

Improvers Bidding Challenge (23)

April 2021

My thanks to all the panellists who support this feature – without their contributions it would not be possible. The regulars are joined by a few newcomers this time

Problem 1 Teams None Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠Q				P
♥AK53	?			
♦J742				
♣QT76				

Most of the panel were in agreement here.

EDMOND: Pass – don't like to open a 4=4=4=1 with only 12 HCP - perhaps if the singleton was an Ace I might try 1NT.

CAMPBELL: Pass. A 4=4=4=1 hand doesn't play well, unless a fit is found. If you open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠ 2♣ doesn't really describe the hand. You may well be able to bid at a later stage, but I prefer to pass initially.

HAMILTON: Pass. If partner has Spades, I've no rebid. If the opponents have Spades, I can double for takeout.

To sum up: downgrading a 4=4=4=1 hand is a sound policy, especially when the singleton is an honour. You may get the chance to make a very descriptive take-out double later and you will avoid getting into trouble when the hand is a misfit.

Still, many of the Bronze players and two panellists could not resist bidding. There is much debate over what to open with 4=4=4=1 distribution. The most popular choice was:

GALLACHER: 1♥. Bid the suit below the singleton, and if partner bids 1♠ we have an easy rebid of 2♣. Partner might play us for 5-4 distribution.

Indeed, partner probably will assume that you have 5 hearts if you rebid two of a minor.

MCLEOD: 1♦. I'm torn between this and passing, all because of the rebid issue. 1♣ is the worst possible bid, because when partner replies 1♠ (likely), you are forced to lie about both your shape and points! Similarly, when you open 1♥ and get a 1♠ response, you can't avoid pretending you have a 5+ card heart suit, or a balanced 15-17 – neither of which you want to lie about. I think this is *just* too good to Pass, so I'll open 1♦ and prepare to rebid 2♣ if I must. Certainly, at Bronze level, most players will open here, so choosing the best of the opening bids will put you ahead of the field.

Best advice: consider what you will rebid when partner responds in your shortage; if nothing appeals, pass the noo'!

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
Pass	7	10
1♦	1	6
1♥	1	5
1♣	0	2

Partner held K8652 9864 Q63 3. Opening 1♥ gets you too high, 1m gets a bad lead to let 3N home. If you pass opponents probably play in 1NT, but at least you have kept out of trouble.

Problem 2 Teams EW Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠AK9875	-	P	1♥	P
♥542	1♠	P	2♣	P
♦5	?			
♣A85				

The entire panel chooses to raise hearts (they assume that partner is not 1=4=4=4!) Most thought the hand worth a raise to game.

FRAME: 4♥: We have at least an 8-card heart fit and, despite only having 11 HCP, have a 7-loser hand.

Indeed, the point count is not a good yardstick once you have found a major suit fit: controls and distribution are more important. Some panellists thought the hand too strong for a simple raise to game.

MALE: (Similarly **TUDOR** and **MCLEOD**) 2♦. A nice hand, three-card fit for partner's hearts, Ace of partner's second suit, singleton diamond, and a good 6-card spade suit. 4♥ looks a safe bet, but could partner have a 15/16 count? I think I need a little more information, so will use Fourth Suit Forcing.

Others were less sanguine:

GALLACHER: 3♥. Partner's bidding shows an unbalanced hand otherwise she would bid no-trump at some level. I have 3 cards in both partner's suits and ruffing values with the singleton diamond. I can't quite decide if we have enough for game so I invite with a delayed jump raise. .

Several Improvers preferred to rebid their nice spade suit rather than raise partner on xxx. But 2♣ is a sign off, and 3♠ may be passed if partner has a singleton. Useful advice is "Whenever raising partner is an option, choose that."

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
4♥	5	10
2♦	3	9
3♥	1	7
3♠	0	5
2♥	0	4
4♠	0	3
2♣	0	2
Pass	0	1

Partner held 4 AKJ86 KQ4 T973. 4♥ was makeable in spite of a 4-1 break: 4♠ was hopeless with 2 spade losers.

Problem 3 Teams EW Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠K9	-	-	P	1♠
♥AT	DbI	P	2♥	2♠
♦KJ982	?			
♣AKQ2				

The panel mostly think we are worth another go. The majority rebid 2NT, more or less enthusiastically.

SANDERS: 2NT. 19-21 with a spade guard. Easy now for partner to take appropriate action.

MALE: 2NT. This is tough. West has a pretty good hand to be able to repeat their spades, partner hasn't much, I don't like 2NT, but I don't like double again, partner might pass and we have doubled them into game. Passing seems wimpy, so 2NT it is.

Others thought their spade stopper was inadequate:

HAMILTON: (supported by **MCLEOD**) **DBL**, though I'll have more problems on the next round. If partner has the $\diamond A$ I want to be in 3NT, if he doesn't 2NT might be too high. I'm going to guess he doesn't have it. and not trust my single Spade stop.

FRAME: (Similarly **TUDOR**) **3 \diamond** . Shows a very strong, 2-suited hand with five diamonds but without heart support. I shall pass if partner rebids **3 \heartsuit** but am hopeful of him bidding game (3NT or 4 \heartsuit) if he is suitable.

GALLACHER: **PASS**. My double forces partner to bid and she has by-passed clubs and diamonds and replied with a minimum **2 \heartsuit** . West has, presumably, 6 spades and I would guess the $\diamond A$ for his bid. With 20 points and West's 13 say, it does not leave much for partner. Also if I double and he makes his contract it gives him a vulnerable game. This problem has given me heartburn and at the table I would pass.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
2NT	4	10
Dbl	2	8
3 \diamond	2	8
Pass	1	7
3 \heartsuit	0	5
3 \clubsuit	0	4
3 \spadesuit	0	3
4 \diamond	0	2
3NT	0	2
4 \clubsuit	0	1
4 \heartsuit	0	1
4NT	0	1

Partner held T82 987432 6 753, so Mike's was the winning action. If you make another call it would be best to respect partner's sign off in 3 \heartsuit .

Problem 4 Teams EW Vul

	N	E	S	W
$\clubsuit 6$				P
$\heartsuit KT93$	P	1 \diamond	Dbl	P
$\diamond 73$?			
$\spadesuit QJ9752$				

When partner doubles 1 \diamond he should either have a very strong hand or support for both Majors, but he does not guarantee clubs as well. So four panellists choose to bid their Major before the longer clubs.

CAMPBELL: 1 \heartsuit . Prefer not to miss a 4-card Major fit and unless forced, you really only have one bid. If partner bids 1 \clubsuit , you can then bid 2 \clubsuit .

EDMOND: 1 \heartsuit - I always bid a major if I can and here I can bid 2 \clubsuit later if forced to

It would be normal to bid 1H with 4 hearts and 5 clubs, but some are swayed by the sixth club and the poor heart quality.

MCLEOD: 2 \clubsuit . The sort of hand that makes me wish I hadn't signed up for this! Right, if you have an agreement with partner that a 2-level response to their X shows 10+ points, I think you have to close your eyes, bid 1 \heartsuit , and hope for the best. But if partner knows that any non-jump response from you could be weak because you are forced to bid, clubs is your likeliest fit, so you may as well bid those. Even when

you have a 4=4 heart fit, you're odds on to have a 6=3+ club fit (if you can trust partner's double, which you should).

Our outlier is characteristically optimistic:

SANDERS: 3 \clubsuit . Despite only 6 points this hand has great shape and it looks like the opponents have an 8-card spade fit. So we can give ourselves two bites at the cherry, pre-empt the auction and should partner take further action with a 3 \diamond cue bid have a 3 \heartsuit rebid to fall back on

Jim also considers 3 \clubsuit but finds it a bit rich.

TUDOR: 2 \clubsuit I hope I have the opportunity to show my heart suit on the next round. If I jump to 3 \clubsuit initially I think partner will expect more in the way of high cards.

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
1 \heartsuit	4	
2 \clubsuit	3	
3 \clubsuit	1	
4 \clubsuit	0	
2 \heartsuit	0	
3 \heartsuit	0	
5 \clubsuit	0	

Partner held AKT542 A8 J5 AK3. He will rebid 2 \clubsuit over either minimum response, but might be tempted to try 3NT over 3 \clubsuit . Which will be fine unless they lead diamonds.

April Top Scores

Congratulations to the top scorers, particularly Bill, Ken, Gill and Liz on coming so close to maximum:

3Star Master		
Ken Blake	Hamilton	32
2Star Master		
Bill Crighton	Banchory	39
Will Iles	Stewartry	38
Iain Bannatyne	Largs	37
Charles Fogelman	Maccabi	30
1Star Master		
Alasdair Adam	Direct	33
Master		
Robin MacPherson	New Melville	37
Fiona McElhinney	Dunfermline	36
Alex Sutherland	New Melville	36
Sue Smith	Dunfermline	35
Cornelius Meehan	Buchanan	34
District Master		
Ken Brown	Pentland	39
Gill Terry	Kyle of Lochalsh	39
Cornelius Meehan	Buchanan	34
Alistair Smillie	Moray	34
Pamela Warner	New Melville	33
Yvonne Elrick	New Melville	31
Local Master		
Paul Kerr	Troon	35
Alan Paterson	Johnstone	34
Douglas Wodburn	Doon	32
Club Master		
Liz Forbes	Oban	39
May Armour	Kyle	37
Liz MacPherson	Kirkcudbright	33
Margaret Mainland	Orkney	32
Brian Allan	Dundee	31
Novice		
Stephen Carr	Ness	31