

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

March is upon us. The sunshine, the warm weather, the annual reawakening of the miracle of nature. We should all spend it inside an air-conditioned bridge club. Fewer allergy problems that way.

*March also marks the D4MSC's first set of results with our new website. As you'll soon see, the number of respondents has increased greatly. Editor Allison and I are very encouraged, and we hope the convenience of online submissions means that the Club will continue to grow. Of course, the increased competition will make it tougher to win the annual **D4MSC Challenge** championship, but the glory and honor to the victors will increase proportionally. The prizes (two free District Four regional entries) probably won't, but maybe we'll throw in some Claritin for next spring.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NEITHER VUL.

♠-KQ108 ♥-AQ7 ♦-K4 ♣-KJ74

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		Pass	Pass
1♣ ¹	1♦	1♥	2♣ ²
Double ³	Pass	2♥	2♠
Double	Pass	3♥	4♦
?			

¹ 1NT = 15-17 HCP

² Strong diamond raise

³ Three-card heart support

A. Do you agree with all of South's calls thus far?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Yes	12	17	20
No	1	3	10

You don't often see a fourth-round problem in a bidding forum. With three previous South calls foisted upon the panel, it's usually a wise directorial move to ask if anyone has any objections to get off his chest. Surprisingly, almost nine in ten respondents were favorable, or at least amenable, to what's transpired thus far. Summarizing nicely for the "Yes" contingent:

DOUGLAS DYE (with **DON DALPE** similarly): Yes. 2NT was an option over 2♠ but double shows the same strength and pinpoints the location of my values. Partner has a very good picture of my hand now.

TOM WEIK (with **ED SHAPIRO** and **MARK BOLOTIN**): Yes. Though, I am uncertain as to the meaning of the second double in the context of this hypothetical partnership. Whether penalty oriented or simply announcing extra values, the double is appropriate

BARRY PASSER: Yes. So far, a perfect description of my shape and points. And now I should get a spade lead if they sacrifice later in diamonds.

Most of the objections were mild and targeted the ambiguous second double:

RAY RASKIN: No. I don't like the double of 2♠ because this hand is worth far less than its high card value. The ♦K and spade honors may be worth almost nothing.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: No. I think the second double "suggests" that I am 4=3=1=5 and not strong enough to reverse with 2♠ earlier. I would rather call 3♦ here to emphasize my big hand and let partner help choose the final contract. And yes, I hate that the opening lead will be through my king-low of diamonds, but East might hold the ♦A or my partner the ♦Q or ♦J.

SAMUEL DORFMAN: No. I prefer 3♥ instead of doubling 2♠. Who knows, the opponents might have a five-three spade fit and want to play there.

Personally, I'm fine with the double. Undiscussed, I think it means simply: "You think you can take eight tricks in spades? I laugh. I snicker. I guffaw. I mock you and call you silly names." The language of bridge is quite rich when you can say all that with a little red card. Anyway, if I were to raise an objection to any of South's actions, it would be along the lines of this:

PHIL FREIDENREICH: No. Because I am in third seat after two passes, I would have opened 1NT despite my 18 points. I have two tenaces and the doubleton ♦K. I want the lead to come to my hand; also, 1NT will often shut out the opponents.

B. With the auction as given, what is your call?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♥	4	9	80
Pass	5	3	70
Double	4	8	70

What the heck has gotten into East? First, he passes in second seat, not vulnerable. Then, after his partner has made the most unassuming of overcalls, he turns into the Incredible Hulk, cue-bidding to show strength, introducing new suits in competition, and driving all the way to the four-level. Clearly a urine test is in his future. Unfortunately, a very difficult call is in ours as well.

BILL FOSTER: 4♥. I hope that the full deal will be shown when the entries are graded.

I can oblige, but it'll have to wait until the end of the article. All I'll say for now is that the deal arose on Bridge Base Online, that all three of South's opponents were robots, and that only one of the calls, maybe two, was a bit dodgy. One possibility that could be ruled out at the table is:

CRAIG ROBINSON: Double. I just want to see them make this one. Lefty psyched, righty never caught on

BBO robots never psych, or at least they never intend to. However, in a flesh-and-blood setting (or a bidding forum), this is a scenario that must be considered. I'm from the school that espouses never assuming a psych unless no other explanation is possible, including hallucinogenic mushrooms accidentally making their way into the bean dip. It's clear that somebody at the table, maybe multiple somebodies, is light for his actions. But, for the moment it's still possible to construct layouts where nobody is outright lying.

One other possibility we should rule out up front:

BILL FOSTER (cont.): 4♥. Partner *should* have a bit more than just six or seven hearts, since she did not jump initially.

We need a District 4 Standard, akin to Bridge World Standard, to avoid ambiguities in our MSC problems. Our late, great Director Emeritus, Henry Bethe, spoke of compiling such a bidding system based on a comprehensive survey of our local experts. Our current, not-so-great Director Imperious has no such plans, having enough difficulty as it is remembering his agreements with his current partners. At any rate, weak jump shifts in competition probably aren't universal enough to be considered "D4 Standard", though I concede I might have added a fourth footnote to the problem to make this explicit.

With all that out of the way, let's turn to South's dilemma. There are several ways to go about this. One is to try to divine the layout of the 39 unseen cards based on the considerable, if somewhat contradictory, evidence at hand. Another is to follow some time-tested rules for dealing with unusual competitive situations at this form of scoring. For the latter group:

BILL SCHMIDT: Double. I expected to make 3♥, so we're not getting any matchpoints for -130. If partner has extra distribution, he'll know what to do.

BARRY COHEN: Double. I don't think we can make 4♥, so I'll double.

LYNN HARRIS: Double. If I thought that the ♦A was in front of my king, I would bid 4♥. In a heart game, I think that we will lose two diamonds, one spade, and one club. Against 4♦ doubled, I expect to win one or two spades, a heart, and one or two clubs. I expect a black-suit lead from partner.

Mind you, some of those "time-tested rules" are a bit contradictory themselves. Here's one I never knew had a name until Ed clued me in:

ED SHAPIRO: 4♥. Long ago, I heard about *Rich's Rule*: "Never double four of a minor!" I don't think that this hand is a clear exception. So, I bid 4♥, perhaps hanging partner. He did bid 1♥, when a weak 2♥ was available. (*Well-I-I... See above. -NS.*) He voluntarily bid 3♥ after I'd shown extras. So, inferring a lawful six-card suit, and maybe a singleton diamond (or 19 total tricks), I'll bid one more. If I were sure that partner would take my double of 2♠ as penalty-oriented, he also shows an unwillingness to defend, which makes 4♥ here even clearer.

As for our divine-the-layout types, more chose to bid than to double. Still, even the analytical doublers make some excellent points.

BOB & JOANN GLASSON: Double. Hard to see how we could make game in notrump with only king-low of diamonds. 4♥ rates to fail. We have the spade values and the ace-queen of hearts and the king-jack of clubs over the strong hand.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Double. I am torn between this and 4♥. I am not sure we can make ten tricks in hearts. The bidding suggests that East has five spades and perhaps four diamonds. Therefore, I'm worried that West will have a singleton spade and that the defense will take the first four tricks: diamond lead through dummy's king for two tricks, followed by the ♠A and a spade ruff.

MORTON ISAACS: Double. We have RHO's spades well stopped. What could the opponents be bidding on? Distribution, but we have clubs pretty well controlled too. On a good day, we may even score the ♦K. Missing three aces, this hand is better suited for defense than offense.

CHRIS MARLOW: Double. East obviously has a very distributional hand, but what does partner hold? Partner tried to sign off in 2♥, then pulled my penalty double while knowing I have a very strong hand. With something like:

♠xx ♥KJxxx ♦xx ♣A10xx

...partner probably should have bid game previously. Change partner's clubs to queen-fourth, however, and now 4♥ as no play and 4♦ is likely off one or two tricks. I think we are making a heart partial, so the double seems appropriate at match-points.

TOM WEIK: Double. A tough problem. Giving East seven points or so and West roughly eleven, partner doesn't have many, possibly four. The bidding suggests the deal is quite distributional. I have a good defensive hand, but it's possible that East-West can make 4♦. Could partner have seven hearts? Certainly, she has at least six. My guess is to double now and hope partner will pull if that's correct. If my second double showed spades, then I can't have many diamonds. If the opponents try 4♠, I get to double yet again!

Tom seems almost excited to run out of red "X" cards. His observation that a double of 4♦ cannot be based on diamond length, and thus must be cooperative, is astute. He and others note that partner can always pull if she has a hopeless hand for defense. Four hearts, however, is committal. Nobody, not even the passers, suggested that a pass was forcing here, so yes: if you are hell-bent on taking action, a double gives you two bites at the proverbial cherry. Still, one cherry chomp is enough for many:

RUI MARQUES: 4♥. East looks to have a distributional hand with five or six diamonds and some extra values. For West to also have an overcall, even skimpy, partner is left with hearts and nothing much. However, as little as:

♠xxx ♥Kxxxxx ♦x ♣Qxx

...is almost a laydown 4♥ if the ♠A is well placed.

DON DALPE: 4♥. If partner has a black ace, we could make this. If, as I suspect, partner lacks a black ace, 4♦ might make and 4♥ might be down one. I realize that many 'real' matchpoint players might double, but I play mostly IMPs. My second choice would be pass.

MARK BOLOTIN: 4♥. Even though my ♦K is probably not working, the spades look especially valuable.

KARL BARTH: 4♥. This might make even if we're off three aces. Partner does have *something*, doesn't she?

DAVE WACHSMAN: 4♥. My expectation is that North's Losing Trick Count (LTC) is at worst 10. My LTC of 5 says that we have nine likely winners in a heart contract (24 - 15 = 9). If this gets doubled, -100 will be a better score than -130. I do not expect 5♦ to be a makeable contract, while I believe 4♦ is viable.

BARRY PASSER: 4♥. Partner has a minimum number of points, if the opponents are to be believed. So, he must have long, and maybe very long, hearts to respond 1♥ freely. We're probably off two black aces and a couple of diamonds, but...maybe East will take the push to 5♦, or partner will have a singleton diamond.

AL SHRIVE: 4♥. To set 4♦, partner will likely have to produce a black-suit ace – the same card he needs to make game in hearts a much better score.

CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN: 4♥. This could work out badly, but I give it about an 80% shot of working well. If they get us for -300...oh well, on to the next deal.

Meanwhile, there's a third contingent, the smallest of all but boasting the plurality of Panelists. These folks are neither following guidelines nor divining layouts. They're merely looking at the three bidding cards on the table in front of them, then at their hand, and saying, "My work here is done."

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Pass. I have told my story. Having shown an extra-value hand with three-card support for hearts, I will leave the last word to partner.

DOUGLAS DYE: Pass. Partner knows I have the best hand at the table, and that I'm four-four or four-five in the blacks with three hearts. If there's any doubling or further heart bidding to be done, I will leave it to her. From my side of the table it is unclear that we were making even 3♥, and the opponents may well have enough distribution to make 4♦.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass. Partner might fairly expect a sharper 4=3=1=5 hand that's a trick stronger than this offensively, and yet he still just signed off. I'll respect that decision.

SAUL & ROSELYN TEUKOLSKY: Pass. 4♥ is right only if we can take at least nine tricks and they are making 4♦. We could easily go for -300 on these cards. The choice is between pass and double, and we think the story of this deal is, "Positive score wins." And, we'll beat the people who double a cold 4♦!

RAY RASKIN: Pass. East-West might even have a game, and I don't want to push them into it.

That's a formidable sextet of players to argue against. As Connie said, we've told our story. We don't have to play MacGyver on every board, saving the day with only our wits and a roll of duct tape. Let partner do some heavy lifting for a change.

Because of the close distribution of responses among pass, double, and four hearts, and because all three choices have merit, and particularly because so many D4MSC members did a magnificent job figuring out what was going on (including correctly discerning that the very light bidder was North), the awards are generous this month.

Everyone gets between 80 and 100. We'll save the ruthless differentiation for problems where there is a clearer consensus.

The penultimate word goes to the Oracle of Delaware, Nostradamus J. Filandro, whose soothsaying transcended everyone's this month. Check out his answer and analysis, then have a look at the actual deal.

PETE FILANDRO: 4♥. West's pass of 2♠ doubled showed at least tolerance for a secondary four-card suit, so he has either three- or four-card support. That leaves partner with one or two spades. East's diamonds are at least four long, if not five, to justify going to the four-level after I showed a mountain by doubling 2♠. East will have at most one heart to bid this way. That means East is something like 4=1=5=3, and West is 4=3=5=1 or 3=3=5=2. Can't double – we might take only two spades and a heart. Can't pass and go -130. Partner is perhaps 2=6=1=4 and might make 4♥, or he might go down one, losing a spade, a diamond, and one or two clubs.

He's pretty darn close:

NORTH		
	♠	42
	♥	J98642
	♦	3
	♣	Q862
WEST		EAST
♠	J6	♠ A9753
♥	1053	♥ K
♦	A10987	♦ QJ652
♣	A103	♣ 95
SOUTH		
	♠	KQ108
	♥	AQ7
	♦	K4
	♣	KJ74

North's 1♥ response seems insane, but is it? A six-card major plus four-card support for partner? Even if I were playing weak jump-shifts, I wouldn't bid 2♥ with that collection. The robot took a calculated risk. Besides, if the ♥K and ♥J were interchanged, partner's response would be perfectly normal and yet the bidding would likely have gone the same way -- surely East wasn't expecting much from that stiff king in front of the big hand. A majors-hungry human East might have advanced 1♠, but I happen to like the 2♣ cue-bid, announcing the gargantuan fit at the earliest opportunity against two bidding opponents. The only call I disapprove of is West's pass of 2♠ doubled...and, considering 2♠ is makeable even against the brutal four-one trump split, maybe silicon West knew what it was doing, too.

In short, North bid calculatedly, East bid aggressively, and West just bid what was in front of his nose. On this layout, both sides' four-level contracts fetch. Last word goes to a regular Solver who unfortunately produced the worst prediction of the month:

STEVE WHITE: Pass. This should be unanimous.

Sorry, Steve -- it's just you, me, Samuel Dorfman, and the five quoted Panelists. This turned out to be an excellent if diabolical problem...and, there's what looks to be another for April 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.