



# Master Solvers Panel

**By John Swanson**  
Lancaster, Calif.

Thanks to this month's panel: Wafik Abdou, Bakersfield, Calif.; Mike Savage, Signal Hill, Calif.; John Mohan, Mexico City; Eddie Kantar, Santa Monica, Calif.; Mike Lawrence, Brentwood, Tenn.; and Fred Hamilton, Las Vegas.

Congratulations to Fred on winning the Silver Ribbon Pairs at the recent Memphis NABC, his sixteenth national win to go along with two world titles. I hope our readers appreciate the experience and expertise they all bring to the table.

The hands this month are from online play with experts sitting at every position.

## Problem 1.

Neither side vulnerable, IMP scoring  
You are South holding:

♠64 ♥AKQJ86 ♦3 ♣10752

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	1♦	Pass
?		4♥	Pass

**J.S.:** Partner has shown a balanced 18 or 19 count with four hearts. Opposite your six solid trumps and nice shape there should be enough winners for slam. But might you be off the top two tricks in a black suit? What is the best way to investigate slam?

**Abdou:** 5♦. Tough problem. I hate to cue bid shortness in pard's suit, but I have a sixth heart and solid trumps. I ruled out key card lest pard has ♠Qx ♥10xxx ♦AKQJx ♣AK. I would bid 5♥ if in a regular partnership with a defined meaning for the bid.

**Savage:** 5♦. But if my partner was someone who would just look at his four small hearts and sign-off, I would ask for controls and if we didn't have them all, I would settle for 5♥. However if I bid 5♦, a partner who thinks as I do should realize that I had two ways I might have asked for trump quality - by asking for controls or bidding 5♥ - so bidding 5♦ must mean I have no interest in what his trumps look like (I've got that covered) but I have a diamond control and am looking for black-suit controls. And some tricks wouldn't hurt.

**J.S.:** The 5♦ control bid implies that you have no spade or club control, but doesn't get across the big feature of your hand - great hearts. If you held a high diamond honor with lesser hearts 5♦ would be in order. I much prefer:

**Mohan:** 5♥. Should convey the message that you own long solid trumps but have no controls. Of course there are hands where partner may still get the wrong answer, but the primary question is whether partner can produce reasonable play for six tricks without two fast losers, and I will trust the decision.

**Kantar:** 5♥. In this auction, with partner clearly strong, 5♥ announces great hearts with no side black suit control.

**Hamilton:** 5♥. It seems we should have a slam with our huge trump suit. The question is: how do we get there with any assurance we are not off two cashers? We have nothing to cue bid so we can just blast to six or bid 5♥ which would normally ask about trump quality, but since pard must have quite a few outside controls, perhaps they can figure out I have big trump, and go on to six, or even bid 5NT (grand slam force) if they have everything else. Put me down for 5♥.

**Lawrence:** 4NT. Partner bid 4♥ with crappy hearts and a balanced hand. He rates to have 19 high card points. They still have to find the right lead in some cases where they might set 6♥ - ♠Ax ♥xxxx ♦AKxxx ♣Ax, is a fifteen point hand that gives us a lock for slam. I expect more.

**J.S.:** The comments from Mike seem to favor a reasonable bid that none of the panel choose: a direct leap to 6♥. Asking for aces incurs a slight disadvantage in that a 5♣ response from partner may help West on opening lead whether East doubles or doesn't double. And it doesn't gain against a 5♥ invite - partner will not accept if he holds but one keycard. This is a hand to either invite with 5♥ or simply bid the slam. On the actual deal anything would work. Slam is cold and partner is accepting.

## Problem 2.

Both sides vulnerable, IMP scoring  
You are South holding:

♠ - ♥KQJ1084 ♦AK75 ♣A64

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	Pass	Pass
4♥	2♥*	Pass	3♠
?	4♠	Pass	Pass

\*Spades and a minor

**J.S.:** How annoying. You open in fourth seat with a beautiful playing hand and all of a sudden you have to make a decision whether the opponents are trying to steal, or if is actually their hand and you should sacrifice, or perhaps, despite their bidding, the deal still belongs to your side.

**Lawrence:** Pass. Partner had his chances. 5♥ or 5♦ risks down a lot. Double is possible but not clear enough to me to bid it. I doubt we will set it more than one and I would not be surprised if they made it, perhaps redoubled.

**J.S.:** Partner had some chances but he knows neither that you have a strong defensive hand, nor that you have a very useful dummy for diamonds.

**Hamilton:** Double seems clear, telling pard that I have outside strength and would like to go on, while having good defense for my previous (debatable) 4♥ bid. Perhaps a double of 3♠ would be a better second bid.

**J.S.:** A second round takeout double of 3♠ might well be preferred to 4♥. That would have been an interesting panel problem also. However, I don't see that you would be better off now had you doubled and West's bid of 4♠ comes back to you.

**Kantar:** Double. Too tempting to let go.

**Abdou:** Double. I have defence and have already expressed offensive potential by bidding 4♥ in a solo effort. Pard should know this is not a trump stack!

With two passed hands reaching game some would argue this a forcing pass situation. I disagree; pard didn't make any noise over the Michaels cue bid. My only regret is that I can't lead a trump if pard converts my double.

**Savage:** 5♦. It is unclear to me if they can make 4♠ or that we could make 5♥ or have a good sacrifice if 4♠ makes. Being a bidder, I will not go quietly into the night with this hand. Double is not likely to gain me many IMPs (if any) and will lose some if 4♠ makes. So I will bid - and having decided that, I might as well put partner in the loop by bidding 5♦ on the way to 5♥ - not as an offer to play but so partner can better judge what to do (and how to defend) if my LHO perseveres with 5♠. I will, however, double 4♠ if given the chance.

**J.S.:** I like the idea of bidding - but hold on a second - how can 5♦ here be anything other than an offer to play? And you're on lead against a spade contract. A good thing too, because, after a heart lead, 4♠ is cold.

**Mohan:** Double. Seems perfect to bring partner into play with a long minor or with a lousy hand and some heart support - if partner passes at least we'll know that unilaterally bidding was probably unproductive.

**J.S.:** Perhaps double is the best call here, but it is far from perfect. West is almost certainly 5-6 or 6-5 in the blacks. I am not at all sanguine about the prospects of defeating 4♠ even if partner sits it out. This time I prefer a unilateral approach, trusting my vulnerable opponents (bolstered by partner's failure to double) and bid 4NT. Partner will bid a five-card minor (a 4-4 fit with bad breaks looming is not appealing). For an immediate 5♦ I would like: ♠ - ♥KQJ98x ♦AKxxx ♣Kx On the actual deal partner held: ♠8764 ♥53 ♦J8732 ♣K9 and you are fortunate to defeat 4♠ because both diamond honors cash. The same 2-2 diamond split meant that 5♦ was cold - it takes a heart lead and ruff to defeat 6♦.

## Problem 3.

East/West vulnerable, IMP scoring  
You are South holding:

♠K9743 ♥J8532 ♦K ♣AQ

South	West	North	East
?			1♣

**J.S.:** This problem comes under the general heading of bidding hands with most of your high cards in your short suits. We always like to have good suits for overcalls (even for opening bids). When you use Michaels or any two-suited takeout you are bidding two suits at once - this time it would be with two weak suits.

**Mohan:** 1♣. I just can't bid Michaels on favorable vulnerability with lousy suits and plenty of defense - how can partner get it right if things get to a high level? As you know, protecting partner by anticipating problems is a delicate art in this highly competitive game. A 1♣ overcall will slow things down and I'll try to judge whether to introduce hearts - then partner will get the picture.

**Abdou:** 1♣. Wrong texture and honor location for Michaels cuebid; this is a defensive hand and I don't want a phantom sacrifice by pard.

**Kantar:** 1♣. This is not my idea of a Michaels cuebid. I would rather play this one by ear.

**Savage:** 1♣. This is a close one. I would like to show my two-suiter, but most of my strength is in my short suits. Either bid might work out better but I would bid 1♣ and judge later whether to come back in with hearts.

**Lawrence:** 2♣. Michaels. If you play Michaels, why not use it? The hand is thin but it does have some defence. A frequently ignored consideration is that a 1♣ overcall is

far less bothersome to the opponents than a Michaels 2♣ bid.

**Hamilton:** 2♣. Might as well get my majors into the game now, such as they are. We would all like more of our cards in our suits, but we must deal with what we are dealt. No second choice.

**J.S.:** Ouch! I hate to be in such strong disagreement with one of my favorite partners. There is a significant partnership component here - what will partner expect in your suits? I am with Mohan and the other spade overcallers. Partner is not going to be able to judge the worth of his hand accurately when your suits are so weak. When he has a close decision he will press for game, as on this deal.

After East raised to 3♣ partner, reasonably enough, tried 4♣ holding: ♠J874 ♥K4 ♦QJ109 ♣K83, and was set -300.

## Problem 4.

Both sides vulnerable, IMP scoring  
You are South holding:

♠10842 ♥Q ♦QJ10953 ♣J9

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♦	3♣
5♦	5♥	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Pass		

**J.S.:** There were two questions on this deal. First: what do you think of your 5♦ bid?

**Abdou:** Hate 5♦. Sometimes it's best to pass and see if pard would act if LHO raises to 4♥.

**Savage:** 5♦ is too aggressive/risky for me - until they bid 5♥. Then it was brilliant!

**Hamilton:** 5♦ seems aggressive. Perhaps 4♦, or pass, is enough.

**Lawrence:** I don't care for 5♦. It should show a good hand, not this holding.

**Mohan:** I think that 5♦ was a little goofy, but have no big alternative ideas.

**Kantar:** I guess I can live with 5♦ as one could argue that it is preemptive since bidding 4♥ would show a strong diamond raise.

**J.S.:** A general bidding rule is that one does not preempt after an opponent's preempt. Bidding 4♥ should show a diamond raise that has been significantly improved by the auction, including a heart control, while 5♦ is a hand worth taking a shot at game. This looks like no more than a 4♦ bid to me, with the option of bidding 5♦ should the opponents carry on to 4♥. Wafik's idea of passing has merit. If partner reopens with a double you can try 3♠. Who knows, maybe partner will bid 3NT if 3♥ is passed around to him. And if he passes 3♥ your side is quite unlikely to be able to make even 4♦.

**J.S.:** Second question: what is your lead?

**Abdou:** I lead the ♣J. Feels like I need to start aggressively.

**Hamilton:** I lead the ♣J. Perhaps a promotion for my ♥Q? Is your guess any better? Partner is doubling on cards outside of diamonds.

**J.S.:** Surely this is a forcing pass situation. Partner doesn't know that you have negative defense for your 5♦ call - that your diamond length may prevent his high diamonds from cashing. His double says: don't bid 6♦.

**Savage:** ♣J - and then apologize if that turns out bad. I don't think my teammates would greatly fault me for leading the ♦Q and perhaps I should do so. However, that lead is very probably not going to add tricks to our defence; it's a neutral lead. So if I want to make an aggressive/risky lead matching my aggressive/risky bid of 5♦, I would lead the ♣J and hope I get a ruff or find the dummy with the king and partner with the ♣AQ. I'm probably not going to be on lead again on this hand.

**J.S.:** Your only consideration should be what lead gives you the best shot of defeat-

(See Master Solvers on page 11)

## Hand of the Month

**By Joel Hoersch**  
Editor, District 22 Forum

♠ K74  
♥ KQ6  
♦ K1082  
♣ J106

♠ 532  
♥ 95  
♦ J943  
♣ AK84

♠ 108  
♥ J10743  
♦ Q65  
♣ 975

♠ AQJ96  
♥ A82  
♦ A7  
♣ Q32

(Vulnerable, South plays 3NT at match-points; opening lead, ??)

Many bridge experts have noted the fact that ... when a 5-3 or 5-4 major suit fit is present but the HCP total of the two hands is between 28-30 ... approximately 85% of the time when the supporting hand has a 4-3-3-3 distribution, the better contract is 3NT rather than

game in the major, because of the extra 10 points in the scoring factor.

When this hand was dealt recently in a matchpoint club game, the opening bid was 1♠, and the final contract was 4♠. I was sitting West, and started with a high club, but there was nothing to the play or the defense: with no club ruff available, the declarer quickly chalked up +650.

As he wrote down the score, he stated, "I think 3NT is a better contract," and I quickly agreed. But then he noted that the double-dummy analysis stated that ... regardless of which hand was the declarer ... 10 tricks was the limit in notrump! I was dubious, but when I looked at all 52 cards, I spotted a double-dummy defense that made that statement true.

**Well, readers,** that's this month's challenge: how can West prevent South from scoring five spades, three hearts, two diamonds and a club at notrump? Spread the hand out on the table and play with it until you find the double-dummy defense; then turn to page 11 to check on your analysis.