

Issue 137

Scottish Bridge News

The Official Magazine of the Scottish Bridge Union



John Murdoch

Scottish Bridge News

Editorial

Our Camrose team did not do themselves justice on the first weekend – we hope that things will improve in Manchester for the second weekend on March 1-3.

This edition is dedicated to the memory of one of Scotland's greatest players, John Murdoch. He was a quiet, unassuming man who did not always get the credit he deserved, but whenever Scotland achieved success in Open or Senior events, John was part of the team. We have tributes from Brian Spears, Harry Smith and Iain Sime.

We also pay tribute to Maida Grant, for many years an outstanding but unsung member of the Scottish Women's team.

Both were essentially nice people, kind generous, thoughtful and fun to be with. They will be much missed.

Apologies for the late appearance of this issue – your editor has been overwhelmed! There have been problems with the circulation of the Bidding Competition, which hopefully have been fixed now. Perhaps those of you who enjoy the Challenge could help out by sending in problems that occur at the table?

Please note that the SBNews now appears online every two months!

Contributions should be sent to:

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The Scottish Cup Final

The 2023 Scottish Cup final was contested by SPEARS (Brian Spears, Barnet Shenkin, Derek Diamond, Iain Sime) and SHORT (Brian Short, Alan Goodman, Derek Sanders, Gints Freimanis). Is there some significance in the fact that first 6 named players are our Senior Camrose team? The final consists of 4 x 16-board segments. To play 64 boards in one day is taxing, and the format may give an advantage to younger players.

SPEARS started strongly, but some injudicious overbidding towards the end of the first set frittered away their lead, and SHORT won the segment 38-28. The second segment was unusual: 7 flat boards, 6 where only an imp or 2 changed hands. The only double figure swing was on board 15.

Bd 15	♠—	NS Vul
	♥AJ973	Dir E
	♦KJ862	
	♣Q83	
♠AQ764		♠J982
♥KQ6		♥84
♦QT3		♦7
♣KJ		♣A76542
	♠KT53	
	♥T52	
	♦A975	
	♣T9	

At both tables West opened 1♠. One North made a takeout double; the other a Michaels cuebid. South doubled the final contract of 4♠.

Gints Freimanis made short work of the play after North led the ♥A, then switched to a diamond. He won the heart return and led a trump towards dummy. South won and returned a diamond, ruffed in dummy. Declarer

picked up South's remaining trump with a finesse and cashed winners. In the 3-card ending North could not keep 3 clubs and the ♦K.

Brian Short gave declarer a harder time. He led a diamond and Alan Goodman switched to hearts, so declarer had an extra loser in hand. He won the heart return, ruffed a diamond and led the ♠J, but South did not cover. Declarer crossed to the ♣K to ruff another diamond, reaching this position:

	♠—	
	♥J97	
	♦J	
	♣Q8	
♠AQ76		♠9
♥6		♥—
♦—		♦—
♣J		♣A7654
	♠KT5	
	♥5	
	♦9	
	♣T	

He played the ♣A and ruffed a club, but that allowed South to discard his last heart, overruff dummy and exit with a diamond, eventually scoring the setting trick with the ♠K. One winning line is to lead the ♠9 before shortening West's trump with a club ruff. Alternatively, declarer might ruff his heart first so South has no useful discard. A very tricky exercise in timing.

SHORT won the second segment 30-1 to take a 38 imp lead at half time. There are many tactics a trailing team may try in order to create swings: bidding thin slams; underbidding at game-level in the hope that game does not make; doubling for penalties at the drop of a hat; and taking slightly against the odds lines on the play. But with 32 boards to go such tactics might not yet be

necessary. The third set saw three slam swings, but only two went SPEAR's way and SHORT took the set 27-25.

With 16 boards remaining, still 40 down, it was time for some action. But when your luck is out nothing works.

Bd 6	♠AK ♥AKJ74 ♦QJT7 ♣93	EW Vul Dir E									
♠T6 ♥Q3 ♦A6532 ♣J652	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠942 ♥8 ♦K984 ♣KQ874
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠QJ8753 ♥T9652 ♦— ♣AT										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	<i>Sanders</i>		<i>Freimanis</i>
-	-	Pass	Pass
Pass	1♥	Pass	4♦
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♦
Pass	6♥	End	

Derek Sanders judged that partner's passed hand splinter must have the right cards for slam. At the other table South tried to create a swing by opening an off-centre 3♠. He was raised to 4♠, but missing slam created an 11-imp swing in the wrong column.

Spears rallied towards the end, but too little too late, and the final set went to SHORT by just one imp.

This was Brian Short's 15th win, equalling the success of the late Victor Goldberg. He still has some way to go to catch John Matheson, who has won the Scottish Cup 18 times.

Full coverage of the match is available in the BBO VuGraph archive.

Remember to enter this year!

The First Camrose Weekend

Our team was greeted hospitably with a huge win over Northern Ireland on Friday evening. Douglas Piper and Alex Wilkinson created a slam swing on Board 4 with a nice auction:

♠AKQJT2 ♥AQT2 ♦A6 ♣6	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠96543 ♥5 ♦J74 ♣AT94
	N										
W		E									
	S										

WEST	EAST
2♣	2♦
3♣	4♣
4♦	4♥
4NT	5♣
6♣	End

The key to success was the 3♣ rebid, showing a solid suit and demanding cuebids.

Our 19VP win saw us top the table, but we came back to earth on Saturday morning against Ireland. Scotland lost by 29 imps in spite of this effort by Sam Punch and Stephen Peterkin:

Bd 17	♠AKT6 ♥QJ62 ♦J54 ♣K4	None Vul Dir N									
♠QJ9542 ♥K ♦— ♣AQT652	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠73 ♥54 ♦AKT832 ♣983
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠8 ♥AT9873 ♦Q976 ♣J7										

At both tables North opened 1NT, and both Wests thought it a good idea to overcall 3♦. Sam jumped to 4♥. West led the ♠Q, and Sam was inspired by the

weak jump overcall to drop the singleton ♥K to make her game. The Irish had Texas transfers in their armoury, so reached 4♥ from the wrong side. Three rounds of diamonds saw West score his ♥K and cash the ♣A. If only our other opening leads had been so effective!

England has 2 teams this year, and the EBU 'second' team won all its matches – except against Scotland. This was an interesting board from Match 3.

Bd 17	♠AKQ96	None Vul
	♥KT	Dir N
	♦T763	
	♣96	
♠752		♠T
♥Q9432		♥AJ8765
♦4		♦Q95
♣AJ75		♣432
	♠J843	
	♥–	
	♦AKJ82	
	♣KQT8	

4 North-South pairs bid to 6♠ but only one made the slam. East-West took no part in the auction, and East led the ♣2. West won the Ace over dummy's King and returned a trump. Declarer won in dummy and played another trump. East showed out, discarding a heart.

To succeed declarer must play diamonds for no losers. Most simply followed "9 never" but there is no rush to make the crucial decision. Suppose declarer ruffs a heart, cashes the ♣Q and ruffs a club then ruffs his last heart. By cashing the ♦A and ruffing the last club he discovers that East began with just 4 black cards. On the last trump East produces a 5th heart. His distribution is either 1=6=3=3 or 1=7=2=3. Since the former is *a priori* more likely; and East might make a weak jump overcall with 7 hearts,

finessing in diamonds becomes more attractive. Of course, if the finesse fails you are an ignominious three down... At the other table Sam Punch had made a weak jump overcall, so declarer had every reason to go wrong.

Another opportunity was missed on the very next board:

Bd 18	♠KT93	NS Vul
	♥9732	Dir E
	♦K54	
	♣86	
♠A82		♠QJ764
♥AKQ65		♥J64
♦Q8		♦9732
♣KJT		♣A
	♠5	
	♥T	
	♦AJT6	
	♣Q975432	

At three tables South opened 3♣ and West overcalled 3NT. North led partner's suit and dummy's Ace won. Declarer ran the ♠Q to North's ♠K – and North played a second club. Declarer claimed 10 tricks.

North can see that declarer has only 2 spade winners so far, and he surely has a club stopper. But North cannot see the solid heart suit that means the defence must cash 4 diamond winners now to defeat the game.

Can South help out with a signal at trick 1? There is no point in signalling length, so is the card played a Suit Preference signal? One South tried the ♣2; our South tried a subtle ♣5, hoping that asked for a diamond switch. No joy.

Perhaps the ♣9, discouraging, is best: partner should realise that you cannot want a heart switch? Sadly a flat board against the superior ♠4 in the other room.

This was a nice Scottish pick-up:

Bd 20	♠A	All Vul									
	♥AT9	Dir W									
	♦T7542										
	♣KJ98										
♠Q98742	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠J63
		N									
W		E									
	S										
♥-		♥QJ87654									
♦Q986		♦A									
♣Q65		♣AT									
	♠KT5										
	♥K32										
	♦KJ3										
	♣7432										

2♠ - dbl - 4♠ was the auction at both tables. Iain Sime cashed the ♠A and switched to the ♣8. Declarer feared that if Derek Diamond won this trick he would play 2 more rounds of spades, so he rose with the Ace and crossruffed for a bit, but with only 2 ruffs available in dummy he had to concede 2 down.

Stephen Peterkin let the ♣8 lead run to his Queen. He took 3 ruffs in each hand to reach an ending where his remaining ♠Q98 must produce a tenth trick. +13 imps contributed to the 51-51 draw.

At the end of Day 2 Scotland lay third in the table, behind the two English teams. Our first match on Sunday was against England. In the second half things started to go wrong.

Bd 21	♠8	NS Vul									
	♥K65	Dir N									
	♦T9432										
	♣T964										
♠A	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠KQT9754
		N									
W		E									
	S										
♥Q842		♥A3									
♦AQ85		♦J7									
♣K832		♣AQ									
	♠J632										
	♥JT97										
	♦K6										
	♣J75										

On this deal Ireland reached 6♠ in remarkably few bids. The EBU South cunningly led the ♦6, and declarer fell for it, rising with the ♦A to avoid a possible ruff. When trump broke badly he was one down. England took 11 bids to reach the same contract. Derek Diamond made the same cunning lead – and Neil Rosen ran it to his ♦J to make his slam. Scotland chose to play 6NT, but that had no play on the lead of the ♥J when spades were unkind. The 15-imp swing was a cruel blow.

Losing to England by 30 imps dropped us to fourth place behind Ireland. The last match was against Wales, lying not far behind us.

Sam Punch was justifiably pleased with her play on this deal:

Bd 9	♠KJ973	EW Vul									
	♥KQT92	Dir N									
	♦63										
	♣Q										
♠T42	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠Q865
		N									
W		E									
	S										
♥J43		♥A85									
♦K		♦J875									
♣JT6543		♣K2									
	♠A										
	♥76										
	♦AQT942										
	♣A987										

All 6 South players declared 3NT on a club lead. Three won the ♣A and crossed to dummy with a top heart (all the Easts ducked in tempo). Then they finessed the ♦Q, creating a second diamond loser, and had to go down.

Sam reasoned that with only one entry to dummy it would be better to try to avoid a guess. At trick 2 she cashed the ♦A. If nothing happened she could continue with the ♦Q, hoping for a doubleton Jack, or cross to dummy to lead the second diamond, picking up

Kxx in East as well. When the King dropped she could clear diamonds and claim 9 tricks.

Unfortunately this was one of very few Scottish gains in the match. Perhaps the team was getting tired. Wales won comfortably 89-55 to relegate Scotland to 5th place.

At the end of weekend 1 the scores are:

1	EBU	69.13
2	England	59.83
3	Ireland	57.81
4	Wales	47.50
5	Scotland	42.94
6	N Ireland	21.79

[You can replay all the hands by logging into RealBridge and looking in the January 2024 Archive.](#)

The Second Camrose weekend is on March 1-3 in Manchester. Our team is Paul Barton & Jun Nakamaru-Pinder; Martin Bateman & Callum McKail; and Barnet Shenkin & Brian Spears, captained by Robert Ferrari.

There will be complete coverage on RealBridge with the annoying 30-minute delay, Shireen Mohandes will organise expert commentary in her usual efficient manner – well worth a watch.

Play Challenge

Jim Patrick

1 NS Vul Dealer South

♠KQ5
♥T75
♦J76
♣T965

♠AT96
♥AKJ6
♦T
♣AK8

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
1♦	2♣	Pass	2♦
Dbl	3♣	Pass	5♣
End			

Contract: 5♣ Lead: ♦A

West leads ♦A and ♦K on which East peters. You ruff the second diamond. Both follow to the ♣A. What next?

2 None Vul Dealer South

♠72
♥KQT73
♦A952
♣72

♠AT3
♥75
♦K8
♣AKJ543

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♥	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
End			

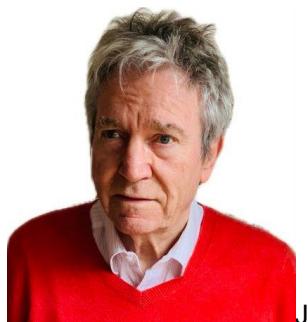
Contract: 3NT Lead: ♠5

East produces Q, then K and a third spade. You win the third round. West signals 5 spades. How do you play?

Solutions on Page ??

John Murdoch

1943-1923



*“The man o’ independent mind,
He looks an’ laughs at a’ that.”*

John, an only child, was brought up in the Hill of Beath, a mining village just outside Dunfermline in Fife. His father was a clerk and storekeeper and they lived in one of the rows of miners’ houses. They later moved to the village of Menstrie, in Clackmannanshire at the base of the Ochil Hills.

John lived in Alloa, but worked as a librarian in Glasgow, a job which suited his personality. He was a “lad o’ pairts” with an enquiring mind and an interest in all aspects of life. He loved poetry and art as well as sport, particularly football. Towards the end of his career he held a senior position within Unison, where he passionately fought for the rights of the underdog.

From the Bridge Obituary at his funeral:

“John was a passionate bridge player, and I had the honour and privilege to be his bridge partner twice over, and a team mate on many occasions. He was also a very tricky and skilful opponent more often than I care to remember, and most importantly he was a very close friend.

I will greatly miss our long phone conversations, when one or other of us

decided to catch up. I reckon that Betty probably gave up any plans she had with John for the next couple of hours on these occasions; we would talk, tell stories, discuss bridge hands, and, what I remember most, was the constant laughter from both of us.

I admired John tremendously, as he was a gentleman with a fierce sense of integrity and a loyal friend, whom I could always rely on. I’m confident that all who knew John will have enjoyed his tremendous and individual sense of humour.

John grew up in a bridge-playing family. His grandparents and parents, Ronnie and Isa all played bridge. When John was 10 years of age, his dad’s partner couldn’t manage for the tournament that night, so his dad called to John that he was needed as a replacement. John and Ronnie duly won the tournament and the local paper the ‘*Stirling Sentinel*’ published an article about this 10-year-old winning a bridge tournament with his dad. John apparently joked thereafter that, if he hadn’t won that night, he wouldn’t have been asked back and perhaps wouldn’t have taken up the game at all.

His dad was John’s first bridge partner, and they would regularly be seen playing in the local club in Menstrie and at various national congresses and tournaments.

In his university days, John formed a partnership with Tony Wilkinson. Both were to go on and represent Scotland. Amongst other partners in his early bridge-playing days were Peter McLaren, who remained a good friend and Gordon Wellington, who is sadly no longer with us.

John’s first international partner was the late Ian Howie. John and Ian spent

many hours constructing a highly intricate and sophisticated bridge system and went on to enjoy many successes.

In total, John was to play for Scotland with distinction with six different partners on 44 occasions in the Home Internationals known as the Camrose trophy. This is a remarkable achievement and one that will seldom be surpassed. John also represented the Scotland Senior team with 3 different partners on 6 occasions in the Senior Camrose, winning it on 3 occasions.

He was 9th on the list of Grand Masters who have won most red points: notable successes were 7 wins in each of the Scottish Cup and the Winter Foursomes; and he won the Arthur Grand Master Pairs 5 times.

John achieved legendary status in many peoples' eyes, when, partnering Iain Sime, he was a member of the Scottish Senior team, which came third in the Senior European Championships and actually missed out on winning the Championship by a whisker when everything went down to the last match against the Netherlands, which Scotland lost narrowly. Scotland, including John and Iain, thus qualified to play in the World Championships in Bali, where they all played tremendously well and reached the quarterfinals before losing to USA.

Another remarkable achievement was when John played in the Scottish team in India in the Commonwealth games. This time John was to go on and win the Gold medal for Scotland. He told me that one of the proudest moments of his life was when "Flower of Scotland" was blasted out at the medal ceremony

whilst John and his team-mates were presented with their Gold medals.

John was a very patriotic person and was always proud to be Scottish and it meant the world to him to achieve this honour for Scotland on the other side of the globe.

John achieved his lifelong dream in bridge when he won Britain's most prestigious competition, partnering Douglas Piper, in the Gold Cup. A Scottish team hadn't won the Gold Cup for many years at that time, and indeed have not won it since. This meant everything to John, although Betty tells me that, having achieved his lifelong dream, John then told her that he now wanted to win it more than once. Neither Betty nor I will ever know if this was John's legendary sense of humour talking, or if he meant it – probably a bit of both.

In fact, what a lot of people were unaware of was that John worked and studied the game of bridge relentlessly, when at home – sometimes through reading bridge books and often by watching on the internet the very best bridge players in the world competing in top tournaments.

Regardless of how accomplished a player John had become, he was forever trying to improve. He approached the game, as he did in life, with great humility.

Scotland have lost one of their greatest players and I for one will forever miss John, whom I was honoured to be able to call my great friend. "

Brian Spears

From a tribute by Harry Smith

John's last international outing was in the Senior online qualifying in 2021 with Iain Sime. All four teams were sat at computer terminals in a large room at the Holiday Inn in Edinburgh, closely supervised and playing different sets of boards. At one point John was heard to say "Something's wrong! My computer is playing my cards for me!" The chorus of "That's because you are dummy" certainly lightened the atmosphere.

John was known as a wonderful partner, a rarity in the bridge world, always modest, ever helpful, and never blaming. He was wonderful company, and on those rare occasions when he was not on the winning side, he lost with grace. His proudest achievement was winning the Gold Cup in 2006. Two days after his triumph he played in a local league match: "What a daft game bridge is; one day you win the Gold Cup, and the next you lose to Stirling!"

An epitaph once used for the late Jimmie Arthur applies equally to John: "In a bridge world full of inflated egos it is refreshing to come across a modest and unassuming fellow, who is invariably courteous to opponents and who ranks high on everyone's list of favourite partners. John was one of nature's gentlemen."

John Murdoch

Iain Sime

I was very lucky to be John's partner in the successful Scottish Senior team of 2012/13. Not only was John a great player, but he was also great company both at and away from the table. All the kind adjectives used to describe John (friendly, humble, witty, gentle, charming etc. etc.) are absolutely true.

There was never a shortage of things to discuss other than bridge. We both liked football and had an interest in politics. It transpired that we were sometimes at the same matches, including Scotland v. England as long ago as 1966. I was intrigued by his stories about his trade union activities; how he fought for the underdog, often against the odds, but with some unexpected successes. He saw some good in everyone, even in some bridge players who had misbehaved against us.

On the bridge front we were part of Scotland teams which won bronze medals at the 2012 European Senior Championship and the Commonwealth Games in 2018. We also won several Scottish titles including the Scottish Cup in 2019. In that final we beat eight consecutive contracts bid by our opponents.

Defending tight contracts was John's forte. Even when prospects looked grim, John was searching for a way to give declarer a problem. Analogies with his work as a trade union official fighting hopeless cases were appropriate.

We did a lot of system work prior to the 2013 D'Orsi Bowl in Bali. As soon as hand 6, it paid off big time.

E/W Vulnerable, Dealer East

♠ -	♠ T87643
♥ AK52	♥ QT874
♦ KQJ653	♦ -
♣ AK8	♣ 62

West (Iain)

2♣¹

3♥³

5♠

Pass

East (John)

Pass

2♦²

5♥

6♥

¹2♣ = FG or 22/23 bal.

²2♦ = relay, most hands

³3♥ = (4♥s and 5+♦s)

Only four out of 22 teams reached the 22-point slam. It is hard to find a successful auction starting with a "normal" 2♣-2♦-3♦-3♠-? What now? At the other table the Japanese West tried 3NT and lost four spades and the diamond Ace.

John's idea of using 3♥ to show the West hand type (game force with diamonds and a major) set us off on the right track. However, the key bid was John's 5♥. This showed a great hand for hearts without a black suit control. John rightly rejected the grand slam try of 5♠. I could play safely for 12 tricks and a 17-imp gain.

That was the difference between winning and losing because we won the match by only 12 imps. We were off to a great start and went on to reach the quarter-finals, losing to the eventual American winners

Here are some other hands that demonstrate John's imaginative skill:

Camrose v Wales

	♠J96432	NS Vul
	♥8	Dir W
	♦A863	
	♣32	
♠Q5	N W E S	♠AT87
♥J762		♥T543
♦Q95		♦42
♣KQJT		♣954
	♠K	
	♥AKQ9	
	♦KJT7	
	♣A876	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	<i>Walker</i>	-	<i>Murdoch</i>
Pass	4♥	Pass	2NT
End		Pass	4♠

In the other room Patrick Jourdain opened 1♦, and ended in 3NT. The obvious club lead gave that contract little chance. When Patrick misguessed diamonds he was two down.

John chose to open 2NT, getting his high card strength over. Dave Walker used a Texas transfer to put him into 4♠, perhaps not the outcome he had hoped for. He won the club lead and cashed the ♥AK to discard dummy's club loser. He entered dummy with a club ruff and led a spade. East naturally ducked and the King scored. Now he cashed the ♥Q, ruffed the last heart, cashed the ♦AK and ruffed another club. He had taken the first ten tricks while the defenders meekly followed suit.

From the Last BBL Premier League in 1999:

	♠T942 ♥AKQT75 ♦ - ♣T62	All Vul Dir W
♠Q75 ♥986 ♦K97632 ♣K	N W E S	♠A8 ♥J42 ♦QJ54 ♣QJ87
	♠KJ63 ♥3 ♦AT8 ♣A9543	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
<i>Murdoch</i>	<i>Lodge</i>	<i>Walker</i>	<i>Crouch</i>
-	-	Pass	1♦*
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	3♣	Pass	4♣
All Pass			

*1♦ = Precision

John led the ♦6, and declarer ruffed in dummy. He ran the ♠T – and John ducked! He could see that dummy's hearts would provide discards for declarer's minor suit losers. The idea was to distract declarer: he succeeded. Imagining a 4-1 spade break declarer abandoned spades. He cashed three hearts, discarding clubs. He led a club to the Ace, discarded a club from dummy on the ♦A, and ruffed his last diamond.

Now he played dummy's last spade. Walker took the ♠A, and when Murdoch followed low declarer claimed, conceding two clubs and a spade.

The defence made a counter claim: a fourth round of clubs re-promoted West's ♠Q.

From the 48th European Championships, 2006, where John played in the Senior Team

	♠AK43 ♥KT ♦T873 ♣853	All Vul Dir E
♠QT98 ♥AQ7632 ♦ - ♣964	N W E S	♠7652 ♥J946 ♦AJ65 ♣Q2
	♠J ♥85 ♦KQ942 ♣AKJT7	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	Pass	1♦
2♥	Dbl	3♥	4♣
Pass	5♦	End	

West led ♥A and another. John led a diamond to the Queen – and things looked bleak when West showed out. There is only one more dummy entry, and if you use it to lead a second diamond East will rise with the ♦A and wait to collect a second trump trick.

John reckoned that his only chance was to remove East's safe exit cards. He could keep a top spade in dummy, and a heart could be ruffed in dummy, so East's only safe exit suit was clubs. His only real chance was that East had the doubleton Queen. So he cashed two top clubs, crossed to a spade and led the ten of diamonds. East had to throw in the towel.

Maida Grant

1946-2023

Another sad loss for the Scottish bridge community, Maida took up bridge when she was pregnant and could not play the other sports that she enjoyed, notably golf.

Her parents were keen players but would not allow their children to play at home. Still, like John Murdoch, she absorbed awareness of the game.

Her first partner was Alex Onions. They were selected to travel to Bulgaria for a friendly match in 1990. Alex, a nervous flyer, took some knockout pills. On arrival they were met by the reigning European Pairs Champions, Matilda Lorer and Nevena Deleva (now Senior) and rushed off to play in a pairs event. Alex passed the evening in a blur – Maida wished she had done the same.

Undaunted, she continued on an international career. After taking early retirement in 2003 she formed a hugely successful partnership with Sheila MacDonald. Together they played in 9 Lady Milnes, winning 4 times; and represented Scotland abroad in the European Championships in 2006 and 2012, and the World Bridge Games in 2008 and 2012.

She had many domestic triumphs also, and became a Grand Master in 2004. Among many other successes she won the Women's Teams 6 times and was runner-up 7 times

Maida was an outstanding partner and team-mate, never critical, always first to admit to her own wrong views. She was

great company, with a wonderful sense of humour.

She enjoyed this deal from the 2006 Grand Masters Pairs.

	♠QJ52 ♥K75 ♦AKJ543 ♣—	None Vul Dir W
♠AKT4 ♥AT86 ♦96 ♣AK9	N W E S	♠973 ♥3 ♦72 ♣Q865432
	♠86 ♥QJ942 ♦QT8 ♣JT7	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♥	Dbl	Pass	1NT
Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
Dbl	End		

Maida sat West. She could not resist doubling 3NT, even though opponents would likely pull to 4♦ and the defence to that contract might be less obvious.

4♦X made at several tables, an unusual way to score 710. East led the singleton heart, and a couple of ruffs take the contract two down, but West could not resist trying to cash one top club...

Maida did much better. Her opponents were too macho to run. She led the ♠A. Sheila Macdonald gave a discouraging signal, so Maida tried the ♣A. This got a positive reaction: the defence cashed the first 10 tricks to score 1700.

Maida allowed herself a quiet smile. She was far too nice a person to gloat.

Play Challenge Solutions

Jim Patrick

1 NS Vul Dealer South

	♠KQ5		
	♥T75		
	♦J76		
	♣T965		
♠74		♠J832	
♥Q32		♥984	
♦AKQ94		♦8532	
♣Q2		♣743	
	♠AT96		
	♥AKJ6		
	♦T		
	♣AK8		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
1♦	2♣	Pass	2♦
Dbl	3♣	Pass	5♣
End			

Contract: 5♣ Lead: ♦A

East appears to have 4 diamonds so, unless the ♣Q is singleton, you have no chance when trumps are 4-1. You have a choice of taking the club finesse or playing the Ace and the King.

If you play the Ace and King and the Queen falls singleton or doubleton, you are home: you can cross to the dummy to ruff your last diamond and return to draw the last trump. If the Queen does not fall, you still ruff the diamond. Then you test spades before taking the heart finesse.

There is no gain in picking up ♣Qxx in East since you still need to bring in spades or the heart finesse. If West has ♣Qx, you lose your certainty for your chance in the majors. If West has ♣Qxx, he will return a trump and now you need hearts and spades.

It is not always best to focus on the best line to bring in trump for no losers.

2 None Vul Dealer South

	♠72		
	♥KQT73		
	♦A952		
	♣72		
♠J9654		♠KQ8	
♥J92		♥A64	
♦QT74		♦J63	
♣9		♣QT86	
	♠AT3		
	♥75		
	♦K8		
	♣AKJ543		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♥	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
End			

Contract: 3NT Lead: ♠5

At the table declarer cashed the ♣K and crossed to the ♦A to take a club finesse. When he set up a long club, a diamond return meant he had only 8 tricks.

Declarer's line works when East has ♣Qxx, but a better chance is to play clubs from the top. You lose only when East has ♣Qxx and West has the ♥A. You gain when West has ♣Qx, and also against the 4-1 break. When West shows out on the second club there is time to switch to hearts, playing East for ♥Axx.

January 2024 Bidding Challenge

Harry Smith

A warm welcome to our 22 guest panellists, and thanks to them for the consideration they have given to this set of mainly difficult problems. The answers were sent in over the Christmas period but despite the probable consumption of too much food and drink were all eminently sensible. All that is apart from the 2 panellists who on their first attempt found a double of their partner's bid, something I have frequently been tempted to do, but the rules forbid!

Problem 1 Teams All Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠9632	-	-	-	P
♥54	1♣	2♥*	Dbl	P
♦KQJ	3♠	P	4♦*	P
♣AKQJ	?			

*2♥ = Weak *4♦ = Cue

There is a clear majority view on this problem, as summarised by:

ASH: 4♠. With such poor trumps opposite partner's 4-card suit and the distinct possibility of a bad break, I have already done enough.

MCGOWAN: 4♠. Rubbish spades and no heart stopper. If partner has a stopper and his trumps are good enough for slam he should give it another go – I did jump last time.

Some, however, have a small element of doubt:

SHORT: 4♠: I'm too worried about my weak spades. Partner could have ♦A, ♥AQ, ♠KQxx and we could go off in 5♠ with 3 spade losers. I might make a try with the ♠J instead of the ♦J.

What does partner know about my hand?

SANDERS: 4♠. My hand is limited to strong balanced or good unbalanced and the real weakness in spades worries me.

It is good practice playing a weak NT for partner to assume my hand is a strong NT when deciding whether to stop in 3♠, bid game, or make a try for greater things. On that basis he must have more than good spades and the ♦A, either in shape or values. We need that heart control, but how can we find out about it? There are different suggestions from the panel on how one might look for it. Several have assumed 4♥ would show a heart control, but:

SHIELDS: 4♠. Our choice here is to sign off or to bid 4♥ as Last Train, telling partner that we have a club control (which they have just denied).

Last train is a useful addition to one's armoury. With no other option below game to make a slam try, that only available bid is used, not as a cue, but as a general try. In this hand it must guarantee club control as partner has clearly denied that. Some panellists have assumed it would not be available, while one regular partnership cannot envisage how to deal with hands like this without it:

ADAMSON: 4♥. Partner has shown a 4-card spade suit and slam interest without club control. It is inconceivable that he does not have a heart control: ♠AKQJ and ♦A alone is not worth a slam try when I could not bid 4♠ on the previous round. I can bid 4♥ as Last Train – showing slam interest rather than a heart control, and promising control in clubs.

VALENTINE: 4♥. My hand is still potentially excellent in context. My clubs rate to be good for discards if partner has decent spades and a heart control. Last Train is my best shot to convey that message and still stop low enough when needed.

In summary, you have the strong NT you have promised, so without extra shape he needs at least as good a hand as yours. If you subside in 4♠, even with the ♥A he will assume you have scattered values rather than the trick taking power you hold in the minors.

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
4♠	20	10
4♥	2	4

Problem 2 Teams EW Vul

♠A432	S	W	N	E
♥43	-	-	-	1♦
♦J532	P	1♠	2♥	P
♣AJ98	?			

From a problem with only 2 suggestions from the panel, we move to one where 6 different answers have been suggested. There is, however, a small overall majority for one action, passing:

SHORT: (similarly **DRAGIC**) **Pass.** No case for any other call. If partner has 8 tricks in hearts, he should double first.

Actually game was reasonable, with partner having nowhere near 8 tricks in his own hand.

PATERSON Pass: At red opponents are not psyching, so I expect partner is stretching to indicate a lead, and we are already at or above our fit level.

Less sure:

PIPER: Pass. And hope I haven't missed a game.

SIME: Pass. I would be more inclined to bid at different vulnerability. If NV, East-West would be more likely to be stealing. Missing a vulnerable game would cost more imps.

WHYTE: Pass. The old idea that partner's bid in the sandwich position shows a strong hand has gone the way of the dodo. It could be a lead indication, a normal overcall, or a reasonably strong hand with an excellent suit. Only in the latter case do we risk missing a game (non-vul). Any trump finesse will likely lose, and the lead will be a spade through my Ace.

ASH: Pass. I am reluctant to punish partner for an enterprising 2♥ bid. Of course, they may be 'stealing' from us, but I think it is more likely that partner has something like ♠xx, ♥AKJxx, ♦xx, ♣10xxx and might just get home in 2H.

ADAMSON Pass: When opponents have opened and responded it is unlikely that we have game unless we have a fit so even if 2NT was natural (which it would not be for me) I wouldn't bid it. I have 2 tricks for partner, and it is long odds against him turning up with the other 8 we would need for 4♥.

MARSHALL Pass: No sensible action. Partner can be quite strong and responder quite weak, but really nothing to say. Will I try 3♥ if available next time round – if there is a next time round. Probably not. Partner is, after all, limited as he did not start with a Double, nor did he bid 3♥. However, tempting it might seem, I do not feel this hand is worth anything other than a Pass.

Just in the minority are the bidders, but they range over 5 different possibilities. Most, in one way or another, decide a small doubleton is sufficient support. Four go for a simple raise and see flaws in other options:

VALENTINE: 3♥. Inconceivable to pass with such a good hand here and no choice is perfect. 2NT is not natural, 3NT is an overbid. 3♥ massages the truth about trump length but compensates with other values and should allow partner to judge the level.

BENNET: 3♥. Partner doesn't need much to bid 2♥ at these colours but pass seems feeble and 2NT if natural would imply some diamond cards.

PETERKIN: 3♥. 2 Aces, we surely owe partner a noise. Only 2 trumps...seems an invite is in order.

CLOW: 3♥. Too good to pass, I hope this doesn't upset partner.

Some questions about what 2NT would mean but Gints feels he has all angles covered:

FREIMANIS: 2NT. Since there are two cue bids available, I will assume that 2NT is natural. Having said that, I do not mind if partner takes this as a good raise in hearts since I have two Aces and a useful holding in the club suit.

While for Derek it is definitely natural and the ideal bid:

SANDERS: 2NT. Partner rates to have a 6-card suit most of the time so with a pair of Aces I owe partner a bid. As a passed hand and not a UCB this action describes the hand perfectly.

Some go for either UCB:

SHIELDS: 2♠. It is awkward to pass with 10 hcp, but no bid appeals. Against solid bidders we might assume that the hand belonged to the opponents and partner was just telling us which suit to lead, but these days even vulnerable opponents try to steal the contract from you. I hope the 2♠ bid will be taken as general values and not get us too high.

With less explanation and using up more space:

DIAMOND: 3♦. Unassuming cue, game try in hearts.

2 panellists have an interesting idea but how will partner read it?

MCGINLEY: 3♣. Non-jump fit opposite a probable 6-card heart suit. Normally would have better clubs for this but Ace-Ace is good news.

MCGOWAN: 3♣. I have to do something! So I bid where my strength lies. Hoping partner will not be too disappointed in my heart support. If NT is where we want to play this should right-side it.

I fear partner will expect a better suit and also better tolerance for his suit.

Partner held ♠KJ87 ♥JT9752 ♦- ♣KQ5, a 10-count with a poor suit. I think Pass is very unilateral; we need to take some sensible action to bring partner into the decision-making. It is the majority view, so Pass gets the points, but to my mind the arguments for a raise or a UCB are significantly stronger. I am less convinced by more enterprising actions.

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
Pass	12	10
3♥.	4	8
2♠	1	7
3♦	1	6
2NT	2	5
3♣	2	4

Problem 3 Teams None Vul

♠932	S	W	N	E
♥-		1♦	1♥	P
♦AKQJ75	?			
♣J973				

This deal appeared in a field of top internationals in the OCBL invitational teams. It would be nice to report on how the experts handled the problem, but at 5 of the 10 tables opener chose to open

1NT with a 3244 14-count, and another 3 opened 1♣. At the 2 tables where the problem occurred, both Souths bid 1NT, but only one reached the making 3NT. Can those who chose pass defend their action? Some see no option:

SHORT: Pass. No case for any other call

McGINLEY: Pass. Least-bad call. East may have a penalty pass of 1♥ doubled, so I can rescue to 2♦. An immediate 2NT is usually a heart raise. An immediate (optimistic) 3NT might have only 4 (or maybe even zero) diamond tricks, or partner might pull to 4♥.

Others are playing a devious game:

WHYTE: Pass. Amusing, no? Wait and see. My RHO has possibly made a trap pass of 1♥.

SANDERS: Pass. It would be helpful to know what system East-West are playing – this affects the range of hands opener can have. When West reopens with a double I can rescue to 2♦.

ROSS: Pass. hope to bid a natural 2♦ if West doubles or bids spades.

Is this not another example of a unilateral action, failing to involve partner in the decision? He can have quite a good hand for his simple overcall and a nondescript heart suit – we know he has no diamond stopper to allow a 1NT bid, and if he lacks a spade suit he will choose this route rather than doubling. Give him ♠AQ ♥Axxxxx ♦xx ♣Qx and 3NT is playable.

Jack and Liz highlight one flaw in the strategic pass:

PATERSON: 1NT: If I pass, opener may have too many hearts to reopen, and I do like our side to have more trumps than the opponents.

McGOWAN: 1NT: Not exactly typical but probably better than passing. If I pass

there is no guarantee that West will find a double.

Some see it as the only option:

SIME: (similarly **BENNETT, VALENTINE**) **1NT.** This should indicate a dislike of hearts, some values and a diamond stop (or four).

And Stephen has a clear plan:

PETERKIN: 1NT. Clearly (almost) anything could be right: we could be cold for game, or they could (less likely). If that goes back round to East who doubles (showing penalty of 1♥) or West doubles and East passes I can bid 2♦ which must now be natural and NF. At least I've shown some values.

CLOW: 1NT. It seems unlikely that E has a trap pass, so I will bid my diamond stop and hope that partner can raise.

And a few want to understand the implications of the opener:

ADAMSON: 1NT. At this point I'd be looking at opponents' convention card. If they would open 1♦ with a 4-card minor and a 4-card major there is a good chance that I can run the suit in NT. If they open the major first then 1♦ is very likely to be 5 cards or longer and my hand is worth two tricks less. Lacking such information, I'm going to risk 1NT, and I'll feel reasonably happy if partner passes, raises or bids 2♣.

ASH: 1NT. If opener has only 4 diamonds, then 3NT may be coming home. But if she has 5 diamonds my hand is a lot worse (perhaps worthless!). I do not think I can Pass so this is a 'noise', just in case partner has a good hand.

Thinking ahead:

SHIELDS: 1NT. There is no point in going minus on a hand where we have more values than the opponents, so I must bid and I would like to play this hand in NT

or diamonds (even though LHO will either have 5 diamonds or extra values) and the only way partner will treat a later diamond bid as natural is if I start with 1NT here.

MARSHALL: 1NT. Maybe when I bid 2♦ next time, if there is a next time, partner will pass. Much as I do not want to bid, I want even less to Pass at this stage.

DRAGIC: 1NT. I prefer this over Pass as I might buy the hand, partner might bid 2♣, and finally they will find it difficult to explore a spade fit.

And good advice on handling misfits like this from Douglas and Gints:

PIPER: 1NT. Always underbid with misfits. Over 2♥ from partner 3♦ is natural.

FREIMANIS: 1NT. I do not believe this hand is worth overbidding since there is no guarantee of a single diamond with partner and ability to cash 6 diamond tricks in, say, a 3NT contract. Partner should be able to find another bid if he has a good hand in which case I will re-evaluate my hand and options.

There was one further suggestion:

DIAMOND: 2♣. Waiting.

I think a good case has been made for taking action, and the most sensible action is 1NT though Derek's waiting bid of 2♣ has merit.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
1NT	14	10
Pass	7	5
2♣	1	4

Problem 4 **Teams** **All Vul**

♠AJ7543	S	W	N	E
♥QJ	-	-	1♥	P
♦K832	1♠	P	2♣	P
♣2	?			

There is huge variation amongst the panel in the evaluation of this hand, ranging from weak to invitational to game forcing. Let's start with those who think this hand is worthless:

McGOWAN: 2♥. Keep it low on misfits. If partner is 3=5=1=4 she will show her spade support now. If not, maybe hearts is as good a spot as any.

SHORT: 2♥. I'm maximum, but we will be high enough if partner is minimum. It also leaves room for partner to bid 2♠ if 3514 and a little extra. Best on balance, I think.

PATERSON: 2♥. Looks like a misfit, so I have a close choice of underbids between 2♥ and 2♠. I choose to support partner as that makes it more likely he will proceed on a marginal hand.

It's good advice to keep low on misfits, but do we know yet that this is a misfit? As Brian and Liz point out, partner can bid 2♠ now on a 3-5-1-4, but only with extra values. A basic 11-count ♠Kxx ♥ATxxx ♦x ♣Axxx makes game worth bidding, especially vulnerable, and partner will not move forward with that. Essentially you could bid 2♥ without 2 of your spades and 2 of your honour cards, e.g. ♠AJxx ♥Jx ♦xxxx ♣xxx. This is surely too wide a range to accommodate in one bid.

The largest single vote went to the second weakest option:

DIAMOND: 2♣. Mild underbid but no established fit. Will come to life if partner makes a move.

SIME: 2♠. Probable misfit. We need to locate a plus score. Even 2♠ may be a struggle when partner tables his customary 1-5-2-5 eleven count.

PIPER: 2♣. Choice between 2NT, 2♥ and 2♠. My selection should show 8-10. 4♣ on a 6-2 is the most likely game.

SANDERS: 2♠. Partner won't be strong unbalanced with a singleton spade – would have rebid 1NT.

MCGINLEY: 2♠. Showing better than an initial weak jump shift, as misfit so far.

They are all clearly holding back, underbidding in case we have a misfit. Seeing it as the most descriptive bid, however, is

FREIMANIS: 2♠. Expecting this for most to show about 8-11 HCP and 6 Spades which is what I have.

Alex weighs up the alternatives:

ADAMSON: 2♠. There are important questions here about partnership agreement. 2♦ is fourth suit forcing, but if it is Game Forcing then my hand is not good enough. I also don't know what strength partner will expect for 2♠. I like to play it as up to invitational (with 3♠ being Game Forcing), so that's what I'm going to bid. If partner passes on a 2524 12 count, I'm fine with that.

Some do not regard 3♠ as FG and indeed see it as the value bid here:

PETERKIN: 3♠. Invitational. The spades are poor so I can be persuaded by 2♠. 2NT seems wrong – only one diamond stop and clubs potentially wide open.

CLOW: 3♠. There could be a wide range of answers for this problem. (*An accurate prediction!*) If we are making game then 3NT or 4♠ may be best and 3NT will be better played by partner than by me.

ASH: 3♠. This is non-forcing because I have not used 'fourth suit forcing' first. I would like a more robust spade holding, but otherwise it describes the hand well.

I certainly play 3♠ as invitational with an easy FG 2♦ bid available. With ♠Q and ♥Jx I think this would be an excellent descriptive bid. Also NF but invitational:

BENNETT: 3♥. Can't see beyond 3H, not ideal but best of a bad bunch.

This has merits as you do have a very good doubleton, but have you really got the balance of the hand across to partner? Also on his own with a different invitational option:

PEDEN: 2NT. Shows length, strength and distribution.

Not really with no mention of your 6-card major and your reasonable support for partner's major?

Now those who are going to game whatever lies opposite. On his own in deciding which game:

MARSHALL: 4♠. My heart holding is potentially very good, and we might well be missing a slam. The only sensible alternative would be to try 2♦, but really I expect to discard my diamond losers on partner's hearts so why publicise my hand? It might be that only the opponents are listening.

Others, while deciding the level, want to bring partner into the discussion on the denomination. Some see it as a stretch:

DRAGIC: 2♦. Would like to have a little bit more but the 6th spade and good hearts compensate.

SHIELDS: 2♦. I have values here which justify a game invite, but it could be best to play this hand in any of hearts, spades or No-Trump. This game forcing fourth suit is an overbid, but it maximises our chance of getting to the right strain, so I am willing accept the downside if partner is minimum too.

WHYTE: 2♦. Slightly aggressive, but the best way to reach a potential game such as 4♠, 3♥ or 3NT. The difficulty may be in curbing my partner's loftier ambitions now that I have forced to game.

VALENTINE: 2♦: I force to game to find our best strain. The upside to finding a

6-2 fit is too great and, the downside of getting to a pushy game is one that I am prepared to live with.

While others are more gung-ho:

McKAY: 2♦. I'm bidding game of some sort.

Some very good arguments for both the invitational options and the 4th suit game force which I have reflected in the marking.

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
2♠	7	10
2♦	6	9
3♠	3	9
3♥	1	8
2♥	3	3
2NT	1	3
4♠	1	2

Problem 5 Teams NS Vul

♠T5 ♥AK ♦KT87 ♣AJ875	S	W	N	E
	-	P	1♦	P
	2♦*	P	2NT	P
	3♣	P	3♠	P
	?			

*2♦ = Inverted

While 2♦ is forcing only to 3♦, once either party shows non-minimum, and here both have, we are in a FG auction. As on board 4 we have a split panel. The issue here is whether to stop in game or look for greater things. Let's hear first from the minority who do not wish to explore the potential of this hand at this stage. Most of this group do express reservations that the hand might be worth more:

PIPER: 3NT: Very tempting to do more. Best problem so far. I suspect I've done wrong. I want partner to bid on with ♠Axx ♥xxx ♦AQxxx ♣Kx and not with ♠QJx ♥xxx ♦AJxxx,♣KQ.

Both these hands look like a weak NT opener, so surely he is stronger? Brian agrees but still looks no further:

Short: 3NT. Partner probably has a strong NT and no heart stop. If he is stronger, he will remove to 4♦, forcing, of course.

McKAY: 3NT, How strong is 2NT in a world of Acoll Weak NT and inverted raises? 3NT might be an underbid.

MARSHALL: 3NT. We must be somewhere near a slam, so a cue here may be appropriate.

But one thinks he has done too much already:

WHYTE: 3NT, This is my last chance to calm my partner down. In retrospect, I regret the 3♣ bid; the suit is too weak, and so is the hand.

The majority of the panel want to make a try at this stage but have 5 different ideas how to do this. These first 2 answers reveal an interesting problem:

SANDERS 4NT: Partner does not know about my strength so I take control to see if we have enough for a grand slam.

Adamson 4NT: Playing Weak NT, partner has shown a strong NT or better with 2NT, and spade values (probably worried about hearts) with 3♣. We are close to the slam zone, and I'd be happy to play in diamonds or NT. The quantitative 4NT allows him to stop with a minimum or bid slam in either denomination.

For Derek, 4NT is clearly RKC, for Alex it is quantitative. This is where you need good partnership agreement. My rule is that when a non-jump to 3NT would be to play, then 4NT is quantitative, so on balance I favour Alex's view here. Also, Derek is worried about partner knowing the strength of our hand. Are there

other ways to get this across? There is a simple waiting bid:

ASH: 4♦. Partner has shown extras by bidding 2NT (a minimum hand would either rebid 3♦ or would open 1NT) so I think 5♦ is safe and we may be in slam territory if partner has (say) ♠KQx ♥xxx ♦AQJxx ♣Kx.

PETERKIN: 4♦. Forcing. Presumably 2NT is a strong NT type and 3♠ denies decent heart values. We should be somewhere close to or in the slam zone.

VALENTINE: 4♦. I think this the least ambiguous bid available to me. 4♣ is an alternative. It seems clear that we rate to belong in slam. 4♦ allows partner to cue 4♠ and then I will feel comfortable taking control by bidding RKC.

After his 2NT bid, 3♠ cannot be a suit, so shows good cards there. We know he can't have a 4♥ cue so he may think there is a heart problem and that it is not worthwhile, even dangerous to stress his spade values again. I feel 4♦ gives partner problems rather than help. Ronan suggested 4♣, and 2 panellists go for that:

MCGINLEY: 4♣. Partner has gone past 3♥ so 4♣ is a cue in clubs and hearts.

PATERSON: 4♣. 2NT is 15+ flattish and forcing. 3♣ is a suit and 3♠ probably shows worry about hearts in NT. The hand is far too good for 3NT, and a 4♣ cue allows partner to wait with 4♦, over which I will cue 4♥. Note the general point that after a fit is found 3-level bids are generally suits or values NOT cue-bids.

This is better as there is a clear path ahead, the only worry bring that he might expect better clubs. The largest group felt we had done enough already with our clubs and stressed the heart controls:

SHIELDS 4♥. It would be useful to have discussed continuations over 2♦, but since our 1NT opener is weak, partner must have 15+ for the 2NT choice and 2NT must be game forcing. This means I know that we are close to slam (although partner doesn't yet). Partner will be worried about hearts, so showing my heart control is the only way to get partner to think slam.

DRAGIC: 4♥. It would be good to know methods first. Assuming 2NT is 15-17 I have an easy 4H cue-bid.

FREIMANIS: 4♥. Should show slam interest with a heart control which partner cannot have.

MCGOWAN: 4♥. I think we are heading towards 6♦ but would rather partner take charge of the control-asking.

BENNETT: 4♥. Slam still possible so bid 4♥. If unsuitable we play 5♦ but probably rest in 6♦ or even 7♦.

SIME: 4♥. Onwards and upwards opposite partner's 15/19 balanced.

And finally Derek makes a critical point:

DIAMOND: 4♥. Cue with Diamonds agreed. Partner can find every card in my hand with RKC.

In my opinion the 4♣ and 4♥ bids are giving partner a clear way forward, while 4♦ leaves him uninformed. While 3NT is the second most popular choice the marking reflects the overall panel view that we should be moving forward.

Problem 5	Votes	Marks
4♥	8	10
4♣	2	9
4♦	3	6
3NT	6	5
4NT	3	5

Problem 6 Teams None Vul

♠QJT653	S	W	N	E
♥T832	-	2♥*	3♦	P
♦Q7	?			
♣8				

*2♥ = weak

After 2 problems with many options, this one is a straightforward choice between Pass and showing your decent 6-card major. The majority are against further action. Some regard it as clear-cut:

ADAMSON: Pass. To my mind, bidding is a huge gamble. Partner will take me for a far better hand and if 4♠ is the right contract I will probably be in 5♠ or higher. I am not afraid of missing a 6-4 fit: with that shape and a good hand partner would start with double.

SANDERS: (similarly MCGOWAN) Pass. We are non-vulnerable, heart losers all over the place, no need to gamble on partner having three spades.

FREIMANIS: Pass. Partner could have some helpful spade length, but it is not guaranteed. A 3♠ bid is quite dangerous – partner will expect more than this.

ASH: Pass. We may have a spade fit but mostly I will be grateful if my ♦Q and possible club ruff help partner make 3♦. With (say) ♠AKx ♥x, ♦AKJxx ♣xxxx the modern style is to double a weak 2♥.

MCGINLEY: Pass. Who's got the clubs? Partner to some extent, so with such modest values it would be over-aggressive to expect him to have ♠Hxx.

Others see it as a close call:

SHORT: Pass, tempting to bid 3♠ but I don't really have enough. I'll pay off to ♠AKx ♥x ♦AKJxxx ♣xxx – I would be more worried if vulnerable

SIME: Pass. Close to bidding 3♠, but the odds are that partner does not have 3 spades. East likely has honours over

partner and 3 or 4 spades. Turning a plus into a minus seems more likely than a missed non-vulnerable game.

PATERSON: (similarly SHIELDS) Pass. If the ♦Q were the ♦A, I would have a 3♠ bid. Also note that if partner had 3 spades and good values he could double then bid diamonds, so the dream hand of spade support and extra strength is very unlikely.

PETERKIN: Pass. 3♠ overstates the hand. Partner hasn't doubled, intending to bid diamonds so is not super strong.

Playing teams there is less need to bid tight non-vulnerable games than tight vulnerable ones. Can those who decided to bid justify their action?

CLOW: 3♠. Take a risk; hope that partner has a heart shortage with 3 spades.

DRAGIC: 3♠. Fit is likely given my length in hearts.

DIAMOND: 3♠. Might make 4♠ opposite ♠Kxx. Can pass 4♦.

WHYTE: 3♠. One must pay the price of opponents' pre-empts. The risk of missing a cold 4♠ is too great.

No overwhelming arguments there, just a likelihood of a moderate spade holding in partner's hand.

PIPER: 3♠. I'd like to be at the table. Did East pass quickly? It won't be the last time I go for 1100.

At the table you might have seen East carefully warming up her double card. 3♦ is down but a matter of a few 50s. Anything else gets that red card applied!

Problem 6	Votes	Marks
Pass	16	10
3S	6	4

Problem 7 Pairs None Vul

♠AKQ53	S	W	N	E
♥AJ3		*2♦	P	P
♦6	?			
♣K753				

*2♦ = weak

My apologies for this (non-)problem. I thought the difference in quality between the majors might tempt some to bid spades first, but only one panellist did, without comment!

McGOWAN: Dble. Planning to convert 2/3♥ to spades, showing, I think, 5=3. With fewer than 3 hearts I would not start with double.

ASH: Dble. This hand is good enough to double and then bid spades – showing about 17+ with a good spade suit.

SIME: Dble. More flexible than 2♠ which risks missing game or locking us into a wrong denomination. Happy to defend 2♦ doubled if partner so chooses.

WHYTE: Dble: We may lose spades as trumps, but it could give us a profitable penalty when no game makes for us.

SANDERS: Dble. Prefer this to 2♠ – it keeps more options available.

Problem 7	Votes	Marks
Dble	21	10
3♠	1	2

Problem 8 Teams NS Vul

♠J972	S	W	N	E
♥J52	-	-	-	1NT
♦J3	P	2♣*	P	2♦
♣KT84	P	3♥*	P	3♠
	P	4♣*	P	4NT
	P	5♣*	P	5♦
	P	5♠	P	6♠

1NT= 11-13; *2♣ = Stayman
 *3♥= 5♠+3♥; *4♣ = shortage
 *5♣ = 0/3 keycards; 5♦ = Q ask
 *5♠ = no ♠Q

What is your lead?

A tough one with no lead immediately obvious. Every suit has been picked by at least 2 panel members, and indeed there are seven different choices of card to lead. There is club shortage on your left and presumably either the Ace or no wasted values on your right, so why have 9 panellists found a Club lead? For some, as with so many leads, it's by a process of elimination:

CLOW: ♠4. I'm not leading a trump and leading from either red Jack could pick up the suit, so that leaves clubs.

DRAGIC: ♠4. A red suit lead might scoop up a whole suit for declarer while a club lead may only give one trick away. No need to analyse spade lead.

Alex and Stephen make a good point:

ADAMSON: ♠4. Unusually for these sequences, the safest suit to lead should be a club. West has shortage and East's bidding only makes sense if he does not have wasted values. If this runs round to declarer's ♠AQ then I'll take note and look forward to defending more contracts against them.

PETERKIN: ♠4. Very strange auction with the limited hand taking control, bidding Blackwood and then seeming to make a grand slam try. We likely have a trump trick, and a red suit lead could clearly give that suit away. A club may give a trick but is it an important one? Maybe. if dummy can pitch a diamond and partner has a slow diamond trick (QTxx) but surely that is unlikely.

Liz and Patrick look seriously at another option before settling on the Club:

McGOWAN: ♠4. Seems our only chance of beating this is to make 2 trump tricks, assuming partner has the ♠Q. Should be easy if declarer has the ♠T, but a trump lead might persuade him to run

the ♠T at trick 2. An innocent looking club removes an entry to his hand.

SHIELDS: ♣8. As the NT opener took charge over 4♣, they must have a very suitable hand. We know of a bad spade break, but it might be that it shows up and we don't have any spade trick. If the bidding is to be believed partner's singleton spade is the Queen. If I lead a spade, would declarer ever believe I have this holding? Won't they place partner with ♠QJ? That does seem the best chance of our getting 2 spades, and we have limited chances elsewhere - but does it depend on declarer missing an easy safety play? The temptation to hoodwink declarer is high, and I think it needs an error from declarer, so I will start with a club.

BENNETT: ♣8. The late David Frew would have had no problem as he would NEVER lead away from jacks. I'll go along with him and lead a slightly deceptive ♣8.

I'm not sure what the point is in the deceptive ♣8 rather than letting partner know you have the suit covered. If you aren't leading a small one surely the best club is the King:

SIME: ♣K. How bizarre! A weak NT assumes captaincy then makes a try for grand! I will credit him with ♣Axx and aim to tap the dummy. I lead the King in case dummy's singleton is the Queen.

Some of those who lead a club are dismissive of the trump lead but Liz and Patrick gave it serious thought. 7 panellists went further:

WHYTE: ♠2. The bidding sequence indicates that East-West have the 5 key cards and would have considered a grand slam if the trump Queen had been discovered. Your partner has a singleton ♠Q. A 'safe' lead of the ♠2 could lull the declarer into assuming the

♠QJ combination is bare or at least in the same hand. If there were a good alternative I would choose it, but the side suits all present considerable risks of making the declarer's task more manageable.

SHORT: ♠2. Only lead unlikely to cost a trick. It would seem that partner has the stiff ♠Q. Declarer will probably drop that anyway.

PATERSON: ♠2. Partner seems to have stiff ♠Q, so a trump is safe. Opponents have all the Aces, so I hope for a trump trick and a slow red-suit trick.

FREIMANIS ♠2: I assume that partner has got a stiff ♠Q, and I do not want to lead away from any of my side-suit holdings.

The logic is right, but it might just assist declarer to avoid 2 trump losers. Only 6 panellists went for a red suit lead. Is there any justification for either?

MARSHALL: ♦3. I expect to make a spade trick, but where is the second trick coming from? A club lead isn't going to bring that second trick in.

Is this really a hand for an aggressive lead? Surely declarer has work to do in whichever red suit he might hope to set up tricks, so why help him?

ASH ♦J: They were looking at a grand slam, so they are not missing an Ace. Dummy is likely 5431 so a neutral lead is called for. Your best bet is to hope for 2 trump tricks if declarer has ♠T.

VALENTINE ♦J: I know the hand, but I think this would be my choice at the table. Partner had the opportunity to double the other two suits, so with not much more to go on, this is my choice.

The ♦J seems the better choice in that suit, but this lead does not give the contract only because partner has ♦9.

The lead which actually did kill the defence was found by 2 panellists ... and yours truly at the table:

MCGINLEY: ♥2. How can a weak NT be making a grand slam try here???

PIPER: ♥2. Likely trump trick not sure how forcing dummy to ruff clubs would work so picking safest.

Definitely better arguments for both black suit leads. It still pains me that we lost a SOL match on this horrible slam making!

Problem 8	Votes	Marks
♣4	6	10
♣K	1	9
♣8	2	8
♠2	7	8
♦J	3	3
♦3	1	2
♥2	2	2

A very hard set indeed, so Iain Sime's winning score of 79 is all the more commendable. Good performances also for Roy Bennett and Patrick Shields on 74, and Stephen Peterkin, Miro Dragic and Gints Freimanis on 73

Scottish Bridge Players Fantasy Football League

The fourth season is now well underway with a record 22 teams.

At the halfway stage the leaders were:

1. Inter Nolan (Tony Nolan) 1132
2. Berisha's Boys (Alexander Duncan) 1093
3. Acollights (Brydon McLafferty) 1079
4. Bruntfield Athletic (Fiona McQuaker) 1066
5. Mitzi Del Bra XI (Alex Wilkinson) 1049
6. Simeone (Iain Sime) 1047
7. Artsnal (William Nelson) 1031
8. Stockbridge Saints (David Hamilton) 1012

All are comfortably within the top 2 million out of 10.5 million worldwide players. Bridge players are good at this!

Previous winners Marina Evans and Jim Mason are conspicuously absent from the front runners. There is, however, half of the season to run. It is possible to catch up with a few good weeks.

The winner will collect £100 with prizes also to 2nd, 3rd, best other second half and the winner of a KO Cup competition run in the last five weeks of the season.

So, the teams who are off the pace will still have plenty to play for.

If you would like to join next season, from mid-August 2024, please email iain.sime63@gmail.com

It is FREE to play and be included in the standings. We ask for £10 to be eligible for the prizes.

If you are interested in how it works, visit <https://fantasy.premierleague.com/help>

Panel Answers – January 2024

Problem	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Top Scoring Choice	4♠	Pass	1NT	2♠	4♥	Pass	Dbl	♣4	80
Iain Sime	4♠	Pass	1NT	2♠	4♥	Pass	Dbl	♣K	79
Roy Bennett	4♠	3♥	1NT	3♥	4♥	Pass	Dbl	♣8	74
Patrick Shields	4♠	2♠	1NT	2♦	4♥	Pass	Dbl	♣8	74
Miro Dragic	4♠	Pass	1NT	2♦	4♥	3♠	Dbl	♣4	73
Gints Freimanis	4♠	2NT	1NT	2♠	4♥	Pass	Dbl	♠2	73
Stephen Peterkin	4♠	3♥	1NT	3♠	4♦	Pass	Dbl	♣4	73
Jack Paterson	4♠	Pass	1NT	2♥	4♣	Pass	Dbl	♠2	70
Alex Adamson	4♥	Pass	1NT	2♠	4NT	Pass	Dbl	♣4	69
Mike Ash	4♠	Pass	1NT	3♠	4♦	Pass	Dbl	♦J	68
Liz McGowan	4♠	3♣	1NT	2♥	4♥	Pass	Dbl	♣4	67
Tim McKay	4♠	Pass	Pass	2♦	3NT	Pass	Dbl	♠2	67
Robert Clow	4♠	3♥	1NT	3♠	3NT	3♠	Dbl	♣4	66
Derek Sanders	4♠	2NT	Pass	2♠	4NT	Pass	Dbl	♠2	63
Derek Diamond	4♠	3♦	2♣	2♠	4♥	3♠	Dbl	♠2	61
Douglas Piper	4♠	Pass	1NT	2♠	3NT	3♠	Dbl	♥2	61
Bill Ross	4♠	Pass	Pass	2♦	4♥	3♠	Dbl	♦J	61
Brian Short	4♠	Pass	Pass	2♥	3NT	Pass	Dbl	♠2	61
Bill Whyte	4♠	Pass	Pass	2♦	3NT	3♠	Dbl	♠2	61
Mike McGinley	4♠	3♣	Pass	2♠	4♣	Pass	Dbl	♦J	60
Ronan Valentine	4♥	3♥	1NT	2♦	4♦	Pass	Dbl	♥2	60
Finlay Marshall	4♠	Pass	1NT	4♠	3NT	Pass	Dbl	♦3	59
Derrick Peden	4♠	Pass	Pass	2NT	4NT	Pass	3♠	♣4	55

Competitors Top Scores

My sincere apologies to those who did not receive this month's set of problems.

My fault for not securing proper lines of communication.

I think we have fixed the problem, but if you do not receive a personal Email you can always find the Problems in the Ezine: "[Scottish Bridge News](#)" (SBN) published by [Scottish Bridge Union](#) (SBU)

The SBN appears every 2 months from January onwards. (Afraid this one appears in February, my fault again!)

Good scores:

Danny Hamilton	(Buchanan)	58
Bob Brown	(GBC)	57
Prajwal Mayur	(Buchanan)	57

SBNews Bidding Panel Problems

March 2024

You are always South, playing with an excellent first-time partner. You have agreed to play Strong no-trump, 5-card majors this time.

Please send your answers to the Scorer:

t.vandelisle@gmail.com

quoting your SBU Membership number.

Closing date: 26 March 2024

Problem 1 Teams Both Vul

♠K93	S	W	N	E
♥AKJT	-	1♠	P	2♠
♦4	?			
♣A8532				

Problem 2 Teams None Vul

♠AQ7	S	W	N	E
♥3	-	-	1♦*	1NT
♦7432	?			
♣A9642				

*1♦ is normally UNBAL, 5-cards unless
4=4=4=1

Problem 3 Teams None Vul

♠K	S	W	N	E
♥AQ	1♣	P	1♠	P
♦75	?			
♣AKQ97632				

Problem 4 Teams EW Vul

♠K87	S	W	N	E
♥43	-	-	1♦	1♥
♦3				
♣KJT9865				

Problem 5 Teams Both Vul

♠AJ42	S	W	N	E
♥QT96	-	1♠	Dbl	1NT
♦J63	?			
♣Q2				

Problem 6 Teams None Vul

♠QJ98	S	W	N	E
♥5	-	-	1♠	4♥
♦AKT5	?			
♣KQ72				

Problem 7 Match Points None Vul

♠KQ943	-	P	1♥	2NT*
♥T53	?-			
♦K8				
♣KT4				

*2NT = 5-5+ minors

Problem 8 Teams NS Vul

♠T4	S	W	N	E
♥KJT9632	2♥	Pass	4♥	4♠
♦J7	P	P	X	End
♣QT6				

What is your lead?