Southern California **Bridge News**

Volume 61, #8 September 2024 Published by ALACBU

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by John Jones



Good news! The reports are essentially all in and we have made money on the July Long Beach regional. We made just over $2000. Making money was a combination or several successful actions. Not the least of these were the donations made by several people. Some of these were to name events, while others just wanted to contribute to a good cause. It appeared as though we were going to lose money because we didn't have enough hotel room nights. However, the Hilton Hotel accepted the argument that some bridge players had booked without using the bridge room rate (they either had some discount or they booked after the bridge rate was no longer available). Kisha Cravens, the Hilton representative, cross-referenced the entire list of attendees with the hotel's list, and found 42 room nights that had not been credited to us. We needed 41 extra room nights to avoid room attrition and paying a fee. Thus, we made money for this regional.

Plans for the next regional are in motion. The contract has been signed. New tournament manger Carolyn Hannas will be taking the lead with the tournament committee. If you would like to be on the tournament committee, volunteer in any way, help design the flyer, or have helpful ideas, please contact me at president@d23acbl.org.

We are fairly certain that the 2026 regional will likely not be held in July at the Long Beach Hilton, due to conflicts with the World Cup and the Long Beach Centennial. The Hilton still hasn't given us a 100% no yet, but I am pretty sure it will be coming soon. We will likely need a new location or at least a different date. The 2027 regional will likely happen without significant problem, but hasn't been signed yet. 2028 has the Los

PRESIDENT continued on page2

Regional Director's Report

by David Lodge

The System Worked!



It seems at times as if the ACBL has an excessively complicated governance structure but we've had a recent experience that indicated that there was wisdom in those past powers that were that established the system. Like all corporations, the ACBL has a Board of Directors (BOD). We're unique, however, in that we have an additional body known as the Advisory Council (AC). The AC is composed of 3 people from each of the 25 districts plus past BOD presidents and past AC chairs. Among their limited powers, the AC has the ability to review actions taken by the BOD and request that the BOD reconsider their decisions. Historically, the BOD seldom reversed the position it took in earlier votes. Such was not the case a few weeks ago. At its meeting in Toronto, the BOD voted on 2 motions involving the Grass Roots competitions, the North American Pairs (NAP) and the Grand National Teams (GNT). The motions dealt with adding a new tier to the NAP and adjusting the masterpoint requirements for the bottom 2 tiers. The GNT has always had 4 tiers: Open, A, B, and C. The NAP has had 3 tiers. The proposal was to add a 4th tier to the NAP and to have the masterpoint

DIRECTOR continued on page2

Inside This Issue

Rank Changes ..... page 2
The Teacher's Corner ..... page 3
Puzzle Page ..... page 4
New Life Masters in D23 ..... page 5
North American Pairs ..... page 6
Stoddard Trophy Winner ..... page 6
Around the Units ..... page 7
Problem Solvers' Panel ..... page 11

PRESIDENT continued from page 1

Angeles Olympics in July, so there is no chance we will have a July regional any place in the LA area. It is possible to have a regional at a different time.

I will announce an ALACBU meeting soon. Unit reps look for announcement through your email. Topics will include the 2025 regional, the January 12, 2025 in person but online (RealBridge) tournament, and the plans for the GNT Sectional.

Exit, stage left!

DIRECTOR continued from page 1

requirements be consistent between the two events. The final version that was approved by the BOD by a vote of 12 to 1, has masterpoint levels for Open- 0 to unlimited, A-0 to 6,000, B-0 to 3,500, and C-0 to 750 but including Life Masters. It was this very last qualifying element, including Life Masters in C, to which the AC objected. So they sent it back to the BOD for reconsideration. The BOD discovered that some of the data upon which it had relied, was incorrect. As a result, we reversed our position and voted unanimously to not allow LMs in flight C. Is this the right decision? The goal is to get as many players as possible participating in these events. So when you prevent LMs with less than 750 from playing in C, you're discouraging their participation. They would have to compete in B, where the upper limit is 3,500. On the other hand, when you allow LMs in C, there are many people who regard that achievement as indicative of greater skills and consequently these non-LMs are disinclined to participate. So what's the right decision? Who really knows. What we do know is that the system worked. The AC felt strongly about an issue, exercised their right to demand reconsideration, the BOD respectfully honored the AC's request and thoughtfully delved into the issue and reversed their position.

By the way, if you're interested in volunteering in a governance role, the AC is a great way to get started. Every year there is an election for one of the three seats. And all AC members are term limited so it's not like the old guard can just keep holding onto their power positions. In many districts there are unfilled vacancies. Check with your district president to see when the elections are and to see if there are any vacancies. Our organization cannot exist without volunteers. Here's your opportunity to help!

Speaking of NAP and GNT, here is another great opportunity. Both District 22 and District 23

are pretty woeful in their ability to encourage lots of participation in these events. By the time you read this, D22 will have had their meeting at the Orange County Labor Day regional. Boosting attendance at these events will be an agenda item. Hopefully, we will have come up with a plan to promote and encourage players to get involved. This especially applies to players who would qualify for the C flight. Be aware of the fact that there are lots of goodies available: if you qualify at the district level you get lots of master points, then you have a chance to win a national championship. To this day, a major highlight of my bridge career was winning the D22 GNT finals by 1 IMP in a 56 board match and getting the opportunity to go to Washington DC to represent D22 in the Flight B competition (yes it still stings that you needed to finish 16th or better on the first Swiss qualifying day to get into the knockout playoffs and we finished 17th). So get your favorite partner and make an attempt to qualify out of the district to the national competition or get your favorite team mates to participate in the GNTs. After all, aren't we in SoCal as good as any other bridge players of our level in North America? You bet we are!

District 23 Rank Changes August 2024

There were *no* rank changes in our District in August!

This is, indeed, a first since we have been editing the Southern California Bridge News!

Lest you be confused by rank advancements announced in the various Unit columns … we here at the SCBN get the announcement notification a full month before the individual Units.

The Teacher's Corner

The Defense Never Rests
by Daniel Oakes

This article kicks off an ongoing series with a common topic – defense. Defense is generally regarded as the hardest part of the game. The funny thing is, although most of us will be on defense about half the time, it seems people would rather focus their attention on learning a new convention that will come up twice a year than work on their defense. This might sound familiar: the opponents are in 4 spades making 5, and you get an average-minus for no obvious reason, because at a number of tables, the result was 4 spades making 4. You have to move on to the next board, so you can't get too deep into the analysis, but you assume that you were unlucky to play that board against a good pair, while several of the other declarers misplayed the hand and only made 10 tricks. Maybe…but are you sure the other defenders didn't do a better job and find that third trick that you dropped?

We'll start at Square 1 but move through a lot of intermediate and advanced topics, hopefully providing some information useful to players at multiple levels. Before we get to Square 1, though, here's a quick checklist of some of the ideas that come up often. Put them in the back of your mind; we'll be getting to them.

1) The best defensive plan often depends on recognizing and counteracting declarer's plan. Put yourself in your opponent's shoes. Does declarer seem to intend to ruff a loser or two? It might well be right to start playing trump. Is declarer drawing trump to pitch losers on a long side suit in dummy? You'd better set up and cash fast winners before they go away.

2) Take this one on faith: you lose more tricks by grabbing your aces too fast than you do by ducking and never getting them. When you could have taken an ace but didn't, it stings. It's embarrassing. And you vow to yourself not to let that happen again. So you lead them, and you grab them even though you know "second hand low," and do your best to make sure that you don't lose those aces ever again. And in the process, you blow far more tricks that you ever lost by not taking your aces.

3) One of the most important defensive considerations on any hand is whether to defend actively or passively. If declarer seems to have tricks to burn, you have to take chances (such as leading away from honors) to get your tricks; if declarer needs to find another trick or two, then you want to defend safely, by giving declarer the tricks he is going to get anyway. Often, you can tell before the opening lead. For instance, if the auction goes 1♠ – 2♥; 2♠ – 4♠, dummy has a good hand with 5 hearts. What's declarer's plan going to be? Probably to draw trump, set up the hearts, and pitch diamond and club losers. You'd better get some tricks set up and cashed in the minors, and fast. What if it's 1NT – 2NT(invitational); 3NT? The opponents don't have anything extra – declarer has 16 or 17 points and dummy has 8 or 9. There's a very good chance declarer has 6 or 7 top tricks and needs to find 2 or 3 more. Now it's time to lead as safely as possible. Even a weak sequence like 109xx is better than a risky lead away from a king.

4) There are two things you almost always have to do on defense – you have to signal, and you have to count. Next month, we'll be getting into detail about signaling – when and how and how to use the information from partner. As for counting, you can often declare successfully without counting, or without doing too much counting. You have a few losers, your ruff what you can, pitch what you can, and lose the rest. Not always, of course – there are things like deception, endplays, squeezes, etc. But regardless, there are many hands on which you can get away with being a lazy declarer. On defense? Far less often. Force yourself to do the work, or as much as you can – remember the auction, remember the spot cards, count the high card points, count the suits. Lazy defenders are punished far more often than lazy declarers.

So that's the rough contours of the road map; that's where we're going. Next month…Square 1.

The Puzzle Page

Bridge Jeopardy
by John Jones

Category: Starting with U (each term begins with the letter U)

And the answer is …

$100 – Making this bid shows 5/5 or better in the lowest 2 unbid suits.

$200 – When your side is vulnerable and your opponents are non-vulnerable.

$300 – A hand with a singleton or void.

$400 – The number of tricks a contract fails by.

$500 – If partner hesitates showing values and then passes you have this.

(Solution to Bridge Jeopardy is on page 10. No peeking!)



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Southern California Bridge News
Published monthly by ALACBU, Inc.
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Los Angeles, CA 90067
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Copy deadlines: the 10th of the month. Opinions expressed in the Southern California Bridge News are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of ALACBU, Inc., The Bridge News or the Editor. The Bridge News reserves the right to reject material it considers to be in poor taste or deems otherwise unsuitable for publication.

New Life Masters in District 23
by Mike Marcucci

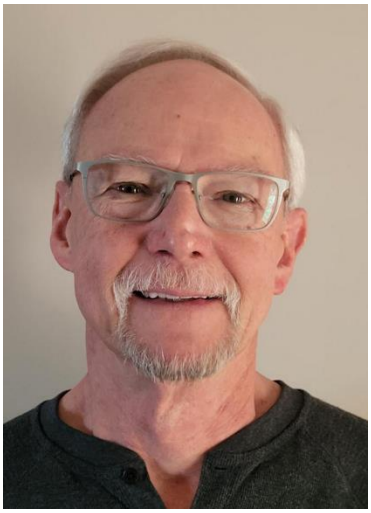
Congratulations of all our members who have earned that coveted Gold Card since out last update!



Ramani Ravikandan – Apr 23
Unit 568



Larry Trygstad – Oct 23
Unit 561



Ed Nowacki – Dec 23
Unit 568



Debbie Hamilton – May 24
Unit 562



Zorina Pelant – May 24



Leo Dittemore – Aug 24
Unit 557



Melanie Smothers – Aug 24
Unit 557

NAP District Final October 27
Reserve your seat soon!
by Morris Jones

The District Final for the North American Pairs will be held at the Pasadena Bridge Club, 649 N Fair Oaks Ave. #201, Pasadena.

The event is a two-session matchpoint game. The first session begins at 10:00 AM, and start time for the second will be announced. The goal is to allow an hour lunch break between sessions, with games finished by about 6:30 PM.

The flighting will be determined by the director-in-charge (Brandon Shuemaker), but most likely we will have three separate sections so the individual flights will be competing only with their peers.

Card fees will be $18 per player per session, or $72 per pair.

Information about the North American Pairs, including the national and local Conditions of Contest, can be found on the NAP information page at https://nap.bridgemojo.com. There you'll find a link to make your reservation request.

Remember that if you and your partner advance to play in the national NAP tournament in Memphis, you will have to play with your partner from the district final! You might feel like it's hopeless to win, but every year we have surprise qualifiers to the nationals. If a pair can not play in Memphis, the next pair in order of finish will be invited to take their place.

Stoddard Trophy Winner
by Mike Marcucci



The Stoddard Trophy is awarded to that player who won the most Masterpoints at our Bridge Week Regional in Long Beach. Winner Iftikhar Bacqi, left, is congratulated by D23 President John Jones for his 86.82 Masterpoints.

Around the Units in District 23



Pomona – Covina
by Tom Lill
www.acblunit551.org

La Fetra Games: Tuesdays and Fridays, 8:45
Individual: October, 5, 10 a.m., TBD
Club Championships: September 17, 20
Unit Game: September 21, 11:00 a.m., Ontario
Unit Board Meeting: 10:15 a.m. before the game

We start of with some sad news. Penny Barbieri, long time Unit member, past President, past Treasurer, has passed away. I have no additional details as of this writing; I will send out details via my "Bridge Alert!" mailing list when available. You don't get these mailings? Why not? Just pop me an email (thomasmlill8@gmail.com) and you are IN.

In the September Individual, there wasn't any winner … because not enough players showed up to hold a game. Sad. I guess everyone was at the Riverside, or perhaps the Beverly Hill, Sectional that day. Ah, well.

In the August Unit Game, Tim and Eileen Finlay took top honors with 60.5%. John Jones – Caryn Mason took second (for those who don't know, John is our current District 23 President). Next we find Steve Mancini – Helen Wang , then David Ochroch – Art Weinstein, and finally Judy Mogharbel – Yours Truly rounding out the leader board.

There were no rank advancements this month.

There were four "big games" in August. The top score was turned in by Mary Ann Wotring – Vic Sartor, 70.72%. In the same game, Steve Mancini – Helen Wang scored 70.06% to finish second! (I guess the rest of us were out to lunch that day.) Fredy and Lulu Minter scored an even 70%, and Nona Stokes – Ramona Hernandez, 69.44%. Other winners last month: Bill Papa, Caryn Mason, Peter Kavounas, Patrick Finley, and Roger Boyar.

Twelve players brought home an impressive 140.48 masterpoints from the Irvine Regional. The top five:

Clint Lew	30.05
Tim Finlay	17.79
Eileen Finlay	17.79
Peter Kavounas	17.32
Amar Elghamry	15.30

Here's a hand that came up last month that is *almost* "semi-balanced" (as *I* define it, that is).

But I'm not going to show it to you yet … let's test your opening leads, first. You are East, and hold

♠ QJ84 ♥ 42 ♦ J654 ♣ AQJ.

You are treated to a somewhat unusual auction. With neither side vulnerable, West deals and passes. North opens 1♣. You pass, and South calls 4♣, which they play as ace-asking. North duly shows one ace, 4♥, and South passes! What do you lead? If you lead the ♣A, what do you follow up with when partner plays the ♣4 (discouraging)?

Under the circumstances, you don't know whether they are missing one ace, or two! As it happens, I led the ♠Q. WRONG! Making six, because the full deal was:

North
♠ A K 7
♥ 7
♦ Q 9 8 3
♣ K 9 7 6 3

West	East
♠ 10 9 7 5 2	♠ Q J 8 4
♥ none	♥ 4 2
♦ A 10 7 2	♦ J 6 5 4
♣ 10 8 5 4	♣ A Q J

South
♠ 3
♥ A K Q J 10 9 8 6 5 3
♦ K
♣ 2

That's right, a 10-card suit! Well, I suppose you *could* consider a 10-1-1-1 hand to be "semi-balanced."

Against a more revealing auction, you just might find the ♣A lead and follow up with a diamond shift when partner plays low (suit preference, don't you know). And to complete the silliness, the hand record claims the par result is 5♠X by E-W down two for -300. Even if the auction goes 1♣ – 1♥, which of you is going to come into the auction????

And here's one strictly for laughs. Or groans, as the case may be. 10 HCP is an average hand, right? Well, no, because notwithstanding Walter the Walrus, there are points and there are POINTS. In a recent BBO game, I had the dubious pleasure of picking up the following 10-count:

♠ QJ5 ♥ QJ32 ♦ J104 ♣ QJ3.

That's right. 4-3-3-3 with three Queens and all four Jacks. And those terrible spot cards! Ewwwwwwww! Can you think of a worse 10-count? I cannot! Even if you held QJ bare, you'd have a five-card suit somewhere as consolation. OK, ok, *one* worse 10 HCP hand: replace the ♦10 with the ♦2. Big whoopee!

Even better (you get THREE hands this month, what luck), here's a gem I picked up at the Irvine Regional. (It's approximate, but pretty close, and exact as to the high cards … such as they were.)

♠ 1063 ♥ 8632 ♦ 6542 ♣ 63.

Yes, indeed. One 10, no nines, one eight, and 11 cards six or below. Not the worst hand I've ever been dealt, but pretty close!

Quote for the month: "Formula for success: rise early, work hard, strike oil. (John Paul Getty)



Santa Clarita-Antelope Valley
by Beth Morrin

Our Face-to-Face game is being held at the Newhall Community Center in Santa Clarita at 10:00 am on Fridays. The game is free but reservations are required as our space is limited.

For more information, please contact Ruth Baker (rbaker1243@sbcglobal.net) or Paula Olivares (paula@pacbell.net)

Winners of the Saturday F2F game:

Aug 23		
N/S	Paula Olivares – Tomoko Stock	67.26%
E/W	Alan Nueman – David Khalieque	56.55%
Aug 30		
N/S	Donna Davidson – Bill Langlois	58.93%
E/W	Kathy Howell – Beth Morrin	58.05%
Sept 6		
N/S	Donna Davidson – Bill Langlois	73.75%
E/W	Jackie Moor – Sara Seeley	59.58%

Virtual Game Schedule

Monday:	12:15 PM	Open game
Tuesday:	6:15 PM	Open game
Sunday:	12:30 PM	Open game

Contact our club manager at virtualclub@bridgemojo.com for reservations. ACBL has increased the minimum entry fee to $5. Virtual games are now available to all BBO players. Invite your favorite partner to play with you in one of our games.

Big Virtual Club Games (65+%):

Mon. Aug. 12	
Frances Szewczuk – Judy Prince	65.48%
Tues. Aug. 13	
Jin Hu – Zachary Madden	71.39%
Mon. Aug. 19	
Donna Davidson – Bill Langlois	69.44%
Sun. Sept. 1	
Ruth Baker – Roy Ladd	65.28%

Next Board Meeting: TBA

Pasadena – San Gabriel

by Morris "Mojo" Jones

bridgemojo.com



The big event this month is the Over/Under game, pairing junior players with experienced partners. The event will be held on Sunday, September 29, and the signups are fairly complete at this point. We should have a splendid game with several tables, and lots of pizza. ☺

Our long time friend of the unit Marie Nimmrich is hosting social duplicate games at the Arcadia Community Center. They're holding games on Wednesday from 9:30 - 12:30 at the community center, and on Fridays from 1:00 to 4:00 in the museum. She asks for a donation of 50 cents for each game.

Since our last column, we've held unit games on August 18 and September 1. The turnout has been great, and the pizza from Blaze seems to go quickly! Our unit games pay lots of extra black masterpoints, and are still only $10 (cash only).

To reserve your seat in a unit game, contact Miriam Harrington at (626) 232-0558 or miratpf@aol.com. Unit games are held on the 1st and 3rd Sundays of each month (usually) at the Pasadena Bridge Club. The next Unit Games are on October 6th and 20th.

Winners on August 18 with 10-1/2 tables:

- N/S: Michael Marcucci and Miriam Harrington
- E/W: Yongkang Huang and Ming Hu

Winners on September 1 with 12-1/2 tables:

- N/S: Karen Arase and Gitta Earll
- E/W: Kim Ebner and Leslie Klein

There are reasons to be optimistic about the future of bridge -- one sign is the number of players who are winning masterpoints and moving up in the ranks of the ACBL. We have a multitude of players climbing the ranks this month!

- Junior Master: Robert Hunt
- Club Master: Anne Buettner
- Sectional Master: Carol Maffin
- Regional Master: Liza Billington
- Ruby Life Master: Diane Gulbrandsen
- Sapphire Life Master: Joan Mesias

Save the date! We're planning to hold our annual Holiday Party on **December 15** at the Arcadia Community Center.



Long Beach

by Lillian Slater

www.acblunit557.org

www.LongBeachBridge.com

Sorry, nothing from Long Beach this month.

Downey-Whittier

by Daniel Oakes

The big winners of the month were Ivan Claman and Jack Rainsberry, whose 68.91% score was good enough not merely to win the August 21 pair game, but also placed them first overall in the Western Conference (75 tables in action Wednesday morning). Way to represent the club, guys! Other silver point winners on the 21st were John Petrie & Sankar Reddy, Mike Ventri & Steve Hough, and Liz & Kent Burrell.

Dan Oakes and Mike Petrie cracked 70% on the 14th, ahead of Reddy & Petrie, Kiran Kumar & Jon Yinger, and Claman & Brij Walia. Rainsberry scored again on the 28th, playing with Bill Skupen in an NAP qualifier, and Yinger and Alan Flower were in the winners in the August 7 game. Others earning points in August included Barbara Horn & John Dobson and Bob & Linda Krause.

I was hoping to get some good Orange County Regional stories from our players (though that would be cheating until next month, but no matter), but I only made it down there a couple of times, and was too busy to do any reporting duties. How about a couple of my own brilliancies, instead? Just kidding…I know you'd rather hear about the disasters, and unfortunately, despite my limited playing time, I have enough material to oblige.

Here's the second hand I played at the Regional, in a bracketed Swiss teams:

♠Q10 ♥KQxxx ♦xxx ♣AQx. And here's the start of the unopposed auction, with me dealing:

1♥ – 1♠; 2♣ – 2♦*.

2♦ was 4th suit forcing to game, saying nothing about partner's diamonds. OK, a pretty typical auction, let's see what I've got for a third bid…hmmmm. I'm supposed to show partner 3-card support if I have it…nope. Rebid hearts? No, that would show 6. NT? Well, partner doesn't promise anything in diamonds, so I'd need a stopper. Clubs? Already bid those, and I only have 3 of them…pretty sure I'm not supposed to rebid my 3-card minor. I've heard that when you have to lie, it's best to lie about a minor…could I treat my 3 small diamonds like a 4-card suit and bid it naturally? Nope, pretty sure that's wrong. Wait, what if I tell partner I had a heart in with my diamonds? No, I only have 8 red cards, and I opened 1♥. I could feign death, but I just got here…I supposed I have to come up with something. What would you come up with?

Partner's expected to have five spades on this auction, so I figured a doubleton with two honors would be ok if partner plays in a 5-2 fit, so I bid 2♠. What's the worst that could happen? No, really… what's the worst that could happen? Score full marks if you said, "Well, partner could bid keycard Blackwood for spades and drive to a grand slam." Yup, 3 rounds of bidding after treating my doubleton spade as a 3-card suit, I was laying this hand down as dummy.

Good news! Partner had AK9xxx of spades, so we had an 8-card fit after all. Grand slam is cold if trump are 3-2, or if they're 4-1 with a singleton jack, and it has play if my LHO has Jxxx of spades (partner can possibly arrange a trump coup). Bad news – trump were 4-1 the other way, and the grand had no chance. What could be worse? No, really…what could be worse? Glad you asked – our opponents didn't stop in six at the other table; they stopped in *four*. Had we bid a small slam, we'd have gained 13 IMPs; instead, we lost 13. A 26-IMP swing on the second hand of the event. Oh yeah, we ended up finishing second to that team. I'll save you disaster #2; spoiler alert – it was worse.

Shortly before press time, I was saddened to learn that Al Kiechle had passed away. Al was a regular at a number of local clubs and tournaments for several decades, continuing to play well into his nineties. He will be remembered for not only his play, but his sense of humor and pleasant demeanor at the table. Our thoughts are with Mary.

Bridge Jeopardy Questions

$100 – What is Unusual 2NT?

$200 – What is unfavorable vulnerability?

$300 - What is an unbalanced hand?

$400 – What are undertricks?

$500 – What is unauthorized information?

Problem Solvers' Panel

John Jones is moderator. Mark Bartusek, Sid Brownstein, Mitch Dunitz, Ross Grabel, Daniel Korbel, Jill Meyers, Rick Roeder, Mike Shuster, and Jon Wittes are panelists.

As always, panelists are playing 5-card majors, 15 - 17 NT, and 2/1 GF. Beyond that, except where indicated, panelists may use any reasonable methods.

1

Matchpoints
E-W Vul

North	East	South	West
1♦	pass	1♥	pass
3NT	pass	???	

You, South, hold: ♠ J ♥ AK10942 ♦ 86 ♣ AQJ2

What call do you make?

What does the 3NT rebid show? Solid diamonds (normally seven diamonds, although I have seen six or eight) and some semblance of a stopper in each of the unbid suits. Slam looks good and a grand is possible if partner has the spade ace and the club king. Some panelists bid their slam.

Wittes: 6NT. I play the 3NT bid shows solid diamonds, stoppers in the other 2 suits, and no heart fit. If partner has the ace of spades and the king of clubs, we probably make 7, but that's asking for a lot. 6NT should be good enough.

Is it possible that partner's spade stopper is something like QTx and the slam needs to be played in diamonds?

Meyers: 6♦. Partner has a solid long diamond suit and some other card.

Other panelists explore.

Brownstein: 4♣. *I think the argument here is that 4♣ is a cuebid for diamonds, that the 3NT bid established diamonds as trumps.*

Grabel: 4♦. Partner is showing solid diamonds and stoppers in the other suits, the only question is whether he has the spade ace. 4♣ or 4♠ would be a cuebid and 4♦ is keycard. We will play 7♦ with the spade ace. It may get tricky without it as I would like to play 6NT with the ♠K.

Shuster: 4♦. In preparation for 4NT RKC next. I expect we're going to 7♦, but need to make sure the spade ace is present first.

Bartusek: 4♦. I must set diamonds for slam purposes; although I will end up in either 6NT (to protect the spade king) or 7NT at MPs. Hopefully partner will be able to cuebid the spade ace. I will follow with RKC and presumably find the club king with partner. Note that 4NT right now is definitely natural and non-forcing.

Korbel: 4♦. Setting trumps. We probably have a grand slam.

Roeder: 4♦/4NT. Use whatever Keycard ask you have as solid diamonds are promised. I prefer 4♦ to be Rangewood here but without that agreement would bid 4NT.

Dunitz: 4♠. The first non- playable spot above 4 of the trump suit is 1430 Keycard Blackwood in my partnerships. If I'm not playing that, 4♦. *This seems like a logical agreement. However, I wonder if there is ever difficulty establishing if a strain is playable or Keycard.*

2

IMPs
Both Vul

South	West	North	East
pass	1♥	X	2♥
pass	3♥*	X	pass
???			

* 3♥ = a 6th heart, a poor invite at most

You, South, hold: ♠ Q107 ♥ A98 ♦ Q1042 ♣ 652

What call do you make?

This is a difficult problem. We could pass and defend doubled, knowing the opponents are ready for being doubled and almost lured us in. We can try 3NT, and will likely need to run eight fast tricks after the ♥A is knocked out. We could try 4♦ and still won't have showed values holding an ace and two queens. We could jump to 5♦ and hope partner has good diamonds. We can cuebid 4♥ and pass whatever partner bids. I don't see a great answer. Many experts choose to pass, hoping they could beat it a trick or two.

Korbel: Pass. This rates to go down and I have no good bid to make. If this backfires, partner won't be very happy.

Meyers: Pass. I'll take my shot that we are beating this.

Shuster: Pass. I think we're getting 500 here and game is uncertain. It's important to not let them push you around.

Brownstein: Pass.

Grabel: Pass.

Dunitz: Pass. I hate 4333. *(Don't we all! Going low or even underbidding on 4333 hands is so often best).*

Some panelists bid, but those that bid don't agree on what bid is best.

Wittes: 4♦. If partner has a perfect hand, we might make game, but there are more imperfect hands than perfect hands.

Roeder: 5♦ With no wasted heart royals, taking the high road. Slam is possible but I fear I do not have quite enough to cue 4♥.

Some do like the 4♥ cuebid. I think given our two passes this is close to the most we could have.

Bartusek: 4♥. My hand is too strong for 4♦ Partner should realize that I don't have a 4-card spade suit to bid this way. Thus, partner should "do something intelligent" by either offering up a "strong" 4-card spade suit or by retreating to a minor suit. 3NT could easily not make, and it seems way too dangerous to pass the double at IMPs (they might have a 10-card fit or be very distributional).

This problem was given to me by my friend and partner Gabe Foster. Gabe thought this was a very, very tough problem. Gabe held the problem hand. The opponents rate to have nine or ten hearts and some distribution. Defending might work, but against opponents that know what they are doing it might not work well. Gabe, like Bartusek, selected 4♥. Gabe passed his partner's 5♣ call, making. Partner's hand was ♠AKJ9 ♥4 ♦K65 ♣AKJT8. 3♥ would be down, probably down two. Gabe argued that partner need not have a 19 HCP hand on this auction. I'll add that he might not have a trump to lead either.

3

IMPs
Both Vul

East	South	West	North
1♠	2♦	X*	3♦
3♥	???		

* Negative double

You, South, hold: ♠ A9532 ♥ void ♦ KQ10954 ♣ AQ

What call do you make?

We love partner's raise, it makes our prospects much better. Do we have enough to explore slam, and if so, with what approach? Some panelists are content with getting to game and do so immediately before the opponents exchange more information.

Meyers: 5♦. I think I have a good shot at making it, particularly if they don't lead a trump.

Shuster: 5♦. This could be a slam hand opposite the right catch, but I expect 12 tricks to be a struggle on a trump lead, especially if partner is not the one with the singleton spade. And sometimes +620 is a win vs 170 at the other table.

Brownstein: 5♦.

Bartusek: 5♦. A real guess re: 3♠, 5♦, or 6♦. I initially thought of 6♦, but with all the bidding it seems very unlikely to make unless partner has a perfecto. It is likely that partner has some wasted heart honors and that partner will probably not be able to cover all of my spade losers. I can see the temptation to bid 6♦ to scare the opponents into a 6♥ sacrifice non-vul. Note the value in cuebidding 3♠ to announce that it is our hand and which would allow me to make a forcing pass over a potential 5♥ bid by the opponents in some auctions. Some partnerships play that if you bid a vulnerable game then you are automatically in a forcing auction if the non-vul opponents keep bidding.

If we are going to make a slam, what's the best try?

Dunitz: 3♠. Sniffing at slam. Won't settle for less than 5♦.

Grabel: 3♠. I know 4♥ is coming next and want to find out partners reaction. If LHO passes and partner retreats to 4♦ I will raise to 5♦. If partner bid 5♣, I will bid 5♥.

Roeder: 3♠. For starters! Dreamers might put partner on ♠x ♥xxxx ♦Axxx ♣Kxxx. Those who fantasize about Marilyn Monroe will add in the ♣J.

If 4♥ denies the ♠A then 3♠ looks best. If not, I like 4♥. The heart shortness opposite partner's presumed spade shortness is what makes slam possible. We may be looking for a perfecto, which generally works out poorly.

Korbel: 4♥. Let's try for slam. Partner should infer short hearts and judge sensibly.

Wittes: 4♥. I have an awfully good hand, and I expect West will bid 4♥ if given a chance, so I'll take that away for the time being while showing a very good hand. Even when we get to 5♦, I expect a 5♥ bid at this vulnerability. Hopefully we'll make the right decision over that, probably double.

4

IMPs
N-S Vul

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♠*	Pass	???

You, South, hold: ♠ AJ107 ♥ 4 ♦ 72 ♣ A109854

* Michaels, hearts and a minor

What call do you make?

Partner has bid Michaels showing 5/5 in hearts and a minor. Methods are a little different in different partnerships, and I have been known to have misunderstandings in new partnerships. I believe that it is most standard in this situation to play that 3♣ is Pass or Correct (pass holding clubs and correct to 3♦ holding diamonds). If 3♣ shows clubs and is non-forcing, is that the way to go?

First, an optimist.

Brownstein: 3NT.

Bartusek: 2NT. Whatever bid asks for partner's minor (some partnerships play 3♣/3♦ as pass or correct). Seems like the normal action. I don't think my club suit is strong enough to attempt to play in clubs. I have a pretty good dummy to play in a 5-2 diamond suit contract with two aces and a likely heart ruff for partner. Consider the play with a non-trump lead and partner possessing the heart ace!

Shuster: 2NT. I play this is an artificial game try, which I have considering partner's unfavorable Michael's call. I will bid 3NT over 3♦ next, since it pays better when it makes. But I might as well check and see if partner's suit is CLUBS, in which case I'd like that suit to be trumps.

Roeder: 2NT. Best used to show a constructive hand. My multiple bullets make me think I have a touch too much for a "pass or correct" 3♣.

Korbel: 2NT. I'll find out what partner's minor is, first of all. Unfortunately, none of my partnerships play 3♣ here as natural, preferring it as Pass or Correct. This allows 2NT to imply some values, so there's a chance we may get to a good 3NT. I will pass 3♦.

Dunitz: 3♣. Pass or correct. I love the aces, but the likely misfit screams for caution.

Grabel: 3♣. This should be to play as 2NT would ask for partners' minor.

Meyers: 3♣. Pass or Correct (I am sure partner is going to correct but I would play both 3♦ and 2NT as something conventional).

Wittes: 3♣. A natural 3♣ bid (not Pass or Correct) is the right choice due to the texture of the club spots on another difficult hand.

5

BAM
None Vul

South	West	North	East
1♦	1♥	2♥*	3♥
???			

You, South, hold: ♠ A1085 ♥ 84 ♦ A972 ♣ AQ8

* Limit raise or better in diamond

What call do you make?

We have a little extra and it's mostly in aces. The experts are not all of the same thought as to the meaning of double. Some think it is penalties, while others think it is extras with a balanced or close to balanced hand and expect partner to react accordingly.

I'll start with a panelist who chooses to pass. Pass isn't forcing here, but if partner passes it might be a reasonable result.

Shuster: Pass. If partner doubles, I'll leave it in. I'm refraining from doubling in front of partner, which could dissuade partner from their planned action.

Brownstein: 4♣.

Korbel: 3♠. If double just shows a good hand, I'd do that, but I'm not sure that's standard enough (yet).

Wittes: 3♠. Some people play that double shows a sound, balanced opening bid and asks partner to do the right thing with, but I have good values, and don't really want to defend 3♥.

Meyers: Double. Do something intelligent!

Roeder: Double. Going for 200 versus 130 or 150. BAM makes one do perverted actions, even by the standards of West Hollywood.

Bartusek: Double. They're vulnerable, and with my significant defense it's likely that we can score at least +200 if partner passes with a balanced hand. This is obviously much safer at BAM than at IMPs.

Dunitz: Double. You seduced me.

Grabel: Double. One of those DSI (do something intelligent) doubles.