

District 8 Solvers Forum

by Karen Walker, Champaign IL

1. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—		?

What is your call as South holding:
S-10 H-Q107 D-AJ94 C-KQ1075 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
1C	100	9	54
1D	80	6	30
Pass	60	1	16

Our regular moderator, Tom Kniest, was in the midst of moving to a new house when this issue was going to press, so he called on me to sub. He and his computer were sitting on packing cartons when he sent in his bids.

Steve Babin of Normal IL, suggested our first problem, which focuses more on your rebid strategy than on the actual opening bid. Steve and several panelists chose to handle this awkward situation by starting with 1D:

KC JONES: "1D. With 4-5 in the minors, you open 1D, prepared to bid 2C over the anticipated 1S response. 1C is preferred only when the diamond honors are much weaker than the clubs."

Kimmel offers the argument for the "prepared" 1D. This approach was pretty much the standard 20 years ago, but the thinking seems to be changing.

KESSLER: "1C. With a singleton spade honor, I can rebid 1NT over 1S. With a small singleton spade, I'd open the dreaded 1D and rebid 2C."

RABIDEAU: "1C. After years of opening 1D with this and getting preferred, on too many occasions, to my 4-2 fit, I open and rebid clubs. Holding bad clubs, though, I'd start with 1D."

For others, the quality of the club suit wasn't a factor:

BERNHARD: "1C. Over 1S, I'll rebid 1NT. Over 1H, I'll raise to 2H."

FEILER: "1C. It's misguided to open 1D with the idea of rebidding 2C

over a 1S response. First, 2C bypasses 1NT, which may be your best spot. Second, partner will convert your 2C rebid to 2D when he has equal length."

This is really a "least of evils" decision. Whether you open 1C or 1D, if partner bids the expected 1H or 1S, you're going to have to skew your distribution. If you open 1C and partner bids 1S, 2C lies about a club and 1NT lies about a spade. If he bids 1H, you're one trump short for a 2H raise. However, opening 1D and rebidding 2C suggests 5-4 the other way, so it lies about a club **and** a diamond.

I think the last time I opened 1D with 4-5 in the minors was during the Reagan administration, about the same time I last rebid a 5-card club suit. Like Feiler and Bernhard, I don't really find this that awkward. If partner responds 1H, I have a good dummy for hearts. If he bids 1S, my hand screams no trump.

It is, of course, helpful if partner cooperates. If you advocate 1D-then-2C with a 4-5 hand, partner should think twice about retreating to 2D with a doubleton. If you're a 1C-1NT type, he'd better not insist on rebidding a 5-card spade suit.

POPKIN: "1D. I really prefer opening 1C and rebidding 1NT, but my partners don't like it, so I don't do it."

Time to train your partners, Nancy. After they declare a few 2S contracts with Qxxxx opposite a stiff, they'll stop rebidding those bad spade suits.

2. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1C	1S	DBL
2S	Pass	Pass	DBL
Pass	2NT	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-3 H-K1042 D-K10953 C-AQ4 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
Pass	100	8	28
3D	80	3	16
3C	80	1	15
3NT	70	3	39
3S	70	1	2

And you thought our panel was aggressive? It's true that most of us usu-

ally need only the palest of red flags to go for game, but 3/4 of the panel decided to put the brakes on here.

The stiff spade talked some into retreating to 3C or 3D. Most thought partner would pass this, but a few hoped the auction would continue:

KESSLER: "3D. The fifth diamond, club fit, stiff spade and heart control point to being aggressive. If partner's spade stopper is Jxxx, then we probably have a minor-suit game."

FEILER: "3C. Partner should do something intelligent."

Half the panel decided to leave partner no such options:

DODD: "Pass. Only at matchpoints would I do something this crazy-looking. What's better? Pull to 3C or 3D in a likely 7-card fit? Cite Hamman's Law and bid 3NT, hoping for a second stopper and minor-suit fillers? Most will think opener opposite opener equals some game somewhere, but this just doesn't feel like game."

ATHY: "Pass. Sure, 3NT might make and even 3C could be the winner, but pass rates to go plus. And isn't that the essence of matchpoints?"

Our more bullish panelists saw the red flag and went right to game:

RABIDEAU: "3NT. I consider this a full opening bid. That diamond suit is worth about 4.66 points. That doesn't guarantee a make, but I like my odds."

At IMPs, like it or not, we'd all bid 3NT. But at matchpoints, we have more license to show great optimism or pessimism. The majority opted for the latter, citing the spade weakness, lack of aces and only one top honor in our long suit. If that's not enough to dampen your game hopes, consider:

CURTIS: "Pass. A case of partnership trust. You've shown a hand worth 10+ points, and he bid only 2NT. He probably doesn't have two stoppers, else he would leave the double in. I can't see us taking 9 tricks before they win an outside trick and run 4 spades."

Tony's point should be the deciding factor here. You showed values with

the reopening double, so partner had the option of jumping to 3NT if he thought he had the right hand. If you're determined to try for game, though, here's an approach I like:

FOGEL: "3S. You want to play 3NT if partner is serious about his spade stop. Otherwise, you get to play 4C."

3S here should show some doubt about 3NT and ask partner for a second stopper. I'd like to have a little more for this, but it does offer a more accurate way to assess your chances. The downside is you may end up in a 7-card fit at the 4-level -- not usually your dream matchpoint spot.

3. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1D
Pass	Pass	1S	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-AKQ H-AJ102 D-AJ764 C-3 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
1NT	100	8	20
DBL	80	5	24
2H	70	2	37
Pass	70	0	10
2D	60	1	6

Regarding notrump rebids, the panel's motto for this set seems to be "Singleton, Schingleton". As in Problem 1, the plurality sees a notrump hand here and that's what they bid, undeterred by that stiff club.

DODD: "1NT. IMPs or matchpoints, this is worth another peep. Not to be too optimistic (North always has a mess of clubs when I bid this way!), but we've got rather good game chances opposite a couple of red queens or even a red king and heart length."

Although a case can be made for laying in the weeds and passing, our panel was unanimous on the need to act here. The Solvers' first choice was:

ATHY: "2H. Pass is no good, and double and 1NT will probably get you 2C. 2H seems to be the obvious bid. If 2D was the max, you just passed it by."

You also just passed up 1NT. The other problem with 2H is that it gives

partner a picture of a big red-suiter. With such weak diamonds and almost half your points in spades, that's not the message you want to send. About half the time, partner will retreat to 3D, and it's not going to be much fun trying to take 9 tricks opposite xxx.

If you took the 1NT card out of my bidding box, I'd go with:

PAULO: "Double, to suggest hearts. I'll rebid a quiet 2D over the likely 2C."

POPKIN: "Double. LHO figures to have a string of clubs, which he'll probably lead if I bid notrump. If partner bids 2C, I'll bid 2D."

It's "Singleton, Schmingleton", even for the takeout doublers. As they point out, though, the stiff club presents no great danger, since you have room to pull 2C to 2D. This gets across the idea of a red-suited hand and, unlike 2H, it assures you can stop at the 2-level.

4. Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1C	1H	2H
3H	Pass	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:

S-KQ5 H-63 D-10872 C-AQ97 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
DBL	100	10	24
Pass	80	3	52
3S	70	2	6
4C	60	1	18

We face this type of situation almost every session. We're having a nice, constructive auction, and the opponents go and outbid us. Even worse, we have the strong feeling they've found their optimum spot (why does it seem they **always** have a higher-ranking suit than ours?) and our chances for even an average aren't looking good.

Yes, it's annoying when your opponents bid well against you. But as our panel shows, matchpoint players don't like to take this treatment lying down:

FEILER: "Double. Pass won't produce a good score, and bidding is likely to produce a minus. Double doesn't come with any guarantees either. I'm crossing my fingers under the table."

MERRITT: "Double. It's matchpoints, so I'm shooting for +200 ... or shooting myself in the foot."

DODD: "Double. Nothing else is even remotely tempting. A bump to the 4-level, red, with all these losers? A timid pass? I'd bet that -140 and -730 will score equally 'well'."

There's a fatalism present in almost all the doublers' comments. We all know full well that 3H could be cold, but we're going for the jugular anyway because there's little to lose. If we pass, we expect an average-minus at best – either they make +140, or they go down -100 and we lose to pairs who made +110 with our cards.

If we double and they make, it may cost a few more matchpoints, but it probably won't even be a zero, since other pairs will double if they face this same problem. But if we double and go +200, we rate to gain a bushel of matchpoints.

This panelist thought he was forced to do something:

ATHY: "Double. I feel the initial cuebid promises one more bid. Thus, I'll balance with a double and accept most actions by partner. Pass could be right, but if partner was waiting to hear my second call, then I've violated the system."

If you double, I'd be very surprised if partner took any action other than pass. His pass of 3H suggests a minimum – he surely would have acted if with a maximum and/or a good hand for 4C – so where can he go if you double? You should be able to pass here, too, which is what I'd do at IMPs. Your cuebid showed invitational-or-better values, and you'd usually want to bid on only if you had the "or better" hand.

Almost no one was willing to be stampered into 4C, but some were willing to settle for the compromise:

CURTIS: "Pass. I know I'm being wimpy, but it looks like we have two heart losers and 1-3 diamond losers. Although my honors are concentrated in partner's suits, I'm loathe to bid 3S on a 4-3, and 4C just doesn't seem right."

There were varying opinions on the meaning of 3S. Some thought it was non-forcing – that since you denied 4 spades (no negative double), it would give partner the option of passing if he had 4 spades. However, 3S should be forcing and interpreted, at least temporarily, as a search for heart stoppers for 3NT. What else would you bid here with S-AKx H-xx D-10xxx C-AQJx?

5. Matchpoints, none vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	1S	Pass	2D
3H	4H	Pass	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-1052 H-K10 D-AQJ97 C-AJ3?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
5C	100	6	29
4NT	100	6	24
5S	70	1	4
6NT	60	1	4
4S	60	2	39

Everyone was clear on what partner was showing – a big hand with good diamond support. That convinced most to make at least one move toward slam, with some hoping for a grand. The Solvers were more pessimistic, favoring the potentially auction-ending 4S. Their supporters on the panel were focused on that dubious heart king:

BERNHARD: “4S. My hand hasn’t gotten any better, and I should let partner know I fit his spades.”

POPKIN: “4S. My heart king is probably wasted, so I have only a 12-point hand.”

That didn’t faze the rest of the panel:

FEILER: “5C. 4H must show the ace, so my king is a good card. I have way too much to just sign off in 4S.”

Others were also convinced partner had the heart ace, citing East’s failure to raise, but partner could be void. At equal vulnerability, East won’t be anxious to bid 5H with a 3433 zero-count. That’s what the world champion held at our table, and she passed in tempo.

Whether you treat the heart king as a trick or as toilet paper, I agree that you have too much for 4S, which sug-

gests bare 2-over-1 values. Most of the panel chose one of two ways to explore – the TCBA (Tortured CueBid Auction) and RKCB (Roman Key-Card Blackwood for diamonds).

RABIDEAU: “5C. That’s an ugly spade holding. The hearts aren’t that great either, but partner has extras (4D would have been forcing), and I’m good enough to make a slam try.”

ATHY: “5C. Just what I need to finish describing my hand – a free cuebid at lower-than-game level. The only other bid that has promise is 5NT, asking partner to pick a slam, but I think it’s Grand Slam Force for diamonds.”

Yes, 5NT would ask partner to bid 7D with two of the top three honors.

MARSHALL: “5C. If this isn’t what he wanted to hear, he should have bid something other than 4H.”

That’s the “Tortured” part of the TCBA. What helpful information can partner give you now? If he cuebids 5H, you won’t know if it’s the ace or a void. If he cuebids 5S, you’ll know he doesn’t have first-round heart control, but you haven’t learned anything about the quality of his diamonds or spades.

If you’re going to resign yourself to playing in diamonds, this approach rates to gather more information:

KESSLER: “4NT. I want to find out if partner has the heart ace or a void. If he shows 3 controls, I can bid 5NT to guarantee all the aces and talk him into bidding 7NT with running spades. If he bids 5NT (2 controls and a void), I’ll settle for 6D because of the liability of my third spade. If he bids 5H (2 controls, therefore a stiff heart), I think 5S is our best shot for a plus.”

FOGEL: “4NT. If partner has one key card, I’ll cross my fingers and hope to make 5S. If he shows two, I’ll cross my fingers and bid 6S. With three, I bid 5NT looking for a magical grand, knowing I can fall back on 6NT.”

They’re relying on their secret support (spades) as the 5-level “fail-safe” if we’re off two key cards. But would partner really throw that big 4H bid at

you with an aceless wonder like KQJxx, x, Kxxx, KQx ? That hand is worth a 4D raise, but not a slam try.

Blackwood could work well here, especially if it discovers a heart void. My choice at the table was 5S, which is forcing and asks partner to pick a slam. He'll know I have only 3-card support and that he needs a strong suit for 6S. If he bids 6D, implying non-solid spades, I'd bid 6NT, assuming he had the heart ace for his strong cuebid. What I was hoping for, though, was that he could make a grand-slam try of 6H to show great spades (AKQ) and a first-round heart control.

One panelist decided he didn't need any more information:

KNIEST: "6NT. Assume there may be a handling charge and go for the highest score at the 6-level. West won't lead his stiff spade against this. I might have to engineer an endplay if spades go out poorly. Then again, I might have 12 or 13 peelers."

6NT could be the right spot, but why the hurry? You'll be preparing profuse apologies if partner puts down AKxxx, void, K10xx, KQxx. But the sooner you get this auction over with, the sooner you can go back to packing those boxes.

At least Tom was thinking past 6D. No matter how you proceed, I think it can be matchpoint death not to at least consider higher-scoring strains. Virtually the entire field will be in some slam on this deal – perhaps a grand – and 6D is going to be the lowest-scoring contract of the bunch.

6 Matchpoints, both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
—	—	1D	1S
2H	2S	3D	?

What is your call as South holding:
S-AQ1054 H-7 D-A8743 C-A2 ?

Action	Score	Votes	% Solvers
4S	100	9	37
DBL	80	4	25
3H	80	2	6
3S	70	1	12
4H	50	0	6

My regular partner often justifies an ultra-aggressive bid by saying the opponents' auction allowed him to "see" my exact distribution. Of course, the bad guys can't always be trusted, and this x-ray vision can lead to some dubious contracts, but he's right on target on this hand:

KNIEST: "4S. We're a bit short on high cards, but partner's diamond shortness gives me extra ruffing tricks. Double wins only when 4S was going down **and** you beat them. Don't think for a moment you're a lock to do that."

East's 3D convinced the majority that they could "see" the location of at least 11 diamonds. That led them to a picture of partner holding no more than his fair share of one diamond:

RABIDEAU: "4S. If partner has as little as Kxxx, xxxx, x, xxxx, I have a play. Any outside king will be working, and the E-W red suits are positionally favorable for our cross-ruff. And now I'll go clean my glasses ..."

BERNHARD: "4S. This should play very well. The opponents haven't found a fit yet, and partner could hold a fair number of hearts."

KESSLER: "4S. With controls, shape and a fit, I bid what I hope to make. At least the short diamonds are in front of the dummy, and the short hearts in front of declarer. Also, there is no lock to beating 3D."

The non-game bidders were worried about partner's spade length and the possibility of trump leads:

PAULO: "Double. If partner has 3 spades and two kings or the equivalent, we'll set 3D or 3H. If he has 4-card support, he'll bid 3S, in which case game is possible, but unlikely after a trump lead."

MARSHALL: "3H, general game try. There's just enough room to involve partner, so take it. 4S really depends on whether he's good with short diamonds. Otherwise, trump leads will likely result in the dreaded -200."

DODD: "3S. At IMPs, I'd be tempted to blast game and hope they didn't lead

a trump (West may not have a diamond to lead). At matchpoints, I'd rather be cautious as partner may have only a 3-card raise, which would turn the otherwise safe cross-ruff into another trip to the consolation."

We always fear our opponents will be brilliant in a Forum quiz, but in real life, I'd be very surprised to get a

trump lead, and that tips the scale toward the aggressive game. Our auction has been uninformative, so West can't "see" our distribution or plans for a cross-ruff. It's far more likely that he'll be trying for ruffs in his own hand — either by leading his singleton diamond or, if he has a void, by trying to get partner on lead in clubs or hearts.

Thanks to everyone who sent in answers for this set. Congratulations to **Glenn Smith, Midge Beiger** and **David Forrest**, who topped all Solvers and are invited to join the February panel.

Winners of the 2002 Solvers contest will be announced in February on the new *Advocate* web site:

<http://advocate.home.insightbb.com>

Future Forum columns will be published on this site around the first day of even-numbered months. See the article on pages 1-2 for more details.

The 2003 Solvers Contest is now underway with the new problems on page 5. I hope you'll all give them a try and help us make our new "electronic" Forum bigger and better than ever.

Please send your solutions by **January 15**. To submit answers online, go to the *Advocate* web site and follow the "New hands" link in the left frame. You can also email your answers halfway around the world to our February moderator, who's now living in Zimbabwe:

Scott Merritt merritt@shout.net

♠ **How the Panel Voted (Panel/Staff Avg: 536)**

Norman Athy, St. Louis	1D	Pass	2H	DBL	5C	4S	550
Bob Bernhard, Orlando FL	1C	3NT	DBL	4C	4S	4S	470
Tony Curtis, Chicago	1D	Pass	2D	Pass	4NT	4S	520
Kent Feiler, Harvard IL	1C	3C	1NT	DBL	5C	3H	560
Micah Fogel, Aurora IL	1C	3S	DBL	Pass	4NT	4S	530
Kimmel Jones, Euless TX	1D	3NT	1NT	DBL	4NT	DBL	530
Mark Kessler, Springfield IL	1C	3D	1NT	DBL	4NT	4S	580
Finlay Marshall, Scotland UK	1C	3D	2H	3S	5C	3H	500
Larry Matheny, Bloomington IL	1D	3D	1NT	DBL	5C	DBL	540
Larry Rabideau, St. Anne IL	1C	3NT	DBL	DBL	5C	4S	550
Manuel Paulo, Lisbon, Portugal	1C	Pass	DBL	DBL	4NT	DBL	560
Nancy Popkin, St. Louis	1D	Pass	DBL	Pass	4S	4S	500

♠ **How the Staff Voted**

Tom Dodd, Boerne TX	1D	Pass	1NT	DBL	5C	3S	550
Tom Kniest, St. Louis	1C	Pass	1NT	3S	6NT	4S	530
Scott Merritt, Harare, Zimbabwe	Pass	Pass	1NT	DBL	4NT	DBL	540
Karen Walker, Champaign IL	1C	Pass	1NT	DBL	5S	4S	570

♠ **Solvers' Honor Roll (Solvers' Average: 458)**

Glenn Smith, Creve Coeur MO	550	Hugh Williams, Carbondale IL	530
Midge Beiger, Champaign IL	540	Dave McNitt, Elkhart IN	510
David Forrest, Kirkwood MO	540	Kathy Miller, Bloomington IL	510
Chris Alfeld, Madison WI	530	Ron Sholes, Springfield IL	510
Warren Bosch, Elgin IL	530	Lisa Sievers, Champaign IL	510
Rich Peer, St. Louis	530	Oyvind Tafjord, Champaign IL	510