

# July 2008 Masters Solvers Panel

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Our July panelists are Paul Ivaska and Fred Hamilton, District 17; Hamish Bennett and Gary Soules, District 21; Ross Grabel and John Swanson, District 22; and Ed Davis, guest panelist from District 23.

## Problem 1.

Both vul, IMPs  
You, South, hold

K107654 ♥KQ ♦J753 2

North	East	South	West
1	Pass	1	Pass
2	Pass	?	

What call would you make?

BENNETT: 2♣. Partner probably has a stiff spade – on bad days a void. But my hand will take more tricks in spades than in clubs, and partner's high cards will take some tricks too.

DAVIS: 2♣. Close to a pass, since 2 is more likely to make than 2♠ (partner's suit is surely better than ours). But there is enough of a chance of game that it is worth bidding again at IMPs.

HAMILTON: 2♣. If there is game it is in spades. I am not trying to improve the partscore, but 2♣ should play okay. And if by chance pard can raise, I like our chances for a spade game! A pessimistic pass is really the only other alternative.

GRABEL: 2♣. This falls somewhat short of an invitational hand because the KQ-tight in hearts don't pull full weight.

Pass of 2 is too unilateral.

IVASKA: 2♣. Game is unlikely but hardly impossible, so it seems to me that I should bid again. Not only that, but 2 isn't a certain make, so I'm not necessarily jeopardizing a known plus score.

SWANSON: 2♣. I don't consider this close. Bad suit, misfit.

M.M.: I think John is explaining why he wouldn't bid MORE than 2♣. Much depends upon whether partner usually raises spades with three card support and a ruffing value. If so, when he doesn't raise spades immediately, your chances of making 4♣ are very slim.

SOULES: Pass quickly. The inference is my partner would go out of his way to bid 1NT, and I do not want to play opposite a stiff. There is no game, so let the opponents balance and go down.

M.M.: It looks like Gary is the only one in my camp on this hand. I calculate the odds against making game here at least 5-1 against, and even if you find a great fit like ♠Ax ♥Axx ♦xx AQ10xxx, you still don't have a cinch to make it. So why jeopardize the part-score plus? I am embarrassed to admit that at the table I bid 2♣ with this hand, down 200 when 2 would make. Should partner have rebid 3 over 2♣ with ♠ void ♥Axx ♦109xx AK10xxx? (making three with a 3-3 club split, making two with the more likely 4-2 split). I don't think so. The fault was mine.

## Problem 2.

Neither vul, IMPs  
You, South, hold

AJ6 ♥K7543 ♦8 J765

East	South	West	North
1♦	?		

What call do you make?

BENNETT: Pass. The two other choices are 1♥ or double. I would not double in second seat; and I hate 1♥ since that is not necessarily the lead I want (but obviously it could work out all right).

Therefore I go quietly for now.

GRABEL: Pass. I don't quibble with a 1♥ overcall, since I strongly feel that the safest time to get into an auction is at your first opportunity. However, with a suit so weak, I hate to prejudice a lead from partner should we defend. If it is our hand, I should get another chance.

M.M.: Yes, but will you take that chance at the two or three level?

SWANSON: Pass. Although a 1♥ overcall might work very well, my methods re-

quire a better suit or a better hand.

One of the drawbacks of the overcall is that if partner has the values for a suit bid of his own, you will want to raise, and partner is certain to be very disappointed in what you table as dummy.

SOULES: Pass. If I were to overcall with 9 HCP, I would need a better suit.

HAMILTON: 1♥. Although double is more flexible, it will not uncover an eight-card heart fit. This hand is too light for a takeout double.

My second choice is pass, since I don't own much of a suit, or much of a hand.

IVASKA: 1♥. To a great extent, this is a matter of individual and partnership style. However, the modern tendency is to overcall, despite the obvious risk of attracting a poor lead and the fact that I'm not inconveniencing the opponents. I'm prepared to be told that overcalling is losing bridge. (Indeed, I have a sneaking suspicion that it is, and I would be interested in seeing the results of a computer simulation.) However, I think that my counterpart at the other table will overcall, so I don't propose to create a swing by passing. A takeout double could be the winner as it would make it much easier to get to a black suit contract, but it has two serious drawbacks, i.e. the risk of missing an eight-card heart fit and (more serious) being about a king light.

DAVIS: 1♥. Overcalling gives us a better chance to contest the auction. However, this is barely worth an overcall. I'd pass with one less black card and one more diamond. Overcalling with this hand is more a matter of style than right or wrong.

M.M.: I'll admit that this is a rather weak overcall, but I am not convinced passing is better. Suppose partner has something like Qxx ♥Axx ♦xxx A10xx. You pass, LHO bids 1. Partner passes and RHO rebids 1NT. The opponents can easily make 1NT; you can probably make 2♥. But should partner have bid when you passed?

Even when he has better distribution: Qxx ♥Qxxx ♦Qxxx Ax or Qxxx ♥QJxx ♦Axxx x, why is it easier and safer for him to bid than it is for you? Nor can I imagine any sequence where it is safer for you to reopen the bidding later than it is to bid now. Whether it goes 1, Pass, 1NT, or 1♦, Pass, 1, Pass, 1NT or 1♦, Pass 1, Pass, 2, can you bid safely at the higher level? In my examples, partner always had a heart fit. What if he doesn't? Then the opponents will disregard your bid and get to the same contract they would get to if you had passed.

Nothing gained, but nothing lost.

## Problem 3.

North-South vul, IMPs  
You, South, hold

♠A75 ♥AKJ1072 ♦ AJ54

East	South	West	North
3♦	?		

What call would you make?

SOULES: 4♥. I play this as a very strong hand. If I double and they bid 5♦, I would be guessing at the five level.

HAMILTON: Double. This is clear-cut. Any immediate heart overcall is too one-dimensional, with good support for both black suits. I will bid 4♥ over a 3♣ or 4♣ reply, and a jump to 4♠ would lead me to slam. Pard would hardly correct a 4♥ overcall to 4♠ with something like ♠KQxxxx ♥xx ♦Jxx ♣Kx, and we would miss a likely grand slam! Plus, a possible leave-in when partner has diamonds would be okay.

DAVIS: Double. The hand is worth 4♥, but there is too much potential in other suits to jump to 4♥. I will bid the cheapest number of hearts over 3♣ or 4♣ by partner, cue bid 4 over 4 and make a grand slam force over 5. If the opponents jump to 5 and partner doubles, I will bid 6♥ (5NT allowing partner to bid 6 might work out better, but I'd be risking a 6♣ bid from partner).

BENNETT: Double. This hand has slam potential. Also, partner could be weak with diamond tricks, and our best plus is a penalty.

GRABEL: Double. I'm inclined to say "What's the problem?" although there is a risk that partner with some 3-3-4-3 hand will pass and we will collect a paltry penalty when on for game or even slam, but anything else is a distortion. 4♥ is not too

far from the mark, but – with every suit in play – I hate to make a bid that sets trumps.

IVASKA: Double. This hand is too strong and too amenable to playing in spades or clubs for the only alternative of 4♥. I could even miss a good grand slam in one of the black suits. Not only that, but defending 3 doubled may well be our best spot, e.g. opposite ♠10xx ♥x KJxxx Qxxx.

SWANSON: Double. There is always potential for a problem when one fails to bid a good suit immediately, but I am willing to trade that risk for the possibility of finding a winning black suit contract.

M.M.: Our opponents bid 4♥ with this hand. Our teammates doubled and got to 6♠, making seven.

## Problem 4.

Neither vul, matchpoints  
You, South, hold

♠K10764 ♥— Q8 K109863

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♥	2
?			

What call would you make?

HAMILTON: Double. We can remove a 2♥ rebid to 3♣, while a 2♠ bid by us would leave us in the soup if we get the expected 3♥ rebid. Of course there is danger involved in this double, since we are a bit light for a free bid, especially with the ♦Q – an iffy value.

I don't generally like to get involved when void in partner's suit, but this hand has too much playing strength to go quietly.

SOULES: Double. Even if partner bids 4♥, my two kings might be helpful. And maybe great things can happen if partner has a fit with me. Even a hand as bad as ♠x ♥Qxxxx ♦Axx ♣Axxx might make a slam, and if I pass partner should not reopen.

DAVIS: Double. 2♠ would cater to finding a 5-3 fit but the combination of only five spades (I can still hold six spades even though I am a passed hand) and a weak suit (I don't want partner passing 2♠ with a minimum hand and short spades) and another suit to bid over 2NT by partner makes the flexible bid the better choice.

BENNETT: Double. Dangerous, but I have both my suits and am showing them as cheaply as possible!

GRABEL: Double. If partner bids 2♥, he'll be disappointed in my void, but such is life. The double is easy; the follow ups may not be as easy.

IVASKA: Double. I'll try 3 over 2♥ or 2NT. 3, followed by 3♠ is likely to get us too high. I usually bid aggressively with 6-5s but here the signs (two losing diamonds, void in partner's suit) are hardly propitious, especially in the matchpoint circumstances which reward plus scores. Should partner surprise me with 2♠,

I'll chance 4♠, a bit of a guess, but partner cannot be expected to make an intelligent decision if I merely invite.

M.M.: If it goes 1♥, 2, Pass, 3, Pass, Pass, would a 3♠ bid show both spades and clubs? Why else would you fail to bid 2♠, but bid 3♠ next round? Or is this reasoning too far-fetched?

SWANSON: Double. Bidding a black suit immediately begs for a disaster, and an first-round pass will not leave me well placed no matter how the sequence develops. The plan is to remove a 2♥ rebid by partner to 3.

## Problem 5.

Both vul, IMPs  
You hold

♠AK65 ♥KJ108 K8 AK5

Playing a match in which your team trails by 30 IMPs with 16 boards to go. Nothing much has happened in the first eight of these final boards, and you hear your partner open 1, showing an unbalanced hand. You respond 1♥. Partner raises to 3♥, which your system defines as 11-15 HCP with four hearts and a singleton.

How do you plan to bid from this point on? And what do you hope for?

HAMILTON: 3♠. I am going to bid Keycard at some point, but it cannot hurt to

cuebid first. It is obviously six or seven, but let's see if pard will cue 4♦ or just go back to 4♥. If no 4♦ cue we might face ♠x ♥AQxx ♦AJxx ♣xxxx, or ♠x ♥AQxx ♦QJxxx ♣Qxx. (By the way, is a cuebid forced with ♦A, or could it be bypassed with a dead minimum?) If all the controls are present, I'll make a grand slam try with 6♣. Or if 4♦ showed a non-minimum, I might try seven after a KCB response showing two with the ♥Q. Bear in mind that if partner's hand is such a rag that his counterpart did not even open it, it's possible that 6♥ could be a pick-up!

SOULES: I bid 3♠, and hope to hear a diamond cuebid. If so, I just bid 5NT. I hope to get to 7♥, but he needs a lot of perfect cards. With 5-4 distribution there is no black card loser, but I need the ♥Q. He might have bid 4♦ over 1♥ to show 6-4, and then if he has ♥AQ and ♦A, the grand slam is pretty good. I just hope he was not dealt 4-4-4-1.

Give him ♠xxx ♥AQ9x and ♦AJxxx ♣x. Only a 5-1 diamond break beats you.

BENNETT: The state of the match does have an influence on your strategy – but not to the detriment of you playing your game well. Here is a hand that might swing a good portion of the 30 IMP deficit. I would bid to ask for key cards in hearts, and if the queen is missing then I might NOT bid the grand, hoping the opponents would bid it since they "know" we surely will be there since we are behind.

GRABEL: 4NT. If partner shows two key cards plus the queen, I bid 7♥. Partner shows at least nine cards in the reds so we have no black losers. Either a cross ruff or other possibilities will be in play. If partner doesn't show the queen, I would probably still bid 7♥. If they lead a trump I should have multiple plays and if they don't, I would play the opening leader for it, since trumps are led against grands so often. I go through Key Card so that the opening leader knows that I have all the info. If they are not looking at the queen, they will have no reason to think our side doesn't own it.

IVASKA: I'll just bid Blackwood and bid 7♥ if we are not off an ace. In response to the second part of the question, I'm hoping to be playing a more standard system in the consolation round so that I don't find myself down 30 IMPs at the next halftime. As for this deal itself, I guess I'm hoping that we're off the queen of hearts and that a trump lead, or the absence of one, will help to solve my guess. In general, I don't usually base decisions on my assessment of the state of the match, partly because I'm not that good at it and partly because I don't like to lose a match by doing something strange when my teammates have won it at the other table. In particular, and I hope that the Esteemed Moderator will forgive this remark, I can't help being a little dubious about his appraisal of the state of the match. In his nearly 81 years on this planet, he has seen more disasters than any 10 other players, with a few obvious exceptions. It may well be that, in the first eight boards there was a 530, a 990, and maybe even a 1100 that EM considered normal and more or less unavoidable. Anyway, I have assumed that this is not the case for the purpose of discussing this problem.

DAVIS: Ask for key cards. I hope we are off the ♥Q so that they will not bid 7♥, as I intend to do.

SWANSON: I am willing to take a shot at 7♥ if partner holds the red aces. Not asking for the heart queen is a good idea, increasing the chances of a favorable trump lead.

M.M.: When you bid 4NT, partner's response (5♥ or 5♠) will show whether or not he has the queen, so you don't need to ask further. Most players will assume that if you bid a grand slam (promptly!) the queen has been accounted for, and the safest opening lead is a trump if he has two or three small. So if he doesn't lead a trump you should play him for the queen. This was my teammate Stephen Goldstein's diabolical plot – a good effort, but it didn't work. The ironical fact is that his RHO had a void plus ♥Q9xx. He didn't double for an unusual lead for fear we would run to 7NT. If he had done so, and if we had run to 7NT, we would have made it (and won the match) since the void would show up early, and Stephen would play the opponent with a void in a side suit for length in hearts.