



## Master Solvers Panel



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This month's problems are taken from the exciting last sixteen boards of the Vanderbilt Cup finals contested this spring in Reno. The Zimmermann team of European stars started the set 24 IMPs down to the U.S. team of Marty Fleisher, Michael Kamil, Bobby Levin, Steve Weinstein, Chip Martel and Lew Stansby. By making successful (but some very doubtful) bids on these hands and a couple others, Europe rallied to win by ten.

Let's see how our panel would have done. Panelists returning this month are: Richard Pavlicek, multi national and international winner from Florida; Colorado stars Steven and Kitty Cooper; Rose Meltzer, national and international team winner who lives south of San Francisco; and John Mohan, national and international team winner who lives south of Arizona.

We are delighted to have newcomers (to this panel) Mike Passell, one of the top players in the world who is the number two masterpoint holder with almost 65,000; and Joel Hoersch, expert player and editor, known for writing and producing bridge parodies "Bridge Guys and Dolls" and assisting Peter Rank's "My Fair (Little Old) Lady" at the recent San Diego Nationals.

## Problem 1.

None vul, IMP scoring

♠3 ♥76432 ♦A10876 ♣A3

East	South	West	North
1♣	?		

**Pavlicek:** 2NT. Not proud of it, but seems right to get hearts in the picture; and to overcall 1♥ feels even sicker.

In the postmortem I'll claim that I couldn't fold with a draw for an inside straight flush in two suits.

**J.S.:** Richard is the only one on the panel who chooses 2NT, showing the lower two unbid suits.

**Hoersch:** Pass. To anyone who immediately trots out the unusual notrump, I note that you have absolutely no internal solidarity (the hearts are nonexistent), and on defense you hold two aces; if partner does the wrong thing, it'll be your fault, not his!

**Meltzer:** Pass. At equal vulnerability, you're better off not bidding 2NT with such weak hearts; better to back in later.

**J.S.:** That would be my inclination also. But the auction could (and would) develop such that it is never comfortable to show either red suit. The panel majority thought it was best to get into the auction at the one level.

**Mohan:** This is a perfect 2NT bid for those who aspire to enter the Guinness Book of Records - down seven at 3♥ doubled. With total revulsion I bid 1♦. Pass is (as usual in my limited vocabulary) ... zero.

**J.S.:** You would have to find a very unlucky dummy to be down more than five in 3♥ doubled. I used to have disgust for bids such as 2NT on this hand. But the bid has the dual advantages of getting both suits in and making life difficult for the opponents (unless you are down five). The big disadvantage in my view is that when you don't buy the contract, an expert declarer will have a roadmap of the distribution. The one-level bids are far from perfect also. Bidding 1♦ won't be embarrassing if partner leads your suit, but doesn't appear to have much of an upside. The good thing about overcalling hearts is that on the occasional hand where partner can raise to game you may achieve a big payoff; but would anyone dare overcall a 7-high suit?

**Passell:** 1♥. I am sure to be in the minority in a bidding contest, but I hope to get my

suits in when and if it is our hand. Bidding a pedestrian 1♦ loses the heart suit forever. 2NT is too much to bid, so my matchpoint blood makes me bid the "lead directing" 1♥ overcall.

**Coopers:** 1♥. We hate it, but if we bid 1♦ we can lose the heart suit too easily ... and what if partner responds 1♠?

**J.S.:** You won't be in such a delightful situation if partner advances with 1♠ after your 1♥ overcall, for that matter. The European player in this position did overcall 1♥. The auction proceeded ... 1♠ - 4♥ - 4♠ - Pass - Pass - Double. The two aces came in handy as 4♠ doubled was down 300. At the other table South did not get into the auction (after a strong notrump), so the opponents played a comfortable 2♠. North/South have eleven tricks in hearts, North holding: ♠K1054 ♥KQ95 ♦QJ53 ♣8.

## Problem 2.

None vul, IMP scoring

♠AKQ42 ♥A8 ♦KJ62 ♣87

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

**Coopers:** Pass. We look forward to the Esteemed Moderator showing us the error of our thinking. Without a fit and no source of tricks this is not enough to move forward. If the ♦J was the ♠J we might try 4NT.

**J.S.:** You do have an ace extra (in addition to what is considered a sound opening bid) which you have not hinted about yet. I will let the panel explain further:

**Meltzer:** 4NT. Pretty obvious.

**J.S.:** That is not the detailed explanation we were looking for.

**Passell:** 4NT. My high cards are so prime I feel like I need to bid again. Being 2-2 in the other suits is a huge plus. Partner with as little as ♠x ♥Kxxx ♦Ax ♣KJQxxx produces a slam.

**Pavlicek:** 4NT (natural). I'd like to bid 4♥ to show the ace, but this seems misinterpretable as suggesting a Moysian fit. The other possibility is 4♣, but the top-heavy spades suggest 6♣ will only be the right contract if partner can offer it.

**Hoersch:** 4♥. With my extra ace, my knee-jerk reflex was to bid 4NT quantitative, but then I considered the mystery of ... why did partner use fourth suit? He must have extras, and that means that his clubs should be solid, with the diamond ace or king on the side (if he held only the ♦Q I would expect him to just rebid his clubs).

Therefore, a slam is very likely, and I should let partner bid it in clubs if he desires.

**J.S.:** I am not convinced about the reasoning of extra values, but I do expect six clubs from partner. Might not it be better to suggest clubs as a possible contract by bidding 4♣ rather than 4♥?

**Mohan:** 4♣. You must move again. 4♣ lets partner know that you are not 5-3-4-1. I'm willing to try it once with a small doubleton before losing this partner.

**J.S.:** Partner held ♠ — ♥10943 ♦AQ8 ♣AQ10932. Obviously the doubleton club is crucial. Stansby and Martel bid well to 6♣, cold on the lie of the cards. The 4NT raise might get North/South to 6♣ also. North, if he elects to bid on, should try 5♦ (or 5NT) over 4NT, giving South another opportunity to bid clubs. (The 4NT bidders might want to argue that the raise shows 5-2-4-2 and that they would bid 4♥ with 5-3-4

-1.) Helgemo and Helness of Norway, one of the top pairs in the world, bid to 6NT. Unfortunately for the American team Levin elected not to lead a heart away from the king, which would have defeated the poor notrump slam a couple of tricks.

## Problem 3.

Both vul, IMP scoring

♠AK106 ♥Q753 ♦2 ♣A763

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

**J.S.:** This problem asked two questions: (a.) What do you bid now, and (b.), would you have made the initial takeout double? The danger with the double is that partner expects diamond support. But passing may cause your side to miss a major suit fit.

**Pavlicek:** (a.) What is the hand worth now? Well, 3½ hearts; so I bid four. Maybe they'll save. This would be a tougher problem at matchpoints.

(b.) Would I double 1♣? No, but it looks pretty good now. I don't mind doubling with 4-4-2-3 shape, since partner usually has 5+ when he bids diamonds; but to table a singleton is revolting.

**Coopers:** (a.) 4♥. Worth bidding a game. Partner would not bid 2♥ on ♥Kxxxx and nothing else, so we should have an adequate play. Typical hand is ♠x ♥KJxxx ♦Kxxx ♣xx, and even with the wasted ♦K, game is good.

(b.) We use equal level conversion and minors are always disfavored, so we would make the takeout double.

**J.S.:** "Equal level correction" means that if you double a major, then remove partner's club response to diamonds by agreement it doesn't show extra values. I don't see that principle applying here; you don't have anywhere to go if partner does bid diamonds. Partner's heart bid has increased the value of your hand - the takeout double was a big success. Is it enough to jump to game?

**Passell:** (a.) 4♥. What else? I can't believe this won't be unanimous. Partner made a free bid, and I'm ready for the save.

(b.) I made the winning bid by saying double the first time - I'm not sure I would be up to it at the table.

**J.S.:** Others (including me) are not so optimistic:

**Meltzer:** (a.) 3♥.

(b.) The immediate double is a little shaky. I'm grateful partner did not bid diamonds.

**Mohan:** (a.) Just 3♥ - partner will overbid anyway with a stiff spade, so let's blame him(her) when 4♥ fails.

(b.) I don't know whether I would double 1♣ - depends upon partner, methods, and opponents. If playing Multi or Flannery I might not for fear of partner having the dreaded weak two-bid in diamonds.

**J.S.:** Is it possible that there is something in between a competitive 3♥ and the bullish jump to game?

**Hoersch:** (a.) 3♣. Now it seems worth a game try (although obviously the ♥K would work better offensively than the ♠K). If partner has a lot of red cards and short clubs, he may be able to jump to 4♥.

(b.) I would always double with this hand.

**J.S.:** Partner has short spades - likely a void - because of West's 1♠ call in the face of your double, coupled with East's four-card raise. He would have to hold a LOT of red cards to be short in clubs also. Partner actually held: ♠--- ♥A1096 ♦J10973 ♣8542. Don't you want him to compete in hearts on the auction? I would want my partner to bid. Thus the jump to game seems precipitous. Some might be con-

cerned that 3♣ is asking for a spade stopper for notrump but that is a doubtful treatment on an auction such as this. A partnership could consider using a double here as a game try.

In the Vanderbilt finals the South player for the U.S. did not enter the auction; East/West made 2♠. The Swiss father-son pair of Michael and Thomas Bessis bid as in this problem, with South making a 3♣ game try and, remarkably, North accepting.

The contract had little chance, but the play (not perfect) was better than the defense ... and the contract came home for another big European pickup.

## Problem 4.

Neither vul, IMP scoring

♠Q87 ♥QJ87653 ♦6 ♣A

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	?	

**Meltzer:** 2♥. I'll take the high road holding a spade fit with partner. The hand could have great playing strength.

**Pavlicek:** 2♥, intending to rebid 3♥ (invitational as I play) unless partner shows extra spade length. Too many times these hands play poorly in a 5-3 fit. Even a small stiff heart is often enough to do better in hearts; e.g., 4♣ is poor opposite ♠AKxxx ♥x ♦Axxx ♣Kxx, but 4♥ rates to lose only three trumps.

**J.S.:** This is a very good hand if partner has any sort of a heart fit. It is far from a game forcing two-over-one call on high cards alone. The difficulty is that there is no good way to find out except by bidding hearts now.

**Hoersch:** 2♥. Okay, you talked me into being optimistic here. Partner's share of the hearts is a doubleton, and his opening bid entitles our side to the live possibility that one of those hearts will be an honor. That would be enough for 4♥ to be a favorite.

And if I completely miss with the heart suit maybe partner will have enough for 4♣ to be a make.

**J.S.:** If your partner never holds a good hand maybe a forcing NT is the better call.

**Coopers:** 1NT (assuming 1N is forcing), followed by 3♣ to show a three-card limit raise. Opposite a sound partner, 2♥ might be okay but opposite each other this hand is not good enough. Although it has a low loser count it is hard to say how valuable the hearts will be, and we only have three spades for ruffing. So the hand should probably be played in hearts if partner has any sort of fit. That argues for bidding 2♥.

In our own methods, we respond 2♣ as an artificial limit raise or better in support of spades.

**Mohan:** Yikes! - I die by the sword - 2♥ game forcing; nothing else looks reasonable - so let's go for a score.

**J.S.:** Bobby Levin for the U.S. made an ultra-conservative single raise of 2♠ with these cards. At the other table Bessis responded 2♥. While kibitzing on the Internet I thought 1NT forcing was best but upon further review 2♥ seems the percentage call. Partner held a ten-count with a heart void and nine tricks in spades was the limit, making either conservative approach a winner this time.

**Passell:** 2♥. This could lead to very good things or very bad things. I must try to get to hearts when it is right so now or never - a good hand for fit-showing jumps.

**J.S.:** Fit bids are a mystery to me. At one time or another I have agreed to use them with three different partners. Not once did my partner hold a hand I would have expected for the jump (this would be one I wouldn't expect also). My advice is to carefully discuss this convention before using.