



Master Solvers Panel



By John Swanson
Lancaster, California

Thanks to our panel regulars: John Mohan, Mexico City; Fred Hamilton, Las Vegas; Eddie Kantar, Santa Monica; Wafik Abdou, Bakersfield, Calif.; Mike Lawrence, Brentwood, Tennessee; and Mike Savage, Signal Hill, California I hope they remain regulars after reading my opinions about some of their bidding choices.

Problem 1

Both sides vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠AQ52 ♥7 ♦3 ♣KJ109874

South	West	North	East
	1♣*	1NT	Pass

?

*Could be a doubleton

J.S.: What is your plan?

Kantar: How can it be wrong to start with 2♣, Stayman?

J.S.: Expanding on that somewhat limited plan:

Mohan: 2♣. I have to have a plan? Okay, my plan is to get to 7♣ via Stayman and then 3♣ game forcing. Then 4♦ RKC (or 4♣ RKC for those who prefer to muddle auctions), followed by a 5♦ king ask to locate the ♠K, and settle for 6♣ without it (or if we are lacking an ace). We will not play spades unless partner shows five by rebidding them over 3♣. I cannot think of a hand where partner has only ♣Ax clubs so the ♣Q is immaterial; I'll worry about the fourth round of spades later - perhaps in the post-mortem with my very understanding partner and teammates.

Hamilton: 2♣ Stayman, and then over a red reply bid 3♣ natural and forcing, showing at least five clubs and four spades (if the reply was 2♥) or clubs and four of either major (if reply was 2♦). It is probably best to play slam in clubs to avoid a club ruff or a four-one spade break (a discard is surely available for a losing spade).

We may make anything from a partial to a grand slam depending upon partner's red suit holding.

Abdou: 2♣. If partner has spades will bid key card; if he responds in a red suit will bid 3♣ and pull 3NT to 4♣ as a club slam try. Hopefully we have some good agreements regarding high level cue bids after that. Have a sneaking admiration for a direct 4♣ Gerber but we could be missing an ace and the ♠K and I wouldn't know what to do after a two ace response.

J.S.: A question for the 2♣ bidders: If partner bids spades and you use key-card to determine if partner holds the spade king, how do you get to play 6♣? Maybe puppet Stayman to ask for a five-card major would be useful if available. Without that tool, it seems better to forego looking for a spade fit and aim immediately for clubs.

Lawrence: 2♣, transfer to clubs and then use keycard for clubs. This routine gives up on spades. A viable alternative would be to bid Stayman. If partner has a spade suit, continue with key cards for spades. If partner bids 2♦, I will bid 3♣ which is natural and forcing.

Savage: 2♣. It's tempting to bid Stayman followed by a forcing 3♣, but in IMPs I'll try a transfer to clubs (2♣ in my partnerships) and if partner bids 2NT (showing a fit and a hand that he likes), I'll bid 3♣ followed by a 4♣ slam try over 3NT. If he, instead, bids 3♣ over 2♣ (discouraging), I would bid a forcing 4♣ and probably settle for game in clubs.

J.S.: There is danger in transferring. Also; you want to declare from your side. A spade lead by East poses a double threat. It could be a singleton with West holding the ♣A club ace, or it might establish the ♠K in West's hand before discards from partner's red-suit holding could otherwise be used, for example: ♠Jxx ♥AQx ♦KQ10x, ♣Axx. There is a risk in an immediate 4♣ Gerber also - can you get out at 5♣ if partner holds only one ace? But the most

important aspect of this hand is to have the partnership agreement to use the same methods after a 1NT overcall as you use after a 1NT opening bid. This includes treating bids in a minor suit as natural even though an opponent opened the bidding in that suit. At last year's world championships a pair from the winning "Monaco" team evidently didn't have such an understanding. They landed in 6NT, off two cashing diamonds, rather than the cold 6♣.

Problem 2

Neither side vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠AJ5 ♥10954 ♦AJ7 ♣864

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♣	Pass	Pass
?		Dbl	3♣*

*Preemptive

Kantar: Double. If partner is 4-4 in the majors he should bid 3♥.

Mohan: Double, responsive, then bid 3♥ over 3♦ or pass 3♥.

Hamilton: Double, responsive. Do not want to defend 3♣, that's for sure. I prefer double but 3♥ is second choice. Will let them go in 4♣.

Abdou: Double. About right in high cards. Partner will bid a major suit game with extras such as: ♠KQxx ♥AKx ♦K10xx ♣xx (bidding 4♥ will be a poor contract opposite that hand), and will pick a major with lesser hands. Yes, will pass a minimum response by partner.

Savage: Double, responsive, expecting partner to bid 3♥ with 4-4 in the majors and would raise 3♥ to 4♥ but would pass 3♣.

Lawrence: 3♥. No need to make a responsive double. If North is 4-3, my 3♥ bid will find as good a fit as any. This way I do not have to wonder what to do if partner responds to double with 3♣. North may be able to continue over 3♥. Certainly, facing a passed hand, this hand is not quite good enough to do more. If I had a fifth heart, I would bid 4♥.

J.S.: Wafik did not notice that partner is a passed hand - he is excused. But the other bids and comments range from inferior to incomprehensible. What do you expect partner to hold for his passed hand takeout double? A perfect ♠K10xx ♥AKxx ♦xxxx ♣x? That would be nice, but partner's frequently disappoint. (Even then, you are not certain to make 3♥ and the opponents are likely down in 3♣.) Do you want partner to pass 1♣ holding: ♠Kxxx ♥AKxx ♦xxx ♣xx? I don't. And what if he held the (evidently) unthinkable: ♠Qxxx ♥Axx ♦Qxxx ♣Kx? Even without the "what if" example hands, the "Law of Total Tricks" provides a strong indication that it is best to stay out of the auction. If your side holds eight hearts and East-West hold nine clubs (both of those numbers could be smaller) the implication is that the limit is 17 tricks; either you or the opponents are going set at the three level. Playing matchpoints the double is reasonable (partner will usually pass holding a doubleton club), but at IMPs passing 3♣ should be obvious.

I am so shaken by the panel's comments I have checked several times to be certain I didn't inadvertently give South a third ace.

Problem 3

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

♠KQ1042 ♥105 ♦AQJ1095 ♣---

South	West	North	East
	1♣	1♥	Pass
?			

Savage: 3♦. My partnership preference is to play that after a one-level overcall by partner, two of a minor is not quite forcing but two of a major is forcing. Three-level bids (or jumps in a minor) are forcing and not some kind of fit bid. Given this structure, I would jump to 3♦, planning to bid spades at my next turn but if I'm not 100% sure that my partner-of-the-day would play

3♦ as forcing, I would bid 1♠ (which is forcing).

Hamilton: 2♣. Bear in mind that a cue bid by an unpassed hand does not promise a fit, but may be setting up a forcing auction in our own suit(s). More problems will come up in the continuing auction; however I am forcing to some game, make it or not. Slam? Not out of the question.

Mohan: 2♦ now, spades later, probably twice, then a last ditch 4♥. Difficult hand to judge so I just keep bidding; illustrates why a new suit response to an overcall must be a one round force at IMPs.

Abdou: 2♦, if forcing, followed by spades. A helpful agreement here is that level changes are at least a one round force and same level corrections are constructive. If 2♦ is not forcing will have to start with a cue bid or some forcing call. I prefer cue bids to show fits, hence the above outlined agreement.

Lawrence: 2♦. Really difficult. I play new suits here are not forcing. 3♦ would be very encouraging but not forcing. Technically, I have to bid 2♣ and then hope for a sequence that lets me show my suits. Practically, bidding 2♦ might be most efficient since I might be able to get 2♥ from partner followed by 3♣ by me. This is more descriptive than starting with 2♣ and being obliged to bid 3♦ (or higher) later.

Kantar: 2♦, not forcing, after much soul-searching. If I can get by this (shades of Al Roth) I will jump to 3♣ if partner bids 2♥; otherwise bid and rebid spades unless I think partner has six hearts.

J.S.: There are four different methods of responding to overcalls mentioned by our panelists. And there are variations beyond that. Choose one and play it - they are all reasonable. But if you feel compelled to bid 2♦, even though it is non-forcing (a la Lawrence and Kantar), you should change your methods. Robert Burns anticipated this deal with his "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley." After a non-forcing 2♦ the opponents come to your rescue and compete with 3♣. But the plan fails anyway. Partner will (did) pass your now non-jump 3♣ rebid holding: ♠Jxxx ♥AQxxx ♦xx ♣xx.

Problem 4

Neither side vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠A9 ♥K65 ♦3 ♣KQJ10964

South	West	North	East
1♣	1♦	Dbl	Pass
?			Pass

Kantar: 3♣, what I think I am looking at.

J.S.: What you are looking at shortly after 3♣ is down a quiet four tricks in 3NT. Partner, the simple soul, bid 3NT holding: ♠KQ43 ♥Q1084 ♦K93 ♣52. West unkindly held seven diamonds. Improve partner's hand by changing one of his low hearts to the ace and give West only five diamonds and 3NT is still a hopeless contract.

Abdou: 3♣, lots of playing strength. I would cue bid with more HCPs and would

bid 3♦, a self-splinter, with the right partner. Slam is possible opposite as little as: ♠xxxx ♥AQ10x ♦J10xx ♣Ax. With that holding partner will bid 3NT over 3♣ but may consider slam opposite 3♦.

Lawrence: 3♣. 2♣ is a nothing bid. It might be the winning bid but it may cause us to miss some games. 3♣ may cause us to bid some bad games, so the winning bid is a bit of a guess.

J.S.: The point is that 2♣ is enough. With almost all hands which produce game partner will be bidding over 2♣. I expect my partner to raise clubs on this auction with as little as ♠KQxx ♥Jxx ♦Kxx ♣xxx. If he does raise, you should bid 3♥, not 3♦ - you want to invite a 3NT call, not force partner into 3NT should he hold only one diamond stopper and no club ace.

The seventh club is a mirage. It will usually be worth an overtrick if you can make 3NT, not a game-fulfilling trick.

Hamilton: 3♣ is enough. I would definitely not cue bid 2♦ because one diamond stop will not be enough unless partner has the club ace also (in which case we will still get to 3NT if that is our spot). I would consider anything but 3♣ as nutty and if others disagree you can tell them I said so :)

J.S.: I was able to speak with Fred about this hand after he submitted the above answer. He wishes to retract his "nutty" comment. He recommends that a 3♣ rebid be used to deny a solid suit; instead using 3♦ to show a solid suit, thus forcing a 3NT bid from partner if he holds a stopper. 2♦ would be used on other, stronger hands.

My view is that such an agreement might be workable but is not necessary. I stand by my opinion that partner will bid over 2♣ when game is playable opposite this hand.

Savage: 2♦. Jumping to 3♣ might be the popular choice, but with fitting high cards in partner's majors, I'll take the high road in IMPs and force to game with 2♦, planning to not stop until game in clubs is reached with 6♣ not out of the question. If I had chosen to rebid 3♣ instead I would be hesitant to pass 3NT by partner, as partner might be envisioning running clubs and have only one diamond stopper.

J.S.: I'm guessing that Mike and partner don't play many part scores. Strangely, 2♦ might work out here if both partners bid accurately thereafter. South should bid 3♣ over 2NT (forcing), North 3♥, then 3♣ by South. By this time the partnership will realize that there is but one diamond stopper and is missing the ♣A, thus avoiding the hopeless 3NT. Putting on the brakes in 4♣ might still offer a challenge, however.

Mohan: 2♣. Not vul I take the low road - if partner cannot find a bid over 2♣, I'll hope there is no game. The problem with a 3♣ rebid is that 3NT by partner will fail every time he holds a single diamond stopper and no ace of clubs. But since RHO did not raise to 2♦, I'll risk 3♣ if vulnerable at IMPs, playing partner for ♦K10xx when I hear the inevitable 3NT.

J.S.: My partners are not clever enough to know that they need two diamond stoppers rather than one to bid 3NT when vulnerable.

(More Master Solvers on page 15)

Hand of the Month

By Joel Hoersch
Editor, District 22 Forum

♠A96
♥AQ10965
♦J9
♣105

♠(?)	♠(?)
♥7	♥J83
♦(?)	♦(?)
♣(?)	♣(?)

♠Q842
♥K42
♦AKQ
♣AQ6

Contract 6♥. Opening lead ♥7, trumps breaking 3-1. How should this hand be played at IMPs? This hand has been specially chosen as

a learning tool for I/N players. It outlines how to make a cohesive plan which evaluates the percentages of your various chances for success. You are invited to search for the proper order of play to test these chances, and answer the following questions:

- (1) How many major chances to take 12 tricks do you have?
- (2) Which chance should you test first?
- (3) Which chance do you test second?
- (4) What chance do you watch for along the way, and what is your fallback chance?
- (5) As a side question, if you were playing matchpoints in a strong field, are you happy with your contract of 6♥, or would you prefer to be in 6NT?

Study the hand carefully, then turn to page 11 to check whether you are ready to move up to the status of becoming a strong B player.