣ when West responds 1♥. Then some Wests will bid 3NT, and East will have to pass reluctantly, especially at matchpoint scoring. Other Wests will take a 3♦ preference, leaving East with a difficult third bid. If he continues with 4♣ to suggest his shape, West doesn't have enough to jump to 5♦, much less cuebid the ♠A to suggest slam; if he returns to 4♦, East might try 4♥ or 4♠ next, but East-West should stop at 5♦. In fact, 6♦ is makeable: if South leads a spade, East can take the ace, come to the ♣A and proceed to ruff two clubs in dummy and pick up the trumps, losing only to the ♥A. East-West would surely get a top for +920. Wests at 3NT should take 10 tricks for +430. The only opening lead to hold them to nine is ... the ♥3.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

The North hand is a shaky 1NT opening, with five points bottled up in a doubleton; high cards are most useful when they help establish a long suit. Moreover, the long club suit contains no honors at all. Still, we suspect that many Norths will start with 1NT, and South will bid 3NT after stopping on the way to use Stayman and look for a spade fit. In theory, 3NT is a doubtful contract that might be down with a heart opening lead, but the East-West hearts might break 4-4 or the suit might block with a defender holding J-x-x. As it happens, East will probably lead a diamond, and declarer will have time to force out the ♣A and win four clubs, three diamonds, a heart and a spade for +400. We can sympathize with North-Souths who bid discreetly to a club partial and score +130, but they won't do well in the matchpoint column.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

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

When East opens 1♥, South can't afford to double for takeout with no club support as well as minimum high-card strength. West will respond 1NT. When East rebids 2♣, the West hand is too promising for a raise to 3♣. West's best action is a bid of 2♠; since he can't have spade length, he shows a huge club fit and a maximum 1NT response. East won't be having any and will sign off at 3♣. He will lose two diamonds and the ♠A for +130. Some Souths might boldly enter the auction over 2♣, and North-South might compete as high as 3♠. In theory East-West could double that and collect +200 with best defense but are more likely to go to 4♣ and make it. We think East-West tops will go to pairs who play at notrump, perhaps when West tries 2NT over East's 2♣. West could be down a few, but with the cards forgiving he will be +150 instead.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

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

South players will adopt varying approaches. A few will open 1NT, a questionable call in our opinion with that distribution and the concentration of the honors. North will probably transfer to spades and bid 3NT next, and there they will rest. Other Souths will upgrade and open 1♣, intending to "reverse" to 2♥ or perhaps jump to 2NT over a 1♠ response. Then North-South might quest up to 4NT, looking for slam that isn't there. (A few pairs treat opener's reverse as equivalent to a jump-shift and forcing to game; most pairs have a structure that lets them stop below game if opener's reverse is lightish.) West can earn a good result if he finds a heart opening lead, which will hold South to just nine tricks. Actually, the best contract in theory is 4♠, which North could make but probably wouldn't. We predict that North-South will win most of the matchpoints for +460.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

South will often open 2♦, weak, despite having as many high-card points outside his suit as within it. After two passes, East will probably balance with 3♣ at the favorable vulnerability, and after two more passes, North will have to judge. To compete to 3♦ might be a winning action on some other layout, but here North will do well to pass. Best defense, involving "uppercuts" by the defenders - forcing declarer to overruff with higher trumps - will hold East to seven tricks at clubs. A diamond contract by South will produce only seven tricks as well, off a heart, two clubs, two spades and a trump (even assuming South handles the trumps for only one more loser after the defense starts with a club to the ace and a club return, ruffed by West.) As in many partscore deals at matchpoints, pairs who get a plus score will do okay in the matchpoint column.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ K J 6 5 2											
♥ Q J 9											
♦ J 10 8											
♣ K 4											

At most tables, North will open 1♣ and raise South's 1♠ response to 3♠. North might stretch to raise to 4♠ or issue a splinter bid of 4♦, showing a game-going hand with good spade support and diamond shortness, but that call would be a significant overbid, and many players are reluctant to splinter with a singleton ace anyway. North would have more excuse for an aggressive call if he held ♠A Q 8 4 ♥A K 8 2 ♦2 ♣A 10 9 7. Over 3♠, South will go on to 4♠. Slam is not a hopeless proposition, but when West turns up with a trump trick, 11 tricks are the limit. We expect +450 to North-South at almost every table.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ J											
♥ 10 8 6 3 2											
♦ 8 4 2											
♣ K 9 7 5											

When North opens 1♦ and East overcalls 1♠, South's hand is too weak to act, especially when the ♠J is probably a wasted honor. West will raise to 2♠ or perhaps show a sound single raise or better with a 2♦ cuebid. Then East may try for game with 3♣ or even leap boldly to 4♠. (If North-South compete actively and bid hearts, East-West are more likely to stop below game since West will know his heart strength doesn't fit well with East's hand.) Will East make 4♠ if he lands there? South will lead a diamond, and East can take the A-K and ruff his last diamond in dummy. If he leads a trump to his king next, he will lose only two trumps for a fine result. But if East prefers to continue with a club finesse, South can win and give North a club ruff, and because declarer can't return to dummy, he will lose two more trump tricks to North's A-Q. East-West should score 80% of the matchpoints for +420.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ Q 8 3											
♥ A 10 8 5 4 3											
♦ Q 4											
♣ K 3											

We expect most Souths will be willing to open 1♥ despite the slight deficiency in high cards and ragged long suit. (With a chunky suit and more defensive values, ♠J 8 3 ♥A K 10 8 5 4 ♦K 4 ♣4 3 would be more attractive to open.) West will overcall 1♠, and North can offer a negative double. When South rebids 2♥, West might trade on the favorable vulnerability to compete with 2♠ on his decent six-card suit. Then North may feel compelled to act with 10 points and might double for penalty or try 2NT. Neither of those actions may turn out well, which casts doubt on South's judgment in opening 1♥: North should take at most five tricks at notrump, but West should rack up eight tricks at 2♠ doubled for +470 at an East-West top. At a few tables, South may pass as dealer or open 2♥, weak. Then West will open or overcall in spades and may play at 2♠ for +110 and what might be an average result.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ K 6 5											
♥ A 8 7 6											
♦ Q J 8 5 4											
♣ 6											

Playing a five-card-majors style, North will open 1♦. Only a brave (or foolhardy) East would overcall 2♣ on a five-card suit, vulnerable against not, but admittedly that bid would have some obstructive value. Assuming East passes, South will respond 1♥, North will raise to 2♥, South will usually judge to try for game, perhaps with a 3♦ bid, and North can reasonably jump to 4♥. At tables where East overcalls, South can make a negative double, intending to convert a spade bid by North to diamonds. West may bid 3♣, but North-South should still find their heart fit and reach game. The play should present no problem. If North is declarer, East might lead a trump. North can draw trumps and lose to the ♦K and ♠A. The defenders will also get a club trick. We think +420 will be a common result, scoring only slightly above average for North-South.

Board 20West Deals
Both Vul

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

When West opens 1♥, some Norths will risk a skimpy 1♠ overall despite being vulnerable. East will bid 1NT. If South passes, West will rebid 2♥, passed around to South, who might compete with 3♣. Then West may judge to push on to 3♥ with his good suit and club singleton. That decision would be correct since both 3♣ and 3♥ are unbeatable. Against 3♥, North will probably cash the ♦AK and shift to the ♣J. West takes the ace, loses a trump finesse, ruffs North's club return, draws trumps and loses another diamond at the end. At tables where North declines to overcall, East will respond 1NT. South might steal the pot by jumping aggressively to 3♣; either West or East would have to judge well to act over that. We think East-West will need to register their rightful +140 to avoid a poor matchpoint result.

Board 21North Deals
N-S Vul

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

East will often open 2♥, weak, doubled by South. When North advances 2♠, South can continue with 3♣ to show extra strength, and then North might look for notrump with an asking 3♥ cuebid. South will oblige with 3NT. When West leads the ♥K, South will duck and win the next heart. He might be tempted to start the spades next, probably assuring at least nine tricks if West had the ace, but that approach would be a spectacular failure here. Instead, South will hope to pick up the clubs. With East marked with heart length, to play West for Q-x-x would be attractive, but then declarer couldn't untangle his diamond tricks (unless he took a first-round club finesse). Souths who mentally shrug, take the ♦AQ, go to the ♣A, cash the ♦K and return a club will take 10 tricks. We doubt that any North-Souths will reach the makeable 6♣, but some may land at 5♣. Sympathy to Souths who go down a few at 3NT after a club misguess.

Board 22East Deals
E-W Vul

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

It's a judgment call, but we think this East hand is somewhat stronger than East's hand on Board 9 (or West's on Board 28). It contains more "quick tricks" and a good three-card spade holding. Hence, a case exists to upgrade and open 1♥ instead of 1NT. After 1♥-Pass-Pass, North will balance with a double, and with East-West vulnerable, South will hasten to pass for penalty. He will eke out a one-trick set, +200, with a spade or diamond opening lead. At tables where East opens 1NT, South and West will pass. At a different vulnerability, North might climb in with 2♦ or with some kind of conventional call, but as it is, he will often pass, liking his prospects on defense. South will lead a heart, but even after declarer wins cheaply, he can take only six tricks. North-South would do well if they found a way into the auction: North could make 2NT or a diamond or club partial. But North-South will need to be +200 for a strong matchpoint result.

Board 23South Deals
Both Vul

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

Most Souths will open 1NT although having those spade honors stuck in a short suit detracts from the value of the hand. We think that North, with 16 good HCP plus three 10s, can reasonably judge that slam will surely have a chance. He can start with Stayman, and when South denies a four-card major, North can lift boldly to 6NT. West will lead a passive spade, and South wins and leads a low club to dummy's queen. He continues with a spade to his hand and lets the ♣10 ride. Then South can give himself an extra chance by leading a diamond to dummy's ten. If the clubs didn't produce four tricks, South would still have chances for 12 tricks in all. As it happens, he will make the slam when clubs break 3-3. We predict that North-South will get a 75% result for +1440; not every pair will get to 6NT.

Board 24
West Deals
None Vul

♠ K 8 3
♥ J 9 7 6 2
♦ 9 8 5
♣ 3 2

♠ 10 9 6 5 4
♥ K Q 10 5
♦ —
♣ K Q 10 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A J 2
♥ 8
♦ A K 10 3 2
♣ 9 7 5 4

♠ Q 7
♥ A 4 3
♦ Q J 7 6 4
♣ A J 8

Individual style and judgment are factors, and we expect as many different results as tables in the game. If West and North pass and East opens 1♦, some Wests will scrape up 1♥. Then North will surely act with a double or a 1♠ overcall, and if East passes, South might try for game with a jump to 2NT. If instead West passes 1♦, North may reopen with a double, and South may pass for penalty or bid notrump. At some tables, North will open the bidding with 1♠. If East risks 2♦, he may play there doubled; if he passes, South will commit to game with his 14-count and will end at 3NT. Can anyone make anything? East-West have five defensive tricks against notrump, but North-South could take nine tricks at spades, nine at clubs without a trump lead, or eight at hearts. Easts who play at a doubled diamond contract can take seven tricks when North-South can't lead trumps effectively. A plus score in either direction will score some matchpoints.

Board 25
North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K Q 9 7
♥ 5 2
♦ A K 5 2
♣ J 10 2

♠ 6
♥ Q J 10 9 7 6
♦ 8 6
♣ K 9 8 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 10 4
♥ A K 8
♦ J 10 9 4 3
♣ 7 5

♠ A 8 5 3 2
♥ 4 3
♦ Q 7
♣ A Q 4 3

At the vulnerability, North will often open 2♥. If South passes, West should balance with a double. Then East might "advance" 2NT (unless that call would be conventional), passed out. South will lead a heart to the nine and king, and if East forces out the ♠A next, South will do well to find the club shift that holds East to eight tricks and +120. (The defense will be easier if South holds off the ♠A, letting North signal strength in clubs, or if declarer runs the diamonds before attacking spades.) At other tables, East will advance 3♦, passed out. If South infers that North's hand is short in spades for his 2♥ opening, South can lead the ♠A and a suit-preference ♠2, and the defense can be +100 instead of being -130! A few Souths may compete to 3♥. East could beat that contract by leading a club and eventually getting a club ruff - a reasonable plan with two trump entries - but otherwise North can be +140 for almost all the matchpoints.

Board 26
East Deals
Both Vul

♠ A J 10 6
♥ 3
♦ A K Q 6 4 2
♣ A J

♠ 8 7
♥ A Q 10 7
♦ J 9 3
♣ 9 8 6 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q 4 3
♥ K J 8
♦ 8
♣ K Q 7 5 3

♠ 9 5 2
♥ 9 6 5 4 2
♦ 10 7 5
♣ 10 2

We think East-West should roll into slam, but the trick is to get to 6NT (preferably with East declarer, though that doesn't matter here). When East opens 1♣, some Wests will flash an immediate slam signal with a strong jump shift to 2♦. If East rebids 2♠, West can raise to 3♠, and East can take control with Blackwood and bid 6♠ when West shows three aces. Then we think West might convert to 6NT since East would not have used Blackwood with a hand lacking a control in hearts. At other tables, East-West will be using "weak jump shifts," and West will have to start with 1♦ or 1♠. (We are no fan of the WJS; the strong variety is too useful in effective slam bidding.) After 1♣, 1♦-1♠, West might use Blackwood, but reaching 6NT will be more difficult. We think East-West will get a fine result for reaching the notrump slam. They will get a top if North-South neglect to take their ♥A on the go.

Board 27
South Deals
None Vul

♠ 4 2
♥ Q 7 6 3 2
♦ 9
♣ A Q 9 5 3

♠ A K J 7 6
♥ A
♦ K Q J 8
♣ J 7 6

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 8 5
♥ J 9 8
♦ 10 5 2
♣ K 10 4 2

♠ 10 9 3
♥ K 10 5 4
♦ A 7 6 4 3
♣ 8

When North opens 1♠, South will usually settle for a raise to 2♠ though the hand is a maximum for that action. North may think fleetingly of slam - 6♠ would be a reasonable spot if South's ♥K were the ♠Q - but most Norths will settle for 4♠. The deal looks flattish enough - North is off a club and a trump trick - but suppose East leads a heart. North will win and will feel constrained to try for two overtricks. If he leads a club, West will win and lead his singleton diamond. If declarer wins that in dummy and finesses in trumps, East can take the queen and give West a diamond ruff, holding North to just ten tricks. If East's opening lead is a passive diamond, or if East leads a club and West wins and shifts to a diamond, North will fear the prospect of a ruff and may cash the ♠AK, ending with an overtrick. We predict that North-South will need +450 to avoid a poor matchpoint result.

Board 28
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A Q
♥ A K 9 3 2
♦ 10 6 5
♣ K J 8

♠ K J 10 5 4 3
♥ J
♦ Q 8 2
♣ A 4 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 9 7 6
♥ 6
♦ K J 9 3
♣ Q 7 6 5 3

♠ 8 2
♥ Q 10 8 7 5 4
♦ A 7 4
♣ 10 9

This is the third deal in the set where a player must choose between opening 1NT or 1♥. Some players always open 1NT, describing the strength and approximate shape in one bid; others are reluctant to suppress the five-card major. We think most experts judge case-by-case, considering many factors, such as suit quality. Here we expect most Wests to start with 1NT, avoiding the potential rebid problem after 1♥-1♠. North may enter with a spade bid or with a conventional call to show a one-suited hand, and if East-West defend a spade partial, they should get a plus score. At tables where West insists on opening 1♥, North will overcall 1♠, East might dredge up a negative double, and West might jump to 2NT, passed out. If North leads a normal spade, West can be +180 for a matchpoint top.

Board 29
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ Q J 9 6 3
♥ 2
♦ 5 4 3
♣ 10 9 7 6

♠ A K
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ 9 7 6 2
♣ K 8 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 8 7 5 4 2
♥ 9 5
♦ A K Q 10
♣ A 3

♠ 10
♥ K Q J 8 6 3
♦ J 8
♣ Q J 5 4

This may be a volatile competitive deal. North will usually open 1♦, and if West overcalled 1♠ on Board 1 on a suit headed by the 7, East can surely try 1♠ here with 8-7-5-4-2. South might stretch to bid 2♥, and West will put it up to 4♠, saddling North with a tough decision. To double is North's winning action in theory: both 4♠ and 5♥ are down one. But in practice, North is likely to prevail if he tries 5♥; if all pass and West innocently leads the ♠Q, South will get rid of a diamond and lose only one diamond and the ♣A. Perhaps West might have a chance to find a winning lead if East doubled 5♥, but that is quite speculative. We think the par result - +200 to North-South at 4♠ doubled - may be achieved at some tables. At a few tables, East-West may buy the deal at 4♠ undoubled. North-South tops will go to pairs who are +650.

Board 30
East Deals
None Vul

♠ Q J
♥ J 7 4 2
♦ 10 8 7 4
♣ K J 5

♠ A 7 5 2
♥ 10 9 6 5
♦ A
♣ A Q 8 3

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 9 4
♥ A 8
♦ K Q J 9 2
♣ 10 6 2

♠ 10 8 6 3
♥ K Q 3
♦ 6 5 3
♣ 9 7 4

Here is a typical matchpoint partscore battle. When East opens 1♦ and West responds 1♥, North will double for takeout. Then East might like his trick-taking potential and bid 1NT, but South can try 2♠; South has just enough to compete at the two level, not vulnerable at matchpoints. West may go to 3♦, but then North can bid 3♠. At other tables, East will pass over North's double, South will advance 1♠ and West will try 2♦. If North bids 2♠, East will surely press on to 3♦, giving N/S the last guess. As it turns out, East can take eight tricks at diamonds, and South can take nine at spades with a little care, so the Law of Total Tricks is on target. N/S will do well if they buy the deal at spades for +140. They will get a top if E/W overcompete to 4♦ and are doubled for -300.

Board 31
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A J 6 4 2
♥ K 4
♦ Q J 2
♣ 9 8 3

♠ K 10
♥ A 10 6 5 3
♦ A 8 7 3
♣ K Q

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q 9
♥ J 7 2
♦ 6 5
♣ A J 10 7 6 5

♠ 8 7 5 3
♥ Q 9 8
♦ K 10 9 4
♣ 4 2

North has 16 HCP and semibalanced pattern, but the hand is wrong for a 1NT opening, with a broken heart suit and the club honors concentrated in a short suit. If North opens 1♥, East might trade on the favorable vulnerability to preempt with 3♣. After two passes, North will reopen with a double, and South's conversion to 3♥ will end the auction. North should lose a trick in each suit for +140 and a decent matchpoint result. At a few tables, West will stretch mightily to open 1♠, but North's 2♥ overcall will be passed out for the same +140. We have no doubt that some Norths will open that flawed 1NT. They will be left to play right there, down when East leads a club, and will get a poor matchpoint result - quite well deserved, we think.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 8 6
♥ A K J 3
♦ K 7 5
♣ 7 5 4 3

♠ Q J 7
♥ Q 9 6
♦ 9 6 4 3
♣ A Q 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 9 4 3 2
♥ 7 2
♦ A Q 8
♣ J 10 8

♠ K 10 5
♥ 10 8 5 4
♦ J 10 2
♣ K 6 2

The deal may be passed out at a few tables, but with the requirements for an opening bid diving lower and lower, we would bet that somebody will open. West has some quick tricks and might start with 1♣. East responds 1♠, West rebids 1NT, and if we were East and playing with someone who would open that West hand, we would pass. If instead East hears two passes, he might risk 1♠; he has length in the boss suit and some defense. West will respond 1NT, passed out. The extra-friendly lie of the cards will make bidding a winner. East can make 2♠, and West can scrape home at 1NT. West could even take nine tricks at clubs(!) on that "robust" fit. We suspect that East-Wests who fail to go plus at some contract will be stuck with a poor matchpoint score.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

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

♠ K J	♠ K J
♥ K 10 9 7	♥ K 10 9 7
♦ 10 9 3 2	♦ 10 9 3 2
♣ J 7 6	♣ J 7 6

After the East-West auction starts 1♦-1♥, East will rebid 1NT. He might raise to 2♥ with decent three-card support and an unbalanced or semibalanced hand, but certainly not here. West is not worth a further bid. South has no attractive opening lead; the bidding will discourage a red-suit lead. If South starts with the ♣6, North can do well to win and return a low club, giving declarer a tough guess. Declarer would have a chance to finish with eight tricks if he put up the queen, but would struggle to take seven tricks if he played low. At tables where South leads the ♦2 or ♥10 despite the bidding, East could take eight tricks in theory but maybe not in practice. We think East-Wests who manage to be +120 will get a fine matchpoint score.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

When West opens 1♠ in third seat, North has 14 HCP ... and should pass all 14 of them. The North hand is good for defense but would make a poor dummy if North doubled and obliged his partner to be declarer. East will scrape up a 1NT response (though to pass might be a winning action), West will rebid 2♥ and East will pass. If South sells out, the defense will get a diamond, two clubs and two trump tricks, and 2♥ will make on the nose. Although South has an ideal pattern to balance, the "red" vulnerability and the possibility that the deal is a misfit all around will discourage him from acting. As it happens, North-South can take eight tricks at clubs, and -100 at 3♣ would beat the pairs who are -110 defending against 2♥. The magic spot for North-South is 2NT, cold for +120, but if they are smart enough to find that contract, East-West can be smart enough to go to 3♥ and concede -100 even if they are doubled.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

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

When South opens 1NT, Norths who lack any special machinery will simply raise to 3NT and hope for the best. They will survive when South happens to hold good spades. West will lead a spade, and East will take the ace and return the ♠4. Declarer may well grab the king, seeing 10 tricks if the clubs come in. When East actually turns up with six clubs, South can still be +430 with a winning guess in hearts. A heart opening lead by West, surely not easy to find, would always hold South to nine tricks. At other tables, North will investigate for the best contract. (After all, there is reason why South couldn't hold ♠J x x x ♥A x x ♦A K J x ♣A x, and then 6♦ would be a desirable contract.) North might bid 2♠ as minor-suit Stayman or jump to 3♠ to show a good hand with spade shortness. Still, we expect every North-South to land at 3NT, so the matchpoints will swing on how many tricks South manages.

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

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

North will open 1♥ (please, no 1NT openings with that shape and high-card structure), and East will double. Some Wests will be enamored of their heart holding and, eyeing the vulnerability, will pass for penalty. Because West's hearts are broken and he has four good spades, that action is open to question. But if North sits, East should lead the ♥Q, and North should salvage five tricks for -500. Some Norths will run to 2♣, and after two passes, West will try 2♠. East might raise to 3♠ (placing West with a better hand for his penalty pass of 1♥ doubled), but West can't go on. If instead East passes 2♠, South might try 3♣. North could make that, but after two more passes, East will compete to 3♠. Wests at 3♠ should be held to nine tricks with careful defense, and with some East-Wests scoring +170 and others collecting a fat penalty from 1♥ doubled, East-West's matchpoint result for +140 may be mediocre.