

2024 Bronze Bidding Challenge: January

This set of problems comes from a SOL match. Online matches allow you to replay the boards so you can see what might work better and are recommended for those who want to improve their game.

Problem 1 **Teams:** **EW Vul** **Dealer East**

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠QT				
♥Q7		-	Pass	1♣
♦AK763	?			
♣QT96				

A gremlin crept in here: the original problem featured a 1♠ opening bid.

The panel is too polite to say: "What else?" but most of them feel the need to bid something.

MCKAY: 1♦. Not strong enough to overcall 1NT.

SANDERS: 1♦. Mainly for the lead, still partner may have some values and we can compete the auction.

SIME: 1♦. If I don't bid 1♦ it is my fault if partner leads a major against North's contract.

These comments touch on two reasons for overcalling: to buy the contract, and to direct a lead. There is a third reason: to disrupt opponents' smooth bidding sequences. That does not apply to an overcall of 1♦, which uses no space and might even help LHO show both Majors at once. Some competitors who chose 2♦ may have been thinking along these lines. Best advice is for a jump overcall to be based on a long single suit of at least 6 cards.

I confess to having a 'thing' about a 1♦ overcall: to me it should be either a very good suit, or a good hand for offence. This Quacky collection seems better suited to defence. So put me with:

MALE: Pass. Bidding 1♦ seems pointless, and it gives the opponents information.

The best argument for overcalling 1♦ is the lead-directing aspect. But there is no reason to assume that partner will be on lead, or indeed that a diamond lead will be best if he is.

.	Votes	Marks	Competitors
1♦	6	10	38
PASS	1	9	2
2♦	0	2	4

Partner had ♠J94 ♥KT94 ♦- ♣AJ8732. The original problem was whether they should rescue you from a 2♦ overcall – what would you do if partner overcalled 1♦?

Problem 2 **Teams:** **All Vul** **Dealer North**

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠9				
♥AQ9	-	1♠	Pass	4♣
♦AK3	?			
♣KJT642				

This is largely a matter of temperament, or perhaps the mood of the moment.

TUDOR: Pass. Although South should have few high card points, North's holding is unknown. Any action could result in a big penalty at this vulnerability.

SANDERS: Pass: I have more chance of defeating 4♣ than making 5♣. The most likely scenario is that neither is making.

MCKAY: Pass- so tempting to bid but double is takeout and 5♣ may well not make. You just want a positive score and 4♣ is very likely to go off.

I am not convinced that my vulnerable opponents cannot make 4♣. North has high cards, South has distribution. Which does not mean that acting will not cost 800 or more. What action might you take?

MALE: Double, not perfect, but we are being done out of something.

Not everyone agrees on the meaning of double here. For some it is takeout, for others card-showing. We can agree that it will give partner a problem: pass, or remove? The remaining panellists decide to take the strain:

HAMILTON: 5♣. I'll bid it quickly and hope for the best.

FRAME: 5♣. Hoping not to be any worse than -2, doubled but, who knows, this might push opponents to the 5-level which might be too high!

Good point. This might be a good save, or it might persuade them to bid one more. Or it might lose 800 against a non-making game. Surely nobody said this game was easy...

.	Votes	Marks	Competitors
PASS	4	10	12
5♣	2	9	7
DBL	1	5	25

Partner has ♠K ♥T854 ♦J9654 ♣973, not much, but enough for 5♣ to lose no more than 500 against the making 4♠.

Problem 3 Teams: None Vul Dealer North

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠8	-	2♥*	2♠	Pass
♥AJ85	?			
♦Q876				
♣QJ87				

*2♥ = weak 2

The panel mainly opt for 2NT:

SIME: 2NT. There had to be a good hand for 2NT natural and Not Forcing one day. How lucky we are that that is today's agreement.

Other seem more aware that this may end badly:

SANDERS: 2NT: Pretty much minimum but we still may have game on in NT or even a minor and I will have a good idea of the layout.

FRAME: 2NT: Invitational, leaving it to partner to decide whether to pass or bid 3♠, 3NT or 4♠S, all of which I'll pass.

We have no reason to think we have enough HCP for 3NT, so 2NT is a stretch. It is usually worth stretching for a vulnerable game bonus, but here we are not vulnerable, So Jim opts for an almost certain plus score:

TUDOR: Pass. For a NT contract the singleton in partner's suit is not a good feature.

S J Simon in his classic "Why You Lose at Bridge" (do read it if you can find it – entertaining and informative even after 75 years) pointed out the dangers of bidding NT on a misfit. When there is no suit that can provide a source of tricks you need extra high cards.

.	Votes	Marks	Competitors
2NT	6	10	29
PASS	1	8	9
3NT	0	3	4
3♠	0	2	1
4♥	0	1	1

Partner has ♠AQJ9543 ♥7 ♦A932 ♣T. Spades break badly and you cannot make anything much. Pass is a good shot.

Problem 4 Teams: EW Vul Dealer South

	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
♠652	-	-	-	1♥
♥K86	Pass	Pass	Dbl	P
♦KT2	?			
♣AJ92				

The re-opening auction is not covered in most lessons – there is not time to cover everything. When 3rd hand passes you should conclude that partner has some values in a hand unsuitable for an overcall. So there is some pressure on you to make a bid rather than defend a contract at the 1-level. The panel choose several ways to respond to the double here.

SANDERS: 1NT. Since partner's 1NT bid in the protective seat indicates 11-14 this action is stronger than a 1NT response to a takeout double in the direct seat. Given there has been no further bidding by opponents I suspect partner may well be 15 plus anyway.

HAMILTON: 1NT - we are maximum but we're allowing for partner to be a bit light

SIME: 1NT. Right on shape. Right on values because we deduct a King when partner reopens in 4th seat. Not everything is right; we have wrong-sided if partner has the ♥Q.

These panellists are following the theory of the Transferrable King: in this situation partner is already bidding some of our hand, so pretend you have a King less than you actually have.

Our resident optimist ignores this advice to go one higher:

MCKAY: 2NT. Even though partner is protecting, I think 1NT would be a bit of an underbid. 3♣ is also a possibility but I think it is less likely to lead us to game.

Jim responds in his longest suit:

TUDOR: 2♣. Partner could be protecting. If she speaks again to show values then I'll get excited!

Steve is more ambitious:

MALE: 2♥ = 10+ forcing to suit agreement. May well have to ask partner for a heart stop too.

Russell is the most ambitious:

FRAME: 2♥. Hoping partner has a half stop in hearts (e.g. Qx or better) to allow him to become declarer in 3NT - I'll pass a response of 2♠, 3♣ or 3♦.

.	Votes	Marks	Competitors
1NT	3	10	8
2NT	1	8	15
2♥	2	7	2
2♣	1	6	10
3♣	0	3	7
1♠	0	2	1
3NT	0	1	1

Partner has ♠AJT3 ♥Q72 ♦AJ63 ♣75 – perhaps he should have bid 1NT, which shows 11-14 in this position.

Competitors Top Scores

Congratulations to Alasdair Adam who scored a maximum and takes an early lead in the annual competition. Just missing out on a maximum score were Graham Vincent, John Smithson and Fiona Davis; well done to them also.

Name	Rank	Club	Score
Peter Martin	5 Star Master	New Melville	33
Will Iles	3 Star Master	Stewartry	38
Alasdair Adam	1 Star Master	Stirling	40
Robin MacPherson	1 Star Master	New Melville	35
Jane Smithson	1 Star Master	Berwick	33
Pam Warner	1 Star Master	New Melville	32
Graham Vincent	Master	Linlithgow	39
Ken Brown	Master	Pentland	38
Paul Kerr	Master	Troon	37
David Hartley	Master	St Andrew	36
Ken Tait	Master	Marmion	35
Brian Rattray	Master	Oban	35
Andy McKinnel	Master	Linlithgow	33
Alan Kirk	Master	Bearsden	32
John Smithson	District Master	Berwick	39
Quentin Stephens	District Master	Aberdeen	37
John Ramsay	District Master	Carlton	37
Tony Goldberg	District Master	GBC	36
Larry Watson	District Master	Buchanan	36
Sheila Ritchie	District Master	Dundee	35
May Armour	District Master	Kyle	31
Keith Smith	Local Master	New Melville	38
John Baraclough	Local Master	Inverness Caledonian	31
Fiona McCourt	Club Master	Bearsden	33
Wilma Currie	Club Master	Kilmacolm	31
Janet Ironside	Club Master	New Melville	31
James Tweddle	Club Master	Berwick	31
Fiona Davis	Novice	New Melville	39
Janet Hamblin	Novice	New Melville	31