

## DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

### AUGUST 2020 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

*The opponents have been quiet so far in 2020. Too quiet. Maybe it's the pandemic. Maybe they just feel self-conscious bidding with masks on. Whatever the reason, and believe it or not, this is only the third problem all year in which either RHO or LHO has made so much as a peep. East, in fact, hadn't even taken a bid in 2020 -- just one cards-showing double two months ago. Evidently, he was saving it up for this inopportune moment when we've picked a promising but complex hand to describe. On the bright side, we have no shortage of takeout actions available, thanks to a serendipitous agreement that 4NT here is not Blackwood. In fact, North said he would rather mud wrestle a COVID-infected alligator than to play 4NT as ace-asking after a four-level preempt. I cannot confirm or deny that I was North. Anyway, let's see what District 4's experts say regarding what differentiates double vs. 4NT vs. 5♥ vs. 5NT, and also let's see if the form of scoring matters. No alligators were harmed in the writing of this article.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

#### NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-KQ952 ♥--- ♦-AQ108 ♣-QJ75

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
	Pass	1♣	4♥
?			

DOUBLE = NEGATIVE

4NT = TAKEOUT, BY AGREEMENT

5NT = 'PICK-A-SLAM' UNLESS GSF IS OBVIOUS

#### 1. What is your call at Matchpoints?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Double	4	18	50
4♠	1	8	40
4NT	3	9	40
5♥	5	0	40
5NT	0	3	30
5♠	0	2	30

*For once, we have a lot of good options. None of them are standouts, of course, which is why this problem was posed in the first place. Much depends on how aggressive*

*we want to be. Let's start the discussion with the folks who answer that question: "Not very."*

**MICHAEL SHUSTER:** 4♠. Obviously awkward, but 4♠ will usually be the spot. Anything else is masterminding.

**ANDY MUENZ:** 4♠. Good but tough problem. It's pretty easy to construct a hand for partner where the best call is any of Double, 4♠, 4NT, 5♣, 5♥, 5NT, 6♣, or even 7♣. At matchpoints, I opt for the highest scoring strain.

**JOHN JONES:** 4♠. I'll shoot for the highest scoring strain at matchpoints. I feel like I'm being sucked in by the conditions of contest.

**JOHN HEMMER:** 4♠. There may be slam in these cards, but I'll settle for the cheapest game.

*Matchpoints or not, this feels wrong. This is a powerful playing hand on the auction. Andy observes that even if we guess the best takeout action, and even if there's a slam that makes, we still might not reach the correct strain. True, but that has to be balanced against the possibility that (a) there are multiple slams that will roll home, making it all but impossible to choose poorly, and (b) spades is our fourth-best strain. West might be sitting behind us with five good spades and ten points. When he sees our 4♠ card, you'll see the fastest and happiest green Pass card all month.*

*If you're going to bid spades, and despite the ratty suit, I mildly prefer:*

**BILL FOSTER:** 5♠. When the opponents have hearts, we often have spades. If partner has decent support, I hope she will raise to slam. If not, she could rebid clubs.

**STEPHEN COOPER:** 5♠. Matchpoints really favors majors. I want partner to bid 6♠ with as little as ace-low in spades.

*If partner has only ace-low in spades and enough values for a raise to six, I hope he bids 5NT, pick-a-slam, so we can reach the surely superior 6♣. On a deal in which East is preempting heavily, any making slam should produce a nice matchpoint score. I don't think that 5♠ asks for a heart control, though many players better than me would vehemently disagree. I think it's better to play it as invitational to slam with five-plus spades.*

*The rest of the Club chose from one of the four takeout options. We'll cover them from highest to lowest. Committed to play this deal in a slam come hell or high wine (who drinks water during a pandemic?) are the 5NT contingent. The only one to comment is:*

**STEVE GIBBON:** 5NT. Trusting partner to know "obvious" when it presents itself. Stated methods provide options which are too tempting to pass up.

*I don't think 5NT is obviously Grand Slam Force. At least, I didn't when I sat down to write the article -- surely it's for takeout, temporarily denying first-round heart control, no? I'm no longer so certain, because Steve believes it's a GSF, and making a v-e-r-y good case for it as well is:*

**STEVE WHITE:** 4NT. 5NT is unsafe. Because we could bid 4NT and raise partner's reply to six, North might reasonably take 5NT as an 'obvious' Grand Slam Force in clubs.

*If anyone has a good counterargument to this, let me know, because I'm sitting here scratching my head and wondering why I thought 5NT was 'obviously' pick-a-slam. At any rate, I think a Grand Slam Force here is too much -- partner's side card might be a red honor or two rather than the all-important ♠A -- but there's a valuable lesson here nonetheless.*

*On the subject of the merits of 5♥, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome our All-Panelist All-Star Revue.*

**CRAIG ROBINSON:** 5♥. I hope this is forcing (and I hope Meyer isn't my partner.) We might miss a five-three spade fit, but we'll likely get to a slam in a nine-card fit.

**JAY APFELBAUM:** 5♥. This hand is too good for any simple game-bid or small slam-bid. Also, I do not know just yet what slam might be best. We could make 7♣ with my spade suit providing a useful discard or two. I expect partner to bid 6♣ with a minimum and long clubs, but he might bid 5♠ with four spades and four (or fewer) clubs. Over 5♠, I'll bid 5NT to invite a grand slam.

**DON DALPE:** 5♥. I don't know how to play Matchpoints, so I'm making the same bid that I would at Bridge. If 6NT is the right matchpoint contract, then let partner bid it suspecting that I have a heart void.

**DOUGLAS DYE:** 5♥. Slammish with first-round control of hearts. Sounds about right. I should be in good shape for the post-mortem.

**RICH ROTHWART:** 5♥. If we play 6♣ and 6♠ or 6NT also makes, we'll still beat everyone who played 4♠ or defended 4♥ doubled. 5♥ shows club support with first-round heart control. There's some chance of getting to 7♣ when partner has both outside aces and both outside kings. I sure hope he isn't 4=3=3=3.

*Note that Rich is the only one of this elite quintet that is explicitly showing club support. The others believe that the choice of strain is still up in the air. The advantage of 5♥ is that it strongly implies that hearts are a not a concern; the disadvantage is that it leaves us just 12 legal bids to find both level and strain.*

*Four notrump is takeout by agreement, and a dozen Club denizens found it quite agreeable at matchpoints.*

**PETE FILANDRO:** 4NT. I eliminate 4♠ as inadequate. 5♥ implies spades and buries spades. 5♠ asks for a heart control. Double may endplay partner into a pass with:

♠-Axx ♥-xxxx ♦-Kxx ♣-AKx

...or similar, where 6♠ or more may be on with only a small penalty available. That leaves 4NT, showing five-plus spades and five-plus diamonds, close to my actual holding, and a hand strong enough to force to the five-level.

**BILL SCHMIDT:** 4NT. Double doesn't describe a hand with five spades and a heart void, so it's too likely partner will pass for +500. Unless he has extras, any slam could go down, which rules out 5♥ and 5NT. Since we have the 4NT Takeout gadget available, let's ask North's opinion.

**THOMAS WEIK:** 4NT. It's not stated that 4NT is specifically a two-suited takeout, so it apparently can contain support for the other three suits (unless later bidding clarifies differently.) I would expect that partner will bid a second suit if he has one, else he'll rebid clubs. I'm avoiding the ambiguity of 5NT, and also the possibility of partner leaving in a negative double.

KARL BARTH: 4NT. Landing on our feet will be worth matchpoints. All of our cards are working, so let's find out where partner would like to play. We may bury spades, but if we find a slam, the matchpoint gods probably won't mind.

WALTER BELL: 4NT. Gotta be a slam somewhere.

MARK BOLOTIN: 4NT. Then follow up with a heart cue-bid. Maybe partner can bid seven with a good hand ignoring any wasted values in hearts. If he has the ♥A, it may cover a loser. *[A very good point -- we rate to run into bad splits, so we can't assume our fourth club and fourth diamond aren't losers. - NS]*

ED SHAPIRO: 4NT. At least I shouldn't miss a nine-card spade fit. I'm curious how 5NT can be pick-a-slam when we've bid only one suit. My second choice is 4♠.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 4NT. Partner bids suits up the line. We could miss a spade slam.

*Several of the 4NT bidders expounded on what they'd bid over various replies by North. Tom will raise to six of whatever suit North chooses, acknowledging that this could be wrong if partner has wasted heart values. Ed notes another looming hazard: partner might huddle over 4NT, saddling South with an ethical problem. He plans to raise to six of either black suit. Karl feels that if partner has a spade suit, we'll find it; others worried that 4NT might miss spades.*

*The 4NT bidders agree on one matter: at least they won't defend against 4♥X on this hand, red-versus-white. I'm not convinced that's advantageous. Remember, from East's perspective, the vulnerability is in his favor and his partner is a passed hand. He might have risked 4♥ on a hand in which other Easts are bidding only 3♥, or even 1♥. At the table, I chose a negative double, freely admitting that I hoped North wouldn't pass it out. But, if he did, so be it. He usually knows better than me anyway. Agreeing:*

**DAVE WACHSMAN:** Double. At matchpoints, I am willing to take some risk in order to involve partner in deciding whether to play for penalties. East's preempt could be based on a junky heart suit with some defensive values.

**CONNIE GOLDBERG** (with RUI MARQUES): Double. Anything else seems like a shot in the dark. Of course, I do hope that partner has a hand that can choose a trump suit, or to bid 4NT to ask me to choose a minor. Nowadays, East doesn't always have eight hearts. At other tables, if East overcalls 3♥, every South will bid 3♠. Over that, if North bids 3NT, I don't think it's at all obvious to bid on.

**RICK ROWLAND:** Double. If partner leaves it in, I have lots of defense.

CHRIS MARLOW: Double. If partner passes, we'll get a plus score. That may beat the pairs who stop in game, and it will beat pairs who go down in a slam.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Double. Seems straightforward, and I don't see why any other call would be superior.

MANOJ DEB-ROY: Double. Partner should respond 4♠, 5♣ or 5♦, or convert it to penalty depending on his heart holding.

*Disagreeing:*

**JAY APFELBAUM** (cont.): 5♥. ...I do not find a negative double to be a good choice unless partner somehow finds a 4♠ bid. His most likely call is to pass my double, and a slam surely pays better than any penalty we could extract.

*The other main drawback to a negative double is what Ed Shapiro mentioned earlier: the chance of partner tanking over it is exceptionally high, particularly if he has exactly three spades. If you're committed to bidding over 4♠ when you double, you must follow through even if partner's anguished reaction makes it clear he hates you, hates everyone who looks like you, and hates the horse you and that stupid negative double rode in on. (Levity aside, an expert North will be perfectly aware that you will often have five spades for this double, so taking out to a three-card suit shouldn't torture him too much. A less-experienced North, however, could be quite put out.)*

*As you'll see, our negative doublers have quite a variety of follow-up plans.*

**BILL PORT:** Double. So East is saying he has a fistful of hearts, which makes it unlikely that partner has many. My 5=0=4=4 distribution is wonderful for supporting any suit. I will ask for aces if possible once the suit is established.

**BARRY COHEN:** Double. I'll start with a negative double in case partner has four spades. I'll push us into a slam.

**RICHARD HARTZ, SR.:** Double. The preempt did its job. I don't think that I have enough for slam, so I want to see what partner does next. I expect a bad trump split, so it would be nice to know if partner has four spades. If I get a chance to bid again, I'll cue-bid hearts.

**LYNN HARRIS:** Double. I am not ready to bid a slam by myself, so a takeout double will help me decide what to do.

**BOB GRINWIS:** Double. If partner has five clubs, that's a great contract, and if he has four spades, even better. The preempt keeps us out of slam exploration.

**BILL BAUER:** Double. This would be easier if you gave us the North hand, too. I promise that I wouldn't look. Double does not take up any bidding space, so I'll find out if partner has a four-card suit at the four-level. If he bids 4♠, I will use perhaps two doses of Blackwood, relying on East to have the ♥A and ♥K rather than my partner. I have not ruled out a grand slam if partner shows two aces and two kings.

*Covering all the ups and downs of a double:*

**BRUCE SCHAIDELSON:** Double. I hate this problem. We may be in slam territory, but that's a big 'may', and in which suit? At the same time, can we afford to go past game if partner is minimum? If you don't bid spades now, they may never get into the auction. But if you bid 4♠ with this mediocre five-card suit, it will likely end the auction -- you may miss slam, or you might find yourself in a five-two fit with bad breaks and getting tapped out. I hate doubling with a void because partner might convert it to penalty, but that's the call that caters to learning more about partner's hand and possibly going further.

*I think a negative double is probably best, and I hate this problem too. Maybe it'll be easier at IMPs. Let's quickly find out.*

## 2. What is your call at IMPs?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Double	3	20	50
4NT	4	9	40
5♥	5	1	40
4♠	1	4	30
5NT	0	5	30
5♠	0	1	30

*Not a lot of movement. Only ten people changed their calls. I decided to bump 4♠ down 10 points because, at IMPs, 90% of the Club chose not to settle for what is likely to be a final contract. I think that's wise -- at these conditions, there's an excellent chance the opponents will sacrifice in 5♥ or 6♥ if they have even a modest fit.*

**DAVE WACHSMAN:** 4NT (*Double at MPs*). At IMPs, I am more focused on reaching an appropriate slam. 4NT is less likely to lead to an IMP disaster.

**CHRIS MARLOW:** 4NT (*Double at MPs*). I do not want to double at IMPs. I can imagine partner grimly looking at 2=4=3=4 and choosing to pass. We will get a plus, but maybe also a double-digit adverse swing for missing slam.

**JOHN JONES:** Double (*4♠ at MPs*). Most flexible, most likely to get a plus score.

**STEVE GIBBON:** 4NT (*5NT at MPs*). Takeout, making it safe for partner to explore. Hopefully, the agreement doesn't preclude a five-card spade suit.

*5NT gained a few advocates, though all believe it is clearly pick-a-slam:*

**PHILIP FREIDENREICH:** 5NT (*4NT at MPs*). I'm less worried about playing a minor-suit slam at IMPs.

**ANDY MUENZ:** 5NT (*4♠ at MPs*). We have a four-loser hand opposite a second-seat opener, so theoretically a slam should make. The difficulty is finding the best fit and level given the limited space. So, I'm selecting 5NT as the most flexible bid, asking partner to pick a slam. My biggest fear is that partner has a heart stopper and would bid 6NT at matchpoints. Hopefully at IMPs we are less likely to see that happen. If partner has:

♠A ♥xxx ♦Kxx ♣AKxxxx

...I'll let him know in the post-mortem that 5NT was a Grand Slam Force.

**STEPHEN COOPER:** 5NT (*5♠ at MPs*). This hand screams slam. At IMPs, any slam will do. There's no risk of partner choosing 6NT.

*Seems to me that 4NT is a great bid opposite Andy's whimsical North hand. Partner removes to 5♣. We bid 5♥, agreeing clubs (surely it does; we can't keep punting the strain choice forever), showing first-round heart control, and implying grand slam interest. If partner trusts our bidding (big if), can't he bid 7♣ now?*

*Last word this month goes to...me. I was very saddened to read of Ray Raskin's passing. Ray was a legend around the Philadelphia bridge scene, and he was the very first D4MSC Challenge Panelist champion. RIP, Mr. R.*



*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/>*