



By John Swanson
Mission Viejo, Calif.

Master Solvers Panel

Problem 2.

Both vul, IMP scoring

♠AK72 ♥J64 ♦A64 ♣J97

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

Davis: Double. Close between double and 3NT. If I double, having failed to overcall 1♠ with obviously enough strength to do so, partner will pull on some hands (♠--♥KQxx ♦KQxxx ♣Qxxx) over which I will bid 3NT. If partner passes the double, there is a good chance he will lead a spade.

J.S.: Note that double here is not responsive despite the bid and raise by the opponents. Partner made a takeout double for two suits - he expects you to choose the one you prefer.

Stakgold: Double. If we are playing sandwich notrumps, North has shown a decent hand with some defense, so I make a penalty double. If we are not playing sandwich notrumps, pard could have 6-5 in the reds with little defense; I still double but expect partner to pull with this kind of hand. If partner pulls to hearts, I'll raise to game.

J.S.: Partner shouldn't double on extreme distribution. If the sandwich business is not available he should use the unusual 2NT.

Grabel: 3NT. Brutal problem. Either the vulnerable opponents are messing with me or partner has a light takeout double (possibly both). In any case, I need to take some action and 3NT seems best. Partner's most likely shape is 1-4-5-3 or 0-4-5-4. Too hard to gauge how many tricks this will provide but hard to imagine that partner will ever raise. Admittedly, this could work poorly if partner had a hand that he might have made a Michaels bid but elected to double, in which case 4♥ might be cold and we are going down several in 3NT.

Unfortunately, I don't expect partner to read a 3♠ bid by me as showing this hand.

J.S.: South's first round pass (a takeout double would have avoided this problem) is justifiably brought into question by half the panel, some more subtly than others.

Stansby: Why didn't I double the 1♣ opening with my three quick tricks and three places to play at the one-level? I bid 3NT and hope partner produces a source of tricks in diamonds.

Smith: 3NT. Why didn't I bid right away?
Ivaska: 3NT. No half measures. Most North hands should offer an acceptable play for game, e. g., ♠x ♥KQ10x ♦KQ9xx ♣Qxx. The modern style is to respond on weak hands, so I don't think I can safely infer that partner is weak. I'm not worried about them running clubs as partner seems to have some club length and they've agreed on spades.

I'm glad that the moderator did not ask me if I agreed with the initial pass.

J.S.: Early entry into the auction affords an advantage - as long as the bid is a reasonable descriptive and is not wild speculation. For me, this hand is right on the border for a balanced pattern takeout double. Combine the two jacks into the ♥Q and I like it; instead make them into the ♣Q and I don't like it at all. As it is, partnership choice.

Just be prepared for some losing competitive decisions by partner.

Problem 3.

East/West vul, IMP scoring

♠AKQ76 ♥87654 ♦-- ♣643

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	1♥	1♠
Dbl*	Rdbl	2♥	?

*Three hearts

Grabel: Pass. Partner's redouble is ambiguous but does promise another bid. Double could be right especially if it taps the long trump holding but possibly ugly if from the short holding. If partner bids 2♣, I'll make a game try with 3♣.

J.S.: I agree with the ambiguous part but I

go stronger than "promises another bid" and claim that it announces that the hand belongs to your side. Not only should you insist on game, but passing misses an opportunity to make a statement about the quality of your spade suit.

Stansby: 2♠. Partner's redouble must have at least xx in spades. If I pass and partner reopens with double, I would remove to 2♣. Bidding 2♣ immediately is my chance to emphasize the good suit quality.

Ivaska: 2♠. Partner is merely showing a good hand, not necessarily with spade support, so I'll show rebiddable spades, after which he may know what to do.

Smith: Double. A little rich.

J.S.: My interpretation: spade quick tricks and five trumps should be more than enough if partner sits out the double.

Davis: 2♠. This should describe a minimum hand with good spades. It is certainly possible to pass but 2♠ should describe my hand better to my partner. I could also double 2♥ but that is a poor choice, since my defense is too weak despite the five trumps e.g., ♠xx ♥AQx ♦xxxx ♣AQJx opposite ♠xxxx ♥KJ109x ♦xx ♣xx would produce eight tricks in hearts; partner would not sit for the double of 2♥ but he would jump to 3NT holding ♠Jx ♥-- ♦AKQJxxx ♣K10xx and be very disappointed when I held nothing in hearts. If I bid 2♣ with my hand, partner might bid 6♣.

Stakgold: 4♠. Partner is short in hearts and has at least three spades. Since the redouble shows a better hand than a spade raise, I bid 4♠.

J.S.: The key to successful bidding is to describe your hand accurately and quickly to partner when possible. Partner has shown a good hand; you have very good spades; show them. 2♠ is beating around the bush a bit - show the power of the suit with 3♠. There is no compelling reason to bid 4♠ - that should deny any interest in other contracts and your spades are good in notrump or diamonds also. Ed had the hand almost on the nose, and 6♦ is a great contract despite your void, partner holding: ♠xxx ♥-- ♦AKQJxxx ♣K10x, (a 4♣ contract is in danger with a club lead which removes the diamond entry). Something to discuss with partner: after your spade bid (2♣, 3♠ or 4♠), if partner asks for key cards (spades agreed) and then bids 6♦ it should be to play.

Problem 4.

North/South vul, matchpoint scoring

♠32 ♥762 ♦AJ64 ♣KQ96

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	1NT	2♣
Dbl*	Pass	?	

*Takeout

Stakgold: Pass. I would have bid 2♥ instead of 1NT on the first round. Now I am stuck, but to justify my 1NT bid, I pass partner's double and hope for a big set!

J.S.: What constitutes a "big set" on this hand is a function of whether you have a game or not. An immediate 2♥ raise would be justified only if the partnership is using (very) constructive raises.

Grabel: Pass. I'll take a plus on this, possibly 300 against a part score or game that may be going down on bad splits.

Stansby: Pass, fully prepared to apologize if this is wrong.

Davis: Good time to find out what this means. Guarantees a singleton club or could be two? Shows extras or could be minimum? If it shows extras, I'll bid 3NT. If it could be a minimum, I'll bid 2NT.

J.S.: Ed has disclosed a weakness in my partnership discussions about using a double as takeout by opener after an overcall of a forcing 1NT response. How much, if any, extra high card values does it show? My implicit belief is: some. But that is probably not accurate enough. I am going to state that it shows a good 14 HCP. If the hand has more than a singleton in the overcalled suit there should be compensating high card values. The implication is that responder should lighten a 2NT rebid by a point or two; likewise 3NT. But there is no

reason to change the requirements for 3♥. You should follow through on this hand and bid what you were planning initially: a balanced invitational heart raise. With good spade values partner can bid 3♠, allowing you to bid an intelligent 3NT.

Ivaska: 3♥. This seems just about right on valuation, so I don't see any reasonable alternative. We may struggle to beat 2♣ with 4♥ on if North has a small singleton trump. I don't like to have surprises for partner, such as my heart support here, especially since such surprises are very destructive of partnership confidence. Indeed, my heart length may cause North to misdefend. In general, I believe in taking out takeout doubles (as Edgar Kaplan often counseled). I'm not attracted to notrump because I may lose two club tricks if East ever gets in and because of possible communication difficulties and my ruffing value in spades.

Smith: 3♥.

J.S.: Finally a comment from Ron I understand.

Problem 5.

East/West vul, Matchpoint scoring

♠5 ♥AQ ♦K542 ♣QJ10743

South	West	North	East
1♣	2♣	Dbl	2♥
?			

J.S.: This is another case where one should attempt to describe his hand immediately rather than settle for a nebulous pass. Thus I am in strong disagreement with the following:

Grabel: Pass. No need to hurry. It appears partner has five spades in which case I expect him to bid 2♠ and I'll bid 2NT. If partner doubles, I'll sit and if partner bids a minor, I will cue bid 3♥.

Stansby: Pass, and happy to pass partner's reopening double.

J.S.: This doesn't look like a defensive hand to me.

Smith: Pass.

J.S.: The following are more to the point:
Stakgold: 3♣. If partner bids 3♠, I will bid 3NT.

Davis: 3♣. I need to clue partner in on the type of hand I hold. With my good controls and shape, we might take a lot of tricks (e.g., ♠AQJx ♥xx ♦AQxx ♣Axx). If partner wants me to bid 3NT with a heart stopper, he will bid 3♠ over 3♣. Because the opponents have shown two suits, we are bidding suits we have stopped . . . even though one opponent has chosen one of the suits.

Ivaska: 3♣. In general, with a weak hand the usual procedure is to define it as soon and as low as possible. In this regard, the above sequence is similar to 1♣ - Dbl - Rdbl - Pass. Were I to pass and then bid 3♣ later, I would be showing a stronger hand. (J.S.: I disagree with the concept of passing to show a strong hand - bid when you have something.)

Also, if West were to raise hearts, which is admittedly unlikely, I might be confronted with an awkward high level guess. I'm prepared to be told that I would have lost the chance for a big number, but I think 3♣ will work out best in the long run. However, I admit I'm a bit nervous because my strong heart holding argues for defending.

J.S.: I think 3♣ is the normal, descriptive bid. I don't understand the concern about the AQ doubleton of hearts being such a great defensive holding. There are at least five hearts behind you, almost certainly including the king, and very likely three hearts to your right. My choice on this hand is an - shall we call it - "enterprising" 2NT. This bid does not show a balanced hand - with that you would pass, eager to see if partner could double. It shows a trick taking hand with hearts well stopped and leaves room for investigation of other strains. On the actual deal the pass allowed East back in the auction with 3♦ and a diamond lead is needed to defeat your 3NT contract (partner held ♠AQ10xx ♥xx ♦Jx ♣Axxx).

Our March expert Problem Solvers Panel this month is:

Ed Davis, Los Angeles, Orange County fence

Ross Grabel, Huntington Beach, Calif.

Paul Ivaska, Las Vegas, Nevada

Ron Smith, San Francisco, Calif.

Ivar Stakgold, San Diego, Calif.

JoAnna Stansby, Castro Valley, Calif.

All except Ross qualify as old-timers for our panel now. Ross is one of those bridge players who doesn't make a lot of tournament appearances but when he does, he usually wins.

Problem 1.

East/West vul, matchpoint scoring

♠J7 ♥QJ7 ♦Q97642 ♣Q3

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

J.S.: Do you go quietly or do you think your heart trick plus scattered junk is worth a double? Or something else? Maybe you would have doubled 3♦.

Ivaska: Pass. I wouldn't have doubled 3♦. I would be quite happy to defend undoubled. I don't know if 3♣ was making, so I don't know that I have a plus score to protect, to say nothing of the fact that I have no idea if I can beat 3♥. I certainly don't want to punish partner for competing. If she/he had a good defensive hand, North could have doubled 3♥ in a (probably vain) effort to get me to do something intelligent.

Grabel: Pass. Partner is 6-4 not 6-5, since he didn't Michaels the hand. Not enough defense to double and despite the ♣Q, not enough offense to bid.

Stansby: Pass. Partner has 10 black cards but I have too many losers to compete to 4♣. Doubling them is out of the question. Here is a twelve count where declarer is cold if the dummy produces as little as 10xx in spades: ♠KQ9x ♥AKxxxx ♦-- ♣xx. If dummy has ♠10xx ♥x ♦KJ10xxx ♣Kxx and partner leads the diamond ace from ♠A10xx ♥xx ♦A ♣AJ109xx, they are cold.

J.S.: Looks like the opponents are cold for ten tricks in hearts regardless of the lead if that is the actual deal. It is certainly a sobering reason for keeping quiet.

Stakgold: Double. Having chosen not to bid Michaels to show spades and a minor, partner must have a good hand with perhaps six clubs and four spades. In any event it is hard to see how West could make 3♥, so I make a business double.

J.S.: Check the above example for an example of how West might be making at least nine tricks in hearts. But I prefer a more optimistic offensive view:

Davis: If it was IMPs, I would bid 3NT. I guess I'll bid it at match points also. I'll need to take eight quick ones after a heart lead and that is certainly possible. Since I didn't want to double 3♥ and couldn't bid over 2♣, partner may pull it with ♠KQxx ♥x ♦A ♣AJxxxx.

I don't think they will make 3♥ but they may (e.g., ♠K10xx ♥AKxxxx ♦A ♣xx opposite ♠Qxx ♥xx ♦KJ10xxx ♣xx).

J.S.: The point is that partner should know almost exactly what you hold if you now bid 3NT (in view of your previous passes), and will run to 4♣ if that is a better contract. No guarantee comes with 3NT, for it is possible that the opponents aren't making 3♥ or that your side is two tricks too high. On the actual deal you would have made nine tricks in notrump after the normal heart lead, and there was no defense against 3♥.

Smith: Double. Continue the mistake?

J.S.: I am hoping for an epiphany to gain insight into Ron's comment.