

2022 Bronze Bidding Challenge: May

The problems come from the Benjamin Individual, an invitation event for the leading players on the Master Point Ranking list. They have to play the same simple system, so you might imagine lots of identical actions from the experts. Read on!

Problem 1 MP Pairs: EW Vul, Dealer West

♠Q53	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥AJ43	?			
♦KQ52				
♣K3				

One panellist and a few competitors opted for 1NT. Indeed this is not a great hand for NT - the intermediates are non-existent. Still, when you think of some of the lousy 12 counts you have opened this is not too bad. SBU standard opens 4-card Majors, but the panel appear to have moved on. Almost all of them open 1♦.

HAMILTON: 1♦ – at least the way I play, where you open the minor suit having equal length. There are advantages and disadvantages to this, but with negative doubles and Checkback Stayman we should be able to find a Heart fit either way.

In my experience it is easier to find a heart fit by opening 1♥.

There are advantages to opening the minor suit with 4 spades and a 4-card minor. Opening 1♠ forces partner to respond 1NT with any old hand not worth a 2-over-1, and now you have to decide whether to make another bid with a 16 count. But I have never seen the advantage of opening 1♦ with touching red suits. It allows partner to respond 1♥ – but then if you opened 1♥ he would raise so you have not actually saved any space, you have just made the weaker hand declarer. And if he has a weak hand with 5 spades and 4 hearts you may miss your best fit. Derek suggests another advantage:

SANDERS: 1♦. Two reasons firstly bidding 4-card suits up-the-way gives the best chance of locating a fit. Secondly avoiding opening 1♥ with a 4-card suit increases the frequency that when you do open 1♥ it will be a 5-card suit, allowing partner to raise more freely with 3 card support in competitive auctions.

Seems to me that Derek just wants to play 5-card Majors. I can't imagine not raising partner with 3-card support in competition just because 1♥ might be a 4-card suit.

No-one mentions the advantage of opening 1♥.

At Pairs in particular you want to play in Majors whenever possible. A 4-3 Major fit scoring 110 equals 3♦ making 9, and if you make 9 tricks in your 4-3 Major fit you score very well.

One panellist has been privileged to hear my views on this subject:

McKAY: 1♥ - I know you prefer that, Liz.

Not sure he is actually convinced – just soaking up!

It really breaks my heart to give top marks to a pernicious aberration in a 4-card major system, one that I feared some teachers might advocate in direct contradiction to the Standard system they are supposed to teach. I am pleased to note that most of the competitors have more sense and reward them accordingly.

	Panel	Points	Competitors
1♦	5	10	31
1♥	1	10	12
1NT	1	7	7

In the Benjamin 3 out of 4 Wests opened the pernicious aberration. Their partners had A72 Q87 T9743 Q7. Over 1♦ they raised, ending in 3♦-1. The solitary 1♥ opener earned a top when partner responded 1NT, then showed heart support over a 2♣ intervention. Against me, naturally. Grrrh!

Problem 2 MP Pairs: NS Vul, Dealer South

♠2	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥AJ852	-	-	-	Pass
♦Q843	Pass	1♦	1♠	Pass
♣K92	?			

A few competitors pass with their misfit. That may be the winning action but you will regret not bidding if partner happens to be 5-4 in the majors! The auction suggests that partner may be quite strong for the overcall, and you really owe it to them to keep the auction open for one round.

The panel agrees that we should take some action. Most prefer a nonforcing 1NT.

MALE: 1NT, showing a diamond stop and no spade fit. The hand is not good enough for 2♥.

SANDERS: 1NT: With ten points and a diamond stop too strong to pass. This action gives you two bites at the cherry! It allows partner to pass if weak balanced or raise if strong balanced

Should they have a second suit they can rebid it and you will locate a better fit.

Meanwhile my style is that responding to an overcall in a new suit at the two level would show six cards, so 2♥ is not an option.

As a general rule, a change of suit after an overcall is forcing for one round. But the situation is similar to a change of suit by a passed hand – because you passed last time partner is allowed to pass. Peter is the only panellist who will find a 5-3 heart fit if one exists:

EDMOND: 2♥. Tricky one but I'll have a wee gamble on 2♥ denying any kind of spade fit.

Lots of competitors agree. But if the heart fit does not exist partner will surely rebid spades and you may regret your enterprise.

	Panel	Points	Competitors
1NT	6	10	17
2♥	1	8	26
Pass	0	6	5
2NT	0	2	1
2♦	0	1	1

In the Benjamin one East considered this hand to be an opening bid and got too high in 3♥. West had AQ73 K4 K76 8765, and 2 intrepid Benjamins overcalled their 4-card Major. Mixed outcomes: one NS pair overbid to 3♠, 3 down; the other stayed quiet, and when East passed the 4-1 fit did not play well. At the 4th table EW quietly defended 2♠ for -1.

Problem 3 **MP Pairs:** **NS Vul, Dealer South**

♠KJ763	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥6	-	-	-	Pass
♦AKT8	1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
♣K64	?			

Should this hand make a move over a simple raise? The panel is split. Peter goes all in:

EDMOND: 4♠ with the 5th spade and a singleton - surely no slam prospects!

Partner's hand might be as bad as Qxxx xxx Qx QJxx, when game is pretty good. Or they might have Axxx Kxx xxx xxx when game is pretty awful. At teams, vulnerable, I would favour the blast it and see approach. I might even do that when not vulnerable. But at Pairs, where what matters is going plus, I vote for the more cautious approach favoured by the panel. They try to discover whether partner has the right cards by making a Game Try in a new suit. But which suit?

SANDERS: 3♦: A traditional long suit trial bid. Essentially describing the hand shape and inviting partner to bid 4♠ with maximum values or, if intermediate with fitting diamond cards, to bid game.

Most of the panel prefer the alternative suit where they want help:

FRAME: 3♣. A long suit trial bid looking for help from partner (top club honour or shortage) with a non-minimum hand.

McKAY: 3♣. A trial bid, asking partner to bid game with something in clubs. You need to invite partner and normally 3♣ is not an invite.

Lots of competitors bid 3♠, but Tim is correct. 3♠ is generally bid on a 6-card suit with the aim of keeping opponents quiet rather than asking partner to guess whether to bid on to game. The Game try asking for help in a specific suit makes it easier for partner to judge whether to bid on.

Danny is the only pessimist, often a good approach to Pairs.

HAMILTON: PASS. I shall compete to 3♠ if pushed as we have 9-card fit. A tiny bit stronger or at IMPs I'd make a 3♦ game try.

When unsure whether to move on this sort of auction the Losing Trick Count can be useful.

You have a 6-loser hand, and a single raise usually contains 9 losers. So you should expect to make 9 tricks almost all of the time. And you can deduct a spade loser 'for trump control' – it would be rather disappointing to find you have two losers in the trump suit.

	Panel	Points	Competitors
3♣	4	10	3
3♦	1	9	5
Pass	1	7	12
4♠	1	6	11
3♠	0	3	19

Partner has T842 A954 4 QT75, so this is not a great game, but it makes when spades break 2-2 with the ♠Q favourably placed. 2 Benjaminers reached game easily when East upgraded his hand to a 3♠ response (!) – perhaps they have been playing 5-card Majors too long.

Problem 4 MP Pairs: All Vul, Dealer North

♠74	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♥AJ93		Pass	1♦	1♠
♦AJ	?			
♣KQJ65				

When opponents intervene in our auction they use up some of our space, but give us extra options. For example, we can cuebid their suit.

EDMOND: 2♠ - (maybe known as a UCB?) tell me more partner, there's a game on here somewhere (NT if you have a Spade stop).

UCB stands for Unassuming Cue Bid, a term invented by Terence Reese. It normally shows a good raise of partner's suit but it can also show a strong hand with no clear way forward. Initially it does not ask for a spade stopper, but if you rebid 3♠ next time that will be a stopper ask.

Another option is the negative (aka Sputnik) double. That shows length in the unbid suits.

FRAME: Dbl: A negative double showing the other 2 suits and values – on this hand I'm looking for game opposite partner's vulnerable overcall but will settle for an invitational 3♦ if partner can only bid 2♦!

Seems some of Russell's partners favour very light openers! Surely this hand is worth a game force?

The third approach is to ignore the intervention and make the bid you would have made last time. What would you respond without the intervention?

GALLACHER: 3♣. With 27+ points between partner and me we have game values.

In an uninterrupted auction 3♣ would be a strong jump shift, forcing to game and indicating slam interest if partner is not minimum. In the modern style it usually indicates a single-suited hand – but here you can rebid 3♥ over 3♦ to get your values over.

However, after the intervention most partnerships abandon the traditional strong jump shift in favour of the Fit Jump. The jump shows a good suit, a source of tricks, with at least 3-card support for partner. Your values should be concentrated in the two suits so that if the opponents compete further partner will have a good idea whether to give up or bid on.

Tim comes up with the winning option:

McKAY: 2♣. You are very strong and can show this by bidding your hearts later if necessary.

The simple 2-over-1 response has not been affected by the overcall. It is forcing for at least one round. If partner rebids diamonds you can continue with 2♥, a Responder's Reverse showing at least opening values and forcing to game. This seems better than starting with a double, which might show a far weaker hand.

	Panel	Points	Competitors
2♣	3	10	22
Dbl	2	8	19
3♣	1	5	9
2♠	1	4	0

2 Benjaminers chose to double; 2 bid 2♣. Partner had – QT82 KQ642 A743 and a successful heart finesse meant there were 13 tricks in either rounded suit! No-one bid slam. EW had a MP save in 4♠ (-500) but the pair that bought the contract in 5♠x scored 0 points for -800.

Competitors Top Scores

2* Master	Charles Fogelman	GBC	35
	Will Iles	Stewartry	31
1* Master	David King	Berwick	34
	Eileen Cowan	Loreburn	33
	Roy Heanes	New Melville	32
	Alasdair Adam	Direct Member	31
Master	Robin MacPherson	New Melville	38
	Alex Sutherland	New Melville	38
	Louis Moore	Berwick	34
	Neil Bulleid	Buchanan	33
	David Edelman	Maccabi	33
	Alan Kirk	Bearsden Improvers	31
District Master	Richard Leeson	Peebles	35
	Alan Morrison	GBC	33
	Ken Brown	Pentland	32
	David Hartley	St Andrew	32
	Sheila Ritchie	Dundee	32
	Alastair Kerr	New Melville	31
	Alistair Smillie	Moray	31
Local Master	Margaret Mainland	Orkney	35
	Chris Mickley	Nairn	32
	Gavin Easton	Longniddry	31
	Angela Ford	Maccabi	31
	James Laird	New Melville	31
	Ken Latham	Carlton	31
Club Master	Stephen Carr	Ness	35
	Linton Horsfall	Carlton	34
	Liz Forbes	Oban	33
	John Baraclough	Ness	32
	Ivor Glynn	New Melville	32
	Debbie Bland	Bearsden Improvers	31
	Irene Bruce	Carlton	31
	Betty Watt	New Melville	31
Novice	Sue Marshall	Dunfermline	34
	Evelyn Watson	Stepping Stone	31