

Master Solvers Panel

By Marshall Miles
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Our June panelists are David Chechelashvili & Rick Roeder, District 22; (Editor's note: These San Diego area players were teammates of Marshall on D22's winning GNT team which will compete in the Las Vegas NABC championship.); Rose Meltzer-Kyle Larsen & JoAnna Stansby, District 21; Bobby Wolff & Ken Barbour, District 17; and guest panelist Eddie Kantar of District 23.

Problem 1.

North/South vulnerable, IMPs
As dealer, vulnerable, you hold

♠KQJ10854 ♥7 ♦void ♣KQ642

What call do you make --
(a) if not playing Namyats?
(b) if playing Namyats?

ROSE-KYLE: (a) and (b) 1♠. This is an opening one-bid no matter what system you're playing.

KEN: (a) and (b) 1♠. There is too much playing strength for a preempt, though with distributional hands like this, anything can work. Namyats is wrong, since partner would undoubtedly over-value the ♠A.

JOANNA: (a) and (b) 1♠. Owing the boss suit, there is no reason to do anything other than try to bid scientifically. If my spades were hearts instead, I would try a tactical 4NT (Blackwood) opening. There are too many playing tricks for Namyats.

DAVID: (a) 1♠; (b) 1♠. I believe there are two challenges when holding this hand. First is to investigate slam possibility; second is to preempt the opponents from finding a possible cheap save, or possibly a making contract of their own. I think it all comes down to which of those two challenges you give higher priority. If finding a slam has higher priority, then you should open 1♠; if preempting has higher priority, you should open 4♣. To me this is not a Namyats hand, since it does not help you more than 1♠ in finding the right slam, and it does not preempt as much as 4♣. I would start with 1♠ and jump shift to 3♣ if given a chance. If the opponents interfere, with partner passing, I would bid 4♣, and bid to 5♣ over an opponent's bid of 5♥ or 5♦.

EDDIE: I would start with 1♠ with this hand and play it by ear. I can't see making a strong opening bid without an ace.

RICK: Scientists will open 1♠, not realizing that it is not likely that this hand can be bid scientifically (especially after competition). Those who want to win the post-mortem will open 4♦. Practical souls will open 4♣, attempting to shut out the heart suit, and give up on certain cold slams. Color me practical. I will come again in spades if the opponents bid at the five level. As for my clubs, surprise!

BOBBY: (a) 1♠. It's just too strong for even a vulnerable 4♣ opening, and opening with a strong 2♣ should be restricted to when you are playing against wimps, since in most cases it loses its tactical advantages. (b) 4♦. I never liked Namyats till now. Back in the dawn of time my brother and I played an opening 2♦ bid which asked for specific controls, but we crossed it off our card, since the right hands never came up for that bid either.

Problem 2.

Neither vulnerable, matchpoints
As South, you hold

♠K8 ♥Q8 ♦KJ63 ♣109875

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

What call would you make?

BOBBY: Double (with pass as a substitute choice against conservative opponents.) Matchpoints makes for strange bedfellows. Here we are at the mercy of the bridge puppeteer.

EDDIE: Double. Partner seems to have hearts and spades, which make my diamond honors look pretty good. How many overtricks did they make?

JOANNA: Pass. I'm grateful partner was able to push them up one.

DAVID: Pass. I believe partner has weak spades and a full opening hand. Some people believe that it is better not to overcall with that type of hand to avoid a lead by partner of their weak suit.

I personally don't agree with that logic, but that's the only explanation I can find for partner's bidding. My second choice would be to double, but unless I am having a bad session and desperately need a top board, I would pass, expecting to get average plus anyway.

KEN: Pass. A most mysterious sequence. Yes, North is in a (sort of) balancing seat, but the opponents have shown no fit. I suppose he could have ♥AK, and good spades, expecting to double 1NT on round 2, but I'm not prepared to put money on that interpretation!

ROSE-KYLE: Pass, although at matchpoints it's tempting to bid 3♦ which might be the winning call. Of course, if they double and lead a trump?! Partner's spades aren't outstanding with no direct overcall over 1♥, but he may be something like ♠Qxxxx ♥xxxx ♦Axxx ♣void.

RICK: Partner has made an advance balance in a limited auction and could not even muster a 1♠ overcall. You should kiss partner for pushing the opponents to a 3-level contract that you have a good chance to beat. Since your defense against 3♣ is about 10 times greater than your defense against 3♥, any thoughts of doubling should be immediately dismissed. Yes, partner could easily have four hearts but what if not? Double is needlessly greedy and brutally punishes partner for what may have been an enterprising balance.

Anybody considering a 3♣ bid should also consider taking up Parcheesi.

M.M.: Most of the panelists passed, expressing puzzlement why partner would pass the first time and bid 2♠ the second. South's (my) hand was ♠Axxxx ♥xxxx ♦xxx ♣ void. I didn't think it was "our" hand and didn't want to encourage partner to compete to a high level or double the opponents, but usually the 2♥ bid would end the auction, and I wanted to push them a trick higher. Rick best expressed my probable reasons for bidding. Bidding here is fairly safe. West denied four spades, and East was unlikely to double "under" the bidder. Whether West can make 3♣ or not (actually he was cold for 3♣), you will probably get a better score defending 3♣ than you would defending 2♥ (cold for three and often making four). So you should be happy the opponents are in clubs, but it would be a mistake to double (changing a top to a bottom).

Problem 3.

North/South vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold

♠10962 ♥K1095 ♦AK9 ♣K2

East	South	West	North
3♦	Pass	Pass	Dbl
Pass	?		

What call would you make?

KEN: 3NT, thus maybe missing a slam for the second time this month. Five of a major may go set with bad splits, and if I cue-bid, I would be tempted to move on over partner's major-suit game bid. This is not as good a hand as it looks, with ♦AK not pulling full weight for a suit slam.

EDDIE: 3NT. Whichever major partner bids (if I bid 4♦) may be breaking obscenely. Why not just take the money and run?

BOBBY: 3NT. This will work out to be wrong only when we should be in a slam. A 4♦ cue bid will get us to our better major fit, but bad breaks could get us a minus result. It would be hard to imagine 3NT going set.

JOANNA: 3NT. It's unlikely that we can make 10 tricks in four of a major, but only eight tricks in notrump.

ROSE-KYLE: We go with 4♦. No pass, no 3NT. Partner will know it's our hand with the direct cue bid.

DAVID: 4♦, and then pass four of a major that partner bids.

M.M.: That might have been my choice at matchpoint scoring. Partner will usually have a four card major, and when he does, you will usually (but not always) score better in the major suit than in notrump. This time he held ♠AJx ♥Axx xx ♣AQxxx, and clubs split 4-2. Was it a mistake for him to double?

RICK: 4♦. Oh, I expect 3NT to make. However, my diamond stoppers represent transferable offensive values. If you catch partner with a big hand and you bid 3NT, he may mistakenly think there is some diamond wastage and not drive to slam when six of a major is cold.

M.M.: If we can make a slam, it won't be easy to bid, starting at the four level. You could be considerably weaker for your cue bid: ♠xxxx ♥Kxxx ♦x ♣KQxx.

Problem 4.

East/West vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold

♠K7543 ♥62 ♦8 ♣Q9754

East	South	West	North
1♥	?		

What call would you make?

(a) If you pass, LHO bids 4♥, and partner and opener passes; what call would you make?

(b) If the opponents are playing a strong club (16+) and sometimes open a four card major with a longer minor, how would that affect your answers to parts (a) and (b)?

EDDIE: I would pass 1♥ and pass 4♥ regardless.

RICK: (a) Pass initially. I like light Michaels bids, but not with these moth-eaten suits. (b) Keep passing. Partner could not double 4♦ with known heart shortness and knowing what the vulnerability is. They will often be able to make at least 11 tricks, so bidding the second time around will often give the opponents a "double shot."

Once you pass initially, it is consistent to pass the second time around. An underrated bridge adage:

"When fixed, stay fixed."

BOBBY: (a) 1♠. It's a bidder's game. (b) Pass. To guess to bid at this level is ridiculous, and anyone who does should have tried 1♠ or Michaels at his first turn.

DAVID: (a) 1♠. (b) Pass. (c) That would only affect my decision in (b) if I was a 1♠ bidder, I would pass, but since I passed anyway, that is not going to affect my bidding decision. I can understand a pass, but I don't understand Michaels with that hand. Get my weak hand into the fray.

ROSE-KYLE: (a) 2♥. Get Michaels in early. (b) 4♣, which shows two places to play in our system.

(c) We still bid Michaels.

KEN: (a) 2♥. This is textbook Michaels – at least with favorable vulnerability. (b) Pass. To bid here is ridiculous. (Was this an appeals case? It seems familiar). You have no clue about the hand. They may go down, they may have missed a slam.

(c) No change to prior answers.

JOANNA: (a) 2♥, Michaels. I want to encourage a save if partner fits spades. (b) Pass! (c) No change from previous tactics.

M.M.: My partner passed over 1♥ and bid 4♣ over 4♥. I happened to hold AQJxx of spades and the king of clubs. We gained 11 IMPs (-50), but I thought his action was extremely dangerous, especially playing a pair whose one bids were limited. I probably would have passed throughout with his hand, but am now convinced an overcall of 1♠ is better. I play that a Michaels bid shows a good offensive hand and encourages partner to compete even at the three or four level with a fit for either suit, possibly with just three cards in the major. I would rather partner play me for sounder minimum values for the cue bid (which forces us to a higher level) than for a one level overcall, which can have a very wide range of strength.

Problem 5.

Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	East
♠AQ9653	♠84
♥K6	♥42
♦AK7	♦10963
♣A6	♣KQJ42

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

(a) Apportion the blame for missing game.
(b) How do you think the uncontested bidding should go?

(Give a complete sequence).

ROSE-KYLE: A lot of the blame goes to West for not opening 2♣: 20 HCP and a 6-card suit can make a game opposite very

little. Give partner ♠Jx ♥QJx ♦xx ♣xxxxxx and the odds are pretty good. But East's bidding (or lack of it) is even worse. The ♣J makes this a mandatory response to an opening bid, even if you're not playing forcing NT. We would assess the blame at 40% for West, and 60% for East's pass over 1♠. We bid the hand 2♣, 2♦, 2♠*, 3♣**, 3NT, 4♣. (2♠* usually guarantees a 6-card suit, as we bid NT with all balanced hands. This auction shows a 6-3-2-2 distribution. 3♣** could be a second negative.

BOBBY: (a) West 0%, East 60%. East's pass is not completely unreasonable, since 1NT will often lead to a minus score.

I think opening 2NT is too much of a distortion, although on this hand it would have been the winning action. I suggest the auction of 1♠, 1NT, 3NT.

JOANNA: West ought to open 2♣ with no good rebid after a 1NT response, but East gets 90% of the blame for his eccentric pass. My auction would be 2♣, 2♦, 2♠, 2N, 3♣, 4♣, Pass.

KEN: (a) This is a marginal game at matchpoints. (3NT by W. is best, but who would ever open the West hand 2NT?). [M.M.: I would!] The blame, if such there is, goes 100% to East, who has a normal 1NT response. (b) The best sequence is: 1♠, 1NT, 3♦, 3♣, 4♣, 4♠, Pass.

DAVID: (a) It is a matter of style, first whether to open the hand with 1♠ or 2♣, and second, whether to pass or respond with the East hand. I think the blame goes equally to both, because obviously they failed to discuss each other's styles. My personal preference is to open 1♠ with West's hand, and to respond 1NT with East's hand. My major reason for opening 1♠ rather than 2♣ is that the suit is too weak to rebid it twice after opening 2♣.

If you open 1♠, you will have no problem with jump shifting to 3♦, and either passing 3NT, or bidding 4♣, depending on what partner does. If you open 2♣ and bid 2♠ over a 2♦ response, your next bid is problematic unless partner raises spades.

Bidding 3♣ should promise a better suit. (b) 1♠, 1NT, 3♦, 3♣ (waiting, shows tolerance in spades), 4♠.

EDDIE: (a) I think West should open 2♣ - but East should respond if West opens 1♠, so I make it 50-50. (b) 1♠, 1NT, 3NT. Shows six spades, balanced. I guess East should correct to 4♠.

Or 2♣, 3♣, 3♠, 4♣, 6♣. I hate this sequence, but the way I play, if responder raises to 4♣, that is forcing.

RICK: (a) East 100%. (b) In Standard American, the auction should go 1♠ 1NT, 3♦, 4♦, (temporizing with 3♠ is 70%), 4♠, Pass. This hand illustrates one of the gaps in Standard American bidding that can be easily remedied: Over a 1NT response, 2NT by opener should be artificial and game forcing. Responder can "punt" with 3♣ to allow opener to complete his description, show hearts via transfer bids, and better define types of spade support as well as other cool stuff. This also means that jump shifts by opener are at least 5-5 and show invitational values. The standard treatment of 2NT is not an absolute necessity. Joe Kivel was one of California's earliest advocates of this approach.

Using 2NT forcing, the action could go 1♠, 1NT, 2NT, 3♣, 3♠, 4♠.

M.M.: It is ironical that with the same high cards and 4-3-3-3 distribution, everyone would open 2NT, but with two extra spades (which make the hand better, not worse) the popular choice is 1♠! Opposite Kx of spades and nothing else, you are almost as likely to make an overtrick (with a heart lead) as to make an undertrick. Another factor: Unless responder has a very good hand, probably 12 points or more, responder, if he bids, will probably bid 1NT, so now if you play 3NT (a very likely contract), it will be played from the wrong side. Either a 2NT or 2♣ bid will probably allow the strong hand to be declarer. Most players keep the bidding open with any six points. At rubber bridge or IMPs, this may be a good idea, since games pay more. At matchpoints the question is whether keeping the bidding open will cause partner to get to a better or worse contract. Will he jump to 3♣, for down one since he can't use your hand, or will he get to a good game, perhaps in a minor? Unless opener has a very good hand and at least two clubs, your hand may be worthless.