

ACBL-wide Charity Game #2

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Analysis by Barry Rigal



American Contract Bridge League



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Married to Sue Picus. 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."

Bd: 1
 Dlr: North
 Vul: None

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

Whether or not it is technically correct, North's practical action is to open 1NT. South will aim to settle in 2♥, leaving West to decide whether to balance with 2♠. At this vulnerability, re-

opening looks clear at Pairs; but will North now risk a 3♦ call? He may pass the buck back to South, who should double to show a maximum in context. Now North is likely to retreat to 3♦, to end the auction. While E/W can shift to clubs early to beat 3♦, it looks hard for E/W to take six tricks on defense. Since spades plays like a dream, -50 ought to matchpoint respectably for N/S.

Bd: 2
 Dlr: East
 Vul: N-S

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

At pairs this board poses a problem in the play for both sides. You'd expect E/W will bid unopposed to 3NT along the lines of 1♦ - 1♥ - 3♦ - 3NT. North has a normal spade lead, allowing West to

win in hand and take a diamond finesse, then clear diamonds, leaving North on play. What should South discard at trick three? If he encourages a spade continuation (correct if partner has a heart honor), declarer will run the diamonds. Now unless North defends accurately, West might finesse in hearts and make +490. If South calls for a club, declarer is held to 11 tricks.

Bd: 3
 Dlr: South
 Vul: E-W

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

Those West cards do not constitute an opening bid for many of us. If West does open, then should N/S reach 4♥, declarer might conceivably be able to find out enough about the deal to drop the ♦K. If West passes initially, you would imagine N/S will still bid to 4♥. But that contract looks very unlikely to come home on a spade lead, since the defenders will have set up three winners ready to cash. Even after a club lead and continuation, the odds remain very much against declarer, because there is really no reason to guess diamonds.

Bd: 4
 Dlr: West
 Vul: Both

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

It looks logical for North to open 1♠ here, over which East is likely to take the risk of jumping to 2NT, though you'd prefer better suits for this call when vulnerable. South has enough to compete to 3♠, showing less than a limit raise - with that hand he could cuebid 3♣ or 3♦ instead. West must compete to 4♣ - indeed some might go for the throat with a 5♣ call. In theory that would be a bad decision, since 4♠ can be defeated, even after the lead of ♣A. In fact, just taking nine tricks in spades seems an uphill struggle. E/W make +110 in clubs.

Bd: 5
Dlr: North
Vul: N-S

♠ 9 8 3
♥ 6 3 2
♦ J 10 4 3
♣ J 6 4

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

When North opens 1♣, it looks more natural for East to overcall 1♠ than to double, given his respectable five-card major and limited values. South can now introduce his diamonds and

N/S ought to be able to reach 3NT, probably declared by North. After a spade lead, declarer needs to play on hearts to develop 12 winners. The contract of 6♣ looks to be a slightly better slam than 6NT; North has some slim extra chances but in essence still needs to find a major-suit honor well placed.

Bd: 6
Dlr: East
Vul: E-W

♠ A Q J 5 3
♥ K 8
♦ Q 3 2
♣ J 8 6

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

When West opens 1♠ in third seat East will respond 1NT, and now will South come in with 2♦ or will he sell out? If he bids 2♦, then since E/W have the majority of high cards they may well not sell out cheaply.

East appears to have a straightforward balance into 2♥, where he is going to find the opponents' high cards lying unreasonably badly. As N/S can make a diamond partscore or collect a decent penalty against spades and hearts, escaping for -100 may not score too terribly for E/W.

Bd: 7
Dlr: South
Vul: Both

♠ 6 5
♥ A 2
♦ A Q 9 6 2
♣ 10 8 6 5

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

When West overcalls 1♦ over South's 1♣ opening, East should advance to 1♠. South will certainly feel inclined to act again; maybe a takeout double is reasonable? That would present

North with a choice of horrible options; simplest is to bid 1NT, suggesting perhaps he has diamonds under control, not guaranteeing a spade guard. East may well feel like competing further, but his side cannot make a two-level contract. After a top spade lead against 1NT, declarer does best to play a top heart from dummy at trick two. That should hold the loss to -100.

Bd: 8
Dlr: West
Vul: None

♠ Q J 8 6 4 3
♥ A 5 4
♦ J 5 3
♣ 6

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

When West opens a weak 2♠, as most will, North has to choose between doubling and bidding 2NT. I'd vote for the latter - since with a balanced hand without four hearts, you'd envisage that you

are more likely to reach the best game by following this route. There is no way South will do more than look for the right game now, is there? Of course as the cards lie 6♥ is somewhat worse than finding the ♥J; it also requires diamonds to break. But today 12 tricks in hearts look to be a relatively normal result.

Bd: 9
Dlr: North
Vul: E-W

♠ 9 8
♥ J 7 4 2
♦ K Q 6
♣ K 8 6 4

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

N/S look likely to end up declaring their nine-card spade fit, probably in partscore rather than game, even if North upgrades his hand into a constructive two-level raise. Whether or not either East or West can double

spades for takeout, you'd imagine 3♠ making +140 will be something very close to an average here. If E/W win the auction, they can take nine tricks in either red suit, since with both hearts and diamonds behaving, the defense cannot arrange a ruff. But of course at this vulnerability if E/W risk the four level they might get doubled and be set 200.

Bd: 10
Dlr: East
Vul: Both

♠ A K
♥ J 10 6
♦ A K 10 5
♣ K 10 5 2

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

With E/W having two balanced hands and no long suits, you do not want to get too high. Indeed, 3NT is where you want to play with the E/W cards, particularly if South is aggressive

enough to preempt here. After all, switch the red-suit queens and nine tricks would represent the limit of the hand. Still, with both red queens onside and hearts breaking, E/W cannot be prevented from taking 12 tricks at notrump. I suppose West may get carried away if East opens, but that doesn't mean he has to bid slam.

Bd: 11
 Dlr: South
 Vul: None

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

There is something tempting to the idea of treating the South cards as a strong notrump, but maybe the ♦10 tips the balance toward opening 1♣, planning a 2NT rebid? A

1NT opener might end the auction, but the more aggressive position will get North to 4♥ at the plurality of tables. This is not an especially appealing contract; but after hearts break 3-2 and spades break 3-3, there are 10 tricks on top without needing a second diamond trick. Does that mean the aggressive approach is best? That is certainly the case today.

Bd: 12
 Dlr: West
 Vul: N-S

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

The vulnerability and West's spots may tempt him to open 1NT. This protects his tenaces, and finds 5-3 major-suit fits more easily than he could after opening 1♦ and rebidding 1NT. If West does

this, he will be treated to the lead of a top diamond against 3NT. When he takes the lead and returns the suit, North gives the least away by cashing the diamond winners and exiting passively in diamonds. But the cards lie well enough that you'd expect 3NT to come home now on almost any logical line of play. If East declares 3NT on a heart lead, the defense are favorites to set the game.

Bd: 13
 Dlr: North
 Vul: Both

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

When both sides have a big fit, only a foolhardy commentator would try to predict the bidding. But OK, here goes: South will respond 1NT to 1♦ after East's 1♠ overcall, despite

his diamond fit. Thereafter E/W rate to compete in spades, while N/S will have the option to defend 3♠ or, more sensibly, to bid on to 4♦. The defenders may have to lead hearts fairly early on in order to prevent North taking 11 tricks in diamonds. Meanwhile, in spades the defense have five top winners sooner or later, and declarer has no realistic chance of a trump coup, I believe.

Bd: 14
 Dlr: East
 Vul: None

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

Very few East's opening bid parameters will stretch to include this collection, I hope. Accordingly North will be allowed to open 1♦ in fourth seat. When East overcalls 1♠, South can either

make a negative double or bid 2♥ as a passed hand. Whatever he chooses, you'd expect North to end up in a notrump partscore rather than in game. Declarer is threatening to take nine tricks — two in each major and five diamonds. Only a somewhat unlikely diamond lead disrupts communications for this line.

Bd: 15
 Dlr: South
 Vul: N-S

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

West is not strong enough to open 2♣. With 4.5 losers, he needs to locate both a trick and spade fit before game becomes reasonable. If so, East might keep the auction alive. Here, over

partner's 1NT response to 1♠, West can try 4♥ as a self-agreeing splinter for spades. (With spades and hearts he'd bid 3♥, which is 100% game forcing.) Then East will sign off in 4♠, leaving West with an awkward play problem on a heart lead. With both red suit finesses working, this may be only about overtricks; but at least in theory the defenders have to attack trumps to avoid conceding -480.

Bd: 16
 Dlr: West
 Vul: E-W

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

At the majority of tables when West opens 1♣, North will either overcall 1♠ and declare 4♠ himself or perhaps show a spade/diamond two-suiter and let South declare the spade game. Should the

defenders lead a top club, they will collect both black aces. If the defenders try for a diamond ruff at trick one, declarer can riposte by pitching the club loser on the hearts and make +480. The deal becomes much harder if North elects to overcall 1♦; now N/S might end up in 5♦, and score very poorly for their efforts.

Bd: 17
 Dlr: North
 Vul: None

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

When North opens 1♦, East might overcall 1♠ (an action to be applauded - if it works). After South raises diamonds, West is likely to bounce to 4♠ and East may be allowed to play there, occasionally

doubled. This is the par contract today, because N/S can take 10 tricks in diamonds, though they could do worse on a heart lead from East. Meanwhile, with spades 2-2, declarer can probably ruff out hearts in 4♠ even if he misguesses that suit; and would South risk ducking his ♥A? 4♠ by West may be harder to defeat, in practice since North might shift to diamonds after a top club lead.

Bd: 18
 Dlr: East
 Vul: N-S

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

Some sick puppies will open the South hand 1NT, but more normal members of the population will open 1♦, and hear West overcall in hearts (any number between one and four is possible).

Determining par here is far simpler than actually finding a way to reach that contract. The point is that N/S have a nine-card club fit where they should make +130. But if South doubles hearts for takeout, he may be very reluctant to let his partner play clubs. West has five top losers if he declares hearts, but ought to take the rest easily enough.

Bd: 19
 Dlr: South
 Vul: E-W

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

South's values might equate to a strong notrump because of the controls, but the square shape and absence of intermediates make that quite a significant overbid. If South opens 1♣, North

will jump to 3♣ — be that a weak or mixed raise — and the vulnerability may persuade East to pass. If East does act, West might go low with a call of 3♦ or take an aggressive position either by passing for penalty, or trying for 3NT. 3♣ can be set one trick after West's natural top spade lead, while 3♦ rates to come home if declarer guesses trumps. +110 ought to score E/W well.

Bd: 20
 Dlr: West
 Vul: Both

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

E/W should bid unopposed to 4♠ on a sequence such as: 1♦ - 1♠ - 4♣ - 4♠. On this sequence all of West's cards are working well, but he would really need a fifth trump to cooperate in a slam venture.

North looks likely to lead ♥10 against 4♠. When South wins his king, his next move is far from clear. A trump or heart return seems to be the most effective defense, but declarer has many ways to set up the extra tricks he requires. Ruffing diamonds in hand or a cross-ruff look the best way to make 620, but some will fail to bring home the bacon here.

Bd: 21
 Dlr: North
 Vul: N-S

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

Very few Norths will elect to preempt at this vulnerability. So E/W should have a relatively straightforward task to bid to the heart game rather than playing notrump, after East opens, be it

with a call of 1♥ or 2♣. As to which game is best in practice, the issue is whether the defenders can work out to cash their three winners against the notrump game. If East declares notrump, he might well be allowed to come home with 11 rather than 10 tricks, which would turn a near-top for the defense into a bottom.

Bd: 22
 Dlr: East
 Vul: E-W

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

Should East open 1♣ or 1♦? Those who prefer 1♣ will probably play 1NT from East, where declarer can take nine tricks on any defense but the lead of a top club, or an inspired spade.

The matchpoint difference between 1NT making seven, where declarer can make 120 (or even 150). A top club lead or spade will surely hold East to eight tricks, though. By contrast if East opens 1♦ (my choice, since why not bid a suit you want your partner to lead?) then E/W might well settle in diamonds. The final result in that strain figures to be +90 or +110, depending on whether the defenders attack spades early enough.

Bd: 23
 Dlr: South
 Vul: Both

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

Most Norths will be confronted with the decision in third seat as to whether to open 1♦, 2♦ or 3♦. All of these actions are defensible, with East likely to produce a minimum overcall

in hearts if given the chance. Who knows what will happen next? In theory N/S belong in a diamond partscore, where +130 is there for the taking. In real life E/W might buy the hand in hearts, and make more tricks than they should, perhaps as many as 10, when the club ruffs get away.

Bd: 24
 Dlr: West
 Vul: None

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

While some Wests will open 1NT, most are going to prefer 1♠. Now if North preempts he may regret it; more solid citizens will pass, letting East respond 1NT, after which the spotlight shifts to South. He has

enough for a Michaels Cuebid of 2♠, and now North will bail out to 3♣, in all likelihood playing there undoubled. East has an easy trump lead, after which N/S can take no more than seven tricks. It is far more difficult to defend clubs when declared from the South seat. For example, unless West kicks off with a spade, South can come to at least eight tricks, and might do even better.

Bd: 25
 Dlr: North
 Vul: E-W

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

At the vulnerability North might pick an excellent moment to open 1♣, and disrupt his opponents' auction. Few Souths will scrape up a response, but even if he does, E/W surely have

more than enough to find spades and reach at least a game. Having said that, how do E/W get to slam - and is it where you want to be after an opening bid from North? The miracle in diamonds means that 7♠ comes home on a club/heart squeeze against North. But I suspect anyone reaching the small slam for +1460 won't be unhappy with their matchpoint score here.

Bd: 26
 Dlr: East
 Vul: Both

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

South has just enough to double East's 1♣ opening bid, and West rates to respond 1NT. When North advances with 2♥, East can compete to 3♣; that ought to end the auction. To make 3♣ after a

top diamond lead, declarer should win ♦A and play two rounds of clubs. The defenders can exit in spades, but eventually East can build up enough of a picture of the high-card location in spades diamonds and clubs to allow him to place South with ♥K, and thus negotiate hearts for one loser.

Bd: 27
 Dlr: South
 Vul: None

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

The power of North's intermediates might persuade some (me included) to open 2NT. A transfer sequence to 4♠ will see East likely to lead a trump, after which it seems relatively

normal to draw trumps then go after clubs - maybe by playing to the nine. All routes seem to produce 10 tricks. If North elects to open 1♣ East will overcall 1♦, after which 4♠ by South is doomed on the diamond ruff. So let's say North declares 3NT on a low diamond lead. He can win and run spades, and now if he reads the position perfectly he can strip and endplay East for +460.

Bd: 28
 Dlr: West
 Vul: N-S

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

There surely won't be too many Souths perpetrating a skewed 1NT call, will there? That action would surely both open and close the bidding. After a heart lead South can use

spade entries to go after diamonds. If he does, the defenders will have to be careful to cash out the clubs not continue the attack on hearts. By contrast, a 1♦ opener from South will see North respond 1♠ (passing would see N/S score very poorly) and South is likely to raise him to 3♠. 4♠ is on the diamond finesse, but +170 in 3♠ ought to be a very common result here.

Bd: 29
Dlr: North
Vul: Both

♠ A 5 4
♥ Q 9 5
♦ Q 10 9 7
♣ A K Q

♠ K J 10 8
♥ 6 3
♦ 8 5 2
♣ 10 7 6 4

♠ Q 9 7 6
♥ K 7 2
♦ A J 4
♣ 9 8 3

♠ 3 2
♥ A J 10 8 4
♦ K 6 3
♣ J 5 2

I'd expect a sizeable percentage of the field to ignore the vulnerability and open the South hand with some number of hearts. That would be a good decision today, because 3NT by West on

a heart lead cannot come home, whatever declarer does. If South has opened 1♥, West's best chance may be to finesse in diamonds then play for a spade/heart endplay at the end; but North has the critical ♠K. If East declares 3NT he cannot be defeated, since a heart lead costs a trick from South, while any other lead gives East time to build an additional spade winner.

Bd: 30
Dlr: East
Vul: None

♠ A 8 5
♥ 10 9 7
♦ 5 4 2
♣ Q J 10 7

♠ 9 7
♥ K 6 5 3
♦ J 7 3
♣ 5 4 3 2

♠ Q 3 2
♥ A J 2
♦ A K 10 8
♣ A K 9

♠ K J 10 6 4
♥ Q 8 4
♦ Q 9 6
♣ 8 6

We should see East play 3NT on an unopposed sequence, giving South a problem on opening lead. Most will try a spade, prepared to invest a trick, as will happen today. East can win cheaply and go in search of

an overtrick; one possible route is to take the two top diamonds, and if no honor appears from South, run the clubs then tackle hearts. If South opts for a passive club lead at trick one, declarer must cash four clubs (pitching a spade) then try a heart to the jack. This frees up his entry position and allows him to go after diamonds by leading the suit from dummy if necessary.

Bd: 31
Dlr: South
Vul: N-S

♠ 10
♥ A 7 5 2
♦ J 10 4
♣ 10 7 6 3 2

♠ Q 8 3
♥ 4
♦ Q 9 8 7 6
♣ Q 9 8 4

♠ K J 6 4
♥ Q J 10 8 3
♦ K 2
♣ A K

♠ A 9 7 5 2
♥ K 9 6
♦ A 5 3
♣ J 5

When South opens 1♠, some Norths will raise to 2♠ (whether it shows constructive values or not), others will use the forcing notrump. Regardless, E/W ought to be able to maneuver

themselves into 4♥, though one can imagine East overcalling 3♥ and West passing. 4♥ looks simple enough to make with the heart finesse working. In fact declarer needs to develop a trick in both spades and diamonds. While this is simple to do with the sight of all four hands, I wouldn't be surprised to see a few declarers failing in their task after a trump lead.

Bd: 32
Dlr: West
Vul: E-W

♠ K J 8
♥ Q 8 2
♦ J 8 4 3 2
♣ Q 6

♠ A 9 7 2
♥ K J 7 4
♦ K
♣ A 9 8 2

♠ 10 5 3
♥ 10 9 6 5 3
♦ Q
♣ K 7 5 3

♠ Q 6 4
♥ A
♦ A 10 9 7 6 5
♣ J 10 4

N/S have more than enough points to attempt game, and since they have no golden fit in a major 3NT seems the obvious resting place, though there will be a myriad different sequences to

reach that spot. After, say, a diamond lead from West, South will probably cross to hand in hearts and go after clubs. Even if the defenders go passive and return a club, the lie of the cards suggests it is going to be very hard to prevent declarer from coming to nine tricks one way or another. But South may find himself cut off from the ♦A, in which case he will struggle to bring home his game.