

Master Solvers Panel

By Marshall Miles
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Our January panelists are Joe Kivel and Jason Feldman, District 22; Hamish Bennett and Ron Smith, District 21; Marinesa Letizia and Dennis Dawson, District 17; and Jill Meyers, guest panelist from District 23.

Problem 1.

IMPs, neither vulnerable
You are playing Precision

As South you hold

KJ1076 A6 K6 AK54

South	West	North	East
1 *	Pass	2 **	Pass
?*16+ HCP **natural, 5+, forcing to game			

What call do you make?

DAWSON: 4♦, RKC for clubs. Will bid 7♣ if pard has two key cards with the ♠Q, 6♣ if he has two key cards without the ♠Q, and 4NT over 4♣ (showing one key card) to ask for the ♠Q. Will bid 6♣ if he has it and pass 5♣ if he doesn't. If he has no key cards I will throw up! This is very unlikely - in that case it probably would have been better to play in spades.

SMITH: 2♠. I'm not sure of the asking bids in Precision, but if I knew how they work I could use one of them to get the number of controls and quality of clubs. Since I assume we don't have a special structure available, the number and quality of partner's spades is also important in a club contract.

BENNETT: 2♠. There are three possible bids: set trump by bidding 3♣; protect my kings by bidding 2NT; or, bid naturally showing my five card suit. Since we haven't discussed any special gadgets here, I opt for bidding my 5-card major.

FELDMAN: 2♠. I want partner to upgrade the ♠Q, and bring him in on the decision. I may get to keycard for spades and find out about the queen this way also.

This bid will also elicit the most information about partner's hand and saves room, as it is cheaper than 3♣.

KIVEL: 2♠. Slam is virtually certain, and a grand is possible. The question is whether 3♣ or 2♠ can get us the most useful information. I think 2♠ is better, especially if partner raises. If I bid 3♣, and partner bids 3NT, now what?

JILL: 3 . I am showing support now, and then I am going to Blackwood for clubs.

MARINESA: 3♣. Set the trump suit first, make other moves later.

M.M.: I come the closest to agreeing with the two ladies' brief answers. If I was forced to make only one bid, it would be 6 . Of course, if we are missing two aces (which is very unlikely), we should stop in 5 . But I am not interested in playing in spades or notrump at IMPs. Even if partner has spade support (Axxx, Axx, or even Ax), I'd rather play in clubs. If I don't bid spades, LHO may lead a spade, especially a singleton, sparing me the guess about the queen, and if he leads something else, I may find out how many spades he has by playing my other suits first.

The disadvantage of bidding spades is that if I bid clubs later (especially after a spade raise), partner will expect me to have something like Axx or Ax and not think I really want to play clubs. With a good hand, partner is not likely to show a club suit with five small or five to the jack, so there should be no club losers if he has the queen or a six card suit, so slam should be laydown or on a finesse at worst. if you bid spades and partner has a singleton (x Qxx AQx Jxxxx), he may take a pessimistic view because of the apparent misfit plus a weak suit opposite a delayed raise. I like Dennis' Blackwood bid (would 1 2 , 2 2NT/3 3 , 4NT be Blackwood for spades, partner's red suit, or clubs? Ideally 4 or 4 over 2 (whichever you agree on) should be Blackwood for clubs since it gives you the opportunity to invite a grand slam without forcing the bidding past 6 when partner lacks sufficient extra values. By the way, when I held this hand, I did bid 2 , resulting in 5 , down one, when we were cold for 6 .

Problem 2.

Matchpoints, both vulnerable
You, South, hold

KJ52 5 Q943 Q763

West	North	East	South
1	1	Pass	?

What call do you make?

MARINESA: 1NT. Nothing's perfect.
KIVEL: 1NT . What other choice is there? Pass is unilateral, and will probably end the auction - right or wrong.

BENNETT: 1NT. If I pass, it will be easy for opener to double and have East pass for penalty with a good heart stack. Of course, if partner is really out-of-line, 1NT may go for numbers too.

JILL: 1NT, but I don't argue with a pass.
SMITH: Pass. Partner doesn't have to have a big hand. And even if he does, he needs a second suit to produce much here. Maybe they'll reopen and land in a bad spot.

FELDMAN: 1♠. This could pay off big if we find a fit, in which case the hand will play better than 1NT. And when it's right to play 1NT partner will often bid it. I am passing anything partner bids (besides 2♦).

DAWSON: 1♠. I think this hand will play better in a suit than in 1NT if we find a fit. 1♠ starts the search. 1NT second choice.

M.M.: What if he passes 1 with 10x AQJxx xxx KJx or Qx AJxxxx xx Kxx, thinking you have five? Or should he rebid his heart suit?

Maybe 1 is the percentage bid, but I think there is more than one way that bad things could happen.

Problem 3.

IMPs, both vulnerable
You, South, hold

Q106532 K3 K654 7

North	East	South	West
1	Pass	1	Pass
2	Pass	?	

MARINESA: Pass.

BENNETT: Pass. Partner can be very short in spades, and my two kings will be valuable in a club contract.

FELDMAN: Pass, unless I'm playing with someone who hardly ever raises with three card support ... in which case I bid 2♣.

DAWSON: 2♠. Game is still possible as 2♠ has a fairly wide range. Also spades may be a better part score than clubs.

KIVEL: 2♠. The only other choice is pass. Partner's spades rate to be better than my clubs, and he may even have a modest fit. If not, I'm not ashamed of my hand if he bids 3♣ or a constructive 2NT.

SMITH: 2♠. Since game is possible if partner fits spades, I'll give it another chance.

JILL: 2 . It is perfectly reasonable to pass, but if partner has a max with a ruffing value and doubleton spade honor, we have a chance of game.

M.M. But if we need (a) a max, and (b) a doubleton spade honor, and (c) a ruffing value to have a CHANCE for game, should we try for it?

Problem 4.

Matchpoints, North-South vulnerable

East	South	West	North
2	Dbl	4	4
Pass	?		

(a) What call do you make with
A954 — Q43 AKJ874

(b) What call would you make if West had bid 3 and partner had bid 4 ?

DAWSON: (a) 6♣. This is somewhere between cold and having no play! There is no good way to find out if pard has good spades, not to mention a diamond control. This may make even if he doesn't have a diamond control if they lead a heart and he has good spades.

(b) 6♣, but with more conviction.
FELDMAN: (a) 5♥. I will let partner out at 5♣. (b) Also, 5♥, but in this case I won't pass a signoff. My only worry about this bid is that partner might sign off slowly. So with some partners, I would be forced to just bid 6♣ directly.

MARINESA: 5♣ in both (a) and (b). In either case, a slam move is called for.

M.M. Marinesa's choice raises an interesting question for the reader to answer: In your partnerships, have you discussed whether 5 here is a cue bid for spades or a suggestion to play 5 ?

BENNETT: (a) Pass. Partner never has perfect cards on these preemptive auctions, and trump may divide badly for our side. (b) Now I will bid 5♣ and if partner shows interest by bidding 5♦, I will show my void in hearts.

KIVEL: (a) Pass. Don't hang partner for bidding. He should bid 4♣ on any hand with five or more spades, and easily could hold a hand similar to that shown in problem 3.

(b) 5♥. This is the toughest question of the set, and could easily be wrong. However, ♠KQxxx ♥xxx ♦Kxx ♣xx gives us a reasonable play for slam, and partner could have more.

JILL: (a) This is tough but there is no guarantee of making at the five-level, so I am going to pass.

(b) I would bid Blackwood (4NT). Partner shows "extras" by jumping, whereas in (a) partner was "under pressure" and might have KJxxxx and out.

M.M. No doubt, if partner shows two controls, Jill plans to gamble that one of them is the ace of diamonds, not the ace of hearts.

SMITH: (a) Pass. (b) Pass again. Here I'm tempted, but partner can have all kinds of random hands and still bid 4♣.

Problem 5.

Open Pairs, matchpoint scoring
North-South vulnerable

North
A103
J2
AQ976
AQJ

East
952
A
K1084
K9865

North	East	South	West
1	Pass	1 *	Pass
(*N-S do not play weak jump shifts.)			
2NT	pass	3 **	Pass
(**Nor do they play "fast arrival.")			
3NT	Pass	4	(end)

Partner leads the ♠K (ducked by declarer) followed by the queen. Dummy wins the second trick and plays the ace and another diamond.

You are East. Plan the defense.

BENNETT: This is a real problem. I wonder why partner did not play his ♠J at trick 2: Maybe he doesn't have it? Did partner give diamond count? I am playing declarer's distribution (the way he is playing the hand) to be 3-6-1-3, and I am ducking the diamond. If declarer was 2-6-1-4, why did partner not lead his singleton club at trick 2? If declarer has seven hearts, why is he not pulling trump?

MARINESA: I duck the diamond; if declarer now hooks the club, play a club back and hope to give partner a club ruff, unless partner shows an odd number of clubs. In that case, then play a diamond back. If you

assume partner's spade queen showed an even number of spades left, declarer only has two spades, so we must beat them with a club ruff or diamond uppercut.

FELDMAN: This is a weird problem, and I may not have enough information. If partner does not have the jack of spades, why did she continue after I discouraged, and if she does have it, why did she not play it at trick 2? I assume partner gave me count on the diamond, so assuming she showed me three, I am playing low. If declarer ruffs, cashes the ♠J and throws me in with a heart, my only choice is to exit a club.

If partner showed me two diamonds, I have a tough problem, because declarer's play doesn't make sense. Still, it makes more sense if declarer has Jx instead of xx, so I hop. Cash the ♥A and exit with a spade to whoever has the jack.

DAWSON: Where is the ♠J? Partner continued spades despite my discouraging signal, so he must have a stand-alone holding such as KQ doubleton or KQJ. If it's KQJ, why didn't he play the jack at trick two? One possible explanation is that declarer has concealed five spades in the bidding, and he is 5-6-1-1. When I get in with the ♥A I'm leading a spade. Perhaps declarer has something like ♠Jxxxx ♥Q109xxx ♦x ♣x. We will get one spade and three hearts if he is. (Obviously, I played a low diamond at trick 3).

M.M. Both you and partner should know declarer doesn't have the jack of spades, or he would have won the first trick. Only declarer doesn't know who has the jack, so should you tell him? I had never heard of using honors, rather than spot cards, to show present count, but here it would be a good idea. Not having discussed it, can you count on partner to show present count in that way? I'd rather trust my opponent!

SMITH: I think we have a second spade trick coming. Partner didn't pass with KQJxx non-vul? There is the possibility of a trump promotion on the fourth diamond. If declarer finesses the club I have a tough choice to make. I'll lead a low diamond back and go for the uppercut.

KIVEL: I spent a lot of time worrying about what diamond spots were played by partner and declarer under dummy's ace. I finally decided that we would have been told if they were not the lowest ones available, so I rejected hopping with the diamond to try to outwit that sly declarer Marshall trying a swindle! I expect that declarer is 3-7-1-2, and is planning to take two club finesses to get rid of his third spade. If this is right, I should duck the first finesse smoothly in order to lull him into ruffing another diamond and repeating the club finesse. If partner has 10xx of hearts with decent spots, we'll beat him two tricks for a great match point score when I win and lead the ♦K. Declarer can counter this by discarding his spade, but partner will then discard his last club, and a club lead may promote the 10 anyway.

Having said this, I confess that I don't know if I'd be up to finding this play at the table ... unless I had the same hour to think things over that I used when I got this hand in a problem setting!

M.M. The biggest problem is to figure out what declarer has and how he plans to play the hand at the moment he cashes the ace of diamonds. Declarer must have a singleton diamond and plans to ruff the next diamond in order to take the club finesse. If he had three clubs, there would be no reason for not playing trumps immediately.

Since he needs the club finesse to work, he might as well take it right away, so that if it works, he can repeat it for an overtrick. You need to duck smoothly, as Joe noted, when declarer takes the club finesse.