



By John Swanson
Lancaster, Calif.

Let's have a big round of applause for our panel this month: Ed Davis, Seal Beach, Calif., Mike Savage, Signal Hill, Calif., Rose Meltzer, Los Gatos, Calif., John Mohan, Mexico City, Jim Tritt, Fresno, Calif. Eddie Kantar, Santa Monica, Calif., and Wafik Abdou, Bakersfield, Calif. Mike is joining us for the first time. In addition to being a top player Mike is also a system guru; he is responsible for all the wonderful convention sheet handouts at Southern California regionals.

Problem 1.

Neither side vul, matchpoints
You are South holding:

♠AQ1075 ♥AQ102 ♦-- ♣AQ76

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

Davis: 3♣. I play jumps as self-splinters in this auction. However, a self-splinter is based on a one-suited hand looking for partner to hold the right cards for a slam, for example on this auction 4♦ should show something like: ♠AQxxxx ♥AQx ♦-- ♣KQx. With a three-suited hand, I will need the appropriate high card help plus an extra spade or four plus cards in length opposite one of my other suits.

In matchpoints, I don't want to be in a slam that most others will not reach unless it is a good slam, say 67%. If partner bids 4♣ over my 3♣, I'll bid 6♣. If partner bids 3♥, I'll bid 4♥ and we will reach slam if partner goes beyond 4♣ (3♥ by partner would show values in hearts but they could be ♥Kxx as well as ♥Kxxxx - when I raise to 4♥, partner should be able to correctly evaluate his hand).

J.S: The concept of splinters, initially only used to show a singleton or void with primary support for partner's last bid suit, has been extended such that one can jump in a short suit indicating slam interest after partner raises your suit (or makes a notrump response to your suit). As always, please confirm such understandings with your partner before employing the bid. I get blamed for enough bad calls as it is.

Savage: 4♠, splinter, planning to pass if partner signs off in 4♠. There is a chance for slam if partner has a perfecto - two working kings and four trumps or some such and he will now cue bid. I may regret bidding 4♦ later because on a really bad day 4♠ might fail and the splinter bid will help the defense. Originally I thought about continuing with 5♣ if partner returns to 4♠ but decided that was too risky.

J.S: Bidding past game without cooperation from partner implies that you are looking at your cards with Rose-colored glasses. More examples to follow.

Meltzer: 3♥. We'll definitely be in game, so would start slam investigation with 3♥. If partner bids 3♠, would bid 4♠, signing off in 4♠ if partner bids 4♦. For his/her 2♠ bid, partner could easily have ♠Kxx ♥Jxx ♦xx ♣Kxxxx (wishful thinking).

Mohan: 3♥. Difficult to reject slam when a grand could be reasonable - I'll try 3♥ and bid slam over 4♥ or 4♠, otherwise give up.

Abdou: 3♥. We can possibly reach a better game, say opposite ♠Kxx ♥Jxxxx ♦Qxxx ♣x or a slam if pard cue bids 4♣ with ♠Kxx ♥Kxx ♦Jxxxx ♣Kx.

J.S: Expecting partner to come up with a 4♣ cue bid without the ace, regardless of how good his single raise, is another case of Rose-colored glasses.

Kantar: 3♥. If I get anything encouraging like 4♣, I will trot out 5♣. Even over 3♣ I plan to bid 4♣. Nothing like giving the defenders a road map to the best defense.

Tritt: 3♣. Essentially we need two of the three missing kings to make slam playable. I don't like a 4♦ splinter because it takes up too much space, does not convey the void (partner may think the diamond ace is good), and makes it impractical for partner to cue a club control. Bidding 3♣ may allow partner to show a good club fit with a jump to game or a raise to 4♣, making it plausible that partner has the club and spade kings; or may allow partner to bid 3♥, suggesting the heart and spade kings.

After a 3♠ sign-off or a 3♦ cue, I would give up on slam and just bid game.

J.S: I like the 3♣ call. It provides a good chance to discover if partner has the secondary fit necessary to make slam a good bet, but doesn't expose your hand completely to the defense if there isn't.

Problem 2.

Vul versus not, IMPs
You are South holding:

♠J2 ♥K109876 ♦Q3 ♣872

South	West	North	East
1♦	2♣	Pass	
?			

Savage: 2♥. Playing IMPs, I'm going to bid 2♥ and hope to survive. If there is a heart fit, there might be a game. However if partner doesn't raise hearts or rebid clubs, much danger lurks. 2♣ shows a good hand and I don't want to pass up a possible game. I am willing to risk getting a bit too high if there is no heart fit, since I have three-card club support as back-up.

Tritt: 2♥. This looks like an overbid, but we are vul at IMPs, so if possible we should try to reach a 40% game. Partner could easily have something like ♠xx ♥Axxx ♦x ♣AKxxxx opposite which 4♥ is good. Partner might have more. The worst case scenario is that we may need to retreat to 3♣, and my three-card support may provide some help in that event.

Also ... if we are on defense, the 2♥ bid may get partner off to a good lead.

Meltzer: 2♥. Should be a one round force; partner will either bid 3♣ or 3♥ and you would rather get a heart lead if defending. If partner bids 3♦, you can sign off with 3♥.

J.S: A forcing 2♥ call seem more than optimistic to me. Could we have discovered the source of the "Rose-colored glasses" expression?

Kantar: Pass. Can't get myself to mix it up at this vulnerability with this hand.

Abdou: Pass. I use intermediate jump overcalls at these colors, which makes the pass comfortable. Where are the spades?

Even opposite a perfecta, game isn't cold; pard could have a very good hand like ♠Axx ♥Qx ♦xx ♣AKQxxx and no game is making.

Mohan: Pass, then 3♥ if partner finds another call; good argument for non-forcing responses to overcalls at the two level.

Davis: Pass. I play 2♥ as non-forcing on this sequence, however, with few values (including a possibly wasted diamond queen) and a three-loser heart suit opposite a singleton, this hand is not good enough to bid 2♥.

J.S: As is frequently the case in a close bidding decision, a basic question to consider is: what will partner expect? If 2♥ is not forcing in your partnership the only criticism you might receive is that you were too aggressive. If it is forcing, partner is going expect a good deal more in high cards or playing strength in your hand.

Problem 3.

Neither vul, IMPs
You are South holding:

♠A982 ♥KQ762 ♦85 ♠106

South	West	North	East
	1♣	3NT	Pass
?			

Savage: Pass and lead a heart. Have no system to show both majors over 3NT even if I wanted to. Either 4♥ or 4♠ might be making, but I'll stay fixed and see what happens on defense.

J.S: I trust you intend to lead a heart honor. Leading low could provide declarer with a ninth trick if he holds seven diamond winners and the heart ace.

Tritt: Pass, which is what I did at the "table" when this hand came up online. I could bid 4♦, looking for a major suit fit, or 4♥, hoping for a heart fit, but either action seems like a wild gamble. Also, I've seen 3NT overcalls with a solid major, so without discussion it is not 100% clear how partner will read 4♦ (although I do think it should be treated as a 5-5 or better major suit takeout). If partner were to double 3NT after it passed back to him, I think it would be best to treat that as a good takeout double of the opponent's presumed minor.

Playing that treatment, we would have less worry about a possible double game swing against us if we pass.

J.S: Pass allows the opponents to take too many free shots during the auction. You need to slap some hands with a double when they are trying to reach into your pockets.

Davis: Double. No guarantee of beating the hand, but I think the odds are in our favor. I would lead the ♥K. On this auction, where the opponent is presumed to have a long minor suit, four of that minor should be takeout for the majors. I would bid 4♦ if I was 5 - 5 in the majors or if I was 4 - 5 - 1 - 3. If the 3NT bidder runs to 4♦ after my double, I'll pass (non-forcing) and hope partner can bid four of a major.

J.S: Defending against 3NT overcalls is not a topic I've seen discussed in bridge textbooks. It's not impossible for the 3NT bidder to hold a solid seven- or eight - bagger in partner's opening bid, but that is unlikely enough that a bid of four of the presumed suit - the other minor - should be takeout as Jim and Ed suggest.

Meltzer: Ugh, RHO has a mitt full of diamonds and is planning to make. I would still double, lead the heart king and hope for the best!

Abdou: Double and lead the ♠A. This has worked for me over the years. Pard has an opener outside clubs or diamonds! (♠KQxx ♥Axxx ♦xxx ♣Kx)

Mohan: Double, lead a high heart and hope; double because a multi-trick set is possible or with an unusual hand partner could pull to a makeable spot.

Kantar: Double. The problem is what will a pass by me mean if East runs to 4♦?

J.S: Partner should infer you have a hand of this nature: too much defense to allow the opponents to have an unmolested go at 3NT, but not certain of defeating 4♦. I expect him to bid a four-card major if he doesn't double 4♦.

Problem 4.

Neither vul, IMPs
You are South holding:

♠432 ♥AQ764 ♦K4 ♣Q53

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♦
1♥	Dbt*	2♦**	2♠*
?			

* Shows four spades
** Invitational heart raise

Davis: 3♥. I don't have enough to accept game, but I think we can make 3♥, (and possibly game if partner has ♠AKxx(x) of clubs). I don't think I am quite good enough to bid 3♠, but I could have passed 2♠ (the weakest bid in my system), so partner will play me for expecting to have a decent play for 3♥. It would be reasonable for partner to play me for my actual distribution or ♠xxx ♥AQxxxx ♦x ♣Qxxx, and he might carry on to 4♥ with the right cards.

J.S: Partner made his game try; 3♥ is a competitive bid. Partner is a passed hand - he will not carry on to game.

Kantar: 3♥. Good things are happening. I'm in back of the diamond bidder and partner is marked with only two spades. Given all this, my hand must be worth 3♥.

J.S: Great things are happening. Partner has made a game try opposite your passed hand. Good things warrant a 3♥ call; great things require a 3♣ counter game try.

Savage: 3♠. My style is to open 1♥ with this hand, although passing is perhaps more normal. Having said that, I would make a 3♣ help-suit game try over 2♠ and abide by partner's verdict.

J.S: I am reluctant to shade a major suit opening using a five-card major, forcing notrump response system. Partner will be tempted to make an aggressive two-over-one game forcing response on hands which are difficult to describe after a forcing INT. Opening light will lead to struggling in 3NT with insufficient high cards on too many deals.

Mohan: 3♣. This problem points to the importance of using a cue bid for a three trump limit raise and 2NT for a four trump limit raise. In the actual auction I would try for game with 3♣ and hope for a fourth trump to make it a reasonable (or cold)

game, i.e. ♠xx ♥Kxxx ♦xxxx ♣AKx. Opposite a three trump limit raise, game becomes remote with trump leads.

J.S: It's pessimistic to require four trumps from partner on this deal; if he accepts the 3♣ try there will be enough club tricks - you won't need to ruff a spade.

Abdou: 3♣. Game is good opposite ♠xx ♥Kxx ♦xxx ♣AKxxx, bad opposite ♠xx ♥Kxx ♦Axxx ♣Kxx, so I'll consult pard. Even adding the ♣10 in the last example, game has a shot.

J.S: Wafik's first example was partner's exact hand. How sweet it is to bid a game you are confident of making with a 5-3 trump fit, 21 total high card points and no singletons.

Tritt: Pass. Partner passed in third seat, and I don't believe this hand is worth a non-vul game try despite the three small spades and the favorable position of the ♦K.

If partner has four trumps, I assume he'll take the push to 3♥.

Meltzer: Pass. I'll let partner decide.

J.S: Where are those glasses?

Program 5.

Neither vul, IMPs
You are South holding:

♠AKQ94 ♥2 ♦K876 ♣KQ8

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

Davis: Pass. Partner may have only two spades and, if he has three spades, he doesn't have enough strength to bid 2♠ on his own. In either case, our best chance at a plus score will be in defending 3♥, which we may or may not beat.

Why is this hand a problem?

J.S: Because the moderator said it is a problem - not necessarily a good problem, however.

Kantar: Double. Since I would have reopened with much less, I'll tell my partner I wasn't kidding.

J.S: That's the point. The use of negative doubles requires that you strain to bid again if an overcall by your left hand opponent is passed around to you; essentially you reopen with a double if you are short in the overcalled suit. Partner needs to allow for this in his bidding; he can't be too aggressive in responding to the reopening double. Thus, when you hold substantially more than a minimum and the auction gets complicated, how do you deal with it?

Mohan: I think pass is clear when you have no idea whether anyone can make at the three-level. Obviously a second double will work in some cases, but it will lead to random, and frequently bad, results.

Meltzer: Pass. Trying to picture the hand where partner wouldn't bid 2♠ directly - must be pretty bad and may only have two spades. Something like either: ♠xxx ♥Qxx ♦10xx ♣Jxxx or ♠xx ♥Jxxx ♦Qxx ♣Qxxx. I've already shown a decent hand.

Abdou: Pass. I would double playing matchpoints, but am content to pass hoping to go plus at IMPs.

Tritt: Pass. Yes, this is a good hand, but partner did not have enough to raise spades initially and may be on a doubleton and/or very weak. Also, the 2♥ bidder is sitting behind my minor suit cards. I could try doubling again, but I'm not confident of beating 3♥ if partner passes, nor of making 3♠ if partner bids. The auction's not over, and partner may be better placed to decide what to do when it gets around to him.

J.S: It's unlikely that partner will have a hand sufficient for another bid if you pass, but it's possible. Plus, partner has already had two chances to show some life.

I agree with the strong panel majority; it's time to take your foot off the accelerator.

Savage: Pass. I don't think 3♠ is odds-on to make, and who knows how many hearts they can make. I'll quietly defend and hope there is no double part-score swing.

However, I confess at the table I might have bid 3♠.

J.S: I can't tell you how 3♠ would have fared; this problem was composed. Maybe another jack would have created more controversy.