



Master Solvers Panel



By John Swanson
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Our returning panelists this month are: Paul Ivaska, raconteur and bridge expert with almost as many cats as masterpoints; JoAnna Stansby, half of the top married bridge partnership in the country; Ed Davis, part of the winning District 23 GNT for about the 100th time; and Fred Hamilton, former World Champion (with a couple of 2nd place finishes) and many time National champion.

Our first-timer is Ken Monzingo, whose name appears several times elsewhere in this paper. Ken is District 22 Director and managing editor of the Western Conference Forum - and, on the side, is a part time professional bridge teacher/player.

Problem 1.

Vul vs not, IMPs
You, South, hold:

♠A8532 ♥Q ♦KJ1073 ♣62

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| 2♠ | Dbl | 3♣* | ? |

*Raise to 3♠ suggesting a club lead.

Ivaska: 3♠. This is enough for now. If partner indeed has a spade void and four diamonds, she/he will carry on appropriately. As for passing and doubling 3♣, that course doesn't much appeal to me, since it will often yield inadequate compensation for whatever we can make our way.

J.S.: Why should there be a later? 3♦ is a good bet to end the auction. You would make the same call holding neither the spade ace nor the heart queen. More timidity:

Monzingo: 3♠. Passing now and hopefully sitting out a reopening double is tempting, but I may have the perfect hand for game or better (or the wrong hand to get a plus any higher). I bid my suit.

Stansby: 3♠. Anyone who even thinks of penalizing 3♣ before mentioning the diamonds needs to take a closer look at their trump spots.

J.S.: You do have a lot of them, however. I would be more impressed with 3♦ if the bid was intended to get two bites of the apple: maybe, just maybe partner will raise - with the second chance coming should East decide to compete with 3♠ - to be met with your double. But the value bid is 4♦.

Davis: 4♦. Partner should be well placed to judge whether to pass or raise to the appropriate level. There will be some hands where 3♦ is our limit, but many more where partner will pass my conservative 3♦ bid when we belong in game (e.g., ♠-- ♥KJxx ♦AQxx ♣Axxxx). I would bid 3♦ without the ace of spades.

Hamilton: 4♦. I would like to get pard to bid the diamonds, but I cannot afford to try that without much confusion, so 4♦ (not 5♦ - I want to leave room for cue bids or RKC). I do not expect a pass even though 4♦ is not absolutely forcing.

J.S.: I like trying for two bites of the apple with the "confusing" approach mentioned by Fred. Bid 3♠. Partner, holding four hearts and four or more diamonds, will bid the diamond suit. You then raise to game. After East's 3♣ call the hand will almost certainly play a trick better from partner's side of the table - the heart suit providing a discard or two for possible club losers. If partner fails to bid the expected 4♦ you bid the suit yourself and hope for the best.

Problem 2.

None Vul, IMPs
You, South, hold:

♠KJ10 ♥J5 ♦A32 ♣AKQJ9

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| ? | | | |

J.S.: (a). What is your opening bid?
(b). If you open 1♣ and partner responds 1♦, what is your rebid?

Ivaska: 2NT. (for both questions). I have seven almost certain tricks, more than a typical 2NT opening. Yes, the diaphanous heart stopper might prove to be an embarrassment, but, if partner indeed has a heart honor, it will generally be better to play from my side (except, heaven help us, when North holds a doubleton king).

(b). The second question underscores why it's better to open 2NT. Not only is a 1♦ response awkward, but 1♣ from partner also leaves me in a similar position. I would rebid 2NT in either case, because it's the most descriptive bid under the circumstances. I'm certainly not happy about it, though, since I've dramatically increased the probability of a heart lead as well as understated my playing strength.

J.S.: That all sounds good to me, especially "diaphanous."

Davis: (b). 2NT. Any other bid is likely to cause confusion in the auction.

Hamilton: (b). 2NT. Shows a balanced hand with 18-19 high card points. I would like a heart stopper but anything else is misleading (like a jump shift to 2♠). I'm not going to tell them what to lead. The 2NT rebid is a bit heavy with the good five-bagger, but 3NT shows a different hand type including a stopper in both unbid suits.

J.S.: The panel is not leaving me much room to dissent. Quick, someone say something I disagree with.

Stansby: (a). 1♣ (but open 2NT if partner is a passed hand). The 1♣ opening makes it easier to find a club slam when we have one.

(b). After a 1♦ or one of a major response I rebid 2NT - a very slight underbid, but I can't bid 3NT because that shows long strong clubs and no interest in a diamond contract.

J.S.: A 1♣ opening will sometimes facilitate finding a club slam but, because the 2NT rebid seems inadequate, I go along with the first three panelists - it is better to open 2NT initially.

Monzingo: (a). I would have opened 2NT.
(b). However, stuck with a tacky second bid after the 1♣ - Pass - 1♦ - Pass - ?, I choose a 2♣ rebid over 2NT. Game or slam from the North side looks more attractive, and this gives us the best chance to play it from his chair.

J.S.: There is merit in that observation also, but my experience is that phony jump rebids in a major all too often make it difficult to describe the balanced nature of the hand, and partner will not easily be convinced you hold fewer than four spades.

Problem 3.

None vul, IMPs
You, South, hold:

♠AKQ954 ♥Q93 ♦104 ♣87

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♠ | Pass | 2♦ | Pass |
| 2♠ | Pass | 3♣ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

Ivaska: 3♣. Obviously, the choice is between 3♣ and 3NT. I feel that the former is much the better description. After all, I

don't even have a sure heart stopper, and my spade suit is playable opposite a singleton or even a void.

3♣ is even clearer if 2♠ didn't necessarily show six, a treatment which seems to have faded away in recent years.

J.S.: One can make a strong argument that a 2♠ rebid after a 2♣ response shows six cards, but after 2♦ what is one to bid with, say: ♠AKJxx ♥xx ♦xx ♣KJxx?

2NT seems a complete distortion and 3♣ on a minimum is going to make slam bidding difficult when opener actually holds a good hand. (In my partnerships 2♠ after a 2♣ response does not guarantee six cards either.) It turns out then is another strong candidate bid besides the obvious 3♠ or 3NT:

Stansby: 3♥. This is a fourth suit kind of punt: I can't hold four hearts because I would have bid 2♥ on the previous round. It (3♥) gives partner room to rebid 3♠ with doubletons in the majors.

Monzingo: 3♥, whatever that means - hanging my head and rehearsing my apologies. Not my idea of a 1♣ opening if I had Weak Two Bids checked on my convention card.

J.S.: All right - next time I'll throw in the club jack.

Hamilton: 3♥. I loath Western Cue Bids. This hopefully shows some doubt and a partial heart stop. I would like to bid the spades again, but prefer to leave partner a little wiggle room, as he might have ♥Jx or ♥Jxx and we would miss 3NT.

J.S.: I agree that 3♥ should show some value in hearts. How much value is a partnership decision. Because I haven't shown the sixth spade yet my choice, by a small margin, is 3♠.

Davis: 3♠. 2♠ doesn't show six spades, and the alternative bid of 3♥ does not show six spades and does not limit my hand as well as 3♠ does.

Problem 4.

East/West vul, matchpoints
You, South, hold:

♠974 ♥Q9 ♦K3 ♣AK8632

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| South | West | North | East |
| 1♠ | Pass | 1♠ | Pass |
| 2♠ | Pass | 2♦* | Pass |
| 2♠ | Pass | 3♣ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

***J.S.:** 2♦ is a kind of "third suit forcing" call. Many use it as a game force - probably a good idea. You might get to a pushy game occasionally, but it facilitates full investigation of the best strain.

Monzingo: 3♦. Best I can do to honor a forcing auction. I wonder where my partner is going with this? Hope he is happy with me.

J.S.: Ken seems very concerned about pleasing partner. After all these years he should realize that it is partner's job to keep him happy.

Ivaska: 3♦. Partner has shown at least a game going club raise, not necessarily including five spades. My first responsibility is to help to decide among the various possible game contracts - 3NT, 4♠, and 5♠, so I'll show where my outside value is. 3♦, therefore, is not, at least for now, a cue bid in support of a club slam, especially since it's below the 3NT level (though I do like my hand for slam). I plan to raise 3♠ to 4♠, pass 3NT, and raise 4♣ to 5♣.

Hamilton: 3♦. This might help us get to, or avoid, a slam. It also leaves room for 3♥ by partner. I hope that doesn't lead to a 3NT contract from my side with ♥Jx opposite ♥Qx - although on really lucky days it

becomes a stopper.

J.S.: I don't think partner can afford to bid 3♥ (after your 3♦) without a high heart honor. He must be looking for you to bid 3NT to protect your diamond holding. (If he holds three little hearts, 3NT could be the best game, needing 4-4 hearts.)

Stansby: 3♦. If partner rebids three of either major I will rebid 3NT. Bidding 3♦, then 3NT instead of a direct 3NT, suggests a heart stopper that is less than solid.

Davis: 3♠. Minimum hand with three spades that has not improved on the auction.

J.S.: I don't think 3♦ implies any values above a minimum. It is a descriptive bid looking for the best game.

Problem 5.

Both vul, IMPs
You, South, hold:

♠A107 ♥K96543 ♦8 ♣A97

| | | | |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| North | East | South | West |
| 1♣ | Pass | 1♥ | 2♦ |
| Pass* | Pass | ? | |

*Double would show three-card heart support.

Ivaska: Double. Hardly ideal, since I would normally have one fewer heart and one more diamond for this reopening double. However, the alternatives of 3♥ and 3♣ are unappealing. The former is right on values but greatly overstates the suit quality, while the latter is a slight overbid and consumes a lot of bidding space as well.

I'd have to pass 3NT, but I'd be worried that 4♥ is better. Furthermore, we might pick up a juicy penalty even when we don't have a game.

Stansby: Double. "Do something, partner." I would typically have a doubleton (rather than a singleton) in the opponent's suit for this action at the 2-level, but the order/rank of the suits is important.

Partner can conveniently show a doubleton heart now, having denied three via no support double and that will help me decide whether to treat my hand as invitational or game forcing.

Hamilton: Double. By far the most flexible call played by most for takeout (under the bidder). I prefer not to double with a singleton but have plenty of defense to compensate. If double is penalty the way you play then I guess you are stuck with a 3♦ cue bid and hope you can make some game. 3♥ is a possible bid but you are facing two or fewer hearts and the suit is pretty weak.

Davis: Double. The standard takeout bid when playing support doubles. This is not close as there are no reasonable alternatives. If not playing support doubles and partner doubled 2♦ for penalty, I would sit for it.

Monzingo: 2♥. I think I have enough big cards and shape to make eight tricks without a fit. Double here should be takeout and gives us more options, I believe, but I like 2♥ better at this low level.

If partner has the dreaded 4-0-4-5 pattern, I hope he is creative enough to bid 2♠ for a Moysian challenge.

J.S.: The logic by which you believe that double gives the most options but yet choose 2♥ is a mystery to me. Any hope that partner will "creatively" remove your 2♥ underbid to spades has to be considered fantasy. As the panel points out, partner will expect another diamond in your hand, but it is the lack of appeal of either 2♥ or 3♥ which makes the takeout double so attractive.

Monzingo: Okay, okay. I surrender!