

# DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

**APRIL 2026 PROBLEM**  
**NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR**

*We love North of the District 4 MSC. She (or he, in odd-numbered months) is an expert bridge player, smart, loyal, patient, and thoughtful. Usually. This April Fools' Day, she apparently sent her evil twin sister Ursula to torture us. We picked up our most powerful playing hand in eons, and when East tried to steamroll us with a 4♠ preempt, we just chortled and called confidently for partner's better minor. Gulp! So, uh...now what? Did partner forget our agreement? Did she pull the wrong card from her bidding box? Or did she really get dealt a heart suit from here to Canarsie, and if so, is our two-loser monster worth kicking it up a notch or two? Every April 1st, the D4MSC copes with some sort of wacky, corner-case problem, so settle in and take your best guess at this year's migraine headache. If you're lucky, Ursula will have some ibuprofen in her purse.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"  
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**IMPs, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE**

♠-A ♥-9 ♦-AQ9843 ♣-AKQJ5

South	West	North	East
			4♠
4NT*	Pass	5♥	Pass
?			

\* - MINORS, BY AGREEMENT

**A. What is your call at Matchpoints?**

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
6♥	5	6	100
Pass	2	3	90
5♠	3	3	90
5NT	3	3	90
6♣	0	2	90
6♦	1	3	90

*Another April tradition of the D4MSC is that the scoring is uber-generous. Usually, one group gets 100, and everyone else gets a 90. There's no penalty for being an unlucky guesser.*

*Many of our regular Club members took the problem in the lighthearted spirit of the holiday.*

**BILL BAUER:** ...As Riley (of *Life of Riley*) would say: What a revolting development this is.

WILLIAM THOMAS: ...How long until May's problem is published?

**BILL SCHMIDT:** ...My answer depends on partner's demeanor as she was considering her bid. (Kidding.)

JOHN JONES: ...First, I'd call the director. Apparently, East didn't see the sign that read, "At this table, only North-South are permitted to preempt."

**BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON:** ...I hope my teammate opens 4♠ too, so that their South has the same damn problem that I do.

RICK OLANOFF: ...Aargh!

*Yeah, "aargh" is about right. Partner has gone rogue on us, but she's an expert so we have to assume she had a good reason. We know she'd rather play 5♥ than five of either minor. Let's give the opening salvo this month to the group that believes we've gone as far as we should.*

**TOM WEIK:** Pass. Is partner bidding 5♥ because she has a fabulous, powerful suit, or because she has very little in the minors and long hearts that might not be fabulous? I'm guessing the latter – something like eight hearts headed by the king-jack-eight, along with two low spades and two-one in the minors. If I held that hand, I would bid the major and pray. I would not bid my doubleton minor. True, if I had solid hearts I might bid the same way, but a very long, broken suit is more likely.

**JAY APFELBAUM:** Pass. Partner figures to have a very long heart suit. It does not have to be a solid or near-solid suit. It could easily be seven or even eight hearts to the queen-jack, or she could have a better suit but with a spade loser.

BARRY PASSER: Pass. I give partner ♥KQJ10xxx and out. She'll appreciate my ♥9.

MARK KINZER: Pass. Partner has chosen.

*Other than the unfortunate prediction, this is a great summary:*

STEVE WHITE: Pass. This should be unanimous. Yes, I have a better hand than I might, and one more diamond than I might, and 6♦ might conceivably make, but that's especially unlikely with 4♠ suggesting bad breaks. Partner has a lot of hearts. This is where to play.

*I think it's a tossup between pass and one particular bid. At the table (where South's clubs were just ace-empty-fifth, making pass much more attractive), eleven tricks were the limit in hearts. Partner had eight strong hearts, but East had two trumps and a stiff to lead, and West had the ♥A. Too bad.*

*With clubs strong enough to provide potential quick discards, and with IMPs scoring where missing a cold slam could be a disaster, most of the Club chose to bid on. Of those who chose to aim for a minor, most picked the six-card suit.*

**BILL BAUER:** 6♦. Partner should have at most two cards in either minor. I hope to find a doubleton diamond and the ♥A. Too much to ask for, you say? How about king-low in diamonds!

REV. JIM MUNDELL: 6♦. My hand only has two losers, and my partner has bid hearts which is one of my losers.

RICK OLANOFF: 6♦. Hoping for a few diamonds in dummy.

*Neither 6♣ bidder offered a comment, but for what it's worth, I might prefer 6♣ to 6♦. Neither is particularly appetizing facing a hand with a gazillion hearts, but at least clubs might play for no trump losers opposite a singleton.*

*A solid plurality this month decided that if partner was so keen to make hearts trump, then let her try to take twelve tricks.*

**MARK BOLOTIN:** 6♥. If anybody knows how many heart losers partner has, please tell me. I'm guessing the answer is one. She could bid this way with anything from:

♠xx ♥QJxxxxxx ♦x ♣x

to

♠xxx ♥AKQxxxxx ♦x ♣x.

**PETE FILANDRO:** 6♥. With seven or so weak to moderate hearts, partner should bid a minor, even if merely a doubleton. She therefore has exceptional hearts, and I have so much unexpected strength and winners that I must raise it a level.

**BOB GRINWIS:** 6♥. Since partner has ignored my request for a minor, she must have a hand with solid hearts. I have at least six tricks for her outside of hearts. Six of either minor could also be right, but it does not score as well as hearts.

**BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON:** 6♥. This is a total crapshoot. I think South at the other table is going to bid 6♥, so I will do the same. It could be that we are already too high, so why not go for the gold?

**PHILIP FREIDENREICH:** 6♥. I hope for partner to get four or five discards on my club suit once trump are drawn.

*Well, yeah, there's the rub. On a spade lead, if partner's hearts aren't solid, she might have to take those pitches immediately, lest the opponents cash oodles of spades upon winning their trump trick. There's a case to be made (not that anyone did) that if you're going to commit to a heart slam, you might as well choose 7♥.*

**MARK COHEN:** 6♥. There's symmetry here – almost everyone has a good hand! Partner has long, solid or semi-solid hearts, and I have a better hand than I might. Auctions starting at this high a level are often crapshoots, but I will not be denied what could be a vulnerable small or grand slam. Partner will know what to do with solid hearts.

**STEPHEN COOPER:** 6♥. Surely with a two-loser heart suit, partner would have picked a minor. It might take very careful play but I think it is worth the risk.

*Bridge Across the Multiverse:*

**JIM EAGLETON:** 6♥. In the MSC world, we do not know the strength of partner's hearts. In the real world, I have to worry if partner thinks 4NT shows any two suits, or doesn't trust my judgement of a solid minor, or thinks 5♥ makes me choose between hearts and one of the minor slams. I'm going for a world where a near-honor will be plenty for my next (probably not as good) partner to make slam.

*If Jim's lucky, Doctor Strange will be available at the partnership desk.*

*Since partner is the one who got us into this mess, might we enlist her help to get us out of it? Several 6♥ bidders considered it but decided not to try.*

**BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON** (cont.): 6♥. ...By the way, I do not think it's too helpful to bid 5♠ to show my first-round control. Partner will likely think I'm looking for a minor suit ace and will bid 6♥ anyway. We are not getting to a grand even if it's a laydown. How about 5NT? Is that pick-a-slam (maybe North will bid 6♦ with king-low) or a Grand Slam Force (look out!)?

**DOUGLAS DYE:** 6♥. I trust partner to hold a semi-solid suit here. Without same, she would bid five of a minor as requested. I have considerably more than I've promised. 5NT, even if it means "pick a slam", seems misdirected.

*Speaking for the directionally challenged:*

**RICK ROWLAND:** 5NT. Pick a slam.

**ANDY MUENZ:** 5NT. With a two-loser hand, we pretty much have to be in slam. 5NT tells partner that we don't have enough help in hearts to choose it unless it is solid. So, partner should only pick hearts if that is the case. If she holds equal length in the minors, she'll probably pick clubs, which leaves us in the shorter but stronger stuff.

**ED SHAPIRO:** 5NT. I believe this is strictly pick-a-slam. If partner bids 6♥, I expect it to make. 5♠ here would imply better support. (It's nice to have been specific about my suits – I still play 4NT as including a three-suited takeout).

*Ditto. I play that any takeout call at this altitude is "at least two places to play". If partner picks the one I don't have, I'll correct and give her a second chance. 5NT was my choice too, though I really do feel deep down that passing is the likely winner in the long run. Partner will get dealt many more hands with non-solid hearts than with solid ones. If declarer can't draw trump pronto, the contract will be under attack from about twelve different directions.*

*There's another way to invite partner to share in our misery.*

**MANOJ DEB-ROY:** 5♠. Forcing partner to choose a slam.

**BOB AND JOANN GLASSON:** 5♠. Partner must have a rich trump suit to prefer hearts to either minor suit in this auction. We will make a grand slam try on the way to 6♥.

**JOHN JONES:** 5♠. North must have an excellent heart suit to bid it at the five-level after learning that I have minors. My singleton nine may actually be adequate heart support. 5♠ shows first round control. Partner can try 6♣, 6♦, 6♥, or, with solid hearts, consider a grand.

*A dish that is best served cold:*

**BILL SCHMIDT:** 5♠. If 5♥ was intended as natural, the chances of North making exactly 11 tricks opposite this dummy are small, so I don't mind raising the level in order to be sure. If she's cue-bidding in support of a minor, then we should make at least six. Mostly, I just want to get revenge!

*Bidding 5♠ (or 5NT) for spite has a certain appeal this month. Is one better or safer than the other?*

KARL BARTH: 5♠. Can partner have a heart suit that is playing for just one loser? Or maybe we are making six of a minor? Partner probably needs only a doubleton club for 6♣ to have a serious play. If she has honor-doubleton in diamonds, 6♦ is not a bad place to play either. I guess we should punt this back to her. Which bid best says, "Try again"? 5♠ and 5NT are the two main candidates, but 5NT might sound like a Grand Slam Force, so I will bid 5♠ to ask partner to take another stab at a trump suit. If partner is missing the ♥A, life could get exciting.

*I've said this before, but in my corner of the multiverse, 5NT is a Grand Slam Force in uncontested auctions only when there is no other reasonable interpretation. In a contested one, and (ahem) **especially** when we've been preempted to the stratosphere, fuggedaboutit. 5NT is indispensable as pick-a-slam.*

*Suppose you decided that you were willing to play in hearts rather than explore alternate strains. Is there a way to tell partner, "If your suit is solid, bid seven?" Sure, there is, and it's nothing fancy. Just raise to 6♥. As Mark Cohen observed, if North is looking at solid trumps, she can't get this wrong. We raised her to a vulnerable slam with no high trump honor and we're off a first-round control too? She'll wonder if we didn't return the favor and send our own evil twin to torture her.*



*What 5♠ means is another matter entirely, but that's for a partnership to decide. It's impossible to have agreements for every violently contested auction like this. The best you can do is to establish some general principles...one of which is "5NT is pick-a-slam" unless everyone in the room, including Larry Cohen's proverbial janitor, would treat it as the Grand Slam Force. There's always something to learn here at the D4MSC. Even in April.*

*Last Word this month goes to a pair of Solvers who earned a top score through different roads – one confident, one not so much.*

BOB GRINWIS (cont.): 6♥. This is a matter of partnership trust.

TODD THORSON: 6♥. Fingers and toes crossed!



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