

Improvers Bidding Challenge (21)

October 2020

We are still looking for a volunteer to replace Russell as Convener of this feature – surely you know someone whose arm could be twisted? Meantime we have answers from a panel of 8 teachers who have all promised to look out for suitable problems – and do feel free to submit a problem or two of your own. I must also apologise for not taking a note of the other hands, so I cannot tell you what would work at the table this time.

Problem 1 Team All Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠KQ65	-	-	1♥	2♣
♥9742	?			
♦K94				
♣J5				

The panel split into three groups. The most popular answer was the single raise:

HAMILTON: (Similarly **TUDOR**) 2♥. A maximum 2♥, but with weak trumps and wasted ♣J not quite worth any more. The hand is too weak for a 3♣ cuebid, too flat for a pre-emptive 3♥.

Some gave the impression that they might bid again given the opportunity

MALE: (Similarly **EDMOND**) 2♥. 4 card support is nice, even 4 small, but the ♣J is probably worthless, so while I am maximum for my call, will await developments.

Others thought it better to jump to 3H.

GALLACHER: (Similarly **SANDERS, FRAME**) 3♥. With 4 hearts, 9 high card points and a doubleton club, plus honours in the unbid suits, invite game.

Point count is not the best method of hand evaluation once you have found a fit. The Losing Trick Count gives a better picture of your trick-taking potential. The LTC persuades Maurice that this hand is worth an Unassuming Cue Bid.

PIGOTT: 3♣. Shows a "real" raise to 3♥ or better. Absolutely minimum for the bid with poor trumps and no great shape but can't risk missing a vulnerable game at teams on this 8-loser hand. 3♥ after the overcall would be pre-emptive, and 2♥ would also be discouraging. We can still settle in 3♥ if partner is minimum.

I think this would be the best choice if we were playing 5-card Majors and were assured of a 9-card fit.

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
2♥	4	10
3♥	3	8
3♣	1	7

Problem 2 Pairs All Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠QJ84	1♣	1♥	2♦	P
♥AK43	?			
♦5				
♣K852				

This one was 'the stinker of the set'. When you opened 1♣ you hoped for a response in a Major that you could raise to 2M. If partner responded 1♦ you could simply rebid 1♥. But

opponents have bid your best suit and partner has made a forcing bid in your singleton. Oh dear.

One panellist decided to Pass. I have tried to shorten his lengthy excuses.

PIGOTT: PASS. ...I have a minimum opener with two tricks in opponent's suit and just 6 HCPs beyond, with a singleton in partner's suit. Couldn't be much worse! With spades as well as diamonds, surely partner would make a take-out double. And would partner bid the other minor with good support for me? It seems very likely he has a 6-card diamond suit. East is likely to have a fair proportion of the missing strength, having overcalled (and not jump overcalled), missing the AK in his suit... Also, it's Pairs, so missing a vulnerable game won't be the disaster it would be at teams. Any suit I bid lies about both my shape and strength; 2NT lies about my strength - and they all commit us to a dubious game... my judgment is that, with the probable misfit, more than 25 HCPs, even if we have them, will be needed to make 3NT so passing gives us the best chance of a plus score. I should never pass a free new suit response by partner? Well, in bridge never means almost never, but I'll be ready to apologise!

He had better apologise very nicely! Passing a forcing bid is the auction equivalent of trumping partner's Ace in the play. To be avoided if you ever want to play with this partner again – unless of course it is the right decision on this deal.

The more disciplined panellists opted to lie about their distribution rather than their strength.

SANDERS: 2♣. Partner will expect 5 clubs. Despite the heart stop 2NT would show a stronger hand, typically 15-17 balanced.

MALE: 2♣. This is difficult, playing a strong NT I would have an easy NT rebid, I can't pass as most play a new suit as F1. Will partner think that is a reverse? I think that's my choice, in a selection of "least bad bids".

We should not assume that a bid made in a competitive auction has exactly the same meaning as when the auction is uninterrupted. 2♣ here is not a real reverse because you cannot rebid clubs at the 2-level. Is there an alternative?

EDMOND: 2NT. Oh dear I must bid after a forcing 2D. 2S will be taken as a reverse (and partner doesn't appear to have 4 spades). 2NT needs 15+ HCP so what to do with the dreaded treble 4-1? I choose 2NT as the worst of all evil possibilities and wish I had opened 1NT in the first place.

Some partnerships agree that 2NT in competition may be stretched if your normal rebid has been stolen. But I prefer 2♣ here. Partner may still have four spades in a game-going hand, and if he has limited values and a long diamond suit he can rebid 3♦ and I shall Pass. No-trump will play very badly when more than half my points are worth only two tricks.

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
2♣	5	10
2NT	2	8
Pass	1	-1

Problem 3 Teams All Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠K82	-	-	1♣	2♠*
♥QT72	?			
♦QJT86				
♣K				

* Weak jump overcall

This appeared to be a non-problem. Almost everybody doubled.

GALLACHER: DBL. You have 11 HCP including the ♣K. You are sitting over West who is most likely to have the ♠A. To bid 2NT you should normally have 2 stoppers in the opposition's suit. A double will show 4 hearts and not 4 clubs. I hope my partner reads that I also have diamonds.

Partners are rarely so perspicacious!

Russell was prepared to explain what he would do over partner's likely responses.

FRAME: DBL. 11HCP with values in the unbid suits - hoping partner will respond 3♠ when I can show my ♠K with 3NT. I'll pass next in response to 3♣, cue 3♠ over 3♦, and raise 2NT or 3♥ to game.

Derek is on his own in preferring to show his longer suit.

SANDERS: 3♦. Good intermediates and single ♣K OK since partner has bid the suit so happy to bid this hand naturally rather than make a negative double which would only show four hearts.

Reasonable to assume that partner will bid hearts if he holds them, but are we worth what is effectively a game force? Nobody mentioned 2NT, though it seems worthy of consideration as a limit bid.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
Dbl	7	10
3♦	1	8
2NT		7
3NT		3

HAMILTON: PASS. A tactical bid, as bidding 4♥ will surely just get them to 4♠ which seems likely to make. Second choice is bidding 4♣, so partner could re-evaluate and decide to bid 5♥ over the inevitable 4 Spades, though this does also suggest a much better hand.

If you pass now you are committed to passing over 4♠ – to pass, then save unilaterally in 5♥ over 4♠, is another bridge sin which partners find hard to forgive

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
4♥	4	10
Pass	4	9

Problem 4 Pairs EW Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠A	-	-	P	P
♥Q9762	1♥	Dbl	2NT*	3♠
♦JT3	?			
♣KJ93				

*4-card raise to 3♥

Some panellists worried about whether this was worth a game bid but bid game anyway.

TUDOR: 4♥. Leaving the opponents to play in 3♠ is unlikely to give you a good matchpoint score, so bid 4♥ with confidence in the hope that you won't get doubled!

Others foresaw that 4♥ might not end the auction.

FRAME:4♥. I will probably need a following wind to make this but, rightly or wrongly, will double if opponents go on to 4♠.

And half the panel decided not to push opponents into game.

October Top Scores

Congratulations to the following top scorers in the various categories, particularly Sheila and David on their excellent scores on an unusual set of questions:

3* Master		
Ken Blake	Hamilton	36
Kit Gow	Alloa	35
2* Master		
William Crighton	Banchory	37
1* Master		
Sheila Templeton	Kyle	38
Gordon Milne	Peebles	36
Alasdair Adam	Stirling&Union	35
Master		
David King	Berwick	38
Rob Hickling	C Castle	34
Robin MacPherson	New Melville	34
District Master		
Neil Bulleid	Buchanan	35
Susan Young	Dunoon	34
Local Master		
Alistair Smillie	Moray	37
Ken Latham	Carlton	35
Grace McVey	Doon	35
Alan Paterson	Johnstone	35
Keith Smith	New Melville	35
Club Master		
Janet Hill	Milnathort	37
May Armour	Prestwick	35
Linton Horsfall	Carlton	35
Thelma Thomson	Dunbar	35
Albert Young	Perth	34