



Master Solvers Panel



By John Swanson
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Marshall Miles assumed the role of editor of the bidding panel for the Southern California Bridge News about 25 years ago, a duty I had performed for that publication the previous ten years. A few years back, Marshall expanded this domain into the Western Conference Contract Bridge Forum, but now claims he needs a break. I have agreed to step back in ... on his word that he will be ready to go again in five years.

Our initial panel is small but august: Ed Davis, Fred Hamilton, Paul Ivaska, Ron Smith and Ivar Stakgold. I can vouch for each of their capabilities - they all have either brought me in as a partner or trounced me as an opponent. In Ed and Fred's case, it has been both. Many westerners may not recognize Ivar's name, but he was a member of the team which defeated me in the first National Knockout I entered - only he wasn't there. He and partner Lenny Harmon had not yet returned from playing in the 1959 World Championship. His bridge activities have been diminished for a number of years while he has been a professor of mathematics at Northwestern University, but he has recently immigrated to the San Diego area. So all of you are warned to be wary of an opponent you don't recognize, who speaks in a distinct but not quite recognizable accent and seems to know what he is doing, and who might be discussing boundary value problems of mathematical physics with his partner!

Problem 2.

Vul vs. not, IMP scoring
As South, you hold

♠AQ105 ♥5 ♦AQJ42 ♣AKJ

East	South	West	North
1♠	Dbl	Pass	2♥
Pass	?		

Already you're saying to yourself, "What's wrong; where is Problem 1?" It took me at least one problem to warm up, and Problem 1 turned out to be a dud. Maybe it will be morphed and recycled into another set.

SMITH: 2NT. "Partner, please be able to take a joke and don't jump to 4♥."

Not sure if I agree with my first bid, but what else is there? I'll probably make 3NT if partner's hearts can stop them from taking too many tricks.

JS: I wondered if anyone would take exception to the double. There is always a risk in doubling one major without support for the other.

HAMILTON: 3NT. Well, it's either 2NT or 3NT. The danger with 3NT is partner might correct to 4♥, expecting two or three hearts from me, where if I bid 2NT I can then overrule a 3♥ bid with a final 3NT. Still, many weak hands will provide a good play for 3NT, so that would be my call. It doesn't have to be a good contract, just needs to make.

STAKGOLD: 3NT. To avoid 4♥ by pard. I might have bid 3NT the first time.

JS: I'm with Ivar, in that I believe there is more danger of partner bidding 4♥ over 2NT than 3NT. After the takeout double 2NT announced a good, balanced hand; 3NT is a very good hand which expects to take nine tricks in notrump. Partner should not bid 4♥ over 3NT with a weak suit, even six long.

IVASKA: 3NT. This may come a terrible cropper, but 2NT and 3♦ are unconscionable underbids in view of my spade holding and good diamond suit. After all, if LHO leads a spade, we're cold for 3NT opposite as little as ♠xx ♥J10xxx ♦109 ♣xxxx.

DAVIS: 2♠. I use the Herbert convention in responding to a cue bid when there is a non-jump suit response to a takeout double. Partner bids the cheapest suit with a very weak hand, notifying the doubler that he will pass the next bid. If partner comes up with a miracle 3♦ bid we will be in slam;

otherwise I rebid 3NT. I don't expect partner to insist on a heart game unless he has a good suit.

I like Herbert also. The convention allows good definition for auctions where the takeout double is a very strong hand. This time it works like a charm, for partner held: ♠xx ♥Kxxx ♦Kxxxx ♣x. I don't believe that is quite enough to move over the immediate jump to 3NT.

Problem 3.

Not vs. vul, IMP scoring
As South, you hold

♠54 ♥KQ5 ♦K8 ♣A108753

South	West	North	East
1♠	1♠	Pass	Pass
?			

STAKGOLD: Pass. Partner had many options, but chose to pass; I have nothing extra.

JS: You will have missed a window of opportunity if partner holds, say, ♠KQ1087 and another high card or two.

Hamilton: Pass. I would not double with this shape, so it is either 2♣, which could stir up a hornet's nest, or give it up. If partner is trapping they may have a worthwhile diamond (or even heart) contract.

DAVIS: Double. I see no reasonable option.

JS: Double is a winner when partner has a penalty pass AND East/West do not have a red suit home. Pass has to be at least in the reasonable category.

IVASKA: Double. 2♣ would show a better club suit and less defense. In view of my spade shortness, pass is theoretically not permitted. I dare say that partner will not appreciate my failure to reopen with double if she/he holds a penalty pass, which is not unlikely. (Had I held one more spade and one fewer heart, I would pass, as that would greatly decrease the possibility of a penalty pass and substantially increase the possibility of an E/W heart fit.) I will have to pass partner's nonforcing response, even 2♦. In practice, in view of my minimum opening (at least in high cards), one, or more, of the other players will often give away what's going on. (Perhaps that's the genesis of the present problem.)

JS: The genesis was sitting North and having West bid a natural 2♣ after partner's reopening double, then on the next round accept a spade game invitation and score it up despite my Qxx of spades, diamond queen and club void. Did I mention that I also doubled?

SMITH: 2♣. Double could be right, but passing never seems to work.

JS: There is always a first time.

Problem 4.

Vul vs not, IMP scoring
As South, you hold

♠64 ♥Q8532 ♦A ♣AJ1073

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	1NT*	?
*forcing			

STAKGOLD: Pass. If West rebids 2♦ (even if it is raised to 3♦ by East), I shall double for takeout. Is there a Cappelletti variation to handle this hand on the first round?

JS: Yes, 2♠ ... but under a different name. With Fred on the panel we best call it Hamilton. But - because there was an opening suit bid - we have to call it "Michaels."

SMITH: 2♥. Risky, but it would be very unlucky to go for a big number. If I don't hit partner we could be minus 200 or more on a part-score hand. 2♠ is too big of a bid.

IVASKA: 2♥. Yes, this is dangerous, but passing with such a hand almost never works out for me. Were I to pass, the auction would probably continue 4♠ - Pass - Pass - ?, with our side cold for 5♥, or something similar. Of course, if doubled, I'll beat a hasty (but possibly spectacularly unsuccessful) retreat into 3♣.

HAMILTON: Pass. To bid or not to bid, that is the question. My guess is that pass is best in the long run, as one may get a better chance after 2♦ - Pass - Pass (dream on).

2♠ is probably best if you do bid, but a bit rich for my blood. 2♣ has some merit as you might get a 2♦ bid and can then get your hearts in. Any call has some dangers attached ... including pass, of course. Color me chicken with this vulnerability. Caution is called for.

JS: I'm pleased that my 2♣ choice at the table at least got a nod. The key is to bid the suit in which partner holds length, and perhaps that it the reason that 2♠ is not such a 'big' bid - you get to bid both suits at once.

DAVIS: Pass. There is no safe way to enter the auction.

JS: This time the pass was not so safe. Your side is on for game in hearts. Admittedly you will get another chance after 2♦ to your left and 2♠ by responder ... but now your reentry is at the three-level.

Problem 5.

Vul vs not
IMP scoring
As South you hold

♠— ♥K10842 ♦AKQ952 ♣74

South	West	North	East
1♦	3♠	Pass	Pass
?			

Hand of the Month



By Joel Hoersch
Editor, District 22 Forum

more than 550 tips on declarer play, and I recommend it to all of you, whether you consider yourself to be advanced or still in the beginner stage.

I dreamed up the above hand while I was digesting the implications of one of Eddie's tips. Since it involved mathematics, I enlisted the comments of three of my favorite slide-rule people - Andrew Campbell, John Strauch and Kent Hartman. As in most cases involving persons of this peculiar breed, I got a 2-1 disagreement on the best answer -- and three slightly different sets of figures -- but the differences were not enough to make the problem invalid.

So your job this month is to find the best percentage play to take nine or more tricks at notrump with the ♠Q lead. It will probably be helpful to your thinking if you make a note of how you would proceed, trick by trick, when various things happen along the way.

Good luck ... and don't look at the solution below until you're on top of the problem ... or people will think you cribbed all your answers when you got that A in algebra junior year in high school!

Solution to the Hand of the Month

(See the problem above)

♠ A7
♥ 752
♦ K9874
♣ 643

♠ QJ1085
♥ 1094
♦ 63
♣ KJ9

♠ 932
♥ QJ6
♦ J1052
♣ Q102

♠ K64
♥ AK83
♦ AQ
♣ A875

Obviously, you have eight top winners, and your goal is to increase this number to nine. When inspecting the hand, the three most important observations are:

- (1) there is just one side entry to the diamond suit in dummy
- (2) the heart suit will yield a third winner, but only if the suit breaks 3-3 and,
- (3) the diamond suit will yield five tricks on a 3-3 break ... but since only four tricks are needed from diamonds to make the contract, if you consider that suit by itself, it is much better play on the second round to overtake the queen and bang out a third round, gaining success whenever the suit is 3-3 or the jack or 10 falls on the first or second round.

So the most efficient order of play is to win the spade opening in South, then play off ♥K, followed by ♥A if no one shows

out. (After all, you don't want to be embarrassed by playing for 3-3 hearts when that would be impossible!)

Next you lay down ♦A. On that card, six times out of the 64 possible diamond breaks you will see an honor card (two singleton jacks, two singleton 10s, and two J10 doubletons). If that happens, your course is easy: overtake ♦Q, then clear the suit for your contract.

When no honor appears under the ace, you lay down the queen and inspect West's card; again, if it's an honor, you overtake and claim. If not, John and Kent recommend you switch your allegiance to the heart suit by playing low, making if either red suit was originally 3-3. Since there are 20 cases out of 64 in each suit for that to happen, at that point you are still odds-on to make your contract ... 58.4%, according to John's calculations. Andrew recommends that you stick with the diamond suit overtake play, but indicates that the percentages are very close.

And how good were your overall chances if you played the cards in the order described above, and switched to hearts? According to Kent, you succeed 67.773% of the time. But he and John both admit that to totally ignore hearts and stick to diamonds with the overtake play is not far behind: Kent makes that 65.625%, so it would be close enough to back that line anytime your gut gave you a bad feeling about hearts at the table, surely.

Whew! Lots of numbers to chew on ... but you gotta be impressed by the three decimal places Kent came up with!