

2022 Bronze Bidding Challenge: June

This month's problems come from the Lady Milne Trophy, the Women's Home International teams event. Scotland sneaked a win by a fraction of a VP but might have done better on these deals!

Problem 1 Teams: NS Vul, Dealer North

♠T6	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥AJ93	-	1♣	1♦	Dbl
♦8632	?			
♣K63				

The panel decides to raise partner's suit. The only question is: how high? Steve and Mike think 2♦ is enough.

MALE: 2♦. 4-card support. 5/9 points.

GALLACHER: 2♦. I have 4 of partner's diamonds, a shortage in spades, some values in hearts.

Others think 3♦ is more descriptive:

HAMILTON: 3♦. A mild pre-empt based on our nine-card fit. It's likely the opponents have a spade fit and this might put off a shy North.

The jump raise gets over the fourth diamond, bidding to the level of the known 9+card fit. It is popular with the competitors, perhaps because it sounds stronger than 2♦. But is it? Most play that a jump raise in a competitive auction has pre-emptive overtones, it is based on distributional values rather than high cards.

Alisdair and Derek both consider an Unassuming Cuebid of 2♣. This shows a high-card raise to 3♦ but does not promise 4-card support:

MCLEOD. 3♦. I would consider 2♣, but I prefer the stretch raise here, because it eats more of the opponents' bidding space. It is not a great 8-count anyway, because the ♣K could be wastepaper, so downgrading rather than upgrading is the way to go. Even with said downgrade, the level of the fit should be safe enough. This does require partner not to read 3♦ as a strong raise though!

This hand is not primarily pre-emptive, rather it is defence-oriented with all the high cards in opponents' suits. I have split the tie in favour of 3♦ because that was the bid made at the table, but my personal vote goes to the more neutral 2♦. Bidding more is likely to drive them into game – is that what I want?

Jim prefers to play a waiting game:

TUDOR: PASS. I know some shifty characters who would bid 1♠ here! A pre-emptive raise in diamonds might give the opponents something to think about – but it might also propel them into a making game they wouldn't have bid themselves! Depending how the auction proceeds I might speak on the next round...

In the early days of contract bridge a psychic 1♠ bid would be almost routine, but nowadays it should be rather pointless – North doubles to show spades in response to partner's double, and South 'raises' to expose the psyche.

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
3♦	3	10	33
2♦	3	9	15
PASS	1	8	2
1♥	0	7	4
REDBL	0	6	3
4♦	0	3	2

Partner held Q4 2 KJT94 AJ954 and sacrificed in 5♦ over 4 of a Major. With both diamond honours badly placed this had to go three down doubled. Not much of a save when 4♠ is in danger of losing 2 heart ruffs and 4♥ needs a double-dummy line to make.

Problem 2 Teams: EW Vul, Dealer West

♠KQ97	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥T3	Pass	Pass	1♣	1♠
♦QJT43	?			
♣76				

A nearly unanimous 'what else' from the panel.

SANDERS: 1NT. The vulnerability is wrong for a penalty double so prefer a bid because a vulnerable game is worth more than any penalty we might get. The main requirement when bidding No Trumps in a competitive auction is to have a stop in the opposition suit.

GALLACHER: 1NT. I have good spades sitting over south and from the bidding partner should have hearts. I am not good enough for 2♦.

Bidding a new suit at the 2-level is a one-round force, and this hand is not really strong enough for that, but Alisdair suggests that there are tactical considerations.

MCLEOD: 2♦. ... you don't want to declare a NT contract unless partner has enough extra values to make 3NT reasonable. The opponents cannot make headway in spades, but what about hearts? They'll have values there, and probably need only to duck once in each of the pointed suits to lock you out of your hand. So if you end up declaring, you'll want to be in diamonds. Partner will expect you to be about a Queen better, but they won't get carried away because of your original pass. Without that, 1NT and Pass are both better options. With it, you can hide your spade cover until the opportune moment. The opponents might compete, or partner might have a strong hand. The worst-case scenario is partner hates diamonds and run to 3♣. This is far less likely than the distributions that will vindicate the 2♦ bid.

Some of the panel considered a Pass but think they would have no good way forward if LHO passes and partner re-opens with a double. 1NT would now show a weaker hand than this, so they would have to pass and hope for a reasonable penalty. This might not compensate for a vulnerable game, but are we sure that the vulnerable game exists? I think there is quite a lot going for the wait-and-see-what-happens-next Pass. North might even raise spades....

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
1NT	6	10	49
2♦	1	8	7
PASS	0	7	3

Partner's hand was T3 85 A87 AKQ432. She has no good continuation over 1NT. Even 2NT has a fatal flaw, but a pessimistic pass, or a pull to 2♣ allows South to get hearts into play – and there are 10 tricks available to NS in hearts.

Problem 3 Teams: All Vul, Dealer North

♠T	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥T76	-	-	1♣	Pass
♦KQ965	?			
♣K532				

Complete unanimity this time.

HAMILTON: 1♦. If this gets competitive later better to show our suits – I'm ready to bid lots of clubs later if need be

TUDOR: 1♦. Describing my hand to partner. Perhaps the opponents will find a major fit now – Hey-ho!

Your Major suit holdings do suggest that opponents may be about to compete, it is surprising that RHO has passed. But is there anything you might do to stop them?

SANDERS: 1♦. Don't mind 3♣ either but the single spade worries me if partner rebids 3NT. If I respond 1♦ and partner is strong balanced, they will rebid 1NT I can now jump to 3♣, getting across the hand shape.

Some competitors do raise to 3♣, but this is a bit of an overbid and conceals the best feature of your hand. It may not deter LHO from competing – and if they do, what would you like partner to lead?

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
1♦	7	10	40
3♣	0	8	9
2♣	0	6	5
4♣	0	4	1
5♣	0	2	1
1NT	0	1	2

Opponents have good reason to be silent: partner has AQJ6 K984 T AQJ7. She got overexcited by a limit raise to 3♣ and reached a no play slam! Even 5♣ was too high. 3NT was the making game.

Problem 4 Teams: None Vul, Dealer North

♠T	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥A85	-	Pass	Pass	1♠
♦KQJ8	Dbl	2♣	Pass	Pass
♣AKQT5	?			

A 2-horse race this time. Steve weighs up the alternatives:

MALE: DBL. Double again or 3♣ showing a big hand? I like this to show 6 cards, but AKQTx is pretty good. Still, 5♣ is a long way off, partner might have 5 hearts or a spade stop and the ♦A, so I think double is my best call.

SANDERS: DBL. Give your side the best chance of locating a fit. If you double and then bid a new suit that indicates a strong hand but if you double twice and now bid, sounds even stronger!

Mike is less optimistic about the chances of making game:

GALLACHER: 3♣. With my 19 hcps and oppositions 20 or so, partner can have at most 1 point. 2♣ scores 110 points. I can see 4/5 clubs + 2 diamonds + ♥A, giving me 7/8 tricks. 3♣ one down gives me a better score, 2 down doubled is a disaster. Opposition also likely to have tricks in hearts and an available plus score greater than 110. It's marginal.

Jim too is concerned that a second double might not be an unqualified success.

TUDOR: 3♣. I could double again for takeout, but what if partner has four spades with 4333 shape? If she had a hand unsuitable to pass for penalties, she might bid 3♥!

If you swapped the hearts and club suits everybody would bid 3♥ now, showing their strength and their 5-card Major. Does a second double not suggest a 4-card heart suit? After the initial double 3♣ should indicate that you have more than one place to play, so if partner happens to have 5 hearts she can bid them now, if not you will avoid a 4-3, possibly even a 3-3 fit.

	Votes	Marks	Competitors
3♣	4	10	30
DBL	3	8	21
PASS	0	7	5
2NT	0	4	2
4C	0	2	1

Partner has 94 QJ64 T972 974. Over a second double she will happily bid 4♥, but her happiness will fade when trump break 4-2. The making game is 5♦ but no-one reached that!

Competitors Top Scores

Lots of good scores this month – those who did not manage the full 40 can console themselves in the knowledge that they would probably have won the Lady Milne Trophy more decisively!

2* Master	Charles Fogelman	GBC	40
	Will Iles	Stewartry	40
1* Master	Robin MacPherson	New Melville	40
	David King	Berwick	37
	Rose Bisset	New Melville	35
	Roy Heanes	New Melville	33
Master	Neil Bulleid	Buchanan	40
	Robin Crouch	Buchanan	38
	Alan Kirk	Bearsden Improvers	38
	Marilyn McDonagh	Carlton	38
	Sue Smith	Dunfermline	38
	David Edelman	Maccabi	37
	Jane Smithson	Berwick	37
	Pam Warner	New Melville	37
	David Olive	Inverness Caledonian	36
	Alex Sutherland	New Melville	36
	Louis Moore	Berwick	32
District Master	May Armour	Kyle	40
	Peter MacLaren	Colinton Castle	40
	John Smithson	Berwick	39
	Ken Brown	Pentland	38
	Alastair Kerr	New Melville	38
	Alan Paterson	Johnstone	38
	David Hartley	St Andrew	34
	Sheila Ritchie	Dundee	34
	Quentin Stephens	Aberdeen	33
Local Master	Lesley Marron	Stornoway	40
	Keith Smith	New Melville	40
	Douglas Woodburn	Doon	39
	Peter Beckett	New Melville	38
	Liz Forbes	Oban	38
	Ken Latham	Carlton	37
	Margaret Mainland	Orkney	37
	John Malcolm	New Melville	37
	Grace McVey	Doon	37
	John Ramsay	Carlton	37
	Nicola Corbyn	Berwick	36
	Angela Ford	Maccabi	36
	Gerald Della-Porta	New Melville	34
	Gavin Easton	Longniddry	33
Club Master	Helen Adamson	Kirkcaldy	40
	Debbie Bland	Bearsden Improvers	40
	Angela Horsfall	Carlton	39
	Jacky Lindsay	New Melville	38
	Brian Allan	Dundee	37
	Irene Bruce	Carlton	36
	Stephen Carr	Ness	36
	Fiona McCourt	Bearsden Improvers	35
	Susan Muir	Helensburgh	35
	James Laird	New Melville	33
	Bill Wheeler	Stirling & Union	30
Novice	Evelyn Watson	Stepping-Stone	39
	Caroline Mann	Aberdeen	35