

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ K J 7	♠ 10 6	♠ A 8 5 4
♥ A Q J 7 2	♥ K 9 4	♥ 10 5 3
♦ Q J 4	♦ A 10 6 5 2	♦ K 8 3
♣ Q 9	♣ J 10 7	♣ 8 3 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 9 3 2	
	♥ 8 6	
	♦ 9 7	
	♣ A K 6 5 4	

EW 3♥; EW 1N; NS 2♣; EW 1♠; NS 1♦; Par -140: EW 3♥=

When neither side is vulnerable players it's a bidders' game, so N/S might get involved at some tables, perhaps with South making a lead-directing bid in clubs. E/W have a clear majority of the points though, so are likely to declarer the hand. Here are four possible scenarios:

2♥ by West (after 1♥-2♥)

There is a latent diamond ruff that threatens to mature if declarer tries to access dummy with the ♦ K, or if the defence leads diamonds at an early stage. The winning line is to play ♥ A followed by ♥ Q at the first opportunity. The ♠ A is used as an entry for the spade finesse later in the play. This is a tough line of play to find as it obviously blows a trump trick if the finesse is winning. Making 140 rather than 110 could swing a lot of matchpoints, especially if players in NT contracts manage to make eight tricks for 120.

1 NT by West (strong NT)

On the likely diamond lead declarer can certainly make eight tricks. Note that there's a blockage in the club suit so the defence can only score three quick tricks in it.

1 NT (or 2 NT) by East (after 1♥-1 NT)

Now the likely lead is a club. This neatly unblocks the suit. It gifts dummy a trick with the ♣ Q, but sets up four tricks for South to run. Declarer is held to just seven tricks.

Finally, at tables where South opened or overcalled, West may be pushed to 3♥ and will be under even more pressure to score that critical ninth trick.

As a very rough guide, one's side should aim to declare part-score deals three-quarters of the time at this vulnerability.

Board 2

East Deals

N-S Vul

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

EW 4N; EW 4♥; EW 2♠; EW 3♦; EW 3♣; Par -430; EW 3N+1

If the bidding starts 1♦-1♥-2♣, a conservative West might give simple preference for diamonds. This could well be the right thing to do on another day. ♦Q6 is a great holding in partner's long suit so stretching to bid 2NT is a fair gamble. East will certainly go on to game.

The cards lie very kindly for declarer and ten tricks roll home, playing South for ♥Q. The defence make their three aces but that is all.

Board 3
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ 8 7 3	♠ J 9 6 2	♠ K 5 4
♥ K 8 2	♥ A J 7 6 3	♥ 9 5
♦ A 10 8	♦ Q 5 4	♦ K J 9 7 6
♣ 10 9 5 4	♣ K	♣ J 8 7
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; border: 1px solid black;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A Q 10	
	♥ Q 10 4	
	♦ 3 2	
	♣ A Q 6 3 2	

NS 5♥; NS 4♠; NS 4♣; NS 2N; NS 2♦; Par +450: NS 4♥+1

4♥ should be the popular contract and once again the cards lie very kindly. Eleven tricks are an easy make, all thirteen on a non-diamond lead as a single ruff establishes the fifth club. Declarer will need to find something else to moan about.....

.....and here it is! There are always one or two pairs that play in 3NT on hands like this despite the 5-3 major suit fit. West is unlikely to lead from ♦A108 so the par result of +450 is a joint bottom for N/S.

Board 5

North Deals

N-S Vul

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

EW 6N; EW 6♠; EW 6♦; EW 5♥; EW 3♣; Par -990; EW 6N=

3 NT should be fairly universal. The West hand is 3-3-4-3 so not worth more even if partner might have as many as twenty points.

Declarer can't (or rather shouldn't!) go wrong in diamonds so it is all about whether they make one or two heart tricks. South, the spotlight is on YOU! Are you ready to play a low card in tempo if declarer plays a low heart towards the ♥ Q107 early in the play? As the cards lie, declarer actually does better to cash all the spade and diamond winners, putting South under intolerable pressure.

Board 6

East Deals

E-W Vul

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

NS 5♠; S 4N; NS 4♣; N 1N; NS 2♦; Par +450: NS 4♠+1

The contract should surely be 4 ♠. At most tables North will be declarer and they will be faced with an early decision if East leads a low heart. Run it, hoping to score two heart tricks, or rise with the ace and play three top clubs) Tough call!

It is this sort of position that militates against leading 2nd highest from poor suits against a suit contract. Declarer is faced with a harder decision if the opening lead doesn't flag the position of the ♥ K.

Board 8

West Deals
None Vul

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

EW 5♠; EW 3N; EW 5♣; EW 2♥; EW 1♦; Par -450; EW 4♠+1

On this occasion the inveterate 3 NT bidders in the West seat run out of luck. North has an obvious diamond lead and declarer is held to at most nine tricks. In practice, they might take the spade finesse rather than the heart finesse and go down. The spade game makes eleven tricks on a diamond lead and twelve on any other lead.

Memo to North: Did you stick in a ♦ overcall? It is vital at pairs scoring to help partner out with their opening lead whenever you can.

Memo to West: Did you bid 3 NT at your second turn to show 19 points? It is much better to play a 2 NT rebid as showing 18-19. This allows partner to checkback for 3-card spade support.

Board 9

North Deals
E-W Vul

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

NS 4♠; NS 3N; NS 2♥; NS 2♦; NS 2♣; Par +420; NS 4♠=

It is only board No.9, but this is the fourth time that there has been a choice between a 5-3 major suit fit and a no-trump contract. It is usually the player with the three-card holding in the potential trump suit that is better placed to make the decision. A doubleton, or a long suit that might be established by ruffing, suggest playing the major suit fit. Here South is completely balanced and that usually favours NT.

However the club suit is unstopped so the spade contract appears to be the happier choice. BUT, will a club be led? If East is on lead, maybe, but West would prefer a diamond.

Having escaped a club lead, declarers in NT will takes the spade finesse to establish nine tricks. Should they risk the heart finesse for a tenth trick, knowing that all those in a spade contract will have no reason not to? In a part-score contract its an even money shot to beat or lose to those in a spade part-score. Some pairs may reach game. If game is making you cannot compete with those pairs, but if game is going down any plus score will earn some extra matchpoints. Therefore, cash your nine tricks.This also secures a win against those in the same contract who receive a club lead and lose the first five tricks (You don't know that the suit is split 4-3)

If you *are* one of the pairs that have slightly overbid to game in NT, you should emphatically play safe for nine tricks. It is fair to assume that many pairs will stop short of game so don't jeopardize the advantage you have already gained simply by securing a game bonus. Only take the heart finesse if you are shooting for tops and want to beat everybody!

Board 10
 East Deals
 Both Vul

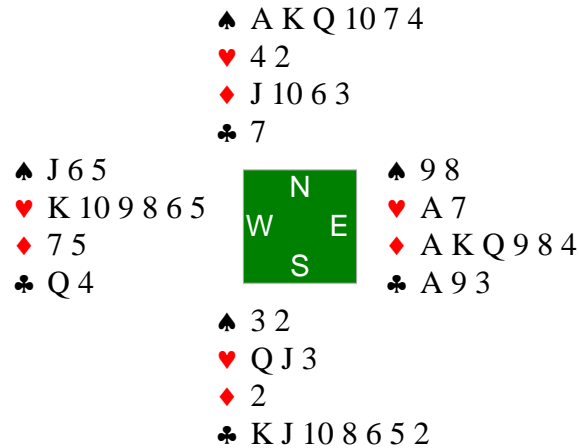
♠ Q 8 5 4 2	♠ 6 3	♠ K J
♥ A K J	♥ 8 2	♥ 10 9 7 6
♦ 9 8 3	♦ J 10 7 5 2	♦ A 6 4
♣ Q 6	♣ A 9 5 2	♣ 10 8 7 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A 10 9 7	
	♥ Q 5 4 3	
	♦ K Q	
	♣ K J 3	

NS 1N; NS 2♦; NS 2♣; EW 1♠; EW 1♥;
 Par +90: NS 1N=; NS 2♣=; NS 2♦=

A plus score for either side should score well. If South opens 1 NT, that should end the auction, but over 1 ♣ or 1 ♥ West might bid 1 ♠. If that is followed by two passes South has a tricky decision. 1 NT would earn a great score if East parted with the ♦ A on the first or second round of the suit, but that would be very poor defence. In practice, declarer is likely to be held to two diamond tricks and then go down after trying the club finesse.

So, passing 1 ♠ could well work out well for N/S, conceding minus 90 whilst others are scoring minus 100.

Board 11
 South Deals
 None Vul



E 3♥; W 2♥; EW 3♦; EW 1N; NS 1♠; NS 1♣; Par -140: E 3♥=

South will open 3♣ and West doesn't have enough strength to make a bid. North should also pass as 3♠ is a one-round force in standard methods. No doubt some will bid it anyway!

Anyone for 3NT on the East cards after 3♣-pass-pass? Facing West's cards it is a good contract on a non-spade lead, just needing a 3-2 diamond break. It would also make on the actual layout if South led the ♥Q.

Ok, so you sensibly bid 3♦. West will be tempted bid 3♥ at pairs scoring. North, who was itching to mention spades at their last turn my well do so now. It would take careless defence to let 4♦ or 4♥ make, so East's last chance of a decent score is to double for penalties.

Board 12

West Deals

N-S Vul

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

W 5N; E 3N; EW 4♦; EW 2♠; EW 2♥; N 1♣; Par -460: W 3N+2

Note that 3 NT must be played by West. A club lead from the South hand establishes three tricks for the defence (the ♣ K kills the ♣ J and then a low club forces out the ♣ A). If North leads a club, declarer has a double stop in the suit (the ♣ Q gets killed)

A normal auction (with N/S silent) would be 1 ♠-2 ♦-2 ♥-3 ♣-3 NT

The 3 ♣ bid is fourth suit forcing and says nothing about clubs.

In the play, declarer should take a FIRST round finesse in diamonds to cater for ♦ QXXX in the North hand. This is four times more likely than a singleton ♦ Q in the South hand. With this combination you must be prepared to pay out to ♦ Q offside, singleton or doubleton.

After the finesse wins, the winning play for eleven tricks as the cards lie is a spade from dummy, playing ♠ J if South plays low.

Board 13
 North Deals
 Both Vul

♠ 10 8 5	♠ 4 2	♠ Q J 9 7 6									
♥ 6 5	♥ A 10 8 2	♥ K J 9 7									
♦ K J 10 5 2	♦ Q 8	♦ 4									
♣ J 6 3	♣ A Q 9 8 5	♣ K 7 4									
<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <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										
	♠ A K 3										
	♥ Q 4 3										
	♦ A 9 7 6 3										
	♣ 10 2										

NS 3♥; NS 2N; NS 3♣; NS 2♦; NS 1♠; Par +140; NS 1♥+2

South is highly likely to play in 3 NT. So long as East overcalled in spades, West will lead one and the contract will fail. The spade lead hands the tempo to the defence.

On any other lead, declarer has time to establish nine tricks. Repeated finesses in clubs sets up four winners in the suit. It is best to start by running the ♣ 10, scoring five club tricks if West was dealt ♣ KJX.

A red suit lead sets up a ninth trick at once. On a club lead, losing to the ♣ K, declarer unblocks the ♣ 10 and wins the spade switch. Then declarer finesses the ♣ 9 lest West started with four club, and leads a low heart from dummy. This is better than playing a low diamond at trick three, for West would play the ♦ K and clear the spades, leaving the diamond suit blocked.

Board 14
 East Deals
 None Vul

♠ 5 4	♠ J 10 6	♠ A 9 8 3 2
♥ A K 9 8	♥ 5 3	♥ Q J 7 2
♦ K J 8 7 5	♦ Q 10 9 4 3	♦ 2
♣ 4 3	♣ A Q 6	♣ 8 7 5
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K Q 7	
	♥ 10 6 4	
	♦ A 6	
	♣ K J 10 9 2	

EW 3♥; NS 3♣; NS 1N; EW 1♠; NS 1♦; Par -100; NS 4♣×-1

This hand plays very nicely for E/W in a heart contract, aided by the 3-3 break in spades. However, at some tables the suit might not get a mention.

If South opens 1 NT, those with a bid to show hearts and another will fare well.

If South opens 1♣, either natural or 2+ clubs, West bids 1♦ and North 1 NT or 2♣, East can double to show the majors. Ideally this should show diamond tolerance but it is less unilateral than 2♠. If North passes it's a bit more problematic. East might try 1♠, but if that is non-forcing it is possible that everyone will pass. Should West bid 2♥? After all, to find a fit someone has to bid the suit where there is a fit! It could all go pear-shaped now, but the bid doesn't promise extra values in the way that an opener's reverse would.

Bidding opposite an overcall is one of the most contentious areas of the game. Lots of players have strong opinions about what should be forcing or non-forcing, but there is no gold standard.

Board 15
 South Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ J 10 9	♠ Q 2	♠ A 8 6 5 3									
♥ Q 9 6 5 3 2	♥ A 7 4	♥ J									
♦ J 6 5	♦ 8 3	♦ A 10 9									
♣ 10	♣ J 9 7 6 4 3	♣ K 8 5 2									
<table style="border: 2px solid green; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto; text-align: center; border-collapse: collapse;"> <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 7 4										
	♥ K 10 8										
	♦ K Q 7 4 2										
	♣ A Q										

N 3N; N 4♣; S 3♣; S 1N; NS 2♦; E 1♠; NS 1♥; Par +500; E 4♠×-3

A no-trump contract is better played by North as a spade lead allows declarer to score two tricks in the suit. 3 NT by South fails on a spade lead as the defence will have time to unblock the suit and enjoy four spade winners and at least two further tricks.

3 NT by North makes if declarer guesses to do the right things. For a start, declarer needs to give up on the slim chance of making six club tricks and should also reckon that a defender will not part with the ♣ K on the first or second round unless they have to.

On a spade lead, declarer can lead diamonds twice from hand to establish four winners in the suit. East can lock declarer in dummy by playing ♦ A on the first or second round and exiting with a diamond, but this is answered by A ♣ then Q ♣. East can cash the ♠ A but then has to concede.

On a passive lead such as ♥ J, win with the ♥ K and play ♣ A, then ♣ Q. East has to duck or you are home! Now play ♦ K. East wins and exits with a diamond. Next play ♦ Q (it won't help the defence if West unblocks the ♦ J) and then a third diamond. West wins and switches to ♠ J to the ♠ Q and ♠ A. East exits with a spade but declarer wins with the ♠ K and plays their last spade. West wins, but has only hearts left and has to gift declarer a third trick in the suit. Game made by way of one spade, three hearts, three diamonds and two clubs.

The tempo-stealing play in clubs is a good tactic that can be used in lots of other settings. It sets up a trick for the defence which they cannot afford to take.

It has to be said that both of these lines are rather double-dummy, and the blockage in spades very lucky. You could take other perfectly reasonable lines and end up going down.

Board 16

West Deals

E-W Vul

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

EW 4♥; EW 5♦; NS 2♣; Par -600: EW 5♦=

West has no picture cards facing the void so all of the E/W points are working. Despite the good fit it is unlikely they will bid to game without being pushed. At the vulnerability N/S may well bid their ten-card fit to a high level, unaware that their opponents may not have bid their cold game in one of the red suits if left to their own devices.

The challenge for E/W is to play in the higher scoring hearts rather than diamonds, ideally 4♥, but if the opponent press on to 5♣ this all changes. They must bid 5♦ (best), or double, but definitely not bid 5♥.

Perhaps more than any other board in this set, it will be fascinating to look at the scores across the whole event to see what has happened.

Board 17
 North Deals
 None Vul

♠ A 8 3	♠ K 10 9 7	♠ Q J 5 4 2
♥ K 7 2	♥ 4 3	♥ A 9 8
♦ K 8 7 6	♦ A Q J 3	♦ 2
♣ 5 4 3	♣ K J 8	♣ Q 10 9 6
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 6	
	♥ Q J 10 6 5	
	♦ 10 9 5 4	
	♣ A 7 2	

NS 3♥; NS 3♦; NS 1N; EW 1♠; N 1♣; Par +140: NS 3♥=

It is love-all and the points are fairly evenly divided between the two sides. Under these circumstances it generally pays to declare and on this deal everyone will want a piece of the action.

N/S are likely to reach 3♦ or 3♥ after East raises spades. Should E/W bid on to 3♠? Neither of them has an extra trump, West is totally flat and the bidding won't have suggested that either side has more than an eight card fit. So the answer the answer is no, but one of them might do so anyway thinking that one or two down will be a good result if the opponents can make their contract.

If E/W do bid to 3♠, North emphatically needs to double them when playing pairs. Opponents are apt to take liberties when non-vulnerable, banking on not being doubled and hoping to win the battle for matchpoints. Minus 100 will score very well indeed for E/W, whereas minus 300 will score next to nothing.

Board 18
 East Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ A K 6 3	♠ J 7	♠ 10 9 8 5 4
♥ A 10 7 5 4 2	♥ Q J 6	♥ 9 8
♦ —	♦ J 7 5 3	♦ K 9
♣ K 5 3	♣ 7 6 4 2	♣ A Q J 10
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: green; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 2	
	♥ K 3	
	♦ A Q 10 8 6 4 2	
	♣ 9 8	

EW 6♠; EW 5♥; E 4N; EW 5♣; NS 1♦; Par -980: EW 6♠=

E/W should manage to find the spade game (rather than hearts)

For instance, after 1♦-1♥-2♦, East can double to show the black suits and West will jump to 4♠. The slam in spades is slightly against the odds (46%). If anyone bids it they get lucky.

The correct play of the trump suit ♠ A then ♠ K unless North drops an honour on the first round. In that instance, it is better to run the ♠ 10 on the second round of the suit. This loses to ♠ QJ bare (one possible holding) but wins if North's honour is a singleton (two possible holdings)

Board 19
 South Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ A K 4 3 2	♠ J 8 5	♠ Q 7
♥ 9 2	♥ 7 5 4	♥ A 3
♦ 4	♦ Q 10 7 5	♦ A J 9 6 2
♣ Q 7 6 5 2	♣ K 10 8	♣ A J 9 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 10 9 6	
	♥ K Q J 10 8 6	
	♦ K 8 3	
	♣ 3	

EW 7♣; EW 6♠; EW 3N; EW 3♦; EW 1♥; Par -2000; NS 7♥×-8

South has a nice weak 2♥ opening and West has good distribution but only nine points. The spade suit lacks impletion and is hardly ideal for a two-level vulnerable overcall. The hand is too weak for a leaping Michaels bid of 4♣. This would show at least 5-5 in the black suits and a hand with at most five losers, preferably fewer, and is 'almost' forcing. That said, either action would make East's life a lot easier!

If West sensibly passes, North might raise the ante with 3♥ and now East has a real problem. The least worst action looks like a take-out double, prepared to feel uncomfortable if partner jumps to 4♠.

Here is a question for regular partnerships:

If you double 3♥ (after 2♥-pass-3♥) and partner bids 3♠, what does it mean if you bid 4♦?

If you double 3♥ (after 2♥-pass-3♥) and partner bids 4♠, what does it mean if you bid 5♦?

How about the play in either a club or spade contract? In view of the preemptive opening, there is a good case for starting on clubs with the Q♣, picking up ♣ K108, ♣ K103 or ♣ K83 in the North hand.

Any pair that bids and makes 7♣ is too good for this event!

Board 20

West Deals

Both Vul

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

EW 4♠; W 3♥; EW 4♣; E 2♥; NS 3♦; Par -500; NS 5♦×-2

E/W can make a game in spade, but only with the aid of an inspired view in clubs. There are various possibilities depending on the lead, but all winning lines involve dropping the ♣ J5.

No doubt N/S will locate their diamond fit and possibly push their opponents to a game that they wouldn't have bid under their own steam. Such is the nature of the game! Should they then sacrifice in 5♦? This goes for 500, less than the value of game, but will lose to all pairs defending a part-score and to those defeating 4♠. Bidding it in the hope of pushing them to the five-level is over optimistic. It is better to take your chances in defence on this occasion. Neither North nor South has the distribution to suggest a vulnerable sacrifice at the five-level.

Board 21

North Deals

N-S Vul

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

NS 5♥; S 5♦; N 4♦; EW 2♠; NS 3♣; NS 1N; Par +500; EW 5♠×-3

A competitive auction may lead to E/W sacrificing in 4 ♠ over 4 ♥. West has a void in the enemy suit and East has no defence, so at favourable vulnerability this looks attractive.

Will N/S bid on to 5 ♥? This is an easy make, but North is aceless and South is shapeless. It might not happen! The third spade in the South hand is actually quite a good omen as it makes it likely that there is a singleton opposite. All (except possibly one) of North's cards should be working in offence. It's reasonable to suppose that 5 ♥ will be on a finesse at worst and that the score for defending 4 ♠X will be inadequate compensation for a vulnerable game.

Board 22
 East Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ A 9 5 3	♠ K 10 2	♠ J 7
♥ A K	♥ 10 7 2	♥ J 9 8 5
♦ A 4	♦ 10 8 6 5 3	♦ K Q 9 7 2
♣ A K 9 8 4	♣ 7 3	♣ Q 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q 8 6 4	
	♥ Q 6 4 3	
	♦ J	
	♣ J 10 6 5	

EW 5N; EW 4♠; EW 4♥; EW 5♦; EW 5♣; Par -660: EW 3N+2

The West hand is so rich in controls that it looks better to open 2C (or whatever your big bid is) rather than 2 NT. That gives room to search for a fit in both spades and clubs at a safe level.

Give East ♠ K2, ♥ 432, ♦ 6532, ♣ QJ32 and they would just raise 2 NT to 3 NT. 6 ♣ is excellent.

Or maybe ♠ 7642, ♥ 432, ♦ 6532, ♣ Q2 and they certainly pass 2 NT. 4 ♠ is excellent.

The actual East hand is stronger but there is no fit, so E/W need to stop short of a slam. Eleven tricks can be made by way of a second round finesse of the ♦ 9 plus establishing the fifth club.

It is a bit sweaty if North leads ♠ 2. The J♠ is covered with the Q♠ and this is ducked, Declarer wins the spade return and cashes four diamond tricks. South has to keep three hearts and all four clubs so has to part with their remaining spades. It is now safe to play four rounds of clubs, conceding a trick to South.

West will feel more comfortable if they manage to stop as low as 3 NT, but possibly less focused.

Board 23
 South Deals
 Both Vul

♠ 10 6 5 4 3	♠ K J 9 7	♠ 2
♥ K 10 5 4	♥ —	♥ A Q 8 7 3
♦ J 7 4	♦ 8 3 2	♦ 10 9 6 5
♣ J	♣ K Q 10 9 8 2	♣ A 7 4
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A Q 8	
	♥ J 9 6 2	
	♦ A K Q	
	♣ 6 5 3	

NS 6♣; NS 3♠; EW 2♥; NS 1N; NS 1♦; Par +1100; EW 6♥×-4

6♣ is an excellent (77%) contract for N/S yet 3NT goes two down. (Note that the defence get two chances to lead hearts!)

It is the lack of wastage in hearts facing the void that makes clubs such a good option, but it is very difficult for North to know that partner's values are nearly all working. This is especially true if South opens 1♥. A holding such as ♥KJ96 would constitute four useless points in a club contract. The best that North can do is describe their hand as fully as possible and let partner take control.

Some pairs will have methods that could give them a good shot at reaching the slam, or at least 5♣ in preference to 3NT. For instance, playing four suit transfers a common agreement is to play a new suit as shortage after transferring into a minor. So, playing a strong NT, it would start 1NT-2♠ (clubs)-3♣-3♥ (singleton or void). South, knowing that partner has game values with all their high cards in the black suits will favour playing in clubs. The auction continues 4♣ (sets the suit)-4♥ (♥ void, no control in♦)-6♣.

In the play, declarer should plan to lead towards the club honours and repeat if necessary. They will be pleased to see the ♣J appear on the first round! If West had followed low and the ♣Q had lost to the ace, declarer is on a guess when West follows low to the next round. It is slightly better to play the ♣K now rather than take a finesse

Board 24
 West Deals
 None Vul

♠ Q 3	♠ 8 6 2	♠ K J 5 4
♥ 10 5	♥ 9 8 4	♥ K J 7 6
♦ K 10 3	♦ Q 9 7 5 2	♦ J 6
♣ A K J 9 6 4	♣ 7 5	♣ Q 8 3
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A 10 9 7	
	♥ A Q 3 2	
	♦ A 8 4	
	♣ 10 2	

EW 2N; E 2♠; EW 2♥; EW 3♣; W 1♠; NS 1♦; Par -120; EW 2N=

3 NT played by East looks probable. Against this, South has a horrible lead problem. A diamond (either the ace or a low one) works best as North will get in with the ♦ Q sooner or later. A heart switch then defeats the contract.

If a low heart is led, declarer will knock out the ♠ A. South's only chance at this point is to lead a low diamond in the vain hope that declarer goes wrong. It is very unlikely that they will because the play at trick one has marked South with ♥ AQ. As letting North in will be fatal, declarer should play the ♦ K, there is only one card that can lose to.

If a spade or club is led, declarer will knock out the ♠ A. Now South can exit with a low diamond as above, or play a spade. If declarer then leads a diamond towards dummy South must play low and hope for a wrong guess. There is some chance of this now as the heart position is not clear. After a spade exit, declarer might, instead, rattle off six club winners. In that case, South must not bare either red ace and keep ♥ AQ and ♦ A8 as their last four cards, then lead the ♦ 8 when they obtain the lead in hearts.

Board 25
 North Deals
 E-W Vul

♠ K J 10	♠ A 9 3 2	♠ Q 8 7 5
♥ A 9 7	♥ 2	♥ K 10 3
♦ K J 8 7 5	♦ 3	♦ A Q 6 4 2
♣ K 2	♣ A Q J 9 8 7 4	♣ 3
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ 6 4	
	♥ Q J 8 6 5 4	
	♦ 10 9	
	♣ 10 6 5	

W 4♠; EW 5♦; W 2N; E 2♠; NS 3♣; EW 1♥; Par -500: NS 6♣×-3

A quiet game might work out best for North, what chess players call *Giuoco Piano*. Open 1♣ and do nothing more if the bidding proceeds Dbl-pass-3 NT. A club lead holds declarer to eight tricks and you will be one of the few N/S pairs to register a plus score.

If, instead, the opponents settle on playing in diamonds, it will pay to compete as far 4♣. Let them play in 4♦ rather than goad them into game. However, if they freely bid to 5♦, going to 6♣ will save a few matchpoints. Well judged, but maybe not a great result!

The other approach is to open clubs at a high level and give up on a possible spade fit or slam. 5♣, or even just 4♣, puts the opponents under a lot of pressure and they might do the wrong thing by settling for an inadequate penalty.

Board 26
 East Deals
 Both Vul

♠ 10 7 6	♠ 8 5 4 2	♠ A K 3
♥ K 6	♥ Q J 10 4	♥ A 8 7 5 3
♦ 8 3	♦ J 10 2	♦ A K Q 7
♣ J 10 9 6 4 2	♣ 8 3	♣ 5
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> W N E S </div>	
	♠ Q J 9	
	♥ 9 2	
	♦ 9 6 5 4	
	♣ A K Q 7	

EW 3♠; EW 3♥; EW 4♣; EW 2N; EW 3♦;
 Par -140: EW 1♥+2; EW 1♠+2

This is a rather extraordinary hand. The par result can be achieved by making nine easy tricks in spades on a 3-3 trump fit, yet is no play for nine tricks in NT despite all the suits being stopped. Furthermore, TEN tricks can be made in clubs missing AKQ873 in the trump suit!

If West scrapes up a bid after it starts 1♥-Dbl, E/W will probably reach a hopeless game. Pass works better, they should now emerge with a plus score by playing in a part-score, or by penalizing the opponents. Some may upgrade the East hand and open it with their big bid, probably with an unhappy outcome.

E/W do better to play in a major suit part-score rather than clubs. To make nine tricks in hearts, declarer should transfer the ruff from diamonds to spades. In other words, discard a spade on the third round of diamonds and then play ♠ AK and ruff a spade in dummy with the ♥ 6.

Board 27
 South Deals
 None Vul

♠ A J 9 7 4	♠ Q 3 2	♠ 8 6
♥ Q J 8 7 5	♥ 10 6	♥ A 3 2
♦ —	♦ A Q 6 4	♦ K 10 7 5 2
♣ 8 6 4	♣ K Q 7 2	♣ J 9 5
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K 10 5	
	♥ K 9 4	
	♦ J 9 8 3	
	♣ A 10 3	

NS 2N; NS 3♦; NS 2♣; S 1♠; EW 1♥; Par +120; NS 2N=

The South hand may be totally flat but it has a good array of intermediate cards. They are unlikely to let the bidding die in 1 NT, or to let the opponents play in 2♥/♠ should West get into the action.

Let's suppose that North is declarer in 2 NT or 3 NT. On a minor suit lead declarer will score nine tricks. Likewise on a spade lead, but declarer needs to rise with the ♠ K at trick one in order to block the run of the suit. West has to win, but cannot continue the suit without gifting a trick.

A heart lead is the killer. Eight tricks is now the limit and declarer will only make seven if they take the diamond finesse. They must, instead, plan to eliminate clubs and end-play West. For instance, win the third round of hearts, cash three rounds of clubs and ♦ A to be sure that West has no minor suit cards left. Then exit with ♠ K. This line should not be too difficult to find if West has shown both majors during the auction.

Board 28
 West Deals
 N-S Vul

♠ 6 5 2	♠ A J 9 7	♠ 10 4 3
♥ K Q J 10	♥ 7 3 2	♥ 9 8 6
♦ Q 3 2	♦ A K 10 8	♦ 5 4
♣ A 9 2	♣ 10 8	♣ Q J 5 4 3
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; text-align: center; margin: 0 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K Q 8	
	♥ A 5 4	
	♦ J 9 7 6	
	♣ K 7 6	

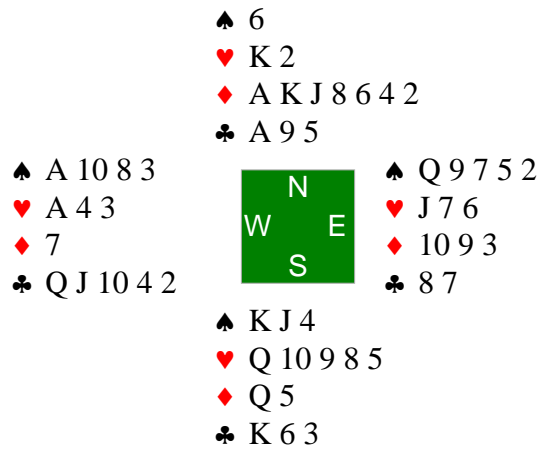
NS 3N; NS 3♠; NS 4♦; NS 2♥; EW 1♣; Par +500; EW 4♣×-3

The club suit is blocked, meaning 3 NT makes even if played by North on the lead of the ♣ Q.

Indeed, on that lead, West cannot afford to encourage with the ♣ 9 if dummy plays low. If the ♣ K is played at trick one, West must win and then play any card in their hand other than the ♣ 9!

Letting declarer score a tenth trick will be very expensive for the defence.

Board 29
 North Deals
 Both Vul



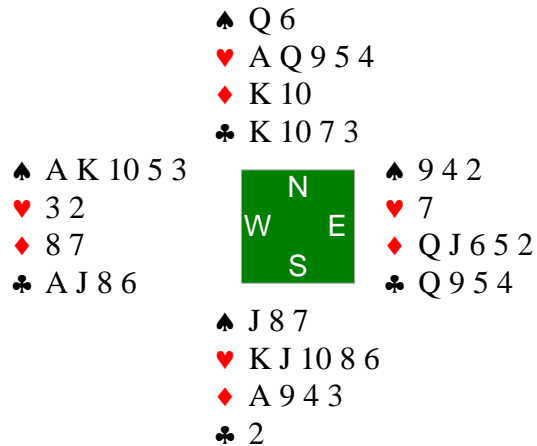
NS 5N; S 5♥; N 4♥; NS 5♦; NS 2♣; EW 1♠; Par +660: NS 3N+2

A typical auction will be 1♦-pass-1♥-Dbl-3♦-pass-3NT and the ♣Q a popular lead.

Cashing all the diamonds straight away is not a good idea as declarer will squeeze their own hand. It looks right to lead a heart to the ♥K and finesse the ♥10 on the way back.

West wins with the ♥A and needs to cash the ♠A NOW! Otherwise they lose it. There is quite a strong indication that this is the right play, for if the diamonds are not running declarer would probably have set about that suit at trick two rather than play on hearts.

Board 30
 East Deals
 None Vul



NS 4♥; NS 2N; EW 1♠; NS 1♦; EW 1♣; Par +420: NS 4♥=

Expect another love-all battle where both sides will be keen to declare. 4♥ is cold for N/S and 4♠ might turn out to be a good save for E/W.

(4♠ can go three down on a rather unlikely minor suit lead. Declarer can cash one top trump, but then has to concede a heart in order to set up a ruff. Now the defence can score tricks one way or another. Note that a third round of diamonds promotes a trick for the ♠Q)

The N/S cards show the power of distribution, and of shortage in the right place. You could take away five of their picture cards and all of their tens, leaving them with a bare seven points each. 4♥ is still an excellent contract! Here you go.....

♠ 32
 ♥ A5432
 ♦ K2
 ♣ 5432

♠ 654
 ♥ K9876
 ♦ A543
 ♣ 6

Board 31

South Deals

N-S Vul

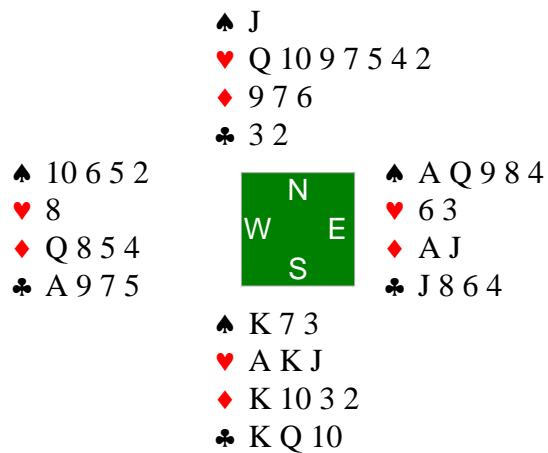
	♠ 10 9 3 2	
	♥ 7 6 4	
	♦ 9 2	
	♣ Q 10 9 5	
♠ K Q 8 6		♠ A J 4
♥ K 8 5		♥ 9 3 2
♦ 8 6 4 3		♦ Q J 5
♣ K 4		♣ A J 6 2
	♠ 7 5	
	♥ A Q J 10	
	♦ A K 10 7	
	♣ 8 7 3	

EW 2N; EW 2♠; EW 2♦; EW 2♣; EW 1♥; Par -120; EW 1N+1

Did someone once say that 'PASS' is the best bid in Bridge?

At this vulnerability, East does best to pass if South opens 1 NT, 1 ♦ or 1 ♣. Plus 200 beats anything that E/W can score by declaring. Passing out 1 NT should be routine, but some may be tempted to balance with 1 NT after a minor suit opening. It is only after a 1 ♥ opening that East needs to act, 1 NT working better than doubling for West will then bid spades (they can hardly be expected to pass!)

Board 32
 West Deals
 E-W Vul



NS 3♥; NS 2N; EW 2♠; NS 2♦; EW 2♣; Par +140: NS 3♥=

At favourable vulnerability, North won't have any qualms about opening 3♥. Will East risk 3♠? This could go for a cricket score if there is no fit! South will probably bid 4♥ regardless. It takes the unlikely lead of ♦ A followed by ♦ J to defeat the game contract, on any other lead declarer has time to set up the ♠ K for a diamond discard.

If East *does* bid 3♠, West will bid 4♠ over 4♥, and will be somewhat aghast when this goes for minus 500 on normal breaks!

To be fair to East, not bidding over pre-empts can be just as dangerous as bidding. This time they have picked up a well deserved speeding ticket!