

ACBL-wide International Fund Game #3

Monday Morning – Dec. 16, 2019 – Set 226030



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

♠ 7 3
♥ 10 9 8 6 3
♦ K 9 7 2
♣ A 8

♠ 10 9
♥ Q 2
♦ A

♣ K Q 10 9 7 6 4 2



♠ A K 5 4 2
♥ A 7
♦ Q 8 5 4 3
♣ 5

♠ Q J 8 6
♥ K J 5 4
♦ J 10 6
♣ J 3

If North opens 1♣ — he has 11 high-card points, too many to preempt — East will overcall 1♠, and South may make a negative double (a questionable action with his spade holding). Then North may be tempted to jump in clubs, but to overbid the high-card strength is dangerous. If North rebids 2♣, East can try 2♦, and then East-West may declare at a diamond partial for +130. (With best play, East could make 5♦ for +400.) Of course, some Norths will preempt with their eight-card suit. If we opened 5♣ on that hand, dummy would hit with a club void and enough bits and pieces to stop East-West from bidding anything or making anything if they did bid, or else 3NT would be the only makeable game for North-South. But if North opens 4♣ here, he may buy the contract for minus 50, a good result for North-South.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 7 5 3 2
♥ 9 5
♦ A Q 7 6
♣ Q 7 3

♠ A Q J 8
♥ J
♦ J 10 9 4 3
♣ K 6 2



♠ 10 9 6 4
♥ K 10 4 2
♦ 5 2
♣ 10 9 4

♠ K
♥ A Q 8 7 6 3
♦ K 8
♣ A J 8 5

When South opens 1♥, North can respond 2♦ if he judges to force to game, or 1♠ if he wants to settle for an invitational sequence. (He might try 1♠ in any case; a 4-3 spade fit might be best.) Over 2♦, South can bid 3♣, and North's 3NT will be passed out. If North responds 1♠, South could rebid 3♥ to show about 16 points with a good six-card suit, but a 2♣ rebid is more flexible. Then if North continues with 2NT, South can try 3♥, showing a good hand with six hearts and four clubs, and North will sign off at 3NT again. The play at notrump looks awkward, but 11 tricks are likely. Suppose East leads the ♠4. North can take the king and lead the ♦K. West can duck and win the next diamond, but then anything he leads helps declarer. Souths at 4♥ can take 11 tricks also but may score average at best for +650.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 7 5 4 2
♥ 5
♦ K J 6
♣ 9 5 3 2

♠ 8 6
♥ K Q 7 3
♦ 8 7 5 3
♣ K 10 8



♠ K J 10 9 3
♥ 10 9 4
♦ 10 9
♣ J 7 4

♠ A
♥ A J 8 6 2
♦ A Q 4 2
♣ A Q 6

North-South must avoid 6♥, which has about a one-in-three chance. South has 21 points and ample defense to open 2♣, but since he lacks sure playing tricks, he must open 1♥. North is on the cusp between a 2♥ raise and a 3♥ limit raise. If he raises to 2♥, South may test the water with 3♦, and North may jump to 4♥ though his diamond holding is the worst. If South continues with 5♥ (suggesting both black aces, as he would cuebid with one or the other), North should pass. At tables where North picks the aggressive 3♥ call, South may drive to slam. If he settles for an invitational sequence, North must not cooperate. If West leads a spade against 5♥, South should strip out the black suits before playing diamonds, saving a trick if West has K-J-9-6 or J-10-9-6. We think North-South will do well to be +450.

Board 4West Deals
Both Vul

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

We expect South to play at 1NT after 1♦-1♥, 1♠-1NT, Pass. As is often the case at a 1NT contract, there will be twists and turns in the play, but South will probably go down at least one. A possible scenario: West leads the ♠K, ducked, and a second spade to the ace. South leads a club to dummy's queen, and East takes the ace and exits with a club. South then might try a low diamond from dummy, and East can continue his passive defense by rising with the queen and exiting with a diamond. South wins with the jack, cashes the ♣K and exits with a club, but East can in turn exit with a diamond, endplaying dummy and giving the defense the last three tricks and seven in all. Some Souths will take only five tricks against similar stout defense. We predict that North-South may score a little above average for minus 100.

Board 5North Deals
N-S Vul

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

With 32 high-card points, two running suits and 12 top tricks at notrump, North-South should reach slam. They must not get bogged down in an auction where nobody ever conveys extra strength. A "standard" auction may start 1♦-1♥, 2♣, and then South will often try 2♠, a "fourth-suit" action to establish a force. If North continues with 3♣, South should bid 3♦. If North dislikes his weak diamonds and signs off at 3NT, South will have to scrape up a raise to 4NT to avoid missing slam. Some Norths may try 3♥ at their third turn, and South may cuebid 3♠ next. Again, someone must make an unambiguous move toward slam if North-South are to get there, and if North accepts an invitation, he should not do so in diamonds. North-South should score average at 6♣ or 6♥ and will get a top for +1440 at 6NT.

Board 6East Deals
E-W Vul

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

Most Easts will open 1♠ despite the vulnerability. In Standard methods, West will respond 2♦, North will overcall 2♥ and East will raise to 3♦. When West bids 3♠ next, East will be encouraged by his good spades, diamond fit, singleton heart and ♣A and will bid 4♠ though he has only 11 high-card points. If South leads a heart, East can take the ace, finesse with the ♠Q and lead a diamond. North wins and leads a heart, but declarer ruffs, takes the ♣A, ruffs a club, finesses in trumps and ends with 12 tricks. A few pairs will miss game when East doesn't open. Others may miss out when the 2/1 style comes to grief: East opens, but West responds 1NT. He will jump in spades later, but since East won't know about the diamond fit, he may decline the invitation. We think East-West will win 80% of the matchpoints for +680.

Board 7South Deals
Both Vul

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

Another slam for North-South, who may wish they were playing for money. South will open 2NT, and if North-South use simple methods, North might transfer to spades and jump to 6♥ next, offering a choice of slams. Since South has top honors in the minors, great heart support and the K-10 of spades - he can bid 7♥. Of course, some pairs will conduct lengthy scientific auctions to the same spot. If East leads the ♦K to dummy's ace, North can make 7♥. If he takes the ♥AK and next the ♠KA, East will discard. North ruffs a spade in dummy, ruffs a diamond and takes two more trumps. The last trump effects a double squeeze, and the ♣J wins the 13th trick no matter how the clubs lie. South can make 7NT with a similar squeeze but must guess who holds the ♣Q. We predict that North-South will get a near-top for +2210.

Board 8West Deals
None Vul

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

If East opens 1NT in third seat, West will transfer to spades and bid 3NT next to offer a choice of games. We wouldn't criticize East if he passed with his flat distribution and minimum strength, but with three-card spade support and no sign of a heart stopper, most Easts will go to 4♠. If South leads a diamond, East wins with the king and takes the ♠AK, getting the bad news. Then he might guess to try for an endplay by taking the ♦A, ruffing a diamond and running the clubs. If North refused to ruff, East could exit with a trump, salvaging the contract if North held a hand such as ♠J 10 9 7 ♥A J 2 ♦Q J 5 ♣7 3 2. As it happens, East would go down when South perversely holds the ♥A. We predict that East-West will get a good matchpoint result for +420; Easts at 3NT will be held to nine tricks by a heart opening lead.

Board 9North Deals
E-W Vul

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

North's hand is hard to describe. If he opens 1♣, he is too weak to "reverse" with 2♦ over a major-suit response. He could raise a 1♥ response to 2♥ (a slight underbid) or rebid 2♣ over 1♠ (but suggesting at least six clubs). We would open 1♣ and rebid 1NT over 1♠. We certainly would not open 1♦ and rebid 2♣, which would risk landing at a 4-2 fit if South held ♠Q 6 5 4 3 ♥K J 4 3 ♦Q 2 ♣8 7. Whatever North opens, East may overcall 1♠, and West will raise to 2♠. If North doubles, North-South could be +500 on defense, but South will jump to 4♦, which North may raise, or bid 5♦ himself. At tables where East does not act, South will respond 1♦, and North will raise to 3♦. Then a few pairs may get to slam. We think South will take only 11 tricks, misguessing in trumps, but North-South should get a good result for +400.

Board 10East Deals
Both Vul

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

West opens 1♥ after two passes, and North tries 1♠. East is too weak to raise to 2♥, but South, with four-card support, may boost to 2♠ though his ♥K looks worthless. West will double, and East will go to 3♥. After two more passes, not every North will compete to 3♠, but if South had a slightly different hand, that contract might be makeable. If North does bid 3♠, West might double to protect his presumed plus if he thought 3♥ was makeable, but he can't know he would have been plus at 3♥ or that 3♠ will fail. As it happens, 3♠ is minus 100, and West could be +170 at hearts with good guessing. If North leads the ♠A and another spade, West ruffs and can force two entries to dummy to finesse twice in trumps, losing only three side-suit tricks. We think East-West may score above average if they buy the deal for +140.

Board 11South Deals
None Vul

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

Many results are possible. When South opens 1♣, it wouldn't occur to us to overcall 1♠ on the flimsy West cards — and if we did overcall, East would bid way too much — but some players do well with an aggressive competitive style. If West restrains himself and passes, North will respond 1♦, probably silencing East. If South rebids 1♠, some Norths will rebid 2♦. If East doubled, and West treated the double for penalty, as we would, East-West would be +300. If instead North takes a 2♣ preference or bids 1NT, passed out, North-South would get a plus score. A few Easts may try a swashbuckling 1♥ overcall at their first turn, a call we can't endorse but a typical bad-bid-at-the-right-time matchpoint action. West will raise, and if East plays at 2♥, he might win nine tricks for +140 and a fine matchpoint result.

Board 12West Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

When East opens 1♠ and South bids 2♣, West will scrape up a negative double. North may respect his partner's vulnerable overcall enough to raise to 3♣, and since West's double has suggested length in both red suits, East can bid 3♦; it is often correct to compete to the three level with a trump fit and half of the high-card strength. North-South must subside; they would be minus 500 at 4♣ doubled. At 3♦, East can ruff the second club and lead the ♦Q, ducked. He can take the ♠A K, ruff a spade, ruff a club, ruff a spade and lead to the ♦J. North wins and leads a heart, and East wins in dummy, draws the missing trump, comes to the ♥K and wins the 13th trick with a good spade, making five. Only a trick-two heart shift by South holds East to 10 tricks. East-West should win most of the matchpoints for +150.

Board 13North Deals
Both Vul

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

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

Some players are reluctant to open a weak two-bid with two aces, and North may pass as dealer. Then East may pass also; his hand is junky and his spades are too ragged to open 2♠, vulnerable. If South is left to open 1NT, North can transfer into 4♥. A club opening lead would hold South to four, but if West leads a diamond, South can take the ace, draw trumps and lead a spade, setting up a pitch for his club loser and making an overtrick. At tables where North opens 2♥, some Souths may bid 3NT. When West leads a club, South may hold up his ace twice. He could still win 10 tricks by running the hearts and catching East in an endplay. If West leads the ♠J against 3NT, East can hold South to 10 tricks only by grabbing his ace and shifting to clubs. We think North-South won't score many matchpoints if they are only +620.

Board 14East Deals
None Vul

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

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

When East opens 1♣, many Souths will jump to 2♦, preemptive. If West were to bid 2NT, showing about 11 points, East might pass. If instead West bids 2♥, and East rebids 3♣, West will have to try 3NT since East could have a good hand. If against 3NT North leads a low heart to the jack, queen and ace, West can return a heart. North wins with the 10 and leads the ♦J, ducked, and a second diamond. West takes his ace and concedes another heart to set up his ninth trick. If North's opening lead is the ♦J, West can win the second diamond and will be afraid to play hearts, lest South get in. But West can run the clubs, pitching two hearts and his last diamond. At the end, he can lead the ♥A and a second heart to endplay North and score the ♠K. Making 3NT will be a lucky result; East-West may get a 75% board for +400.

Board 15South Deals
N-S Vul

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

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

West's hand is not ideal for any action. To preempt with an atypical hand in second seat, when South has passed, is questionable, and the high-card values and defense are iffy for a one-bid. If West opens 3♠, he will shut out everybody. If he opens 1♠, East will respond 2♣ or 1NT (forcing). West rebids 2♠ and signs off at 3♠ over East's 2NT. If North leads the ♥2, West may be tempted to finesse with the queen, hoping to pitch his club loser (or maybe a diamond later) on the ♥A. Then he will lose a heart, a club, two trumps and at least one diamond. If he grabs the ♥A and finesses with the ♠Q, North takes the king and exits with a trump. West can throw North back in with the ♠10, and then if North leads a diamond, West will be spared a guess in the suit. We think East-West will score well for +140.

Board 16West Deals
E-W Vul

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

When West opens 1♥, East can commit to game. A leap to 4♥ may appeal, but that action is dubious with first-round control of two side suits and might result in a missed slam. An artificial 2NT response as a forcing raise would suggest balanced pattern. Some Easts will “splinter” with 3♠, showing heart support, spade shortness and slam interest. Since West’s ♠K is wasted, he will sign off at 4♥. When North leads the ♦Q, the play may be awkward, but the friendly lie of the cards can produce 12 tricks. West takes the ♦A and passes the ♥8. He might try a club to his queen next, and North wins and leads a spade, forcing dummy to ruff. If West then leads a second club, and South’s jack appears, West can take the ace, ruff a spade and pick up the ♥K. East-West will need +680 to score well. A couple of pairs may be +1430.

Board 17North Deals
None Vul

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

North-South should have a prosaic auction: 1♦-1♥, 2NT-3NT. Ten tricks are likely. If West leads the ♣10, South wins with the queen and might lead a diamond to dummy’s king and a heart back to his king. He next ducks a spade. If East wins and returns a club, South can take the ace and cash the ♦A, dropping East’s jack. The 3-3 spade break gives him three spade tricks, a heart, four diamonds and two clubs. Even if West stays off a club lead and tries, say, a spade, South can manage the same 10 tricks. We expect +430 to North-South at most tables.

Board 18East Deals
N-S Vul

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

Many Souths will open the bidding. South has three quick tricks and four spades, and passing would risk a passed-out deal when his side could make a spade partial. But South’s hand is bereft of playing tricks, and the vulnerability is adverse. This time, South’s winning action is to pass. West may open in third seat with 1♠ or perhaps 2♠, and East-West will play a spade or notrump partial for +110 or +120. But if South starts with 1♦, West will overcall 1♠, North will double and East will bid his time. South will wish he hadn’t opened and will rebid 2♦. If he plays there, best defense will beat the contract two tricks. (In some variations, East must ruff one of West’s spade winners to lead a heart or club, promoting a second trump trick for West.) East-Wests who are +200 will pick up most of the matchpoints.

Board 19South Deals
E-W Vul

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

North will open 1♠ in third chair; he has three quick tricks and five cards in the ranking suit. Most Easts will double, and South can redouble. West will bid 2♦, promising no strength but suggesting a port in the storm, and after two passes, South will try 2♠ or 2NT. East-West will subside; they would be minus 200 at 3♦ doubled. Against 2♠, East will take the ♣A K and give West a ruff. North will lose two more trump tricks, making two. Best defense — a diamond opening lead by East — beats 2♠. 2NT will be an unhappy contract after a diamond lead, surely down two. North-South will score well for +110 but can get a top if East prefers to overcall 2♣ at his first turn. South may pass, hoping North will reopen with a double. North’s hand is so minimum he may not act again, but North-South could still be +300.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

North-South can get a good matchpoint score if they find a way to go plus. After three passes, South may consider passing out the deal since he has only 12 points and no spade length. Most Souths will open 1♦ — North may have good spades — and if West restrains himself from overcalling on a shabby suit, North responds 1♥ and South rebids 2♣. Then some Norths will take a conservative 2♦ preference. Others will try an aggressive 2NT bid, and then some Souths will pass while others will try 3♣, passed out. The play at any contract, especially a club partial, may be complex. South can make 2♣ with best play but is likely to go down one; he will surely go down at least one at 3♣. Norths at 2NT rate to go down one. Pairs at 2♦ have the best chance for a plus; eight tricks are more than likely.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

This is not an easy slam to bid with only 29 high-card points. The keys are two productive long suits and a wealth of primary values. West's ♦10 9 are unbiddable values; without them, slam would be iffy. A "standard" auction may start 1♠, 2♦-3♣ (a "high reverse" promising extra strength). West should be encouraged by his useful honors and might stall with a "fourth-suit" bid of 3♥, and then when East takes a 4♦ preference, West should like his slam chances even more since his ♥A is an ideal card opposite East's presumed singleton. Even if West bids 3NT at his third turn, East might give it one more try with 4♦, and then West should drive to slam. We think East-Wests who judge the auction well and reach 6♦ or perhaps 6♠ will score somewhere above average. If you found a route to 6NT, well done.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

We expect every North-South to reach 3NT. When South opens 1♠, some Norths will respond 2♣. South will rebid 2♦ and carry North's 2NT to 3NT. If North use a game-forcing 2/1 style, North will respond 1NT and rebid 2NT over South's 2♦, and South has an easy lift to game. No East will find your lead and ours, the ♠A, which holds North to 10 tricks. More likely, East will lead a heart or a passive diamond, and North can win and play for the maximum by taking the ♣A, leading a club to his queen and conceding the third club; he will set up 11 fortunate tricks. (East might try to deflect him by dropping the ♣10 or ♣J under the ace.) North-South may be stuck with a mediocre matchpoint result if they fail to handle this deal for +460.

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

South's hand doesn't look like an opening bid, with a lot of "quacks." If South passes, West will open 1♠. His hand is little more compelling than South's, but he does have a five-card spade suit and ample defense. Then East may "splinter" with 4♣ to show a big spade fit, club shortness and slam interest. (A conventional 2NT forcing raise would suggest balanced pattern.) West will know his ♣K is wasted and will sign off at 4♠. At tables where South opens the bidding, the contract should be the same: West overcalls 1♠, East commits to game. If North leads a trump or a diamond (or if he leads the ♣A and then a diamond), West will make 4♠ on the nose. But if North happens to lead a heart, West has the timing to set up and cash dummy's ♥J for a diamond discard, making an overtrick. We expect +620 at most tables.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

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

After two passes, East opens 1♦, South overcalls 1♠ and West, a passed hand, can try 2♥. If East rebids 2NT (limiting his hand and aiming toward the most likely game), South may compete with 3♣, but West will bid 3♦. East will do well to stop there; if he persisted with 3NT, a club opening lead would beat the contract, and a spade opening lead would beat it two tricks. At 3♦, East will take 10 tricks, losing to South's A-Q of trumps and ♣A, and we expect +130 to East-West to be a common and about average result. A few Souths will compete vigorously, but their limit is eight tricks at either spades or clubs, and if they bid as high as the four level, East-West could double for +300 and a top.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

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

East-West using Standard methods may encounter awkwardness. When East opens 1♥, West will temporize with 2♦, and East will raise to 3♦. Then West can't afford to suppress his support for East's major. If he continues with 3♥, East may treat that bid as forcing and go on to a poor game. A game-forcing 2/1 approach would stop at 3♥: West would respond 1NT, forcing, and jump to 3♥ over 2♦, and East would pass. (The 2/1 style has benefits and drawbacks.) East would survive at 4♥ if South led a club. He could also make 4♥ with a spade lead but probably would not. South's doubleton ♦Q would fall under the A-K, but East would have to pick up the trumps as well, and finessing against North's Q-10 would not be clearly indicated. East-Wests who find themselves scoring +620 may win 80% of the matchpoints.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

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

If East opens 1♣ despite lacking two quick tricks and despite being vulnerable, some Souths will pass, hoping East-West will get too high. West responds 1♥, East rebids 1NT and West signs off at 2♥. After two passes, South has nowhere to go, and East-West will be +110. Most Souths will show their hand with a 1NT overcall. West may compete with 2♥, but if North risks 2♠, everyone will pass. (At tables where East passes as dealer, South will open 1NT, and North will transfer into 2♠, hoping for the best.) If East leads the ♥Q against 2♠ by North, declarer can take dummy's ace and lead the ♦A and a second diamond. He can ruff a diamond in dummy, keep control and win 10 tricks — or 11 tricks if West errs by ruffing in on the second diamond. We expect +170 to North-South. Will some pair reach 4♠ for +620 and a top?

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

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

Many Wests will open 1NT, passed out, and North may lead the ♠Q, asking South to drop the jack if he has it. (This commonly played lead convention is not risk-free; your analyst once led the queen from North's holding, and partner, with A-x-x, took the ace, assumed declarer had the king, and shifted.) When South duly produces the jack, North will continue spades. West takes the ace and cashes four clubs. If he then courageously leads a diamond to dummy's king, he is home with +90. Many Norths will act over 1NT and may play at 2♠. The defenders have six sure tricks, but if North must guess where the missing heart honors lie, he should go right: After West shows up with all the club honors and the ♠A, East will be marked with the ♥A. If North gets out for minus 50, North-South will get a good matchpoint result.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

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

Many Wests will open 3♥, though some might deem the hand too heavy for a three-level preempt, not vulnerable. North can't act, and if East raises to 4♥, South may pass for +100. Some Souths will double 4♥, fearing correctly that East-West are stealing. Then North may pass for +300, still not a maximum result for his side. If he takes out to 5♦ and plays there, he could make an overtrick, but if he ruffs East's heart lead in dummy, comes to his ♣A and leads a trump to the jack, West can win, lead a spade to East and ruff a club return for down one. North-South may not bid and make a game even if West passes or opens 1♥ as dealer; they may fail at 4♠ or 5♣. We can imagine North playing 3NT with a heart lead, down a ton when he misplaces the ♦Q. North-South should get a good result if they score game.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

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

North-South should get to the good spade game with no difficulty. If South opens 1♦ in third seat and North responds 1♠, some Souths will raise to 2♠. To raise a major-suit response with three-card support in a suitable hand is a winning tactic and will simplify matters here: North can jump to 4♠. If instead South rebids 1NT, North may bid 2♣ next (a conventional "new minor forcing" action for many pairs) to learn about South's spade support, and 4♠ should be reached. East leads the ♥J, and North can take the ace, lead a diamond to his ace and try a trump to dummy's 10. West wins and cashes a heart. North ruffs the next heart and leads another trump to the ace. He can ruff his fourth club in dummy and lose only to West's high trump, making four. We expect +620 to North-South at most tables.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

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

Assume that East and South pass. Most experts open 1♠ with 5-5 in the black suits, getting the major mentioned promptly and making it harder for the opponents to come in, and we think almost all experts would open 1♠ on a 6-6 hand such as Wests. If North passes, East can issue a limit raise to 3♠ or, even better, jump to 3♦. (A passed-hand jump shift suggests that the hand is improved by partner's opening bid, so East would promise spade support.) If West continues with 4♣, East will sign off at 4♠, having no red ace to cuebid, and West will settle for 6♠. A few Norths may preempt audaciously in hearts, but East-West should still reach slam. North-South can't afford a 7♥ save that would be minus 1100. East-West should score average for +980. Some will be +1010 when North's opening lead is a non-heart.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

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

Decades ago, players counted "honor tricks," emphasizing the value of aces and kings. Then point-countitis set in, and now players open junkpiles like West's hand. A 1♣ opening will silence North, and East may respond in a red suit and pass when West rebids 1♠. The defenders can pick declarer clean: two high clubs, the ♥A, an overruff in the third club, the ♥K with North pitching a diamond, a heart ruff, the ♦A and a diamond ruff and the ♠A. Down three, +150 to North-South. If sanity prevails and West passes in second seat, North-South may stop low: 1♣-1♥, 1♠-1NT, 2♣-Pass. If East leads the ♦K, killing dummy's entry to the ♥K, declarer can't avoid losing two trumps, a diamond and three spades. North-South's best spot? A spade partial on the 4-2 fit where nine tricks and +140 are available.

Board 32West Deals
E-W Vul

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

The adverse vulnerability may deter East-West from acting; West may pass as dealer. But North will be reluctant to pass in second seat with borderline opening values and six cards in spades. If he opens 1♠, some Easts will try 2♦, and a few will bid 2NT ("unusual," showing length in the minors) despite the vulnerability. If instead East passes, South may respond 2♣, and when North rebids 2♠, South may raise to 4♠, a losing decision since the defense can take the ♥A, a heart ruff, a club and a diamond. Over 2♠, some Souths may try their luck at 3NT where nine tricks are unstoppable. (We think North-South are more likely to reach 3NT if East overcalls 2♦ or 2NT at his first turn.) North-South will win most of the matchpoints for +400. A few Norths will open 2♠ and play there for +140 and an average result.

Board 33North Deals
None Vul

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

After two passes, South will often open a lightish 1♣, hoping wistfully for a major-suit response he can pass. Then the auction may develop in different ways, depending on the players' judgment. Some Wests will handle their 18-point hand by starting with a double. If North bids 1♦ and two passes follow, or if South rebids 1NT, West will double again. Then East might land at 2♠, where with astute play he can take nine tricks for +140. At other tables, West will downgrade his hand slightly and start with a robust 1♥ overcall. If all pass, West will manage seven tricks, +80; if instead North stretches to compete with 1NT and two passes follow, West may double. Then East might bid spades, but if he treats West's double as for penalty, passes and finds a spade opening lead, East-West can be +300 for a top.

Board 34East Deals
N-S Vul

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

East's six-card suit contains only a jack, but some Easts will eye the vulnerability and open a flawed weak 2♥. If West raises to 3♥, some Norths will pass, and North-South will at best +100 even if East misguesses the trump position. Bold Norths will come in with 3♠, and South will raise to 4♠ unless he gives his partner plenty of room to compete. If East leads a heart, North will take the ace and must guess right in both trumps (not a sure thing if East has opened 2♥) and clubs (he may be able to place the ♣A with East based on the bidding and play). At tables where East passes as dealer, North will open 1♠, East may get in the way with 2♥, South will raise to 2♠ and West may try 3♥. After two passes, South will go to 3♠ with his good hand and four trumps. We think North-South will get an 80% result for +170.

Board 35South Deals
E-W Vul

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

South has a good weak 2♠ opening, not vulnerable. Then if North jumps to 4♠, a lot of matchpoints will ride on West's opening lead. A club lead would hold South to 11 tricks, and East-West would get a maximum result for minus 450. If West is less inspired and quite reasonably leads a trump, South can win in his hand with the jack (counting on a 3-2 break), finesse in diamonds, draw trumps and finesse in diamonds. When the ♦K succumbs under the ace, South has 12 tricks. Other Norths will try their luck at 3NT. Here, East will probably lead a red suit; the ♣A might be his last choice. If East leads a heart, North might play safe at IMP scoring by running the spades and taking his three red-suit winners. At matchpoints, his normal course will be to try for 12 tricks, and North-South can be +490 for a top.

Board 36West Deals
Both Vul

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

Many Wests will open 1♦, though they would prefer length in the majors. If North overcalls 1♠, South may raise to 3♠ (or cuebid 2♦), and North should land at 4♠. If East leads the ♦A and a low diamond, North ruffs, draws trumps, leads a heart from dummy — and might put up the king, placing West with the ♥A for his opening bid but not A-Q-8; East might have led a singleton. North-South will be +650. At other tables, North will issue a 2♦ Michaels cuebid to show length in both majors. (Many players use Michaels only with weak or strong hands.) North-South should get to 4♠ again. We are not sure how East-West can find their paying sacrifice in clubs. If West passes as dealer, North opens 1♠ and South raises, maybe West might climb in with an unusual notrump bid. Kudos to East-Wests who achieve par: minus 500 at 6♣ doubled.