



Commentary for the IBU Autumn Simultaneous Pairs Wednesday 9th November 2022

Dear Bridge Player,

Thank you very much for playing in the IBU Simultaneous Pairs 2022, and for supporting the Irish Bridge Union.

The funds raised this year will be used to defray the costs of sending what we hope will be two IBU teams to the World Championships in Marrakech in 2023 – our Open Team will definitely be competing for the Bermuda Bowl, and our Women’s Team will very likely be competing for the Venice Cup (for the first time). So your entry fees will be going to a very good cause. Players from each of these teams have contributed a commentary this week, which means that those of you who play in Wednesday or Thursday’s sessions will have the opportunity to observe their analytical skills, and gauge your own bidding and play against Ireland’s best.

We hope that you enjoyed the chance to pit your bridge wits against your fellow players across Ireland (and for those still playing online, maybe overseas as well). As ever, the hands (which are randomly dealt by computer with no manual intervention) provided plenty of challenges. Many thanks to our expert commentator(s) **Monday** – Brian Senior; **Tuesday** – Enda Murphy; **Wednesday** the Irish Women’s Team, Rebecca Brown-O’Keeffe, Jeannie Fitzgerald, Diane Greenwood, Joan Kenny, Gilda Pender and Teresa Rigney; **Thursday** – members of the Irish Open Team, Hugh McGann, Adam Mesbur, and Tommy Garvey and **Friday** – Paul Delaney for their guidance through the maze. I hope that you have picked up some useful tips from their advice.

Don’t forget to check your standing in the national results at www.ecatsbridge.com/sims.

Harold Curran – President, Irish Bridge Union

Board 1. None. Dealer North

	♠ Q 10 6 2		
	♥ Q J 8 2		
	♦ 6 5 3		
	♣ 10 4		
♠ 7 5 4		♠ A 8	
♥ A 3		♥ K 9 7	
♦ A Q 9		♦ 10 4 2	
♣ A K J 9 3		♣ Q 8 7 5 2	
	♠ K J 9 3		
	♥ 10 6 5 4		
	♦ K J 8 7		
	♣ 6		
North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Bidding wise, almost all tables will start with 1♣ from West and end in 3NT. For those tables that bid 1NT directly over the 1♣ opening, this will see East playing the contract. If East decides to support their partner’s club suit, then West is likely to play in 3NT. This is likely to work

out better than 5♣ playing pairs, though as the cards lie (South holding both diamond honours) 6♣ makes – 5 club tricks, 3 diamond tricks, 2 top heart tricks, 1 heart ruff and 1 spade trick.

Playing in 3NT, irrespective of which side is playing the contract, declarer is likely to get a spade lead, and you must decide how brave you are feeling...

Declarer has 9 tricks on top. East is likely to win the second round of spades and will run 5 clubs. South does best to discard 1 diamond and 3 hearts, while North can discard 1 spade, 1 diamond and 1 heart. Brave Easts can make 11 tricks by finessing diamonds twice. This is a great play if you don’t receive a spade lead, but when you could lose a diamond trick and another 2 potential spade tricks if the finesse loses, it will seem reasonable to forgo the double finesses and hope the ♦K is on the right side, collecting 10 tricks on the first-round finesse of the Queen.

Indeed, there may be some declarers who settle for 9 tricks if they are worried about losing the diamond finesse and their opponents cashing lots of spade tricks – however the spade lead and return (assuming declarer ducks the first trick) should give the 4-4 break away and allow you to safely finesse the diamond. A lead of the ♠2 from North indicates 4 on a normal 4th highest lead; and if South is on lead and leads the ♠3 to the ♠Q and the ♠2 is returned then this will also confirm the spade position.

Board 2. North/South. Dealer East

♠ A 8 6 5 ♥ A 10 3 ♦ Q J 10 7 ♣ J 6 ♠ K J 7 4 3 ♥ 8 ♦ A 9 4 ♣ Q 10 8 4	♠ 2 ♥ K Q 9 7 6 ♦ K 8 6 ♣ A 9 5 2 ♠ Q 10 9 ♥ J 5 4 2 ♦ 5 3 2 ♣ K 7 3
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North	East	South	West
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Most tables are likely to finish playing in 3♣, but there will be some tables who do end up in NT. Typically, you want to play in NT in pairs as the expectation is that you will be able to gain enough tricks in the play to make it more attractive than playing in your minor suit fit. This worked well on board 1 where 10 tricks scoring 430 points was better than 5C+1 scoring 420.

In terms of the bidding, the point of divergence may be at the rebid stage, with those playing strong NT potentially rebidding INT with their singleton spade to show 12-14. In contrast, the weak NT players will bid the standard 2♣ instead. Is it a good idea to rebid INT? This is one of those awkward situations where the danger is that your partner will, inevitably, assume you have at least 2 cards in spades and may well bid on in their suit. This is far less of a concern in the minors.

If there is a 2♣ rebid, there is also the possibility that West could bid 2NT now, showing 11/12 points, but at most tables the likely bid will be 3♣ with their 10 count and 4

card support, giving East the option of bidding on if they have a good enough hand.

In the play, clubs play very nicely, and even if South manages to find a diamond lead, going up with the ♦A and playing the singleton heart from dummy puts North under pressure and creates a discard for the losing diamond trick. 3♣ + 1 is the most likely result playing in clubs, losing one heart, one spade and one club – though depending on how East plays the clubs, they may lose a second club trick.

For those tables playing in NT, this should result in 7 tricks - 3 club tricks (by playing a club to the Q), 2 diamond tricks and 2 tricks in the other suits, though the defence may end up helping in the end game for an overtrick...

2♠ will make 8 tricks with careful play but will also score worse than 3♣ plus 1.

Board 3. East/West. Dealer South

♠ K Q 10 9 8 6 4 ♥ 7 ♦ 9 2 ♣ J 6 4 ♠ J 2 ♥ J 9 8 3 2 ♦ 7 6 5 ♣ K 5 2	♠ 7 5 ♥ A K 10 6 4 ♦ Q 10 4 3 ♣ Q 3 ♠ A 3 ♥ Q 5 ♦ A K J 8 ♣ A 10 9 8 7
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North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	1♣	Pass
2♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
Pass	Pass	4♠	Pass

South's lovely hand will start with 1♣ and North will bid 1♠ (simply changing the suit here at the 1-level is better than jumping). There will be some Easts who now find a double showing the other two suits, but that won't stop South reversing by bidding 2♦ and showing their strong hand. Aggressive Wests could bid 2♥ at this point – at favourable vulnerability it is a great bid, at adverse vulnerability it is a more difficult decision, especially when South has shown such a strong hand... But either way, North is likely to bid 2♠, which should show 6+ spades.

Easts who continue competing may find themselves in trouble. Bear in mind at this vulnerability, down 2 is worse than letting your opponents make game. 3♥ doubled will certainly go at least 2 down for minus 500 but

could go for minus 800 if North/South find the beautiful defence of a trump promotion on a third round of spades, with declarer losing 3 diamonds (on a diamond lead from North), 1 club, 2 spades and the heart queen - if North can find the third spade continuation (difficult to do!).

Most tables will play in 4♠ by North. In terms of the play, it looks an obvious 11 tricks, losing 1 heart and 1 club. 12 tricks can be made by running the diamond 9 at trick 3 – assuming the ♥AK lead, but this is a high-risk strategy and must be done when in the North hand with a heart ruff as there are only 2 quick entries to North's hand – a heart ruff and spade honour – and both entries are needed if East covers the ♦9.

Board 4. All. Dealer West

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

North	East	South	West
			1♦
Pass	1♠	Pass	INT
Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Or

North	East	South	West
			1♦
INT	Pass	Pass	?

Playing strong NT and 5-card majors, West is likely to open 1♦ and over a 1♠ response bid INT. While some East players will choose to pass this, many Easts may choose to go back to 2♦.

Those who are playing weak NT will open INT on the West hand and may play there, though there is a possibility that South may get involved after a INT, Pass, Pass sequence. Having 9 cards in the majors makes it attractive for South to bid... having 8 of your 10 points in the minors, including a singleton ♦K is not appealing.

Very conservative Wests, first in hand vulnerable, may choose to pass and this will be a good score if it is passed out.

In terms of the play, 2♦ should go down at least 1. Unless your opponents are being very nice, it is difficult to see a way of avoiding 2 clubs, 1 spade and 3 diamond losers. Playing in INT may be even worse and is likely to go down 2 – losing 3 hearts, 2 diamonds, 2 clubs and 1 spade.

Should West open a weak NT, and if South gets involved showing the majors, then North/South will end in a nice heart contract. North may even jump to 3♥, which South should pass - if North couldn't bid anything over the weak NT then they have limited their hand and 4♥ is a step too far.

North can make 9 tricks with careful play, but as it happens on this hand, letting West play in INT and collecting 200 will give North/South a better score.

Board 5. North/South. Dealer North

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

North	East	South	West
1♣	Pass	1♦	Pass
1♥	Pass	3♣	Pass
Pass	Pass		

A variety of potential scores are possible on this board.

The opening bid is straightforward by North, and most Easts are likely to pass this bid. The 1♦ response from South means West is likely to pass and North is now likely to bid 1♥. If East doesn't bid, South is now likely to bid 3♣ – hoping that North will be able to bid 3NT if they have 13/14+ and a spade stop. On this hand, some Norths may punt a 3NT bid, and it is tempting to do so looking at 7 likely club tricks, but your partner also had the opportunity to bid NT and didn't, so the spade situation is precarious. There is also the possibility that 5♣ could make too, but your

diamond void is far less attractive opposite a partner who has bid 1♦. As it happens, the best option for North is to pass the 3♣ as 10 tricks in clubs is the best makeable contract for North/South.

Of course, once North passes 3♣, if East hasn't previously bid there is now the possibility that East will get involved as it is increasingly likely that there is a spade fit on for East/West given both North and South have shied away from bidding NT. This is still a risky bid, but at favourable vulnerability it may be a risk worth taking.

If East/West do bid (and are lucky), they may get left in 3♠ and can make 9 tricks. However, there is a strong possibility that North will bid 4♣ with their hand. East/West do better to go on to 4♠ – and if they do and are allowed play there, then the defence needs to be careful.

Board 6. East/West. Dealer East

	♠ 8 7 6 4 ♥ 4 3 2 ♦ 9 5 4 ♣ Q 10 2		
♠ J ♥ Q 10 8 ♦ K J 10 8 7 3 ♣ 9 6 4	♠ 9 ♥ A K J 9 5 ♦ A 6 ♣ K J 7 5 3	♠ A K Q 10 5 3 2 ♥ 7 6 ♦ Q 2 ♣ A 8	
North	East	South	West
	1♥	1♠	2♥
2♠	3♣	4♠	5♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

A competitive bidding hand.

Where South overcalls 1♠, West can now bid a simple 2♥ if you play 5-card majors. It is a more difficult decision playing 4-card majors, but over a 1♠ bid, West may find a double and East/West should then find their heart fit. North holding a flat hand may bid 2♠ (though 3♠ may be more effective here). Finding your heart fit early, it is likely that East/West will bid on to 5♥ at this vulnerability, though both sides have difficult decisions to make...

Should East/West bid 5♥, it is then a question of whether North/South should bid 5♠? If they do, then this works out well as they sacrifice 500, losing 5 tricks – 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and 1 club. This is better than the 11 tricks that East/West make in hearts or diamonds. In the

play, South is almost certain to lead a spade honour and no switch is particularly attractive. The passive play is to switch to a small trump, and East can win in hand, cash another round of trumps and then play ♦A and another diamond. On the favourable diamond position, declarer should now draw the remaining trump and has 11 tricks, meaning the club guess is not needed. If East hasn't bid clubs, then at trick 2 South may well play the ♣A and another club, hoping to find partner with the ♣K. This gives the club suit away, but makes no difference on the board.

An initial 4♠ bid may also be a popular choice by South – especially at this vulnerability. With minimal values, West may pass this initially. East may be somewhat reluctant to let this go and is likely to find another bid. If East doubles, this gives West a difficult choice. If they choose to bid 5♦ or 5♥ it will be successful.

Board 7. All. Dealer South

	♠ K Q 8 ♥ A K Q 9 6 ♦ 9 3 ♣ K 10 3		
♠ J 9 6 4 ♥ 7 3 ♦ A Q 10 6 5 ♣ A 4	♠ 10 3 2 ♥ J 10 5 ♦ J 7 4 ♣ Q J 6 5	♠ A 7 5 ♥ 8 4 2 ♦ K 8 2 ♣ 9 8 7 2	
North	East	South	West
		Pass	1♦
1♥	Dbl	2♥	?
?			

There are several possible auctions depending on whether West chooses to open or pass initially.

Over a 1♦ opening North must choose between a double and an overcall (17 points is at the very upper limit of a simple overcall). If North doubles, then East may bid INT which will be passed around to North who can now bid 2♥ or even double again (if INT doubled gets passed round to West they are likely to bid 2♦).

If North bids 1♥, then East will probably double, showing 6+ points. South can now show some support with a bid of 2♥, though with 5 points and a 4-3-3-3 hand, South may prefer to pass. After a double from East, West may find a 2♠ bid over 2♥, though bearing in

mind that East has denied holding 4+ spades, West may choose to pass over 2♥ and let partner bid again if they want to. Over a 2♥ bid from South, North will bid again – South will rebuff any advances made by North if they invite – and be sorry they bid at all if partner jumps to 4♥!

Should West bid INT initially, North will make a swift penalty double, but it is now likely that West will bid 2♦ as a means of escape, even if their partner passes to play... North may now bid 2♥ and is likely to play there.

If West passes initially, North may open 1♥ playing weak NT. Playing strong NT North may open INT or may choose to open 1♥ planning to rebid 2NT with their lovely 17HCP.

In the play, declarer can make 9 tricks in a heart contract. Against INT by North, defenders can cash 5 diamonds and 2 black aces for -1. North/South pairs playing INT or those who play in 4♥ will likely score poorly.

Board 8. None. Dealer West

	♠ Q 4		
	♥ Q J 8		
	♦ A 10 9 8 4		
	♣ Q 10 7		
♠ J 10		♠ 7 6 5 3	
♥ 9 7 6 3		♥ A 10	
♦ J		♦ Q 7 6 2	
♣ A K J 4 3 2		♣ 9 6 5	
	♠ A K 9 8 2		
	♥ K 5 4 2		
	♦ K 5 3		
	♣ 8		
North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
Pass	3♣	Dbl	2♣
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Some Wests may be tempted to open 1♣ or 3♣, which will likely propel North/South into 3NT. But even without the opening bid from West, it is likely that North/South may well end there anyway, especially if North opens with their 11 count, non-vulnerable. Indeed, some North/South pairs, playing weak NT may get very lucky if they open INT with the North hand and over a transfer or Smolen sequence end up in 3NT without interference. Without any indication of what to lead, East may well start with a small diamond, which, if North reads it as natural, will also give away the diamond suit position and allow North to come to an easy 9 tricks.

Where North opens 1♦, South is likely to respond 1♠. If West now bids 2♣, this makes life difficult for North, who is likely to pass. South won't give up so easily, and may double or bid 3♥, giving North several options to choose from. Scoring at pairs, many will choose to bid 3NT.

For those North/South pairs who do get interference, end in 3NT, and get a club lead, the contract will be made if West cashes their top clubs and plays a third round – eliminating any possibility of getting in again. On best defence where East/West keep their communications open, 3NT can still be made on a diamond guess, but North will have to play their ♦A first, before finessing. East/West pairs will feel slightly unlucky if their opponents find this play but can do nothing but grit their teeth and congratulate their opponents!

For those that don't end in 3NT, with the ♠J10 dropping doubleton, North/South can make 10 tricks in 4♠, losing a trick in each outside suit.

Double dummy, 10 tricks are also available in 4♥ on careful play – but it is a rather uncomfortable contract. 5♦ will not succeed as there is an inevitable diamond loser to go with the club and heart aces.

Board 9. East/West. Dealer North

	♠ K 10 4 3		
	♥ 10 9 7		
	♦ 5 4 3		
	♣ 7 3 2		
♠ A 2		♠ J 8 7 6	
♥ A K 8 5		♥ Q 6 4	
♦ A 10 9 6 2		♦ 8 7	
♣ 10 8		♣ A J 9 6	
	♠ Q 9 5		
	♥ J 3 2		
	♦ K Q J		
	♣ K Q 5 4		
North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1♣	1♦
Pass	INT	Pass	2♥
Pass	2NT	Pass	Pass
Pass			
or			
North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	INT	Dbl
?			

With relatively balanced hands around the table and East/West holding a combined 23 HCP, they are likely to declare on board 9 – unless North/South are playing weak NT. On

a 1♣ opening by South, West will get involved and East's response of INT with most partnerships will show 8-11 points. West may try again with a 2♥ bid, but East is likely to either pass this or settle for 2NT. Playing in 2NT should deliver 8 tricks and 120 for East/West. Playing in hearts scores much better as the cards lie. Double dummy East/West can make 10 tricks in hearts, losing one trick in each suit outside trumps. East/West pairs playing in hearts should score reasonably well, but those playing against North/South pairs who play weak NT may do even better as this is a hand where those North/Souths may well end up on the wrong side of the board.

After two passes, South has an obvious weak NT opening for those playing it, and West has an equally obvious penalty double. Now North/South find themselves in trouble. Many pairs won't have a defence with their 4-3-3-3 hand, so may end up in the doubled contract and East will be happy to pass and let them play there. Some North/Souths may be able to scramble into a 2♣ contract playing some systems. One of our pairs playing weak NT would bid 2♣ on the North hand showing clubs and a higher-ranking suit. In an ideal world, this would show at least 4 cards in the suit bid, but the hope is that East/West will bid on, rather than let 2♣ stand (and if partner does bid over the 2♣ (not on this hand), then North will bid 2♠ and hope to find a fit...).

But, if the North/South pairs do end up in INT doubled, then it is difficult to see more than 4 tricks, 5 if lucky. The available penalty to East/West should outscore all but the 4♥ bidders.

Board 10. All. Dealer East

<p>♠ 8 7 ♥ A K J 9 6 ♦ J 10 8 ♣ K 7 4</p> <p>♠ K 6 4 2 ♥ 7 4 3 2 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 9 5 2</p> <p>♠ A 10 5 ♥ 10 5 ♦ A 9 7 4 ♣ Q J 6 3</p>	<p>♠ Q J 9 3 ♥ Q 8 ♦ K Q 5 2 ♣ A 10 8</p>
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North	East	South	West
	1♦	Pass	Pass
1♥	Pass	INT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Or

North	East	South	West
	INT	Pass	Pass

?

Another hand where playing weak NT may see you end up on the wrong side of the scoring.

Playing strong NT and 5-card majors, East will open 1♦ and this will be passed round to North who will bid 1♥. East, with a balanced weak NT will pass and South is likely to inquire whether partner has any interest in game. Similar to board 9, a INT bid in response to a simple overcall typically shows 8-11 points – though with their nice 11 points, some Souths may jump to 2NT instead.

North will definitely pass a INT bid but may be tempted to bid on over a 2NT response - though in practice game is difficult to reach with confidence. Double dummy, there are 10 tricks available for North/South in hearts or clubs and 9 in no-trumps if you pick up the ♥Q (bearing in mind that East opened and West passed, this is not inconceivable).

East/West pairs playing weak NT will be fortunate not to run into a double, but even without one are likely to be disappointed in the scoring. On best defence, INT can be held to just 3 tricks. Playing in spades, East/West can make 6 tricks.

Should East open weak INT, passed around to North, some Norths will find a 2♥ bid, but as it happens, passing will score better than any part score in hearts or NT.

Board 11. None. Dealer South

<p>♠ 7 4 ♥ 10 6 3 ♦ 9 4 3 ♣ J 10 8 7 6</p> <p>♠ K Q 10 5 ♥ A Q 9 8 7 5 ♦ K 5 2 ♣ —</p> <p>♠ J 8 6 2 ♥ 4 2 ♦ Q 10 8 6 ♣ A K 2</p>	<p>♠ A 9 3 ♥ K J ♦ A J 7 ♣ Q 9 5 4 3</p>
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North	East	South	West
		Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♦	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

This is a hand which could end in several different contracts for East/West, the most likely of which are 3NT, 4♥ or 6♥.

The initial 2♣ response may be a game forcing bid for some pairs, which makes it slightly easier bidding wise, but those partnerships in which it is not game forcing may still consider bidding their 4-card spade suit, even though the 2♣ bid does not improve West's hand. If the bidding does progress this way, then it is likely East will bid 3♦ as 4th suit forcing, and West can now show their 6th heart giving East the opportunity to support hearts or bid 3NT.

Ambitious East/West pairs might head for 6♥ (undeterred by the 2♣ bid), and if they do end up there, West will be thrilled with dummy, finding most of the points outside clubs.

Playing in 4♥ and possibly even 6♥, you may well get a diamond lead, and the obvious play of the ♦J at trick one delivers bad news. You can still make 12 tricks by ruffing three clubs, and when the ♣AK fall it sets up your ♣Q – though you will have to start this process relatively quickly while you still retain enough entries to dummy. You can probably afford to ruff one club on your first heart entry and then when you play a second heart to dummy and get the good news that trumps divide 3-2, you can now ruff a second club. The ♣K falling will allow you to draw the final trump (South throwing a small diamond) and play a diamond to the ♦A. Now a third low club from dummy will deliver the good news and set up your ♣Q. If South happens to throw a spade at any point then declarer can end up with all the tricks. And if you get a heart lead and play on clubs without trying the diamond finesse, then you can squeeze South in spades and diamonds and could end up with all the tricks that way.

If East declares in 3NT and South decides not to cash both ♣ honours, East-West may well end up making 12 or more tricks in NT as South has to find a lot of uncomfortable discards on the hearts - which is likely to be a very good score, even if it is slightly fortunate.

Board 12. North/South. Dealer West

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

North	East	South	West
			1NT
Pass	Pass	2♣*	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

or

North	East	South	West
			1♣
Pass	Pass	Dbf	Pass
2♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

* Both majors

Playing weak NT, West has an ideal opening bid with 13HCP (14.5 if you use the banzai count developed by David Jackson which counts 10s as half a point), but then stays silent. North/South have all the options after that, and with a 4-4 heart fit, two singletons and a combined 22-point count, it is likely that the majority of North/South pairs will end in game.

Playing strong NT and 5-card majors, West is likely to open 1♣, but South's takeout double should set them on the right path to game.

On the play, a heart lead and continued hearts from West cuts down the ruffing potential for North and may limit North/South to 9 tricks: 5 hearts – 3 rounds of trumps, plus one ruff in each hand – one spade, one club and 2 diamonds (assuming North plays East for the ♦J or double finesses the diamonds). If East starts with a black suit then this will allow declarer to get ahead of the curve and they may well be able to set up a long spade or club. On a diamond lead from East, it delivers an immediate second diamond trick for North – 3 tricks if West goes up with their ♦K, which then pinpoints the ♦J in East's hand.

Bidding and making game for North/South should generate a good score for their side.

Board 13. All. Dealer North

<p>♠ K J 9 5 ♥ K 7 2 ♦ J 9 ♣ A 10 7 2</p> <p>♠ A Q 8 7 3 ♥ A J 5 3 ♦ K ♣ Q J 5</p>	<p>♠ 10 2 ♥ 9 8 ♦ A 10 7 6 3 2 ♣ 9 8 6</p> <p>♠ 6 4 ♥ Q 10 6 4 ♦ Q 8 5 4 ♣ K 4 3</p>
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North	East	South	West
INT	Pass	Pass	2♣*
Pass	2♦**	Pass	2♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

or

North	East	South	West
1♣	Pass	1♥	1♠
INT	Pass	Pass	?

* both majors

** equal length

Another hand where the bidding will diverge significantly depending on whether North/South are playing weak or strong NT and where West has plenty of options too.

If North opens a weak NT then West will certainly feel like they have to get involved in the action and they have a choice of either a penalty double, or they may decide with their singleton ♦K that they would prefer to show both majors instead. The penalty double option may see East passing or they may feel like bidding 2♦ instead, which then makes life difficult for West. Should East pass the double then South is also likely to pass as nothing else seems very attractive and they do have 7 points. If West shows both majors then East will pass the decision back to West by bidding 2♦ showing equal length in both suits, West then plumping for 2♠.

If North does end up playing in INTx then East will lead a small diamond and West will probably return a small spade. Should North play the ♠J, they are then likely to make 2 spades, 3 clubs and a trick in each of the red suits and they should be able to do this before EAST/WEST can cash all their tricks, but it will be cat and mouse for the board.

If West gets to play in 2♠, nothing is particularly attractive for North to lead, but

the J♦ may seem the least bad option when West has both majors. This runs to West's K♦; trying for a ♥ ruff in dummy, West plays a small heart, taken by South who does best to play a small trump now. This gives West a difficult decision. If they decide to play the ♠A and then play their ♥A and another heart, they will get a ruff in dummy. Declarer will then play the ♦A (their only time in dummy) and discard a heart from hand.

From here, if West can make a club trick and hold the losses to one down then that will limit the damage. If South can make either of their red queens, then two down will be a very good score for North/South.

Board 14. None. Dealer East

<p>♠ J ♥ Q 5 4 ♦ A Q J 10 8 7 2 ♣ A 10</p> <p>♠ A K Q 6 2 ♥ A 9 3 ♦ 5 ♣ J 9 5 2</p>	<p>♠ 7 5 4 ♥ J 10 8 2 ♦ 9 4 ♣ Q 7 6 4</p> <p>♠ 10 9 8 3 ♥ K 7 6 ♦ K 6 3 ♣ K 8 3</p>
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North	East	South	West
	Pass	Pass	1♠
2♦	Pass	3♦	Pass
3♠	Pass	?	

West's 1♠ opening ends their participation in the bidding, and North/South can move towards game by overcalling and supporting diamonds.

Many players play a minor suit overcall as showing a good hand, giving them the opportunity to give a lead directing option to partner, or showing a stronger than a normal overcall. Those partnerships who do that will be more likely to reach game here, as with three kings then South may decide to bid on to 3♦, in which case North is likely to attempt to reach game in NT. Those partnerships who play lighter overcalls may well find that the bidding stops short of game, as with a 4-3-3-3 hand and three bare kings sitting under the opening bid there is far less incentive to get involved in the auction. A pass from South may see West reopen with a double, in which case South may come alive again.

For those partnerships that do move over 2♦, if North does ask for a spade stop by bidding

3♠, South may nervously say they do. They may hope that partner has a singleton honour (as in this case), or assume that if West has started with all four honours they will duly double and South can change their mind about how effective their 'stop' really is.

9 or 10 tricks should follow in NT. 9 for those West's who cash their 4 tricks and 10 if West sets up a spade trick for South, but then doesn't cash their heart winner.

For the North/South players who end up in diamonds, there are 11 tricks to be made if you assume that West has all 3 missing spade honours. North can give a spade trick and then run the spades through West to set up a heart discard and thus lose only a spade and a heart. This is an easier option if you get a spade lead, as the situation may be clearer. On the ♥J lead it is more difficult, but can be achieved by playing the ♠J immediately and then saving your ♦2 as a third entry to dummy!

Board 15. North/South. Dealer South

<p>♠ K Q 9 ♥ 7 3 ♦ 8 3 2 ♣ 9 8 6 3 2</p> <p>♠ J 7 4 3 ♥ K Q 8 4 2 ♦ K 4 ♣ A K</p>	<p>♠ A 10 8 6 5 ♥ — ♦ A Q 9 6 ♣ J 7 5 4</p>
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	♠ 2	♥ A J 10 9 6 5	♦ J 10 7 5
	♣ Q 10		
North	East	South	West
Pass	Dbl	2♥	Pass
Pass		Pass	Pass

A weak 2♥ from South seems very reasonable on this hand, even vulnerable against not, but opens the door for a big penalty for East/West! East, with no hearts, has the perfect opportunity to start with a takeout double, swiftly converted to penalty by West. North has nothing to bid and will pass reluctantly and wish their partner the best of luck. On these sort of hands North may also choose to go to the bar and get their poor partner their drink of choice to take the sting out of having to play such a horrible hand!

West is likely to start off with their ♣K and A (playing them this way round traditionally shows a doubleton). If East can signal, or if West is inspired and finds a switch to the ♦K

and another one, the defence will take the first 5 tricks before the poor trump suit is tackled. East/West will get at least another 3 tricks and possibly even 4 more, and that will deliver 800 or 1100 to East/West.

If a weak 2♥ is not opened, alternatives for East West will be 4♠ or 3NT, but even with overtricks they will not yield a score anything like the penalty incurred by those poor North/South pairs who are playing weak two bids.

Board 16. East/West. Dealer West

<p>♠ A Q ♥ A J ♦ Q J 5 4 3 ♣ K Q 10 7</p> <p>♠ 8 5 4 3 2 ♥ 10 3 ♦ 6 ♣ J 9 8 6 5</p>	<p>♠ K 10 9 6 ♥ Q 8 7 4 ♦ A K 8 ♣ 4 3</p> <p>♠ J 7 ♥ K 9 6 5 2 ♦ 10 9 7 2 ♣ A 2</p>
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	North	East	South	West
	1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Almost all tables will play in 3NT by North, choosing this in preference to playing in 5♦.

North has an obvious 1♦ opening and once South responds, North is highly likely to bid NT to protect their spade holding. Whether North bids 2NT (in many systems this shows 18/19 and allows the partnership to get further information) or bids 3NT directly, game in NT is usually a far more attractive option playing in pairs than playing in 5 of a minor.

However, despite North's best efforts in trying to protect their spade holding, spades are the Achilles heel here and if East leads their King, 10 or 9 of spades the contract is doomed, because North needs at least 2 diamond tricks and must let East in with their top diamonds.

Those Easts unlucky enough to lead 4th highest will find the suit blocked and there is nothing they or their partner can do about it. If East does start with a high spade, they still need to be careful to continue playing a high spade second time around too. This will pay dividends if you do manage to retain your ♠6 as an entry to partner, who can overtake and cash the winning trick for the defence.

Board 17. None. Dealer North

<p>♠ 10 2 ♥ Q 7 6 5 ♦ J 6 4 ♣ K 8 4 2</p> <p>♠ A K J 7 6 ♥ 2 ♦ A 8 7 5 ♣ J 9 6</p> <p>♠ 9 8 4 ♥ A K J 8 ♦ 10 9 ♣ A Q 7 5</p>	<p>♠ Q 5 3 ♥ 10 9 4 3 ♦ K Q 3 2 ♣ 10 3</p>
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North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1♣	1♠
Dbl	2♠	3♥	3♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

A real battle here with 20 HCPs for each side.

If South opens a weak NT then West is likely to bid 2♠ and may well get to play there as neither North nor East will move.

Should South be playing strong NT and 5-card majors, then they are likely to open 1♣ and West will overcall 1♠. Now, North is just about worth a double to show points and imply 4 cards in hearts (though you would be forgiven for passing). East may well bid 2♠ and hope to win the contract here. Brave Souths who trust their partner could bid 3♥, though it is a hand where many Souths will choose to pass, even if their partner's double does infer a heart suit.

If South does bid, West has the better shape and the boss spade suit and so will win the skirmish, even if they do have to play at the three level. There may even be some very aggressive East/West pairs that make it to game.

If the defence leads trumps at every turn, declarer can be held to nine tricks in spades. On a non-spade lead or switch, if West can play clubs early enough, they can ruff a club in dummy and thus make 10 tricks, which is likely to be a good score.

If West isn't brave enough to outbid South's hearts or North/South compete further in hearts by bidding 4♥ (a very aggressive strategy), North/South are likely to score well. Making 3♥ will be close to a top and going down 1 in 4♥ – even if doubled – is still going to be a very good score compared to the making spade contracts.

Board 18. North/South. Dealer East

<p>♠ A K 5 ♥ A J 9 5 ♦ A 2 ♣ A Q J 6</p> <p>♠ Q 9 6 3 ♥ Q ♦ Q 10 7 6 5 4 ♣ 7 5</p> <p>♠ J 4 ♥ 8 7 6 3 2 ♦ 9 8 3 ♣ K 9 4</p>	<p>♠ 10 8 7 2 ♥ K 10 4 ♦ K J ♣ 10 8 3 2</p>
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North	East	South	West
	Pass	Pass	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♦	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

This is likely to be a straightforward strong auction here – 2♣ and, after a 2♦ relay or negative bid, 2NT shows 23 – 24 HCPs. (Some Wests may be tempted to double the 2♦ bid, but you have to ask yourself if you really want your partner to lead the suit, bearing in mind the strength of the North hand).

South's shape and few values suggests a transfer to 3♥ is a better strategy than simply bidding 3NT. North may now choose to cue bid, knowing they have a 9+ card fit, or simply be happy to jump to 4♥ if they know their partner has very little. Either way, the final contract is likely to be 4♥ by North.

Play is likely to be similarly standard – with declarer guaranteed to lose two hearts and almost certain to also lose one diamond trick in 4♥ (the defence would have to be very generous to allow declarer to win 11 tricks).

If South ignores their heart suit and does bid 3NT then there is the possibility of 10 tricks for declarer if they manage to avoid a spade or diamond lead and if East doesn't find a diamond switch when in on their first heart winner. This will allow North to be able to cash 3 hearts, 4 clubs, 2 spades and 1 diamond. However, a more likely result for North/South pairs playing in 3NT is 9 tricks, with the defence likely to cash 2 spades and 2 hearts. This will be a worse outcome versus those who find their 9-card heart fit.

Board 19. East/West. Dealer South

<p>♠ 8 7 5 ♥ 4 3 ♦ K 5 3 ♣ K 10 9 7 5</p> <p>♠ A J 9 4 3 ♥ J 8 ♦ Q 9 4 2 ♣ J 6</p>	<p>♠ K 6 ♥ Q 10 7 6 2 ♦ J 10 7 ♣ A Q 8</p> <p>♠ Q 10 2 ♥ A K 9 5 ♦ A 8 6 ♣ 4 3 2</p>
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North	East	South	West
Pass	1/2NT	1♥	1♠
Pass		Pass	Pass

Or

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	INT	Pass

Depending on whether you are a weak NT or strong NT partnership, this hand could easily be played in NT by either side. Playing a strong NT, South is likely to open 1♣ playing 5-card majors, or 1♥ playing 4-card majors, but either way, West is likely to overcall 1♠. Opposite a 1♥ opening, with nowhere to go, North is likely to pass and now East can bid INT or 2NT depending on partnership agreement. This is likely to get passed out. Over INT, West could consider bidding 2♦, but with their semi-balanced hand, INT looks an okay spot. If South opens 1♣, then there is a possibility that North will bid 2♣ and this could become the final contract if East doesn't move.

It will be a much more straightforward auction for those pairs playing a weak NT, with South likely to play in INT.

If South plays in NT then East/West will take the first 5 spade tricks and at least another 2 clubs. They may also get a red trick before declarer can get their club suit working, so the expectation is that it will be INT-2 or possibly even minus 3 on perfect defence.

If South plays in 2♣, then the defence are poised to get 3 spades, 2 clubs and 1 diamond for down one – not a bad score on the board.

If East plays in INT then playing the hand wide open (finessing the ♠J) generates 5 spade tricks, plus 2 clubs and hopefully at least 1, if not 2 red suit tricks – though having to find 3 discards on the winning spades is not straightforward.

This is a hand where making 90 as East/West won't be a good score compared to a range of 100 or 150 scores from North/South going down in INT. Making 120 as East/West will be pretty good. And for those North/South pairs who play in 2♣ and only go down 1, that will definitely be a good outcome.

Board 20. All. Dealer West

<p>♠ 7 4 3 ♥ J ♦ A J 8 6 5 2 ♣ A 6 3</p> <p>♠ Q 10 6 ♥ A 8 7 5 4 ♦ K 7 ♣ K 4 2</p>	<p>♠ 8 5 ♥ K 10 9 3 ♦ 10 4 3 ♣ 10 9 8 5</p> <p>♠ A K J 9 2 ♥ Q 6 2 ♦ Q 9 ♣ Q J 7</p>
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North	East	South	West
			1♥
2♦	2♥	2♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Those East/West pairs playing weak NT may open INT, in which case it could go pass, pass, double from South and now you have to hope that you have a good defence to INT doubled.... If you do happen to end up playing in INT doubled, on a small diamond lead, you may get away with making 6 tricks if you happen to pick up the heart suit by playing small to the King and then finessing the ♥10 (also being careful to unblock the ♥9 if South plays low. However, if West plays for a 2-2 heart break, this will lead to sad times, with the defence able to score 5 diamonds, 1 heart, 2 spades and 2 clubs – minus four...

If West instead opens 1♥, or if North overcalls the INT opening, with 2♦, then hopefully North/South should reach the nice contract of 4♠. A minor suit overcall is typically constructive and should show at least 10 points, which means that South now has options. Showing your 5-card spade suit is your best strategy here and this is a forcing bid with most partnerships. With a singleton heart and 3-card support, North can now bid 3♠ and South will go to game.

In terms of the play, it is likely the defence will get 1 heart, 1 spade and that is probably it, as declarer can set up the lovely diamond suit in dummy and is likely to have their club entry still

there – it being very difficult for West to find partner’s entry and to get a club through. Playing a club from the West hand doesn’t work because declarer can simply let it run round to their ♣QJ and West is marked with most of the 15 points in defence with their opening bid.

Board 21. North/South. Dealer North

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

North	East	South	West
Pass	1♠	2♥	Pass
Pass	Dbf	Pass	Pass
Pass			

This is a hand which looks like it could get North/South into a lot of trouble, but as it happens it may work out very well for them.

East is almost certain to open 1♠ at every table and South is almost certain to bid some number of hearts. Those who play weak jump overcalls will find their hand too strong to go to 3♥, and those who play intermediate may want to consider their position – a passed partner, vulnerable against not – these two big factors may put people off jumping and instead settle for a simple overcall too.

After a 2♥ overcall, West has choices, but a very common scenario here is for West to pass and to hope that partner reopens the bidding with a double. In this case that is a highly likely scenario – though there may be some Easts who choose to bid 2♠, especially if the opening 1♠ bid was only showing a 4-card major. Reopening with a double should have West passing. A 10-count, 5 nice hearts and a singleton in partner’s suit all lead one to hope for good things in defence. If your partner does bid 2♠, you may initially be unhappy, and you then have to decide whether to bid on or to pass. You may be tempted to bid 2NT, but if partner then bids 3♦ or even 3♠ that doesn’t improve your position, so passing may be a better option.

If you do end up in 2♥ doubled, the likely ♠J lead will result in dismay when dummy goes down with 2 good hearts and the ♦AK. Prospects for the defence are now eroding... The ♠J should be overtaken by the ♠A and the ♠Q is likely to be returned (pinning the ♠10) which can be ruffed by West. From here it is difficult to see a good line for the defence. Ideally you want to remove the hearts from dummy to eliminate spade ruffs but doing so will kill a heart winner if you play a high card, so playing a low heart may be best. This then allows declarer to win low and to ruff a spade in dummy (coming back to their hand with a club if need be). If West plays a minor suit then declarer may be able to ruff both spades in dummy or leave West with a similar dilemma if they choose to ruff a spade high ahead of dummy. In all cases, declarer is likely to make at least 8 tricks.

For those Wests who may have been unhappy with their partner bidding 2♠, the regret will be short-lived when they discover plenty of 670 scores in the North/South column.

Board 22. East/West. Dealer East

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

North	East	South	West
Dbf	Pass	Pass	1♦
4♥	2♠	3♥	Pass
	Pass	Pass	Pass

Or

North	East	South	West
Dbf	Pass	Pass	1♦
3♥	1♠	2♥	Pass
Pass	Pass	4♥	Pass

This is a hand which could lead to lots of trouble for either side.

Should East open a weak 2♠? At this vulnerability, with the relatively anaemic spade holding, passing is likely to be the best option on this hand. The South hand also has weak-

two options, but while the vulnerability is in your favour, your heart suit certainly isn't.

If there are two passes then West will open 1♦, and North now has choices. Bidding spades is unlikely to tell your partner just how good you are, so starting with a double may be best. Over to East, who is now likely to bid spades. If you have a system bid that shows a weak hand with 6 spades, you may choose to bid 2♠ after partner has opened. Otherwise, you may well bid 1♠. Those who pass may fare even better. Over partner's double and a bid from East, much as it would be wonderful if South could find a responsive double (North would be in heaven), with 6 hearts it is far more likely that South will bid some number of hearts instead. It is tempting to bid hearts over either a 1♠ or 2♠ bid and it will be difficult to stop short of game.

On the play, it is almost certain that the defence will start with the ♦AK and a ruff, East ruffing with the ♥Q. The problem for Declarer is that they are now going to get stuck in dummy before they can pick up the heart suit. Yes, declarer can return to hand with a spade ruff, but as long as West covers the ♥9 (for example), Declarer cannot return to hand, e.g. attempting another spade ruff will see West overruffing.

If East doesn't get a heart ruff then the best way to play this sort of suit holding 9 cards (without other information from the bidding) is typically to cash the ♥A first, hoping to fell an honour and then to lead towards the ♥J – but of course you need to have an entry left for this to succeed.

Board 23. All. Dealer South

	♠ Q 5 2		
	♥ K Q 4		
	♦ 9 8 2		
	♣ 9 8 7 2		
♠ 10 9 8 6 3		♠ 7 4	
♥ A J 7		♥ 9 6	
♦ A 4		♦ Q J 10 6 3	
♣ K Q 4		♣ A 10 6 3	
	♠ A K J		
	♥ 10 8 5 3 2		
	♦ K 7 5		
	♣ J 5		
North	East	South	West
2♥	Pass	1♥ Pass	1♠ Pass

Playing a weak NT there is a possibility that South's INT opening bid will get passed out.

West doesn't really want to overcall 2♠ holding no points in their spade suit, even if they do have 14 points outside it. And while East will know after North's pass that their partner has some points, it will require a lot of guts to bid with their 7-count vulnerable, especially if you have an enthusiastic partner thinking you have more points if you do bid.

Playing a strong NT and 5-card majors there are a variety of possible final contracts on this board, the most likely one being 2♥ played by South. Over a 1♥ opening, West may well find a 1♠ bid, but it is unlikely to affect the final contract.

Playing in hearts you are likely to make 7 tricks and could be lucky enough to make 8. On a likely spade lead you will win in hand and play a heart towards your KQ4. Assuming West plays low, you may well come back to your hand with another spade and do the same again (though you may decide to avoid a possible spade ruff and try a diamond to the King immediately). This should give you 4 hearts and 3 spades, so the contract rests on the possibility of a diamond trick. If you play a diamond to the King you will go down one.

The play in NT will be virtually identical. You are likely to get a spade lead and play on hearts in the same way. If West switches to a high club then the defence could get lots of tricks, but at most tables, INT will probably make 7 tricks and declarer will be delighted to make their contract – especially when they open the scoresheet.

Board 24. None. Dealer West

	♠ 7 6		
	♥ Q J 6		
	♦ K Q 7 5		
	♣ K 9 4 2		
♠ A J 5 4		♠ K Q 10 9	
♥ 10 7 3		♥ 8 4 2	
♦ 10 3		♦ A J 9 8	
♣ Q J 7 6		♣ A 3	
	♠ 8 3 2		
	♥ A K 9 5		
	♦ 6 4 2		
	♣ 10 8 5		
North	East	South	West
Pass	1♦	Pass	Pass
Pass	2♠	Pass	1♠
Pass		Pass	Pass

While the previous hand is likely to have benefited those playing weak NT, this is a hand which should benefit those playing a strong NT.

West and North are both likely to pass, and if East opens a weak NT this will probably get passed out. For those pairs playing a strong NT, if East upgrades their hand to allow them to bid INT then East/West could end in 3♠ via a Stayman sequence or possibly even 4♠ if they are very aggressive. Otherwise they will open 1♦ playing 5-card majors or 1♠ playing 4-card majors, with the final contract likely to be 2♣ or 3♠. If East opens 1♦, after a 1♠ response from West the East hand is now worth 15 points, but it is still only worth a 2♣ bid opposite a passed hand. Should West have a good hand now they've found a fit, they will bid on.

Playing in NT, East/West are likely to lose the first 4 heart tricks before making 4 spades, 2 clubs and (on the lie of the cards) 2 diamond tricks – giving Declarer a likely 8 tricks.

Playing in Spades, East/West lose just 3 hearts and a diamond, so are likely to make 9 tricks for a better result.

Whilst it didn't necessarily work on Board 23, the number of tricks on this hand is entirely consistent with the odds, which suggest an 8-card fit is likely to make 1 extra trick versus playing in NT with the same number of points. Therefore, at pairs scoring, finding your major fit is usually better than playing in NT, whereas playing in NT with a minor fit tends to work out better on average.

Board 25. East/West. Dealer North

	♠ 9 6 3		
	♥ 10 9 6 5 3		
	♦ J 5 4 2		
	♣ 10		
♠ A Q 8 7 4 2		♠ —	
♥ A J 4		♥ K 8 2	
♦ K 6		♦ Q 10 9 7 3	
♣ K J		♣ A Q 8 5 4	
	♠ K J 10 5		
	♥ Q 7		
	♦ A 8		
	♣ 9 7 6 3 2		
North	East	South	West
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♥
Pass	3♣	Pass	3♠
Pass	3NT		

Assuming North and South pass throughout, East should open 1♦ with their 11 points and 5/5 in the minors. Even if you don't like opening with 11 points, the rule of 20 comes into play here (a hand is worth opening at the one-level if your points and two longest suits get you to 20 or above – this is also typically a great rule to use when deciding with 10 points whether to open a weak two or 1 of your suit). It is also nice to be able to open when you have a perfect rebid – in this case 2♣ to show at least 5/4.

West will respond 1♠ at most tables. Even if you're tempted by the idea of jumping to show points, it typically isn't a great idea; changing the suit is forcing and most people now play a jump response as weak rather than strong. East now gets to show their second suit, bidding 2♣. West already knew they wanted to be in game, it is simply a question of which one. Since West still doesn't know the answer to this question, a fourth suit forcing bid of 2♥ is your best option here. You are trying to establish if you have a spade fit. The answer East gives is 3♣ which shows a 5/5 hand. West now knows East doesn't have a 3-card spade suit (with three spades, a bid of 2♠ would have been preferable to 3♣). However, this doesn't rule out the possibility that your partner has 2 spades. West's best bid is therefore 3♠ telling partner you have 6 and East can now finally sign off in 3NT.

South doesn't have a great lead but may settle for a small club on the basis that everything else looks far less attractive. In terms of the play East's best strategy is to give up two diamond tricks and make 11 tricks via 1 spade, 3 hearts, 3 diamonds and 4 clubs. You may be given another spade trick by the defence, but there are few ways of making more than 11 tricks without some serious help from the defence.

Board 26. All. Dealer East

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

North	East	South	West
	1NT	2♠	2NT
Pass	3♣	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Or

North	East	South	West
	1♣	2♠	?

This is a difficult hand to play where every possible card is in the wrong place. Even with a spade lead from South you are unlikely to come to more than 7 tricks, so the lower you are the better. There are a variety of ways in which the bidding might progress on this hand, depending on whether you play weak or strong NT.

Playing a strong NT East is likely to open 1NT and South may well bid 2♠. This is an aggressive move by South with only 8 points and vulnerable, but it typically pays to get involved. With 9 points, a 5 card diamond suit and a spade stop, it is very tempting to bid 3NT on the West hand (playing Lebensohl, you may well end up there slowly or quickly depending on your system). If you're not playing any conventions over the interference, you may get away with bidding 2NT if you take a conservative view, and East will happily pass with their minimum hand.

If playing a weak NT then a 1♣ opening bid from East is still likely to be met with a weak jump overcall bid of 2♠ from South. This makes life difficult for West. A double here may well be the best option, even though in theory you would like to have 10+ points when forcing your partner to bid at this level. Over a double, your partner may find a bid of 2NT or potentially 3NT depending on your agreed system. If West decides to pass the 2♠ then the chances are that East will let it go too, in which case +110 would typically be considered a good result for the South hand – until they open the scoresheet and discover there are several 3NT-2 scores by East, giving 200 to North/South.

Board 27. None. Dealer South

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

North	East	South	West
		Pass	1♠
1NT	2♠	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

South passes and West is likely to open 1♠. There may be a few people who choose to open a weak NT with the West hand, but with your rebiddable spade suit, it is typically better to show it than bid NT. North now has options. Double is a reasonable choice here, made even more reasonable by the fact that you have 4 good hearts. However, with a balanced hand, 15-17 points and a stop in the suit that has been opened, 1NT is typically a better bet. There will be rare occasions where you might miss out on a heart fit if your partner is weak and passes, but overcalling 1NT leaves your entire system on, so you should be able to find the right contract.

If partner has opened 1♠, then we will find some Easts getting active! But while it might be tempting to bid 3♣ if you're playing 5 card majors, you have 11 losers and at equal vulnerability you have no compelling reason to get too aggressive. 2♠ is probably the right compromise, willing to compete and make life slightly difficult for your opponents, without running too much risk of losing 800 or more. Whatever East bids, South may well decide their hand is worth bidding 3NT. Two Aces and a 5-card diamond suit does make it attractive. For those who get interference from East, if you play Lebensohl then 3NT also looks like a good option. You can of course show your partner that you don't have a stop in spades - and let's be clear you don't much like your singleton - but North has already promised a spade stop for their 1NT overcall.

If North starts with a double, and potentially another double from South over a 2♠ bid from East, then there is a possibility that North/South may end up in 4♥ instead of 3NT.

Typically this wouldn't work quite so well on a 4-3 fit, but it happens to play beautifully on this hand, with a spade ruff and 5 diamond tricks delivering maximum results.

In terms of how to play the diamond suit, bear in mind that North/South have a combined 26 points and West opened, so the odds distinctly favour the ♦Q being with West. Playing in NT you are going to have to play the hand wide-open and are likely to play a diamond to the ♦A and a diamond back, getting the good news. In 4♥, you will need to test the diamond suit early, before you draw trumps and while you still have some hearts in the South hand.

Board 28. North/South. Dealer West

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

North	East	South	West
			Pass
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♦
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♥	Pass	Pass
Pass			

West and North are likely to pass and East has the perfect hand to open 2NT (which typically shows 20-22), or some equivalent strong bid followed by 2NT. This will certainly put South off bidding and West can happily bid 3♦ as a transfer to hearts. Back to East who is delighted to play in hearts and with all 4 Aces and maximum for their opening bid, this is a perfect time to super-accept. A super-accept here means bidding anything other than 3♥. As it is preferable to cue bid upwards (effectively, your cheapest suit first), this means that 3♠ is a good option – as this leaves space for partner to cue in the minors if possible. A cue here shows a first or second round control as we are below the level of game. On this hand, West is not smitten by East's attempts at thinking about a slam – with 6 points and a balanced hand with lots of losers, even if partner has 22 you are unlikely to make 12 tricks. This means West will want to rebuff partner's optimistic efforts. Different partnerships will play this next bid in a variety of ways. You could simply bid 4♥ as a way of telling partner to stop bidding. You may prefer the strong hand to be playing the contract, so some people will play 4♦ as a re-transfer. Or you could simply bid 3NT and indicate that you have nothing further to say. In all cases it is likely that 4♥ will be better than any other contract. Play is tricky, and you would ideally like to finesse the diamonds at least once, but as always, when one hand has the majority of points, it is more difficult as you have limited entries to the West hand.

You are likely to make 10 tricks on normal defence, losing 1 heart, 1 spade and one trick in the minors. It is possible on a spade lead that things could get tricky if you use your heart entry to try and finesse the diamonds and get a spade return, causing complications on how you draw trumps - but it should still work out as North will be ruffing with their heart winner. If you get lucky and get a minor suit lead from South, you may make 11 tricks.