

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

AUGUST 2018 PROBLEM

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There are few bigger embarrassments at bridge than missing a cold vulnerable game at IMPs, particularly when an opponent preempts you out of it. You go to compare scores, your teammates announce "minus 620", and you mumble "plus 170". An uncomfortable silence descends on the table, perhaps broken by someone asking, "you didn't get there?" Eventually the words "lose 10" are spoken with the gravity of a judge sentencing you to hard labor. To avoid this fate, IMPs mavens go to great lengths to bid vulnerable games requiring little more than a wing, a prayer, and maybe a revoke or two. This month, courtesy of a problem submission from Rui Marques, we explore exactly how far the men and women of District 4 will go when faced with such a situation. The answer might surprise you.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

IMPS, NORTH-SOUTH VUL.

♠-Q4 ♥-AQ987 ♦-KJ9 ♣-K52

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		Pass	3♠
?			

A. What is your call?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Pass	9	24	100
Double	2	15	80
3NT	1	1	60
4♥	0	2	60

Color me surprised, anyway. I expected a lot of teeth-gnashing followed by double, four hearts, or three notrump. Teeth-gnashing, well, there was some of that...

STEVE WHITE: Pass. I hate this decision. There's enough chance of a vulnerable game that bidding would be right if we were sure of not going down more than one. Here, even with the great heart spots, we don't have that level of safety. At this vulnerability, the spade queen might not be wasted, but it easily could be. We also have no assurance of reaching the best game, whatever action we take. So, I'll wimp out.

Steve went on to say that he feels passing on this hand is easier in a bidding competition than it would be at the table. Perhaps he's right, though I feel that the opposite is more often true: participants in a bidding forum turn into paper tigers when there's

no partner one must answer to and no risk of having one's left-hand opponent snap a Double card on the table louder than the crack of a whip.

BARRY DEHLIN: Pass. I feel queasy giving in with this much strength, but (a) I think we need a maximum or near-max passed hand from partner to make any game, (b) they may be making 4♦ even if we bid and can make 4♥, (c) East is less likely to be completely messing around in second seat, and (d) if they hold minor aces they're poorly-positioned for me

BOB GRINVIS: Pass. Reluctantly, and primarily because partner is a passed hand and we are vulnerable. Partner still has a call if he wants to get involved.

RICK ROWLAND (with MARK BOLOTIN): Pass. Partner did pass. I'm not going for a number. (*Bolotin added that he'd risk a double at matchpoints - NS*)

TODD HOLES: Pass. Unlikely to win an award for bravery.

Sometimes, silence is courageous. This is a tough hand to pass. We have five pretty good hearts, strong-notrump values, and our side's shortness (such as it is) in the preemptor's suit. The bogeyman at the table is Pennywise, sitting West, who hasn't had a turn to speak yet.

BARRY COHEN: Pass. With partner being a passed hand and West an unpassed hand, the likelihood of a favorable outcome if I bid is very small.

AL SHRIVE: Pass. While it's correct to bid vulnerable games aggressively at IMPs, I do not want to give LHO a two-way shot to earn \$\$. My kings are finessable and the ♠Q4 is probably worthless. Pass and hope we go plus on defense.

TOM WEIK: Pass. Is it possible we can make a contract at the four-level after partner has passed, when I hold a dreaded doubleton in their suit, when we may not have a good fit, and when our suits could split badly? Yes, but it's not bloody likely. And bloody it could be if West has a good hand. Risky business at IMPs. Bidding could work, but assuming the significant risk is unwarranted.

BILL BURNETT: Pass. West has values sitting over me. It's too dangerous to compete to the four-level.

JIM EAGLETON: Pass. This hand might fit with a good passed partner, but it will more likely be sitting in front of West's unlimited values.

RICHARD HARTZ: Pass. Not quite enough to venture further at this vulnerability. If the missing values are with LHO, it could be quite costly for me to compete.

To be honest, I'd pass too. This should come as no surprise to my regular partners and teammates because, to borrow a joke from The Bridge World editor Jeff Rubens, my coat of arms at the bridge table consists of a chicken on a yellow field. I didn't expect the likes of Barry and Al to pass, however, nor the following panelist, who does so while making a very good observation.

DON DALPE: Pass. I know that I might be missing a vulnerable game. But, the hand behind me is probably the strongest at the table, and he might be able to get a good score by either doubling or bidding 4♦, whatever we choose. I'm really hoping that the spade game makes, but LHO worries that his partner has made a light overcall at favorable vulnerability, and he passes.

Yeah, there's that. Preempts are double-edged swords. Clearly, on this deal, East got us good. But, might not he also get his partner good if we simply keep quiet and let the preempt do its work?

PETE FILANDRO (with REV. JIM MUNDELL's calculations similar): Pass. With a probably wasted spade queen, I have a balanced 13-point hand. Opposite a passed partner, why would I provoke four-level action? 3♠ should show a decent seven-card suit with little wasted outside spades. Let's assume the remaining points are divided equally between North and West. One possible layout is:

♠ Jx	
♥ Jxxx	
♦ XXX	
♣ AQJx	
♠ xx	♠ AKxxxxx
♥ Kx	♥ xx
♦ AQxxx	♦ xx
♣ xxxx	♣ xx
♠ Q4	
♥ AQ987	
♦ KJ9	
♣ K52	

Pass gives East-West +170. If I declare 4♥, I go for -300 (or -800 if doubled). If they "sacrifice" at 4♠ doubled, we are -590!

True, and it's not like we'd be a lot better off if the North and West hands were swapped. Keep in mind too that West cannot be a whole lot weaker than in Pete's construction, but he could be quite a bit stronger.

Great Minds Think (and Write) Almost Exactly Alike Dept.:

ANDY MUENZ (with BOB & JOANN GLASSON, BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON, and RICH ROTHWARF all making virtually the same points in virtually the same order): Pass. I have a seven-loser hand and only a five-card suit. Partner is a passed hand. Suits might not split. Honors are behind me. I don't see a strong likelihood of game making, so bidding here just helps declarer if they go on to 4♠, and gives LHO the additional option of doubling when that's right.

This problem also brought out the philosopher in many.

WILLIAM KILMER: Pass. Preempts work.

STEVE GIBBON: Pass. Preempts preempt.

BILL FOSTER: Pass. If the ♠Q were the ♣Q, that would be different. Somebody used to say: when you're fixed, stay fixed.

WALTER BELL: Pass. Staying fixed.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass. It is not unusual to find yourself forced into a high variance position after an opposing preempt. However, all the signs here point to caution. Partner is a passed hand, our loser count is high, and we have a defensively-oriented holding in the opponent's suit. Given all that, I think pass is easily the long-run winning action.

Rothwarf, Schwaidelson, Weik and Grinwis expressed hope that partner might be able to balance. Shuster called the chance of a reopening by North "rare," but I think even that's too optimistic. Assuming we pass in tempo, partner will reopen about once every other pope, if he found an extra king stuck behind one of his cards.

Direct from Hollywood, it's Dirty Barry:

BARRY PASSER: Pass. I don't have so many points or tricks that I should feel robbed. Why double if I don't want to hear four of either minor? 4♥ would be okay if and only if partner has hearts. 'Do you feel lucky, punk? Well, do ya?'

I suppose that after three pages' worth of reasons to pass, we ought to give Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition a say. About two-fifths of the Club did take a call in this sticky situation. A takeout double was the runaway preferred action.

JAY APFELBAUM: Double. Leaves the greatest number of options.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Double. There is no perfect bid here. It could even be right to pass, but I don't think I can afford to do so. I will pass anything except a cue bid or 4NT (pick a minor).

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: Double. With East showing seven spades, I expect partner to have a five-card suit. I plan to pass whatever suit he chooses.

WILLIAM PORT: Double. I would like to bid my hearts, but I feel I cannot because West could have a bunch of them behind me. It's certainly possible, if not likely, that North has a long suit. I plan to pass whatever he says. I think I will be screwed if West redoubles.

JAMES MASON: Double. Game in notrump or hearts is possible. Otherwise, a minor-suit part-score. The ♠Q is questionable at this stage. Can we go plus, or at least keep it to down one undoubled?

LYNN HARRIS: Double. Opposite a passed hand, this might be a disaster, but the vulnerability and form of scoring is a strong stimulus to bid. I suspect the optimum result is if partner converts for penalty or bids 4♥. I'll pass any minor-suit bid.

KARL BARTH: Double. It's risky to jump in here, but I probably have the best hand at the table. If I don't pipe up, we might be +50 instead of +620. I can handle partner bidding 4♥ on honor-third in a pinch, but I would really love for him to find a 3NT call on ace-third and a ten count.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Double. I predict an 80% vote for this. It's not the perfect double, but everything else is far less perfect. Pass is possible and will get a few votes, but that's too mastermind-y for me. I'll just tell partner that I have values, including the other major, and hope he knows what to do. (*Chris's predictions are often fairly accurate; this month, not so much. - NS*)

DANIEL DROZ: Double. Passing could be the winner in theory, but I just don't think my counterpart at the other table is passing. Shooting out 4♥ myself seems too big a position to take. So, this leaves double. It's dangerous, but I guess we can use this deal to show our partner that we trust him to play the cards well.

Most doublers make it explicit that they plan to bail out of the auction at the first available opportunity. That's wise, though it's fair to wonder if one is that anxious to get out, maybe it's a good idea not to get in at all.

Nobody used the omnipresent F-word ("flexible") to describe their takeout double, but three Solvers used the U-word to describe the non-pass alternatives:

DAVE WACHSMAN: Double. The call most likely to get the partnership to the correct strain. 4♥ is too unilateral and could easily miss a superior minor-suit contract, not to mention 3NT by North.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Double. Let partner pick the suit, or 3NT, rather than taking unilateral action with a 4♥ call.

JOHN JONES: Double. I have just enough to risk entering the auction. 3NT and 4♥ are too risky and too unilateral for my taste. Pass is my second choice.

Representing Unilateralists Anonymous:

CRAIG ROBINSON: 3NT. I hate this hand. I can easily turn +50 or even +620 into --200. But, if I bid hearts, I expose my diamonds to a ruff, and if I pass my partner will call me a sissy.

JOHN VOLPEL: 4♥. An ace, a king, and a queen in partner's hand could be enough to make this; maybe even less.

My thanks to Rui for submitting this excellent problem. These days when everyone seems to intervene on any excuse, it provided a great learning opportunity for D4MSC readers to see when, where, and why most experts draw the line. Normally he'd get the last word this month....

RUI MARQUES: Double. Half a stopper and the unlikely prospect of partner supplying the other half sways me away from 3NT. I have too many hearts and too few of each minor for a double, but I'm a bit short in hearts for 4♥. Pass might be an option, but if West raises to 4♠ and it gets passed back to us, now our goose is really cooked. I go with a double and a prayer...

...except two Solvers came up with brilliantly novel "solutions" to this problem:

BILL SCHMIDT: Pass, then ♣2. This is an opening lead problem, right?

TED LEVY: 4♥. I hate problems like this. My hand is full of tenaces and points, too many spades, not enough hearts, and partner won't have enough to balance at unfavorable vulnerability. Can I bid only 3♥ and then correct to pass? I'll happily pay the lead penalty.



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/>