



Master Solvers Panel



By Marshall Miles
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This month features a special guest panelist at large: Adam Zmudzinski of Katowice 40-479, Poland. Adam is a many-times international champion, and most recently was a member of the winning team at the Las Vegas Spingold. Western Conference panelists are Wafik Abdou and Dayou Zhou, District 22; Paul Ivaska and Bobby Wolff, District 17; Harvey Brody and Bob Etter, District 21. District 23 guest panelist is Ed Davis.

Problem 1.

Neither vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold

♠AK753 ♥AQ83 ♦6 ♣AQ6

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

*Precision; **Natural, game force

What call do you make?

ETTER: 4♦, splinter. Since we are playing IMPs, there is very little advantage to look for a major fit when we have already found clubs, and the subsequent auction could get off the rails if I bid 3♣. I think I am forcing to slam even if partner signs off. I hope that partner will cuebid first and second round controls up the line, except for diamonds, of course.

WOLFF: 4♦. Having only three clubs for this splinter is not nearly as attractive as having four, but for bidding panels we need to have problems, not "gimmies."

ZMUDZINSKI: 4♦, splinter. I am waiting to hear a 4♥ cuebid, in which case I can expect to pitch partner's possible third small spade away in a slam contract. My worst fear would be both of us having singleton diamonds!

M.M.: And if partner just bids 5 over the splinter, he probably has a lot of wasted values in diamonds.

ZHOU: 3♣, showing my suit. If partner can raise spades I will bid Blackwood. If partner bids 3N I will bid 4♣. With one more club I would splinter right away with 4♦. And if we actually belong in hearts, too bad, but at least this is IMPs.

IVASKA: 3. I don't see any reason to abandon normal development of the auction. I intend to raise clubs next and try for at least a small slam in clubs, but 3 allows me to gauge whether we have duplication of values in diamonds, which would be suggested if partner tries 3NT. Even if she/he raises spades, we don't have to play in spades in the end (e.g., opposite 10xx K Jxx K10xxxx, which would be a dubious 3 bid to begin with).

ABDOU: 3♣. If pard retreats to 4♣, I will bid Blackwood, knowing partner has at most a doubleton spade. Over 3NT I'll bid 4♣ to set trump, then Blackwood.

BRODY: 4NT. On a good day we can make 7♣. Realistically, unless I find everything perfect I'll stop at 6♣.

DAVIS: I bid 4 or 4, whichever bid is keycard for clubs. Bidding spades naturally could make it difficult to play in clubs if partner raises to 4.

M.M.: I, like Ed, worry: If you bid 3 and partner raises to 4, would 5 be a cue bid (AKJxxx AQx xx A), or show a desire to play in clubs? Or if you bid 4NT would it be keycard for spades or clubs?

Problem 2.

Both vulnerable, IMPs
You, South, hold

♠J10987 ♥A65 ♦KQ108 ♣4

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

What call do you make?

ETTER: 2♦. This should show 10+ points, 5 spades, and 4+ diamonds, which is what I have. Perhaps I'm missing something.

DAVIS: 2. I can't force to game with this hand, but I want to be sure that I reach

spades when partner holds something like Kxx xx Ax KJxxxx. If I rebid 2NT instead of 2, partner will pass with the above hand [probably minus score —MM]. After my 2 bid, I will bid 2NT over 2, raise 2 to 3, and pass 2NT, 3 or 3.

ABDOU: 2♦. I have too much to go quietly. This is only a one-round force (I hope!), and I will pass 2NT.

WOLFF: 2NT, like a football player running for daylight! I prefer a conservative pass at matchpoints, trying for a plus score. By the way, partner should strain to raise spades with three cards rather than rebid clubs, which shows six about 90% of the time. And personally, I would still raise spades with three trumps and six clubs.

IVASKA: 2NT. With the excellent spot cards, this hand has far too much potential to pass 2. 2NT is the most flexible bid, since it allows us to explore a number of contracts, i.e., 2NT, 3 3NT and 4.

(We can't get to 3 intelligently as 3 over 2NT would be forcing).

However, if opener's suit had been diamonds, then 2 would have been forcing and possibly artificial. (I don't know if this treatment is general.) If the hand were weakened to something like J9632 A65 KQ84 4, I would pass as I would regard game as remote.

As it is, I think game is at least an even money shot, so I can't afford not to explore it, especially vulnerable at IMPs. Indeed, I feel that 2NT is correct even in the more conservative matchpoint conditions.

ZMUDZINSKI: Pass. No game is likely, especially 3NT. I hope my partner would not be afraid to raise spades immediately with a three trump fit and a small side doubleton or singleton.

BRODY: Pass is the only bid that makes sense to me.

ZHOU: Pass. Seems pretty clear. I normally don't invite with 10-counts, and the bad spade suit and no club fit are just more reasons to stay low.

M.M.: Before choosing hands for these problems, I often check with some good players to see whether it is controversial enough. On this one, some very good, aggressive players (I think Grant Baze was one) pleasantly surprised me by passing (my choice). Of course, a good game is possible if partner has a perfecto like ♠xx

Kx xxx AKQJxx, but change the queen of clubs to a small club, and even 2NT and 3 are in danger. If you would always make a game contract or be down one, you only need a 37.5% play to bid game when vulnerable at IMPs, but this is the type of hand where you could easily be down two or three in 3NT if you can't run your club suit, especially if you have only a single stopper in hearts. And you are not confident of making 3 or 2NT even if partner rejects your game try. [Editor's note: When Marshall first ran this column, his panelists gave him NO support for the pass. This panel chooses pass three times, which is tied for the majority answer.]

Problem 3.

North-South vulnerable, matchpoints
You, South, hold

♠109762 ♥63 ♦J6 ♣AQ84

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♠*	Pass	3♣**
Pass	5♦	Pass	?

*hearts and a minor
**Pass or correct to diamonds
What call would you make?

DAVIS: 6. Guessing the A is working.

IVASKA: 6. Can partner have less than x AK10xx AKQ10xx 7 (which admittedly is only a fair slam)? In fact, he probably has more than that. The jack of diamonds is a huge card in this auction, and partner is unlikely to have a club void, unless he is 5-7. I expect that slam is at least a 75% shot.

The more I think about it, the more I feel that a 6 cuebid is nearer the mark than pass, but I need a third diamond for that.

ETTER: 6♦. I like to play 3♣ is pass or correct with a bad hand, and 2NT asks for the minor with some values. [M.M.: Jeff Goldsmith suggests a similar treatment: 2NT (over 2) should show an interest in game, 3 just denies three or more hearts.] Since I'm not sure if partner is on the same wave-length, (or which category

this hand fits!) I'll go optimistic. My ♠A, ♦J, and doubleton heart are good holdings.

BRODY: Pass. Partner is showing a great hand with more diamonds than hearts. There's a good argument for bidding six.

ZHOU: Pass ... or maybe it's worth raising to 5.5♦! Seriously, it's obvious partner bid 5♦ to make, and I have an ace to contribute, plus the nice-looking ♦J.

However, my doubleton trump is a drawback, since they may not be enough to ruff out the hearts.

Give partner ♠x ♥AKxxx ♦AKQxxx ♣x (seems like a clear 5♦ bid to me), on a trump lead 6♦ is not good. With a third trump I would bid 6♦ with confidence, expecting it to be on a finesse against the opener at the very worst.

WOLFF: Pass. The ♣AQ is not enough for slam. I hope no one has the audacity to prefer the small doubleton heart to the jack-x of diamonds!

ZMUDZINSKI: Pass. Partner should have cuebid spades first with a very strong hand.

ABDOU: Pass. I would have liked it better if spades were raised. Sounds like pard is 6-6 or better (5-7). My ace could be facing a void: ♠x, ♥AQJ10x, ♦AK10xxxx, ♣ — still needs luck to bring home a slam. And pard could have bid 3♣, then 5♦ with a hand this good or better.

MM: Partner actually held — KQJx AKQ109xx Kx. (He is supposed to have five hearts). Perhaps, on the second round, he should have bid 3 (followed by 5).

Problem 4.

East-West vulnerable, IMPs

West	East
♠97	♠void
♥A	♥10964
♦AJ10752	♦K843
♣AK76	♣J10943

South	West	North	East
1♠	2♦	4♣	Pass
Pass	5♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			

Apportion the fault for not bidding slam.

DAVIS: East 100%. East has a normal 5 bid over 4, but he passed. Why is this a problem?

IVASKA: East 100%. Words nearly fail me, but the Esteemed Moderator (EM) would scarcely thank me for a blank space in his column. Despite the lack of high cards, the East hand is very powerful in support of diamonds, and the pass of 4 is inexplicable. West did indeed make a mistake when he selected 5 instead of the rather obvious 4NT for his second bid, which could have resulted in a awkward 4-3 fit. However, this should have helped East to find the raise to 6 (or, better, the 5 cuebid, which would be beyond the powers of someone who could pass 4).

After all, let's say that West had been drinking before and/or during (and, without doubt, after) the game (which, I must say, would be understandable in the circumstances) and had held J97 7 AQ752

AQ76. It seems to me that 6 would be close to a favorite even opposite such an unlikely hand. Perhaps East was afraid of two heart losers, but this is hardly possible unless his partner held a 16-card hand, which possibility could be excluded by a careful inspection. (Perhaps they were playing behind screens.)

ZMUDZINSKI: East 100%. The hand should bid over 4♣ in IMPs, although that is close. So if West can bid at the five level when I have passed and have a spade void, now I must bid slam.

WOLFF: East 100%. I would have bid 5♦ the first round with his hand. Now, not to bid 6♣ on the auction is totally ridiculous.

BRODY: East 100%. Maybe it should be more than that, since he had two chances! He should bid 5♦ the first time, and when he didn't do that, it should definitely be 6♣ the second time.

ZHOU: 100% to East. He had enough to bid 5♦ the first time, and not bidding 6♣ or 6♦ the second time was even more cowardly. I think with 6-4 in the minors, West's second bid should have been 4NT, but that didn't contribute to missing the slam.

ABDOU: East 99%. I can go along with his first pass, but when he got another chance, he should realize that the spade void, five card support for partner's second suit, and a fit in pard's first suit with a

keycard must make slam a good gamble!

I give West 1% of the charge because 4NT is a better description of his hand, with a two-card disparity.

ETTER: East 80%, 20% to bad luck and pointcount hangups. The only thing West could have done to show more strength was to double the first time, and then bid 5♦, to which East would have most likely passed. On the actual auction, West could have bid 4NT over 4♣, showing something like 6-4, but that wouldn't have shown any more strength than 5♣.

The only reasonable way to get to slam is for East to bid 5♦ over 4♣. West could likely bid 6♦ then, although it is not impossible that he would pass.

Problem 5.

East-West vulnerable, matchpoints

West	East
♠8	♠Q6
♥KJ	♥AQ765
♦A109754	♦83
♣KJ82	♣AQ53

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

Down one for +100 East-West, while they (E-W) have a good vulnerable game in both hearts and clubs. Apportion the fault.

DAVIS: West 100%. East's double shows cards and denies a singleton spade. West should bid 4 over East's double.

WOLFF: West 100%. Like West in Problem #4, East is totally innocent here. I would rate West's possible bids after the double as 4♥ = 100%, 4♣ = 60%, 4♦ = 20% and Pass = 0%.

ZHOU: 100% to West. It might be nice to play that over East's double, 3NT by West shows some hand like this, but this is probably for very experienced partnerships only. However, the bottom line is that West shouldn't have passed the basically takedown double at this vulnerability, and my personal choice is 4♥.

ZMUDZINSKI: West 100%. This double is basically for takedown, with values that work both on defense or offense. A penalty pass with singleton spade, ♥KJ, six diamonds and four clubs can never be right.

ABDOU: West 90%. These doubles are card-showing, not penalties. Also, my high cards are all working on offense, so passing with a stiff is just wrong. West should know that 4♥ or 5♣ should be a great contract. And if you change one of East's small diamonds to a heart, 6♣ would be cold.

ETTER: West 80%, 20% no one. East's double is not penalty, but "Do something intelligent," and pass is the least intelligent of his choices. I would bid 4♣ with the West hand. Now East should probably, but not surely, bid game. This bidding gaffe is similar to the last problem: if the one at fault does the right thing, there is no guarantee that partner will follow up correctly.

IVASKA: West 50%, East 10%, garden variety bidding misunderstanding 40%. Many partnerships play that East's double in such sequences merely shows extra values, essentially for takedown, not a trump stack. This partnership obviously did not have a clear agreement on this point.

Even so, West's pass is quite dubious since it would seem that partner couldn't have more than three spades. Therefore, West should have chosen between 4 and 4, which I prefer in view of the doubleton honors and the matchpoint environment.

BRODY: East 50% for double over 3♣, West 10% for passing the double with a stiff spade and little defense and a lot of offense. The other 40% I charge to bad luck and the lie of the cards which makes it hard for either player to bid more.

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Great Western
Holiday STAC XVII
Local Clubs
December 8-14, 2008