

Canada-wide Olympiad Fund Game #2

Thursday Afternoon – Oct. 3, 2024 – Set 237495



Analysis by Barry Rigal



Barry Rigal is a player, author, commentator and syndicated columnist. Born in London in 1958, he has been a professional bridge player since moving to New York in 1994. Rigal has written many books as well as magazine and newspaper columns and has contributed to the world championship books for two decades. He has also served as the Chief Vugraph commentator for the World Bridge Federation for 10 years.

He has won two North American championships as well as EC Mixed Teams and multiple UK titles. As a professional player claims to be the only pro ever to have been shut out by his client from declaring a single board in a session — not for want of trying! At college reached the quarterfinal round of the University Challenge for Queen's Oxford — where he suffered the indignity of losing to Queen's Cambridge — and a team headed by the comedian Stephen Fry. He also claims that his tutors awarded him the title of “The laziest man in Oxford.”

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

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

Some Easts are going to open 1NT, but to me East has an unbalanced hand with the black suits. If East opts for 1NT, South may introduce his hearts, and now West has a choice. He might drive to 3NT, losing the first six heart tricks, or he might decide he does not have a heart stopper. In the latter case E/W might end up going +130 in a minor. Should East open 1♣, South will probably jump to 2♥. If West passes now (what else can he do?) E/W can make a partscore in any of three suits, or hold South to seven tricks in hearts. But there is no easy route for E/W to achieve a decent plus score.

Board 2

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

When West opens 1♣ in third seat, North is going to double, after which East might have a fit-jump to 2♦ available or he may simply bid diamonds, planning to raise clubs later. Now South wants to show both majors (with a cuebid?) and N/S rate to buy the hand in a spade partscore. Their cards fit perfectly, both black-suit finesses work, and N/S can come to 10 tricks on their combined 18 HCP. Isn't life simple when you have a following wind? E/W had better not advance beyond the three level, or they will go for a number.

Board 3

South Deals
E-W Vul

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

West has a normal overcall of 1♠ when South opens 1♣, planning to introduce hearts later. North can double 1♠, after which East should raise preemptively to 3♠. When the auction reverts to North, does he elect to stay fixed and defend, or should he make a card-showing double, hoping to get to a red-suit or see partner opt for defense? I cannot answer that definitively, but 3♠ is clearly cold. N/S do best to play a diamond partscore, which is likely to come to nine tricks. N/S's problem is that they may concede a sizeable penalty if they declare clubs.

Board 4West Deals
Both Vul

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

Some will open the West cards 2♦, others will be offput by their spade suit and pass - and yes, a third group will open 1♦ (unaware of the risk of karma in this life or the next). Whatever West chooses, N/S have the firepower to get to 3NT, probably from the South seat, and no real reason to climb any higher. In 3NT, South can play to establish an extra winner from both spades and diamonds, with nine tricks easy and 10 tricks more than likely after a diamond or spade lead. If North is declarer, a spade lead holds him to his contract.

Board 5North Deals
N-S Vul

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

When North opens either a natural 1♣ or Precision 1♦, East will overcall 1♠. Now South might well jump to 4♥, perhaps planning to come again over 4♠. However, this time the auction is likely to end at 4♥. After a spade lead to the ace and king, East will surely believe his opponent. If so, he ought to shift to the ♦K. Bingo! The defense can cash out for down one. That should represent a very healthy result for them, because at quite a few tables N/S might be allowed to make their game, or go plus defending spades.

Board 6East Deals
E-W Vul

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

After South opens a minor, West has the choice of doubling (hoping to find a major-suit fit) or overcalling. Most will bid hearts, though a few others may opt for the lead-directing merits of overcalling 1♠. The 1♥ overcall will see North bid spades, and East can raise hearts. Now if South either supports spades or makes a support double, E/W can choose between defending 2♠ (where they may be able to collect 200) or declaring hearts. The defense have to arrange a trump promotion, via repeated club leads, to hold West to +140.

Board 7South Deals
Both Vul

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

Another complex deal. West might pass or bid hearts at any level from one to four! My choice at this vulnerability would be 2♥ (planning to jump to 4♦ if partner shows game interest). If West preempts, North also has choices (a Michaels cuebid, or simply bidding spades), After North's call, everybody has tough competitive decisions. N/S have decent play for 10 tricks, but will be held to nine when the ♠Q is offside. By contrast, E/W have 11 tricks in either red suit when the diamond finesse succeeds. It is so hard to predict what will happen here that I will not try.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

| | | | | | | | | |
|---------------|--|--------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| ♠ 6 | ♠ Q 8 5 3 2 | ♠ A 9 | | | | | | |
| ♥ J 8 3 | ♥ A Q 6 | ♥ 10 9 7 5 2 | | | | | | |
| ♦ A Q 9 8 4 3 | ♦ K 6 | ♦ 7 5 2 | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 8 4 | ♣ J 7 3 | ♣ K 10 5 | | | | | | |
| | <table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; 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 style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | E | S | |
| | N | | | | | | | |
| W | E | S | | | | | | |
| | ♠ K J 10 7 4 | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ K 4 | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ J 10 | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ A 9 6 2 | | | | | | | |

A 2♦ or 3♦ preempt by West will see North on the cusp of bidding spades. Color me yellow, but I would pass; now if East ups the ante in diamonds, his side may buy the contract there. While that looks good for E/W, since they rate to escape for -50 in 3♦, look what might happen if E/W do not preempt to the maximum. Won't N/S find their spade fit and play 4♠? With clubs unfriendly, there is no obvious way to hold the defenders to just three winners. Any N/S who manage to stop in 3♠ will have most of the matchpoints, plus your commentator's admiration.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------------|--|-------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| ♠ 4 | ♠ K 3 2 | ♠ Q 9 8 6 5 | | | | | | |
| ♥ A K Q 10 8 7 | ♥ 4 | ♥ J 3 | | | | | | |
| ♦ A 10 9 6 | ♦ K Q 5 | ♦ J 4 2 | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 4 | ♣ A 10 8 6 5 2 | ♣ K 9 3 | | | | | | |
| | <table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; 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 style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | E | S | |
| | N | | | | | | | |
| W | E | S | | | | | | |
| | ♠ A J 10 7 | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 9 6 5 2 | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ 8 7 3 | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ J 7 | | | | | | | |

When North opens 1♣ South will innocently respond 1♥, thereby stealing his opponent's fit. Nonetheless West could and should be able to overcall 2♥ here, natural. (If you cannot, consider changing your methods!). I cannot see any reason why that call shouldn't end the auction; but if N/S find a way to compete in clubs, East might trustingly raise West to 3♥. Nine tricks ought to prove simple for West, but a top diamond lead from North lets through a tenth. That trick would prove really expensive if West finds himself in game.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------|--|--------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| ♠ 10 7 6 5 | ♠ A 3 2 | ♠ K | | | | | | |
| ♥ A Q 8 7 | ♥ K 6 2 | ♥ J 9 3 | | | | | | |
| ♦ Q 7 6 2 | ♦ A K | ♦ J 10 8 4 3 | | | | | | |
| ♣ 7 | ♣ A Q J 8 4 | ♣ 10 6 5 2 | | | | | | |
| | <table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; 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 style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | E | S | |
| | N | | | | | | | |
| W | E | S | | | | | | |
| | ♠ Q J 9 8 4 | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ 10 5 4 | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ 9 5 | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ K 9 3 | | | | | | | |

A few hotheads Wests will open (1♥ anybody?). However you'd expect N/S to bid unopposed via a 2NT opener and transfer to 4♠. Yes, a few pairs may settle in 3NT. In 4♠ on a diamond lead, North might well win and cross to the ♣K to take the spade finesse - he really does not want to let West win the ♠K and shift to hearts. At this point, though, a heart switch will likely defeat 4♠. This would hardly be a triumph for N/S, because an inspired view in trumps might produce 11 tricks. 3NT is hardly an inelegant contract on a heart lead, but it should come home today.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|------------|---|--|---|---|---|--|
| ♠ A 7 3 | ♠ K J 8 5 | ♠ Q 9 2 | | | | | | |
| ♥ 8 6 | ♥ Q 7 5 4 | ♥ A 2 | | | | | | |
| ♦ 7 5 4 | ♦ K 9 8 | ♦ J 10 3 2 | | | | | | |
| ♣ K 8 5 3 2 | ♣ A Q | ♣ 9 7 6 4 | | | | | | |
| | <table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 60px; height: 60px; 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 style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | E | S | |
| | N | | | | | | | |
| W | E | S | | | | | | |
| | ♠ 10 6 4 | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ K J 10 9 3 | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ A Q 6 | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ J 10 | | | | | | | |

A few Souths will find their hand within their opening-bid range (perhaps the strong clubbers?) even at unfavorable vulnerability. The majority of Souths will pass, after which his side can bid quietly to 4♥ - perhaps by North after a strong notrump and transfer. The matching distributions for N/S mean that even 4♥ is not cold. After a diamond lead, declarer can win and drive out the ♥A. Then he takes the diamond return and should next draw trumps before playing a spade to the jack. If East wins, no return can prevent South from coming to 10 tricks.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

Another board, another strong notrump, this time for West. This ought to end the auction, letting North lead a spade to the 2 and ... ? Playing the king never gains, but loses N/S a trick when declarer has the doubleton A-J or A-10. When West wins the ♠10, he can lead a club to the jack. If South takes his ♣A, declarer will be playing for overtricks; if South ducks, West goes after hearts, again coming to at least +120. Best might be for South to win the first club and shift to diamonds. If he plays a spade instead (be it a high or low one) West has outside chances of +150.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

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

Some Souths will go low and open 1♠ but since game makes facing as little as ♥Q J, I'd prefer to open 2♣. North has a clear-cut slam drive, but can he sensibly explore for seven? When South bids and rebids his spades, North can find out, through cuebidding or Blackwood, that his side has all the keycards, and perhaps the club and heart kings. 6NT may be a good compromise between 6♠ and the various grand slams. The heart break provides the 13th trick. But if they did not break, a single- or double-squeeze might well develop.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

When South opens 1♣, West will pick some number of hearts between one and three (it is 2♥ for me) after which N/S will have to decide whether to settle in their 4-4 spade fit or to play 3NT. I can see North doubling 2♥ then cuebidding, and letting South declare 3NT. Against that game, either red-suit lead is immediately fatal to the defense. After the singleton spade lead, though, East could win and switch to diamonds, to break up the pressure in that suit, to defeat the game. Conversely, 4♠ by South is only allowed home on a low diamond lead.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

The West hand is inappropriate for any preempt (unless you play 2♥ as a two-suiter). So most Norths will be allowed to open 1♦, allowing East to overcall 1♠. South's diamond length makes it unattractive to play for penalties, so he will surely produce a diamond raise. Now what? N/S can make 3NT thanks to a few finesses working, while E/W play very nicely in clubs, but not nearly so successfully in hearts, if N/S set up a force. Diamond partscores by North come to 10 tricks - the defenders do have a spade ruff, though they might not take it.

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

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

Sitting North, even the soundest of opening bidders will kick off with 1♥, won't they? N/S will find clubs, after which South can discover his partner's extra shape, and may then settle for simplicity by using Keycard Blackwood to drive to slam. South is going to have to choose between clubs, hearts, and notrump - with the ♥10 being a hugely critical card. 6NT on a spade lead is horrible, while 6♣ needs only one of hearts or clubs to behave. Today, though, inaccurate bidding will be rewarded. Those who stop in 6♣ will find virtue may have to be its own reward.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

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

A second successive possible 7NT for N/S. That spot is no better than 50% while 7♥ is excellent by comparison. If South forces to game with a jump rebid to 3♦, North can take control after Blackwood and bid 7♥ - though, at pairs, he might want to explore en route for the higher-scoring grand slam of 7NT, in case partner has the ♦J. In 7♥ on a trump lead declarer should contemplate drawing two rounds of trumps then cashing two top diamonds, just in case one hand is long in both red suits. With the ♦J falling, it will be very hard not to take 13 tricks here.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

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

When East opens 1♦, South may try to exploit the vulnerability by preempting to 3♣, after which very few Wests are going gladden their partner's heart by doubling. Instead, West will bid his majors and force East into a horrible decision - which game to go down in. East might well pass 4♥, where the 5-1 break should prove too much for declarer. In fact, because every game by E/W appears to fail, it is hard to see how their side can go plus except on defense, especially since West might contemplate driving to game even facing a passed partner!

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

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

After they open 2♣, some Norths may pretend they have a balanced 22-24 and rebid 2NT. I would rather bid clubs then spades (or raise partner's hearts). Still, all routes ought to lead to 4♠, because South has little reason to go beyond the four level without some encouragement from partner. If North declares 4♠, a heart lead lets him pitch dummy's club loser and set up diamonds, then crossruff for 10 tricks. An option is to draw trumps and finesse in clubs. If North plays notrump, the defenders do best either to lead the ♦A or to lead a heart and shift to diamonds.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

♠ A K 9 7
♥ Q 8 7
♦ K 10 8 5
♣ 9 8

♠ J 10 8 3
♥ J 6 4 3
♦ A 2
♣ A K 10



♠ Q 5 2
♥ 10 5 2
♦ Q 7 4
♣ Q J 7 2

♠ 6 4
♥ A K 9
♦ J 9 6 3
♣ 6 5 4 3

It looks clear for North to double West's 1♦ opener. East should surely make a simple raise of diamonds, prepared to compete again, if necessary; perhaps to his surprise, West may well end up declaring 2♦. If so, the defense might lead trumps, in which case South must retain his ♦Q, so he can overruff on the fourth spade. On the lead of the ♠J, N/S have an easier route to four tricks. Against 1NT by E/W, the defenders have five winners in the minors but no more; however, if the diamond finesse were to lose, declarer might be held to five tricks.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

♠ Q 9 2
♥ J 9 7 4
♦ 7 4
♣ J 8 7 4

♠ J 8 6 5 4
♥ K
♦ A K Q 3
♣ A 9 2



♠ A K 10
♥ A 10 5 3
♦ 10 9 2
♣ 10 5 3

♠ 7 3
♥ Q 8 6 2
♦ J 8 6 5
♣ K Q 6

When North opens 1♠ (would anyone deem this to be a 1NT opener?) South is likely to treat his hand as an invitational spade raise, which North will accept. The singleton heart certainly suggests re-raising to 4♠, rather than contemplating 3NT. If North declares 4♠ on a heart lead, he should probably win in hand and take the top spades. Then he pitches a club on the ♥A and ruffs a diamond in dummy. That line produces a painless +450. The same approach would work on a club lead. In 3NT, a club lead holds South to nine tricks, though declarer has +430 on a heart lead.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

♠ 8 4
♥ A J 3
♦ A 9 5 4
♣ Q 9 5 3

♠ A K Q J 10 6
♥ K
♦ Q 8 6 2
♣ J 6



♠ 7 3 2
♥ 10 8 5
♦ K J 3
♣ K 8 7 2

♠ 9 5
♥ Q 9 7 6 4 2
♦ 10 7
♣ A 10 4

Will East open 2♥? That suit really does not qualify for a vulnerable weak-two call, at least in my book. Assuming East passes, West will have a choice of opening either minor or of passing, but N/S ought still to be able to bid to 4♠, more or less scientifically. If E/W get to hearts fast, they might actually encourage North to bid 4♠. There seems to be no practical way to defeat the spade game, since East can hardly underlead the ♣A at trick one. To escape for -500 in 5♥, East would need to drop the ♥K offside, and that seems unlikely.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 7 6 2
♥ J 8
♦ Q 4 3
♣ 10 8 5 2

♠ A 3
♥ K Q 9 4 3
♦ K J 2
♣ J 7 3



♠ K 10 9 8
♥ 2
♦ A 8 7 5
♣ A Q 6 4

♠ J 5 4
♥ A 10 7 6 5
♦ 10 9 6
♣ K 9

The 4=1=4=4 shape is normally handled by opening 1♦ and hoping to bid all three suits, even though here opening the strong club suit for the lead does have some merit. Either way, you would expect N/S to power into 3NT - although the field will be split as to which player will introduce notrump first. If it is South declaring, West might lead a heart through strength, but the cards lie so favorably that in reality the defenders' task appears to be to try to prevent N/S emerging with +460. A tough task, but that 11th winner may well represent a bushel of matchpoints.

Board 28
West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 7 6 4 2
♥ Q 8 7
♦ 4 2
♣ K Q 8 5

♠ K J 10
♥ A 5
♦ J 10 9 8
♣ J 7 3 2



♠ A Q 5 3
♥ K J 10 6 3
♦ A 7
♣ A 9

♠ 9 8
♥ 9 4 2
♦ K Q 6 5 3
♣ 10 6 4

E/W have the fit and values to suggest they should have no problems reaching four of a major, but the field will be split between those who play hearts and those who play spades. In either case, the defense does best to lead diamonds, forcing declarer to cash three clubs to pitch a diamond, then take a spade finesse. With both majors and clubs breaking, and the spade finesse working, declarer cannot be stopped from collecting 11 winners. However, I am sure there will be many who can find a plausible way to take fewer tricks.

Board 29
North Deals
Both Vul

♠ 10 5 3
♥ A J 9 6 5
♦ Q 10 3
♣ 9 7

♠ Q J 8 4
♥ K 8 2
♦ 4
♣ A J 10 8 6



♠ A 9 7 6 2
♥ Q 10 3
♦ J 5
♣ K 4 3

♠ K
♥ 7 4
♦ A K 9 8 7 6 2
♣ Q 5 2

You would figure North would open 1♣ at more tables than not, and that will probably see South drive to game one way or another. (Yes, a few Souths might invite game showing a diamond single-suiter, and come to rest in 3♦). But 3NT by North looks hard to make on a spade lead, despite the diamonds breaking. If East finds a heart lead, West might set the game at once by inserting the jack, but even if he does not find that play, West does have a potential re-entry in diamonds. Overall, any plus score for N/S ought to represent a fine result.

Board 30
East Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 7 5
♥ 10 7 6
♦ 7 5 4 3 2
♣ 10 9

♠ J 10 6
♥ K 9 5 4 3
♦ K
♣ A J 8 2



♠ A 9 3
♥ A Q 8 2
♦ A 8
♣ K 6 5 3

♠ K 8 4 2
♥ J
♦ Q J 10 9 6
♣ Q 7 4

Most Easts will open 1NT (yes, one could argue that the controls and honor structure argue for an upgrade). If East opts for 1NT, the occasional South will intervene with a Woolsey double, or a call of 2♦ to show diamonds and a major. When West stays silent it will be up to N/S to find their way to a partscore in spades. 2♠ by North can be brought home on some good views; but if South is declarer, a club lead ought to prove fatal. If East is left in 1NT on a top diamond lead, declarer comes very close to making (three hearts, two spades, a club, and a diamond trick).

Board 31
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ K Q J
♥ A Q 8 6 5 4
♦ 9 2
♣ 8 7

♠ A 9 6 5 4 3
♥ 2
♦ K 10 5
♣ 9 5 3



♠ 10 7
♥ J 9 7 3
♦ Q 6 3
♣ A 6 4 2

♠ 8 2
♥ K 10
♦ A J 8 7 4
♣ K Q J 10

When South opens 1♦, West will have to decide whether to make a simple 1♥ call or bid higher. North will not be prevented from bidding spades, and a competitive auction should then see each side bid up to at least the three level. 4♥ can be set if the defenders get round to clubs early enough. Even after a diamond lead, South ought not to go wrong on defense. Meanwhile, 4♠ looks to have nine tricks and no more. Accordingly, anyone making a contract here is sure to score handsomely.

Board 32
West Deals
E-W Vul

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

Few Wests will preempt here, I suspect. That lets North open 2NT and be raised to 3NT, keeping West silent. Declarer must win the likely diamond lead, and can then afford to play ♣K and duck a club. The point is that the diamonds pose no threat, but North needs to protect the ♣A, dummy's sole entry. Paradoxically, declarer may do worse in 3NT after a diamond lead than a heart - because in the latter case North cannot afford to duck a club, and so would need to rely on the 2-2 break. Any East who fishes out a heart here against 3NT may feel entitled to rue his bad luck.

Board 33
North Deals
None Vul

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

Some Norths will look at their soft honors and open 2♥, others will add points like Walter the Walrus ("I had 12 points, partner!") and open 2♥. A 2♥ call is going to end the bidding, whereas a 1♥ call will see South respond 1♠, after which North has the option of raising spades or rebidding hearts - both actions have merit, but your choice may be affected by whether you play Flannery. (If so, South has promised five spades.) 2♠ handles much better than 2♥ today. On a spade lead against 2♥ E/W can set up diamonds, draw one trump, and arrange a spade ruff.

Board 34
East Deals
N-S Vul

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

Most Easts will open 2♥, a few may prefer a 3♥ call, opting for preemption over soundness. This would be a great moment to go high. N/S really want to play 3NT here, rather than 4♠ or 5♦; the bigger the preempt, the harder it will be for them to bid intelligently. Admittedly 3NT may not be easy to make: there are views in both spades and diamonds to take - but you would surely want to be there. After a 2♥ call, N/S should reach a high-scoring game, but in the face of a 3♥ preempt, South will almost certainly double. Then it is tough to get to a making game.

Board 35
South Deals
E-W Vul

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

Another board, another (non-)preempt. Here South's defense and weak suit argue for an initial pass. But that still does not make the hand at all simple for N/S to bid. They can find hearts, but will not come close at many tables to the best slam, of 7NT. Indeed reaching any slam (and avoiding 6♥ on a club lead!) will be beyond the vast majority of the field. Strong clubbers may, however, have a chance if their opponents stay silent. In 6♥, after a club lead, declarer will need to draw two rounds of trumps then cross his fingers and unblock diamonds.

Board 36
West Deals
Both Vul

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

Most Wests will open 1NT - the hand does add to 15 HCP. But the small side-doubleton and solid major might argue for a 1♥ opener. I would expect most Norths to pass over 1NT, so East will simply bid 3NT, making between 600 and 660 (though the ♦J lead or shift might scare declarer!). If West opens 1♥, North might try a frisky 2♠. Now East can double, but getting to 3NT with confidence looks far from straightforward after that start. Since hearts can be held to nine tricks, maybe the 1NT opener has much more to recommend it than I am prepared to admit.