The unbalanced auction - commentary

Note that in the following raises are based purely on high-card point count.
Points for shape or losing trick count are not taken into account.
Some hands will in due course qualify for more ambitious raises.

Hand 1

North opens 1♥ planning to rebid 2♦.
South has 4-card support for partner's major and 9 points, so raises to 2♥ (suggesting 6 to 9 points).
This will probably end the auction.
Declarer can come to 9 tricks by clearing trumps, leading towards the spade honours and eventually establishing a long club.
If EW can locate their spade fit they can also make 9 tricks.

Hand 2

East opens 1♠ planning to rebid 2♥.
With 4-card support for partner's major and 11 points West raises to 3♠ (suggesting 10 to 12 points) and East signs off with 4♠ with at least 25 HCP and a 4-4 major suit fit.
South will lead ♣J, then the defence will get in with the ♠A and take 2 hearts to hold declarer to 10 tricks.

Hand 3

South opens 1♣ planning to rebid in hearts.
North responds 1♦ (cheaper of two 4-card suits) and South rebids 1♥ as planned.
With a 4-4 major suit fit and 8 points North raises to 2♥ and South raises to 3♥ (or 4♥ adding points for shortage) showing the fit and suggesting 17 or 18 points. North will bid the game.
West leads the ♠K which East encourages with the 7. However, two spades and a diamond are as much as the defence can muster when the club finesse comes off.

Hand 4

West opens 1♦ planning to rebid in a major.
East responds 1♠ – note – always search for a major suit fit before agreeing a minor.
West cannot do less than 3♠ on his rebid (suggesting 16+), which East, with a maximum, will raise to four. Personally I would go straight to 4♠ every time.
South may well lead ♥8 or ♥7 for the lack of anything better. However, the ♥K and the ♠A are all they can take, holding declarer to 11 tricks.

Hand 5

With 24 points and 9 playing tricks North forces with 2♣.
South relays with 2♦ and North rebids 2♠ promising at least a 5-card suit.
This bid is certainly forcing, and I play it as game-forcing.
South can now see a 5-3 spade fit and raises to 3.
North might try a control-showing cue-bid, but South will sign off in 4♠.
East's most effective lead is a diamond, but a heart seems more likely.
Declarer should take the top 2 trumps then the top 2 hearts, then cross to the ♠Q drawing the last trump and discard a diamond on the ♥Q. He will then come to 11 tricks losing just the A and another club.

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Hand 6
East opens 1♥ planning to rebid in diamonds.
West will not stop short of game, but starts with a simple forcing change of suit – 1♠.
East rebids 2♦ as planned, and West jumps to 4♥ on the known 5-3 fit.
South leads, probably a black suit.
Declarer should lead towards the DK at an early stage giving 2 chances of an extra trick (K behind the ace or a diamond ruff. When the diamond establishes he can clear trumps and take his top tricks for a total of 11.

Hand 7
With 19 points South opens 1♥ planning to force to game facing any response other than pass.
South responds 1♠ and North jumps to 3♣ showing 5-4 shape, 19 points and forcing to game.
South can now see the 5-3 heart fit and corrects either to 3♥ (which North will raise) or 4♥.
It makes little difference what East leads. The defence will take their 3 aces whilst declarer takes 10 tricks with the help of a club ruff.

Hand 8
West opens 1♠.
With 11 points and a 4-4 major suit fit East raises to 3♠, which West raises to game.
North probably leads a heart, but the defence can only come to 2 aces as the spades split and the diamonds establish.

Hand 9
With 8 playing tricks old style, and still recommended by some authorities, would be to open 2♣ on this North hand. South will relay with 2♦, North will bid 2♥ (forcing), South has enough to encourage with 3♣, North shows his 6-card suit with 3♥ and South raises to game.

Modern style in a 3-weak-two system is to play 2♣ followed by a suit rebid as all but game-forcing. In this scenario North must open 1♥ (he needs a response from partner to make a game). South will bid 1NT and now North must jump to 4♥.

Declarer will lose just the two major suit aces in coming to 11 tricks.

Hand 10
East will open a textbook weak 2♥.
South does not have an overcall but must fancy the defence, and West should not get excited facing a maximum of 10 points. The opening bid should be passed round.
South will probably lead the ♠Q.
Defence will take 1 spade 1 heart and 2 clubs to hold declarer to 9 tricks.

Hand 11
South opens 1♠ planning to rebid 3♠ (16 to 18).
North responds 1NT, and South rebids 3♠ as planned.
With nothing to spare and a poor fit North should pass.
Declarer should have little difficulty in clearing trumps and coming to 9 tricks, but that is all.

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Hand 12

West opens 2♣ (23 points and 9 playing tricks) – East relays with 2♦ – West rebids 3♦ (all but game-forcing as I play it). East might try 3♠ but the partnership can only finish in 5♦.
North will lead the ♣J, but the only tricks for the defence will be ♥A and ♠Q – contract made.

Hand 13

North opens a weak 2♦. South raises on length to at least 3♦.
It will be a brave West who enters the fray at this point.
East will lead the ♣AK and perhaps the ♥J, but declarer will take his 6 trumps, 1 heart and 2 spades when the King lies right.
Meanwhile EW can make 9 tricks in Hearts, but can they find this contract against aggressive pre-emptive bidding from NS?

Hand 14

East opens 1♥, West responds 1NT, and East rebids 2♦.
West could raise to 3♦ (his hand already limited) or make a false preference to 2♥, but he must keep the bidding open with 9 points in case partner is maximum.
East makes a further bid (as you do with 17 or 18) – 2♠ over 2♥, 3♠ over 3♦, and West bids 3NT.
The defence can take 3 clubs and a heart but declarer gets his 9 tricks – contract made.
Hearts make 11 tricks, as do diamonds, but 3NT is by far the most likely outcome.

Hand 15

South and West pass.
North opens a textbook weak 2♠.
This is probably enough to keep East silent, and with just 2-card support South passes.
It would be an experienced or possibly a foolhardy West who came in at the 3-level with only 3 hearts and 10 points, even non-vulnerable in the protective seat, and so 2♠ is likely to secure the contract.
After clearing trumps repeated leads towards the red-suit honours in dummy should bring in 8 tricks.
If EW can see their way to getting into the auction then 3♥, 4♦ and 3♣ are all are making contracts.

Hand 16

West opens 1♥ and East makes the dustbin response of 1NT.
West can now force to game with a jump to 3♦ showing the 5-4 shape and 19 or so points.
East's best rebid is 3♠ (having already denied four spades), and West will sign off in 3NT.
In a no-trump contract declarer can never both set up the club suit and get to it, and so he will have to take his 3 spades, 2 clubs and 4 hearts helped by the 3-3 trump split.
4♥ also makes thanks to the same split, as the defence finally have to surrender either a club or a diamond.

Hand 17

North opens 1♣, South responds 1♦, and North rebids 1♠.
South can now see the 4-4 major suit fit, and raises to 3♠ suggesting 10 to 12 points.
With 15 points North bids the game.
I lead the ♦J from this East holding.
Declarer will have little trouble in coming to 4 spade tricks, 2 hearts and a diamond (for 7 tricks).
A further 3 tricks are available in clubs provided that he plays to finesse the Jack.

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Hand 18

East opens 1♥, West responds 1♠, and East rebids 3♥ showing a 6-card suit and suggesting 16 to 18 points. West has an easy raise to 4♥.

Declarer should have little trouble coming to 10 tricks losing just 1 spade, 1 heart and 1 club.