

August 2008 Master Solvers Panel

By Marshall Miles
San Bernardino, Calif.

This month's panelists are Mike & Nancy Passell and Jan Janitschke of District 17; District 21 is represented by JoAnna Stansby and Rita Shugart (Rita is bidding with her international partners, Boye Brogelund & Andrew Robson).

District 22 representatives are Grant Baze and Mark Itabashi; and guest experts at large are Jill Meyers of D23 & Mike Lawrence of District 10.

Problem 1.

Both vulnerable, IMPs
As South, you hold

♠AQJ94 ♥J108 ♦A6 ♣KQ4

South	West	North	East
1♦	2♥	Dbl	Pass
?			

What call would you make?

LAWRENCE: 3♣. The alternative is to bid 3♥, which will not really solve a stopper problem, but may get us into an auction that cannot stop in time.

JANITSCHKE: 3♥. Not perfect, but I'm willing to force to game as long as I (probably) find the right strain.

PASSELLS: 3♥. First we try for 3NT. If that doesn't pan out, we will go for the best game available. At this level, partner has to have values for his negative double.

BAZE: 3♥. This is a game force, with or without a definite direction. Here, clearly, it is without direction, and admittedly with no guarantee that any game will make.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: 3♥. Overbid to find the right strain. We wish we had opened 1NT to avoid the dilemma.

MEYERS: 3 . I don't want to miss a vulnerable game at IMPs, so I would rather overbid slightly and hope for 3NT than underbid with 2 or 3 .

ITABASHI: 3♥. This keeps more final contracts in play. 3NT, 4♣ or five of either minor are all possibilities, and partner is the one to decide which.

STANSBY: 3♥. A cue of overcaller's suit is game forcing. 3NT, 4♣, 5♣ and even slam are all in the picture. Passing the double is unacceptably unilateral; too bad if partner has ♠x ♥xxx ♦KQxx ♣AJxxx.

M.M.: Several panelists were hoping to get to 3NT, but if they can make 3NT, how will the opponents do in hearts? At the table, John Swanson passed with this hand against me. His side couldn't make a game, and all I could take was six heart tricks. I had a king or queen on the side, but couldn't get to the dummy to lead toward it. Is it too risky to pass? If West had a seven or eight card heart suit, he probably would have bid more than 2 . Even the ultra-conservatives.

Problem 2.

Neither vulnerable, matchpoints
As South, you hold

♠A54 ♥AKJ7 ♦K5 ♣KJ106

South	West	North	East
1♣	2♣	3♣	Pass
?			

What call would you make?

JANITSCHKE: 4♥. If I can get partner to cuebid a stiff spade, I can bid RKC.

LAWRENCE: 4♣. Partner made a game forcing cue bid for clubs in my style. None of these limit raise or better cue bids. This is a fine hand for clubs, and the only question is whether to stop in six. In the later auction, I play that 4NT is Keycard, and 4♣ would be rolling.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: 4♣. We expect to end in 6 or 7♣, so we start with an ace-showing cue bid, making our slam intentions clear.

ITABASHI: 4♣. If partner is relatively short in the majors, it won't take much to make seven – something like ♠xx ♥x ♦AJxx ♣AQxxxx would be a claimer.

If partner signs off at 5♣, we'll still force to six.

STANSBY: 4NT: RKC for clubs.

MEYERS: I bid whatever Blackwood for clubs is (in my system 4). My partner is cuebidding when I could have a 3-card suit, and instead I have close to an opening 2NT.

BAZE: 4NT. RKC, followed by 5NT if we catch the expected 5♣ response, seems the only sensible way to invite a grand.

PASSELLS: 4NT. What else can we possibly do? A 4♣ cuebid will only handcuff partner, since we have everything!

Problem 3.

North-South vulnerable, IMPs
As South, you hold

♠K762 ♥Q63 ♦AK1076 ♣8

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♠	Pass	3♥	Pass
?			

What call would you make?

ITABASHI: 4♦. Whether partner is making a game try or a slam try, I like my hand.

MEYERS: 4 . I don't know whether partner is making a game try (for which I have a clear acceptance) or a slam try. If it is a slam try I am cooperating.

LAWRENCE: I need to make a strong bid, so I'll bid 4♦, showing values and showing interest. Other two choices are 4♣ or 4♠, and I don't think 4♦ would be interpreted as a splinter. I wish partner had availed himself of a different game try, such as 2NT. Perhaps his failure to do so offers some insights.

JANITSCHKE: 4♣ seems right. Gotta encourage partner as much as possible in case he actually has the slightest bit of slam interest. After all, I almost had enough to raise him directly to 3♠ initially.

Four is okay also.

PASSELLS: 4♣. Partner can be making either a slam try or a game try. We will bid Blackwood if he makes another try. In the given auction, 4♦ should deny a club control in our hand.

STANSBY: 4♣. Can't tell yet if 3♥ is game try or slam try, but 4♣ caters to both. I will pass if partner bids 4♠, or bid RKC over four.

BAZE: 4♣. If partner has slam in mind, I want to co-operate.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: 4♣. Showing a super-maximum with a club control.

M.M.: I strongly prefer the last five panelists' answers. Partner will play you for something in diamonds since you bid them, but he may worry about a club control if he lacks one himself. His hand was AQxxx

AKxx x QJx. Should he risk a 5 bid over 4 (or 4)? Perhaps he would, perhaps not. Over 4 he bid Blackwood, followed by 6 .

Problem 4.

North-South vulnerable, IMPs
As South, you hold

♠A6 ♥74 ♦AJ84 ♣Q10752

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♣*	Pass
2♣**	Pass	2♣	Pass
?			

(*artificial, 15+; (**)natural, forcing to game

What call would you make?

BAZE: 3♦. Of course I show my suits, particularly when the expected auction will enable me to bid my hand accurately (3♣/3♥, 4♣/3♠, pass over 3NT, and acceptance of all slam tries).

ITABASHI: 3♦. Since I have a maximum passed hand over partner's strong club opening, I see no reason not to bid out my suits.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: 3♦.

Shape-showing; we don't see the problem (yet).

PASSELLS: 3♦. We must bid out our pattern here.

STANSBY: 3♦. Pard can bid 3♥ if interested in hearing about my honor-doubleton in spades, and then I will jump to 4♣.

JANITSCHKE: 3♦. But you could easily talk me into bidding 3♠, so that if partner has diamonds (and bids them) he plays the hand, which certainly could be important.

On the other hand, if he bids 3NT over my 3♦, that is probably right.

LAWRENCE: 3♦. I have a good hand opposite a strong club opening, and partner knows I couldn't open the bidding. I expect to do some cue bidding later, but I'm not sure what form that will take at this moment.

MEYERS: 3 . I assume that is natural.

M.M.: The panel is unanimous on this one, and I think I would have bid 3 myself, but to me (and partner) the decision seems very close between showing diamonds and showing my partial spade fit.

Over 3 opener is almost certain to bid 3NT, even with a single heart stopper, and he may think you have something like 1-2-4-6 distribution, and therefore a misfit. And you can't very well bid 4 over 3NT. Of course, the risk in bidding 3 is that

partner may think you have better spade support and bid 4 or 6 without looking for an alternate strain.

Problem 5.

North-South vulnerable, IMPs

West	East
♠Q753	♠K
♥	♥653
♦Q1087	♦KJ654
♣KQJ96	♣A843

South	West	North	East
1♠	2♣	Dbl	3♠
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

North-South made 4♥. If the minors had broken more favorably, East-West could have made five of either minor. As it was, they had a cheap (one trick) sacrifice. Apportion the fault.

ITABASHI: Am I allowed to give 100% blame to both players? I would never consider defending at IMPs with either hand! Both should expect the opponents to be making, and both know that the save must be cheap. Seriously, I give West slightly more of the charge: he is the one with the void, and had a chance to bid 5♣ to put the pressure on the opponents.

BAZE: West 100%. The hand with the void in the opponents' trump suit must act. The usual explanation for not acting ("for all I know partner has three defensive trump tricks, etc., etc.") is not practical, not sensible, flies in the face of experience, and is cowardly. This is particularly true in this case, when the opponents are known to have a one-loser eight card spade fit.

If the opponents choose to play in hearts, the heart fit must be even better than the spade fit.

RITA-BOYE-ANDREW: We make West the culprit in this scenario. The heart void and the fact that partner has at most one spade adds up to only one loser in the majors our direction. Therefore we MUST go to (at least) 5♣.

LAWRENCE: West 100%, East 10%. West had to bid 5♣. He had good clubs, he had a void, he had little wasted in spades. This is a lousy overcall that grew huge. East has what he said, but his king of spades does not look like a save-worthy value. Also, East can not come close to visualizing West's shape.

Why give East 10%? Because he had the last chance, and he might have bid 5♣. There is some value in that bid.

PASSELLS: At first glance, Mike wanted to give West all the blame, but decided after reflection that he might think that East could be loaded in hearts. In reality, East can be sure partner is short in hearts from the auction, and there will be few wasted values. So Mike did a switch and gave East 80 percent of the blame.

Nancy disagrees, but would have bid 5♣ with the East hand in the hope that partner's hearts and diamonds aren't reversed.

STANSBY: 100% East. This hand is a good advertisement for fit jumps after overcalls. Now East could make the more descriptive bid of 4♦, and West certainly couldn't go wrong. On the actual auction, West doesn't know if partner has three small hearts or ♥AJ109. But East knows that 5♣ must be a cheap save, possibly even a make if overcaller has as little as ♠xxxx ♥x ♦Ax ♣Kxxxxx.

JANITSCHKE: 100% East. East should bid 5♣. Not guaranteed, but (1), he's got no heart strength opposite hoped-for shortness, (2), he has four trump, and (3), he is pretty sure his stiff spade should be fine.

For all West knows, his partner has QJ10xx of hearts and wants a piece of them. The player with the void should not be the one to guess what his partner has.

MEYERS: East 100%. West didn't even have an overcall.

What is he supposed to do?

M.M.: The panel is split widely on this one, but I think East is the one most at fault. Since the opponents don't have many high cards (as both East and West can tell from their own bidding), they probably have good distribution. That means that they probably have ten, or at least nine, hearts between them. East knows he has no values in hearts and that the East-West hands fit well. The king of spades is likely to take a trick on defense but won't be worth much, if anything, on offense. West doesn't know where his partner's high cards are. He could have values in hearts or diamonds or both. Switch the diamond and heart honors, and if West bid 5 , he would probably take a two trick set against a non-making 4 contract.