

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

MARCH 2017 PROBLEMS

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I'm in a lousy mood so everyone gets a zero this month. April Fools! Well, sort of. Nobody got a zero, but no one -- as in, zero of 32 experts -- notched a perfect 100 either. The two-part question was very tough to answer and even tougher to grade...but then, it was very difficult to deal with at the table, too. In fact, there was another achievement that no member of the heralded District 4 Master Solvers' Club, Panelists and Solvers alike, managed to accomplish this month, but that big reveal will have to wait until the end of the article. Let's go to the video....

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

BOTH SIDES VULNERABLE

♠-AK94 ♥-KQ4 ♦-AJ9 ♣-AJ5

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
			1♣
Double	Pass	1♠	Pass
?			

A. What is your call at Matchpoints?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
2♣	5	9	50
2NT	4	3	40
3♠	1	4	20
3NT	1	2	20
2♠	0	2	20
4♠	0	1	10

Bridge is a weird game, but you already knew that. Had partner made virtually any other advance to our takeout double, this problem would be easy. Had either opponent acted, we'd still likely be better positioned. But no, that rat North had to go and bid our one and only four-card suit. In theory, this is a very positive development. In practice, uh, so much for theory.

DON DALPE (with BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON): 2♣. This seems too easy. What am I missing? The real problem will come with my decision on the next round.

RUI MARQUES: 2♣. The best way to ask partner to evaluate his hand and further describe it. I might play at the three level, or at the game level. If partner has a bust, it is hard to see where my tricks are coming from.

Don and Rui are our defending Panelists and Solvers champions from 2016, so if they agree on a call, one might surmise that it's going to be the scoring winner. And indeed, the cue-bid notched a plurality among both groups (but not a majority in either), so it earns the top score for Part A. But, 2♣ has one obvious flaw. Concurring with their choice, but fully recognizing that what they're showing and what they're holding are quite different animals, are the First Family of Philadelphia Bridge:

JOANN & BOB GLASSON: 2♣. Shows a three-card raise with extra values. Over partner's expected 2♠, we will rebid 2NT to give a choice of contracts. A direct raise to 3♠ would be right on values and on number of trump, but this 4=3=3=3 hand feels like notrump.

Yup, that. Some play that 2♣ promises precisely three-card support. Others more generally use it to show significant extras with fewer than four spades, asking partner to show another suit or bid notrump if possible. I prefer the latter treatment because otherwise many strong, stopperless hand-types would be all but unbidable, e.g.:

♠Kx ♥AKQx ♦AKQx ♣432

However, if you believe that the cue-bid is merely an amorphous show of strength, and that it might very well contain primary spade support, I don't know how you can sort out all the myriad possibilities later. Partner might be broker than Bernie Madoff.

Like the Glassons, most 2♣ advocates seem aware to varying degrees that the cue-bid has its drawbacks, but they are looking for both flexibility and information.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 2♣. Asks partner to clarify his minimum advance. A rebid of 2♠ will result in my passing. 2NT will get me to raise to 3NT, and a jump rebid of 3♠ will get me to bid 4♠.

PETE FILANDRO: 2♣. At matchpoints, "protect the plus" is paramount. If partner rebids two of a red suit, I will bid a non-forcing 2♠, showing about a 19- or 20-point hand. Our 22 HCP are a mirage. If East has the ♥A and both missing king-queens, then to make game we need up to SIX ENTRIES (!) to North's hand to lead towards my hand: twice each in hearts, diamonds, and clubs. Plus, no trump loser if we play in spades. Points, shmoints.

CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN: 2♣. When in doubt, cue-bid and let partner figure it out. But seriously... I do think partner's reply will be illuminating. And, what alternative do I have? Just a straight jump to 4♠ or 3NT? Seems too conclusive without having gotten enough information.

RICK ROWLAND (with LYNN HARRIS providing several example hands for North): 2♣. Can't rule out a slam yet.

STEVE WHITE: 2♣. May as well try to get more information. I won't insist on game, but I will correct to spades if partner shows another suit because it could help to ruff the fourth round in dummy.

BILL SCHMIDT: 2♣. Hoping to eke out eight tricks in notrump if partner has nothing.

MARK BOLOTIN: 2♣. I'll raise 2♠ to 3♠. If partner can't go on over this auction, I hope we don't go for -200. If partner rebids two of a red suit, I don't know how to determine if it's a real suit or if he's just taking a preference between diamonds and hearts with a dog.

All of this underscores what you've read here before: bidding after an extra-values takeout double remains one of the weakest areas of standard methods. I think 2♣ followed by 2♠ should show a strong three-card raise. At the least, it should indicate openness to playing in another strain. If you already know that spades are a hunky-dory trump suit, then pick an appropriate level in which to raise them.

CHRIS MARLOW (joined only by YOURS TRULY): 2♠. I cannot believe I am making such a massive understatement of my strength, but there it is. Unfortunately for me, LHO opened and I have a flat 22-count. On average, partner has a bust. Practically every key honor will be offside and I can expect little to no transportation between the hands. At IMPs, I need to be a bit more optimistic, but at matchpoints, getting a plus should be the long-term winner.

RAY RASKIN: 3♠. Partner needs two or three entries to his hand to have a shot at a spade game, and if his hand is that good he will bid it over 3♠. Bidding 4♠ by yourself shows distrust of partner.

BOB BROWNE: 3♠. At matchpoints, I will allow partner to help decide. He'll have four spades, but he might have no points whatsoever.

KARL BARTH: 3♠. At the table, I might bid 4♠, but in a bidding contest I should really allow for the possibility that partner is on a zero count.

I think the hand is worth about two and three-eighths spades, but alas, the Laws are so darn OCD about using integers only. One could try ripping the 3♠ bidding card in half, but the opponents and directors would not be amused. Yes, you know where all the defensive points are, but as Pete and Ray point out, partner will need some non-trivial number of hand entries and endplays to take full advantage.

Quite a few respondents pointed out that North was nearly certain to have four spades, having bypassed both red suits. (He might have some miserable 3=2=2=6 yarrowborough or the like, as Lynn Harris notes, but if so, we're in big trouble regardless.) Our final contingent, and a sizable one at that, knows all about the eight-card or better spade fit, but they also know what 4=3=3=3 usually spells:

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 2NT. Balanced hand, opening 2NT strength.

DOUGLAS DYE: 2NT. The value bid. I will pass 3♠, but if partner shows a second suit I'll bid game in spades.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 2NT. I need very little for game, and with a balanced hand, notrump rates to be the best strain. Four small spades in North's hand is a likely entry. Five spades are both a source of tricks and up to two entries. I'll give us an out below game to try to outscore any spade contracts.

ED SHAPIRO: 2NT. Very close to rebidding only 1NT, which I'd consider playing my preferred methods (which include very sound direct notrump overcalls.) But here, I have a legitimate if flat 2NT hand, so I'll make the normal bid. Raising spades can come later if I get a chance over anything but 3NT.

RICK OLANOFF: 2NT. I have plenty of outside stoppers.

And, shooting for all the notrump marbles are:

JAY APFELBAUM: 3NT. Too many high card points to allow my hand to be the dummy. Nine tricks figure to be easier than ten. Also, I may need a late entry in the spade suit. If so, that might require me to exhaust my trump suit.

PHIL FREIDENREICH: 3NT. East opened, and I have no long suit to set up and run, so slam is unlikely. But, I should be able to make an equal number of tricks in spades and notrump.

JOHN D'ERRICO: 3NT. Thinking like a Bayesian (*That will always earn respect from the Club's math-nerd Director; check out Bayes' Law on Wikipedia if you're unfamiliar with John's reference - NS*), if I have a monster hand, then it decreases the odds that East is big. Of the 18 unseen points, 12/4/2 is a far more likely event than 18/0/0. Plus, with extras, East might have taken a second action. So, let's give him roughly 12 points. That means North and West have six points. West also passed, so I expect partner to have a queen or two.

If partner has four spades and a three-count, will we have play for ten tricks in spades? Doubtful, but nine tricks in notrump are possible opposite some very ratty hands, some of which partner would not raise to game if I only bid 2NT. (*Copious examples omitted - Ed.*) If I go down, I will tell partner that next time he should have a hand that justifies my bidding. Just kidding, I'll apologize immediately.

Curious hand, as Oscar The Owl would say. Takeout doubles are designed to uncover eight-card major suit fits. We found one, but we're possibly better off pretending it's only seven. Our MSC denizens have covered the matchpoint angles of this hand quite thoroughly. Now...what about IMPs?

B. What is your call at IMPs?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
2NT	4	3	50
2♣	3	9	40
3NT	2	1	30
4♠	1	6	30
3♠	1	2	20

KARL BARTH: 4♠. (3♠ at MPs.) I'll have lots of company on this one.

Yes indeed, but still not a majority anywhere to be seen. This time the top score goes to 2NT, the Panel's plurality. Karl was one of twelve respondents to change his call with the form of scoring, and the big gainer was simply to pin one's ears back and bang out game in spades. Let's hear from more of those folks:

DON DALPE: 4♠. (2♣ at MPs.) I don't see how I am going to decide that a spade contract won't take ten tricks when notrump can make nine. It's extremely likely that partner has four spades; therefore, I punish him if he is 3=2=1=7. That's the only pattern in which I would bid 1♠ with a three-card suit if I didn't pass for penalty.

BOB BROWNE: 4♠. (3♠ at MPs.) I don't want to miss a potential game.

HOWARD WACHTEL: 4♠. (3♠ at MPs.) Stretching to bid a vulnerable game.

PHIL FREIDENREICH: 4♠. (3NT at MPs.) No difference at IMPs between making ten tricks in spades or in notrump.

BILL FOSTER: 4♠. Partner could be broke. He certainly has eight or fewer points, having not made a jump response. Even so, game is difficult to stay out of, especially at IMPs.

Bill was the only 4♠ bidder to stick to his guns on both Part A and Part B. Several people switched to a straightforward spade invitation:

PETE FILANDRO: 3♠. (2♣ at MP's.) I must chance being a level higher, vulnerable at IMPs. My 3♠ shows eight-and-a-half to nine winners and begs partner to go on with any likely trick.

BILL SCHMIDT: 3♠. (2♣ at MP's.) I expect partner to bid game if he has anything. This shows better trump support than 2♣ followed by spades. There's no reason to complicate matters by trying for 3NT.

CHRIS MARLOW: 3♠. (2♠ at MP's.) I need to be more optimistic at IMPs about bidding games, particularly when vulnerable. Something like:

♠Qxxxx ♥xxx ♦Qxxx ♣x

...gives us a reasonable play for game. Of course, take away the ♦Q and nine tricks are in trouble. That's why I prefer to stay low at matchpoints.

I too bailed on 2♠ at IMPs, preferring to go with the rebid I had planned to make all along before partner threw that blasted 1♠ monkey wrench into the works:

RAY RASKIN: 2NT. (3♠ at MP's.). The most descriptive call, and the most likely one to get you to the best contract.

Rick Olanoff went in the opposite direction, ditching 2NT for 2♣. At matchpoints, four spades or not, the cue-bid has merit. That form of scoring prioritizes getting both level and strain correct as often as possible. IMPs however is all about getting whatever game and slam bonuses are out there, and going plus otherwise. 2♣ risks some really wacky results; it seems preferable to guess a strain and make a clear value bid, allowing partner to guess the level. But, most 2♣ bidders in Part A hung in there for Part B.

JOANN & BOB GLASSON: 2♣. Here, we'll raise to game (3NT) after cue-bidding and hope. It's too hard to thread the needle at IMPs.

STEVE WHITE: 2♣. I doubt we'll stop short of game vulnerable at IMPs, but once again I'll look for more information. If guessing now, I'd try 3NT.

MARK BOLOTIN: 2♣. Despite the opponents' cards being well placed, that's not going to do me much good if I have to keep leading from my hand. If partner has nothing but four small spades, even 1♠ could be a shaky contract. Despite that, I'll risk going to 3♠ on my own. I hope I'm not -100!

DAVE WACHSMAN: 2♣. Bridge is a partnership game. The cue-bid involves partner in determining the final contract. Here though, if I believe the opponents will bid game at the other table, I may very well do the same to avoid a big swing.

Are there any other reasons to change one's mind in a teams game?

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 3NT. (2NT at MP's.) Will partner move over 2NT with, say:

♠xxxxx ♥xxx ♦Qx ♣xxx

Probably not, so I'll just bid game myself.

One thing is for certain: this will be a swingy board at IMPs. S.J. Simon observed years ago that the two most common mistakes in bridge are bidding too much with a good hand in a poor context, and bidding too little with a poor hand in a good context. The former error is probably exacerbated by the frequency of the latter. Perhaps this problem comes down to one of partnership trust. Our bridge lives would be so much simpler if we could be confident that, if we bid one notch short of game by ourselves, vulnerable, our loving partner will go on if he has a trick no matter how godawful the rest of his hand looks. Food for thought.

As noted, nobody scored a perfect 100 this month...and, at the table, nobody would have gone plus, either. North had the dreaded $4=2=3=4$ trainwreck, spades split miserably, East had out cards but South didn't...you get the idea. Even the $\spadesuit 10$ was offside. Seven tricks were the limit, and you had to play carefully just to take those. John D'Errico and I will take up this highly improbable result with Thomas Bayes (even though he's been dead for 250 years); everyone else can have a go at the May problem on the D4MSC website: <http://d4msc.straguzzi.org>.



The District 4 Master Solvers' Club appreciates problem submissions of any sort. Our crack analytic staff can be reached at d4msc@straguzzi.org.