

2022 Bronze Bidding Challenge: September

More problems from the European Youth Championships in July.

Problem 1 Teams:EW Vul, Dealer East

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠Q43	Pass	3♣	4♠	Pass
♥42	?			
♦AT93				
♣AT74				

What to expect from partner's jump to game over a pre-empt? There are 2 possibilities: a long suit and little else; or a big hand that expects to make.

Almost all the panel look for slam. The majority start with a cue-bid, hoping partner will show a heart control:

Male: 5♣. A super hand opposite a partner that can jump to 4♠.

Tudor: 5♣. If partner's jump to 4♠ is partially influenced by her holding a void in clubs then news of the ♣A might not improve her hand! She also knows that I have less than 12 points (after my initial pass) so she can hopefully re-assess her hand on that basis.

Tim and Mike G opt for 4NT, asking for Aces:

McKay: 4NT. Partner shouldn't be pre-empting over a pre-empt so well worth exploring slam.

It is not clear how Blackwood will help. What next if they are missing an Ace? Partner is unlikely to have a shortage in hearts but might have ♥KQ or the missing Ace might be in spades.

Derek takes the direct route:

Sanders: 6♣. Partner's jump overcall of a pre-empt shows a very strong hand so there is no danger of not having twelve tricks. There is a slight risk that the opponents can take the ♥AK, but they may well need to lead a heart so prefer this to the alternative 5♣ cue bid.

The late Tom Culbertson used to say that a slam flawed only by missing two top honours in a plain suit was at least 50%: it fails when the hand on lead has AK; makes when the leader prefers not to lead away from one honour; and makes when the leader has no honours and fails to guess well. Here you would expect to get a club lead most of the time. The real problem is: where are 12 tricks coming from?

Almost all the European Youths could not envision 12 tricks and passed. Mike agrees:

Baron: Pass. I would not assume partner had a big hand – double is available to show that. The A♣ is a good card but where are 12 tricks coming from? The pre-empt makes it hard but there is a danger of letting it push you too far for a bad score.

Something to discuss with partner: if you expect to make 4♠ should you start with double, reserving the jump to game for weaker hands with a long suit?

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
5♣	5	10	4
Pass	1	8	9
6♣	1	6	4
4NT	2	4	14

Partner had ♠AKJT765, ♥AQ8, ♦K5, ♣J so 6♣ was a fine spot; 13 tricks when the heart finesse surprisingly worked. But would he make the same bid without the ♦K?

Problem 2 Teams: None Vul, Dealer East

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠K7	-	1♣*	1♠	Pass
♥AK3	?			
♦T8732				
♣Q42				

*1♣ = 3+cards

This is not nice! Clearly you have to do something – your side could easily have game on, most likely in no-trump, or possibly in spades.

The panel splits: one group prefers to mark time with 2♦.

Tudor: 2♦. I tend to play this (change of suit over an overcall) is as encouraging but not forcing. I don't like it with the poor suit, but other options are equally unappealing!

Tim, Mike B and Danny all believe the change of suit is forcing and hope to learn something from partner's rebid. Danny looks ahead:

Hamilton: 2♦. I'd play this as forcing. If partner rebids 2♣ I'll pass, else I'll need to decide if my Qxx is a club stopper.

Others prefer not to introduce such a poor suit and think 2NT is the value bid:

Gallacher: 2NT. South cannot find a bid to support her partner. If my partner was short in clubs she might have doubled rather than overcall. I have 12 points with the ♣Q and a balanced type of hand.

Frame: 2NT: This is tricky and depends on the meaning of 2♣ - I would love it to be asking for a stopper but I'm sure that partner will take it as showing spade support and 3♣ is clearly too pushy!

Some players use 2NT in competition to show a 4-card raise of partner's suit, reserving the cuebid for a 3-card raise. Might that apply here? In any case, 2♣ will surely be taken as a UCB, some sort of spade raise. You might bid 3♣ over partner's response to 2♦, that would clearly be a stopper ask – but that gets the auction rather high.

Iain is more pessimistic:

Sime: 1NT. Enough with a tenuous club stop and nothing in my long suit. On a bad day even 1NT might be too high – seven top winners but we have to throw one as they cash out.

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
2♦	4	10	12
2N	4	9	7
1N	1	7	8
2♣	0	6	1
2♠	0	3	1
Pass	0	1	2

Partner had ♠A86432 ♥J982 ♦KJ ♣5. 2♣ is a comfortable spot, many were allowed to make 10 tricks. DA was onside but there was a heart loser

Problem 3 Teams None Vul, Dealer East

♠KQ632 ♥A9 ♦AJ75 ♣AK	West	North	East	South
	-	-	2♠*	Pass
	?			

2♠ = weak, 5-10

The panel choose to investigate slam in different ways, the most popular being 2NT, asking for more information.

Sime: 2NT. A feature and range ask. Partner bids 3♣ with a minimum and shows a feature otherwise. If the feature is a red suit King, we can look beyond 4♣.

It is hard to see what other feature partner could have! Iain knows exactly what he is asking for. Most competitors who chose 2NT thought it was asking for Ogust-style responses.

Gallacher: 2NT. I have 21 HCP and partner bids a weak 2 in my best suit. I'll be disappointed if my partner has only 5 points including the Ace and Jack of spades. I can count 10 tricks. It seems a tossup between 6♣ and 2NT asking how good her hand is.

Derek points out that it would be nice if 2NT asked for a singleton on this deal.

To quote SJ Simon: "slam bidding is mental play". Imagine partner has Ace to 6 spades. You count 10 winners. If you can make 2 ruffs in your hand that makes 12. So slam will make even when partner is minimum with a singleton diamond; or CQxx so you can discard the losing heart; or even four small clubs and only 3 red cards

Russell finds a way to focus partner's attention on the diamond suit:

Frame: 3♦. Natural and forcing, helping partner to judge when I make a slam try on the next round.

I wonder what that slam try might be? Some of the panel cut to the chase with Blackwood.

Hamilton: 4NT. 6♣ is very likely, maybe 7♣ if partner has the right hand. If playing a feature ask 2NT to find a diamond singleton would be handy.

Indeed. 7♠ will make if partner has the ♥K and a singleton diamond. Most partnerships do not have the methods to find out. Best to follow advice from Bob Hamman: "Don't play me for perfect cards. I don't have them."

My personal view is that there are so many hands where 12 tricks are there that I may as well bid slam and see if it makes. A more scientific approach may help only the defence.

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
2N	5	10	11
6♠	0	9	6
4N	3	8	9
3♦	1	7	1
4♠	0	2	3
3NT	0	1	2

Partner had ♠AT9875, ♥32, ♦94, ♣Q74. Not a particularly strong opener, but 6♠ is cold. Only one pair of Juniors bid slam – and it looks as if they were employing Gerber!

Problem 4 Teams EW Vul, Dealer South

	West	North	East	South
♠6	-	-	-	1♣
♥4	?			
♦AQJ8542				
♣KT75				

We can all agree that it would be a good idea to bid some number of diamonds. The question is: How many? It rather depends on how the remaining HCP are divided between North and East.

Both Mikes and Tim adopt the 'softly, softly' approach.

McKay: 1♦. Tricky - any jump in Diamonds is usually pre-emptive (in most people's methods) so bid 1♦ and hopefully the auction won't end there. We don't really know whose hand it is yet.

Baron: 1♦. I wouldn't pre-empt as partner is not a passed hand. 6♦ may be on, 3NT may be better than 5♦, or a part score in diamonds may be all there is. Don't cramp the space to find this out.

This may work well on some layouts. One thing we know: over 1♦ someone will bid a Major. If the auction returns to us at the 4-level in hearts or spades what shall we do?

No panellist chose 2♦. For several competitors that might be an Intermediate Jump Overcall, but it seems like a misdescription, falling between constructive and pre-emptive.

Most of the panel choose a pre-empt, hoping to make life difficult for North. Iain and Derek agree on the 3-level.

Sanders: 3♦. I am a bit top-heavy for a pre-emptive jump overcall but the unfavourable vulnerability does indicate a sound hand.

Jim and Steve give up on the remote possibility that 3NT might make, preferring to put on the pressure.

Male: 4♦. It's a very good 3♦, 7/4 shape. Let's make the opponents guess at the 4 level.

Danny and Russell go all the way:

Hamilton: 5♦. Although partner is an unpassed hand I'm tempted to go for a big pre-empt and in fact can't resist. Hoping that North has the majors and will be forced to guess.

The problem with this is that North may be forced to guess to double. At this vulnerability you might be lucky to escape for -500 if partner has no diamond support.

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
1♦	3	10	12
4♦	2	8	1
5♦	2	7	1
3♦	2	6	9
2♦	0	3	8

In real life partner had most of the remaining HCP: ♠KQ972, ♥JT65, ♦K3, ♣A3. 3NT was a lucky make, 5♦ needed some help from the defence. There were some large penalties when NS ventured too high in a Major.

Competitors Top Scores

Not easy to score well this time – everybody who scores 25 or more merits a mention.

2* Master	Charles Fogelman	GBC	32
1* Master	Robin MacPherson	New Melville	37
	Roy Heanes	New Melville	32
Master	Neil Bulleid	Buchanan	40
	Marilyn McDonagh	Carlton	33
	Jane Smithson	Berwick	30
District Master	Paul Kerr	Troon	37
	Jean Cousins	Buchanan	35
	John Smithson	Berwick	31
	Graham Vincent	Linlithgow	31
	Rosemary Jamieson	Carlton	28
Local Master	Gavin Easton	Longniddry	32
	Peter Beckett	New Melville	30
	Margaret Mainland	Orkney	29
	Angela Ford	Maccabi	28
	Larry Watson	Buchanan	27
	Chris Mickley	Nairn	25
Club Master	Helen Adamson	Kirkcaldy	31
	Debbie Bland	Bearsden Academy	25
Novice	Mairi Lowson	New Melville	34
	Evelyn Watson	Stepping-Stone	32
	Wilma Currie	Kilmacolm	29
	Ian Lowson	New Melville	28