

August, 2001

District 8 Solvers Forum

by Scott Merritt, Champaign IL

1. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1NT	2H*	Pass
Pass	DBL	Pass	?

* (Hearts & spades)

What is your call as South holding:
S-Q42 H-Q5 D-QJ86 C-10975?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
2NT	100	10	30
3D	80	0	22
3C	70	1	6
Pass	60	2	30
3NT	50	1	4
2S	40	0	8

Some say they would rather give up their firstborn than sell out to “Law”-protected opponents. Partner must be of that school! We were happy to defend 2H in the vain attempt to go plus 100, but partner has tossed us back into the fray. While the majority of the panel is certain this is a takeout double, there are still some doubters:

HUDSON: “Pass. With East showing both majors, the takeout interpretation is less plausible.”

FEILER: “Pass. Since this is a nebulous situation, a takeout double is way too dangerous and too likely to be misunderstood.”

It’s clear this isn’t cut and dried, but this double can’t be anything but takeout. West has already preferenced to hearts, we’ve shown no values and partner is under the long suit.

So if we are going to advance, what is the best avenue? Our diamonds are clearly superior to our clubs, but are they superior enough to bid? It would seem that the panel is convinced that 2NT would be pick the better minor, so that the better fit is indeed found.

KESSLER: “2NT. Partner probably has similar shape (3244, 2344, 2245 or

2254). It cannot hurt to have the lead coming into the strong hand.”

WILLIAMS: “2NT. Partner is in front of the 2H bidder, so this should be takeout. 2NT says pick a minor.”

As BWS includes Lebensohl in the direct seat, the question arises, how can one ever get to 2NT? While the need does seem unlikely, how would you bid Kx, Kxx, xxx, JTxxx on the same auction? So I decided to call in a guest panelist, the world’s foremost bidding theorist, Eric Kokish:

KOKISH: “Theoretically, opener’s cooperative takeout double shows a maximum with (32)44 or perhaps 2245 shape, so to that extent, responder ought to be able to pick a minor meaningfully. Thus I think the case is strong for 2NT to be natural ... some stuff in the majors but not enough to pass for penalty.”

So, for all the panelists who bid 2NT, it’s time to reflect on your reasoning. If the thinking was wrong, this bid deserves a low score, but this is the majority-rules system, so I can’t do it.

2. Matchpoints, NS vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	1H	DBL
4H	4S	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-KQ8 H-42 D-AKQ104 C-KQJ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
Pass	100	10	52
4NT	70	1	30
5D	60	0	4
5H	50	2	2
5S	50	1	6
6S	30	0	4

We’re left with a high-level decision. We have so much to share, and yet those dastardly opponents have gone and preempted us. Why doesn’t the Great Card Watcher reverse the colors on these hands? That would help slow down these kids and their crazy bids! Well, I’ve just prayed to the heavens for divine intervention, and nothing happened, so it’s time to make the best of a bad situation.

All partner needs for slam is three cover cards, and the heart shortness seems fairly likely on this auction (making it that much more tempting). But some are even worried about that. Here's what the passers had to say:

WALKER: "Pass. Your opponents could well be putting the pressure on with 9 trumps at this vulnerability."

Assuming Karen is just being overly cautious, and partner really does have heart shortness, what does the rest of the passing crowd have to say?

ATHY: "Pass. Thank God I don't have to explain this action to teammates when partner has a heart void, spade length and an ace. Just a few too many holes to go to the 5-level. And when the 5-level stop *is* right, won't *pard* press on to slam?"

KNIEST: "Pass. Partner was under pressure and there's no safety at the 5-level. Partner would bid with a lot of spades and nothing else."

I agree whole-heartedly with Tom. Could you bite your tongue and pass holding JTxxxx, x, xx, xxxx on this auction? So what do the advancers have to say for themselves?

FEILER: "5H. I hope partner hasn't chosen this moment to take a vul.-vs.-not sacrifice. If he has a void and an ace or two, 5H will probably make him go on."

HARTSMAN: "5H. Three covers doesn't seem like that much to ask for from partner. I assume with two aces and a singleton heart, he'll carry on."

The problem with advancing with 5H was pointed out by ATHY. Who could blame partner for bidding six with AJTxxxx, x, x, xxxx on this auction? And will partner bid six with JTxxx, void, xxx, Axxxx?

It seems to me that if you're going to advance, you just need to bite the bullet and Blackwood. If you're going to put the heart shortness in partner's hand, Blackwood should be safe. Now you will at least know from the auction if you have 5-level safety! While being in 5S going down might be considered

unlucky, partner did take an unfavorable dive, I am not so quick to dismiss.

3. IMPs, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—		1NT	DBL *
Pass	2NT	Pass	?

* (penalty)

What is your call as South holding:
S- Q54 H-A D-AKJ742 C-A108 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
3D	100	8	48
3NT	80	3	36
4D	70	1	4
5D	50	0	8
3C	50	0	2
6D	40	2	2

It appears as though another lesson hand has been sneaked into the Solver's Forum! Some panelists were certain that they knew the "Standard" interpretation of partner's 2NT. Others were somewhat certain that a friendly partner wouldn't whip this bid out on us, their hapless partner, unless they had minors. Finally, others insisted that this must be some sort of psych-exposing bid. So let's attack these arguments one by one, starting with the psych hypothesis. Some of our panelists took this straight to heart and shot out a 6D call

POPKIN: "6D. Obviously, East has psyched 1NT. If partner had 0-6 pts., he would simply bid a suit at the cheapest level. So even though he has minors (ostensibly), he cannot have just 6 pts. If he's not afraid of the 3 level, he must have more than 6 pts."

Nancy has a dizzying intellect! The problem with the idea of a psych is why isn't partner passing? If partner was worried that East was being a joker in first chair, a pass followed by a cuebid should adequately expose the tomfoolery, while leaving the chance for a telephone number in the picture.

While I made the same bid Nancy did, this clearly appears to be wrong, outside of some sort of really strong partnership agreement (but wouldn't it be funny if partner held x, JTxxx,

Tx, KJxxx?). So now what about partner having the minors?

RABIDEAU: “3D. The auction barely seems possible. Where are the hearts? Did we catch East with 5 and West with 4? Even so, West has some distribution (two or fewer diamonds) and a few points. Maybe partner has the reds and was planning to correct?”

WILLIAMS: “3D. Partner is broke and now wants me to choose a minor at the 3 level? This is from outer space.”

Even the panelists who expect partner to have minors don’t really believe this is correct. Why didn’t he start with 2C if he’s broke? Where are all the hearts? How can West be passing? All these questions point to the real answer, which several panelists swear is the “standard” treatment here:

WALKER: “3D, for now. Partner’s 2NT shows a big two-suiter, but since he has a maximum of about 7 pts., he’s probably 6-5 (maybe even 6-6). I expect to hear 3H over 3D, and I’ll make the value bid of 4S. Partner will convert to 5C if he has hearts and clubs.”

FEILER: “3D. Partner has some kind of two-suiter. I’m expecting to hear 3H next and I think I’ll try 4S over that. If his other suit is clubs, he can bid 5C or maybe go to 5D.”

This seems to answer the lingering questions, except for the final one: “How will I ever manage to repay Scott for bringing this enlightenment to my life?” You readers will need to answer that one on your own.

4. IMPs, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	Pass
1C	DBL	RDBL	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-732 H-104 D-AKQJ C-J962 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
1D	100	6	39
1NT	90	3	10
2D	80	2	22
Pass	70	2	18
2NT	70	1	6
2C	60	0	4

This problem wins this month’s award for the greatest number of logical answers. What used to be a routine passout is now a hotly contested auction at the 1-level! Everyone has his 10-count (except for the guy with 9!), and in today’s Me-Me-Me society, they feel the need to share their meager values as some sort of ploy to derive self-worth! So now that the social commentary is through, what is the best way to arrange to go plus on this hand? I will discuss the calls in ascending order, starting with the passers.

FEILER: “Pass. Too many points in the deck. Maybe I can figure out what’s going on by passing. Any bid I’d make after the redouble would be weak anyway.”

Well Kent, we know what’s going on (see earlier diatribe). While passing keeps everyone in the dark, this may be our hand, and partner won’t be able to help later if you don’t come alive now. So what about the subtle 1D?

MATHIS: “1D. If I don’t get my suit in now, I never will.”

HARTSMAN: “1D. I assume partner is looking at length in the majors, since he can’t be looking at very many points. Maybe he’s 4-5-3-1 with an 8-count and bad hearts? I won’t hang him for doubling, so I bid a simple 1D.”

It is nice to see that Jenni knows that partner is the joker in this auction, not either of the opponents! If the simple 1D isn’t to your liking, there is the more aggressive 1 NT.

DODD: “1NT. Given that everyone around the table has bid light (except me, I would’ve opened this hand in the days of my misspent youth), I might even get to make this doubled.”

That kind of wishful thinking can only come from looking back through your rose-colored glasses! I am still in my misspent youth, and I know, with a large degree of certainty, that when I get doubled in this contract, I am on the fast track to 500-ville!

Finally, the bidders that the 1-level couldn’t contain:

KESSLER: “2NT. It is not my style to pass opening bids, but having done that, 2NT seems automatic. What else would you bid?”

Then there’s the jump to 2D, an attempt to push them as high as is conceivably possible, at the risk of playing in your 4-3. I feel comfortable making a ruling on most hands as to the bids that are “right”, but on this hand, I am clueless. Decide for yourself.

5. IMPs, none vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1D
Pass	1S	Pass	2H
Pass	3D *	Pass	3S
Pass	4H	Pass	?

* (forcing; 8+ pts.)

What is your call as South holding:
S-QJ5 H-A1073 D-AKQJ8 C-J?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
5D	100	6	24
Pass	80	1	20
5C	70	1	4
4N	70	3	26
4S	60	1	22
6D	50	2	2

So we reversed and now have to figure out what to do over partner’s subtle advance. Our decision hinges on the meaning of 4H. The panel is split between believing it’s a cuebid and that it is just a further description. So let’s let the panel sock it out so we may come to a better understanding. First, the smaller, 4H-is-natural camp.

WALKER: “5D. Since we’re still searching for the best trump suit, partner’s 4H is *not* a cuebid. He’s just showing three good hearts and no club stopper, and suggesting that the 4-3 is playable. There’s also the inference that his spades are not strong, else he might have chosen that 4-3 fit.”

It’s perfectly reasonable to expect that partner has Axxx, KQx, xxxx, xx, and is suggesting playing hearts because it’s a level lower. The other camp believes 4H is a cuebid:

RABIDEAU: “6D. Partner has honorless trump support, yet is inter-

ested in slam, even after hearing of my club shortness. It’s hard to imagine he doesn’t have AK and K in the majors.”

KESSLER: “4NT. Blackwood and bid a slam if partner has an ace. It should not be worse than a hook. Remember partner cuebid with terrible trumps, so he probably has a pretty good hand.”

WILLIAMS: “4NT. Partner does not have a club card. This being said, chances are good for the AK of spades and K of hearts.”

It is hard to argue with that logic. If partner has indeed cuebid, slam must be bid. But then again, if he *isn’t* cuebidding — if the poor guy was just trying to stop in 4H with his balanced 9-count — you’ve hung him out to dry.

What is also interesting to note is that if partner has AKxx, Kxx, xxxx, xx or AKxx, Kxx, xxx, xxx, there are only 11 tricks in diamonds, so we need to play in 6S. This is a hand where discussion with partner is critical.

6. Matchpoints, NS vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	3S	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-A10652 H-KQJ6 D-KQJ3 C-Void?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
Pass	100	9	64
3NT	80	5	16
DBL	50	0	16
4D/4H	40	0	4

Wow! We’ve found all the spades! I’m drooling, like my puppy over one of those meat-flavored rawhide treats, at the chance to hold them to 4 tricks in 3S doubled! So how do you get there from here?

DODD: “Pass. Other calls are even more distasteful.”

KNIEST: “Pass. Wait for the double; it’s amazing how often it comes.”

MATHIS: “Pass. I don’t think this auction is dying, and unless partner can bid a red suit, I want to defend.”

I’ve learned there is an inverse relationship between the number of words

a panelist uses and the certainty he has about his bid. So using what I now call Scott's Rule #6, these panelists seem fairly certain that pass is correct it isn't entirely unlikely that partner will double. So what did the other panelists have to say in defense of 3 NT?

POPKIN: "3NT. Last chance to play here."

HARTSMAN: "3NT. It's not pretty, but I don't have any other choice."

Wow, Scott's Rule #6 from the other side of the fence as well! With all of the hands where the panel has eked out a 3NT call over a white 3-level preempt, I can say that I am shocked that more people didn't take that call. The wacky panel is always full of surprises!

My final comment brings up the importance of using the "Stop" card when you make a high-level opening like 3S. Whatever the decision that South comes to, it will take a moment's reflection. By properly using the tools in the bidding box, you can minimize the chance of creating an ethical problem.

Thanks to all who sent in answers and comments for this interesting set. Congratulations to **Tony Curtis** and **Charles Fyffe**, who topped all Solvers. They're invited to join the October panel.

Past columns and the new problems are available on the web at:

www.prairienet.org/bridge/#forum

If you'd like to read new analysis of some of our past problems, check out the "It's your call" column in the July and August issues of the *ACBL Bulletin*. The editors submitted several of our Forum problems to their experts, and you may find some interesting new spins on our discussions.

You can join the fun by trying the new problems on page 6. Please submit your answers as soon as possible (by August 24) on the handy web form — **www.prairienet.org/bridge/forum.htm** — or by sending mail or email to:

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♠ How the Panel Voted (Panel/Staff Average: 518)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Score
Norman Athy , St. Louis	2NT	Pass	3NT	1D	5D	3NT	560
Kent Feiler , Harvard IL	Pass	5H	3D	Pass	4NT	Pass	450
Jenni Hartsman , Champaign IL	3C	5H	4D	1D	5C	3NT	440
Mark Kessler , Springfield IL	2NT	Pass	3NT	2NT	4NT	Pass	520
Jim Hudson , Dekalb IL	Pass	Pass	3D	2D	6D	Pass	490
Larry Matheny , Bloomington IL	2NT	Pass	3D	Pass	5D	Pass	570
Don E. Mathis , St. Louis	3NT	Pass	3D	1D	Pass	Pass	530
Larry Rabideau , St. Anne IL	2NT	5S	3D	1D	6D	3NT	480
Nancy Popkin , St. Louis	2NT	Pass	6D	1NT	4S	3NT	470
Hugh Williams , Carbondale IL	2NT	4N	3D	1NT	4NT	Pass	530

♠ How the Staff Voted

Tom Dodd , Boerne TX	2NT	Pass	3NT	1NT	5D	Pass	570
Tom Kniest , Clayton MO	2NT	Pass	3D	1D	5D	Pass	600
Scott Merritt , Champaign IL	2NT	Pass	6D	2D	5D	3NT	500
Karen Walker , Champaign IL	2NT	Pass	3D	1D	5D	Pass	600

♠ Solvers Honor Roll (Solver average: 487)

Tony Curtis , Chicago IL	600	Hugh Metzger , South Bend IN	540
Charles Fyffe , St. Louis	580	Bill Rotter , Granite City IL	540
Rich Peer , St. Louis	550	Lisa Sievers , Champaign IL	540
Michael Clark , Urbana IL	540	Allan Shephard , St. Louis	530
Bill Lindemann , Champaign IL	540	Will Engel , Champaign IL	520

Solvers Forum October Problems

1. Matchpoints, NS vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—		--	1D
Pass	1NT	2S	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-5 H-AJ84 D-AK932 C-A53 ?

2. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	1D	DBL
Pass	1S	Pass	2D
Pass	2S	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-KQ7 H-KJ108 D-J5 C-AKQ6 ?

3. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1H	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-KQ987 H-AJ107 D-Void C-10943 ?

4. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1H
1S	Pass	Pass	DBL
2C	DBL	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-J H-AKQ1083 D-AJ106 C-62 ?

5. IMPs, none vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	1H	2D
2H	2S	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-105 H-Q863 D-KQJ1087 C-A ?

6. IMPs, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	--	--	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-A8752 H-KQ9753 D-2 C-2 ?

Thanks for the problems above to Larry Matheny (#1), Jenni Hartsman (#2),
Mike Halvorsen (#3) and Steve Babin (#6)

Submit your solutions online: www.prairienet.org/bridge/forum.htm
