

Scottish Bridge News

Editorial

This edition covers international activity during the summer. Our Under 31 team were invited to the World Youth Championships in Salsomaggiore. We were making up the numbers as a late substitute, which gave no time for proper preparation, but experience of international competition is invaluable if we are to make our mark in future.

In August the World Championships – the Bermuda Bowl, Venice Cup, d’Orsi Trophy and Wuhan Cup – for Open, Women, Senior and Mixed teams – took place in Herning in Denmark. Scotland did not qualify for any of these, but we have another chance for 2027 at next year’s Europeans. Preparation is key: the time to start is now.

One way to improve your game is to read books and articles. Your editor has finally fulfilled her promise to the late John Matheson and compiled some of his ideas into a book. If you would like a

copy (£10, any profits to go to the Junior fund) please contact her at the Email address below.

Iain Sime reports on his experience at the Mutton Cup, an Individual tournament organised in Spain by Jason Hackett (aka Mutton).

Entries for the Bidding Competition have hit a new low: if you are interested, please make sure that your name is added to the distribution list by contacting Troy, our scorer at:

t.vandelisle@gmail.com

Your editor is aware that many Emails from her are going to Spam. Some that she receives suffer the same fate. It seems impossible to fix the glitch, they keep appearing in Spam. Please check your Spam files regularly. She will certainly check hers, hoping to find contributions to this magazine...

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Sinking in Salsomaggiore

In 2022 the WBF introduced an Under-31 category into its Youth Team Championships. Our Under-31 group entered the European Championships with high hopes but not so high results, finishing 13th of the 16 teams. We were surprised to receive a late invitation to the World Championships the following year: it appears that the WBF has difficulty in finding 20 Under-31 teams. We cobbled a team together and they performed rather well, qualifying for the knockout stages.

There were just 13 Under-31 teams in the 2024 Euros and our team finished in 11th place. A late invitation to the World Championships was again unexpected. Three of our more experienced players, Glen Falconer, Jun Nakamaru-Pinder and Ronan Valentine were not available, so we recruited Edan Gardner and Damien Murray; paired Jack Shearer with Niall Tennant; and made a new partnership of Antone Huang and Jen Middleton. Jake Milne volunteered to act as npc.

The format was unusual: a complete Round Robin of 8-board matches with the top 8 teams to qualify for the knockout stages.

Scotland got off to a great start, winning 4 of their 6 matches on Day 1 (including a win over England) to lie 3rd of 20 teams. Day 2 had 7 matches, and we came down to earth, winning only 2 matches and losing heavily in some others. Day 3 was not much better, but we finished with two wins to secure 16th place. No disgrace, given the team's relative inexperience and lack of preparation time.

Jake has vowed to build on this experience for next year's Euros.

A few opening lead problems. For simplicity, you have been moved to the West seat.

1	♠K985		W	N	E	S
	♥87532		P	P	P	1NT
	♦A		2♣	3NT	End	
	♣764					

You back in over the strong no-trump to show both Majors, but North raises to game anyway.

2	♠KT94		W	N	E	S
	♥KQT		-	1♦	P	1NT
	♦8642		P	3NT	End	
	♣K2					

North has one of two types of hand: a big balanced 19 count or a running suit with good controls.

3	♠T65		W	N	E	S
	♥K85		-	-	-	1♣
	♦432		P	1♥*	X	2♠
	♣AJ63		P	4♠	End	

NS play transfer responses to 1♣, so partner's X is lead-directing. 2♠ shows a minimum opener with 4 spades.

4	♠A872		W	N	E	S
	♥JT53		P	P	P	1♠
	♦AJT4		P	1NT	P	4♠
	♣5		End			

5	♠J		W	N	E	S
	♥T6		-	-	P	P
	♦KQT42		1♦	X	P	2♣
	♣K9843		P	2♦	P	2♥
			P	4NT	P	5♣
			P	5♥	End	

A Junior auction! North seems to have a strong hand. He signs off when South shows 0 keycards.

Problem 1 v Chile

Bd 25	♠K985	EW Vul
	♥87532	Dir N
	♦A	
	♣764	
♠Q72		♠A43
♥KJ		♥6
♦Q953		♦KJT764
♣AKJ3		♣T85
	♠JT6	
	♥AQT94	
	♦82	
	♣Q92	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	Pass	Pass	Pass
1NT	2♣	3NT	End

You have a sure entry in the ♦A. Which Major is more likely to produce tricks? Generally speaking, the longer suit works better. Even if you find partner with good spades, they will bring only 3 tricks. And the ♠K might be a second entry to cash hearts.

Our East opened 3♦, West bid 3NT and North led a heart for one down. If you chose a heart lead you save 13 imps.

Problem 2 v Netherlands

Bd 8	♠653	None Vul
	♥A853	Dir W
	♦T	
	♣QT974	
♠AQ7		♠J82
♥962		♥J74
♦AKJ75		♦Q93
♣A3		♣J865
	♠KT94	
	♥KQT	
	♦8642	
	♣K2	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
1♦	Pass	1NT	Pass
3NT	End		

Not much to go on here. Declarer does not have a 4-card Major, but dummy could have anything. Must be right to lead a Major but which one? Here the ♥Q, to have a look at dummy, works best. Partner encourages, you cash four hearts and switch to clubs to teach East a lesson on overbidding. The unfortunate spade lead makes 3NT easy and allows East to smile as he writes 8 imps in the plus column.

Problem 3 v Germany

Bd 27	♠AQ32	None Vul
	♥3	Dir S
	♦AJT5	
	♣T974	
♠T65		♠K8
♥K85		♥QJ976
♦432		♦976
♣AJ63		♣KQ5
	♠J974	
	♥AT42	
	♦KQ8	
	♣82	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♥	Dbl	2♣
Pass	4♣	End	

Partner's lead-directing double is not a command. It seems unlikely that declarer can discard heart losers productively as long as you control the clubs. Assuming partner has a few values for his bid this is a thin game contract. You should lead trump only with a purpose: here the purpose is to cut down ruffs.

Declarer can still make his contract: he wins partner's spade return in dummy and takes two heart ruffs. Back to a diamond to draw trump and one more loser goes on the long diamond. Unlucky: teammates stopped in 3♣.

Problem 4 v Italy

Bd 14	♠T	None Vul
	♥KQ862	Dir E
	♦K52	
	♣Q974	
♠6		♠KQJ9543
♥A974		♥—
♦Q976		♦83
♣KJ62		♣AT83
		♠A872
		♥JT53
		♦AJT4
		♣5

Bd 25	♠97432	EW Vul
	♥AK	Dir N
	♦J63	
	♣652	
♠AKQ86		♠T5
♥Q87532		♥J94
♦A		♦9875
♣A		♣QJT7
		♠J
		♥T6
		♦KQT42
		♣K9843

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
—	—	1♠	Pass
1NT	Pass	4♠	End

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
—	Pass	Pass	1♦
Dbl	Pass	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♥	End		

Singleton leads work best when partner has quick entries to give you ruffs. Which seems unlikely here when you have two Aces. A singleton often picks up partner's holding in a key suit. Which seems to be the case here, but that is an illusion. The club lead gives declarer a choice of losing options. If he plays low from dummy North just covers dummy's card. South wins the ♠A and the defence cash two diamonds and take a club ruff. If declarer rises with the ♣K to pitch a diamond on the ♥A he lacks the entries to finesse clubs later. South wins the ♠A, underleads his ♦A, takes his ruff and exits with a heart.

The Italian North found a double over 1NT, which made the singleton a more tempting choice. 11 imps to Italy.

Problem 5 v Bulgaria

The auction suggests that East has quite a few cards in the minors. West's sign off presumably means that partner has two keycards. Provided one of them is a Major Ace you can surely get a spade ruff. Time to lead the singleton,

The spade lead risks establishing dummy's side suit, but that is unlikely to allow East to discard all his minor losers. In the other room South pre-empted with 3♦, pushing team-mates to the same uncomfortably high level. Leading the singleton flattens the board.



Outside the venue:
 Left to Right: Jack, Antone, Jen, Niall Edan and Damien.
 Jake is hiding behind the camera.

World Championships

The WBF runs its Championships in odd-numbered years. 24 teams qualify from its 8 Zones in each of four categories: Open; Women; Senior and Mixed. For the first 6 days teams play a complete Round Robin; the top 8 teams qualify for the knockout stages. The knockout matches run over 2 days with 4 segments of play each day, and after 12 days of bridge the winners emerge.

After its successful hosting of the 2024 European Championships, Herning in Denmark was chosen as the 2025 venue. On past occasions all matches and segments consisted of 16 boards, but this year they were reduced to 14 – perhaps today’s players lack stamina?

Qualification is based on the numbers in each Zone: Europe gets 10 teams, and because of its size USA is allowed two qualifiers. These Zones were again the most successful in 2025. Both USA teams reached the Knockout stages in every category except the Women. The other qualifiers were from Europe, with the exception of China Women; and China and Hong Kong Mixed.

England were represented in all four events and qualified for the knockout stages in the Bermuda Bowl and the D’Orsi Trophy. Just their luck to face USA1, the eventual winners, in both quarterfinals.

USA dominated the Senior event. When both USA teams reach the semi-finals they have to play each other so that there cannot be an all-USA final, which meant they had to settle for Gold and Bronze. It was a different story when women were involved. China reached the Finals of both the Venice Cup and the Wuhan Cup, only to lose both to Netherlands and Italy respectively.

Two big swing boards from the Final:

3/13	♠T62 ♥– ♦AKQJT2 ♣AK86	All Vul Dir N									
♠4 ♥AKT872 ♦96 ♣JT52	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠Q53 ♥943 ♦8753 ♣Q93
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠AKJ974 ♥QJ65 ♦4 ♣74										

This board was played in eight matches, four Finals and four 3rd place play-offs. The auction mostly started 1♦ - Pass - 1♠ and West stuck in a 2♥ overcall – what harm could it do?

Five pairs bid all the way to 7♠. All but one made 13 tricks by finessing in trump, guided by West’s overcall. Denmark was the unlucky team: Adam Grossack passed throughout and Martin Scholtz played for the drop. -17 imps.

The late Patrick Jourdain bid a Grand slam with this spade holding. He claimed that it was 75%, since West would lead trump unless she held the Queen, in which case it might drop... Do you always lead trump against a Grand? Scholtz got his revenge later.

5/6	♠AKQ865 ♥– ♦T9 ♣AKQT9	EW Vul Dir E									
♠J943 ♥64 ♦Q742 ♣765	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠72 ♥QJT75 ♦875 ♣8432
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠T ♥AK9832 ♦AKJ63 ♣J										

USA bid:

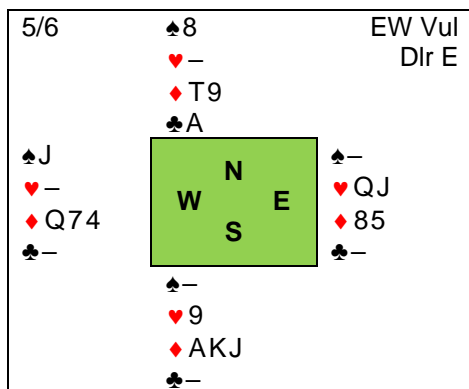
N	S
-	1♥
1♠	3♦
3♠	4♦
5♣	6♦
7♦	End

This contract failed when the trump Queen was offside. Denmark bid:

N	S
-	1♥
1♠	2♣*
2♦*	3♠*
4♦	4♠
7♣	End

A Gazzilli auction: 2♣ was either 16+ or natural; 2♦ promised 8+ HCP. Later bids are obscure! The Danes reached their 5=1 fit, played by South.

West led a trump. Declarer won the Jack and cashed two top hearts. He crossed to the ♠A to draw trump, then cashed two more spades to reach this position:



When he cashed the last trump East discarded another heart, as did dummy, and West had to throw a diamond. Declarer read the position well and dropped the ♦Q for his contract.

17imps back on a deal that Victor Mollo would have loved.

Mutton Cup Quiz

Before reading Iain Sime's article, how would you have done here at match-pointed pairs?

1. You are South at Game All.

♠Q6542	W	N	E	S
♥T9842	-	-	-	P
♦965	P	1NT	2NT	P
♣-	3♣	P	P	?

1NT = 15-17

2NT = minors

2. You are Dealer at Game All

♠KQJ952
♥3
♦J5
♣K862

Your bid?.

3. You are South at Game All

♠-	W	N	E	S
♥AJT942	2♠	P	3♠	?
♦AKQT9				
♣AQ				

4. You are East at Love All

	♠T54	
	♥AKQ6	
	♦AKQ62	
	♣7	
		♠AJ2
		♥73
		♦T874
		♣KQJ5

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♥	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT

Partner leads the ♠6 and declarer drops the ♠Q. under your Ace. What now?

Could You Win the Bermuda Bowl?

After 112 boards the result was :

USA1 253: Denmark 236

This rather flatters Denmark, who put on 42 imps in the last four boards in a desperate effort to catch up. Each team won four of the eight segments, but USA1 were always in the lead.

USA1 had the advantage of an easy semi-final win over Belgium, who conceded after 84 boards. Denmark had to fight to the end to beat Sweden by just 9 imps.

Most of the swings came from the auction, but here are three boards where Denmark missed chances in the play. Can you do better?

Segment 3, Board 3

♠AK76	W N S E	♠Q542
♥AKT		♥J62
♦AK96		♦54
♣Q3		♣T972

You are East. Your strong club system has landed you as declarer in 4♠, no opposition bidding.

South leads the ♦7 – A – 2 – 5.

(NS lead 3rd & 5th; signal standard count)

How would you play?

You have 4 Sure Tricks in the red Ace-Kings, so you want to make six trump tricks. But, your trump pips are poor. The simple line of ruffing two diamonds in hand risks an overruff, or perhaps a trump promotion if North ruffs in with a doubleton trump. You have two clubs and a possible heart to lose, so you cannot afford a trump as well.

You may as well try to cut opponents' communications by playing clubs. You try the ♣Q from dummy. North wins the

♣K and perseveres with the ♦T, South following with the ♦3. This suggests that South started with ♦Q873. You win the ♦K and play a second club. North rises with the ♣A and South drops the ♣J.

North plays the ♦J which you ruff in dummy.

What now?

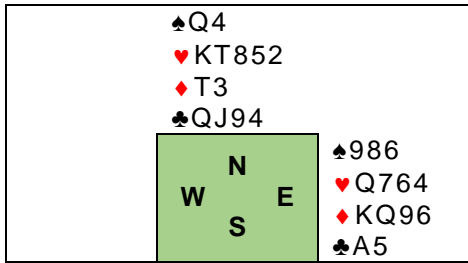
The defenders have kindly set up two club tricks for you, so if trump break 3=2 you can draw them, ending in hand, and discard dummy's fourth diamond and a heart.

But suppose trump break 4-1? Now South will ruff the ♣T and you have no way back to hand for the fourth club. You can afford a trump loser provided you can discard a heart on a club. Cash the ♠A and ♠Q and lead a club. When South ruffs overruff and ruff your last diamond. Your heart loser goes on the last club as South ruffs with his trump trick.

Bd 3	♠9	EW Vul
	♥Q754	Dir S
	♦JT2	
	♣AK864	
♠AK76	W N S E	♠Q542
♥AKT		♥J62
♦AK96		♦54
♣Q3		♣T972
	♠JT83	
	♥983	
	♦Q873	
	♣J5	

The hand was normally played by West and North led out the ♣AK, then played a third club for South to ruff. This defence forced declarer into a winning line. USA offered East a tempting alternative and gained 12 imps.

Segment 4, Board 16



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	1♦	Dbl
1♠	2♦*	Pass	4♥
End			

*2♦ shows hearts.

Partner leads the ♦7, 3rd/lowest.

Declarer wins the ♦A and plays a club to the ♣Q.

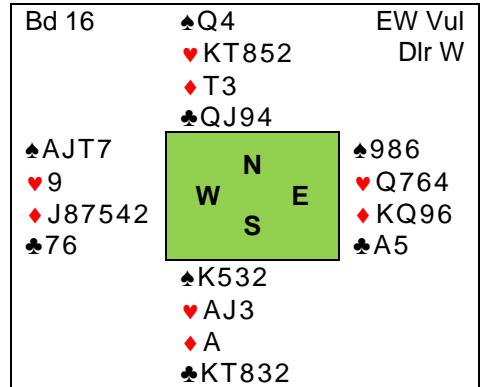
Do you win this trick/?

Partner's lead is clearly not lowest, so he has 4 or 6 diamonds. You might have a trick in each suit, but there is no rush to take them. You may as well duck to find out more.

Declarer ruffs dummy's second diamond and plays the ♥A, then runs the ♥J. Partner follows with the ♥9 and discards the ♦8 on the second trump, possibly suit preference for spades.

How do you defend?

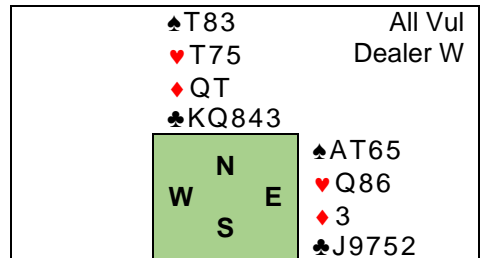
You now know declarer's exact distribution: 4=3=1=5. (Partner bid spades so surely has four.) Your heart pips are not great, but you still control the black suits, so forcing dummy to ruff diamonds will be effective. If declarer draws trump you can win the ♣A and cash diamonds; if he knocks out your ♣A you can force dummy with your last diamond to make another trump trick.



Towards the end of a long day East ducked the ♥J and the contract made. His team-mate took the same line but the defence made no mistake. -10 imps.

This board produced a swing in almost every match. Declarer had a blind spot. Why rush to ruff a diamond? Better to use your dummy entry for a trump finesse. If necessary, you can discard dummy's diamond on a long club.

Segment 7, Board 4



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
2♦*	2NT*	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Dbl	End

2♦ = diamonds + a Major

2NT = Rubensohl transfer to clubs

Partner leads the ♠K, and continues with the ♠2 to your Ace, declarer following with the ♠J and ♠7.

What now?

Partner's Major seems to be to spades, and he is probably void in clubs to justify his vulnerable intervention. He will have one top diamond, but not both, since he did not open. Declarer has the remaining Aces and Kings and his distribution is probably 2=4=4=3.

You switch to your singleton diamond. Declarer wins the ♦A and plays a low diamond towards dummy. Partner signals an even number and wins the ♦K on the second round.

What do you discard?

You need to make 2 trump tricks to defeat this contract. If declarer has the ♦J, he plans to discard a heart from dummy, then ruff a heart. You must discard a heart so that he has to ruff high and your intermediate trump will come into play.

	♠T83	All Vul	
	♥T75	Dealer W	
	♦QT		
	♣KQ843		
♠KQ42			♠AT65
♥J32			♥Q86
♦K98654			♦3
♣-			♣J9752
	♠J7		
	♥AK94		
	♦AJ72		
	♣AT6		

East carelessly discarded his last spade on the second diamond. West played a spade for declarer to ruff. South led the ♦J, discarding a heart as East ruffed. Declarer could now ruff a heart low in dummy, then finesse the ten of clubs to make 5 club tricks and his contract.

At the other table North-South reached a normal but unlucky 3NT. One down. Beating 3♣X gains 3 imps for your team instead of losing 13.

Play Challenge

Jim Patrick

1 None Vul Dealer South

♠J864
♥AT95
♦Q98
♣T7

♠K93
♥KQ
♦AK43
♣9654

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1NT

End

Contract: 1NT Lead: ♦2

How do you plan the play?

2 None Vul Dealer North

♠-
♥K65
♦KQ753
♣KQ853

♠Q972
♥AJ72
♦A
♣AT94

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	6♣	End	

Contract: 6♣ Lead: ♠4

North's leap to slam is reasonable. He would be unlucky not to find two useful Aces opposite. Blackwood would not help, and sophisticated methods might not find the correct answer either.

Assuming trump are not 4=0 what is the best way forward?

Solutions on Page 13

The Hog Bemoans His Luck

Michael Baron

(With homage to Victor Mollo, the funniest of them all.)

The Hog sat down next to me and took a large drink of my wine. “How can you compare chance and skill?”, he asked. “Take this hand from last night. I was playing with the Walrus against the Rabbit and some member with a short attention span.”

The Hog wrote down the following hand:

	Rueful Rabbit			
	♠Q54			
	♥94			
	♦AJ876			
	♣954			
Walrus	♠763	N	E	Hideous Hog
	♥KQJT6	W	S	
	♦Q2	♠JT2		
	♣JT8	♥85		
		♦KT953		
	♠AK98			♣K63
	♥A732			
	♦4			
	♣AQ72			
	Distracted Griffin			

“The Rabbit was in 3NT”, continued the Hog, “I won’t repeat the bidding, but I did know that South had a big hand, and that North had very little.

“Of course, I found the only lead to threaten the contract, a heart. The Rabbit ducked the first round and won the second round with the Ace. He went across to his hand with the Queen of spades and led a club.”

The Hog finished my wine, waved to the waiter for a replacement and continued:

“You could see that I need my partner to have one of two cards to beat the contract.”

I nodded knowingly, that is, I knew the Hog would explain. He did. “The Jack of clubs or the Ace of diamonds – his only possible entries for his winning hearts. It was likely that if the Rabbit had the Jack of clubs, he would lead it, so I was inclined to think that the Walrus had it. I made the obvious play - the King of clubs – otherwise it will win the third round and not my partner’s Jack.

Just as the Rabbit was about to call for a card, that new waiter came up and asked him: ‘Did you order a large or a small Cherry Brandy, sir?’ ‘Small’, said the Rabbit. His distracted partner, who had been watching a game at another table, played the two of clubs, and the Walrus followed.

‘What happened’, said the flustered Rabbit, ‘I did not call for a card, obviously I wanted the Ace’.

“I suggested that the card should be taken back”, went on the Hog, “but the Walrus insisted that the trick stood quoting some rule or other.

‘Sorry partner’, said the Rabbit, but in fact the contract was now unbeatable. I tried the last chance to get my partner in, a diamond, but as you can see the Rabbit won and cashed his winning clubs and spades. Nine tricks – four spades, three clubs and two red Aces.”

“Of course,” the Hog confided, “any half competent declarer would have known to duck the King. I am sure you saw it straight away, but to be beaten by luck, bah! What is the point of being the best player in the club, when you can be beaten by a combination of an incompetent waiter and the Rabbit’s Guardian Angel?”

The Mutton Cup

lain Sime

Madrid in early September is a good time to be playing bridge later in the day. The mornings are pleasantly warm, but the temperature then rises, and it can be very hot by about 5pm. So that was a good time to sit down for a session of bridge at the Club de Bridge Vergara.

The Mutton Cup is an individual tournament, run by Jason Hackett from Manchester. Three days of play were followed by three nights of food and wine. Actually four nights of food and wine, since Jason had organised a tapas crawl on the eve of the tournament. That was an excellent opportunity to meet some of the players you had not seen before. Whilst the majority of the 45 players were English, Irish and Spanish, eleven other countries were represented. I was guaranteed to finish as top Scot. I was also guaranteed to finish as bottom Scot.

Every two hands you changed partners. In my case I had never played with anyone else in the field, so it was 44 new partners over three days. Some of them were top class bridge professionals. A few would struggle on a Wednesday evening in the Melville.

Scoring was match points. You played a fixed bidding system and no bidding deviations were allowed. 15/17 No trump, 5 card majors, weak twos, but not Two-over-one Game Forcing. You agreed your defensive methods before each round. The better players said: "You choose." The majority chose standard count (lo=odd), reverse attitude (lo likes). The relics wanted standard attitude as well.

Day One went well for me. I was lucky here, playing with German internationalist Barbara Hackett.

	♠7	Game All									
	♥K	Dir E									
	♦KQJT32										
	♣AQ963										
♠AT98	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠Q6542
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥A3	♥T9872										
♦A7	♦965										
♣KT854	♣—										
	♠KJ3										
	♥QJ654										
	♦84										
	♣J72										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
<i>Barbara</i>		<i>Me</i>	
—	—	Pass	Pass
1NT	2NT	Pass	3♣
Pass	Pass	Dbl	End

My double at Game All was scary and I was remorseful when partner passed for penalty. I needn't have worried. It looked as if West's trumps could be neutralised for one loser, but Barbara found the winning defence. She cashed her three Aces and played a second diamond, locking declarer on dummy. South tried a club to the Jack, but Barbara won and exited with the club ten. The eight was the setting trick and plus 200 scored 19/20. Three Clubs one down undoubled would have scored below average.

I had the overnight lead but had played with more than my share of the better partners. That was confirmed in the first round of Day Two. In an individual tournament, there is nothing more frustrating than partner handing you two bottoms. You can console yourself that you will play four boards against him and only two with him.

Not today- the geezer who doubled an unbreakable contract and then revoked on the second board woke up enough to score two tops against me later in the day!

I salvaged 50% on the day partly thanks to this misdefence:

	♠T54	Love All
	♥AKQ6	Dir N
	♦AKQ62	
	♣7	
♠98763		♠AJ2
♥T954		♥73
♦95		♦T874
♣T8		♣KQJ5
	♠KQ	
	♥J82	
	♦J3	
	♣A96432	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
–	1♦	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♥	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
End			

West led the ♠6 and East won and returned his small spade. The hand played itself from here with East being squeezed in the black suits. Twelve tricks brought in 18/20. West could save the day by keeping both his clubs, but East's defence suggested that he had a red suit covered.

Could West have a red suit Jack? South might have responded 1NT with a point fewer. East should have seen what was coming. A club at trick two breaks up the squeeze.

On the next board opening One Spade did not work out well for an unusual reason. Yes, quiz hands 2 and 3 are from the same deal.

	♠KQJ952	Game All
	♥3	Dir N
	♦J5	
	♣K862	
♠–		♠8643
♥AJT942		♥6
♦AKQT9		♦7432
♣AQ		♣J543
	♠AT7	
	♥KQ875	
	♦86	
	♣T97	

After 1♠ -Pass-2♥ there was no chance that West would play in hearts. It transpired that Five Diamonds was unbeatable, although not everyone made eleven tricks.

Where North opened Two or Three Spades, South raised, and West had a dilemma. Solving it by bidding hearts and suppressing the diamonds was not a success. Federico Goded of Spain salvaged some match points by sneaking the ♣Q past at trick two. He was on BBO at the time so also some kibitzer kudos.

At the end of the three days I came fifth (bottom Scot), just outside the generous prizes, but with a free entry for next year. The winner was Tomasz Twarog (Poland) followed by Diego Brenner (Brazil) and David Levy (France). All three were top class players and very pleasant to play with and against. But it was not so much about the bridge as about the party. A great time was had by all.

Play Challenge Solutions

Jim Patrick

1 EW Vul Dealer South

	♠J864		
	♥AT95		
	♦Q98		
	♣T7		
♠AT7		♠Q52	
♥J43		♥8762	
♦J762		♦T5	
♣KJ3		♣AQ82	
	♠K93		
	♥KQ		
	♦AK43		
	♣9654		

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1NT

End

Contract: 1NT Lead: ♦2

This lead means you should be able to win four diamond tricks by finessing on the second round. But you have communication difficulties – the blockage in hearts means you cannot cash three heart tricks as well.

Not to worry: provided clubs break 4=3 you can guarantee 7 tricks. Win the ♦K over East's Ten and finesse the ♦9. Cash the ♦Q and return to hand with a heart. Cash the ♦A and the other heart honour. If West turns up with the doubleton ♥J you can overtake, but when he does not just exit with a club.

The defenders can cash four clubs, but will then have to give you a heart trick, or establish a spade for you

2 None Vul Dealer South

	♠–		
	♥K65		
	♦KQ753		
	♣KQ853		
♠KJ843		♠AT65	
♥QT8		♥943	
♦T4		♦J9862	
♣J62		♣7	
	♠Q972		
	♥AJ72		
	♦A		
	♣AT94		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	6♣	End	

Contract: 6♣ Lead: ♠4

Partner took a bit of a flyer, but your contract is a reasonable one. You have 10 tricks on top. If you can make two ruffs in hand, or three in dummy, you are home.

Ruffing diamonds in hand looks more likely to hit an overruff. You can afford to cash one of dummy's top clubs. When both follow cash the other one.

If clubs break 2=2 you can claim on a crossruff. When East shows out cross to the ♦A and take a second spade ruff. Back to the ♥A for a third spade ruff, then ruff a diamond low and draw the last trump.

That is nine tricks and the ♥K in dummy is the entry to cash the top diamonds. If diamond break 4=3 you make an overtrick.

September 2025 Bidding Challenge

Liz McGowan

Welcome to the Bidding Challenge. The problems were faced this summer by current and / or future internationalists. Your conductor assembled them in a hurry and forgot to take a note of the source. Senior short term memory loss means she cannot remember what happened at the table.

Problem 1 Teams EW Vul

♠KQJT	S	W	N	E
♥J	-	-	-	1♣
♦AQJ97	?			
♣AJ8				

The majority of the panel choose a flawed takeout double.

PIPER: DBL. A bit too strong for 1♦.

GORDON: DBL. 1♦ looks tempting, but you might play there with a game on.

FREIMANIS: DBL. Would normally strain to bid 1♦, but the hand seems too good for that.

DRAGIC: DBL. 18 points and no interest in scoring 150 in 1♦ passed out.

If partner passes 1♦, I would not expect to make more than 9 tricks. Some doublers plan their rebid over the almost inevitable 1♥ response.

PEDEN: DBL. If partner bids 1♥ rebid 1NT = 19-21. Hopefully partner won't bid 4♥ with 6.

SMITH: DBL. Far too good for 1♦. If partner bids hearts, I will bid some number of NT. The risk is him bidding 4♥, but you have enough strength outside to cope with that. I do not want to play in 1♦ opposite a moderate 5- or 6-count.

PATERSON: DBL. I hope partner is not the sort of hog who leaps to 4♥ (rather than bid 2♣ or 3♥) with 6 hearts and 8+ points.

ASH: DBL. I intend to rebid 2NT if partner responds 1♥. North will be aware that I may have a strong hand without 3+ hearts so will be wary of jumping too high with a five-card suit.

ROSS: DBL (will bid No Trump after partner's heart bid.)

Bill considers many possible scenarios.

WHYTE: DBL. Possibilities on this hand range from part score in diamonds to game in ♦/♠/NT if partner has some fit and most of the remaining 8-9 points.

I can bid 1♦ trusting that someone will bid hearts. This allows me then to either bid spades or double to show my powerful hand. It also avoids a penalty when partner has nothing to help me. But if opponents find a heart fit I may be faced with a "heads they win" when I take fright, and "tails I lose" when I compete and get clobbered.

At pairs I would bid 1♦. At teams I don't want to miss a potentially easy game, so I go for the "all-embracing" double that shows at least 18/19 points, any distribution and covers the hands where the risk that a natural overcall is passed out is too great to ignore. If partner bids 1♥ I know he has less than 8 points and I can bid a simple 1NT, showing 19-20.

Some think rebidding 1NT would be an overbid. They prefer to underbid:

SIME: 1NT. Showing 15/18 balanced. Double then 1NT over the probable 1♥ is 19/22 balanced. I have Discounted.

CLOW: 1NT. Perhaps a point too high but if I double what do I after partner bids hearts... again?

If partner has a weak hand with long hearts they will surely transfer? Now you have no way back to No-trump.

There is a third school of thought:

SHIELDS: 1♦. There is a danger it gets passed out but if I don't take an age to bid it, the probability is very low. The difficulty with double is what happens after partner responds 1♥ or 2♥. In the former case I can bid 1NT or 2♦ but both of these make it difficult to find a spade fit, and I have similar issues over 2♥ (unless 2♥ denies spades – perhaps it should?). Partner's average holding here is only 4-5 hcp, so this is more likely to be a part-score hand than a game hand, and 1♦ makes it easier to find the right part-score.

This is a hand that you cannot hope to describe adequately, so it must be better to collect information. The quiet overcall seems the best start.

MCKAY: 1♦. I can always come in with a double over any heart bid by opponents.

VALENTINE: 1♦. If I double and partner jumps in hearts, I will struggle to get either of my suits in. Starting with 1♦, I have a chance to get my suits in, and probably show that I have a decent hand.

I confess to being disappointed that none of the panel even considered 1♠! It is often the best option with this shape, though this hand is admittedly too strong. If we have game on is 4♠ not more likely than the alternatives? Give partner 987x xxxxx Tx Kx and put the ♦K with the opening bid.

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
Dbl	10	10
1♦	4	9
1NT	2	5
1♠	0	4

Problem 2 Teams NS Vul

♠9	S	W	N	E
♥AK2	-	-	P	1♥
♦KQ32	?			
♣AJ943				

A similar type of problem with a weaker hand. The panel is split.

GORDON: 1NT. Might be the least lie?

ASH: 1NT. I do not like to be shut out with a promising hand, even though partner has passed. If I am doubled and partner runs to a 5-card spade suit, the contract may be playable – aiming to make 4 or 5 tricks in dummy.

ROSS: 1NT. Will continue no-trump after partner's transfer to spades.

I am unsure what Bill means here: if partner transfers any bid other than 2♠ is a super-accept promising 4-card support. The No-trump bidders will likely find themselves declaring 2♠.

PATERSON: 1NT. Best of a bad lot. To Pass with 17 points or bid 2♣ with this wretched suit is so bad!

DRAGIC: 1NT. There are 3 important points that make this different from problem 1: I don't have unbid majors, partner has passed, and my suit is not great quality. If I double I cannot bid NT over partner's expected spade bid.

Double followed by 1NT would certainly show a stronger hand than this.

SHORT: 1NT. Completely clearcut for me. I'm maximum and with ♠93 and ♣AJ94 I would bid it in a flash. How different is this hand?

SIME: 1NT. Closest description to what I have (within one card of a prototype). I don't want to miss a vulnerable game by overcalling 2♣.

One wonders which vulnerable game we can hope to make opposite a passed

hand. With the right cards for 3NT partner might take some action over 2♣.

SMITH: 2♣. Another very strong hand but I see no alternative

WHYTE: 2♣. This by comparison with Q1 is not strong enough for a “tous azimuts” double, but I again reckon it is better to get into the arena, fortune favours the brave. If the oppos find a spade fit, we probably cannot win the part score bidding duel but can possibly push them above their level of security.

MCKAY: 2♣. (I really want to bid 2NT, but this is a bidding competition.)

FREIMANIS: 2♣. I could bid 1NT but partner will almost certainly expect some spade length for this.

VALENTINE: 2♣. Similar to above. If I double and it goes 3♠ from partner, life is not comfortable. Whenever I bid 1N on these hands, I play a 5-1 spade fit.

You would prefer a stronger suit for this bid, but at least it does not invite a response in spades.

When all options are bad perhaps this one is best

SHIELDS: PASS. Partner is a passed hand and will average less than 5-6 hcp – so game is unlikely unless 3NT when partner has a decent spade stop and then it is a misfit. Passing now and doubling spades when they are bid gives us a much better chance of effectively competing the part-score. I hate to bid 1NT and find partner dumps me in 2♠ and at this vulnerability we lose 200 or 300 for no reason.

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
2♣	8	10
Pass	1	9
1NT	7	8

Problem 3 Teams EW Vul

♠KJ	S	W	N	E
♥8		P	1NT	2♥*
♦J7653	?			
♣AT875				

2♥* = 5+hearts and 4+ minor

Regular partnerships have discussed how to cope with interference over 1NT. Playing in an irregular partnership the panel makes 6 different suggestions.

FREIMANIS: 3♦. I will make a natural and forcing bid and hope that partner can find a 3NT bid with a heart stop.

SIME: 3♦. Natural and Game Forcing. I can bid 4♣ next if partner doesn't support diamonds or bid 3NT.

GORDON: 3NT. A guess has to have a good upside!

SHORT: 3NT. Again, the least bad bid. Can't double as this must show spades. Pass could be the last call in the auction and we could get +100 with +600 available. I've gone off in games before.

Miro also chooses 3NT – but he is making some assumptions.

DRAGIC: 3NT. Assuming we play "slow shows". If not then I'll bid 2NT followed by 3NT if that's how we show a hand with no spades and no heart stop. Partner will know to pull to 4m with a weak heart stop. 4NT would be chopped (to use a gen Z expression).

I have never understood the rationale behind “Slow Shows”. It seems to get you to 3NT after telling the defence that you have no heart stopper and without offering partner an escape route.

SHIELDS: 3♣. Having a full Rubensohl here would allow me to bid 3♠ to show the minors. Back in the real world, X is ruled out as partner will bid too many spades, and 3♦ is both misleading as to the location of my strength and might

preclude a club fit. Bidding 3♣ gives better on the lead front (not likely to be relevant!) and allows partner to bid 3♦ – but it loses out if LHO bids 3♥ and that is passed back to me. Very awkward.

PIPER: 3♣. I haven't decided what to do over 4♥. Dbl could be wrong.

CLOW: DBL. For goodness sake let up! If my partner lasts this set she will be divorcing me on the [justified] grounds of cruelty. Pass will probably end the bidding and 3♥ seems a little heavy if partner has both Majors.

PATERSON: DBL. Pretty standard now for this to be takeout (with 2NT a transfer). Over the likely 2♠ response I bid 2N invitational or raise a minor.

VALENTINE: Dbl. I would want partner to know that I have values. If 2♥ is being passed by LHO, then I need to double to give partner the chance to pass.

ROSS: DBL. Can't think of anything else other than Pass.

Speaking of which...

WHYTE: PASS. Playing the more-or less standard Rubensohl I cannot bid 2NT (natural) but could punt 3NT. However, East's vulnerable intervention gives me pause. Any heart values partner has are sitting under East, so seeking a penalty at the 2-level is unlikely to be successful, so this is a wait-and-see situation. Here be dragons.

SMITH: PASS. There is no good bid here. You are well short of being able to force to a minor game. If partner has decent hearts, you will be collecting 100 for each undertrick, and if they retreat to East's minor you will bring out the red card. This would be a much harder problem at the opposite vulnerability.

MCKAY: PASS. At teams I'm happy to defend 2♥ if that's where they end up.

Mike is boldly prepared to force to game.

ASH: 3♥. In the absence of an option to use lebensohl, this clearly must ask for a heart stop. If partner bids 3♠ I hope she reads 4NT as showing both minors.

I guess I included this one as an advert for Rubensohl, where 2NT thru 3♠ are all transfers. Here 3♠ shows the values for 3NT with length in the minors and no heart stopper.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
Dbl	4	10
3♣	3	8
3NT	3	7
Pass	3	7
3♦	2	6
3♥	1	4

Problem 4 **Teams** **EW Vul**

♠JT6 ♥K9543 ♦9876 ♣Q	S	W	N	E
	P	1♥	Dbl	P
	?			

Some saw a straight choice between 1NT and Pass.

GORDON: 1NT. I don't like defending sitting under the bid.

PATERSON: 1NT This is least committal. If partner has five spades he will also have points enough to bid again.

SIME: 1NT. Confucius said: "take out partner's take-out doubles." A penalty pass spawns a trump lead from my learned partner, neutering my nine. Minus a number ending in 60.

FREIMANIS: 1NT – we have values likely in line with partner's expectations for a 1NT bid, but the hearts are too weak to attempt to penalise 1♥ here.

SMITH: 1NT. Pass is a very poor action. We're showing about 7 – 9 with a heart stop which is sufficiently close to what we have.

I would expect rather more for a 1NT response to my takeout double. Some panellists agree with me.

WHYTE: 1♠. What is the problem? Pass is a no-no, 1♠ shows a maximum of eight points, and at least three spades. Since the likelihood is that partner has four spades a spade contract will play quite well, even at a higher level if partner gets over-excited.

SHORT: 1♠. I hate 1NT. This will play terribly from the East hand and we may be in 2NT or even 3NT, which will be painful to watch. In spades we can at least ruff a club or two in my hand.

ASH: 1♠. My trumps are not good enough to make a penalty pass so I will go for a low-level contract that should be playable. I am a bit too weak for 1NT

Partner's double should promise four spades unless he has extras, when he will bid again over a 1♠ reply. The alternative removal into 2♦ is just as likely to be a 4=3 fit, but a level higher.

PIPER: 2♦. 1♠ might work.

VALENTINE: 2♦. 1♠ is an option, but I have a 4-card suit. It doesn't promise much and defending is not an option.

PEDEN: 2♦. I don't want partner stretching if I bid 1♠ and they compete.

A weak hand with 3=5=3=2 has no choice but to respond 1♠. Partner will be aware of that possibility and should not stretch too far.

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
1NT	9	10
1♠	4	9
2♦	3	6
Pass	0	2

Problem 5 **Teams** **EW Vul**

♠QJ76	S	W	N	E
♥Q762	-	1NT	Dbl	2♣
♦A5	?			
♣842				

Dbl = Penalty

WHYTE: This is Alice-in-Wonderland stuff. No-one sufficiently intelligent as to play a strong 1NT plays an immediate double as penalty. No-one.

Being insufficiently intelligent, I have never understood why one extra point should save you from a big minus. (I remember a Mixed Pairs where a foreign 'gentleman' took time out from berating his partner to ask what my double meant. "Penalty" I said. He gave me a pitying look. It was so satisfying to write 800 in the plus column.)

The majority of the panel choose their "flexible friend".

FREIMANIS: DBL – should be takeout. I hope that partner finds a bid in one of my majors.

DRAGIC: DBL. Points, forcing to 2N. If we play double for penalties, then I would bid 3♣.

SIME: DBL. I don't care if this is takeout or penalty. I am not going to pass up a rare opportunity for 800+ from a strong 1NT.

CLOW: DBL. Take-out. We should be able to get at least 3 off if partner leaves it in, if not game in a Major looks favourite but not much compensation.

PATERSON: DBL. As in Q3, this now pretty standard as take-out. I can only assume these problems are included to demonstrate the usefulness of this understanding! Note that with good clubs one passes, and partner reopens with short clubs.

Jack is confident that partner will understand that double is takeout. Others are less sure. They choose a different takeout method:

ROSS: 3♣. "Pick a Major, partner." How many points are in this pack?

SMITH: 3♣. "Pick a Major, partner, and I'll raise you to game."

.ASH: 3♣. This is an area where all partnerships should have agreements as to when a Pass is be forcing and if a bid shows strength or weakness. In the absence of such an agreement, 3♣ seems to be best as partner can bid a major without a good club holding. Over 3♦, presumably denying a club stop, I will have to bid 4♣ and settle for a 4/3 major game.

GORDON: 3♣. Forcing to game. The problem with a takeout double is that I don't know how to force to game over partner's 2♦ response.

I suppose a delayed 3♣ bid is still forcing.

SHIELDS: DBL. I would expect to know whether this is biased to takeout or penalty, but at least it shows some values. I am in favour of partner doubling a lot (to get them out of a comfortable 1NT) but I don't know if partner is balanced (when I want to defend) or was looking at a good suit to lead to beat 1N (in which case we want to bid). Partner's next choice will clarify.

SHORT: DBL. For takeout. Automatic really with a 9 count and both majors. My partner, unless too troubled by his irregularity, will know this I'm sure

VALENTINE: Dbl. Presumably takeout, but I imagine it will be passed if partner holds three clubs. It is our best way to get to a major if that is right too, I think. If partner bids 2♦, I will bid 3♣ and pass

if they bid 3NT. I would expect them to bid a 4-card Major if they had one.

MCKAY: DBL. Which I am hoping is takeout of clubs. If partner responds 2♦ I'm planning to bid 3♣ to invite 3NT

Another advert for Rubensohl! If it applies in this situation. 2NT is a transfer to clubs, their suit. Which makes it a Stayman substitute asking partner to bid a 4-card Major if held .

WHYTE: 3♣. If partner has all the missing 16 pts and a solid or near-solid suit, a double is not sensible. 2♣ is presumably a "wriggle", with or without clubs. Partner can read my bid as showing a major, both majors, or asking for a club stopper. No doubt I want to be in game, and this is the best way to get there, hopefully the right one

Problem 5	Votes	Marks
Dbl	10	10
3♣	5	8

Problem 6 **Teams** **All Vul**

♠K87	S	W	N	E
♥AQT	-	P	1♦	3♠
♦T8754	P	P	Dbl	P
♣84	?			

For most the question is: which game? The majority vote goes to 3NT.

ROSS: 3NT. Feeling I'm missing 6♦.

CLOW : 3NT. Sucked in, but I can hardly support diamonds. We might be able to scramble 9 tricks by holding up the ♠K for one round

FREIMANIS: 3NT – partner could have a wide variety of hands here, so will just bid 3NT and hope to make it.

SIME: 3NT. Confucius said: "take out partner's take-out doubles." Too many diamonds for a penalty pass. If we don't have nine runners, I may be able to freeze East out of the defence.

PATERSON: 3NT. Crazy to pass, as 3♠ and 3N could both make. With only King doubleton in spades and a third club, the inability to duck the expected spade lead makes NT less attractive, and the problem is harder.

VALENTINE: 3NT. Pass isn't an option, 3♠ should be up to standard here. However, I have a spade stop and 9 tricks are easier than 11. Let's see how that goes. Showing diamonds would be an option, but I would need to bid 4♠ and that feels too much since 4♦ is NF and 5♦ tells partner nothing.

SHIELDS: 5♦. Partner's double at this level is more than just courtesy, so we have enough for game. As little as x-Kxxx-AKxxx-JTxx would be enough for 3NT to make but if partner has x-Kxxx-KQJxx-AKQx 3NT might be impossible and 5♦ easy, I don't like putting all my eggs in the basket of nine running tricks when I have an alternative, so here I choose to play diamonds and 4♦ is too much of an underbid.

SHORT: 5♦. Middle course best. Pass may only get +500: East is vulnerable after all, he probably has some shape and we should lose 3imps. I think I might have bid 4♦ over 3♠ – a risk obviously if North has 3 diamonds, but this is rare. Playing with a very sound bidder I might just punt slam

WHYTE: 5♦. Partner could be 1=4=4=4 with as few as 15 pts, or as strong as void KJxx AKJxx Axxx. We can have a slam, or no slam, perhaps only one of either 5♦ or 3NT, or even no game at all. I would expect East to have an outside useful card such as the ♥K, ♦A or K, or ♣A or K - apart from his ♠AQJxxxx of course. So, I ignore the slam potential and want to settle on the safest game. 5♦ has a slight edge over 3NT. I may be wrong.

MCKAY: PASS. Slightly less risky than 3NT.

GORDON: PASS. And lead the ♠8.

Problem 6	Votes	Marks
3NT	11	10
5♦	3	6
Pass	2	4

Problem 7 Teams None Vul

♠—	S	W	N	E
♥K8762	1♥	P	1♠	2♦
♦J852	P	P	Dbl	P
♣AK64	?			

What do you expect from partner's re-opening double? Is he protecting your possible penalty pass or just competing? Bill sums up the problem

ROSS: 3♣. Toss-up between 3♣ and Pass.

FREIMANIS: 3♣. Partner looks likely to have short hearts and diamonds, so there is a real concern of us having quite a long club fit and, hence, that 2♦ might be a better spot than I would like

SIME: 3♣. Confucius said: "take out partner's take-out doubles." Pass might be a winner or minus 180 instead of plus 920. I ain't risking it.

PEDEN: 3♣. I don't think my diamonds are good enough to pass

CLOW: 3♣. Partner might be protecting so I bid another suit. If he asks in diamonds I will admit to a stop... of sorts

SHORT: 3♣ - I'm a simple soul. Partner has spades and clubs or a game going hand and over my 3♣ has an easy 3♦ bid to ask for a diamond stop, so 3NT is easily available still. 2NT would be natural here after my pass but I don't like it with a spade void. I also dislike pass. We won't have as much side suit defence as it seems (e.g. West may be

over my hearts) and if West has $\heartsuit Qx$ and East $\heartsuit AK109xx$ we won't even make a diamond trick if I pass!!

SMITH: 3♣. Your pass on the previous round told partner you have a minimum, so you now have scope to show your shape, in particular denying any sort of secondary support for his suit.

MCKAY: 3♣. 2♦ could well make.

The bidders have it by a narrow margin. I am on their side: If I pass partner will expect a better trump holding than this. And I do not have a spade to lead...

GORDON: PASS. A void in partner's suit is bad if we declare.

DRAGIC: PASS. Void in partner's suit, no obvious fit and yes obvious lead.

WHYTE: PASS. Partner knows a lot about my hand, I am "premier zone", up to 14 points, rarely more, do not have three spades and a decent hand. He has at least five spades, unlikely six, is not interested in my hearts, and if he was interested in a NT game, he eschewed the perfect bid of 3♦. If I pass and it makes, no great harm done. If I bid it may be a disaster. The biggest risk is if pard has a 5-card club suit and we have game in that denomination. However, he had the option of bidding 3♣ and he eschewed that bid too.

ASH: PASS. This is the ideal position to try for a penalty – particularly as 2♦X making is not game. My decision is also influenced by the fact that no other bid is at all attractive!

VALENTINE: PASS. We don't have game on, partner doesn't have a heart fit, we have club tricks, and we will get spade ruffs. Looks like a misfit for us and passing seems like the most sensible choice if we want to go positive.

PIPER: PASS. I lead the $\spadesuit K$.

PATERSON: 3♣. Partner surely has 4/5 clubs and probably 2/1 diamonds. Even at pairs I would not pass with opponents non-vulnerable. With a small spade and a club less, pass would be the best of a bad lot.

Problem 7	Votes	Marks
3♣	9	10
Pass	7	7

Problem 8 Teams NS Vul

	S	W	N	E
$\spadesuit Q542$	-	1♥	P	1NT*
$\heartsuit J852$	P	2♦	P	2♥*
$\diamonds KT9$	P	2NT	P	3NT
$\clubsuit A3$	End			

1NT = forcing:

2♥ = typically doubleton heart, 9-11HCP

What is your lead?

I must have had a reason to think this was a problem... either something other than a spade was led at the table, or the obvious spade lead did not work...

The panel politely refrains from actually saying "what else?" but see it as a non-problem. Jack sums it up:

PATERSON: $\spadesuit 2$. Opener seems to have 15 points, or perhaps 14 with good stuffing. But his distribution could be anything from 4=5=3=1 to 2=5=4=2 (with 1=5=4=3 would bid 3♣ not 2NT as responder must have either 8 minor cards or 3 hearts). There is no indication to lead other than the obvious $\spadesuit 2$. To me this question is the greatest mystery ever in the SBU quiz. What reason to do otherwise can any panellist find?

PIPER: $\spadesuit 2$. Normally the lead problem is hard: this time there is no alternative.

SMITH: $\spadesuit 2$. Don't expect many points for leading 4th highest of longest and strongest. Surely this lead is clear. Neither opponent is likely to have 4

spades, and leads from Queens are attractive as they gain if partner has any honour. OK this will be the time when dummy has ♠Jx and declarer has ♠AKx.

Has Harry become cynical because of previous bad scores in this feature?

ASH: ♠2. I normally dislike leading from such a poor suit but nothing else looks attractive. My guess is that declarer has 3235 or 3244 distribution and opener has 2542 so there is a good chance that we are not giving away the ninth trick.

CLOW: ♠2. I must be missing something here? I'm not leading a red suit or clubs and surely East doesn't have 4 spades. West is probably 2542. Partner has about 5 points so I am the main defender. Let's hope she has an honour in Spades.

Some panellists at least consider a different lead.:

DRAGIC: ♠2. Dummy's suits are out of consideration and so is a club lead since declarer probably has at least 5 clubs. So, the question is to lead ♠Q or a low spade. ♠Q will work better most of the time when dummy has 3 spades and partner has the ♠J. It will give a trick away if the declarer has KJx or in some other combinations. An important consideration here is the bidding: dummy should have bid 2♠ with a 3 card holding, so with doubleton spade in dummy leading small wins. I have a feeling that at the table ♠Q worked better.

With such a weak suit it is hard to see how the Queen works better than a low one.

SHIELDS: ♠4. They have little to spare so being safe (ie not giving away tricks) is almost more important than being constructive. Any suit could give away a

trick but dummy had an easy black suit bid with any 5431 hand, so I am expecting a doubleton spade in dummy and the spade lead is therefore safe. I hate telling declarer that the spades are 4-4 and not to worry about the suit, so I lead a deceptive S4 expecting partner to work out what is going on.

SHORT: ♠2. East should not have 4 spades, I guess, and West will usually be 2542. The ♦T could be right if partner has ♦AJ8x, but that's quite a position to take. Playing teams, I do the obvious thing I'm afraid.

A spade will likely establish two tricks for the defence, but it is hard to see where three more will come from. Tim is the only one to go on the attack.

MCKAY: ♦T. It is likely that partner has 4 diamonds and if not then hopefully an honour other than the Jack, and even if the Jack. provided East doesn't have the ♦Q then no harm. A spade lead looks more likely to be finessing the Queen even though neither East nor West have a spade suit.

I have a sneaking suspicion that the winning lead was actually a heart, attacking East's entry to his long clubs. An unlikely choice.

Problem 8	Votes	Marks
♠2	14	10
♠4	1	10
♦10	1	4

Thanks to all the panellists for their stimulating contributions. Readers will observe from the allocated marks that I rarely agree with the most popular choice. Congratulations to Jack and Bill, on their good scores.

--Panel Answers**September 2025**

Problem		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Top Scoring Choice		Dbl	2♣	Dbl	1NT	Dbl	3NT	3♣	♠2	Tot
1=	Jack Paterson	Dbl	1NT	Dbl	1NT	Dbl	3NT	3♣	♠2	78
	Bill Ross	Dbl	2♣	Dbl	1NT	3♣	3NT	3♣	♠2	78
3	Gints Freimanis	Dbl	2♣	3♦	1NT	Dbl	3NT	3♣	♠2	76
4=	Bob Clow	1NT	1NT	Dbl	1NT	Dbl	3NT	3♣	♠2	75
	Harry Smith	Dbl	2♣	Pass	1NT	3♣	3NT	3♣	♠2	75
6	Derrick Peden	Dbl	2♣	3♣	2♦	Dbl	3NT	3♣	♠2	74
7	Ronan Valentine	1♦	2♣	Dbl	2♦	Dbl	3NT	Pass	♠2	72
8=	Miro Dragic	Dbl	1NT	3NT	1♠	Dbl	3NT	Pass	♠2	71
	Douglas Piper	Dbl	2♣	3♣	2♦	Dbl	3NT	Pass	♠2	71
10=	Brian Short	1♦	1NT	3NT	1♠	Dbl	5♦	3♣	♠2	69
	Iain Sime	1NT	1NT	3♦	1NT	Dbl	3NT	3♣	♠2	69
12=	Patrick Shields	1♦	Pass	3♣	1NT	4♥	5♦	Pass	♠4	67
	Bill Whyte	Dbl	2♣	Pass	1♠	3♣	5♦	Pass	♠2	67
14	Mike Ash	Dbl	1NT	3♥	1♠	3♣	3NT	Pass	♠2	66
15=	Irving Gordon	Dbl	1NT	3NT	1NT	3♣	Pass	Pass	♠2	64
	Tim McKay	1♦	2♣	Pass	1NT	Dbl	Pass	3♣	♦T	64

Competitors Top Scores

Congratulations to Bob Brown (Clyde Bridge Centre) who outscored the panel with a maximum 80.

Dave Duddell (New Melville) was second

Linton Horsfall (Carlton) was third.

SBNews Bidding Panel Problems

December 2025

You are always South, playing with an excellent first-time partner. You have agreed to play 5-card Majors and a strong no-trump

Please send your answers to the Scorer:

t.vandelisle@gmail.com

quoting your SBU Membership number.

Closing date: 15 December 2025

Problem 1 Teams Both Vul

♠86532	S	W	N	E
♥2	P	1♣	P	1♥
♦KQ9843	?			
♣3				

Problem 2 Teams None Vul

♠7	S	W	N	E
♥7	-	-	1♦	2♦
♦7543	?			
♣AKT8752				

Problem 3 Teams NS Vul

♠QT5432	S	W	N	E
♥AQ4	1♠	3♣	Dbl	4♣
♦Q63	?			
♣A				

Problem 4 Teams NS Vul

♠AT94	S	W	N	E
♥3	-	1♥	Dbl	4♥
♦AT84	?			
♣T965				

Problem 5 Teams None Vul

♠ -	S	W	N	E
♥KQT8642	?			
♦9643				
♣95				

Problem 6 Teams Both Vul

♠542	S	W	N	E
♥A64	-	-	1NT	2♣
♦82	?			
♣A9875				

1NT = 15-17

2♣ = Majors

Problem 7 Teams NS Vul

♠7542	S	W	N	E
♥6	-	-	-	3♥
♦985	P	4♥	Dbl	P
♣QT743	?			

Problem 8 Teams EW Vul

♠A83	S	W	N	E
♥AJ742	1♥	P	P	3NT
♦KJ5	End			
♣85				

What is your lead?