

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

NOVEMBER 2017 PROBLEM

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*There's a chill in the air. The leaves are turning red. The birds are flying south. A plague of locusts has descended, trumpets are sounding in the distance, and four funny-looking guys on horseback just rode across my front lawn. It's either autumn or the Apocalypse. Lemme check...hmm, the Eagles are 7-1?...must be the Apocalypse. Oh well. Hopefully we can stall it for another month so that we can crown the 2017 champions of the **D4MSC Challenge**. There's an update at the end of this article, and final standings will be published in the December issue. Anyone who finishes in the Top 5 for either Panelists or Solvers this year has something to be proud of, because participation is way up. In the meantime, we have an unusual opening-bid problem to grapple with this month, so put down your rake and pick up your cards.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

IMPs, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-A3 ♥-Q104 ♦-AK ♣-AK10765

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
	Pass	Pass	Pass
?			

2NT = 20-21 HCP

2♣/2NT = 22-24 HCP

2♣/3NT = 25-27 HCP

3NT = 'TO PLAY', BY AGREEMENT

What is your opening bid?

If you choose 1♣, what do you rebid after (Pass)-1♥-(Pass)-?

If you choose 2♣, what do you rebid after (Pass)-2♦-(Pass)-?

If you choose any other opening bid, no follow-up action is required.

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
2♣; 2NT	10	6	100
2NT	1	8	80
1♣; 2♦	1	4	70
2♣; 3♣	0	5	70
3NT	1	0	60
1♣; 3NT	0	1	60
2♣; 3NT	0	2	60
1♣; 3♥	0	1	50
1♣; 4NT	0	1	50
1♣; 4♥	0	1	50

Got all that? If you open 1♣ or 2♣, you also have to provide your rebid after a particular response by partner, but if you open anything else, you don't, except on Tuesdays when you get a 14th card, and if that card is the ♦7 you have a Royal Fizzbin and have to buy beers for everyone at the table. Void where prohibited by law.

Anyway, even though the problem was longer than the average mortgage contract, the Club handled it with aplomb. I only had to email two respondents for clarification on their answers. The abridged version of the question reads: "How the hell would you bid THIS one?" Is this a balanced hand? Is it unbalanced? Is it worth a game force? In notrump or clubs? If partner has a heart suit, then what?

Our Club experts came up with ten different bidding plans. Curiously, while the Solvers were all over the map, the Panelists (made up of our District's top 100 lifetime masterpoint holders plus a few esteemed guests) made short work of matters. 77% of them took the upgrade to first class, as it were. Let's hear their reasoning.

TOM WEIK: 2♣, then 2NT. Anyone opening 2NT is overly point-count focused, as game is certainly possible when partner has no points! Three or four little clubs in North's hand could well do the trick. This begs the question: shouldn't you then bid 3NT on your own? That could work, arriving at a makeable game when partner has too little to raise, but there are associated risks. Partner may get you to an unmakeable slam or a bad spade game. I choose the middle-ground auction, knowing my partners will aggressively scrape up 3NT on many weak hands.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 2♣, then 2NT. This hand offers a good play for game opposite a 3=3=3=4 yarborough. We should upgrade out of the 2NT range into 2♣.

PETE FILANDRO: 2♣, then 2NT. I know, I know..."To make game, we only need to find four small clubs opposite (or three, if they break two-two), and we should be aggressive, vulnerable at IMPs." So, bidding 3NT unilaterally (or 2♣/3NT) means ensuring we get to game when partner has 0-1 HCP with club length. But, that is too small of a target. Showing as many as 24 HCPs will keep most auctions alive, and it adds a critical level of bidding for easier slam investigation. Most importantly, we can find a five-three heart fit when partner is short in clubs.

That trio isn't terribly worried about overstating their strength with 2♣/2NT. They're more concerned about missing game when partner is still not strong enough to dredge up a bid. Also seeing extra values are:

RUI MARQUES: 2♣, then 2NT. I value the hand as semi-balanced and notrump-ish. The fifth and sixth clubs produce a 22-count.

CONNIE GOLDBERG (with MARK BOLOTIN): 2♣, then 2NT. The sixth club puts it over the top for me. If my spots were better (i.e., adding the ♣9 and ♥9), I wouldn't even consider this a minimum for my bidding. Playing control responses over 2♣ would be nice on this deal. *(Bolotin adds that if partner's 2♦ response promises a king or more, he'd rebid 3♣. - NS)*

RICH ROTHWART: 2♣, then 2NT. The two extra clubs elevate this hand beyond the 2NT range. The ♠K and two small clubs in partner's hand makes 3NT a good bet.

CRAIG ROBINSON: 2♣, then 2NT. There are only 20 HCP, but the hand has so much extra playing value that the upgrade is warranted.

DON DALPE: 2♣, then 2NT. Close decision, but it looks about right.

The Club's newly reigning NABC Champions have aspirations beyond a mere 3NT.

BOB & JOANN GLASSON: 2♣, then 2NT. The hand is too good for 2NT, and opening 3NT limits other possible contracts. Partner could have a six- or seven-card major suit unsuitable for a vulnerable preempt.

Meanwhile, for Team Solvers, no bidding plan attracted even one-third of the vote. However, the Notrump Upgrade had a solid bloc of supporters:

AL SHRIVE: 2♣, then 2NT. Eight controls and great playing potential make this hand feel too good to open only 2NT.

STEVE WHITE: 2♣, then 2NT. I definitely plan to describe this as a balanced hand. The extra playing strength of the clubs offsets the slight deficiency in high-card points and the minor downgrade for the short-suit honors. 2♣/3NT is too much.

BARRY COHEN: 2♣, then 2NT. This is enough of an upgrade, and it leaves room for partner to show a major on the way to game. I'd be in a difficult spot for a second bid if I opened 1♠.

DANIEL DROZ: 2♣, then 2NT. We will reach more good games and slams after this start than after a simple 2NT opening. We'll also reach hearts if partner has five. I do plan to decline any slam invitations, because many of partner's eight-counts won't be enough (e.g. 3=4=4=2 with the ♠Q, ♥A, ♦Q), but 4NT should be a safe enough resting spot. I hope all of partner's tricks aren't in diamonds, where the suit will be blocked.

BILL SCHMIDT: 2♣, then 2NT. Too good for a 20-21 2NT. I can think of several four-point dummies where we want to be in game, and at least one eight-point dummy where we're cold for slam. However, the club suit isn't good enough, and the rest of the hand is too balanced, for 2♣/3♣.

I agree with Bill's last point, but we'll get to that later. Not everyone who sees this as a balanced hand is willing to go the extra mile to 2♣/2NT. Sticking with the book range are:

KARL BARTH: 2NT. I get that the six-bagger makes this hand worth more than a 20-count, but it's not *that* much stronger. And, it's no fun to try to show strong hand-plus-long clubs in standard bidding. I'll mix a club in with my spades; then, partner gets to use our notrump structure to find a safe landing spot.

BILL BURNETT: 2NT. A little off-shape, but right on stoppers and point count. I'll risk missing a club slam.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 2NT. This should get us to the correct contract. In addition, 2NT is likely to be the opening bid at the other table. Winning IMPs on this hand will more likely be a function of superior declarer vs. defensive play.

PHIL FREIDENREICH: 2NT. Any other opening creates rebid problems.

I think the 2♣/2NT camp makes the better case, but my sympathies lie with the 2NT openers. Perhaps the upgraders all play with partners whose yarboroughs routinely contain length where they need it. My partners rarely extend me that simple courtesy. I'd get a 4=3=5=1 Federal Superfund Site of a dummy.

If you're worried about missing a near-cold 3NT when partner has a few useful clubs and out, there's one way to overcome it. Come to think of it, there's two.

JOHN VOLPEL: 2♣, then 3NT. I'll open 2♣ to give partner the opportunity to show me five-plus hearts headed by the ♥AK. If partner bids over my 3NT rebid, raising my expected 25-27 HCP, we'll proceed to slam.

STEVE GIBBON: 2♣, then 3NT. I normally play step responses after a 2♣ opening.

DOUGLAS DYE: 3NT. May make opposite a yarborough with three small clubs. What's the problem?

Well, the problem with opening 3NT is that partner will almost never be able to bid over it, even when slam is cold. The problem with 2♣/3NT is that partner will often bid over it, even when 3NT is our last plus score. It's a difficult hand and pretty much any bidding strategy entails some risk. One thing I do like about either road to 3NT: at least you won't be left to rot in 2NT. Nothing about this hand suggests that you're going to take exactly eight tricks in notrump.

Everyone else chose to get the club suit in first. This too has its risks and rewards. For the folks who take things fast:

BARRY PASSER: 2♣, then 3♣. If partner now bids 3♦ (double negative), I'll try 3NT and pray that he produces the ♣Q or a second stopper in whatever major they lead. But, if 6♣ is makeable, this is the only opening likely to get us there.

BILL PORT: 2♣, then 3♣. I use the Rule Of 13 to decide whether to open 2♣. This five-loser hand passes the test after adding our quick tricks [five], doubling it [ten], and adding one point for every card of four or more in a suit [thirteen]. If partner likes my club rebid, I'll cue bid diamonds hoping to hear a heart cue from him. I'll stop at 6♣ though, because I did open a little light.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 2♣, then 3♣. This is an interesting one. If partner is short in hearts or clubs, we could be going down in 3NT, but if he has the right cards and shape, slam could be a laydown. I think the best way to find out is to open 2♣ and let partner participate. To those who open 2NT, 3NT or 2♣ followed by some number of notrump: how are you going to find your club slam opposite:

♠Kxxxx ♥x ♦xxx ♣Qxxx?

As with every other bidding plan, this has several ways to win, plus it should get you to 3NT opposite most dummies unsuitable for a club slam. Partner had better have a short memory though, because in a vacuum this hand really isn't close to being

worth a strong-two in a minor. You probably don't want him catering to this relative 'dog' next time you truly have The Goods for 2♣/3♣ or 2♣/3♦.

Last but not least, the slow-rollers. When I held this hand on BBO, I opened 1♣, then reversed into 2♦ opposite my robot partner. I wish to say nothing further about what transpired, at least until the statute of limitations expires. I'd have fared better had one of these illustrious Club members been North:

ED SHAPIRO: 1♣, then 2♦. Assuming North responds to 1♣, 2♦ is unconditionally forcing, and my third bid will put us on a heart-club track if partner makes the mandatory heart rebid with five or more. I'll have the benefit of having implied long clubs, a source of tricks for slam. If my partnership hasn't discussed these reverse auctions in detail, I'd bid 2♣/2NT, preempting myself and hoping to salvage the auction by rebidding 4♣ over an eventual transfer to 3♥.

CHRIS MARLOW: 1♣, then 2♦. Reversing into a two-card suit is not ideal, but it keeps clubs, hearts, and notrump in the picture. At matchpoints, I would hide my shape and choose 2♣/2NT.

ANDY MUENZ: 1♣, then 2♦. While control-rich, over half of the HCP are in the two short suits, so I'd lean towards opening 1♣ rather than 2♣, planning to drive to game if partner responds. After I reverse into my "second" suit, North will rebid hearts with five. That will allow me to make the correct choice between 3NT and 4♥.

Last but not least, a couple of outlier plans...

BOB GRINWIS: 1♣, then 3NT. Although it's close, I wouldn't open 2♣ with this hand. Over a major-suit response, I'd bid 3NT.

LYNN HARRIS: 1♣, then 4♥. Partner should be able to manage a four-three fit. I do not like 3NT with only ace-low of spades.

I'd say this was the most difficult problem of 2017, and my thanks to everyone who provided their insights. Even after reading all this erudite analysis, I'm still not sure what's best, so I'll defer to the Panelists' choice of 2♣/2NT. Last word this month goes to an eternal optimist:

WILLIAM KILMER: 2NT. Fewest problems for both of us.

Don't we all wish?



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/>

2017 District 4 MSC Challenge Update

Wondering where you stand in the D4MSC challenge? Here's the leaderboard through 11 months for both Panelists and Solvers. Everyone listed below is still in the running mathematically to win their respective yearly title.

Keep in mind that only your 10 best scores for the year count, so the maximum through November is 900 points. The number in parentheses represents the best dropped monthly score for each participant so far -- in other words, it represents the minimum score that each person can attain for their 10th and final score of 2017.

Panelists

1. Pete Filandro	870 (80)
2. Bob/Joann Glasson	860 (0)
3. Don Dalpe	850 (70)
3. Connie Goldberg	850 (80)
3. Rui Marques	850 (60)

Solvers

1. Steve White*	860 (80)
2. Dave Wachsman	840 (80)
2. Mark Bolotin	840 (0)

* - Clinched tie