



## Master Solvers Panel



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**R**eturning this month to help us solve the mysteries of bidding are: Ivar Stakgold, an expert even before my time, now winning in San Diego; Jan Janitschke, an expert after my time, from Denver; Jill Meyers, a many time national and world champion; and Mike Lawrence, renowned bridge author and teacher in addition to having won about everything there is to win. We also have a new panel member, Murray Melton. Murray started winning in tournaments years ago, becoming a Life Master in 1961. He then took 25 years off, but is back to his winning ways and has settled in Las Vegas.

## Problem 1.

North/South vul, IMPs  
You, South, hold:

♠AKJ875 ♥A2 ♦J987 ♣5

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

**Lawrence:** 4♥. For many reasons. There is no safe route to a slam. There are many hands that partner can have which will make only four hearts. If partner has a stiff spade, this suit won't provide extra tricks, barring something very lucky (because my doubleton heart holding means that it will not be possible to establish the spades and then use them). If partner has the spade queen and the good hearts we need, he still needs the diamond ace (or a singleton diamond and the club ace). A 3♠ rebid is not forcing. Thus, this bid is not available, which would have made for an easier time. One last inference is that partner would have bid 4♥ with some of the hands that will make slam facing this hand. This all adds up to a very comfortable 4♥ call.

**J.S.:** Mike covered the situation so well it is tempting to go directly to the second problem. But let's hear what others have to say (including me).

**Stakgold:** 4♥. Tough guess. Even if partner holds the ♠Qx it could be better to play in hearts. Although, with ♠Qx, partner would probably have raised to 4♠, and I would have then tried for slam with 5♣.

**Melton:** 4♥. I know I had full values for my 2♠ bid but if slam has a good play partner will move over 4♥. If he can muster up a 4♠ bid I can now cue clubs. I can think of many hands where even the five level is in jeopardy. Anyway, 4♣ doesn't promise heart support. I am from the old school of raising when I hold support for partner.

**Janitschke:** 4♥. What else? Not about to try to cater to the oddball hand where partner has only five hearts. If he has something like ♠Qx ♥KQxxx ♦xxx ♣AQx he should have raised spades instead.

**J.S.:** Try to remember that there is always something else.

**Meyers:** 4♦. My 2♠ bid was not even game forcing; my hand is way too good to just raise to 4♥.

**J.S.:** I believe that the arguments in favor of the heart raise are compelling. However, I would like to suggest the possibility of a 4♦ call with another meaning: partner, please choose between a 4♥ and 4♠ contract. The principle is that it is more important to use the cue bid to locate the correct suit than try for slam (when a suit has not been agreed upon).

This is not something to try in a casual partnership; as with all conventions, discussion with partner is required.

## Problem 2.

None vul, IMPs. You, East, hold:

♠AJ32 ♥AQ ♦AQ952 ♣103

East	South	West	North
1♦	Pass	2♣	Pass
?			

**Melton:** 2♠. The majority of panel will bid 2♠ and I agree. I need to show some shape and I have plenty of time to bid notrump. We can't be too far from slam. Bidding 2NT and then bidding one more if partner signs off is not showing the nice playing strength I have in a suit. An immediate 3NT simply takes up too much room.

**J.S.:** Murray, predicting how the other members of the panel will answer is a losing proposition. I am certain to make note of it when you are wrong.

**Janitschke:** 2♠. 3NT comes later, but I want to suggest the (slight) shapeliness of my hand.

**Stakgold:** 3NT. Shows shape and strength of my hand and may permit partner to move to slam. I am reluctant to play in spades even if pard has four of them (unless ♠KQxx).

**J.S.:** It is nice to show the strength of the hand immediately but hiding the spade suit could work out very poorly. Our two world champions are in agreement here:

**Meyers:** 2♦. We are in a game forcing auction. I never bypass a good five card diamond suit to bid a four card major (if I bid 2♠ directly I would be denying a good five card diamond suit). I can always bid spades later and the onus is on partner to bid a four card major over 2♦.

**Lawrence:** 2♦. This is a matter of system. I play that a 2♠ bid denies five diamonds and does not show extra values. My choice is 2♦, which promises a five card or longer suit. If partner has a major, he is obliged to bid it over 2♦ so a spade fit won't be lost. This treatment may make it harder to catch up but it does make sure that my diamond length is known early.

**J.S.:** It is nice when you can let partner in on the nature of your hand as quickly as possible. But the strict agreement that one must rebid diamonds immediately with five or more has two big disadvantages. It may be difficult to let partner know the strength of your hand (as Mike notes) and protecting your heart position (by declaring from your side) may be critical. I think it better to rebid 2♠ and then rebid diamonds on the next round to show both the distribution and strength of the hand.

## Problem 3.

None vul, IMPs. You, South, hold:

♠AK87 ♥AK4 ♦KQ9754 ♣—

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
?			

**J.S.:** Would you have started with a game-forcing 2♣?

**Lawrence:** 4♣. A splinter. North, if he has the ace of diamonds and any kind of hand otherwise, will bid 4♦, in which case it is easy to continue to 6♠ or 7♠. If he signs off in 4♣, I will have a problem which I am happy not to have to address here.

**J.S.:** Chicken.

**Stakgold:** 4♣. Opener's splinter should show a void. Even then partner will not realize that a hand with six spades and

nothing else will give a decent play for slam. If pard just bids 4♠ I will have to make one more try by bidding 5♣. If pard bids 4♦ over 4♣, I will try for a grand by bidding 4♥. Yes, I would have opened 2♣!

**J.S.:** I believe most experts could systematically use the 4♣ splinter with either a void or a singleton.

**Melton:** 5♣, exclusion (Blackwood) stands out in my mind. If I bid 4♣ I am not going to pass if partner signs off in game so I might as well get it out of my system now. The only other choice appears to be a 2♥ bid, then bid spades at three level. My partners these days won't believe I have four great trumps. (See Jill's continuation below which shows the four trumps.) I feel a great urgency to be Captain Hook and apologize later if I am wrong.

No, I would not open the hand 2♣. If partner has a weak hand and four spades we will probably never even sniff the fit.

**Janitschke:** 2♥. I could splinter 4♣ instead, but partner would be hard put to push on with, say, ♠QJxxx ♥xx ♦Jx ♣Qxxx. I should find out early if he has five or more spades, which obviously is very helpful. And yes, I would always open 1♦.

**Meyers:** 2♥, and then 4♣ which should show a 4-4-5-0 or 4-3-6-0 moose. (J.S.: Might you not have a 4-4-4-1 moose for 2♥ followed by 4♠?) I would not open 2♣ because there are three suits I can play in, which will be difficult to communicate after an opening 2♣.

**J.S.:** When I held this hand I didn't open 2♣ because of the heart fit possibility - even though I use the auction 2♣ - 2♦ - followed by three of a major rebid to show four of the major with longer diamonds. That was a losing position to take because after 1♦ - 1♠ I felt compelled to bid at the five level to make a strong slam try. Let this be a reminder to me that it is better to bid such that you can describe your hand reasonably well - even if is a slight underbid or not perfectly accurate for your distribution - and not bid beyond game to try for slam. Partners have a way of disappointing with the hand they hold.

## Problem 4.

North/South vul, MPs. You, South, hold:

♠53 ♥102 ♦KQJ987 ♣A93

East	South	West	North
4♠	Pass	Pass	4NT
Pass	?		

**Meyers:** 5♣. Partner has two suits and if diamonds is not one of them my hand is not very slam oriented. My wonderful diamond suit may be essentially worthless.

**Lawrence:** 5♣. You probably have the ace of clubs and nothing else. If partner has the minors, this is a poor choice much of the time. I am content to miss an occasional slam in return for getting to the right suit most of the time.

**J.S.:** I heard Mike give a lesson recently in which he stated firmly that a double of 4♠ is takeout. I have used the double as showing the equivalent of four aces, but not guaranteeing length in all the other suits (or shortness in spades). The opponents may steal a bit more with Mike's definition, but it has a great advantage of simplifying partner's decision. The other panelists have a different idea:

**Janitschke:** 6♦. I can't be hanging partner too much on this vulnerability.

**J.S.:** Partner held: ♠x ♥KQ10xxx ♦x ♣KQJxx. Surely you don't want him to pass 4♠ with that hand.

**Stakgold:** 6♦. Since a double of 4♠ (unlike a double of 4♥) would have been for business, 4NT is a takeout for either two or three suits with no more than a singleton spade. Although I hate to punish partner for a courageous balance, I see no way to investigate, so I just bid what I think is likely to be the best contract.

**Melton:** After much soul-searching I decided to bid 5♦. If partner is showing a three suited take-out, then my bid is horrendous. However, most partners have two suiters and I expect partner to bid 5♥, which I will correct to 6♣ and hope I am right. I hate 5♦ but a unilateral slam bid just seems wrong. I dislike this problem a lot.

**J.S.:** The distribution was foul (hearts were 5-0) but you have a chance of escaping with a 5♣ call because West held a singleton club.

## Problem 5.

East/West vul, MPs. You, South, hold:

♠KQ854 ♥4 ♦987432 ♣6

East	South	West	North
1♣*	?		

\* Artificial, forcing, 16+ HCP

**J.S.:** This problem was intended mainly to determine and discuss defenses to a forcing 1♣ opening. Interestingly, the result was a different idea from each panelist.

**Lawrence:** 2♠. A direct, space consuming bid that gives up on locating a diamond fit. Perhaps it will help our side with opening leads. I hope this bid causes problems which other artificial bids do not.

**Stakgold:** 1♦. Since I would be on lead against any Precision contract, the sole purpose of my overcall is to find a save so I start with my longer suit with the option of bidding spades later if the auction suggests that a save might be in order.

**Melton:** I must get into this auction, so I am going to bid 2♦ and then if the bidding isn't too high I will bid spades later. 1♣ could work out better but I like telling my partner I am weak and taking away a bit more room from the opponents.

**Janitschke:** 1♠. Lead directing. Playing CRASH or some such, I suppose I would wield that instead.

**J.S.:** CRASH is a two-suited takeout and stands for "Color, Rank, Shape." The first step (double) shows two suits of the same color, then next step (1♦) shows two suits of the same rank, and the next step shows two suits of the same shape (pointed or rounded). It can be used over either a strong 1♣ or 2♣ and over the artificial diamond responses. The drawbacks are that no preemption is involved and the users tend to enter the auction with minimal playing strength, having little chance of profitably buying the contract. The result is that astute declarers have a roadmap of how to play the hand.

**Meyers:** I play with my partners that over a strong club two of a major shows that suit and another suit of equal (or longer) length. Can I bid that here?

**J.S.:** You stole my thunder. I was going to suggest that as an attractive defense against 1♣. The major suit jump combines preemption and the ability to show two suits at once. It is an adaptation of the "Polish Two Bids" and is usually combined with "Multi" where a 2♦ bid shows a single suit major.

As a footnote, on the deal from which this problem was taken, partner held the ♠AQxx, so it was quite worthwhile to get the diamond suit bid.