

Saturday, Feb. 7, 2025 (morning or afternoon)

A portrait of a middle-aged man with light brown hair, wearing glasses and a blue polo shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a wooden ceiling and white walls.

If not, or if N/S are very aggressive, they might compete to three of a major – although there are only four losers, there are too many things that declarer has to do (finesse spade, knock out ♥A, lead towards the ♣K), that either major will probably take eight tricks at the table. Three of a major down one will be OK for N/S, as there should be a lot of E/W+ 130.

In 3NT by West, declarer can take 11 tricks as long as they guess diamonds and take every major suit finesse. Guessing diamonds is likely, especially if declarer finds out how the clubs split early, and it's a matter of how brave declarer is going to be. Still, bravery and foolhardy are two sides of the same coin, and 10 tricks will be very common.

It's possible at this vulnerability that N/S will play diamonds – while that can be held to eight tricks double-dummy, that requires perfect defense; nine or 10 tricks will be common.

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

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

The auction will depend on West's opening bid. If they open 1♥, North can bid 3♥, asking for a heart stopper for 3NT. South will oblige, and if they buy it, West will probably lead a high diamond, and take their four diamonds for N/S+600.

If West opens a very rich 3♥, or 4♥, North will probably end up bidding 5♣, and this should make six on the ♥K lead – with a non-heart lead there's a show-up squeeze in the majors to let North make six without risk.

One of the rare hands where five of a minor will do better than 3NT. Getting to 6♣ doesn't seem likely.

If E/W plays hearts, unless declarer somehow gets to dummy to take a losing diamond finesse, they will lose four tricks.

Board 5

North Deals
N-S Vul

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

Probably the flattest board of the set. East has a strong 1NT opener, and West will bid 3NT – going through Stayman is optional with extras and 4333 shape, but the final contract will remain the same.

There are 10 tricks – four spades, two diamonds, one heart and three clubs – and little chance of more. The choice of opening lead, although irrelevant, says something about South – do they go for the textbook fourth best club, or (my choice), the attacking ♠10? Either way, ten tricks will happen at most of the tables.

Board 6

East Deals
E-W Vul

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

E/W are cold for 4♠, but with only 21 HCP between the two hands, they've got to push to get there. East will open 1♠, and South will probably double, although some might choose 2♦. Similar to East's hand on Board 3, West can probably upgrade their 9 count plus a singleton to a limit raise, and East should be happy to go to 4♠ with a sixth spade and some shape. Declarer just has to make sure to ruff a heart, and the defense has to make sure to cash their diamond before it runs away on a long club. Neither seems unlikely, and 10 tricks will be common. If West bids only 2♠, East will probably pass, especially if South doubled 1♠, suggesting that the ♥K isn't pulling full weight – turns out, it is. At this vulnerability, 5♥ doubled is a successful sacrifice – down at most three, and that's if E/W get a diamond ruff or declarer misguesses hearts.

Board 7

South Deals
Both Vul

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

North-South are cold for 6♠ – can they get there? The auction will start 1♠-2♦; 3♣-3♠; whether they play 2/1 or standard, this is a game-forcing auction. Cuebidding styles differ, but with the “aces first” method, 4♦-4♥ should allow South to Blackwood to the slam.

6NT makes on a non-heart lead, but the auction does suggest one. There are enough combined values to enable most N/S pairs to bid slam; missing it will prove costly.

Board 8

West Deals
None Vul

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

Poor East – they had only 2 HCP on the last hand, and this one is worse. With 23 HCP, West will open 2♣ if this is too strong for a 2NT opener – after East's response (2♦, or an immediate second negative), West rebids 2NT to show 22–24.

With 1 point, and no spot cards, East will probably pass at pairs. On a low club lead, there are seven tricks after the ♦10 drops – one heart, three diamonds (after knocking out the ♦Q) and three clubs – and it's probable that N/S will have to break spades to give declarer an eighth trick there. The ♣10 lead makes that even easier. North has to pitch clubs to have any hope of beating 2NT. Anyone who goes plus with the E/W cards will get a good score.

Board 9

North Deals
E-W Vul

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

After North passes, East will open 1♦. South will bid 1♠, and West has to decide if they have a single raise or a limit raise. The spade void is great, but they only have four diamonds – it's close. If they bid only 2♦, North can squeak out a 2♠ raise, and South can compete to 3♠. West will probably lead a diamond, which costs an immediate trick, and East-West have to then get a club ruff to beat 3♠. If West bids 2♠ or 3♦ to show a limit raise, it's less likely (although possible) that N/S will compete to 3♠. With the lovely diamond holding, declarer is odds-on to make nine tricks, even with a heart loser. East has to not get greedy and bid 3NT – unless North pitches a heart, that is going to be down one on a spade lead.

Board 10

East Deals
Both Vul

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

It's possible the auction could be nice and placid: three passes to North opening 1NT, leading to 3NT after Stayman. As long as declarer doesn't lose three club tricks (thanks, ♣9!), there should be nine tricks after knocking out the ♠A and ♦K.

But East-West might not be so gentle. If East opens 1♦ (or 1♣), and West bids hearts, North-South will have a tougher time, but should survive as long as North's notrump overcall is natural. If West passes East's opener, North-South had better be on the same page about a balancing 1NT, or they might languish in a partscore.

Board 11

South Deals
None Vul

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

On this board, the low road is the best one. West will open 1♥, despite the anemic suit, and East will respond 1♠. West rebids 1NT, and East is close to an invitational 3♠, with 6–4 shape and what they think is a working ♥K. It isn't, and the bad diamond and spade split and the ♣Q offside means that eight tricks should be the maximum.

There doesn't seem to be an easy way for N/S to enter the auction – the best chance is for North to double 1NT as a takeout of spades – but if they do manage to play clubs, it will play very well, with the ♦10 setting up with one ruff. E/W plus scores will be infrequent.

Board 12
West Deals
N-S Vul

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

This one will be competitive. North will open 1♦ in second seat, and East should double. South will scrape up a 1♠ bid, and West will bid either 2♣ or 3♣. If North can make a support double, they will, but East's hand is good enough to compete to 3♣, and 4♣ if necessary. Clubs is held to nine tricks only on a heart lead (two hearts, spade to ace, heart ruff), or if declarer rises with the ♥K on a heart shift after North wins the ♠A. Otherwise, it should be 10 tricks – 11 if North-South never lead hearts.

It's possible that momentum and the double fit will carry North-South to 4♠, or 4♦. Nine tricks are makeable in diamonds – 10 on the ♠K lead – but the 4-0 break might cause issues. In spades, East-West can either get a diamond ruff or tap to hold declarer to eight tricks. Most tables will end up in a club contract by East-West.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

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

This one will *not* be competitive. East opens 1♥, and West responds 1♠. East has a tough choice of rebids – 3♥ is right on values, but it makes it tough to get to a 5-3 spade fit. After 3♥, West has a really good 4♥ call – if 4♣ is played as a cuebid, that might drive East-West to slam, but most treat it as natural.

Hearts plays well; on a club lead declarer will draw trumps – they might want to take a spade finesse through North, playing them for J-x-x-x, but doesn't have the entries to do that and cash the fourth spade, so must rely on 3-3 spades, which works.

There will be a lot of E/W +680s; it's the good controls and double-fit that makes this an excellent slam, but it's tough to get there.

Board 14
East Deals
None Vul

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

East will open one of a minor, and West will respond 1♠. After East rebids 1NT, West will use whatever methods they have to look for major-suit fits, but probably rest in 3NT.

The lead will be crucial – on a club lead, the defense will win the race to build up a club trick before the red aces are knocked out, and declarer will take at most 10 tricks. They might even go after hearts, and be held to nine.

On a non-club lead, declarer can take 11 tricks – five spades, one heart, three diamonds, two clubs – as long as they save hearts for last.

Spades can make five if declarer gets the two-way heart finesse correct, or if they can set up and get to the 13th diamond in time, but it's not a likely contract.

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

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

It's a North-South hand, but after South passes, and West opens 1♦ (or a short 1♣), it's tough to see an easy way for N/S to enter the auction.

Assuming North passes, East will probably pass, and South can take advantage of their passed-hand status to reopen with 1NT (or 1♥), but might just pass it out.

One of a minor does not play well – declarer will take two spades and one diamond, but that's about it, and N/S will get +200 the hard way, better than any N/S partscore.

Despite only having a combined 24 HCP, N/S can make 3NT, unless North plays it and gets a heart lead; otherwise West will be defending by themselves. However, it requires a lot of pushing to get there. Best shot is Pass-1♦-Pass-1♥; Pass-2♥-Dbl-Pass; 3NT.

Board 16
West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ A J 10
♥ A J 6 4 2
♦ J 4 2
♣ 5 2

♠ Q 7 5 4
♥ 10 7
♦ 7 3
♣ K J 10 9 6

♠ 9 8 6 3 2
♥ 9 8
♦ Q 10 8 6 5
♣ 4

♠ K
♥ K Q 5 3
♦ A K 9
♣ A Q 8 7 3

This is similar to hand 10, in that a lot depends on how active East-West are while outgunned in points. If East-West are quiet throughout, North-South should end up in 3NT, maybe making 10 tricks if West leads a low heart (or the ♠J), but at least nine. If West opens 1♥, and East responds 1♠, it becomes a lot harder to get to a game – South should start with a double, and a club bid by North might get them to a club contract – hopefully five – instead of notrump. It's very possible that E/W actions might talk N/S out of their game.

Board 17
North Deals
None Vul

♠ A 4
♥ Q 2
♦ A J 8 7 6
♣ A 10 7 2

♠ J 10 6 2
♥ A K 7 5
♦ 5 3
♣ 9 4 3

♠ Q 7 5
♥ J 8 6 3
♦ K Q 2
♣ Q J 6

♠ K 9 8 3
♥ 10 9 4
♦ 10 9 4
♣ K 8 5

After three passes, West can make it easy by opening 1NT, which East will raise to 3NT, maybe after going through Stayman, although many won't with 4333 and scattered values. On a spade lead, there are 10 tricks with the club hook on – 11 if declarer plays low from dummy and South mistakenly puts up the king. Declarer does have to make sure to take the club finesse while in dummy with the ♦KQ, but that doesn't look too hard. On a heart lead, 11 tricks should still be easy. If West opens 1♦, they should still get to 3NT, after 1♦-1♥;2♣-3♦; 3NT. But conservative actions by either hand might leave E/W stranded in a partscore.

Board 18
East Deals
N-S Vul

♠ 5
♥ A 9 6
♦ K Q 9 6 5 3
♣ Q 10 2

♠ J 7
♥ J 8 4 2
♦ 10 4
♣ A K J 7 5

♠ A 10 9 4 3 2
♥ K 5 3
♦ A 2
♣ 6 3

♠ K Q 8 6
♥ Q 10 7
♦ J 8 7
♣ 9 8 4

With pure cards and a decent six-card major, East should open 1♠. Playing 2/1, West will probably respond with a forcing 1NT. East will respond 2♠, and West can choose between 2NT, 3♦, or a conservative pass. West might push, and respond with a game-forcing 2♦; this will lead to 3NT by West. In standard, the auction will start 1♠-2♦; 2♠, and West will rebid 3♦ (maybe 2NT). Either way, East will pass. With North holding the ♣AK, 3NT by West is cold, but it's not a great spot, and many will end up in a partscore, probably 3♦. Spades should take eight tricks, diamonds nine or 10, depending on the defense.

Board 19
South Deals
E-W Vul

♠ J 7
♥ K 8 3 2
♦ Q 10 7 5 4
♣ J 10

♠ A 8 4
♥ A 4
♦ 8
♣ A K Q 9 8 6 4

♠ K 10 9 6 5 2
♥ J 10
♦ K 6 3
♣ 5 3

♠ Q 3
♥ Q 9 7 6 5
♦ A J 9 2
♣ 7 2

After two passes, North is about one trick shy of a 2♣ opener – it would be OK if the long suit was a major. East might ignore the vulnerability, and bid 2♠, or just 1♠. South will bid 2♥ or double over 1♠, but isn't good enough to bid 3♥ over 2♠, and will probably make a negative double. Whatever happens, North will probably just shrug off the open diamond suit, and settle for 3NT. If both East and South are aggressive, and the auction goes Pass-Pass-1♣-2♠; 3♥, North might get very interested in slam, but it has no play. On a neutral lead, 3NT has 11 tricks when the ♥J 10 drop, and might even take 12 if East led a spade. On a diamond lead, the only way to take 11 tricks is to duck trick one, win the diamond return, and play the ♥Q, then strip squeeze East in the majors. This is possible if East overcalled 2♠, but still seems double-dummy. Expect a lot of 460s

Board 20
West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 10 8 6 3
♥ A J 2
♦ 3
♣ J 4 3 2

♠ J 7 4
♥ Q 8
♦ J 5
♣ K 9 8 7 6 5

N	E
W	S

♠ 9 2
♥ K 9 4 3
♦ Q 10 7 4 2
♣ Q 10

♠ K Q 5
♥ 10 7 6 5
♦ A K 9 8 6
♣ A

Definitely a partscore battle. Let's start with West passing. There should be two more passes, then South will open either 1♦ or 1NT. After 1♦, West will bid 1♠, and neither North nor East have quite enough to bid. South might pass it out – if they do reopen with anything other than 1NT, they're definitely going minus, but 1NT is makeable as long as declarer wins the spade in dummy, and gets three diamond tricks. In 1♠, West will probably be down one unless they can sniff out the doubleton ♥Q.

North South might play 3♣ – the ♣Q 10 dropping helps, but North doesn't have a quick entry to draw trumps before suffering a diamond or spade ruff.

If West does open 1♠, East will respond 1NT. South will bid 2♦, unless they play equal-level conversion, then they plan to double and convert 2♣ to 2♦, although E/W might be in 2♠ before then. Even 2♦ is too high. Any plus score on offense will be a good board.

Board 21
North Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A K J 9
♥ K Q 5 2
♦ J 9 8
♣ 10 2

♠ 10 4 3
♥ J 7 3
♦ A K 5
♣ Q 9 7 5

N	E
W	S

♠ Q 8 7 6
♥ A 9 6
♦ 7 6
♣ K J 6 3

♠ 5 2
♥ 10 8 4
♦ Q 10 4 3 2
♣ A 8 4

After two passes, South will probably pass. West will open 1♦, and raise East's 1♠ response to 2♠. East is close to a game try, but with a flat 10, will probably pass at pairs. The breaks are very kind on this hand, and making four comes down to the club guess. If North shows up with the ♦AK early, they are unlikely to hold the ♣A as well, given the first-round pass, so most will get the clubs right and take 10 tricks.

If South engaged in a third seat 2♦ opener, West will probably shrug and double, hoping not to have to put down their dummy in 3♣. East will bid 3♠, probably after North bids 3♦, but West will probably pass. 4♠ isn't that great a contract, but we've all been in worse.

Board 22
East Deals
E-W Vul

♠ K J 5 3 2
♥ 4 3
♦ Q J 9 4 3
♣ 3

♠ A Q 8 7 6
♥ 9 7
♦ A K 10
♣ K 5 2

N	E
W	S

♠ 10 9
♥ Q 10 5
♦ 8 7 6 5 2
♣ 9 7 4

♠ 4
♥ A K J 8 6 2
♦ —
♣ A Q J 10 8 6

South might open 2♣, but experts don't like doing that with a two-suiter. After 1♥, West might make a Michaels cuebid, but the vulnerability and poor suits should discourage it. Assuming West passes, North will bid a 1♠, but has an odd choice after South jumps to 3♣. 4NT quantitative would be close to ideal, but nobody does that – 3♦ at least lets South finish describing their hand, probably with 4♣. Now North can use RKC, and find out about the ♥AK and ♣AQ*, and might be able to intelligently bid 7♣.

Different auctions will probably end up with North having to guess, and there will be a lot of *shrug* 6NT calls – especially if South opens 2♣, because they won't have room to describe their hand. Everything makes seven – clubs (best), notrump (second best) or hearts (worst).

Board 23
South Deals
Both Vul

♠ 10 4 3
♥ 9 8 2
♦ Q 7
♣ A K 8 6 3

♠ Q 8 6 5
♥ J 10 4
♦ 10 5
♣ J 10 5 2

N	E
W	S

♠ J 7 2
♥ A K 6 5 3
♦ J 2
♣ Q 9 4

♠ A K 9
♥ Q 7
♦ A K 9 8 6 4 3
♣ 7

South will open 1♦, which West and North will probably pass. East will reopen with 1♥, and South will bid 2♦ (some might even bid 3♦). West can raise to 2♥, and even if North doesn't bid 3♦, South will. If that ends the auction, the defense has to make sure to cash their three winners before South gets in, otherwise one will do away on the long spade.

Nobody really has a reason to bid 3♥, although West might if South rebid 3♦. Hearts should go down one, and might go down two if the defense plays two rounds of diamonds, followed by four rounds of spades, and declarer misguesses.

If North-South wander into 3NT, the defense has to be very careful – if they don't cash all five of their winners right away, it will make. A top club, followed by the ♥9, should do it.

Board 24West Deals
None Vul

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

Let's start with West opening a weak 2♦. East has 15 HCP, aces, and a nice diamond holding and might make some kind of game try with 2NT. West can show a spade feature with 3♠, and this might drive East to 3NT or 5♦. There are only eight top tricks in notrump, but with both hearts and clubs splitting 4-4 and the ♦Q making an early appearance, it will make three as long as the defense only cashed tricks in one of the round suits. 5♦ is a much better spot, and will make 11 tricks.

If East doesn't try for game, South might pop in with a double, letting North play 3♥. This is down two at least – three if the defense gets a club ruff, or they get the ♥10 another way. East must double to protect their partscore in diamonds.

Without a preempt, East will open a strong 1NT in third seat – West might stretch to make an invitational diamond bid, pass 1NT, or sign off in diamonds. Nothing is clear, but all games make.

Board 25North Deals
E-W Vul

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

Assuming East and South pass, West is too strong for a 1NT opener, and will open 1♦. After East responds 1♥, West can rebid 2NT. East will check for three-card heart support, and when they find it, probably will content themselves with 4♥.

East might open 1♥ in second seat, which might drive West to slam, or South might open 3♣ in third. If South does open 3♣, West is close between 3NT (which might get raised to 4NT, but that's all), or double (which will lead to 4♥).

In hearts, South will probably lead their singleton diamond. Declarer will ruff a club (high!) and draw trumps, learning that North has 2♥ and 2♣. That, and the lead, should steer declarer away from testing diamonds – 12 tricks are available only if North is put under pressure in spades and diamonds, by running trumps. North has to either pitch two diamonds, setting up the fourth, or risk being endplayed in diamonds. It requires good card reading, but North will keep parity with dummy, so it is achievable. 3NT, on a club lead, can still take 12 tricks by doing the same thing. Anyone who makes six, however they do it, will do well.

Board 26East Deals
Both Vul

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

This hand might be passed out, but any of the first three hands might open. If East opens 1♦, West will bid 1♠ if South didn't (and 2NT if they did). East will rebid 1NT, and as long as West knows that East opens 11 counts, West will pass. North might very well balance with 2♥, which is a lucky make, and the contract could be 2♥ (maybe doubled), 2NT, or 3♦.

Notrump by E/W can be held to seven tricks if South leads a black suit, and declarer uses an entry to dummy to finesse the diamond. However, there are many pitfalls for both defenders, and +120 will not be uncommon. Diamonds can also be held to seven tricks if the defense can stop declarer setting up and cashing a second heart before trumps are drawn.

If East passes, and South opens 1♣, N/S might buy it for 2♥, and if East West play it, it will be in 3♦.

Board 27South Deals
None Vul

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

The auction should be straightforward – if South doesn't open 3♣, it will go something like 1♦-1♠; 4♠ (or 4♣, splinter), and East will be playing 4♠. South might open 3♣, and North-South might compete to 5♣, but if doubled, that will be down four or five, depending on the spade guess.

4♠ also involves a guess – if declarer gets spades right (ducking the second round), they'll make five, otherwise four. There doesn't seem to be much reason to get it right, unless North might be known as a player that couldn't duck smoothly with K-10-x or K-J-x.

Board 28West Deals
N-S Vul

♠ Q J 5
♥ 4 3
♦ J 10 3 2
♣ Q 9 6 4

♠ 8 7 4 3 2
♥ A K J 10 9 5
♦ A 6
♣ —

♠ A K 10
♥ 7 6 2
♦ 8 4
♣ A K J 8 7

♠ 9 6
♥ Q 8
♦ K Q 9 7 5
♣ 10 5 3 2

After West passes, North has a choice of opening calls. 1♠ makes the rebidding problems easier, but with extra length in hearts, and a far stronger suit, most will open 1♥. East will probably overcall 2♣, South will pass. West might bump to 3♣ – North could make a very aggressive 3♠ call, but probably will content themselves with 3♥. South might very well raise this to 4♥, with what looks like three working cards, but some might pass. Hearts plays OK – even if North doesn't get a spade ruff (which leads to making five), the 3-3 spade split lets 4♥ make four, with declarer just barely keeping control. 5♣ is a paying sacrifice, losing four top red tricks, and maybe a spade ruff. A 1♠ opener might lead to a spade contract – that will lose control on multiple club taps, and makes only eight tricks.

Board 29North Deals
Both Vul

♠ A 6 2
♥ —
♦ A Q 10 4
♣ A Q J 10 3 2

♠ K Q 8
♥ A Q J 7 4
♦ 9 8 5 2
♣ 7

♠ J 10 4
♥ K 9 6 3
♦ J 6
♣ K 9 8 6

♠ 9 7 5 3
♥ 10 8 5 2
♦ K 7 3
♣ 5 4

North opens the bidding with 1♥, and after East passes, South might raise to 3♥ if that's weak, or scrape up a 2♥ call otherwise. Some might pass, but that's not popular with four-card support. West has a choice between bidding clubs and double. Ironically, the double might make it easier for E/W to get to game; East will either bid notrump or clubs, either of which will encourage West to bid 3NT or 5♣. But if West just overcalled clubs, East might pass, devaluing their ♥K. Clubs takes 12 tricks when the diamond finesse is surprisingly on – 3NT can take 11 tricks, but declarer might not be willing to risk the diamond finesse. It doesn't seem likely that E/W will get to 6♣ once North opens the bidding.

Board 30East Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 5 3
♥ K J 6
♦ Q 10 7 6
♣ A Q 6

♠ K J 8 6 2
♥ Q 7 4
♦ 3 2
♣ K 9 5

♠ Q 7 4
♥ A 10 8 3
♦ K 5 4
♣ J 10 4

♠ A 9
♥ 9 5 2
♦ A J 9 8
♣ 8 7 3 2

After two passes, West will open 1♦. North doesn't have a great overcall, but it's still 9 HCP, a decent suit, and it's spades, so most will bid 1♠. East will probably make a negative double, and West has an ugly choice – 1NT without a pure stopper, or 2♥ without 4♥. It won't be everyone, but most will bid 1NT, which should end the auction. Some Easts might choose 1NT instead of a double, which will also buy the contract. On a spade lead (the Jack works double-dummy, pinning the queen, but no-one will lead that), declarer will probably make exactly one, losing four spades, a diamond and a club, and scrambling tricks outside. Some might lose a heart as well, and go down. N/S might end up in 2♠, especially if West rebids 2♥ smoothly after a negative double – this doesn't play well, and unless psychic North will go down two.

Board 31South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ A Q 7 2
♥ K 8 6
♦ A 8 5
♣ A 10 9

♠ 10 8 6 3
♥ J
♦ K 2
♣ Q J 7 5 4 3

♠ J 9 5
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ 10 6 3
♣ K 6 2

♠ K 4
♥ Q 9 5 3 2
♦ Q J 9 7 4
♣ 8

After South passes, West will open 1NT. North will probably pass, and East should, with 8 HCP and 4333. South might very well bid here, but it's such a horrible misfit that no N/S contract is safe, and East can pull the trigger on most of them. Expect a lot of E/W +300s/500s, whether in 2♥ doubled or 3♣ doubled, but if N/S only go down 100, they'll do well. If West does play notrump on a club lead, declarer can take a lot of tricks given the spade situation – nine or maybe even 10 – but there won't be many in game.

Board 32West Deals
E-W Vul

♠ 7 4 3
♥ 10 8 4 2
♦ A 9 7 4 2
♣ K

♠ 10 6 5
♥ A 9 3
♦ Q 8
♣ Q J 8 5 2

♠ A K 9
♥ K Q 7 5
♦ K 5
♣ 10 9 4 3

♠ Q J 8 2
♥ J 6
♦ J 10 6 3
♣ A 7 6

After two passes, East will open 1NT. This will probably end the auction, and if declarer gets hearts right (the lack of entries to dummy might help), will take seven tricks, but probably no more. If E/W get to hearts, that is a more interesting contract – North-South have to prevent a pure crossruff, but also stop West's diamonds setting up. They can't quite do it, double-dummy, and in real life most will take nine tricks. If West plays hearts, and North leads the ♣Q, they might even make 10, utilizing the power of the ♣10 9.

Board 33

North Deals
None Vul

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

♠ K 9 5 3
♥ A 7 6
♦ A Q 10 9 8
♣ J

East opens 1♣, and South will either double or bid 1♦. Over double, West will probably settle for 1NT (or 1♦, then 1NT after East bids 1♥), but might redouble. E/W might get on a penalizing kick, but 1♦ by South is very tough to beat, with South's excellent diamond spots and the ♠A onside.

Notrump will take eight tricks on a diamond lead in practice, unless West takes a spade finesse or North leads a spade (and South starts diamonds by leading the 10). Hearts or spades technically does well, as declarer should navigate the bad splits and emerge with +110 or maybe even +140. But most will be +120.

Board 34

East Deals
N-S Vul

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

♠ J 10 8 6 5
♥ 4 2
♦ A K 5
♣ K 9 2

Someone will be opening light. Probably not East, with their bad 10 count, but South might stretch to open 1♠. If they do, West will probably pipe in with 2♥, and North has an ugly choice – an off-shape 2NT, an overbid of 3♣, or a negative double. 3♣ will probably lead to 3NT after South “asks” with 3♥; this will make if declarer guesses clubs, but will be down a lot if they don't.

Clubs will be +130 in practice, but 11 tricks might happen if declarer can set up the spade suit and still have an entry to dummy.

If South doesn't open 1♠, West will open 1♥. North might bid clubs, but East will raise hearts, and probably end up competing to 3♥. If E/W do play hearts, there are five top losers, and spade ruffs can hold declarer to six tricks, but many will take seven. A Flannery 2♦ opener might stop the opponents competing to the three level, and 2♥ down one would be a good score for E/W.

Board 35

South Deals
E-W Vul

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

♠ Q 6 4
♥ A K J 8 3
♦ 9 6 5
♣ 9 5

If South stretches to open 1♥, it's going to be close to impossible for North to stop below slam. It would be cold if South had the ♠K instead of the queen, or if their shape was 3=5=2=3 instead of 3=5=3=2, but on the actual hand 6♥ has close to no play, and will go down unless there is misdefense.

If South does pass, North will open 1♥ in third seat, and whether East makes a light double or not, South will show a limit raise in hearts. North-South might still get to slam, but the chances of staying out of it are better. The vulnerability should discourage E/W from competing too high in clubs (or opening 3♣), but some might bid 5♣, and that goes down too much to be a good sacrifice.

Board 36

West Deals
Both Vul

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

♠ J 10 9 2
♥ K 10 9 3
♦ K 7 6 4
♣ 9

It's crucial that East-West play 4♥, not 4♠, and they have to have a very specific auction to get there. After West opens 1♠, North will probably bid 3♣. East can bid 3♦, but over West's 3♥, they'll have a problem. 4♥ is OK – the lack of a negative double strongly suggests this is on three – but if they choose 3♠ instead, West has to choose between 3NT or 4♥, either of which will end the auction.

3NT is very close between making and down one – the ♦8 comes into play on a diamond opening lead – but 4♥ should be fairly easy to make, losing two hearts and a club in some manner. 4♠ shouldn't make, with just too much to do, but the defense might slip. E/W making game anywhere will be a very good board.