



By John Swanson  
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When I began playing bridge there was a bidding forum, the Master Solvers' Club, in the Bridge World magazine. The column was moderated by Albert Morehead but was developed into its present form by the loquacious, opinionated editor Sonny Moyses. The form and style have been copied many times over including what you are reading now. I have contributed as a panel member in the Bridge World for more than 30 years, mostly with Jeff Rubens, the editor, as moderator. At last I have the opportunity to turn the tables. Jeff was also my teammate in the 1973 Bermuda Bowl. I don't know if he is a better player, writer, or editor. If you have interest in learning more about bridge, especially from the expert viewpoint, (or the history of the Master Solvers' Club) check out [www.bridgeworld.com](http://www.bridgeworld.com)

We have another east coast contributor this month, Richard Pavlicek. Richard is a top expert who has reduced his tournament schedule, but remains most popular in Florida. He has, in my opinion, the best Internet bridge site, [www.rpbridge.net](http://www.rpbridge.net)

You will find whatever you could possibly want concerning the game of bridge at his site, and lots of it, all superbly written and presented. Did I mention that I thought it was good? Our other panel members this month are Steven and Kitty Cooper, Chip Martel, Mark Itabashi, Harvey Brody and John Mohan. All have remarkable tournament records. Kitty has an Internet site for bridge teachers and students:

[www.kittycooper.com/Bridge](http://www.kittycooper.com/Bridge)

Chip, with partner Lew Stansby have a national and international record over the past twenty plus years matched only by members of the Nickell team. Harvey is a leading San Francisco area player and John Mohan seems to be the best player in whatever country he is currently residing.

### Problem 1.

North/South vul, matchpoints

♠5 ♥KQJ10954 ♦AQJ ♣J4

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

\*Preemptive

**Pavlicek:** 5♥. Wow, you really dug deep for this scenario. Defending 4♣ doesn't rate to be a good score (and might make) so I bid what I'm looking at. As unlikely as it may seem, this has to be to play with 4NT and 5♣ available for takeout. If partner pulls to 6♣, I'll try 6♦ and might get lucky.

**J.S.:** Unlikely, yes. But no digging was involved. I faced this problem in the B-A-M at the recent nationals in San Diego. The problem, as I see it, is getting partner to believe that any heart bid you make is natural and not a cue bid.

**Mohan:** I held this hand in San Diego; after 1♥ - Pass - 2♠ - Pass - 2NT I ventured 3♥; after Pass - Puzzled Pass - 3♠, opponents clearly tipped that 4♥ was correct action. I was allowed to play there and since I made five, I now bid five.

**J.S.:** It's really nice when the opponents make the bidding soft for you. Rodwell and Meckstroth made life difficult at my table.

We will assume that you bid 5♥ in this situation with confidence that partner will realize that your bid is to play. Sharing this confidence are:

**Martel:** 5♥ (with a sensible partner who will view this as natural).

**Itabashi:** 5♥. This must be natural, as I have a 5♣ bid available if I really wanted partner picking a minor at the 6-level. Expectation is to make five or perhaps even more if RHO has psyched. Partner should be able to work it out if that is the case, as we would hardly be bidding this way with much less.

**Brody:** 6♥. This is the only bid that I can think of to describe my hand it also may be a two way shot.

**Rubens:** 6♥. I expect East to sacrifice (but if he thinks I am bluffing, that is all right as well). What about seven? If we can make it, I don't see how any other action will give us a better chance to reach it (and I hope that partner will be careful about bidding

notrump when his spade control is the ace).

If I bid it right away, I would not expect a sacrifice most of the time - it looks like a gamble, and East will expect others to be in 6♣ doubled.

This extreme case of jumping out of the possible frying pan (5♥) into the fire (6♥) is based on what I perceive as wishful thinking bordering on fantasy. Why shouldn't the situation be exactly what it was (or similar), with partner holding: ♠AK6 ♥8 ♦K10864 ♣Q1076? Defending 4♣ doubled is a likely loser and you will take eleven tricks after the normal spade lead (even Meckwell have trouble diving the winning lead on occasion). The difficulty is getting partner to believe that your 5♥ call is natural. My solution was to bid 4NT, ostensibly a request for partner to choose his better minor. I then bid 5♥. This type of auction is used to suggest a slam (which is fine with these cards) and will serve as an alert to partner that you are insisting on hearts. But I think we all missed the best action on this hand. There is no assurance that the later auction will ever allow you to bid hearts naturally. Thus you should take a slight risk and bid 4♥ immediately over 1♥.

An immediate 3♥ asks partner to bid 3NT with a heart stopper.

**J.S.:** The Cooper's misread the problem.

### Problem 2.

East/West vul, IMP scoring

♠K10854 ♥A987 ♦-- ♣QJ62

South	West	North	East
Pass	1♦	Pass	1NT
Dbl	3NT	Pass	Pass
?			

Would you have opened the bidding?

**J.S.:** The panel is almost unanimous in opening 1♠. The big advantage is that the call acts as a preempt, frequently disrupting the opponents constructive bidding. Passing might make it more difficult for your side to effectively enter the auction.

**Coopers:** Pass. We have shown our hand. This is why we would have opened 1♠ with this hand. Six losers and almost two defensive tricks meets our criteria. It helps that we play Drury in all seats.

**J.S.:** I have no strong argument with a 1♠ opening bid on these cards. But I strongly disagree that you would have shown your hand with the call. On this particular auction the delayed takeout double indicates both majors and fewer than 12 HCP, a much more accurate description than the initial 1♠ bid gives.

**Brody:** I believe in opening all close hands that contain the majors.

**Pavlicek:** Pass. At this vulnerability I would have opened 1♠; but it's too late to speculate now, especially since my double was a reasonable description. Anything further seems desperate, though a double has appeal if aiming for swings.

**Rubens:** Pass and lead whichever spade spot matches my agreements. Deception offers little when the bidding has been so descriptive, and it's possible partner will be involved. I pass initially opposite myself but it depends on agreements. It's close but loses on the honor-trick tiebreaker.

**Itabashi:** Pass. I would not have opened and partner did hear me double. West probably has running diamonds, but partner also has this info available by looking at his hand. If someone put a gun to my head and made me bid, I would double again to give partner the choice of saving or defending.

**J.S.:** Obviously someone else sent in answers purporting to be Mark Itabashi. The real Mark has never passed at the table when bidding is an option.

**Mohan:** Pass - yes I would have opened. I think today that virtually all experts agree that initial action at favorable vulnerability is a big winner in the long run (I hope that this hand is not the short run).

**J.S.:** This is a deal which argues for an initial pass followed by appropriate action to describe the hand - which includes a second takeout double. Partner will know if diamonds are running or not from the first double but he doesn't know your hand has so much offensive potential (and you don't know what to lead). He held: ♠63 ♥KJ532 ♦75 ♣9743. Your side is off one in 4♥, while the vulnerable opponents have ten easy tricks in notrump.

**Martel:** Double is probably a decent gamble now. I wouldn't expect partner to bid

the first time with some random 4-4-3-2 hand, but four of a major can still easily be a good save and if partner has to pass with ♦J10xx and (hopefully) some bits and pieces, we can hope to beat them.

### Problem 3.

East/West vul, matchpoints

♠AQ ♥6 ♦K98654 ♣AQ74

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

\*shows five or more

**Brody:** Double. Shows a three card spade raise, but in view of my overall strength and location of values it is a useful lie. Maybe I can show my diamonds at the three level. Bidding 3♣ is a good alternate.

**Coopers:** : Double. This shows diamonds and continued interest in the auction, it is not a support double the way we play nor should it be. If they bid 2♥ we can bid 2♠ next to show our strong doubleton and good hand.

**J.S.:** Obviously disagreement exists over the meaning of double in this auction. Make a note to discuss the situation with partner. There is yet a third opinion as to what double shows here:

**Mohan:** 2NT. Presumably double would show extras and encourage partner to compete with a marginal hand; 2NT therefore, while obviously showing extras, pinpoints 6-4. Any spade support now will place partner in a random judgment situation.

**Pavlicek:** Double. This shows extra values and uncertainty as to strain (competitive) which conveys my hand well (not three spades, no clear minor bid). Even if it just shows diamonds as many (most?) play, how bad can it be with a six-bagger? If it continues 2♥ - Pass - Pass, I'll try 2♠.

**Itabashi:** 3♣. I intend to balance with a double if 4♥ comes back to me and perhaps a 3♠ bid if 3♥ comes back. I like support doubles, so partner would know I had a strong doubleton raise in the second case, not three. Having to ruff hearts with the spade honors could be a problem, in which case a fit in a minor suit would play better.

**J.S.:** Why would a double of 4♥ (on the next round) be takeout? It's as penalty as they come in my book.

**Rubens:** 3♣. Looks awkward for playing in spades; with six spades, North might have bid 2♠ one time or the other.

**J.S.:** To recap, one of our experts plays that a double here as three-card support, two play it as showing diamonds, and two show minors. Note that none use it as penalty. Penalty doubles at the two level after the opponents have shown a fit are a rare species. Without specific discussion with my partners I would expect them to treat the double as spade support. Strangely, I like double no matter what it means. In all cases it shows extra values and distribution which warrants competition. For those (like me) who enjoy knowing the actual deal, partner held: ♠KJ1074 ♥873 ♦Q7 ♣K53, and a spade partial was the winner. (Chip didn't answer this problem.)

### Problem 4.

None vulnerable, matchpoints

♠A732 ♥KJ82 ♦Q10 ♣984

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	?	

**J.S.:** I wouldn't have thought of this as a problem, Pass seeming automatic, but it was opened 1♥ against me by an outstanding European player and in discussing the hand at the time I found it was opened by another expert. Is my view out of line with current expert thinking?

**Brody:** Pass. Even though I like to open as light as the next bidder, this is carrying light opening a bit too far.

**Rubens:** Pass.

**Martel:** Pass. Opening seems a good way to get a minus score. Also nice for partner to not have to be this afraid of your third seat openings.

**Coopers:** Pass. Playing an aggressive opening we do not need to protect with this poor hand in third chair, if we did open we would open 1♥.

**Mohan:** Pass. In my humble opinion it is

a losing tactic to open this hand with no idea what partner should lead and no offensive potential. Yes, if all pass you may be entitled to +110 but even that is questionable. The myriad of bad results will more than offset the occasional winner.

**J.S.:** Please - no humility here. We're all about boldly expressing our views. If anyone disagrees they are probably wrong.

**Pavlicek:** 1♥. While I'd like a better suit, matchpoint events aren't won by waiting for ideal hands. Getting in my lead-director and hampering the opposition are too attractive to pass up. Presumably we play some form of Drury, so partner can tune in on the joke without stringing me up.

**Itabashi:** 1♥. With both majors and a lead directing type opening, I like opening here (non-vul only).

**J.S.:** My objections to the 1♥ opening (in addition to not have an opening bid) is that you don't have a strong opinion about the opening lead - your bid may deter partner from attacking in his own suit. Also, if you open and partner has a useful suit you will not be able to raise in a competitive situation without overstating your values significantly. At one table where the hand was opened justice was served in my view. The East/West players briskly bid to 4♠ and North "saved" at 5♥, down more than the value of the game which wasn't making.

### Problem 5.

None vul, IMP scoring

♠A ♥AQJ95 ♦Q752 ♣J43

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

**Coopers:** 3♣. We don't know what's right so let partner do something intelligent.

**J.S.:** It's more likely partner will do something intelligent if we do something intelligent first - not that I know what that is on this hand. Let's see if we can get some help:

**Brody:** 3♠. I will make one slam try given my partners unknown strength, if we are playing 2/1 and will bid 3♥ if we are not.

**J.S.:** I don't understand what the difference is now whether or not 2♣ was a game force. Also, why is 3♠ a slam try? Can't 3♠ simply be an effort to find the best game, allowing partner to bid 3NT with an appropriate holding?

**Martel:** 4♣. While 3♥ has appeal (if partner has, say, ♠Qx ♥10x ♦AKxx ♣Axxxx, we belong in 4♥, and probably won't get there over 4♣), I can't pass up supporting when it describes my exact pattern and when clubs may be our best strain (with ♠xx ♥Kx ♦Axxx ♣AKQxx, 7♣ is great).

**Rubens:** 4♣. If I bid 3♥ now and 4♣ next, partner may think my clubs are high-honor-doubleton, which offers different prospects opposite, say, ♠AKxxx or ♣AQxxx. We can still reach 4♥. If the nine of hearts were the ten, I would bid three hearts and plan not to bid 4♣ at all, despite the weak diamonds.

**J.S.:** What's your call with ♠xx ♥AQxxx ♦KQxx ♣Kx? Surely not 3♥; maybe 3♠ shows this hand. I would be a 4♣ bidder.

**Itabashi:** 3♥. I thought this was the most difficult choice of the set. With such weak holdings in the minors I was a little hesitant to make a forward sounding bid of 3♣. Either minor or even 4♥ in a 5-2 fit could be right. If partner bids 4♣ over 3♥ I will bid 4♣ and hope partner gets the right picture.

**Pavlicek:** 3♥. Showing a strong five-card suit (or six). The weak diamond suit and doubtful club holding dims slam prospects, so I'll continue to describe in search of the best strain. For instance, if partner has ♠Kx ♥10x ♦KJxx ♣AKxxx, how else can we reach the best contract of 4♥?

**J.S.:** The panel's views are so disparate that this must be another good partnership discussion hand. At the table I bid 2♦ and followed up with 3♥. But I now want to back up the auction and raise clubs immediately. The diamond suit is so weak that it is an embarrassment to have introduced it at all - even though the suit has been raised I don't want to declare in diamonds.

**Mohan:** This is difficult because partner's values could be anywhere. I guess at 3♥; maybe partner's next bid will help. I will pass 3NT gleefully and if partner bids 3♣ instead, I'll retire to the bar.

**J.S.:** Yes, let's all go - order me a glass of water - without ice.