

April 2008 Master Solvers Panel

By Marshall Miles
San Bernardino, Calif.

Our panelists are Paul Ivaska and Steve Bruno, District 17; Gary Soules and Rita Shugart, District 21 (Rita is bidding in a troika with European champions Boye Brogeland and Andrew Robson; Ross Grabel and John Swanson, District 22; and Ed Davis, guest panelist from District 23.

Problem 1.

Both vul, IMPs. You, South, hold:

AJ AK865 AKQ84 7

East	South	West	North
2	Dbl	Pass	3
Pass	4	Pass	6
Pass	?		

- (a) What call do you make?
(b) Would you have bid differently now?

DAVIS: (a) 7. If partner had a second suit, he would have investigated with 4NT instead of jumping to 6. I think he is likely to have six or seven very strong clubs since I have everything else. (b) Yes, if I had a bid to show a strong two-suited hand such as a cue bid or 4 (to show diamonds and hearts) I would have used it.

M.M.: Doesn't the 4 bid suggest a two-suiter of some kind?

SOULES: 7. Partner must have better than 6 solid clubs to make the slam bid, but if he does not, then he might be able to ruff out one of the red suits for his 13th trick. (b) I would have bid 3 over 2 to show a very good distributional hand with five or more hearts. (Yes, vul I can be this good!) Partner can have all his strength in clubs, but he needs to know my stuff is in the reds.

BRUNO: (a) 6. Over 7 I will bid 7, showing hearts and diamonds. There's no hand pard can have which does not contain the club ace. (b) Yes! I would have bid 4 over pard's 3. The face-to-face cue bids are cute, but they never work. We should have started naming our suits sooner than we did, and we would be more certain of reaching the right grand slam.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: (a) 6. We have so many extras that we must make a grand slam try. We bid 6 in the (unlikely) chance that partner has another possible strain than clubs. Needless to say, we pass to 7 in case we have to establish a red suit by ruffing. (b) Yes. We bid 4, showing a strong diamond-heart two-suiter. The hand is perfect for the Roman Jump, and leaves us with less guesswork later on.

GRABEL: (a) If I trust partner, either pass 6 or bid 7NT. Partner may or may not have solid clubs on this auction. With

AQJ10xxx he might have expected the suit to be running after my takeout double. But he could easily have solid clubs as well. With two places to play the hand, I would expect partner to bid 5NT over 4. If I have to choose which hand, I'll give him some leeway and pass 6. (b) I'm satisfied with the way the hand was bid.

IVASKA: 7NT. Take no prisoners. I can't imagine anything partner could hold other than seven solid clubs. If that's the case, we have 13 top tricks and no need to ruff a diamond or a heart to set them up. However, in the (obviously unlikely) event that I'm wrong, perhaps we can make 7NT without the clubs. 7NT will also pick up twoimps compared to 7 (though that's not the reason for my bid) and avert the microscopic possibility of a ruff on the opening lead.

SWANSON: Pass. Partner probably has AKQJxxx or AKQxxxxx for his bidding. I'll go conservative, allowing for a slightly weaker holding and a bad split.

M.M.: North had xx Q10xx x AKJ10xx, so 6 makes (losing only a trump trick); 6 is the best contract, and 6NT will make by taking the club finesse.

Problem 2.

Neither, IMPs. You, South, hold:

Q76 — J8642 K7652

North	East	South	West
1	Pass	?	

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: 1. Okay, we fell for it! Seriously, this controlled semi-psyche will work out quite well much of the time no matter how many spades partner has. At the least, we stand to improve our own contract while making it harder for opponents to find theirs.

DAVIS: 1NT. I doubt pass can really win in the long run.

GRABEL: 1NT, forcing. No problem!

IVASKA: 1NT. I have strong feelings here. Passing in such situations is a huge loser in the long run. One of the cardinal principles of bridge is that it pays to overbid slightly in an effort to find a fit. Partner will rarely jump in hearts, and it won't always be wrong when he does. In standard systems, partner could hold 20 or 21 points on rare occasions, and then we could miss out on 26 or 27 HCP, not an easy achievement. You can pass if your partner enjoys playing K9xxx opposite a void (or if you're trying to get rid of this particular one), but otherwise passing is false economy. In fact, I'd bid with weaker hands. Why shouldn't North have something like KJx Axxxx

AQxxx? If you are playing a forcing notrump, as most do now, you can find and play in a 3-5 minor suit that is preferable to a notrump contract. It should go without saying that I wouldn't pass a jump shift. If you bid over 1, you must see it through.

BRUNO: 1NT. I don't pass or bid 1. Could we have a game? Yes. Where? In one of our minor suits, most likely. Pard could have AJ, AJxxx, AKxxx, x.

Slam should be on a spade finesse.

SWANSON: 1NT. Am I missing something here?

SOULES: Pass. It's a long shot to make game in a minor, but if we can maybe 1 won't be passed out.

M.M.: I wish someone with a bridge program could tell me how frequently partner will rebid hearts (2, 3 or 4) over 1NT when responder has a void in hearts. As it happens, we can make a club slam; partner would jump shift and we probably get to five. But game is remote unless partner can jump shift in a minor, and how often will he be able to do that? Even if the partnership has a total of 26 points (which is not likely), 3NT will not make because of the misfit.

Problem 3.

N-S vul, IMPs. You, South, hold:

Q10 AQ954 108762 7

West	North	East	South
1	1	3 *	?

*weak

What call do you make?

SWANSON: 3. Maybe this should be a negative (Snapdragon) double situation. In a similar situation my partner once held xxx

AKxx Axxx Qx on this sequence. He elected to bid 4, which was down two doubled, when 3 would have been down three (doubled) opposite my hand — Q109xx x xxx AKxx.

GRABEL: For me this is easy since I play a double showing hearts with a spade tolerance. For standard bidders, I think it's close between 3 and 3, but I opt for 3.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: Double for take-out. We have the perfect shape for this, so can hardly refuse.

DAVIS: 3. I am not willing to bid 3 without a stronger or longer heart suit. My hand isn't quite worth an invitational bid in spades, but it is worth a game bid if partner has length in hearts. Bidding 3 gives room

for partner to bid 3 and we are still at the 3-level if partner can't bid more than 3.

M.M.: It seems to me that partner would interpret a 3 bid, not as natural, but as showing doubt whether to bid 3 or 4. I think even a 3 bid is a slight overbid (but it is still my choice unless playing a double as Snapdragon, as several of the panelists have suggested.)

IVASKA: Pass. I can't imagine what I could possibly bid. I have the uneasy feeling that the Esteemed Moderator is trying to tempt me into an action (?) double, hoping that partner's club holding will inform him that I couldn't have a club stack. Obviously, this approach could result in fiasco in two likely ways. We may have no playable spot, especially if we're playing a weak overcall style, as most pairs do nowadays. Secondly, LHO may have club length, making it difficult for partner to read my brilliant bid and minus 570 is a possible result. So, as Sam Goldwyn famously said, "Include me out."

If I were barred from passing, I'd bid 3, and I might do that with a doubleton honor were my hand stronger, but this holding isn't nearly good enough.

BRUNO: Pass. If partner reopens, I'll be happy to bid game. If he doesn't, he has length in clubs, and we don't have a game.

SOULES: Pass. Why encourage my partner with a negative double? All he did was overcall. The bidding might not be over.

Problem 4.

N-S vul, IMPs. You, South, hold:

— J8763 AJ9 Q7643

West	North	East	South
1	1	Pass	?

What call do you make?

BRUNO: Pass. I haven't had much luck bidding with a void in my partner's suit and no suit of my own. Sure, we might have a better spot. The auction's not over yet.

GRABEL: Reluctantly, I will pass. I expect to make 1; game is unlikely; and the auction may not be over. And, if it's not, I hope to be better placed the next time around.

Should it go double, pass, pass, to me, I will bid 2, not 1NT.

SOULES: Pass. This is not matchpoints. If a penalty double is passed around to me that's when I will have to make a decision.

IVASKA: 1NT. This problem is the first cousin of problem 2. I bid for many of the same reasons advanced there. Suffice it to say that I don't think we're in a very good contract right now, so I'll take a slight risk to improve the contract. The arguments for 1NT here are slightly weaker than above, since the probability of a strong suit (and maybe a weak hand) is much greater. (Indeed, I may even cause a large penalty in case LHO wasn't going to reopen with a double because of spade length.)

Nevertheless, I stand by 1NT.

SWANSON: 1NT. I'll invest one level in the hopes that someone will bid something other than spades.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: 1NT. Passing is wiser, but we hate to table a void in trumps.

Problem 5.

E-W vul, IMPs

West	East
765	AKQJ842
KQJ	75
AJ1073	Q4
86	94

South	West	North	East
1	Pass	Pass	2
Pass	3	Pass	3NT

(All Pass)
Apportion the blame for getting to the wrong game.

DAVIS: This isn't really fair. It is obvious West has never played bridge before.

[M.M.: No, West was a fine, experienced player who apologized for our result (de-

spite the fact that some players would consider my 3NT bid questionable). But I'm glad that you told me you would have bid 3NT also with my hand. Ed and I are such high level players that most (lower level) players cannot even understand us.]

SOULES: West 100%. East showed an intermediate hand with good spades. West's bid was ambiguous; he could be showing a spade fit, or asking for a diamond partial for 3NT. East's first responsibility was to show the partial. There might only be 9 tricks, and protecting the Qx might be vital. (10xx KQx Kxx QJ10x). For West to pass without a club card is inexcusable.

Why gamble when you do not have to?

BRUNO: West 100%. What was 3?

Kelsey would call it "daisypicking." 2 shows a non-minimum opener with a 6-card suit. What more does West need to know? Just bid the spade game. And passing over 3NT shows West should look to a game other than bridge for entertainment.

GRABEL: Hard to answer. West 100% because 4 seems automatic over 2. However East has no business bidding 3NT over 3, so I'd like to charge him with 100% also. East has a hand that if 3NT were a good contract, West would have started with 2NT or 3NT himself.

IVASKA: West 70%. Another in the (seemingly endless) long line of Esteemed Moderator classics, in the sense that both partners produced at least one bid so atrocious that he deserved all (or almost all) of the blame, leaving long suffering panelists to sort out the situation within the mathematical constraint that the total blame cannot exceed 100%. (Indeed, it's difficult to believe that EM himself was not involved.)

Oddly, the worst bid was East's 3NT. Not only did he not have a full diamond stopper, but he also had no stopper at all in the other two side suits, not even a minor honor such as a jack or ten, to suggest notrump. The only characteristic that did was his distribution, but that is hardly enough in view of the other drawbacks. But West caused the situation in the first place with his cuebid, and then he failed to avert the obviously impending disaster, so he (and I say "he" advisedly since most women are too practical to conduct such an auction) has to shoulder the lion's share of the blame.

In fact, most players in West's position would have just bid 4 directly.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: West 60%; East 30%; one of those things 10%. We think it's foolish for West to even offer 3NT with two small clubs. East took a forgivable shot, bidding pattern rather than stoppers.

SWANSON: Neither 3 nor 3NT would appear on my radar. (4 and 3 seem obvious to me). I'll give each player 50% and a gift certificate for a book on bidding.

M.M.: Perhaps I should explain my bidding. (Yes, Paul, I was East.) Since West hadn't made a bid or takeout double on the previous round and only invited game, East thought it unlikely that he would find the three top tricks in his partner's hand to make 4. If West had something like xxx Axx Axx Q10x or xx KQJx Kxx QJxx, 3NT from East's side would be a much better contract than 4. Almost everyone would bid 3NT with the king of diamonds instead of the queen. But West might figure that if East had a running spade suit and a diamond honor, he could hardly have much in the other two suits. So, with two small clubs plus slow tricks in hearts, he should bid 4 over 3NT.

Have I convinced anyone? I don't think so.