

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

MARCH 2018 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

March in the USA is famous for the NCAA Basketball Tournament, aka "March Madness", in which 68 teams of youngsters from across the nation participate in a diabolical contest designed to guarantee that 67 of them will end their season with a heart-breaking loss. It's like *The Hunger Games* for tall kids. We're more civilized here in District 4: our hallowed D4MSC is designed to let a plurality of players go home every month with a "win", so to speak. A record 63 respondents took part this month, and 25 of them earned the top award of 100 points on a difficult rebid problem that attracted seven different answers. Let's bring in Dick Vitale for a recap of the brackets. On second thought, let's not. He gives me a headache.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

IMPs, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-AK62 ♥-A ♦-AK9873 ♣-J10

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		Pass	Pass
1♦	2♠	Pass	Pass
?			

What is your call?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
3NT	10	15	100
2NT	4	9	90
3♦	0	12	80
Double	1	5	70
4♦	1	3	70
Pass	0	2	60
3♠	0	1	60

Nothing like picking up a monster hand only to hear your LHO preempt in the suit you intended to reverse in. Partner is being of no help whatsoever, as partners are wont to do. It looks like we're going to have to take the goat by the horns. (I'm too old to wrestle with bulls, sorry.) How aggressive should we be in this unusual situation? Two Solvers say 'not very':

KARL BARTH: Pass. I realize it's timid to pass, but I'll take my plus-50s and be glad they're not minus-100s. Partner has five-five in the rounded suits with a zero count, right? If he can't wheeze out a double with a fistful of hearts or 3♦ with diamonds, where's the upside to bidding? Call me a pessimist but I don't see a game here.

JOHN JONES: Pass. We won't get rich defending, but we will probably beat it. 3NT our way may require diamonds to run, which seems unlikely without partner acting.

Passing is timid, but it's hardly foolish. Quite a few respondents toyed with the idea. Ultimately though, all the others sided either with Panelist Connie Goldberg (who might pass if the opponents were vulnerable) or Panelist Ed Shapiro (who might pass at matchpoints.)

A notch or two higher on the aggressiveness scale is simply to rebid our diamonds. Summing up neatly for this entire contingent is:

BILL PORT: 3♦. Our 19 points plus West's presumed 9-10 HCP leaves not many for North and East. We know it's a distributional deal, so probably has hearts and/or clubs. I considered 3♠ to get partner to say something, but he could be broke. 3♦ gives North some vision of what I have: long, strong diamonds with enough points to bid on over 2♠. Hopefully he'll continue with any sort of diamond support.

All true, I suppose. The concern with 3♦ is that we likely need to catch something in dummy to make it, even if it's only three low trumps. And, the set of dummies that allow us to make 3♦ overlaps heavily with the set of dummies that allow us to make 3NT. Granted that if 3♦ fails, it rates to go down fewer tricks than 3NT, and those 100s do add up. But, they won't add up enough to offset that juicy 500-point game bonus.

Pretty much every one of the other eleven 3♦ proponents touched upon one or more of the points in Bill's analysis. Additional arguments included:

JIM MASON: 3♦. Trying for a plus score. Maybe we'll push East-West too high.

BOB GRINWIS (with LYNN HARRIS): 3♦. I'll consider a penalty double if the opponents compete further in spades.

SUSAN RANDALL: 3♦. We have a possible nine tricks without partner.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 3♦. I expect partner to have a few points. 3NT is overly aggressive.

WILLIAM KILMER: 3♦. Fewest problems for partner, with plenty of roads out of the woods.

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood/And I took the one less traveled by/And that has made all the difference." Oh well, enough waxing poetic. We have miles to go before we sleep. Another popular way to keep the auction alive without committing to game was:

CRAIG ROBINSON: 2NT. 2NT or 3♦? 3♦ is safer. 2NT is stronger. This is the better chance to get to game.

DANIEL DROZ: 2NT. We cannot pass; we might have a cold game or slam. On the other hand, I'm not willing to bid 3NT by myself. Partner could have a dreadful misfitting hand where I'll take my five tops and little more. So, I need a bid that says I have a good hand with spades under control, but I need a tiny bit of help to make 3NT. Many good things can happen; e.g., if partner bails out to 3♦, I can use even that little tidbit of a known fit to push on to 3NT.

ROSELYN & SAUL TEUKOLSKY: 2NT. By far the best bid.

The issue with 2NT is that partner will sometimes accept the game invitation when he should be passing, and vice versa. Wouldn't North be more likely to bang out 3NT holding:

♠xx ♥KQxx ♦x ♣xxxxxx

...than he would with...

♠x ♥xxxx ♦Qxx ♣xxxxx

Against that, Daniel points out the extra "juice" of choosing 2NT instead of 3♦: on some hands in which North will decline our game invitation, he'll correct back to diamonds, allowing us to do a little happy dance on top of the table. Our D4MSC opponents might object to this uncouth display, but who cares? They're fictional anyway.

ED SHAPIRO: 2NT. I'm not proud of this answer, but nothing seems right. At IMPs, I can't afford to miss game opposite the right balanced bust. Maybe partner can help: if he runs to 3♦, not impossible since I have shown some diamond length, I'll hang him and bid 3NT.

MARK KINZER: 2NT. Balancing with 3♦ is risky because partner won't have a spade stop, so he'll be leery of bidding on. Some people play 2NT in this auction as showing a minors-oriented hand; e.g. six-four in diamonds and clubs.

BARRY DEHLIN: 2NT. 3♦ doesn't convey my full strength. I have no idea whether 3NT or 5♦ is the most likely game, but if I bid 4♦ we're never playing notrump if it's right. If I bid 2NT, there's at least a small chance we'll play in diamonds if that's right.

BILL SCHMIDT: 2NT. Giving partner room to stop short of game or to suggest a minor-suit contract. 3NT would be a close second choice. 3♦ is too conservative.

The most popular gambit, garnering a majority of the Panel's votes and about one-third of the Solvers', was to remove partner from the equation entirely. A partner-ectomy, if you will. Proponents of 3NT can be grouped into a variety of subspecies, which we'll let noted Detroit taxonomist Stevie Wonder describe. First, the dreamers who keep on dreamin'...

BOB & JOANN GLASSON: 3NT. Vulnerable at IMPs, we can't afford to miss a game when partner can have as little as queen-third of diamonds and nine-fourth of clubs. 3NT is the only practical bid.

JOHN VOLPEL: 3NT. All I need is some diamonds or the right six or seven HCP.

MARK BOLOTIN: 3NT. It's IMPs; I'm happy to be there opposite as little as ♦Qx. I don't think I can determine if partner has the perfect hand for slam (♠A, four diamonds, and no more than two spades). If West had an iffy 2♠ bid, the auction at other tables might start 1♦ by me-pass-1♥-pass; 2♠, with a club lead against 3NT now obvious.

MICHAEL SHUSTER (with BARRY COHEN): 3NT. Since 3NT is great opposite as little as queen-low of diamonds and has play opposite a balanced zero-count, we need to take a stab at the red game bonus. Besides, nothing else really describes this hand.

RICK ROTHWART: 3NT. I need ♦Qxx from partner. I'll take my chances.

WALTER BELL: 3NT. Why not? Hoping partner has queen-third in both minors.

ANDY MUENZ: 3NT. Game is odds-on against many Yarboroughs with diamond support. And, occasionally partner comes up with an actual trick in case diamonds don't split well.

To be honest, even a 2=4=2=5 dog with the ♥K might be enough. Win the opening (say) spade lead, unblock hearts, play on diamonds. West will need two minor-suit entries to set up and run his spades. If he lacks them, the contract might hinge on which side can endplay the other in clubs.

Next up, the duplicate bridge soldiers who keep on warrin'....

KEN COHEN: 3NT. I hope I make it. Vulnerable at IMPS is not the time to be timid. If you want to receive the rewards, sometimes you need to take a little risk.

DON DALPE 3NT. Seems like the most likely game. I don't see what doubling first will do to help us more than it helps the enemy.

BILL BURNETT: 3NT. I'll go for the vulnerable game bonus. I've been down four before.

RICK ROWLAND: 3NT. Let West find the genius non-spade lead.

BILL BAUER: 3NT. Why not? Vulnerable at IMPs, I bid games freely. If partner has as little as queen-low of diamonds and a bunch of worthless clubs, we're in good shape. Of course, I also think the Eagles will win the Super Bowl, so my judgment can be questioned. *[Subsequent events refute this, I am happy to say. - NS]*

Teachers, keep on teachin'....

PETER FILANDRO: 3NT. Even a 1=4=4=4 Yarborough (among dozens of similar holdings) makes 3NT a virtual lock. As for 2NT, if partner is broke and diamonds don't run, then both 2NT and 3NT might take only 5 tricks. *[Pete is alluding to the fact that minus-300 vs. minus-400 might mean next to nothing IMPs-wise in the score comparison. - Ed.]* I'm not at all tempted to double and let partner squirm in a six-one fit against potential bad breaks.

AL SHRIVE: 3NT. Applying Hamman's famous rule: if you think you should be in game and 3NT is a possibility, bid it!

STEVE WHITE: 3NT. Will this be unanimous? Occasionally 5♦ or even 6♦ will be better, but partner's spades are likely to be such that, if you don't express a strong belief in playing notrump, he'll pull 3NT when that contract best. Most often, 3NT is our best spot.

HOWARD WACHTEL: 3NT. It's not unreasonable to play North for a club stopper and a few diamonds. Even if clubs are unstopped, I expect West to lead his spade suit anyway. Bids other than 3NT will probably not reach game.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 3NT. The bid that is most likely to be the correct contract and least likely to create a bidding mishap.

Believers, keep on believin'....

JAY APFELBAUM: 3NT. The most likely game.

TOM WEIK: 3NT. A difficult problem. Rebidding 3♦ here on unfavorable vulnerability is a pretty big bid, but it still understates the hand. Nevertheless, it may encourage partner, who could well have some values. 2NT is an alternative, but 3NT will succeed opposite as little as a good diamond fit and nine-fourth of clubs. While aggressive, this is my preference.

TED LEVY: 3NT. There are as many ways 3NT might make as there are that it might be a terrible spot. I can't think of another call, however, with a better risk/reward ratio. Right or wrong, bidding contest or not, it's what I'd bid at the table.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 3NT. With partner unable to act despite short spades, I'll give up on slam. I'm not in love with this action, but if I were still in high school, I'd vote for it as "Most Likely to Succeed."

And finally, this dispatch from the Fatalism Dept.:

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 3NT. If this doesn't make because partner is short in diamonds, then I wasn't making 3♦ either. Bidding 2NT isn't enough. Doubling with short hearts is pointless and asking for trouble. 3♠ is similarly pointless. If I bid 3♦ and partner raises to four, I'll bid 5♦ while wishing I were in 3NT. So, the practical 3NT must be the right bid. If they take the first five club tricks while 5♦ was cold, oh well.

All joking aside, I can't quarrel with taking the higher ground of 3NT. It might make. It's inarguably practical. I've been down four before too -- heck, as our District's premier manufacturer of luxury compression plays, I wouldn't be surprised if I went down five or six on these cards. It's true we might get there when it's right even after re-bidding 2NT (partner bids 3♦) or 3♦ (partner comes to life with 3♠), but 3NT guarantees we get there when it's right. At the cost of getting there when it's wrong as well, of course.

Are there any other options? Our 4♦ bidders were bashful, but I'll take a stab for them. If 3NT makes, you'll likely need to catch a nice diamond fit. And, if you catch a diamond fit, then 5♦ isn't terribly less likely to fetch than 3NT...with the added benefit that you might get to a good 6♦ now and then. As for the other two candidates:

STEVE YOUNGER: 3♠. Show a strong hand, then insist on diamonds or notrump if partner has clubs stopped.

I believe Steve is treating 3♠ as a so-called "Eastern" Cue-Bid, showing a stopper. This was once mainstream practice, but these days the "Western" Cue, asking for a stopper, is more prevalent.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Double. I see four possible actions: pass, double, 2NT and 3♦. I don't like 2NT with two poorly protected suits. I do like 3♦ and might choose it if my table feel told me to go low. Double is my choice because I have a very strong playing hand, and we might have game or even slam if partner has the right weak hand. I think I will be okay most of the time even if I have to correct 3♥ to 4♦.

RUI MARQUES: Double. Keeping all my options open. If partner bids 3♣ or 3♦, I'll venture 3NT. If he bids 3♥, I bid 3♠ trying for 3NT. (I didn't cue 3♠ earlier, so it should be clear that clubs are the problem suit.)

STEVE GIBBON: Double. This gives North the most options for showing concentration of values at the three level. A spade cue-bid showing strength and asking for controls would be great, if that were our partnership agreement.

Double might have been the winning call at the table. I don't have the complete deal, but North was something crazy like 1=4=1=7 with the ♣K and out. If you have the partnership methods and discipline to get to 5♣ after this start, take a bow.

Final word this month:

BARRY PASSER: 2NT. Second choice is to put down four Double cards at once, excuse yourself, and pick up three of them. This round is easy though; the real problem is what do you do over partner's 3♥ bid?

I like it. Most of my opponents, alas, have such undeveloped senses of humor. Incidentally, to answer Barry's question, I'd try 3NT over 3♥. In for a penny, in for a pound.



Still more reports of D4MSC regulars kicking butt in those "lesser" bidding forums keep trickling in. Ken Cohen won the ACBL Bulletin's 2017 "It's Your Call" contest, as announced last month, but he wasn't the only local Cohen in the Top 10. My friend and longtime partner Barry Cohen finished sixth. How come he never bids that well when he's playing with me? (PS - Way to go Barry!)



*The District 4 Master Solvers' Club appreciates problem submissions of any sort. Our crack analytic staff can be reached at **d4msc@straguzzi.org**. Monthly problems plus our online submission form can be found at **<http://d4msc.straguzzi.org/>***