

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

MAY 2021 PROBLEM

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Welcome to an exercise in hand evaluation. Let's see. Upgrades: a chunky six-bagger, nine of the deck's 20 honor cards, and a big fit with partner's presumptive club suit. Downgrades: an unsupported king, two low honors tight, and are we really so sure that partner has long clubs in this day and age of Inverted Minors? Sidegrades: that's not a word. But, um, there's the small matter that the opponents have at least 17 cards in the majors, and they might be able to make a lot of tricks, even a game, if we allow them a convenient entry into the bidding. Final grade: this is an annoyingly difficult problem for such a simple auction. Let's see how the Club grades it.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

IMPS, BOTH VULNERABLE

♠-K ♥-J10 ♦-AQJ985 ♣-AQ106

South	West	North	East
			Pass
1♦ ?	Pass	1NT	Pass

1. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
2♣	6	24	100
3♣	3	7	90
3♦	4	6	90
2♦	0	2	80
2NT	0	2	80
3NT	1	1	80
5♣	0	2	80

Before we get started, try your hand at three related problems. Any form of scoring, any vulnerability, you hold:

- (a) ♠-7532 ♥-Q98 ♦-K104 ♣-KJ8
- (b) ♠-A62 ♥-Q43 ♦-107643 ♣-K4
- (c) ♠-QJ10 ♥-QJ3 ♦-7643 ♣-K94

Partner opens 1♦, pass by RHO. You're playing a basic 2/1 GF system with the usual tournament gadgets, including Inverted Minors. What is your call?

If you chose 1NT all three times, I wouldn't fault you. On (A), 1♠ is the book bid, but with four rotten spades, flat distribution, and all those soft values, it's quite reasonable to cut to the chase and bid notrump. On (B), holding five-card support, you'd like to raise, but neither a skinny 2♦ nor a wildly misdescriptive 3♦ is attractive. Finally, there's (C). Anything other than 1NT would be just plain weird.

You may have noticed that on none of the three hands does responder hold as many as four clubs, let alone six or seven. Before the adoption of Five-Card Majors and Inverted Minors, opener could be virtually certain that a 1NT response to a 1♦ opener showed clubs. Today...well, 1NT suggests clubs, maybe 80% or better. But there are a lot of hand-types on which a modern North might prefer to temporize with 1NT, because no immediate diamond raise is right.

Should this influence our choice of rebid? Almost everyone was excited about our prospects in one or both minors, but no one mentioned the possibility of short clubs in their comments. To be fair, if partner lacks four clubs, he'll have good diamond support, and that certainly wouldn't break South's heart. From the D4MSC's Department of Exuberance:

DAVE WACHSMAN: 3♣. Clearly, we have a club fit, so let's share that news. If North bids 3NT, I will pass. Further bidding could lead us to a minor-suit game or slam.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 3♣. I'm willing to force to game, but I want to stop off to name clubs first. If partner bids 3NT over this, I'll have a comfortable pass. But, if partner can't bid 3NT, then we're doing well to avoid it. Opposite:

♠ xxx ♥ Axx ♦ xx ♣ Kxxxx

...even 6♣ is better than 3NT. But before we can play in clubs, someone needs to bid the suit.

TOM WEIK: 3♣. Partner could well have a good 1NT response, as the opponents haven't come into the auction with their majors. Vulnerable at IMPs, I have an incentive to pursue game. I hope partner can bid 3NT, but five of either minor could work if he holds prime cards. If he's minimum, we will likely go minus, but then we may have blocked the opponents from bidding and making three of a major.

Only three? I'm a little worried about four.

WALTER BELL: 3♣. We should have a game in some minor.

CHRIS MARLOW: 3♣. We really cannot afford to miss a vulnerable game. The ♠K is of dubious value, but that doesn't mean it has to be worthless. Give partner the ace of either major and a minor-suit king and we have decent play for game in a minor. Not vulnerable, I am more likely to rebid just 2♣.

RICHARD HARTZ, JR.: 3♣. 1NT tells me we must have a minor-suit fit. By jump-shifting, I think partner can determine the correct contract -- either pass (if truly rock bottom), 3NT with the majors stopped, or 5♣/5♦. Partner will be very happy with my dummy in 3NT.

In my innocent world, North should never pass a jump-shift unless he psyches his original response. This is especially true on the auction 1♦-then-3♣, since South practically needs to hold Godzilla to open 2♣ with a minor two-suiter. He could have as

many as 22 points on this auction. At any rate, if we want to show extra values without forcing to game, our options are limited. One is to fake a reverse into 2♥ or 2♠, which thankfully no one tried. Another is to suppress clubs altogether, via:

JAY APFELBAUM: 3♦. 3♣ is an overbid. 3♦ shows the right strength, and my major-suit honors will help more in notrump than in five of a minor.

BILL SCHMIDT: 3♦. 2♣ will cause us to miss game too often, 2NT risks an embarrassing -200 when we're cold for +110, and 3♣ is a huge overbid. 3♦ should be fairly safe, and it will convince partner to bid 3NT when it's right.

BARRY PASSER: 3♦. Shows good diamonds and 17 points. I have, what do you know...good diamonds and 17 points.

STEPHANIE FINE: 3♦. Must show strength and length.

Reasonable, particularly if the goal is to get to a light but making 3NT, which is always a primary consideration at IMPs. The downside comes when partner really does have a fistful of clubs. Look again at Michael Shuster's construction for North, but with 3=3=1=6 or 3=2=1=7 shape instead. We might languish in 3NT, down off the top in spades. At the other table, North-South might stop in 5♣, cold for six, and in fact take thirteen tricks on a non-spade lead. When you compare scores, the first thing your teammates are going to ask, excitedly, is, "Did you get to the slam?" You will pretend not to hear them, and when they repeat the question, you'll excuse yourself to slip out the side door and hitchhike home. I hate when that happens.

There's a side tactical benefit to choosing 3♦ (or 3♣), already noted by Tom Weik and expounded upon by:

PETE FILANDRO: 3♦. Yes, the most descriptive bid is 2♣, but it would allow easy competition by the opponents, who hold 17+ cards in the majors. They might use the Law of Total Tricks to compete to three or four of a major. The second-most descriptive bid, 3♦, accurately shows by suit and strength, albeit burying clubs. Most importantly, it acts as a blocking preempt of sorts.

STEPHEN COOPER: 3♦. The opponents have nine-plus spades and eight-plus hearts. If I try to get out any lower, they will come into the auction. Partner could have:

♠-QJx ♥-Qxx ♦-K10 ♣-xxxxx

...and might try 3NT. Any worse and he should pass. My second choice is 2NT, but that's too risky at IMPs as they might take nine tricks off the top.

BARRY COHEN: 3♦. Expecting that partner has at least seven cards in the minors and the opponents have a big double-fit in the majors. I won't bid 2♣ and invite them into the auction. I'm not strong enough for 3♣, so I'll bid 3♦ and can bid clubs over any continuation.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 3♦. I bet that the opponents, with at least 17 cards in the hearts and spades, can find a major-suit lead against 3NT. I'm not bidding 2♣ because that gives the opponents another chance to bid their majors, and 3♣ doesn't feel right as five of either minor could be down off the top. 3♦ allows partner to pass, to raise diamonds, or to bid 3NT with the right hand. She may have any of:

♠-xxx ♥-Qxx ♦-Kx ♣-Kxxxx

♠-xxx ♥-xxx ♦-Kxx ♣-Kxxx

♠-QJx ♥-A9x ♦-Kxx ♣-xxxx

...so, I'll let her be the judge.

Another possibility is that partner might bid 3♥ or 3♠ over 3♦, showing the values for game but expressing doubt about 3NT (see Bruce's first example hand.) If North has doubts about notrump, we have an outright phobia about it. Trouble is, we might not have a safe landing spot in four of a minor (or if we do, partner might raise to five), and if we try 3NT anyway, East will know what suit to lead. Our next group tries to keep these looming issues in-house and out of sight of the opponents.

DOUGLAS DYE: 3NT. Game rates to be no worse than on a finesse. I could torture partner with a slow auction, but the opponents are the more likely beneficiaries if I further describe my hand. Vulnerable at IMPs, I will take a shot.

STEVE WHITE: 3NT. At least we won't miss a vulnerable game. Better to keep my hand concealed.

KARL BARTH: 2NT. I want to play in notrump, but we are certain to get a major-suit lead, and we are likely to have stopper issues. 3NT could be down very quickly. On the other hand, if partner has no ace, there's probably no minor-suit game. So, my compromise try is 2NT, my shape notwithstanding. I'm not strong enough for a game-forcing 3♣ even opposite partner's implied club length. 3♦ is right on values but doesn't really offer any better hope of determining if the fit is suitable for game. (PS - this was a toughie.)

BILL BAUER: 2NT. I am one of those "notrump-happy" players. Partner's 1NT most likely eliminates the possibility of a minor-suit slam. So, I'll invite game in the strain that requires the fewest tricks. Partner needs only the ♥A, ♥Kx, or ♥Qxx to stop hearts, and if a spade is lead, perhaps East will underlead the ace. It would be nice for partner to hold the ♦K.

This too is reasonable. It's kind of hard to be unreasonable this month, frankly. South has far more information than the other three players, who are all staring at their hands in blissful ignorance. We alone know we have a big double-fit in the minors, that the opponents have one in the majors, that we're close to game values, that our stopper situation is tenuous, and that if East underleads the ♠A against a notrump contract a loud gong will sound, frightening the caddies. The problem is deciding what information, if any, to share with our tablemates.

Rebidding 3♣, 3♦, or any number of notrump could win by keeping the "right" information hidden. But, let's face it, it's mostly a matter of luck. If poker is not your thing, then surely the right 'bridge' bid is the majority's choice, even if it carries the risk of spilling the beans about the deal to the entire table.

BOB & JOANN GLASSON: 2♣. This might be an underbid, but we'll await partner's response. We are unsure of the value of our major-suit holdings.

DON DALPE: 2♣. Yes, we are vulnerable at IMPs, but partner knows that also. He will bid again if he likes his hand relative to my minors.

STEVE GIBBON: 2♣. Easy does it. Facing opponents with major-suit fits, I think it pays to see what partner, with a likely minor-filled hand, feels up to doing after we've shown both minors and a willingness to go on.

BOB GRINWIS: 2♣. The most descriptive call for my hand. Too many points in short suits without real stoppers to be interested in notrump.

MANOJ DEB-ROY: 2♣. Telling partner to bid notrump with protection in the unbid suits, or else choose a safe minor.

RICHARD J. HARTZ: 2♣. 2NT is tempting, but I think the opponents are likely to set up one of their majors before we get our tricks. Partner can bid again with the right hand.

LYNN HARRIS: 2♣. Shows at least nine cards, and decent minor-suit values.

JAMES C. EAGLETON: 2♣. I don't want to bid three of the wrong minor when West balances with a major.

SASTRY DASIKA: 2♣. If partner has stoppers in the majors, game is possible.

Here comes the R-Word again: this approach seems perfectly reasonable, too. Many 2♣ adherents provided their follow-up plans should the auction not end here. They weren't entirely on the same page, but they also weren't too far apart.

JOHN HEMMER (with MARK KINZER): 2♣. The heart values are too soft for 2NT. 2♣ is a slight underbid, but 3♣ is an overbid. If this is not passed out, I'll bid diamonds next, showing strength.

ED SHAPIRO: 2♣. Tough problem, as game (or slam on little more than a finesse) is possible, or notrump could be down a bunch. If I could be the declarer, I might consider a shot at 3NT, but as it is, I'm simply making the lowest natural bid. If partner raises to 3♣, I will rebid 3♦. Over two of a suit, I will rebid 2NT.

MARK BOLOTIN: 2♣. With plans to come back in with 3♦ if the opponents enter the auction in a major. I think that's a better description than an immediate 3♦.

DANIEL DROZ: 2♣. It seems fine to me to make the obvious bid, planning to show extras next round. If partner preferences to 2♦ or raises to 3♣, I will bid 3♦ to show extras and/or to pattern out. If partner shows stoppers with 2NT, I am all-in for 3NT. Partner might also bid two of a major to show a fragment; over that, I could gamble out 3NT or just continue with 3♦ as above. If partner passes, we will go plus.

WILLIAM E. FOSTER: 2♣. This shows not only a real club suit, but at least a four-card diamond suit. If partner is 3=3=3=4 with all her point count in the majors, she might rebid 2NT, which I will raise to three. Otherwise, we play in a minor.

JOHN SCHWARTZ: 2♣. Partner seems to have at least four clubs. If she's at the lower end of her 1NT bid, she will pass, and that then seems like a good spot. If she's toward the upper end, she'll raise to 3♣, and then I can torture her with 3♦. With that description of my hand, I hope she'll know what to do. Or maybe not, but I like my position for the post-mortem, and isn't that the point?

JOHN JONES: 2♣. The most flexible bid. Our diamonds are strong, but our best strain might still be clubs. A more difficult decision may be looming: deciding between 2♠ and 3♦ if partner takes a preference to 2♦.

It's perhaps significant to note that of our thirty 2♣ bidders this month, only a handful discussed explicitly (Mark Bolotin, Daniel Droz, Andy Muenz) or implicitly (John Hemmer, Mark Kinzer, Jim Eagleton) what they'd do and how high they'd compete if the opponents chimed in with two of a major.

Several Club regulars had advice on how to bid this sort of minor two-suiters - in particular, what is expected of CHO over there.

CONNIE GOLDBERG (with RUI MARQUES): 2♣. Playing 2/1 GF or SAYC, it's a good idea to have a partnership agreement that, with a potentially useful minimum, responder stretches to keep the bidding open over opener's 2♣ or 2♦ rebid. Even without such an agreement, 2♣ seems best here. *[Connie and Rui's follow-up plan was identical to Daniel's. - Ed.]*

ANDY MUENZ: 2♣. This hand shows the advantage of opening 1♣ when four-five in the minors. Now, when you open diamonds and rebid clubs, partner knows you have at least as many diamonds as clubs and can correct back to diamonds with equal length. If the opponents compete in a major, you can bid 3♦ next. Because we know that both sides have a double fit, it should be safe to compete to the four-level, provided we find our better minor-suit fit. 2♣ is the start towards doing that.

To play Devil's advocate to Andy: the downside of opening 1♣ with a minimum four-five in the minors comes if partner responds in your major-suit singleton. Now you have to choose between an off-shape 1NT rebid, or 2♣ on only five. You can't cover all the bases; the best you can do is agree with your partner (and properly inform your opponents) as to what lie you prefer to tell.

For what very little it's worth, my partner (a BBO bot) had a problem of its own when choosing a response:

♠-A82 ♥-K86 ♦-7643 ♣-743

So much for our monster club fit. You can judge for yourself how your preferred call would have turned out. We also received a couple of outlier choices. Neither of the 5♣ bidders offered a comment. As for 2♦, I think it's far too much of an underbid, but to be fair, it would've worked out rather well on the actual (unfriendly) layout.

EDWARD SCHWAN: 2♦. Not going anywhere. Might as well be in your strong six-card suit.

This is the sort of problem where luck plays a vital role and any sensible rebid could work. With that said, I believe that a simple 2♣ is best. It names the suit that partner rates to be most interested in. It doesn't show our extra values, but it doesn't deny them either. It risks the opponents finding a profitable eleventh-hour fit in a major (or two, ugh), and that could be dangerous. But, they haven't bid yet, and for all we know they might never be able to enter the auction.

Final Word this month goes to:

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 3♦. This is how I know I'm not a good or imaginative bidder. Too often, like here, I read the problem, come up with my answer, and think, "What else?"

*On this deal, the "else" might not be any better. Take care everyone; see you in June when we'll have our first update on the **2021 D4MSC Challenge** standings.*



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/>