

March 2008 Master Problem Solvers

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Our panelists are Irv Kostal and Grant Baze, District 22; Fred Hamilton and Jan Janitschke, District 17; Kit Woolsey and Bob Etter, District 21; and Mike Lawrence, guest panelist at large from Tennessee.

Problem 1.

Both vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold:

10753 AQJ43 6 Q62

North	East	South	West
1	Pass	1	Pass
2	Pass	?	

What call do you make?

KOSTAL: A difficult auction in Standard. Does North have 11 points, 15? 18? Since I have 9, I guess I ought to keep it open for one more round. No bid is in any sense "right" but I'll try 2 . 3 is a possibility, though I don't like it much. Passing may be best, but seems too conservative.

HAMILTON: 2 . Game is still possible if opener has a third bid, so although 2 might be our last plus, the game bonus says bid. To me this is clearcut! Both 3 and 2NT are more flawed than 2 .

LAWRENCE: 2 . Odd to rebid a five card suit, but in this case we should not face a forcing defense. I can make quite a few games if North cares to continue. I'm hoping for a raise, which I will accept. Otherwise, I would have passed 2 .

JANITSCHKE: 2 . Not ideal, but pass is too conservative and unilateral, and I don't want to bid 2NT and wrong-side it. Raising to 3 is just weird.

WOOLSEY: 3 . This is a classic dilemma in Standard. You would like to pass, but partner may be strong enough to gin a game. 2 doesn't accomplish anything. 2NT and 3 are both overbids, but I choose the latter, as it is less encouraging than 2NT and probably more likely to make than 2NT if North has a minimum and would pass either. Now if we belong in notrump, North will be bidding 3NT or 3 .

ETTER: 3 . Pass is probably best more times than bidding anything at all, but we are vulnerable at IMPs, so it seems wrong to chance missing a game. The possible bids are 2 , 2NT, and 3 . I don't have quite enough strength (or a spade stopper) for 2NT. Partner will often have a singleton heart: thus 2 may be doomed to failure when partner has minimum values. The flaw with my bid is I am missing a club. But if partner has to pass, we are favorites.

BAZE: Pass. Not enough high cards for 2NT, especially given the tenuous spade stop and no fit. My hearts are not quite good enough to rebid 2 .

M.M.: At the table Grant's pass was the big winner. And I concur: are your game prospects good enough to choose the slightly riskier partscore? Mike bids game if partner raises hearts, but the others don't specify.

Problem 2.

Both vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold:

A102 AKQ752 85 84

East	South	West	North
1NT* Pass	2	Pass	
2	Pass	3NT	(All Pass)

*14-16

What is your opening lead?

JANITSCHKE: Small heart. Pard could have the jack (stiff or doubleton). Or, maybe declarer doesn't have eight minor suit cashers.

BAZE: Low heart. Partner may have the jack; in any case it is absurd to look for a different lead.

ETTER: 5. I admit that I would have bid over 1NT, but now I have the advantage that declarer has no idea my hand looks like this. Partner probably has at most two jacks or a

queen ... and maybe not even that. The J could be the only honor in partner's hand. Thus, it has to be wrong to lead high. I choose the five-spot, since the deuce is too suspicious on this auction, and the seven-spot is too revealing.

KOSTAL: 2. Perhaps I can lull declarer into a false sense of security, perhaps partner has the jack (it seems like he can't have much more than that!). If he has eight tricks in clubs and hearts I may be presenting him with his 9th, but probably I couldn't have beaten the contract anyway.

HAMILTON: A low heart, of course. How else are you going to beat it? Pard might have stiff jack or even Jx. If not, perhaps declarer will need a spade trick, and then I can run the hearts.

LAWRENCE: Small heart. They have enough values that 3NT rates to make if given time. This won't always be best, but it wins in the event partner has the jack. Could be right to lead a high one, hoping dummy has stiff jack and partner the 10x.

WOOLSEY: 7. This could give declarer nine tricks, but if I don't lead a heart he can probably knock out my ace of spades and have nine tricks anyway. On a low heart lead, declarer might not have eight tricks in the minors, or partner might produce the J. And if partner does win the heart trick, he should have no trouble reading my lead as suit-preference.

Problem 3.

Both vulnerable, matchpoints
You, South, hold:

54 AQ4 AK109 AKQ4

East	South	West	North
2	Double	Pass	2NT*
Pass	?		

*Lebensohl

What call do you make?

BAZE: 3 . I have too much to bid 3 , so I will drive to the four-level (or 3NT - I will pass four of either minor). Sometimes you bid game with no real conviction.

JANITSCHKE: 3 . Hopefully I will catch partner with a 3-6 count. Those who bid 3 instead will play it there opposite, say, K10xx Jxx x 10xxxx.

LAWRENCE: 3 , asking for a stopper. What partner does without a stopper will be interesting.

HAMILTON: 3 , asking for a stopper. I cannot think of any other sane bid. I certainly cannot afford to honor pard's request for 3 . Pard may have some other suit to signoff in, and that will get raised (unless it is 4 which I will be delighted to pass). Perhaps we should pass four of a minor also, but partner may have a little something like K, Q and some shape, who knows? I plan to get to game and doubt it will be doubled even if it does not make.

The fact it is matchpoints makes passing four of a minor more attractive, and I could be convinced that this is right. However, I would never pass four of a minor at IMPs with this much hand.

ETTER: 3 . I cannot imagine doing anything else, though I am sure many will. I won't bid 3 for fear partner will pass, and I cannot bid 3 or 3 since I don't have five of either. I won't bid 3NT with no spade stop. Partner will surely bid notrump with a stopper, which is what I want. And partner will bid something else over 3 without a stopper, which is also what I want. I may have to make a decision to bid game over what partner bids, but partner may bid game anyway.

KOSTAL: 3 appears to be the only option, unless I want to just shoot out 3NT. If he bids 3NT I'll just hope he has a few bits and pieces that will let the contract make. If he bids 4 or 4 I'll have a decision to make, but I'll probably raise.

WOOLSEY: 3NT. This doesn't change the original meaning of my takeout double. North will know that I have other strains in mind, and hopefully will act accordingly. The problem with bidding 3 is that it isn't clear that this asks for a spade stopper - it may be bid on a big distributional hand where South needs to find North's suit.

Problem 4.

You, South, hold:

K962 Q62 1097 Q76

North	East	South	West
1	2	Pass	Pass
Double	Pass	?	

What call do you make?

WOOLSEY: 2 . Seems straightforward. Why can't partner be 4-4-4-1, with whatever strength?

LAWRENCE: 2 . This is a good enough hand that you would like more bidding. You are more likely to get that if you bid 2 than if you bid 2 .

HAMILTON: 2 . Although 2 might make and 2 not, one cannot be sure of that (pard could be 4-4-3-2, 4-4-4-1). The main point to 2 is that if we get raised we should have game, with two good cards in the majors. Yes, I keep trying to make bids that will get us to game if we have one. And you should too.

BAZE: 2 . This is more progressive than 2 , and more likely to get us to game if we have one. Not enough to jump to anything, given the useless club queen and terrible hand pattern.

ETTER: 2 . After all, partner may have only three diamonds (4-4-3-2 distribution). Again, I don't see how anyone could bid anything else.

JANITSCHKE: 2 . Perhaps partner has QJxx AJ10x AKQx x rather than Kx KQxx AJxxx Ax, or even worse. I feel there is no good solution here, just a guess. 2 is acceptable also.

KOSTAL: 2 seems best. Partner is likely to be 4-4-4-1, (4-3)4-2, or (4-3)5-1. From LHO's failure to find a club raise I lean toward the more balanced hand. The 4-3 shouldn't play too badly, and there's no guarantee that 2 is better. I fleetingly thought of passing (couldn't partner have 18-19?), but that's too big a position for me. Still, more problems with the wide range openings of standard bidding.

M.M.: I think the 2 bid is best here. Since opener will reopen with a double almost any time he is short in the overcalled suit, I am not worried about missing game with my balanced hand, with no sure fit of any kind and five working points. I hardly expect my queen of clubs to be worth much. I just hope for a plus score. My main concern is to find an eight card trump fit, if there is one. Partner doesn't have to hold four of each unbid major. He may hold 3-3-5-2, 3-4-5-1, 3-4-4-2, etc. I don't know which is more likely, a 4-4 spade fit or a 5-3 diamond fit. But we still have a chance to get to spades if I bid 2 . Partner may have a very strong hand and bid again. And if he holds 4-4-4-1 distribution, even with a minimum of high cards, I think he should bid 2 . He is assuming from the opponents' failure to bid more strongly that I have SOMETHING, (but not enough strength to cue bid and force him to show a four card major at the three level if he has one). So, with four card diamond support, I probably would have raised to 2 last round. With 4-4-4-1 distribution (and two chances to find a better contract than 2 , (not to mention getting to game if he has a strong hand), I think partner would find another bid. As is often the case, not everyone agrees with me, but I am used to that.

Problem 5.

Both vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold:

KJ854 — A74 109852

South	West	North	East
Pass	1	Pass	3 *

*(limit raise in hearts)

What call do you make?

JANITSCHKE: 3 . A little loose, but we could have a game opposite something like Qxxx Jxxx KJx KJ. I assume 3 showed 4+ hearts.

BAZE: 3 . I can take a chance with this

hand ... or I can pass. I choose to act for three reasons: (1) this will be my only chance; (2) if I am wrong I may get away with it; and (3) if we defend I have suggested a spade lead.

HAMILTON: 3 , Michaels. I once held a hand somewhat similar, with AKxxx and perhaps Q-5th of a minor. My 3 got doubled, down three (with 4-2 trumps and every card wrong. Worse, they could not make 4 ! And bidding 3 on this suit would be far more dangerous than on AK-fifth. Having said that, I admit one could pass, but I can't believe that is the percentage action when they have a 9+ card fit. It must be profitable in the long run to bid, since we could have a great save ... or even a 4 game. If we pass, that is long gone.

WOOLSEY: 3 . Get my cheap Michaels in now. If I had takeout double shape I would either double 3 (if my agreements were that this showed a takeout double of hearts), or pass and double 3 or 4 later.

KOSTAL: 3 . While it looks dangerous, partner doesn't rate to have more than four hearts and frequently will have only three. When our hands don't fit well, we're only at 3 or 4 , with opponents that may bid 4 rather than double. When the hands do fit well, the upside is enormous, either a good save or even a making game.

LAWRENCE: 3 , showing spades and clubs. With spades and diamonds, you would double 3 and then bid 3 if possible.

ETTER: Pass. Call me a chicken, but this is the closest problem in the set for me. If I bid, I would try 3 (rather than bidding 3 for takeout). Since I am a passed hand, partner should recognize that I am distributional with only five spades and another suit that I'm not proud of. But there are two possible negative consequences from such a bid: (1) I may go for a bigger number than they can make. (2) If they buy the hand, declarer will correctly make any heart (or other) guess if there is one.

There also are two possible positive consequences from bidding 3 : (1) Partner will get off to the right lead. (2) It may be correct for us to buy the contract.

M.M.: This time it seems I have no support whatsoever, although Bob, who passes, at least considered my choice . I think 3 is the percentage bid. How often do the opponents double you in a partscore when they know they have at least a nine-card fit? Surely they don't think they can score better defending against 3 than they would if they could make 4 ! The only time they will double is when they were planning to reject the limit raise, or perhaps when opener forgot to open 2 (since all "experts" play Flannery). If nothing else, the 3 bid may get partner off to the best opening lead. With the right sort of hand, partner may take a cheap sacrifice over 4 . He may even double with a stack in trumps and shortage in spades. O.K., I was joking when I said all experts play Flannery, but what are the chances that West will have a spade stack and/or that West will elect not to bid 4 ? By the way, I don't see the point in showing a two-suiter. It is extremely unlikely we belong in five of a minor, and we don't want a club lead ... say, from Kx. (Besides, the 3 bid logically has to infer another possible strain. Why didn't I open 2 or 3 ?) Also, in matchpoints it would be more dangerous to bid 3 if West signs off in 3 than to bid it right away. The opponents know they will get a very bad score if you can take nine tricks for +140, so they have little to lose, and much to gain, by doubling (if they aren't going to bid game).