



Master Solvers Panel



By John Swanson
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This month we welcome returning panel contributors

Jerry Gaer, Phoenix
Rick Roeder, San Diego
Jim Tritt, Fresno

Eddie Kantar, Santa Monica
Mike Lawrence, Now living in Tennessee.

It is rather remarkable that on this panel we have the two best bridge authors in the world offering insight to these bidding problems. No hints as to which two they are.

Problem 1.

None vul, matchpoint scoring

♠AK4 ♥A64 ♦A764 ♣J32

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	?	

J.S.: Before deciding on the best bid we need to discuss our system. The most basic issue is the range of an immediate 2NT or 3NT response. Many partnerships are using a 2NT response to 1♦ to show invitational values; about 11 high card points. I don't use that treatment because a jump to 3NT is then used to show a balanced opening bid, say 13 to 15 HCP. It acts as a preempt against accurate game and slam auctions. Another question is whether a partnership uses a single raise as 'inverted', showing a limit raise or better. It seems that our panel members are predominately inverted raisers.

Roeder: 2♣, if playing inverted as I do. Otherwise I must temporize with a tricky 2♣ call. I would not immediately bid notrump because I don't hold secondary honors. It will be better to have the lead into partner's hand.

Gaer: 2♦. Assuming inverted and therefore forcing. Wherever we end up on this hand, notrump or diamonds, it will certainly play better from partner's side.

Lawrence: 2♦, inverted. If not available, then I bid 2♣, at least creating a game force. Too many controls here to bash any number of notrump. If partner holds as little as KQxxx of both minors we have an excellent play for six diamonds.

Tritt: 2♦, inverted. I prefer 2♦ over the alternatives which could distort or confuse the auction. Jumping to 3NT on ♣Jxx – which could easily be opposite shortness – or responding in a three-card major – which could easily be greeted with a splinter raise by partner – both have major flaws. Bidding 2♦ should lead to a relatively straightforward auction.

J.S.: That's the theory and that's why we use them. However, the bid is far from a panacea. Jim has forgotten that he held the North cards on this deal. After his partner's inverted minor, neither side was able to get across the message that the hands were balanced; and the auction escalated to the slam level when the limit was nine tricks.

Kantar: 3NT. A simple matchpoint bid for a simple soul. Please don't tell me partner had a singleton club!

J.S.: Not this time. Eddie didn't tell us the range of his 3NT response (I would like to think 16-17). There is an advantage in simplicity, especially when you can show the nature of the hand and approximate high cards in one bid. I guess there is no big lesson here. Just know what your bids show and do the best you can within those limits. Not every hand is a textbook example.

Problem 2.

Both vul, IMP scoring

♠K73 ♥5 ♦KQJ83 ♣AJ73

North	East	South	West
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
4♥	Pass	?	

Kantar: 4NT. In case partner has three aces and the spade queen. The torture rebid is 5♠.

Gaer: 4NT. Sounds like a good 6-5 or even 6-6. With all controls, I see no reason to not get right to the point.

Lawrence: 4♠. 4♥ is an odd bid that takes up a lot of room. It better have a distinct meaning else this South hand will be guessing. My guess is that North has five spades and six hearts and not that much of a hand: ♠AQ10xx ♥KJxxxx ♦x ♣Q. I do not feel strongly about this.

J.S.: Well, I do, so I am taking over. Jumps in forcing auctions should be descriptive, or if you prefer, picture bids. The 4♥ bid says precisely: I am interested in slam with good hearts, but I have no control in the unbid suit (clubs). This means that, even if partner has the doubleton club queen slam is, at best, even money. Partner should not hold a singleton club (per Mike's example). The following two panel members have the general idea also, but need to tighten up the meaning of 4♥.

Tritt: 4♠. I think 4♥ is more of an effort to describe the hand and suggest hearts as trumps than it is a slam try. 3♥ seems a more economical start to slam exploration than 4♥. So I would just correct to 4♠.

Roeder: 4♠. If pard was more interested in slam or hearing a club cue bid from me, he could have slowed down the auction with 3♥.

J.S.: For the record, partner held ♠AJxxx ♥AKQxx ♦x ♣xx. One could nitpick that the spade suit should be a tad better, but the hand does offer good trick taking potential. As it is, even 4♠ could be in danger with a bad trump split opposite South's useless diamond holding.

Problem 3.

North/South vul, IMP scoring

♠83 ♥K109543 ♦93 ♣J83

South	West	North	East
Pass	Pass	1♦	Dbl
?			

Lawrence: 2♥. Pretty good hearts, one chance to show them. You must make up your mind whether this is a safe and useful moment to bid 2♥. I have had way too many experiences where an opponent made a bid like this, and after I got a mediocre result, I thought that he had gotten away with something. I am not so sure that it was not just good bridge. If my partner has two hearts, nothing bad should happen here, and there are many good things that can happen.

J.S.: What if I told you that East held four hearts and opening bid values (over partner's honors)? Would 2♥ seem safe? It is not I who told you - it was East!

Gaer: 1♥. The systemic 2♥ could lead to a real disaster if the doubler has his bid. After 1♥ I shouldn't be in a position to have to bid again.

J.S.: Let's imagine that partner rebids 1♠ after your heart response. Do you pass? I would say you have committed yourself to another bid.

Tritt: 1♥. I would like to bid 2♥, but the colors are wrong. 1♥ might allow us to compete, or might direct the best lead.

J.S.: The problem is that the colors are wrong for 1♥. It is a risky investment for a nebulous, even doubtful opening lead advantage. Is anyone beginning to get the idea of what happened on this deal?

Kantar: 2♥ and get it over with. If I bid 1♥ and then later more hearts won't that show a better hand?

J.S.: Eddie is recovering from a hip replacement and it is hardly fair to kick a man while he's down, but I can't help myself. Doesn't even 1♥ (in view of the vulnerability and takeout double at your right) show a better hand?

Roeder: 1♥. My hand is not strong enough to jump to 2♥ at these colors. I am not crazy about the possibility of 1♦ doubled being the final contract. I wish to suggest a heart lead against a spade contract.

J.S.: Suggest away. Partner holds: ♠K1094 ♥-- ♦AQ8642 ♣K64. This deal has a remarkable story behind it. It was the last hand (number 64) in the finals of the Japan NEC money tournament this year. Two measly IMPs separated the combatants. Both South players decided to risk a 1♥ bid, and as a result got to declare 2♥. The declarer on the leading team slipped a trick in the play and was down 400 versus the minus 300 at the other table, losing the event (and \$6,000) by 1 IMP. It is going to take a lot of successful 1♥ (or 2♥) bids to recover that!

Problem 4.

East/West vul, IMP scoring

♠J10 ♥AKJ6532 ♦A5 ♣J10

West	North	East	South
1♣	3♦	Pass	?

Kantar: 3♥. It sort of looks right.

J.S.: It does - from an offensive view. This is a tactical bid situation. You expect four losers is a diamond contract; maybe only four in a heart contract. But you expect only three tricks on defense; possibly four if the opponents hold relatively balanced hands. How are you going to defeat a 4♣ contract? No one on the panel seemed to appreciate that the object here is to buy the contract at the four level.

Gaer: 3♥. Again, the conservative course. Partner is allowed to raise if his hand got better. (Something like ♠xxx ♥xx ♦KQxxxx ♣x) Also, if we end up defending, not unlikely, I know that if partner now doesn't lead my suit it is probable that he doesn't have any, which will simplify the defense.

Lawrence: If 3♥ is natural and constructive and not forcing, 3♥ is best. If it is forcing, 3♥ is too dangerous. So your question really is not what you should bid but what 3♥ should mean. I can make a case for it being this hand, so I will do that.

J.S.: It is nice to know if 3♥ is forcing or not, but that question is not germane to my concept of what this problem is about. For future reference: I respond to jump overcalls with the same system I use to respond to opening preempts. In this case, 3♥ would be forcing.

Tritt: 4♥. I like 4♥ because we might be able to play it there, or we might be able to judge whether to bid above the opponents at the five level, or we might get pard off to the best lead, or we might disrupt the opponents' auction by continuing the preempt. Given East's pass, the opponents cannot introduce spades until the four level after

4♥.

Roeder: 4♥. If you settle for a forcing 3♥ bid, you are going to wind up at the four level anyway if LHO passes this call. An immediate 4♥ bid makes it difficult for the opponents to find their presumed spade fit. RHO may not have been able to make a negative double because of his heart shortage.

J.S.: You might be able to buy the contract with a 4♥ call, but I think your chances are even better with a 4♦ call. This makes it dangerous for the opening bidder to reenter the auction with a double (which would imply heart support) and he might be quite uncomfortable rebidding 4♠ on a four card suit. The uncertainty of a worthwhile five level contract should remove that from consideration.

Also, a diamond lead will be just as useful as a heart lead for the defense.

Problem 5.

None vul, matchpoint scoring

♠J6 ♥87 ♦AKQ4 ♣K10642

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

Lawrence: 2NT. I am not rebidding 3♣, painting a picture I am not happy with. I do have the Jx of spades so notrump will be bad only if North has ♠xxx or ♠xx. I am estimating that 57% of the panel will suggest that rebidding 1NT on the first round is a better call than 2♣. Is there anyone who likes bidding after opening this hand with 1♦? A 1NT rebid makes the bidding easy. Of course you still have to find a contract you like, but that is a tradeoff. I can make a case for opening 1♣ too. Lots of ifs here. Perhaps this is just a lousy hand type.

J.S.: I agree with all of that. Proponents of other calls are going to have difficulty defending their choices.

Kantar: 2NT. If I had 10x of hearts, I would bid 3♥.

J.S.: Will it be unanimous? Unfortunately not:

Roeder: 3♣. The real problem comes on the next round if pard bids 3♦. Ugh! But, for now, like many Americans who overcharge on their credit cards today only to have to pay the piper down the road, I will be oblivious to future problems.

Tritt: 3♣. I know this bid is potentially dangerous (suggesting five diamonds), but clubs could still be the right strain. Hopefully, I can convince partner of lack of diamond length by bidding 3NT over a 3♦ preference and/or offering clubs again as trump if possible, suggesting longer and/or better clubs than diamonds. 2NT is possible, but is also flawed due to the weak spade holding. If 3NT is right, partner can still bid it over 3♣.

J.S.: He can, of course, but you might have stirred him to unnatural heights with 3♣.

Gaer: 3♣. Marking time until I find out what is going on. 3♣ is too much of a distortion, and my spade stopper is a little too shaky to bid NT myself.

J.S.: I don't mind 3♣ with three little spades, a singleton heart and solid values. Partner will be disappointed in your actual distribution if he bids beyond 3NT. Holding this pattern the entire auction is placed on a more solid basis with a 1NT rebid (after opening with either minor).

But if the opponents run off five or six spade tricks it is not my fault - it is just a lousy hand type.