



By John Swanson  
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**C**ontributors this month are: Ed Davis, perennial District 23 Grand National Teams and Pairs representative (and formal national title holder); Fred Hamilton, former World Champion and perhaps the best at-the-table bridge teacher I have ever seen in action; Ivar Stakgold, many time national champion, Bermuda Bowl contender and mathematics professor; Paul Ivaska, player par excellence, and perhaps the best bridge raconteur of all time. Paul has named several spectacular losing plays including a sacrifice which is set more than the value of game which the opponents can't make - an "airball." It was taken from former great Laker basketball announcer Chick Hearn's name for a shot which misses both the basket and backboard. Joining the panel are JoAnna and Lew Stansby, who have individually won numerous bridge titles at the national and international level and together are, without doubt, the best married mixed bridge pair of all time. Their favored system is based on Kaplan-Sheinwold.

### Problem 1.

North/South vul, IMP scoring

♠AK7 ♥108 ♦KQ94 ♣A732

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

**Stackgold:** Again it's a guess, but with a vulnerable game at stake. I bid 4♠. I assume partner has 6-9 points with five spades or a good four-carder. Obviously, there are many hands on which we are favorites to make 4♠ and others where we fail. Since I don't expect to set 4♥ more than two tricks, the vulnerability leads me to bid 4♠.

**Stansbys:** 4♠. We might bid 4♠ over 2♠ if RHO passed, so will bid it now. Double would be penalty, not a good hand with three spades.

**J.S.:** But is that the best way to use double here? It seems much more likely that we will hold extra values for a takeout double with exactly three spades than some kind of balanced monster with only a doubleton.

I am quite comfortable criticizing a 4♠ call because that is what I did at the table (bid it, not criticize it).

**Ivaska:** 4♠. Obviously I would have bid a game (via a 3♥ cue bid) if East had passed so I have to do something here, as I don't regard this as a forcing situation. Double would better describe the general nature of the hand, but I don't want to double without a trump trick.

As in another problem, I have to be concerned about East holding a highly distributional hand. My doubleton will keep partner from being tapped indefinitely.

**J.S.:** Space does allow me to be critical of a 3♥ cue bid (should East have passed); what purpose would that bid serve? There is no slam interest, you are not going to sit for 3NT, and you know what to do should an opponent bid again. 3♥ would draw a five yard delay of game penalty.

**Hamilton:** Double. This double traditionally shows a good hand without four spades. There are some hands where pard will jump to 2♠ on a four card suit with good shape, so 4♠ is not a real consideration. Double fills the bill nicely.

**Davis:** Double. I hope double conveys extra high cards and three spades so that partner can pull this with some distribution. I would not be surprised if 4♥ is close to making (♠x ♥AKQxxx ♦x ♣KQ10x), as opener has a hand too good to open 4♥. I would have only raised to 3♠ should East have passed. After all, I wouldn't raise 2♠ at all if my ♠K was a small card.

**J.S.:** I agree that a semi-balanced 14 is not worth a raise opposite partner's limited 2♠ call, but with that extra well-positioned queen thrown in this looks like a game raise to me. But Ed was right. 4♠ has essentially no play opposite partner's grubby ten count. East was trying to donate 500 points against a part-score.

### Problem 2.

Both vul, IMP scoring

♠A ♥A863 ♦AK64 ♣A962

East	South	West	North
1♣	?		

**J.S.:** What a diabolical hand! You pick up all the aces with a king thrown in and wonder if you and partner can bid accurately to a possible slam. Then RHO throws a 1♣ card on the table. Not only does slam become a thing of the past, even game is doubtful.

Worse, you have no good initial call.

**Ivaska:** Double. No problem for now. I plan to rebid in notrump over spade bids from partner. She/he will not expect the usual spade length once I show my considerable strength.

**Hamilton:** Pass. Well, you cannot get me to double with a stiff spade. An overcall does not look right, so it's a heavy 1NT or an even heavier pass. I am a passer.

If we miss game where LHO can't bid and pard cannot dredge up a reopening call, I (along with my pard and teammates) will be unhappy. I am man enough to take the criticism. Something quite good may result for my side as well.

**Stackgold:** 1NT. Many possible bids - none perfect. I can't double because I am unable to handle a high-level spade response. I see 1♦ or 1NT as reasonable bids. My choice is 1NT (yes, I know I have 19 points and five honor tricks - but only a single club stopper.) Because I play the 1NT overcall as 16-18+, I am only under-bidding a little.

**J.S.:** You couldn't get me to double either, but 1NT is way down on my list also.

**Davis:** Pass. I hope to enter by doubling on the next round if LHO responds 1♠ or RHO rebids 1♠ over a red suit response. I expect this to work out better than to double 1♠ and then rebid over partner's likely 1♠ bid. If it goes all pass in 1♠, that contract may fail by a couple of tricks when we have no game.

**Stansbys:** Pass. Hope they bid spades so we can double. That might be the only way to get to clubs if that's our best suit. If LHO responds 1NT, we play that reopening with 2♦ shows diamonds plus a major and would bid that.

**J.S.:** My choice would be 1♣, planning to reenter the auction with double after the opponents bid spades. The big drawback of passing, then doubling, is that you would do the same with two aces fewer. There will be no way to express the overall strength of your hand after passing initially. It turns out that your side doesn't belong in the auction. E/W can't be defeated in 3♠ and you would have trouble taking eight tricks in your 4-4 diamond fit.

There is a partnership issue worth discussing here. After the auction 1♣ - Pass - 1♠ - Pass; 2♠ - Dbl (by you) - Pass - ? would 2NT be Lebensohl or would it be asking for partner (you) to choose a suit?

A useful definition is that if game is a possibility, Lebensohl applies.

### Problem 3.

North/South vul, IMP scoring

♠97542 ♥Q ♦AK642 ♣104

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	4♥	?

**J.S.:** It's bad enough when opponents interfere with our strong notrump opening bids at the two level and sometimes at the three level, but here we must contend with a four level preempt. Is it better to risk 4♠ on a suit which barely qualifies as a five-bagger, or to show general strength with a double?

**Stackgold:** 4♠. Tough problem. Partner probably has three or four spades, but the suit is not likely to break favorably so that 4♠ may be in jeopardy. Still, it's easy to construct hands in which 4♠ has a good shot, for instance: ♠KJxx ♥Jxx ♦QJx ♣AKx. Thus I bid 4♠ with trepidation and prepare excuses for the post mortem!

**J.S.:** What is partner's expected spade

length in this situation? I asked that question of Tim Bourke, a leading bridge probability expert. He reported back (based on appropriate inferences from the auction): A simulation of 600 deals suggests that 3.25 is a good number to work from. Similarly West has an average 3.27 spade length and East 1.48.

**Hamilton:** Double. Boy, they really put a gun to my head! I have to double, as 4♠ is just too much of an adventure. At least if partner can bid them we are in the right contract. But will pard do so with four spades? I think so; after all there are only 13 hearts - and RHO is known to have seven or eight of them.

So the double must be based on high card values, no clear direction. If pard pulls to 5♠ though, do I pass or try 5♦?

Most of the time pard will just pass the double unless he has more offense than defense. We will not be shocked if they make it but expect down 1 or 2.

**Ivaska:** 4♠. People don't usually bid 4♥ over 1N without extreme distribution, e.g., an 8-bagger or a 7-4-1-1, since they're so exposed to a double, so I wouldn't be too surprised if 4♥ made. In the present setting, I don't wish to risk a possible double game swing. The more solid a citizen East is, the more attractive 4♠ becomes. By the way, if 4♥ were passed back to partner, I would think a double would show heart shortness with a good defensive hand, not a penalty double with a couple of heart tricks.

**Davis:** 4♠. With RHO having seven or eight hearts, I think partner's average number of hearts is about 2.4. Thus he is a favorite to have three or four spades. I expect to have a decent play for 4♠ most of the time, and it is clear to go after the vulnerable game bonus. If my LHO doubles, I will assume that is based on spade tricks and will try to minimize my losses in 5♦.

**J.S.:** From the previous three comments it appears that no matter who doubles four hearts it is takeout. As silly as this might seem at first blush, it is based on a sound bidding principle. If the opponents are in a contract you are certain to defeat, you must not double when the double could be based on general strength and partner could misjudge and remove the double when you know it would be wrong.

**Stansbys:** 4♠. If RHO is short in diamonds we won't get rich against 4♥. If this is wrong maybe LHO will double and we can get to 5♣. Or to 5♠x.

**J.S.:** It's asking a bit much of the opponents to be making takeout doubles for your side. On the actual deal partner did hold 3.25 spades (the AK10 tripleton) and it was better to bid 4♠ even though it wouldn't make - because 4♥ was cold.

### Problem 4.

East/West vul, IMP scoring

♠Q653 ♥K7 ♦1075 ♣AJ94

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♦	1♥	Pass
?			

**J.S.:** This is a straight-forward problem. You hold too much to pass, but is it better to raise with a doubleton or bid 1NT with a non-existent stopper?

**Stackgold:** 2♥. Only a raise to 2♥ seems reasonable. I can always claim afterwards that I had a diamond mixed up with my hearts.

**J.S.:** Or you could bid 1NT and claim that your ♥K was mixed in with your diamonds.

**Ivaska:** 1NT. Yes, of course I would prefer a diamond stopper, but pass is out of the question with this good a hand. Bidding 2♥ might work out better if partner is short in diamonds, but 1NT is a better description and therefore a sounder basis for any further auction. I would be more reluctant to bid notrump on ten-third if LHO had opened in a major.

**Hamilton:** 1NT. Right on shape, right on strength, a bit weak in the stopper department. It is surely somewhat dependent on pard's overcall style, but I can see game as a real possibility, and prefer not to raise with only ♥Kx. Help! Somebody save me

from 1NT please.

**J.S.:** The Bible doesn't have a lot to say about bridge, but this situation is covered in Luke 4:23.

**Stansbys:** 2♥. We don't like raising with only two trumps, but nothing else is attractive either.

**Davis:** 2♥. If partner has a minimum, this should be fine. If partner has enough for another bid, we will be well placed to explore spades or notrump.

The only really bad contract that can occur is if I bid 1NT rather than 2♥ and partner has enough to bid 3NT with a hand like ♠AJ ♥AQJxxx ♦xx ♣Kxx.

**J.S.:** That, or the hand that partner actually held. Enough to raise to 2NT (without a diamond stopper). The opponents briskly cashed five diamonds and an ace with your side on for ten tricks in hearts.

### Problem 5.

None vul, Matchpoint scoring

♠AKQ3 ♥Q4 ♦A104 ♣A1042

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

\*natural

**J.S.:** \*As an aside, note that the use of a cue bid as natural is an alert under ACBL rules.

**Hamilton:** Double is the most flexible. Again this double shows extra strength and leaves partner in on the decision making. The only other calls that come to mind are 3NT, which would better describe something like ♠Kx ♥Qx ♦Kxxx ♣AKQJxx, or 3♥, which is better defined as a big hand with short hearts. So double it is.

**J.S.:** There are other possible calls: a natural 2NT or ...

**Ivaska:** 2♠. I don't see any reason to abandon normal development of the auction. 2♠ shows a good hand, although I don't think it's absolutely forcing.

If partner can't raise spades or bid notrump, I'll bid notrump myself, hoping that we have a stopper between the two hands (or that the hearts are blocked, or that West doesn't have one to lead).

**Davis:** 2♠. A really tough choice between double (penalty) and 2♠ reaching game somewhere. Give partner ♠Jxx ♥Kxxx ♦xxx ♣KJx and 3NT makes whereas 2♥ will probably go down only two tricks.

Take away partner's two black jacks and now we probably don't make 3NT but still beat them two tricks. And, of course, partner's hearts could be ♥xxxx.

**J.S.:** The other two panelists don't believe there is any alternative to the double:

**Stansbys:** Double. This seems too obvious. Partner need not sit with very weak hearts.

**Stackgold:** Double - for business (what else?). With only four small hearts, partner may choose to run.

**J.S.:** At the table I thought that South should bid 2NT rather than double. This opinion was based strongly on the belief that East was not doing something stupid. On reflexion, aided by Freddy's comment, I have come about 180 degrees.

Double is such a flexible call - it keeps partner in the auction without raising the level. Partner must also appreciate that East is (probably) not completely out of line - East knows that there are at least four hearts in one hand against him. Thus holding four baby hearts North should remove the double to a suit. With four hearts and a single honor he should bid an appropriate number of notrump. With four or more healthy hearts he will pass.

My judgment at the table might have been affected by seeing seven hearts to the AKJ10 in the East hand. East would have taken zero tricks in notrump with his partner on lead but took plenty in 2♥ doubled.

So it was my pass of the double holding four small hearts that was stupid, not East's 2♥ bid or partner's double. Ah, well, that is one of our problems as bridge players: finding opponents who make more stupid bids than we do.