4-4-4-1 commentary

Hand 1

I open 1♣ on this North hand. South could raise immediately but I prefer 1♦ which might prove more constructive in the search for a no-trump contract. North rebids 1♥, and South reverts to 2♣ to end the auction.

If West comes in with 1♥ then North can double in search of a spade fit, but once again South can only revert to clubs.

Some older methods might open 1♠ planning to rebid in hearts, but for me this sequence promises 5 spades. A spade fit will never be missed provided that you play the 4th suit at the 1-level as a natural 1-round force.

West leads AK and another Heart but South trumps (or overtrumps) and clears trumps following which 2 diamond ruffs, a spade and a heart will quickly bring in 9 tricks.

EW can make 8 tricks in diamonds making 3♦–1 an excellent sacrifice, but it is almost impossible to find after South's natural bid.

Hand 2

Open 1♣ or 1♦ – it really doesn't matter which. If partner responds 1♦ (over 1♣) or 1♥ you will rebid 1♥ if he responds in spades you will raise, and if he raises the minor then he should be denying 4 spades.

In practice West will respond 1♥ facing either minor, and East will rebid 1♠ which West should raise to 2♠. East may well be tempted to 3♦ which West might just raise to game.

Declarer will lose 2 trumps and a diamond, and either a second diamond or a heart as he runs out of trumps to ruff, making a total of 9. Those who stop in a part-score will score well.

Hand 3

I open 1♦ on this South hand, North responds 1♠, and South should raise to at least 3♠.

With extra playing potential in the South hand and extra strength in the North hand the partnership should limp into 4♠ one way or another whatever the initial rebid.

Older methods would open 1♥, but if a spade fit does not come to light then South's rebid of 2♦ would imply (if not promise) 5 hearts, and declarer may well find himself playing in a 4-3 fit.

As it is spades make 11 tricks and hearts make 10 tricks.

East will probably lead the ♣K, but that will be their last trick apart from the 3rd spade.

Hand 4

West must open 1♦ to leave a club rebid facing a response in spades.
East responds 1♠ and West rebids 2♣.
East could pass 2♣, but is more likely to show preference to 2♦ both in the hope of five diamonds opposite and as a false preference just in case partner holds 17 or 18 points. In either case this should end the auction.
Unfortunately, on this occasion, 2♦ makes only 7 tricks while 2♣ makes 8 tricks.
However, both are good scores (provided 2♦ is not doubled for penalties) compared with the 8 tricks which NS can make in spades, but finding the contract is easier said than done following East's natural bid in the suit.

Hand 5

With only 12 hollow points in a 4-4-4-1 hand I pass on this North hand following which the hand may well be passed out.

If North chooses to open with 1♣ South will respond 1♦, and North will rebid 1♥.
South has an unenviable rebid at this point, but with 9 points will probably keep the bidding open with 1NT.
Alternatively, some might open 1♠ on this North hand. South will respond either 1NT or 2♦, and North will either pass 1NT or respond 2♣ or 2♥ depending.
It matters not. EW have making contracts in both NT and spades, and NS will end up with a negative.
The initial decision to pass was a wise choice.

Hand 6

I open 1♦ on this East hand and West responds 2♣.
East has no choice but to rebid 2♦, and West will choose between 2NT and pass.
On the more traditional opening bid of 1♥ West will again respond 2♣ and East will rebid 2♦.
Should West correct to the probable 5-2 fit in hearts? As it is hearts make only 7 tricks.
It so happens that EW can make 8 tricks in spades or 8 tricks in diamonds when played by the East hand even against this extreme distribution.
The spade contract scores best, but it does seem rather unlikely.

Hand 7

South opens 1♣, North responds 1♦ and South rebids 1♥.
North must raise to at least 4♥.
It's not easy, but if declarer can delay clearing trumps for long enough to ruff out some diamonds then 12 tricks are there for the taking. Even without any clever stuff a spade finesse and just 1 ruff will bring declarer to 10 tricks.

Hand 8

West opens 1♣ however unintuitive it might appear, East responds 1♦ and West rebids 1♥. Recommended is that 1♠ by East at this point should be a natural 1-round force (4th suit at the 1-level).

West can hardly be blamed if he now jumps to 4♠, but with one diamond and three club losers off the top he can only come to 9 tricks in either spades or no-trumps if the defence cash their tricks early (otherwise one goes away on a heart).