

## DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

### MARCH 2020 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

*Yikes! We've had some doozies in the D4MSC, but this month's problem might go down as the one against which all future nightmares are judged. It set a slew of new Club records, some of which I didn't even realize existed: most responses (64; thanks everyone), most different calls receiving votes (13), most different Panelist calls (8), most respondents who changed their answer over the course of the month (7, including one who changed his answer twice), and most astonishing at-the-table winning call (just wait.)*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

#### MATCHPOINTS, EAST-WEST VULNERABLE

♠-AKQ1093 ♥-AJ95 ♦--- ♣-Q86

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

N-S ARE USING A STANDARD 2/1 GF SYSTEM

3♣ = 6+ CLUBS, USUALLY <2 SPADES, 5-10 HCP

#### 1A. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♦	5	9	100
5♦	1	0	90
5NT	1	2	90
6♣	4	4	90
4♠	2	12	80
5♣	1	4	80
3♦	0	5	70
3♠	1	5	70
4♣	0	2	70
4NT	1	1	70
6♠	0	2	60
3NT	0	1	50
Pass	0	1	50

As you know, I'm always reluctant to disclose the North hand and the table result, because I believe that showing it often distorts the discussion. For any bidding decision, most every reasonable call will work if you catch the right 52-card layout. The point of a bidding forum is to hear what experts believe is the right long-term action. This month, however, I can't even wait until the end of the article to show you the full deal, because it appeals to my warped sense of humor. (\*Ahem\*) Take another look at the scoring table. See that "Pass" all the way at the bottom, garnering one lonely vote? Ding-ding-ding-ding...we have a winner:

NORTH			
♠ 2			
♥ 72			
♦ K874			
♣ K98543			
WEST		EAST	
♠ J8764		♠ 5	
♥ K106		♥ Q843	
♦ QJ102		♦ A9653	
♣ J		♣ A102	
SOUTH			
♠ AKQ1093			
♥ AJ95			
♦ --			
♣ Q86			

Deep Finesse says you can take 10 tricks in clubs at double dummy, but I think 9 is the practical limit. Spades are no better: West has a natural diamond lead, after which 2♠ might come home if you're clairvoyant, not that you can get to 2♠ from 3♣. North is at the bottom of her range, her clubs are about as weak as they could be, her side card is spectacularly useless, and the spade split is depressing. Pass is a deep position to take, but to be fair, in 'traditional' 2/1GF methods, partner is promising no more than this. Anyway, Christine Sgro, who chose this month not to include a comment with her response, would have earned an intercontinental top board with a quiet +110.

As for the rest of us...um, yeah. At least we're not vulnerable. When this deal came up in another of Bridge Base's screwy Robot Race timed games, I chose 4♣ quickly, knowing that my robot partner would raise it to five. (If I'd jumped to 5♣, trust me, the bot would've raised to six no matter what it held. And if I'd splintered with 4♦, I'd have had a chance to show off my skills in playing a four-zero fit. I know those silicon fiends very well.) As this made my partner declarer, the play of the hand was over in about 15 seconds. Down two, minus 100, but no game missed and lots of time saved. An OK outcome in context.

After the tournament, however, I had second thoughts about my action. If North had six-plus clubs and invitational values, it would have jumped to 3♣ over 1NT. This treatment is a relatively recent change to BBO Standard, and it's gaining popularity

*in the flesh-and-blood community as well. The idea is to provide better delineation when responder holds what amounts to a weak-two bid over partner's 1♥ or 1♠ opener. 1♠-3♣ shows a "good" such hand: say, 9 to 11 HCP. But, 1♠-1NT; 2any-3♣ shows a "bad" Weak Two: 5 to 8 HCP. In that structure, I realized belatedly, I probably ought to have passed.*

*Oh well, thoughteth I, maybe it'll make a good MSC problem, especially in old-fashioned 2/1 methods where 3♣ could show almost anything. Little did I suspect that the responses would range from settling for a part score to invoking the Grand Slam Force. Where to begin? What say we take a quick spin around the block, as it were, giving one advocate for 11 of the 13 calls (our lone 3NT bidder didn't comment either) the opportunity to make an opening argument for their camp.*

CATHY STRAUSS: 3♦. Forcing, and asking for a diamond stopper. If partner rebids clubs, I'll raise to 5♣. With a doubleton spade, partner should bid 3♠, and I'll raise to game.

ANDY MUENZ: 3♠. With such a good suit, I'll show the sixth spade and look for a higher-scoring matchpoint contract (and maybe collect 100 honors 😊). If partner rebids 3NT, I'll complete my hand pattern with 4♣.

LYNN HARRIS: 4♣. Don't think that 3NT is the right contract with the likelihood of a diamond lead. 4♣ should be safe, and it leaves open the possibility of partner bidding 4♠ or 5♣.

CHRIS MARLOW: 4♦. The splinter keeps both 4♠ and 5♣ in play, and it directs partner's attention to hearts when contemplating our slam potential.

RICHARD J. HARTZ: 4♠. My spades are self-sufficient, and dummy should be able to hold my club losers to one. 5♣ might be safer, but this is matchpoints.

CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN: 4NT. Presumably Roman Key-Card Blackwood for clubs. Can't think of anything better. If partner bids 5♣, I'll sign off in 5♠, because +400 for 5♣ making five would be a zero. If partner bids 5♦ or 5♥, then 6♣ is likely to be a good contract.

BOB GRINWIS: 5♣. I have four tricks outside of clubs for partner, plus a void for ruffing diamond losers. With at least nine clubs between us, this should make. No interest in slam with partner having 10 or fewer HCP, and no good way to find out what his cards are.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 5♦. I guess I'm committing to six, but it's worth the risk to get to a grand slam when partner holds the ♣AK. 2♥ was a big underbid, but I guess it struck gold since we're now looking for a grand.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 5NT. Grand Slam Force is the obvious call. By the way, the 2♥ rebid undervalues the four-loser hand.

DON DALPE: 6♣. I have been thinking about all kinds of probing or asking bid possibilities, but I decided that they would not help my guess and might help the defense. By the way, my second guess is 4♠.

MARK BOLOTIN: 6♠. Even if I assume (or find out via Exclusion Blackwood) that clubs are running, I probably need to know whether partner has the ♥K, or the ♠J, or ♠xx to go to seven. Bidding 4♦ (or 5♦) might increase the chance of a heart lead.

*Weren't they great, everyone? Let's give all of our contestants a round of applause! Seriously, the amazing part is that they spanned such a wide gamut of strategy and tactics, yet any one of them could have been the big winner if they caught the "right" layout. If nothing else, this problem underscores why invitational jump-shifts are catching on: because the old-fashioned approach of going through 1NT Forcing leaves you at the three level with no clue whether to stay put there, or look for the seven-level, or aim for something in between.*

*Now, let's get down to details. Note that Michael Schuster and Dave Wachsman expressed doubt about the 2♥ bid. Thank heavens I didn't include a "Do you approve...?" Problem 1A this month, or this article would be even more of a novella than it already is. Still, we should address the issue. Other concerned/questioning/kvetching voices, whom we'll hear more from later, include:*

MICHAEL MAYER: 4♦. ... The 2♥ call was a bit of an underbid, so I want to make sure my next call is forcing. ...

RICHARD HARTZ, JR.: 4♠. ... I don't like the 2♥ call. I'm stronger than that. ...

PETE FILANDRO: 4NT. ... Do I agree with South's 2♥ bid? No. I am too strong for a non-forcing 2♥ when an invitational 3♠ is available. ...

JOHN JONES: 6♣. ... I would have rebid 3♥, not 2♥, but I realize that's a bit of a guess. ...

*Dear Santa: I can explain! Look, maybe this is a style issue, or maybe it's the fact that a y-u-ge reason that tournament players use 1NT Forcing is to find excellent heart contracts that would otherwise be missed after one spade-one nonforcing notrump. At any rate, my style is almost always to rebid 2♥ with six=four hands not quite good enough for 3♥. If partner passes and we can make a spade game, I'll pay off, but honestly, I can't remember that ever happening. If partner takes me back to 2♠ with a doubleton, as is so often the case, I'll invite with 3♠ and feel I've done my duty. If he continues with 2NT or three of a minor, and my spades are extra-strong such as here, I can make one last try with 3♠. I was taught long ago that if you're six-four with minimum values, bid your suits in the sequence six-six-four, but if you have extra values, bid six-four-six. This is a six-four-sixer.*

*Next: what would 3♦ mean? Cathy Strauss believes it's akin to fourth-suit forcing, as do:*

WALTER BELL: 3♦. My first instinct was to bid 6♣, but this gives me a chance to hear more.

JIM EAGLETON: 3♦. 4♠ is a game force, but it doesn't help for exploring 6♣. I prefer to have agreed upon a trump suit before cue-bidding, but 3♦ is forcing, strong, and takes up the least bidding room.

*Karl Barth, who chose a 4♦ splinter, asks rhetorically (I think), "What would 3♦ mean if not diamond shortness and club help?" Michael Mayer opines that 3♦ is forcing and might fetch a 3♠ preference on a doubleton. I agree that, by bridge logic, 3♦ must be forcing, but it will more often be a diamond fragment or a waiting bid rather than implying primary club support. And in any case, look at that North hand again. Can't you envision partner, who must have been squirming after our first two calls,*

*delightedly saying "Diamonds?! Good here!" and whipping out a green pass card? We'll win the post-mortem but lose the board.*

*This being matchpoints, it is eminently understandable if you aim for the boss suit holding six to the ace-king-queen-ten-nine. I expected the 3♠-vs.-4♠ debate to be much closer than it actually was.*

STEPHEN COOPER: 4♠. When you cannot make up your mind between 5♣ and 6♣, bid the major-suit game. I hope that if the opponents get a fast club ruff, it will be with the four-card holding.

BILL PORT: 4♠. We have a self-supporting suit. With a void, notrump is off the table and out the door. Partner must have something, hence the 1NT bid. Plus, 4♠ keeps the strong hand hidden, which 3NT would not do.

RICHARD HARTZ, JR. (cont.): 4♠. At this point in the auction, I'll just take my relatively safe game and hope we didn't miss a club or spade slam.

BARRY COHEN: 4♠. The spade suit is nearly solid, and 4♠ pays more than 5♣. If they lead hearts, I want to be the declarer.

BILL SCHMIDT: 4♠. Any number of clubs (including 7) could be right, and at IMPs I'd bid 4♦ to attempt to find the right level. But, making exactly twelve tricks in clubs is unlikely, so 4♠ is a better guess at matchpoints. Partner should correct to 5♣ with a spade void. *[I have to disagree -- bidding 1♠-2♥-4♠ to me screams "if you don't like hearts, partner, then we are playing in spades, period." - NS]*

JUDITH STILLINGER: 4♠. At most, there is one spade loser and possibly only one club loser. With distribution, I'm giving myself 21 points, and partner has enough to go to the three level.

MARK KINZER: 4♠. Even if partner is void in spades, I expect +420 rather than +400 in 5♣.

SASTRY DASIKA: 4♠. Good chance of making game in spades.

**BOB & JOANN GLASSON:** 4♠. At matchpoints, we will bid the game that scores the best.

*A few very successful D4'ers did sound a warning siren, prophetic as it turned out, about overconfidence in a spade contract. As good as these spades are, the diamond void coupled with the likely diamond lead could consume them faster than we would like. Craig Robinson (5♣) worried about getting tapped out if the ♠J doesn't fall quickly. Also expressing doubt to varying degrees:*

STEVE WHITE: 4♠. At matchpoints, 3♠ could easily be enough, but there are a lot of ways this could come home.

**ALA HAMILTON-DAY:** 3♠. Conservative, but I expect to be forced in diamonds.

*If you want to retain the chance of stopping in a part-score if partner has a dog, there's only one other option, espoused by Lynn Harris and:*

BILL FOSTER: 4♣. Four clubs is -- I hope -- "How good are your clubs?" Partner will make the correct judgment: pass or bid 5♣.

*Everyone else who commented this month has effectively saddled up the steeds in clubs. Reaching game is a given; now, they're just haggling over level. Let's hear from our top award-winners who chose that rarest of birds: a third-round splinter.*

**RICH ROTHWART:** 4♦. We may have a slam, or even a grand slam if partner has the ♣AK. Not sure what I'll do if partner signs off in 5♣.

**MARK HAUSER:** 4♦. I play this as a splinter.

**RUI MARQUES (with STEVE GIBBON):** 4♦. Showing a perfect picture of my hand.

**MICHAEL MYERS:** 4♦. We might not be able to make game, or we might have a grand slam. I will not take the most pessimistic view, so I'll force to at least game.

**KARL BARTH:** 4♦. This is clear because it's an automatic win in the post-mortem. If partner can't work out to bid six when it's right, we can calmly point to our bidding. Can we realistically have any less for this auction?

**PAUL D. AMER:** 4♦. Partner should have at least six clubs. With nothing more than ace-king-sixth of clubs, a grand slam is a good bet.

*It's easy to see why many believe a splinter is best. It describes your hand, forces to game, might allow you to reach a magic club slam, and still leaves open the possibility of backing into a higher-scoring spade game. ("Ooh...nice singleton jack of spades, partner!") So, how many diamonds does this splinter show, zero or one?*

**CONNIE GOLDBERG:** 4♦. I want to be in game in a black suit or a slam in clubs. 4♦ shows my strength and my shape to within one card. I can be 5=4=1=3, 5=4=0=4, 5=5=0=3, 5=5=1=2, 6=4=1=2 or 6=4=0=3.

Logically, a four-of-a-major call from partner now is an offer to play. If he bids 4♥, I will bid 4♠. If partner signs off in 5♣, I will have to decide whether to pass or not. If, however, West doubles 4♦ for the lead, and partner fails to redouble (denying the ♦A), I can now bid RKCB and pass 5♣ if partner denies a high club. If instead he does redouble 4♦, I will still bid 4♠, because after all this is matchpoints.

**BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON:** 4♦. I'm letting partner know that I am highly distributional and that we are close to slam. North will likely envision me with 5=4=0=4, which is fine, because it's the diamond void that I want him to picture. This will give him a chance to cue-bid a heart control, offer 4♠ as a place to play, sign off in 5♣, or just bid the club slam himself if he likes his clubs and his points are outside of diamonds.

**KARL BARTH (cont.):** 4♦. ...There is a case to be made that this shows a void.

*Personally, I think it's an iron-clad case. 4♦ absolutely, positively, without an iota of doubt, shows a void. We've already shown at least nine cards in the majors, we failed to jump-shift (important!), partner has made what might be an attempted sign-off, and yet we're saying, "I think we have a game and might even have a slam." Have fun constructing a South hand in which we'd bid this way with a singleton diamond opposite a partner we're not trying to torture. If we wanted to show a stiff, we could simply raise clubs to the appropriate level. We'd then have bid spades-hearts-clubs, with the club raise coming at altitude. How much room can we possibly have left for diamonds?*

*As it turns out, we've already covered this very issue in the D4MSC. I didn't recall the problem, but our noted Club historian, Daniel "Herodotus" Droz, has me covered:*

DANIEL DROZ: 4♦. This problem is very strongly reminiscent of the one from May of 2018, when South held:

♠AKQ985 ♥A8743 ♦-- ♣Q9

This hand is far better than that one was, with a third club and an extra jack and ten to compensate for one fewer heart. It seems like the splinter (which was the winner 22 months ago) should be best here too. You argued at the time that 4♦ should promise a void, and I agree. Is partner's 4♠ next round an offer to play, or showing a void of his own? I'm glad you didn't ask...

*You know, I thought I felt a certain déjà vu as I was writing the article. What's doubly ironic is that the May 2018 problem was the previous record holder for Most Different Answers Received (a measly 11.) Also, Daniel noted that he was the only person to pass back then. He and Christine ought to have a game -- I bet they'd score 80%. Anyway, on the subject of why void splinters are best on auctions like these, my views come from studying under my longtime friend, collaborator, and bridge mentor:*

**DANNY KLEINMAN:** 4♦. I disagree strongly with "splinters" showing singletons or voids indiscriminately. I believe they should be reserved for voids specifically. I jump to 4♦ as a void splinter to show club support and encourage slam, while leaving room for partner to decline with 4♠ on a doubleton and poor values for a club slam. Without this splinter available, I'd have to guess between 4♠ and 5♣.

*I asked Danny to chime in this month, hoping to break the Panelists' tie between 4♦ and 6♣. He came through for me admirably. He and I have been friends for over two decades, but we've only partnered each other once, at his club in L.A. when my family and I were on a Disneyland vacation. Danny filled out a card for us to use, in which he checked off the "splinters" box and wrote "VOIDS!" next to it. Would you believe that the treatment came up four times during our session -- three times positively (he or I splintered to show a void) and once negatively (Danny showed primary support for me while bidding three suits, allowing me to infer he must have exactly a singleton in the fourth.) And, we won going away despite my going down in a cold slam on one deal and leading out of turn on another. I happen to lead out of turn a lot; Barry Cohen is reading this somewhere and screaming "YOU THINK, NICK?"*

**TOM WEIK:** 4♦. Exclusion Blackwood seems called for, although it will result in uncertainty next round if partner shows one key card. (A heart lead will be suggested by the bidding.) Alternatively, it will enable us to reach 7♣ if he shows two.

*Tom is treating 4♦ as Exclusion ("Show me your key cards outside of diamonds, partner"), while Michael Shuster uses 5♦ for that purpose. I think, absent prior discussion, that Michael's treatment will be fielded more often by an unfamiliar expert North. Expounding on this topic in detail:*

**PETE FILANDRO** (cont.): 4NT. If partner had three hearts with zero or one spade, she would (should) have passed 2♥. Thus, barring very extreme shapes, partner is 1=2=4=6 or 1=2=3=7. Expecting a misfit, any six-card suit will be chunky -- king-jack-ten-sixth or better. Seven-carders might be only king-empty. *[Sigh...I wish sadly that Pete had programmed the BBO bots. - NS]*

For partnership harmony, one of the few pre-session agreements I made with North was "Undiscussed conventional bids will remain unbid, even if one of us thinks it is 'obvious'." So, 4♦ as Exclusion Blackwood is out. 4♦ could be used as a

splinter, arguably the most common interpretation, and it would be very appropriate if my  $\spadesuit 3$  were the  $\diamondsuit 3$ . As it is, my first-round controls tell me I don't expect a meaningful continuation. Partner's reply to 4NT should be clear and safe, as there is hardly any chance North has the  $\spadesuit A$ .

*Pete went on to observe that  $4\diamondsuit$  could also be treated as a trump asking-bid, a natural jump-shift implying extreme shortness in clubs, an old-fashioned asking bid (with, say,  $\diamondsuit xx(x)$ ), or an ultra-modern self-splinter.*

**CRAIG ROBINSON:**  $5\clubsuit$ . This could be a matchpoint disaster if spades are right, but  $4\spadesuit$  is likely to get tapped out unless the jack falls. Clubs should be a scramble, but I think eleven tricks are likely.

**HOWARD WACHTEL:**  $5\clubsuit$ . Losing Trick Count would suggest that we can take ten tricks, but with North probably having a singleton spade, a crossruff seems likely, so I am willing to contract for an eleventh. Not sure how to probe for a club slam.

*Honestly, I think you just did.  $3\clubsuit$  did not convey captaincy to us, because both partners had very wide (5+ HCP) ranges for their bidding. Someone has to limit their hand narrowly before the other becomes captain. Thus, if North is at the top of her range and thinks she has the right cards for  $6\clubsuit$ , she's perfectly entitled to bid it over  $5\clubsuit$ . My only concern is that North could and should play us for a stiff diamond rather than a void, most likely  $5=4=1=3$ .*

**ED SHAPIRO:**  $6\clubsuit$ . I give up on seven. This is quite a hand in support, one that will make you consider switching to a big-club system. Here at matchpoints, you might consider  $4\spadesuit$ , since the field won't bid a minor suit slam even if it walks up, introduces itself, and shakes their hand. But, I'll assume that partner is sound for his bidding and take a shot.

**JOHN JONES:**  $6\clubsuit$ . When in doubt, be practical.  $4\diamondsuit$  would be Kickback for some, a splinter for others, and Exclusion for another crowd. For my partnerships, it would be a splinter, which isn't horrible, but how will partner have any clue that:

$\spadesuit xx \heartsuit x \diamondsuit xxx \clubsuit KJ10xxxx$

...should accept? Most of the time,  $6\clubsuit$  will be a good contract, so I'll throw my hat in that ring.

**DOUGLAS DYE:**  $6\clubsuit$ . Partner should have at most one spade, so I'll bid the slam in clubs. If I were sure 5NT would be taken as a Grand Slam Force in clubs, I'd try that.

**BARRY PASSER:**  $6\clubsuit$ . I'll give partner  $\clubsuit KJ10xxx$  and out. Enough for  $6\clubsuit$ .

**JAY APFELBAUM:**  $6\clubsuit$ . System might allow a  $4\diamondsuit$  short-suit bid, but I wouldn't try that without an express agreement. With no tools available to explore slam chances scientifically, I'll guess that we can make twelve tricks.

**MANOJ K. DEB-ROY:**  $6\clubsuit$ . My bid should be either  $6\clubsuit$  or  $6\spadesuit$ . I'll choose  $6\clubsuit$ , giving partner the option to correct.

*I wouldn't worry in the slightest about missing a grand slam. For one thing, it's almost unbiddable. For another, not to be a party pooper, but just as in the May 2018 problem, an opening heart lead might blow  $7\clubsuit$  straight out of the water by removing a critical late entry to dummy. For a third, as Ed alludes to,  $6\clubsuit$  making seven ought to score spectacularly well. There is a tremendous amount of uncertainty swirling*



*around that 3♣ bid by North, so reaching any making slam will be highly rewarded. Speaking of Ed, in regards to the problem footnote:*

**ED SHAPIRO** (cont.): 6♣. ...By the way, if your system allows you to have only 11 points to bid 2/1 forcing to game, isn't that a bit pushy given the garbage the field tends to open on nowadays?

*Jim Eagleton wondered about this too. It would indeed be pushy, but I wasn't suggesting that with the "5-10 HCP" note. Even using standard 2/1 methods (i.e., without the invitational jump-shift treatment), I think most Norths would bid differently with 11 or 12 HCP and a six-card minor. We all realize, if only implicitly, that an eight-point range for 1NT followed by 3♣/3♦ is quite insane. I meant to imply that, most likely, North would have bid 2NT over 2♥ on almost any shape with invitational high-card values. As always, your mileage may vary.*

*One way or another, a successful partnership needs some way to whittle down the 1NT-then-3♣/3♦ range into something digestible. Perhaps invitational jump-shifts are superior, but, having used them for about six months on BBO, I can testify that they solve some problems but create others. They chew up bidding room awfully quickly, which sometimes cuts sharply across partner's neatly planned auction with a complex hand. If you want to see an example, check out the April 2020 problem on the website. 😊 (Yes, I had planned all along to do a two-month treatment on this topic, with the very similar second half serving as this year's April Fools' Day mirthfulness. What I didn't plan on was for the first half to be total March Madness.)*

*Phew! We're almost done. All we need to do is give the Final Word to two Solvers, who have rather different and, um, interesting takes on the deal.*

**BILL BAUER:** 4♦. Hoping my partner will read this as a splinter in support of clubs. Since my partner cannot be me, who has misread more splinters than any bridge player in history, he ought to get it right. I just want to explore for 7♣ being the greedy b-----d that I am. (PS - I like to give Nick an answer he can work with in his column.)

**KATHY CREVELING:** 6♠. Be a man!!

*We must be swift as a coursing river / With all the force of a great typhoon... Great song, great movie, but on the actual deal, being a mouse would've scooped up all the matchpoints. Thanks everyone, see you in April.*



*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/>*