



Master Solvers Panel

By John Swanson
Lancaster, California



Thanks to our panel regulars: Kitty & Steve Cooper, Mitch Dunitz, Jerry Gaer, Ross Grabel, Geoff Hampson, Eddie Kantar, and JoAnna Stansby. Come to think of it, Ross has been missing for a while. It's good to have him back. And a special thanks to Forum editor Ken Monzingo, who responded on short notice so we would have a quorum (quorum in this case means that there are enough answers such that surely I will have at least one with which to disagree on each problem).

Problem 1.

Neither side vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠7 ♥8643 ♦AKQJ104 ♣A5

South	West	North	East
2♦	Pass	2♠*	3♥
?			

*Not forcing

Dunitz: 5♦. Can't bid more, can't bid less.

J.S.: Not according to rest of the panel.

Grabel: 4♦, without enthusiasm. Won't be surprised if I'm turning a plus into a minus, but my diamonds are too good to be worried about being doubled.

Coopers: Pass. We play 2♠ is a one-round force, but still we have nothing additional to say here.

Gaer: Pass. No spade support, no heart stopper. Partner should visualize my problem and take the appropriate action. I would welcome a competitive double or a diamond raise. I can even live with a spade rebid, which I would consider raising. If worse comes to worst, we end up plus 50 or minus 140.

J.S.: Partner might visualize ♦AQJxxx for the overcall rather than six solid. He will not assume you had a problem when you pass (although you do and it is not clear how to solve it). We could almost say that the biggest problem on this hand is how to make a call in tempo so that partner doesn't know you have a problem.

Kantar: Pass. Without diamond support, what I am going to do with all these hearts?

J.S.: Ruff spades?

Monzingo: Pass. Bidding anything at this level, other than a speculative double, pre-empts partner if he desires to reopen with a bid (or double). A 4♣ bid I convert to 4♦, I'll happily pass 3NT, feel nervous passing a cooperative double, and downright scared shirtless if he bids 3♠, testing my resolve to sit it out or bid 4♦. (I would take it out.) If partner passes I have an attractive diamond opening lead.

Hampson: Double. Hopefully this conveys extra values and will get partner to bid 3NT with a heart stop. I will correct black suits to diamonds cheaply.

Stansby: Double, not penalty, shows a good hand, says "do something," typically

used to get to 3NT when there isn't room to cue.

J.S.: Reading these bids reminds me of Goldilocks. The papa-bear 5♦ is too much; mama-bear pass too little; 4♦ is a cousin-bear, not too much or too little, just doesn't have much of an upside. Maybe double isn't just right either, but it does show extra values, could get you to 3NT, and if partner passes, you won't mind defending (which is what happened at the table). If a double is strictly penalties in your system, look for another bear.

Problem 2.

North/South vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠Q1085 ♥AKJ106 ♦K104 ♣8

South	West	North	East
?	3♣	Pass	5♣

J.S.: If you pass and then partner reopens with a double, what would you expect him to hold?

Kantar: Double. I'm doubling before partner does.

Grabel: Double. If you pass and then partner reopens with a double, what would you expect him to hold? I would have to know my opponents. If solid citizens, I expect partner's double is takeout; if young and wild, more penalty oriented.

J.S.: Let's hope partner judges the opponents' nature as well as you do.

Coopers: Double. May be too aggressive and maybe at the table we would have a better feel for whether East is saving or bidding to make. (b) We expect about two club tricks and an ace; there is no safety reopening for takeout. If partner's hand wasn't good enough to make a takeout double before, it sure isn't good enough now, so we think that this double is for penalties.

Stansby: Double. If I pass and partner doubles, it is penalty, not takeout. Partner has what he hopes are three defensive tricks and I would pass.

Hampson: Pass. I would expect good defensive assets for 5♣.

Monzingo: I (reluctantly) pass the first time, then 5♥. With my strength in controls I'm surprised partner could find a dangerous vulnerable double. I can't imagine a hand passing 3♣ now doubling for penalty, nor one risking -500, -800 or more without very attractive distribution. I'm guessing very good shape, so 5♥ is my call which rates to make or go a small minus. Should partner be 2-suited in diamonds and spades, I still have a good catch. Passing the double might not guarantee a plus score.

Dunitz: I would pass 5♣. And now, I expect light takeout with a club void. He wants to bid but is willing to defend if I so choose.

Gaer: Pass and pass. I expect to set them but don't visualize an eleven trick contract our way after partner's original pass. Partner should have some scattered honors and club shortness, also. If he balances with a double he is protecting me.

J.S.: I'm in the pass and pass camp. A double of 5♣ should contain better defensive strength. You expect to defeat 5♣, but it is far from certain. The greater downside is that partner, expecting at least as much offensive strength as you hold plus slightly better controls, will bid a slam on many hands on which you make exactly 5♥ (which is what happened at the table).

On the other side of the table, if partner passes at the three-level, then doubles 5♣, I expect two aces plus a bit more, his double protecting against split resources for your side (and does not require club shortness). Thus you should pass and accept whatever penalty is available.

Problem 3.

Both sides vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠KJ1095 ♥9862 ♦1083 ♣9

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	2NT	Pass
?			

Kantar: 3♣. Looks like a good spot to use Smolen.

Gaer: 3♣. I intend to raise a major or bid 3♥ (Smolen) over 3♦. Too much trick taking potential in this hand to pass.

Coopers: 3♣ Stayman, then Smolen. True, this hand may not be worth much if there's no major fit, but there is a big bonus for game.

Hampson: 3♣. I will raise a major or follow with Smolen.

Stansby: 3♣, Stayman, followed by 3♥ (Smolen) if pard has no major.

Dunitz: 3♣, planning to bid 3♥ (Smolen) over 3♦. I don't play that this promises a good hand.

Monzingo: 3♥, transfer, then 3NT. I may have overbid but, vulnerable, I'll try to stay even with the other table. If, failing to use the Stayman/Smolen conventions, I missed a heart contract, woe is me. But I have much more than my share of 10s, 9s and 8s, so I opt for a speculative 3NT or 4♠.

Grabel: 3♣, to be followed by Smolen 3♥ if partner doesn't bid a major. If partner bids 3NT, I will remove to 4♠.

J.S.: I fear I did not frame this problem well. The real question is whether you would sit for 3NT or remove to 4♠. The problem with 4♠ is that it requires ten tricks to fulfill the contract. The problem with 3NT is that your hand may produce almost no tricks for partner. Only Ross anticipated the problem - I agree with removing 3NT to 4♠ (bid 4♥ to transfer - a continuation of Smolen). Oh well, at least Mike Smolen got his convention mentioned by everyone on the panel.

Problem 4.

East/West vulnerable, match points
You are South holding:

♠AKQ97 ♥A93 ♦-- ♣Q9875

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	1NT*	Pass
2♣	Pass	3♣**	Pass
?			

*Forcing one round
**Fewer than 10 HCP

Kantar: 3♥. If partner doesn't bid 3NT, there may be a club slam roaming around.

Grabel: 3♥. I will settle for 5♣ over 3NT, and make further moves over anything else. Over 5♣, I will bid 6♣.

Gaer: 3♥. If partner bids only 4♣ I will bid 4♦. But if he bids 5♣, I will bid 6♣. If over 4♦ he bids only 5♣, I will pass. 4♠ is a possibility in matchpoints, but only if partner bids it, with something like ♠xx ♥Qxx ♦Axxx ♣Kxxx.

J.S.: That looks like a 2♠ preference over 2♣ to me. In other words, partner is quite likely to hold five clubs, putting you on the verge of slam regardless of what else he holds.

Coopers: 3♥. Slam could be easy if partner has no diamond wastage. So if partner doesn't bid 3NT we will bid 4♦, Kickback; if he does bid 3NT we'll bid 5♣ (to play, not Super Gerber).

Hampson: 3♥. This will bring my other possible strain into focus and help partner to evaluate diamond assets and belatedly preference spades on a doubleton.

Stansby: 3♥ showing a fragment. I'm angling toward 4♠ if pard has a doubleton.

Dunitz: 3♥. I'm forcing to game and will bid 4♠ next. I would rebid 3♣ with the spade ten, and am tempted here.

Monzingo: 4♠. My knee-jerk was 3♥ ... whatever that would gain me. If I think about it a little longer, I prefer 4♦ splinter (or some sort of minorwood, or exclusion Blackwood) which could get us real excited if partner has as little as the ♥K and five clubs headed by the ace or king. Also slows us down if he has wasted diamond strength and slow, or no, club/heart winners. Since you told me he's limited to less than 10 HCP, I'll rule out the perfecto ♥K and ♣AK for an attractive grand slam.

J.S.: At match points 4♠ may be the best contract, but for very small values of "may be." Partner raised clubs; he didn't preference to 2♠. With an almost unanimous vote for 3♥ it is perhaps dogmatic to claim that it is not the best call; but I am with Ken, preferring a 4♦ splinter bid over 3♣, immediately notifying partner that you are excited about a club contract and have slam interest. After 3♥ partner will think that you are only looking for game and the best strain. But you may recover after 3♥ if you bid 4♦ on the next round, letting partner in on your heretofore slam aspirations. On the actual deal partner held ♠Jx ♥xx ♦xxxx ♣AKJxx, so you are cold for a grand in clubs.

Problem 5.

Both sides vulnerable, match points
You are South holding:

♠1085 ♥3 ♦AQJ1043 ♣965

South	West	North	East
Pass*	1NT**	Pass	Pass
Dbl***	Pass	Pass	2♣
2♦	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Dbl	Pass	Pass
?			

*2♦ would have been Flannery
**14+ to 17
***Shows 4 in a major, longer minor

(Your idea was to pass an artificial 2♦ by partner, which would ask for your major.)

Kantar: Pass. But we could do without problems like this, John, my friend.

J.S.: Unfortunately, convoluted auctions and unusual situations do arise. The idea was to find not only the panel's judgment regarding the auction, but also whether any partnership agreements apply regarding redouble to express doubt about stoppers. Thus we have:

Coopers: Redouble. We play redouble to show doubt in the passout seat - that seems about right. We also use a direct seat redouble to show confidence in making. If forced at the point of a gun to play Flannery, we would have opened 3♦ (as we would have had to do playing our methods, where 2♦ is a weak two bid in hearts).

J.S.: The Flannery convention seems to engender the greatest amount of enthusiasm and disgust as any bidding idea known. (Although I have also seen some rather large stones thrown at Drury, which is perhaps the best convention devised since Stayman.) I too use redouble to show doubt in the passout position, but specifically regarding the suit the opponents are going to lead (by reason of a bid or a double). What lead is West requesting with the double?

Grabel: Pass. My hand should be a boom or bust but playing match points let's go for the gusto.

(See Solvers on page 14)

Hand of the Month

By Joel Hoersch
Editor, D22 Forum

♠ A532
♥ AKJ
♦ Q105
♣ K42

♠ ??
♥ ??
♦ ??
♣ J??

♠ QJ7
♥ 632
♦ AKJ9
♣ AQ7

Here's my Christmas present for all Intermediate and Newcomer players: it's from Eddie Kantar's book entitled *Take All Your Chances at Bridge* 2. This 100-hand lesson volume - and its older brother - are available through kantartbridge.com for less than 20 cents per lesson, and if you hurry, you may still acquire them in time to stuff into Santa's bag. But don't those of you who are beyond the I/N level skip this lesson. Your object should be to identify the three main possibilities for success, and then go on to calculate the combined percentages that will get you 12 tricks on this layout.

As always, take your time, plan ahead, and count your tricks. Then turn to page 14 to see if you have earned the best from Santa's bag ... or whether all you deserve is a lump of coal!

Contract: 6NT. Opening lead: ♠J.
Plan the play to utilize the best percentage chances for success.