



Master Solvers Panel



By John Swanson
Lancaster, California

Thanks to panel members: Leo Bell, Steve and Kitty Cooper, Mitch Dunitz, Jerry Gaer, Fred Hamilton, John Jones, Eddie Kantar, and Mike Savage. The problems are taken from the team finals of the World Bridge Games, held in Wroclaw, Poland this fall. Netherlands defeated Monaco in the Open, USA defeated France in the Womens, USA defeated France in the Seniors with a big rally in the fifth (out of six) segments, and Netherlands defeated Russia in the Mixed. Boards were duplicated across the field, so there are up to eight results for each problem.

Problem 1.

North-South vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠10 ♥KQJ542 ♦KJ4 ♣Q93

South	West	North	East
	1♠	2♦	3♠*
4♥	4♣	Dbl	Pass
?			

*preemptive

Coopers: 5♦. If partner really has enough to beat them, we are likely making 5♦. If partner doubled because he thought we were in a force, they may be making. Too often they have a double fit and both sides can make game. Steve would pass, expecting a plus score.

J.S.: The point about a forcing pass is significant. A pass by North would have been forcing in my partnerships because the non-vulnerable opponents are in a preemptive auction. Because of that, the double is only a vote to defend, not a declaration, and defending is less attractive.

Gaer: 5♦. Not only is this our most likely best contract, but there is no guarantee that we will beat 4♣ with my red suit length and lack of quick tricks. We also may get a shot at 5♠.

J.S.: Being doubled at the four-level will usually dampen the opponents' enthusiasm for a five-level save.

Bell: Pass. At some point, partner should have a say. No reason to think we should expect to make a contract at the five-level or need to sacrifice.

Dunitz: Pass. I might make 5♦, or even 5♥, but I could also guess the strain wrong and have no play.

Kantar: I'm a reluctant passer. Don't like my chances at the five-level.

Savage: Pass. I am confident of a plus versus 4♣ doubled, but am not sure of a plus if I bid five somethings.

Hamilton: 5♦. Yes we can (probably) beat 4♣, but we may be cold for 5♦. I do not think the money odds for a pass are there. I can see that we might be down one while they are down one (or two?) but when I have a lot more offense than defense I use the rule of "If I am not wrong by more than one trick either way I choose offense."

Jones: 5♦. Tough problem. Partner does not know about the diamond fit, so unless he has a significant spade stack (unlikely), he is not in a good position to judge whether or not to compete. My decision is close. If partner has: ♠xxx ♥x ♦AQ10xxx ♣Axx, we will probably make 5♦. If he has the ♣K rather than

the ♣A, we will be defeated in 5♦. We may only be beating 4♣ one trick, so we aren't getting rich on defense. A vulnerable game is a distinct possibility, and I think our expected value is higher in 5♦.

J.S.: Playing match points the passers have a case. But in IMPs you lose 5 if both contracts are set one and gain 11 when 4♣ is down and 5♦ makes. Everything considered, bidding seems a standout. But in addition to our four panel members who passed, all four players who faced this decision at the table sat for the double. Partner held: ♠Q2 ♥10 ♦AQ10752 ♣AK43; 4♣ was down one and 5♦ was cold. The preemptive 3♠ bid was a tad light: ♠9863 ♥8763 ♦963 ♣106, but was made by half the players.

Problem 2.

East-West vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠KJ82 ♥K42 ♦K108 ♣QJ2

South	West	North	East
		Pass	1♣
?			

Dunitz: Double. I'm not thrilled, but I'd rather bid now and crawl under the table than have to stick my neck out at a higher level.

Bell: Double. At IMP scoring, I believe in entering the auction early and then keeping quiet as appropriate. Even with this balanced scattered collection of mediocrity, it's now or never.

Gaer: Pass. All defense, no offense.

J.S.: As succinct as the baseball scouting report, "Good field, no hit."

Kantar: Pass. This is not my idea of a takeout double.

Savage: I should probably pass, but in practice I'd probably double. It depends somewhat on our game and my evaluation of the opponents. My main fear is that my double might enable E/W to bid a game and make it, knowing where all the defensive high cards are.

Jones: Pass. I have a better hand for defense than I do for offense, so I should be reluctant to initiate action. Further, I believe that balanced hands with three cards in the opponents' suit should not double with fewer than a very good 14 HCP. I'm about a king light for a 1NT overcall, and the four-card spade suit isn't remotely close to an overcall by my standards. This hand isn't close to tempting me.

The Italian Blue Team from the 1960s era used to make takeout doubles on this type of hand and normally survived. However, there were some who thought that their success on hands of this variety was partially due to voice inflection or a little black magic.

Hamilton: Pass! This is a poor hand and there is no game unless partner can freely bid. I would consider double somewhat suicidal and wrong even at matchpoints. Surely no panelist will bid on this junk opposite a passed hand. Three things wrong: no shape, no aces, three soft points in the opponent's suit that may be worthless. Two flaws are enough for me to keep my mouth shut.

Coopers: Steve bids 1♣ to get the lead and interfere. He bids a spade over a club whenever possible.

Kitty would pass since if Steve passed in first seat there's no point in getting involved.

J.S.: On the flip side, there is a point to not getting involved. Not only might the opponents take advantage of knowing where most of the missing high cards are located as Mike noted, there is partner to contend with. At three tables after: 1♣ - Dbl - 1♠, North bid 2♥, holding: ♠73 ♥Q953 ♦A7654 ♣95, and then competed with 3♦ after West's 3♣ rebid was passed around to him. Wouldn't you? At one of those tables. East (Zia for the U.S. Srs.), holding: ♠AQ1054 ♥87 ♦QJ93 ♣107, expressed doubts that the contract would make, and collected +1100 for that insight. At another, the U.S. Women's pair, sitting East-West, bid the cold 3NT with their combined 22 count.

At the third, West failed to double 3♦ and his partner misdefended. Five of six South players doubled 1♣ (Chip Martel for the U.S. Seniors discreetly produced a green card) but only two of the five got their comeuppance.

Problem 3.

Neither side vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠QJ9832 ♥93 ♦AKQ ♣K9

South	West	North	East
		3♣	4♣*
?			

*Red suits

Savage: Gambler that I am, I'd probably bid 4♣ and cross my fingers. If there is a loud double, I could run to 5♣. Somewhat depends on who are my opponents.

Hamilton: 4♣. Of course there is no way to know if you can nick them a trick in 4♥ or if pard has some spade support. There is something to be said for passing and then balancing with 4♣ over 4♥ as pard will sense a club fit (I think) and remove to 5♣. The decision should be weighed somewhat according to preempt style, but I am not inclined to go quietly on these auction types; we might even make: ♠Kx ♥xx ♦xx ♣AJxxxx!

Bell: 5♣. I want to push them to the five-level and it may be necessary to score a club trick on defense.

J.S.: It turns out you do want to push them to the five-level, but you must do so with the proper suit: spades. Partner is 3-2-2-6 with the ♣A. 4♣ is off only one; 5♣ will be down -800.

Jones: Pass. I'll pass again if it goes 4♥ on my left, pass, pass, back to me. Spades don't rate to be favorable here, and we will occasionally beat 4♥. 5♣ could easily go for too much (losing two hearts, two spades and a club).

Dunitz: Pass. Quite interesting. I don't expect to make 5♣, and my defense is good. So a pass is very tempting. I think 4♥ will go down a healthy amount of the time that a singleton spade is led.

Coopers: Double for a club lead. Opposite partner's preempts that is plenty.

Kantar: Double. I don't think they can make it (ha, ha). I also don't think I can make 4♣.

Gaer: Double. Partner needs to know to lead his suit.

J.S.: The club lead is worth a trick, but it's not enough to set 4♥. East held: ♠--♥AQJ1085 ♦J108653 ♣7. It is tough to criticize any action, so maybe it is worthwhile to note what worked. Only Hamman for the U.S. Seniors faced this exact auction. He elected to pass

both 4♣ and 4♥ and was -420. At the other table, the French North did not open 3♣. Meckstroth, East, opened 4♥, South bid 4♣, West 5♥, North 5♠, and Meckstroth took "insurance" by bidding 6♥, down -300. Should West (Zia) have prevented his partner from falling into the insurance trap by bidding 4NT, holding: ♠AK75 ♥K74 ♦42 ♣Q653, rather than bidding 5♥? Results in the other matches were all over the place: from 3♣ down a couple to 4♣ doubled, cleverly played by Sylvia Shi of the U.S. Women's team, taking advantage of a defensive slip to make.

Problem 4.

North-South vulnerable, IMP scoring
You are South holding:

♠A ♥K10982 ♦K ♣AQ9752

South	West	North	East
			3♣
?			

Savage: 4♣. There is no bid that I am in love with, but I will choose the overbid of 4♣ - letting my partner know that I have hearts and a minor and a good hand. This may tempt my LHO to bid 5♣, which I will double. It well could be better to bid 4♥ instead, ready to bid 5♣ over a double and perhaps over 4♣ as well.

J.S.: I have been using the cue bid of a major suit three-level preempts as a slam try with both minors and 4NT as a lesser minor suit hand. Because the bids so rarely occur, the only important aspect is that you and partner are in agreement.

Kantar: 4♥ with clubs in reserve. If I bid 4♣ (hearts and a minor), I might wind up in a touchy 5♥ contract. Double is scary. Thank God there is only one more problem.

J.S.: There is always another problem.

Gaer: Double. Planning to bid hearts if partner bids diamonds or bid clubs if 4♣ comes back to us. A truly ugly problem.

Bell: 4NT, planning to correct 5♦ to 5♥.

J.S.: I don't like that idea; you may have to choose a bid over 6♦. A double, planning to correct diamonds to hearts, or a free-wheeling 4♣ both seem better to me.

Jones: 4♣. This isn't a good enough hand to double and then pull 4♦. In Europe, 4♣ would show clubs and hearts, similar to Leaping Michaels. However, it doesn't show that in any of my partnerships. So I will settle for the value bid of 4♣. I don't hate double, but if I doubled I would pass 4♦.

J.S.: The U.S. appears to be catching up with Europe:

Coopers: 4♣, showing clubs and hearts. These hands are frequent enough that we long since chose to play non-leaping Michaels. With just clubs you have to choose between 3NT, 5♣, or pass.

Hamilton: 4♣. The method I have been playing for the last few years is that this shows clubs and hearts. True, we cannot overcall 4♣ natural and will have to pass or bid 5♣, but really, when is the last time you just wanted to overcall four of a minor natural? So use non-leaping Michaels over three of a major. I expect some of your panel-

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