

## DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

**MAY 2026 PROBLEM**

**NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR**

*So here we are, not vulnerable at matchpoints, with six HCP and seven spades to three honors. This is a classic preempt situation, right? Well, maybe. The concern is which of our three tablemates we might be preempting. Our singleton in opener's suit suggests that partner holds something other than a classic 4-4-4-1 takeout double. In fact, he might hold a monster opposite which a slam cannot be ruled out. Or he might instead hold a big one-suiter in which we belong in a strain other than spades. Or he might hold a perfectly normal three-suited takeout double. Or maybe something else entirely. Isn't this fun? This month, the D4MSC wrestles with the issue of how high to bid without potentially stepping on partner's toes. Put on your ballet slippers and dance along.*

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### MATCHPOINTS, NONE VULNERABLE

♠-QJ106542 ♥-Q5 ♦-2 ♣-J103

South	West	North	East
?	1♦	Double	Pass

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

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
3♠	7	6	100
4♠	6	7	90
2♠	3	4	90
1♠	1	3	80
6♥	0	1	see text
7♣	0	1	see text

*The two slam bids aren't typos – I'm sure they're phantom entries from last month's problem, where the auction was at 5♥ by South's second turn. If your web browser caches pages aggressively, this sort of thing can happen. I've made some HTTP tweaks to the website to keep this from reoccurring, but in the meantime, it's always a very good idea to check the contest month shown at the top of the page and refresh it when necessary. As for the scoring, I awarded both bidders what they would have earned on the April problem.*

*Moving on to May. The entire Club chose to bid some number of spades. Go figure. 3♠ earned the top score partly because it drew plurality support from our 17 esteemed Panelists and partly because more than two-thirds of the electorate chose a bid that allowed North-South to stop in a part-score. (At IMPs, I think most of us would have chosen the jump to game.)*

*This month, we'll start at the top and work down. Representing the group that chose to jam the auction straight to game without worrying about which opponent might get his or her shorts in a knot over it are:*

**MARK COHEN:** 4♠. This should show a long, decent suit since partner could have a big hand with "shortish" spades. If I had an opening hand myself, I could always cue-bid first, especially holding the master suit. I'm light on controls but I like the placement of my soft honors over the opening bidder and then into partner's strength. Note also that opener's partner has passed.

**DOUGLAS DYE:** 4♠. I have one place to play, and this call is the one most likely to convey the message. Since diamonds haven't been raised (yet), partner may well have an 18-point balanced hand or a big hand with hearts; either way he will at least have tolerance for spades and will expect this kind of hand for my call.

**JAY APFELBAUM:** 4♠. It may be possible to make a slam, but the more likely scenario is that West has a pretty good hand. We will need North to have three aces for any slam to have a chance. The other possibility is that West has a distributional hand. Bidding game might dissuade her from competing.

**BARRY PASSER:** 4♠. To play with a very long suit. I didn't cue 2♦ so partner should not go looking for a slam.

**MICHAEL MAYER:** 4♠. It will be very hard for partner to evaluate if I bid only 3♠. I'm counting on most available finesses working.

**BOB GRINWIS:** 4♠. I am bidding what I hope we can make. 1♠ would not be strong enough, and 2♠ is too strong.

*Keeping it real:*

**KARL BARTH:** 4♠. Although this is a bidding contest, I'm choosing what I would do at the table, and I imagine many others will do the same. This call is obviously preemptive, but I won't be surprised if it makes, especially given partner's minimal duplication of values in diamonds. Opener may have strong hand or long diamonds or both. In that vein, what's your follow-up if West bids 5♦? My answer is, "I'm glad it's matchpoints, so if I guess wrong, it's only one board".

*The \$64,000 Question (\$770,000 adjusted for inflation):*

**BARRY COHEN:** 4♠. Long spades and nothing else. Where are all the diamonds?

*Well, maybe North has a few. If so, that increases the chance that he has a big hand, perhaps a balanced 19+ too strong for a 1NT overcall. Opposite that, 4♠ seems like a perfectly peachy contract, especially if we somehow had the methods to make North the declarer. (Does anyone play Texas transfers on this auction?) But there are still a couple of hitches, which many of our lower bidders noted.*

*Hitch #1: Partner's strong hand could be something other than a 19+ notrump. He might, to give just one example, have a strong-two in hearts, opposite which our queen-small is 24-carat gold. "Big" takeout doubles require two bids to describe. Jumping to 4♠ isn't conducive to having partner finish his description.*

*Hitch #2: Partner could have innocently made a garden-variety takeout double on, say, a 3=4=2=4 13-count. Bidding 4♠ might cement us with a minus score on a deal where most North-Souths are bidding and making a routine part-score.*

*Keeping it one level lower:*

RICK OLANOFF: 3♠. I need a few extras from partner's double to make game

**BILL SCHMIDT:** 3♠. Too much playing strength for 1♠, too weak in high cards for 2♠. 3♠ is better than 4♠ because (a) it describes the hand perfectly, (b) we may not make 4♠, and (c) if partner is strong and balanced, it provides more room for a slam auction. Holding:

♠Axx ♥KJTx ♦AJx ♣AKx,

...partner might decide it's too risky to bid over 4♠, but would try 4♦ over 3♠.

JOHN JONES: 3♠. 4♠ can't be terrible opposite almost any hand partner has, whether it is a minimum takeout double shape, a non-minimum takeout double shape, or a hand too good to overcall. However, partner won't know 4♠ is good and may have difficulty opposite the big hand.

**MARK BOLOTIN:** 3♠. I think this shows long spades and less strength than 2♠. I don't see a game opposite a minimum. The other option is to bid 1♠ and keep rebidding spades, but this makes it harder for them to go to 4♦.

MARK KINZER: 3♠. This is supposed to show a six-card suit, but my diamond length suggests partner has an atypical hand.

**ED SHAPIRO:** 3♠. Pretty much descriptive. Hope partner hasn't doubled with a good hand and a load of diamonds. Even then, the 3♠ call should offer reassurance on suit length and quality, allowing a raise without good support. Maybe showing my age here.

JIM EAGLETON: 3♠. This looks like the definition of a three-level bid. I agree it is on the weak side and there are possible wasted values in diamonds that would encourage partner to bid too high, but we are not vulnerable.

*Daffy and Donald would approve:*

**PETE FILANDRO:** 3♠. Insufficient points (and no controls) for me to quack an invitational 2♠. 3♠ is a perfect "picture bid" showing 6 or 7 spades and some points (like the bottom of an opening 2♠ or 3♠ bid). If partner has the "big double" and bids on, I am happy to hear 4♠ or provide a dummy for 3NT, 4♥, or 5♣.

*On the subject of whether North promises at least spade tolerance for the double:*

**ANDY MUENZ:** 3♠. My first thought was to bid 4♠ figuring partner should have at least three, so we are likely to have a 10-card fit. But with a singleton in LHO's suit and RHO not raising, there's a greater chance of partner having a monster that may or may not have spades. So, I'll only bid 3♠ to give partner some room. The tough decision will come when he bids 3NT next. At IMPs I would definitely just bid 4♠ to ensure we are in game.

*I'm with Andy on this matter. If you want to compete aggressively – and these days, doesn't everyone? – that means overcalling on light hands. Even for those of us who are comfortable with wide-ranging overcalls (8 to 17 HCP is my preference, non-vulnerable), sooner or later you'll pick up a hand so strong that you simply must start with a double. The lower your ceiling for a simple overcall, the more this will happen. The notion of a takeout double promising "tolerance" for the unbid suits is charming, but it wasn't a guarantee in 1966, much less 2026. Partner could have precisely zero spades over there, which kind of stinks, but it is what it is.*

*Those who chose 4♠ might fairly wonder: if you don't bid it on this hand, then when would you ever choose it? Here's one Panelist's answer:*

**BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON:** 3♠. Although you don't see this bid discussed very much, I play that it's a six card or longer suit, preemptive in nature. With the right hand, partner can up the ante to 4♠ or even look for slam. I won't jump to 4♠ for two reasons. (1) If partner's double is minimal, there are no guarantees we can take ten tricks, and (2) a jump to 4♠ usually looks more like :

♠A97632 ♥A2 ♦K65 ♣Q5

...which was the suggested bid in an article I read recently.

*Hmm. I checked several textbooks plus the usual suspects on the web. I found one source that backed Bruce's example: six-card suit, minimum opening bid strength, no unusual distribution. I found a couple that backed the 4♠ bidders' view: highly preemptive, likely a seven-card suit, no side ace or king. Mostly, I found silence. I mean total, complete, subway-walls-and-tenement-halls silence. Overwhelmingly, most teaching websites solve our current dilemma by pretending that a jump to game over a takeout double simply doesn't exist. The conspiracy of silence even extends to [our national organization](#).*

*So, whatever you believe 4♠ shows, you'd better double-check with your partner about it. If you ever peer across the table and see me in the opposite seat, after you stop screaming, be advised that I'd guess to take it as preemptive.*

*Down further we go:*

**RICHARD HARTZ, SR.:** 2♠. If partner bids again, I'll try 4♠.

**STEPHEN COOPER:** 2♠. Anything else would be too unilateral. Preempting does not seem right. 4♠ is likely where you want to be but give partner a chance to show a big hand first.

**BILL BAUER:** 2♠. Although my points are in queens and jacks, the hand values at 9 points and is thus worthy of a jump to 2♠. I'm curious to learn what partner will do, but remember: "Curiosity killed the cat!"

**STEVE WHITE:** 2♠. If I had to place the contract, I would bid 4♠. There are some deals where 4♠ would be a favorite even if partner will pass 2♠. But on most deals, were partner to pass, game would not be a favorite, and that's the right test at matchpoints. Another advantage of bidding 4♠ now is that it decreases the chance of the opponents bidding 5♦, but that's not a strong enough consideration to get me to bid 4♠.

*If the opponents can bid and make a diamond game (or find a profitable equal-vulnerability sacrifice) after kicking off their end of the auction with 1♦-pass, we'll*

have a good story to tell our friends at dinner. I have no objection to keeping the auction low here, but I can't agree that a value-showing 2♠ is the best approach. Yes, we have the playing strength for it and then some, but if the auction stays competitive, partner will expect us to have roughly one ace more and as many as three spades fewer. Yeesh! We might end up setting some sort of contract bridge record for most penalty doubles pulled in a single auction.

I'm unsure whether it's better to go high or low here, but I do think that if you choose the latter, then take no half-measures.

**MICHAEL SHUSTER: 1♠.** Considering my spade and diamond length and East's pass, partner has a double-and-bid hand, possibly a huge one. I'm going to start with 1♠ and jump to 4♠ at my next opportunity. Earlier spade jumps might find us in an unwanted Blackwood auction.

*This should work. The chance of 1♠ being passed out is about one in three bajillion. We've limited our high-card values so any further bidding by us will not cause partner to go bananas. The two-step sequence eliminates all danger that partner will misread a direct jump to 4♠. The downside of course is that the opponents get an extra round to freeze us out in a suit, but having seven spades is pretty good insulation against the cold.*

*Here's one thing everyone can agree on:*

JOHN JONES (cont.): 3♠. ...I would love to know about who LHO and CHO are and what their styles are, but alas, this is a bidding panel. Al Roth would surely abstain!

*At the table, North held a 1=5=3=4 20-count; his stiff spade was the king. I don't know if that counts as "tolerance", but it certainly counted as "glorious". Slam was on a club finesse through the opening bidder, which was as close to a sure thing as bridge does out. I didn't record the matchpoint outcome (at my table we stopped at 4♠) but if you and your regular partner could get to the slam, you'd undoubtedly have scored very well.*

*Last Word this month goes to a longtime Panelist who had the temerity to go out and win a national championship (the Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams) at the San Francisco NABC's in December. Yes, you already knew that, but I'm four months behind in reading my ACBL Bulletins.*

**CONNIE GOLDBERG: 4♠.** I just can't imagine bidding any less.

*You may say she's a dreamer, but she's not the only one. Thanks as always, everyone. I hope you'll join us in June.*



*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 <https://d4msc.straguzzi.org/>*