

May 2008 Master Solvers Panel

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This month's panelists are Jan Janitschke & Josh Donn, District 17; Bob Etter & Harvey Brody, District 21; John Strauch & Jon Wittes, District 22; and Eddie Kantar, guest panelist from District 23.

Problem 1.

Neither vul, matchpoints
You, South, hold

5 AJ96 KQ4 KQJ102

East	South	West	North
2	?		

What call do you make?

KANTAR: 3 . Let him get his 3 bid out of his system so I can bid 3NT.

STRAUCH: 3 . Too much chance partner will insist on spades if you bid 2NT.

DONN: 3 . There is nothing partner can do over this bid to upset me. I can raise 3 or bid 3NT over 3 or 3 . Most of the time if we have game partner will be able to move for me; overcalling at the three level doesn't show peanuts. I think 2NT is too likely to get me to a bad spade contract for no good reason, or to a notrump contract with spades inadequately held. 3NT could work, but it's a really wild bid. Even if they lead a heart instead of a killing spade, they will have time to find the switch later unless partner is kind enough to provide me with a minor suit ace and a spade stopper. 3 is also the toughest of the bids to double if LHO is looking at a nice hand.

Anything could work, but I don't want to get too creative at matchpoints on what looks like a normal auction to this point.

ETTER: 3 . I have a good hand, a good suit, and length in RHO's suit (a good sign for bidding). My singleton spade keeps me from bidding 2NT.

BRODY: 2NT. This seems to be the most likely way to get to game, even though you may get into trouble.

WITTES: 2NT. This is a difficult problem with no perfect solution. 3 seems inadequate. I could pass and hope partner will reopen with a double, but that is unlikely, given my extra values. If partner transfers to spades over my 2NT, I will bid 3NT.

JANITSCHKE: 2NT. This makes it easy to get to 3NT if partner has something like K10xxx xx AJxx xx.

M.M.: The panel is split fairly closely on this, so I had a friend run a computer simulation which indicated that ... with double dummy defense ... 3NT will make slightly less than 50% of the time. However, as a practical matter (usually without a spade lead) it will make about 54% of the time. So it's a very close question what the best call would be. I'm inclined toward bidding 3 since sometimes you can still get to 3NT.

Also, when you can't make game, 3 will usually be the best part-score.

Problem 2.

North-South vulnerable, matchpoints
You, South, hold

Q52 752 KQ QJ953

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

What call do you make?

JANITSCHKE: 4 . Sets the trump suit, and if partner can cue-bid a singleton (or void) heart, then we may get to a cold slam.

KANTAR: 4 . Well, he doesn't have solid diamonds, looking for a heart stopper, and if we are playing a double of 2 is penalty, he can't double for takeout.

So I have decided to bid my time to see where all of this is leading.

BRODY: 4 (which I consider forcing). When I find out what type of hand partner has, I will bid more.

STRAUCH: 3 . Tough problem. My guess is that partner has an 18-19 point notrump with no heart stopper. He could easily have two or three small hearts.

On the other hand, you have prime values

outside of hearts, so you want to get to game at the very least, probably in your best minor, but possibly in spades. 4 is a "nothing" bid, and I don't really want to cue bid hearts without a control.

ETTER: 5 . Partner's bid shows one of three types of hands: solid diamonds, hoping I can bid 3NT, or a big balanced hand with no heart stopper, or a great hand with heart shortness. Since my diamond holding rules out the first possibility, and since I have a good hand also, I cannot make a minimal bid. I suppose the choices are 4 , 4NT, and 5 , and since I don't know how partner will interpret the first two, I choose 5 and hope partner can make the right decision over that: from passing all the way to a grand slam!

DONN: 4NT. Partner's 3 bid should be based on either primarily diamonds or 18-19 balanced without hearts well held. With spades or clubs he should just bid his other suit rather than confuse the issue. My main concern at this point is locating the proper minor to play in, and 4NT should be asking partner to choose in case he has the balanced hand. Partner will probably assume I have three diamonds for him, but KQ doubleton may be at least as good, and my clubs don't warrant a 4 bid. No worry about 4NT being interpreted as Blackwood - that would be a joke after I have made a limiting 1NT bid and partner's hand type hasn't yet been defined.

WITTES: 4 . I could not possibly have a better hand on this auction. If partner has a heart control (which he rates to have since his diamond suit is broken so he doesn't have a source of tricks for his 3 bid), we are surely in the slam range. It does seem unusual that hearts were not raised on my left at this vulnerability. I suppose West could have a seven bagger, but if that's the case, he might have preempted. East might also be too flat and too broke to raise to the four level.

M.M.: Partner actually held Axx x AJ10xxx AKx. He intended, if his partner bid 3NT, to bid 4 to show a strong hand with a broken diamond suit and suggest a possible club contract if partner had club length. But one important question is whether a 4 bid should be forcing, as Jan, Eddie and Harvey apparently assumed, but John describes as a "nothing" bid. The table result shows the problem:

My partner bid 4 with this hand, and I passed, thinking he might hold something like Qxx Qxx xx QJxxx. I would have bid 5 with partner's hand as Bob did, but that doesn't necessarily get us to six. Normally one does not cue bid and pass partner's next bid short of game; but in competition, no major fit, and crowded bidding, should the normal rules apply? Partner knows, from his diamond holding, that you have a good all-around hand—not a solid diamond suit, needing only a heart stopper for 3NT.

Josh's 4NT bid also looks logical to me, as offering a choice of minors.

Problem 3.

Both vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold

AKJ8 97 10 AKQJ62

South	West	North	East
1	Pass	Pass	1
?			

What call do you make?

WITTES: 1 . If spades are raised, I'll bid game. If not, I'll rebid clubs at my next opportunity.

ETTER: 1 . I feel that 2 should be reserved for a 6-5 hand or a slightly better hand, still short of a 2 opener (maybe

AKQ10). I would like to get to bid 2 at next turn, indicating interest in 3NT, but I may not get that chance. 2 now could be right for the same reason, but I feel that I should show my spades.

Bear in mind that the final contract may be 1 at the other table. Minus 400 in 3NT wouldn't score very well against that.

STRAUCH: 1 . I will later compete in clubs, to the four-level if necessary.

JANITSCHKE: Double. I'd rather risk having to pull partner's diamond bid back to clubs and maybe get a trick too high, than bid 1 or 2 and have him pass me with three cards in spades and one or two in clubs.

BRODY: Double. This shows the value of your hand, and you can handle all partner's responses.

KANTAR: 2 . A slam dunk.

DONN: 2 . This should be a unanimous vote. Q10xx of spades and out is game so I can hardly do less, and the time is convenient to introduce that suit. If partner doesn't like spades then how bad can 3 be?

Double would just be wasting my turn; it's completely off point. A continuation like 2 , 3 , Pass, would get me a level higher in clubs for no good reason, and why shouldn't partner compete with xxx xxx KJxxx xx in what he expects to be a fit?

M.M.: Will partner raise 1 with Qxxx xxx xxx xxx? I doubt it. But even if partner will raise to 2 with any four card holding, I still don't like it. Nor do I like a double. The opponents have lots of high cards and lots of distribution. If you bid either 1 or double, and the next hand bids 2 , 3 or 4 , do you expect partner to bid anything with something like Qxxx and a red suit queen?

When you can anticipate competition, I think it pays to show whether you are competing for the part-score or still think game is likely. Therefore I am in the same camp as the last two panelists on this one.

Problem 4.

East-West vulnerable, IMPs

	North		
	AKJ5		
	A74		
	2		
	KQJ75		
West		East	
Q9762		1083	
106		K952	
AQ107		543	
73		A82	
	South		
	4		
	QJ83		
	KJ986		
	1064		

North	East	South	West
1	Pass	1	Pass
2	Pass	2NT	Pass
3	Pass	3NT	(all Pass)

Opening lead: 6

- 6 A 3 4
- 5 2 10 7
- 4 3 J 8
- K A 6 2
- 5 J Q 6
- 7 J 8 6
- 4 2 Q 6

Claiming nine tricks. Apportion the fault.

STRAUCH: West 70%. He should have worked out the distribution and diamond position, and therefore switched to a high heart. East could be right to duck if South had Q-10 and the A, but it seems odds against.

ETTER: West 80%. Many will blame East for ducking the K at the "crucial" point in the hand, but that's influenced by having seen all four hands. Declarer might have held a totally different hand from the one given - i.e., Q1083 and KJ1076. The only way to beat that hand is to duck at trick 7 and hope South misguesses hearts. West should have reasoned after winning

Q that declarer will take the spade finesse (if needed) if a second spade is led, and so if declarer has the K, there are nine tricks available. (Declarer will guess hearts anyway with KJxx since I have the 10). So West needs East to hold the K (or the QJ when declarer has a stiff spade). So the 10 is required from West at trick 6. East gets 20% for not being as good as Garozzo and rising with the king of hearts at trick 7.

JANITSCHKE: West 80%. West apparently read the diamond position properly, so he should have known that his partner needs the K to set the hand, and thus he should have led the 10 at trick 6. From East's point of view, flying with the K could have been wrong if West had held Jx or Qx and South the A.

BRODY: West 100%. West should know that if declarer has K, he has nine tricks. Therefore it's West's job to switch to 10, so that East will win and continue diamonds to beat the hand.

DONN: 100% West. East correctly gave count on the opening lead when he couldn't beat the jack in dummy, so West was asleep at the switch by not playing a heart back. A spade could never be superior to a heart in terms of chances to set the contract, plus East wouldn't have had a chance to duck the heart later. East's duck of the heart was fine. If South had the same shape but with J and 8 switched for the 10 and 10, then East has to duck the heart to give the defense a chance. This is a very plausible layout too, since then West would have good reason to stay off a heart return.

I don't see any way East could have worked out that was going on, since West should always have played a heart back from his actual hand.

KANTAR: This is a toughie. West might have broken with tradition and given suit preference rather than count in clubs to emphasize the diamond strength. As for East, it is right for East to duck if South has the

KJ10 with any heart holding. It is right to go up if South does not have the 10. I don't blame anybody.

M.M.: Why shouldn't West lead a heart to force East to take his king (if he has it) since West has the 10?

WITTES: East 100%. East can surely see that if South wins the heart, he has nine tricks. The only chance the defense has is to rise with the heart king and hope partner has the A10 left. An additional indication is that partner's first discard was the 2, which should imply a good diamond holding since he could discard a higher spade if he had no strong preference.

M.M.: Would West encourage with AQ10 of diamonds, but discourage with AQ9? I agree with the five panelists who faulted West more than East ... perhaps because I WAS East, and ducked for the reasons they stated.

Problem 5.

Both vulnerable, matchpoints
You, South hold

10754 - QJ106 QJ752

North	East	South	West
1	1	?	

What call do you make?

KANTAR: Pass. I hate this hand.

DONN: Pass. The most obvious consequence of making a negative double would be to find partner rebidding hearts. Considering that I have negative offense for him in hearts, I want to get out while the getting is good. If it continues 2 , Pass, Pass, I will infer a fit (or pray for one anyway) and be in there with 2NT, for a choice of minors. If partner simply passes out 1 then I think we are right where we want to be, which is defending in our own likely seven card fit.

If partner balances with 2 I probably still gained, since that means he likely would have rebid 3 had I made a negative double.

WITTES: Pass. I do not like this hand with a heart void. If I double and partner jumps in hearts, he will not be happy at all with this dummy.

JANITSCHKE: Pass. Yes, of course I could make a negative double ... but you would have to promise me partner won't rebid hearts!

BRODY: Pass. It's too dangerous to bid at this point. Why not let the opponents get into trouble instead of us?

STRAUCH: Pass. Double could work out, but I'd be afraid that partner would be bidding too many hearts. He still may over my pass.

ETTER: Double. I have enough points to bid, length in the unbid suits, and no real spade stopper. If partner is 3-3 in minors and chooses to bid one of them, he will probably bid clubs, which is good. (As an aside, once Eric Rodwell bid notrump twice (!) on the same spade holding against me on a similar auction ... when Meckstroth had never bid at all ... and he landed on his feet. I guess I'm not good enough to do that!)