

Master Solvers Panel



By Marshall Miles  
San Bernardino, Calif.

This month's panelists are Harvey Brody and Hamish Bennett, District 21; Ken Barbour, Steve Bruno and Jerry Gaer, District 17; Dayou Zhou and John Strauch, District 22; and Jill Meyers, guest panelist from ALACBU District 23.

Problem 1.

Neither vulnerable, matchpoints  
You, South, hold

♠K4 ♥K106 ♦Q52 ♣KQ986

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

What call do you make?

MEYERS: 2NT. I am not crazy about only having ♦Qxx, but I am balanced, only have two spades, and don't want to distort the hand by taking a false preference.

ZHOU: 2NT, assuming this is forcing, of course. Yes notrump (if that's where we belong) will play better from partner's side if she has Kx of diamonds, but this is not a perfect world. 3♣ (the only alternative for me) seems more flawed with such a "no-trumpy" hand. Partner's next bid should pinpoint where we live.

STRAUCH: 2NT. Give partner some space to describe his hand. Not a time for "fast arrival." In a finely-tuned partnership you might bid a 4th suit 3♦, hoping to get notrump played from the other side with ♦Kx, or to have partner rebid a chunky major with diamond weakness.

BRODY: 3♦. This seems to be the most flexible bid, even if you are playing 2/1.

BRUNO: 3♦. If I had a full diamond stopper, I would bid NT. The trouble with not bidding NT is that pard could have Jx of diamonds. But I'm hoping for Kx. Or a sixth spade; or a fifth heart; or a third club ... in which case I'll hear about those things over 3♦.

BENNETT: 3♦. If partner bids 3NT, I will pass; if he bids 3♥ or 3♠, I will raise to game. If by chance, partner bids 4♣ showing 5-4-1-3 distribution, slam in clubs is a possibility.

BARBOUR: 2♠. It's critical in 2/1 bidding to allow maximum room to explore for the right contract. We should take advantage of the system here to make the cheapest descriptive bid. Later bids will allow the partnership to decide between spades, hearts, clubs, or notrumps - all of which are possible games.

GAER: 2♠. Anything else is even more flawed. Partner's next call should clarify this common, but awkward situation.

M.M.: I'll admit that I favor the mark-time bid of 2♠ in this situation, for many of the same reasons mentioned by Ken and Jerry. I am not happy about forcing to game with an aceless, balanced 13 points, since ... holding this hand, it is possible that no game will make. But you can't logically stop short, and the problem is to choose the right strain. Over 75% of the time you will belong in either 3NT or 4 , and the problem is how to get partner to make an intel-

ligent choice. If you bid 2NT, he will not rebid a five card spade suit with 5-4-2-2 or 5-4-3-1 distribution, but will almost surely raise to 3NT. But if you bid 2 and partner bids 3 (not playing a fast arrival), you can now bid 3NT to give him a choice. I don't see why, when playing a 2/1 system, you can't bid that way to show a single stopper in the unbid suit (with possibly a doubleton honor in spades), while bidding 2NT immediately implies a double stopper or potential double stopper (like K10x or Q98x) or no reasonable alternative like xx Qxx Kxx AK10xx. Even so, there are pros and cons to bidding 2NT. A better example for a preference with a doubleton honor would be with the A rather than the queen. Qx KJx Axx KJxxx (when opener holds KJ10xx AQxx xx Qx or AKxxx Q10xx xx Ax).

Problem 2.

North-South vulnerable, matchpoints  
You, South, hold

♠A9 ♥Q64 ♠Q7543 ♣AQ7

North	East	South	West
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
2NT	Pass	?	

What call do you make?

STRAUCH: 5♣. I hope partner has a pretty good 6-5. He could double or bid a 1NT with less distributional hands.

GAER: 5♣. Partner doesn't have much in high cards, but he should be very distributional for his vulnerable takeout: something like Kxxxx xx void Kxxxxx could be enough. My prime cards in his suits should do it.

BENNETT: 5♣. Partner should be 5-6 in spades and clubs for this vulnerable action after passing. I'll play the safer contract.

MEYERS: 4 . All partner needs is KQJxx and the ♣K.

ZHOU: 4♠, the same bid I would have made without the red queens. Given that 1NT would already have been "unusual," 2NT has to show extra playing strength. I think partner is most likely to have five spades (with six I'd expect partner to start by bidding them) and six clubs with both kings, although 5-5 is still possible, in which case the spade suit should really be no worse than KQJxx. It's clear to me to bid game and the choice is between 4♠ and 5♣ (okay, I did briefly consider 3NT, thanks to the red queens). As long as partner's spades are headed by the KQ, which is likely for 2NT at this vulnerability, 4♠ should be cold as long as trumps are no worse than 4-2 (take the initial tap, draw three rounds of trumps and run the clubs). The above, combined with the matchpoints factor, makes 4♠ a stand-out for me.

BRODY: 3♦. I will force partner to game either in clubs or spades, depending on what he bids next.

BARBOUR: 4♣. Invitational (I hope). It's not clear whether diamonds or hearts is a cue. Yes, I could have bid 2♥ natural on the last round, but I might still want to play in hearts now as the best of bad alternatives.

BRUNO: 4♣. We're vulnerable. Pard has a great hand for a passed hand. If I thought he might have six spades, I would bid slower. But it's more likely he has five

spades and six clubs. I'm afraid of missing a game. But suits rarely break and I will get a trump lead. If he has Kxxxx x x Kxxxxx or better, I hope he carries on.

Problem 3.

East-West vulnerable, IMPs  
You, South, hold

♠— ♥AQ6542 ♦K8 ♣Q8652

South	West	North	East
1♥	4♠	Dbl	Pass
?			

What call do you make?

BENNETT: Pass. Take a plus score rather than a minus - or lose 5 IMPs!

GAER: Pass. Partner had 4NT available if he really wanted to hear from me.

BRUNO: Pass. Pard is short in hearts. If he had a minor two-suiter, he would bid 4NT. They're vul and they're going down.

BARBOUR: 5♣. Although a penalty double, partner's action will be based on "convertible" values - that is, aces and kings rather than trump tricks. If you have a spade lock in partner's position you grit your teeth, pass in tempo, and hope partner reopens with a double.

BRODY: 5♣. North should have transferable values for his double. And after all, I'm 6-5!

STRAUCH: 5♣. Double should show cards, not a spade stack. I don't want to defend with this hand, even if they are vul.

MEYERS: I play negative doubles through 4 . I would bid 5 , which would show length in the suit since I didn't pass and I didn't bid 4NT, offering choices.

ZHOU: 5♣. Double just shows values. It's true that bidding could mean trading a juicy penalty for a minus score, but passing could also result in a double game (or even slam) swing. I'd love to have better suits but nevertheless, my shape still suggests bidding, even at this vulnerability.

M.M.: On the actual hand, partner held BOTH a spade stack and lots of high cards on the side ... but his cards in hearts and clubs did not translate well for 11 tricks on offense. At least with this panel I am not the only one who thinks pass is the most practical answer on this hand. Most opponents will bid 4 with fewer than nine or ten tricks, even with unfavorable vulnerability. True, partner doesn't have to have a spade trick, but he might. Partner can't wait till he has a perfect hand for his double. Shouldn't he double with Jxx xx AJxxx Axx or Axx xx QJxxx Kxx and similar hands? And won't you have a better chance of taking four tricks on defense than eleven tricks in clubs? If your clubs were better (like QJ10xx) I would agree with the 5 bid, but when you are likely to lose two or three trump tricks opposite average support, bidding at the five level does not appeal to me.

Problem 4.

Both vulnerable, IMPs  
You, South, hold

♠A ♥KJ97654 ♦— ♣KQ875

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

(\* ) 12-14 HCP. (\*\* ) transfer

What call would you make?

BRODY: 4♠. If partner bids 5♣, I will follow up with 5NT, Grand Slam Force; otherwise will bid only 6♥.

ZHOU: 4♠. Without any agreements about the difference between 3♥ and 4♥, the idea is of course to try as hard as possible to find out whether partner has the rounded-suit aces, which is all that's needed for a grand. If partner can't cuebid 5♣, things are easy and I will just sign off in 6♥ (if it turns out that we have two club losers, just too bad). If she does, I will cuebid 5♦ and hope partner will infer from my failure to use Blackwood that I have a void and this sort of hand.

GAER: 4♠. If partner doesn't bid 5♣ I will sign off. We could easily be off two cashing aces.

BENNETT: 4♠. Partner only needs the aces of hearts and clubs for a grand.

BRUNO: 4♠. We might have a grandie. If pard can bid 5♣, I hope we're playing the Josephine form of the Grand Slam Force.

He could show the ♥A without the queen. MEYERS: Many people play 4 as the weaker bid here. I don't know what the conditions of control are, but I would probably bid 4 (cue bid).

STRAUCH: 4♠. If partner bids 5♣ (or 4NT) I will bid 6♦, hopefully showing a void. Maybe partner will bid 7♥ with the key aces.

BARBOUR: 4♠. Hoping for 5♣, which would allow a grand slam try. Partner with concentrated values in diamonds might have tried 3♦ over 3♣, so I am optimistic. By the way, I play that 3♥ on the previous round could be passed, so partner has to bid 4♥ with suitable minimums.

M.M.: The panel was unanimous on this one, and I admit that a 4 bid would be less confusing than my bid: when I held the hand, I jumped to 6♣ at this point. I hoped to emphasize to partner that good clubs would be necessary for a grand slam. Since it was IMPs, I thought if partner passed 6 , it would be almost as good a contract as 6 , and if he had the AJ he would bid 7 (which I would correct to 7 ). At the table, it didn't matter much, since the AJx was behind me and no slam was making. So Jerry's signoff at the 5-level ... when partner couldn't bid 5♣ over 4♠ ... would have picked up the marbles this time.

Problem 5.

Both vulnerable, IMPs

West	East
♠AJ1084	♠3
♥4	♥J98652
♦K543	♦86
♣765	♣AKQ3

South	West	North	East
1NT*	Pass	Pass	2♥
Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass
2♠	Pass	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(\* ) 15-17 HCP

Apportion the blame for playing in this inferior contract.

MEYERS: East 100% for bidding 3 . STRAUCH: East 90%. He's just trying too hard to compete. West is likely to have four or five spades, and shouldn't have to double to keep East quiet. It sounds like you have less than half the high cards and a likely misfit. North's double sounded penalty to me - perhaps South was confused.

BRODY: West 10% for not doubling 2♠, East 90% for bidding again when he had no real reason to do so.

ZHOU: East 70%, West 30%. West could have doubled 2♠, but not doing so is certainly reasonable (after all, a minor suit runout might make or go down only one). East should have been warned by North's double that neither side may have a fit and figured that 3♣ vulnerable at IMPs may not be a good idea.

BRUNO: West 85%, East 15%. The single worst bid in the entire auction is East's 3♣ bid. But West's pass over 2♠ is silly. It's true that you don't want to hang pard for balancing and you don't expect many quick tricks. And you know you're getting a plus score. But you have four trump tricks! If they run to 2NT or 3♦, you don't double. But they have to know to run. This is a case of drawing your line in the sand too cautiously. When the opponents are going for a number, you should double them. If they run to a makeable spot, tip your hat.

My experience is that they don't run as often as you would think. I've regretted not capitalizing on missed opportunities to gain IMPs when I've lost matches.

BENNETT: Interesting problem: I give West most of the blame for not doubling 2♠. East did his job bidding in balancing seat - obligatory with a singleton. However, he should probably let 2♠ go. Score it West 65% for not doubling what was in front of him, East 35% for trying too hard.

M.M.: The opponents probably have a 4-4 spade fit (actually it was 4-3), and neither can have five spades. When West passed over 2♠, his main fear was not that the opponents would make 2 doubled, but that someone (maybe partner) would run. From West's point of view, he was happy that the opponents were in spades rather than 1NT or letting partner play 2 .

Hand of the Month

By Joel Hoersch

Editor, District 22 Forum

Last summer Terry Badger of Escondido, Calif., sent me a delightful book of double-dummy problems that he had compiled and published in 1996. Double-dummy problems, as most of you know, are bridge puzzles where all four hands are shown, and the reader is challenged to work out the best line of play (or defense) to make (or break) a specified contract. They are often a good way to learn technical plays and techniques that can be put to good use in the "real" world of the bridge table.

The hand below is from Terry's book, and it is practical enough so that it could be posed as a straightforward "play or defend" problem. The specified contract is 4♠, and the specified opening lead is the ♦K.

Given that information, would you rather be the declarer, or would you bet on the defenders to prevail?

Study the hand carefully and make your decision. It will help if ... when you turn to

page 5 to check your solution against the analysis ... you cover the text you find there with a sheet of paper or cardboard, and read the explanation one paragraph at a time, to see how well your solution will stand up. I should warn you, though, that the entire process is much like peeling an onion: it always seems that there's another totally different layer beneath what you thought was the key to the matter ... and you may end up crying!

♠ 1076  
♥ AK  
♦ 63  
♣ KJ9843

♠ 2  
♥ Q106  
♦ KQ10874  
♣ A102

♠ J93  
♥ J743  
♦ A2  
♣ Q765

♠ AKQ854  
♥ 9852  
♦ J95  
♣ void