

District 8 Solvers Forum

by Tom Dodd, Boerne TX

1. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	2D *	Pass
Pass	2S	Pass	?

* (Weak 2-bid)

What is your call as South holding:
S-3 H-A864 D-K64 C-QJ865 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
Pass	100	9	42
2NT	90	8	40
3C	50	1	16
3NT	30	0	2

First, congratulations to Scott Merritt, and welcome to the married bridge players club! The "best" advice I can offer is that if your new bride doesn't already play bridge, don't teach her! My wife and I have had 12 great years, partly because we haven't post-mortemed each other into a frenzy. And this problem would be a doozy to post-mortem. I can hear the arguments already:

KESSLER: "Pass. It's matchpoints; go for the plus. Looking for a better spot will often result in a minus (or larger minus) score."

MARSHALL: "Pass. A good score seems to depend on whether we're doubled. I don't have enough strength for 2NT this time around, but if 2S is doubled, it will surely be because of a trump stack, and I shall run."

WERTHEIMER: "2NT. Are we better off in a probable 5-1 fit or in notrump? 2NT is a clear winner. Partner is free to bid again with extra strength, 6 great spades or a second suit."

See what I mean? Even within partnerships, there's disagreement. If this were IMPs, everybody would be bidding 2NT, seeking that always pivotal vulnerable game. But it's not.

MERRITT: "Pass. I know this isn't gonna score (actually it did!-TJD), but my

stiff, and the fact this is matchpoints, has me just angling for a plus."

WALKER: "Pass. Partner's balance could be fairly light, and the clues point to a misfit. 2NT could work, but with only one stopper, no spade fit and such a flimsy club suit, I can't see where the tricks would come from."

My initial gut reaction was that the panel would vote 2-to-1 to take the plus (if there is one), and save the grey matter for the next exercise. Silly me.

POPKIN: "2NT. If partner is just joking, he can pass 2NT. Bidding 3C propels us to game in most cases."

BERNHARD: "2NT. Could be hanging partner but I have enough for a mild peep, and 2S could play very badly."

Spades will play worse at the 3-level, but one argument for bidding is we only lose if we can make exactly 2S. Of course, the flaw here was pointed out by Marshall -- if we start fooling around, it will be easier for West to hammer 3S, knowing we have nowhere to run. In reality, as FEILER mentions, balancing ranges are so wide that this is a virtual guess. For my money, I'd guess North for a 6-card spade suit (7 isn't impossible!), perhaps 5 good ones, and hope my ace and well-placed king will help him scramble in 8 tricks.

RABIDEAU: "Pass. I could bid 2NT, hoping partner has extras or 4 hearts -- but I usually hear a spade rebid."

Your experience parallels mine here, Larry. Plus I hate to be on the receiving end of the glare when I put this dummy down after I pull a balance.

2. IMPs, NS Vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	3H	Pass
4H	Double	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-QJ84 H-Void D-J93 C-AJ8753?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
5H	100	6.5	17
4S	80	5.5	47
5C	80	5	15
6C	50	1	5
Other	40	0	16

Another split panel, this time a 3-way. A moderator's dream! At least no one passed figuring North must have hearts. Here's the direct approach:

CURTIS: "6C. 5NT (pick-a-slam) might work, but I have a definite preference. Why not spades? This is IMPs, and I don't want to be tapped and at the mercy of a bad split if partner is 4-2-4-3. Nor can I see an easy way to 7."

I often favored the bid-what-you-think-you-can-make approach during my days in District 8, and it often works out. Here, however, you can accept whatever suit partner may have length in, and I'd hate to be in the one slam that doesn't have a play.

Tony has a good point, too, in that suits figure to split badly, especially given the vulnerability. The majority was content to let North decide whether the hand belonged in slam.

KNIEST: "4S. I think I can depend on partner for 4 spades, but he may be a bit off shape, and I don't want a correction of 5C to 5D, having passed up a perfectly good 4S. Slam is possible, but you've been preempted and suits may be breaking bad, so just take the money."

MERRITT: "4S. It looks like West is a bit of a sissy for not bidding more. We may make 6, as I have a bit to spare, but 5H and 6C just seem to cause more questions than they answer."

BERNHARD: "5C, taking the middle ground. 4S is tempting and so is 6C, but both could be very wrong."

FEILER: "5C. Like the first problem, there's too much variation in partner's hand for accurate bidding. If you told me that Pass, 4S or 6C was the right spot, I wouldn't be surprised."

I'd be shocked if Pass was right here, given the vulnerability. 5C and 4S both seem safe enough, but we game bidders are kidding ourselves if we think North is going to move forward, especially with likely heart losers.

WALKER: "5C. There's an inference that partner has a big balanced hand with moderate heart length, and there's no guarantee he has 4 spades. With

heart taps, 4S could go down when 6C is cold. If I were certain partner had that hand, I'd bid 6C, but when the auction has been jammed, it's usually best to settle for the 'sure' thing."

If you put a gun to my head and said choose between 4S and 5C, I'd probably lean toward the latter, but the onset of middle age has made me somewhat conservative, so I opt for the 10-trick contract. Who knows, even with a tap we might make on a high crossruff, whereas if North has diamonds and not clubs, we could easily go set a level higher.

The cuebidders are all looking through rose-colored glasses. In my youth, I'd have been one of them:

WILLIAMS: "5H. I have a mountain opposite a 4-level take out double. I'll raise partner's bid to 6."

KESSLER: "5H. Too much chance we have a grand. Over 5S, I'll bid 6C (a grand-slam try). Over 6D, I'll bid 6S. If we bid 6C and the opponents save in 6H, I'll try 6S."

KC JONES: "5H. Intending to raise 5S to 6. If pard can't bid 5S, then we'll play slam in a minor."

ATHY: "5H. No telling how good partner is on this auction. Cuebid and prepare to bid at the six level."

Any of these could be "right". Depends on your perspective, eh? One thing for sure, given the vote, this rates to be a big swing, one way or the other.

3. IMPs, Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	1S	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-AK H-AKQJ854 D-74 C-65 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
3NT	100	9	16
4H	90	2	19
Double	80	6	56
2H	60	1	9

Another potentially huge swing hand here. The interesting thing to note is that only one of the gung-ho cuebidders from #2 followed up with another aggressive act.

KESSLER: "3NT. Hope they lead a spade. Could easily steal a game when 4H has no play."

I'm not so hopeful about the spade lead. Perhaps the wrong minor though. Or maybe North has a few driblets and drabs in the minors to prevent EW from running five tricks. Or if North has garbage, that we've somehow talked them out of their cold game? Lots of "ifs" here, but with 9 running tricks and the ugly distribution, 3NT looks like it's worth a shot.

HUDSON: "3NT. A Marshall Miles hand. On a spade lead, I'm cold. The only question is: if LHO doubles, should I run to 4H? The slower the double, the more inclined I am to sit."

Not me, I'm still a chicken. If West, or especially East, pulls out the axe, I'll take my chances in 4H or let them have their game. Unless of course, the last board was Problem #2 and it made slam, then who knows?

KC JONES: "Double, then bid strongly in hearts. With an ace or a KQ in either minor, partner should give you a boost. Otherwise it seems foolish to be going down in 4H when the opponents are unlikely to have a game."

FEILER: "3NT. Is this the kind of hand that 3NT shows in this auction? It may be that neither 3NT nor 4H makes double dummy, but 3NT only takes a little slip by the defense (leading partner's suit) to make. 4H after a spade lead will be easy to defend."

I'm not sure what the doublers hope to accomplish. Sure, the hand qualifies for a double-and-bid sequence, but with such long, strong hearts, do we really want to risk a competitive auction where North is tempted to jump to 5C or 5D over a 3S raise by West?

RABIDEAU: "Double. Too much defense to preempt."

True, but then 3NT isn't a "real" preempt, though it does have obstructive value. As a bonus, it doesn't tempt North to go adventuring in minors.

VONGSVIVUT: "3NT. Should have a better chance than 4H."

I'd prefer Ax instead of my actual hand, but alas, we have to play the cards we're dealt. Summing up my "reasoning" for preferring 3NT:

MERRITT: "3NT. The slower we get there, the less likely it is to make."

4. IMPs, None vulnerable

West	North	East	South
1C	2NT*	Pass	?

* Unusual — diamonds and hearts
What is your call as South holding:
S-AQ76542 H-73 D-K C-654

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
3S	100	13.5	65
3H	70	3.5	24
3C	60	1	5
Other	30	0	6

A typical nightmare of a hand, though it could be worse (usually in forum hands the black queen is in clubs). The majority couldn't pass up one shot at bidding the 7-bagger:

POPKIN: "3S. I missed an ice-cold 4S at the St. Louis Regional because I bid a heart preference instead of my own suit. I don't think 3S should be forcing because I could have bid 3C first, then spades."

3S isn't forcing; you're absolutely right there. With a complete misfit, North can pass and you'll be left to try to scramble 9 tricks somehow. On average, that promises to be a helluva lot more comfortable than taking 9 tricks in hearts. I don't like those 3 little clubs at all, and the spades could be better, but I like this less:

FEILER: "3H. I notice I'm very pessimistic in this set. Here I'm just trying to not get doubled. If they do double 3H, I'll retreat to 3S."

Though I doubt you'll get doubled in either contract (West didn't advertise defense by doubling 2NT), EW will find it easier to smack 3S once you've given them the chance to double 3H.

WALKER: "3S. 3H appears to be the "safe" or "partnership" bid, but a 7-1 (or even a 7-0) fit rates to play better than a 5-2. I expect partner will pass 3S, but there's an outside chance

he has the right hand for a spade game, and emphasizing the suit now is the only way we'll ever get there."

WILLIAMS: "3S. I don't like where this hand is going, but when they deal me a 7-card suit to the AQ, I feel I have to bid it at some point."

Hugh sent in two sets of answers, and in the second, he bid 3H. Unfortunately, he didn't include a comment or we might've had some fun with this.

RABIDEAU: "3S. Even a 7-0 spade fit should play better than 5-2 hearts."

Especially if North's hearts are as robust as our spades. I like 3S -- or should I say I hate it less than the alternatives? -- for a couple of reasons. It suggests some values (as with jack-high spades I'd be preferencing big-time), so North can bid on with a fit and controls. Also, 3S doesn't mislead North into thinking we have a fit in either of his suits, which would bring a raise to game if he had the big 2-suiter.

The negatives? 3S does bypass both of North's suits and forces him to bid at the 4-level if he has the big 2-suiter. It leaves us both in a real quandary if EW decide to put the wood to 3S. Oh, well, it's only matchpoints. No money to lose or teammates to answer to!

5. Matchpoints, Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1C	Pass	1D
Pass	2C	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-A5 H-10743 D-Q10643 C-A4 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
3C	100	12	19
2NT	80	3	32
Pass	50	3	32
Other	20	0	17

At matchpoints, I'd have hazarded a guess that more votes would accrue to the conservative pass, and that 3C would be lucky to get even 2 or 3 votes. But even at this form of scoring, the lure of a vulnerable game is too great to go quietly into the night here.

KNIEST: "3C. Looking for the magic 3NT. Automatic atimps, but since this

is matchpoints, pass is OK. If I passed, I would double a balance of 2H rather than compete to 3C."

FEILER: "3C. Time for a little optimism, the club ace being a big card. If partner bids on, we'll end in 3NT whether I bid 2NT or 3C, but if he's going to pass, I'd rather be in 3C."

WERTHEIMER and **MARSHALL** made similar comments about taking the plus score at matchpoints. They could easily be right. It's only that dadburned club ace that's got me (and a bunch of others) so hopeful of a game.

KC JONES: "3C. 3NT certainly can make if pard has KQxxxx of clubs and a couple high cards on the side. 3C is a better game try than 2NT because it may be critical to protect partner's holdings such as Qx of spades or Kx of hearts. If pard tries a red suit over 3C, I can then try again with 3 spades."

WALKER: "3C. Easier at IMPs, as it's tempting to pass here and take the plus. 2NT is about right on values, but NT should really be played from partner's side, so 3C appears to be a better way to make a mild invitation. If partner has a dog, at least it will keep EW from walking in with their 8+-card spade fit."

That's the secondary reason I prefer bidding on here. We'll likely get to play 3C if EW do find the balance, but why give them the chance?

KESSLER: "2NT. Even at matchpoints gotta make a try. Aces are good."

But as mentioned, wouldn't it be better to arrange for the opening lead to run into North's hand?

WILLIAMS: "3C. If partner is on a max, we should have game. I see no advantage to 2NT as I want the lead going up to partner's Qxx of spades."

And the beat goes on and on. I just hope North wasn't kidding around with that opening bid, as noted by:

RABIDEAU: "2NT. Even 3NT is tempting, but have you noticed what partners usually hold on these auctions?"

Quit peeking in my hand, Larry. Isn't Qxx, Kx, Kx, KJxxxx a sound opening bid anymore? ~grin~

6. Matchpoints, Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1H	Pass	2H
3C	Pass	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-KQ9 H-Q85 D-J106532 C-7?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
3D	100	9	44
3H	90	5	40
Double	60	2	2
Pass	50	2	14

Plenty of meat on this bone. Do we sell out? Bid on? If so, how? It's matchpoints again, so passing with a potential double fit is unthinkable, at least for the majority. But we're all a bit concerned that North will misread 3D.

BERNHARD: "3H. 3D is tempting but do I really want partner to lead diamonds against 4C? If partner could not move over 3C, game is unlikely."

RABIDEAU: "3D. My hand has improved somewhat so let's give partner something to chew on. Hope he doesn't take it as lead-directing."

Me, too, on the lead-directing aspect, but I don't expect EW to stick their vulnerable necks on the block at the 4-level. A thorough analysis came from:

WALKER: "3D. This isn't really a 'Law' violation, as the singleton is a compensating value. I'd like to have more of my values in diamonds for this bid, but it does offer partner an alternative contract — and may help him evaluate his hand if they bid 4C."

I like the last comment, even though EW don't seem likely to bid again at this vulnerability. The "Law" doesn't apply too well to potential 2-suit fits, so don't cite the law in passing because of a fear of minus 200. A couple of panelists were even hoping for +200:

CURTIS (and similarly **MARSHALL**): "Double. More flexible than 3D (a pretty bad suit). Spades are likely to be evenly split, which makes it likely partner has few diamonds."

Unfortunately, partner will read this as showing a desire to play 3C doubled. It's not entirely penalty, but it can

hardly be for takeout once you've both limited your hands. Perhaps if West had bid clubs and East raised, double would be "action." But in the present case, how can North ever figure you for an aceless hand with a stiff club and only one defensive trick for this double?

WILLIAMS: "Pass and try for +200. I'm a trump short to raise to 3H."

I suppose North could hold three side aces, but given the bidding, I don't see where we'd find 6 tricks against 3C.

Some even thought 3D was a gametry:

MERRITT: "3D. I have 7 losers with a bit of a downgrade for only 3 trumps. But with ruffs in the short hand and fairly solid values, I would expect partner to make game if he bids it."

KESSLER: "3D. Should be a game try. Partner didn't double 3C, and we have a great hand."

Let's just hope North doesn't think Kx of diamonds is pulling full weight and do something silly.

WERTHEIMER: "3H. Shows a maximum raise. 3D would show a max with good diamonds. Anybody who considers a jack-high suit "good" must also be happy with the stock market."

Better color my glasses rosy pink in both cases. Like the market, in bridge, what sinks to the bottom eventually rises -- this from a winner of more consolations than I can remember!

Thanks to all who sent in answers to this interesting set. Congratulations to **Manuel Paulo, Micah Fogel & Bill Smith**, who topped all Solvers and are invited to join the December panel.

Thanks, too, to expert guest **KC Jones** of Euless TX, formerly of Champaign IL. KC wrote this column for the Central IL newsletter back in the 1970s.

I hope you'll all join us for the last set of 2002 and try the six new problems on page 11. Please send answers as soon as possible (by Oct. 25) on the web form: <http://www.prairienet.org/bridge/forum.htm> or by mail or email to:

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♠ HOW THE PANEL VOTED (Panel/Staff Avg. — 541)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Score
Norm Athy, St. Louis	2NT	5H	DBL	3S	3C	Pass	510
Bob Bernhard, Orlando FL	2NT	5C	DBL	3S	3C	3H	540
Tony Curtis, Chicago/Champaign IL	3C	6C	4H	3S	Pass	DBL	390
Kent Feiler, Harvard IL	2NT	5C	3NT	3H	3C	3D	540
Jim Hudson, DeKalb IL	Pass	5C	3NT	3S	3C	3D	580
Kimmel (K.C.) Jones, Euless TX	2NT	5H	DBL	3S	3C	3H	560
Mark Kessler, Springfield IL	Pass	5H	3NT	3S	2NT	3D	580
Finlay Marshall, Edinburgh UK	Pass	4S	3NT	3H	Pass	DBL	470
Larry Matheny, Bloomington IL	2NT	5C	4H	3S	3C	3H	550
Nancy Popkin, St. Louis	2NT	5H	2H	3S	3C	3D	550
Larry Rabideau, St. Anne ON	Pass	5C	DBL	3S	2NT	3D	540
Arbha Vongsvivut, Godfrey IL	Pass	5H	3NT	3S	2NT	3H	590
Don Wertheimer, South Bend IN	2NT	5H	DBL	3H	Pass	3H	490
Hugh Williams, Carbondale IL	2NT	5C/5H	DBL	3H/3S	3C	Pass	530/590

♠ HOW THE STAFF VOTED

Tom Dodd, Boerne TX	Pass	4S	3NT	3S	3C	3D	590
Tom Kniest, Clayton MO	Pass	4S	3NT	3S	3C	3D	590
Scott Merritt, Harare, Zimbabwe	Pass	4S	3NT	3C	3C	3D	550
Karen Walker, Champaign IL	Pass	5C	3NT	3S	3C	3D	580

♠ SOLVERS HONOR ROLL (Solvers' Avg. — 486)

Manuel Paulo, Lisbon, Portugal	570	Leroy Boser, Elkhart IN	550
Micah Fogel, Aurora IL	560	Bob Lambert, Warsaw IN	550
Bill Smith, Fort Pierce FL	560	Paul Soper, Sierra Vista AZ	550

Tied with 530: Bill Johnson, Farmington MO; Rich Peer, St. Louis; Lars Sandegren, Quincy IL; Dave Wetzel, Rantoul IL; Howard Greaves, Portsmouth UK

Solvers Forum -- December Problems

1. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—		?

What is your call as South holding:
S-10 H-Q107 D-AJ94 C-KQ1075 ?

2. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

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

What is your call as South holding:
S-3 H-K1042 D-K10953 C-AQ4?

3. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

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

What is your call as South holding:
S-AKQ H-AJ102 D-AJ764 C-3 ?

4. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
--	1C	1H	2H
3H	Pass	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-KQ5 H-63 D-10872 C-AQ97 ?

5. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

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

What is your call as South holding:
S-1052 H-K10 D-AQJ97 C-AJ3?

6. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

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

What is your call as South holding:
S-AQ1054 H-7 D-A8743 C-A2 ?