

Improvers' Bidding Challenge (24)

July 2021

Look out for the follow-up to this feature that will start in January 2022.....

Problem 1 Teams None Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠A54	-	-	1♦	1♠
♥KQ2	?			
♦J82				
♣KT83				

Without the intervention we respond 3NT with this hand. Does the overcall make a difference? Not to Maureen.

RENNIE (also **MCLEOD**): **3NT** - I could bid my clubs but I think we are going to end up in NT anyway and why reveal our hands to the opposition? I would prefer another stop in spades but at least I can hold them up to break their communication.

A good point: 3NT would be a much worse bid with ♠A5 doubleton. Peter is not sure that there will be enough tricks.

Our NT bidders suggest alternatives. Two panellists pick this one:

TUDOR (also **MCKAY**): **2♣**. I don't rush to bid NT as partner may have some spade holding such as Qx, and then it would be best if she played the hand for the opening lead.

Nobody chose double, though I might have done! Partner will expect four hearts, but we can't always guarantee the perfect hand.

The most popular choice was the cuebid of opponent's suit. Russell believes this asks for a spade stopper:

FRAME: **2♠**: I am looking for a game here but need more information from partner before deciding - this bid is specifically asking him for a half-stop in Spades (Qx or better) which should ensure that, if 3NT is the correct choice, it is played from the right side.

For Derek the cuebid is simply keeping the ball in play:

SANDERS: **2♠**: 'Do something sensible, partner'.

HAMILTON: **2♠**. This cuebid is forcing and normally shows a good hand with support for partner (definitely shows support if partner opened a Major). I think this is better than an immediate 3NT as there are lots of hands where 5♣/5♦ play better than 3NT. I can't double with only three Hearts.

Steve considers that a jump is necessary to force to game, though many players give the jump cue a different meaning.

MALE: **3♠**. A difficult choice of bids, a simple 2♣, 3NT with only 1 spade stop? Or ask partner for a spade stopper and right side the contract? With 13 HCP I want to be in game'

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
2♠	3	10
2♣	2	9
3NT	2	6
2NT	1	5
3♠	1	4

Partner held T 95 AQ954 A9742. A routine spade lead means you need to take a good view in diamonds if you bid 3NT. 5 of either minor is rather easier to play.

Problem 2 Teams EW Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠KJT763			1♦	P
♥3	1♠	P	2♣	P
♦Q3	?			
♣J643				

Four panellists have had enough of this auction.

MCKAY (also **SANDERS**): **PASS**. We should get a plus score this way – it is teams and game looks very unlikely.

RENNIE (similarly **FRAME**): **PASS** - I would like to repeat my Spades because I think they are lovely but with so few HCP I don't want to encourage partner after his minimum bid of 2♣.

The Acol system is built on the concept of the Limit Bid. Wherever possible we simplify the auction by choosing a bid that describes our values within a narrow range. Raising partner, rebidding a suit, and many NT bids are Limit Bids. But introducing a new suit is **not** limited. Here partner may be quite strong, but not strong enough for a game-forcing jump rebid of 3♣. What would he bid with Qx xx AKxx KQxx?

On this sort of auction it is a good idea to give partner another chance if possible. What is the best move?

MALE: (Similarly **EDMOND**) **2♠**. The choice is to pass 2♣, (not good enough to bid 3♣), to repeat this OK spade suit, or to give false preference to 2♦.

Danny has tactical considerations.

HAMILTON: **3♣**. Keeps bidding open as there is some chance of game, also makes it harder for opponents to come in and bid Hearts

And Jim is quite optimistic.

TUDOR: **3♠**. Invitational. The club fit plus the Qx in partner's diamond suit potentially improves my hand if partner has a partial fit for spades.

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
Pass	4	10
2♠	3	9
3♣	1	8
3♠	1	7
4♠	0	4

Partner held 5 K72 AJ976 AKQT, a nice hand but not worth a game-forcing 3♣. Over 2♠ he will probably bid 2NT, which you can remove to 3♣. A good time to be pessimistic.

Problem 3 Teams All Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠KJ53		P	P	P
♥AKJ9754	1♥	P	1NT	P
♦A4	?			
♣-				

This one was less controversial. The majority simply blasts game:

EDMOND (similarly **MCKAY** and **TUDOR**): **4♥**. I have around 8 playing tricks and don't see how partner can have more than two. So a meagre (to some) 4♥.

Some worry about missing slam:

FRAME: (similarly **MALE**): **4♥**: I'm tempted to venture 4♣ (a self-agreeing splinter) or 2♠ (a reverse into partner's "impossible" suit) but either of these choices may well be misinterpreted by my long-suffering partner so I'll settle for

what should be a safe game rather than strive for what may turn out to be a comfortable slam if he holds the right cards.

MCLEOD: 4♥. No point investigating spades when partner can't have more than three of them. Hearts is where you want to play. But at what level? If partner has the right cards, 6♥ could be a laydown. If they have the wrong cards (♠K/Q etc), even Game might not make. Even if you have some kind of Blackwood option here, what decisive information have you gained when partner replies that they have 1 Ace? 4♥ is going to be the best contract most of the time, so let's play the percentages and trust partner to make a move with 2 Aces.

Derek would not have started from here.

SANDERS: 4♥. Should have opened 2♣ in the first place to get across the strength of our hand.

The hand does meet the criteria for a Strong Two but there is no danger that 1♥ will be passed out. With such a distributional hand there is a risk that a 2♣ opener will goad opponents into serious pre-emption. How will you feel when the auction comes back to you at five of a minor?

Danny thought he should look for more information. The reverse into a suit partner cannot have is initially a long suit game try; it may turn into a slam try if partner co-operates.

HAMILTON: 2♠. Tempting to splinter with 4♣ but that won't help us find out about the ♠A. After 2♠ we can bid 4♥ or jump to 4♣ next round and partner might be able to evaluate their hand better (we are always playing in Hearts, partner can't have four spades with their 1NT response).

Maureen was alone in settling for a game invitation. Perhaps she, like me, has painful memories of the times when partner had the wrong cards.

RENNIE: 3♥. I have enough to reverse and bid my Spades but Partner's bid of 1NT has denied a 4-card spade holding so instead I invite game.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
4♥	7	10
2♠	1	9
3♥	1	6
3♠	0	4
6♥	0	2
2♥	0	2

Partner held A98 T8 QJ6 QT932, enough to make 4♥ a comfortable contract, not enough for slam.

Problem 4 Teams All Vul

	N	E	S	W
♠KT543	1♠	P	4♠	P
♥AK864	?			
♦A2				
♣K				

To move or not to move? The answer seems to depend on what you expect from partner's bid.

MALE: PASS. Partner's 4♠ bid is 5 spades and very little else.

5-card majorities are encouraged to raise to game on any hand that can guarantee a 10-card major suit fit. But in SBU standard, where 1♠ may be bid with only 4 cards, we describe the game raise as 'distributional': under strength in high cards, but with lots of ruffing values.

EDMOND (similarly **SANDERS**): PASS. Trusting partner's sign off (perhaps a weak freak). I shall be upset if he has both missing Aces.

There are two questions to ask before looking for slam.

1 Can partner have a perfect minimum?

Axxxxx xx xx xxx looks good enough.

2 If partner has no Aces are we safe at the 5-level?

Partner might have QJxxx xxx QJxx x.

So it all boils down to temperament! Which hurts more: missing a good slam or getting too high at the 5-level?

A small majority move on, mostly via Blackwood.

MCLEOD: 4NT. I know partner's hand is probably lacking in HCPs, but I might not need more than 6. Unlike the previous hand, partner's response to 4NT will tell me a lot here. 1 Ace is enough to have legitimate hope that there will only be 1 loser, no matter what suit they hold it in. Does this cover all the bases? No. But this route will tell me whether slam is with the odds or not. You don't have the opportunity to find out what you want to know by cue bidding here.

TUDOR (supported by **FRAME**, **HAMILTON** and **RENNIE**): 4NT. The raise to 4♠ is based on distribution with few points, so I'm not that confident in pushing on. But passing would be just a little too cowardly.

Tim finds an alternative approach:

MCKAY: 5♣. Cuebid. Partner is not strong but if she has the ♦K and an Ace we want to be in slam. Having said that we will be worried that partner has 3 small hearts.

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
4NT	5	10
5♣	1	9
Pass	3	7
6♠	0	2

Partner held AQ9863 T53 K T76, which makes this a rather fine slam. Drawing trump will not detain us long, and dummy's third heart can be discarded on the ♦A.

July Top Scores

Congratulations to all who scored 30 or more

4Star Master		
Kath Russell	Powmill	35
3Star Master		
Ken Blake	Hamilton	33
2Star Master		
Janet Unsworth	Carlton	37
Walter Freedman	Maccabi	36
Bill Crighton	Banchory	35
Alisdair Adam	Direct	33
Will Iles	Stewartry	32
1Star Master		
Louis Glekin	Maccabi	37
Roy Heanes	New Melville	31
Master		
David King	Berwick	38
Louis Moore	Berwick	38
Anne Murdoch	Kilwinning	38
Brian Rattray	Oban	34
Robin MacPherson	New Melville	33
Ian Harvie	Hamilton	32
Norma Kerr	Carlton	31
Jane Smithson	Berwick	31
Pamela Warner	New Melville	31
District Master		
Alistair Smillie	Moray	36
Alastair Kerr	New Melville	35
Quentin Stephens	Aberdeen	35
Joan Cargill	Montrose	34
Jan King	Dollar	33
John Smithson	Berwick	33
Local Master		
May Armour	Kyle	37
Micola Corbyn	Berwick	35
Angela Ford	Maccabi	35
Brenda Leith	Perth	35
Jack Silverstone	GBC	34
Douglas Woodburn	Doon	32
Paul Kerr	Troon	32
Club Master		
Anne Cairns	Buchanan	38
Jim Neil	Stirling&Union	37
Miles Harrison	Stirling&Union	36
Jonathan File	Dundee	35
Maureen Taggart	Johnstone	35
James Campbell	Ardeer	34
Davan Cutler	Ormiston	34
Ivor Glynn	New Melville	34
Angela Horsfall	Carlton	33
Marie Millar	Johnstone	33
Keith Smith	New Melville	33
Ella Montgomery	Kilwinning	32
Stuart Reid	Stirling&Union	32
Liz MacPherson	Kirkcudbright	31
Tony Pitchforth	Dundee	30