

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

OCTOBER 2020 PROBLEM NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

Few situations are more uncomfortable at bridge than when partner picks up a strong hand and you pick up 13 pieces of wastepaper. Your CHO will double and cue-bid repeatedly to express his joy while you scour your bidding box in vain for a card marked "Shut the Hell Up Already!" Such is our dilemma for October. Unlike most D4MSC problems, this one has a clear-cut solution if you believe our expert respondents, as both halves of the problem received outright majority votes among both Panelists and Solvers. That doesn't happen often.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-109 ♥-Q96 ♦-J8543 ♣-542

| <u>South</u> | <u>West</u> | <u>North</u> | <u>East</u> |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Pass | 1♦ | Double | Pass |
| 1♥ | 2♦ | Double* | Pass |
| ? | | | |

* - TAKEOUT, EXTRA VALUES, PROB. < 4 HEARTS

1a. Do you agree with South's 1♥ call?

| ANSWER | PANEL | SOLVERS | AWARD |
|-----------------|-------|---------|-----------|
| Yes | 13 | 26 | 20 |
| No, prefer 1NT | 1 | 7 | 10 |
| No, prefer Pass | 0 | 4 | 10 |
| No, prefer 2♣ | 0 | 1 | 10 |

Everybody's a comedian these days.

CRAIG ROBINSON: Yes. I like to find our 3-3 fits as early as possible. It makes it much harder for the defense to figure out.

ANDY MUENZ: Yes. Least scary of all options. Although, given partner's second double, maybe an insufficient 1♣ bid to bar him from the auction would have been better, albeit against the spirit of the game.

KARL BARTH: Yes. Because Directors discourage players from vomiting during the auction, nothing appeals more than 1♥.

Let's pause a few seconds for the rimshots to die down. There. There's nothing appealing about 1♥, of course, but it's normal in this sort of situation. As Edgar Kaplan

used to say, takeout doubles are meant to be taken out, and this is the cheapest port in the storm. Many respondents felt that there was no logical alternative.

ED SHAPIRO: Yes. Seems very normal, barely a beginners' problem at this point.

MARK KINZER (with LYNN HARRIS): Yes. No other choice to consider

TOM WEIK: Yes. My best suit of the three I was asked to pick from. No real alternative.

PETE FILANDRO (with MICHAEL SHUSTER): Yes. The guidance I follow is, "When no bid fits, bid your cheapest available three-card suit." (Or, as STEPHEN COOPER put it: "When you have no good bid, choose the cheapest bad bid.)

BILL BAUER (with MANOJ DEB-ROB and JOHN HEMMER): Yes. Unless you think you can beat 1♦ with this rag, you must bid something. 1♥ is the least of all evils.

CONNIE GOLDBERG & RUI MARQUES: Yes. Can't imagine bidding 1NT or passing.

BARRY COHEN: Yes. This seems clear. I'm not strong enough for 1NT.

Bruce Schwaigelson and Steve White even dared to mention the U-word in their comments: "Unanimous". Not quite. The vote for Yes was lopsided, but there were several dissenters we ought to hear from.

BILL PORT: No, prefer Pass. I really should bid to keep my partner's confidence, and I am short of the Rule of Nine for leaving the double in. *[If the auction level + the number of trumps you hold + the number of trump honors you hold is 9 or greater, then you can consider converting partner's takeout double for penalty. - Ed.]* But, the opponents have not been doubled into game, and I am well situation to defend a diamond contract. It's where our best chances lie.

CHRIS MARLOW: No, prefer Pass. I greatly dislike bidding three-card suits if there is a reasonable alternative. If I held only four diamonds and a third spade, then I'd bid 1♥. Here, the opponents might make 1♦ doubled, but maybe partner has a good hand and we set it a trick or two.

BARRY PASSER: No, prefer Pass. At that point in the auction, West had not confirmed diamond length. *[This is a good point. The bidding-forum setting unfortunately gives us a wire that West has a serious diamond suit. At the table, we wouldn't learn this for another round. - NS]*

I can understand the rationale for passing. I think it's a deep position to take this early in the auction, but the upside is that partner, who seems a favorite to have a big hand, might be denied the opportunity to torture us further. If he does bid again, he knows not to expect anything but a bunch of diamonds out of us. I'm less sanguine about this alternative, though:

DAVE WACHSMAN: No, prefer 1NT. This is the most descriptive call, as it denies a four-card major while also denying the strength to convert to penalties.

WILLIAM FOSTER: No, prefer 1NT. Partner appears to have fallen in love with his hand. 1NT will alert him that I have no four-card or longer suit outside of diamonds. If he still takes another call, that's where we'll play, right or wrong.

Bridge is all about finding the least damaging lie for every situation. In a forcing situation, I'll fudge a lot of bids, but a value-showing 1NT advance to a takeout double is way down the list. It's occasionally okay to lie about having a stopper in opener's minor, but I think that the 7-10 HCP aspect is pretty close to sacred.

Now, here's a lie I hadn't considered, but which has an intriguing appeal:

JOHN JONES: ...The late Mike Schuman preached bidding 2♣ on hands like this. He preferred bidding three-card minors to a three-card major because it was easier to slow partner down. If East passed in tempo without a care in the world, I'm a 2♣ bidder; if he passed thoughtfully...I'll bid 1♥ and hope to get out low.

From the Dept. of Awkward Dinner Table Situations:

RICHARD HARTZ: Yes. Not enough high-card points to bid 1NT.

RICHARD HARTZ, JR.: No, prefer 1NT.

But, 1♥ won the day and the extra 10 points in the scoring. Summing up for the wide majority:

RICH ROTHWART: Yes. Passing shows much better diamonds than we have. 1NT implies 6-to-10 HCP. I might bid 1NT with 5 HCP occasionally to avoid bidding a three-card suit, but not with 3 HCP.

JAY APFELBAUM (with DAN LOEB): Yes. My hand is much too weak for 1NT. I have no four-card suit to bid. I have three hearts to an honor. This is a "least of evils" sort of bid.

1b. With the auction as given, what is your call?

| ANSWER | PANEL | SOLVERS | AWARD |
|--------|-------|---------|-----------|
| Pass | 10 | 24 | 80 |
| 2NT | 2 | 8 | 60 |
| 3♣ | 2 | 5 | 60 |
| 3♦ | 0 | 1 | 50 |

"But..but they might make 2♦ doubled!" you protest? "Um, yeah, your point being?" answer these fine folks:

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Pass. I suppose South could bid 2♥, 2NT, or even 3♣, but those are possible recipes for disaster. I'm passing and trying for a plus score. Even -180 could be beating all the -200s at other tables. A good matchpoint gamble.

JOHN JONES: Pass. I think we are a slight favorite to beat this. If we don't, -180 might still be worth some matchpoints.

TOM WEIK: Pass. While I am not at all certain that I will beat 2♦, I will pass and shoot it out. The good news is that, if they make it, it's not game.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Pass. We have a decent chance of setting this, possible two tricks for all the matchpoints. -180 could be an average result.

ANDY MUENZ: Pass. Assuming that partner would have bid a suit if he held five spades or six clubs, he'll have at least one diamond. On defense, we'll have one

diamond trick, maybe two. I hope partner has enough to set 2♦ or hold it to -180 if other North-Souths are going down multiple tricks in a contract our way.

RICH ROTHWART: Pass. I don't see a plus score by bidding, even if partner has 18 or 19 HCP. We'll often beat 2♦, and if we don't, -180 still beats -200.

Aiming for minus 180 is a little weird, but hey, matchpoints is a weird game. We can take solace in the fact that other Souths in the field will suffer just as much when this board reaches them. As long as we suffer just a little bit less, we'll score well. Misery loves company, and it especially loves duplicate bridge.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: Pass. Partner has shown extra values with her second double. With jack-fifth in diamonds, we'll defend.

JAY APFELBAUM: Pass. Bidding carries at least two major risks: we might not have a fit, and partner might easily consider any bid we make here, including 2NT, as showing a better hand than this. Passing has its risks as well, but if we can't beat 2♦, we're very unlikely to make any contract of our own.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass. I'm more content to contract for six tricks in diamonds in our six-card (or maybe seven-card) fit than to try for nine tricks in clubs in our eight-card (or maybe seven-card) fit. Put another way, we have a better chance to go plus here than in 3♣.

CONNIE GOLDBERG & RUI MARQUES: Pass. They may make this or go down only one, but passing seems least risky. If we bid 2♥, partner might guess to play us for four of them, and if we bid 2NT, he'll rightfully play us for more values. Partner will usually hold three hearts, 17+ HCP, and a hand willing to defend should he catch us with what we actually hold.

STEVE WHITE: Pass. This one is closer than Part A. At first, I liked 2♥, hoping for the smallest minus. But, if partner really has only three hearts, it won't be. Partner probably has a diamond, so we might go plus on defense.

BILL SCHMIDT: Pass. Without the takeout agreement, pass would be automatic. With it, I trust partner to have enough values to make 2NT...but if that's the case, then 2♦X should be down two.

MARK KINZER: Pass. Partner probably is something like 4=3=1=5. I considered 3♣, but that sounds too forward going. I'll take a shot at a plus score in 2♦X.

BARRY PASSER: Pass. What else? It might go down.

MARK BOLOTIN: Pass. Partner's strength is over declarer's. Hopefully it will be difficult for West to lead trumps twice from dummy to pick up my suit.

BILL BAUER: Pass. First conclusion: my partner must hate me. Not being a masochist, I'll share my pain with North by choosing to defend. Will we set 2♦ doubled? I hope so. I need a good result after last month's MSC score.

Here comes the U-word again:

CHRIS MARLOW: Pass. Can this be anything other than unanimous?

"Could be worse. Could be raining."

DON DALPE: Pass. I give up. I wonder what I will do after a redouble.

Evil, evidently, is in the eye of the beholder:

RICK ROWLAND: Pass. The least of all evils.

BOB GRINWIS: 2NT. An awful hand with no suit and no good bid. 2NT is the least of evils.

The poor ♠8 just doesn't get any respect:

PAUL AMER: Pass. I wish my ♠8 were the nine.

KARL BARTH: Pass. It sure looks like we aren't going to find a big fit. We aren't making game if partner can't bid a suit or cue-bid. Maybe my diamond length will be a headache for West. +100 might be a good result. I do wish I had the ♠9 instead of the eight.

Spots do matter. With ♠J9543, we'd have a halfway decent chance at two diamond stoppers no matter what Mr. Big Shot across the table has in diamonds. Were that the case, this choice probably would have fetched more votes:

ED SHAPIRO: 2NT. This part of the problem is tougher. I assume partner would have bid 2♠ with five of them, so if I have to guess, his shape is 4=3=1=5. I don't want to rebid hearts on queen-nine-low, despite its relative quality. My values aren't way short of what partner will expect for 2NT, and it will give him another chance to do something descriptive. Pass is a possible alternative, and I might be swayed to that at the table if I knew anything about West's proclivities.

STEVE GIBBON: 2NT. Not 2♥. Not 2♠. Lowest bid that's viable after no fit in hearts and partner's continued lack of suggesting a strain. It's hard to imagine being declarer on these cards, but trust your partner.

STEPHEN COOPER: 2NT. Having not advanced 1NT last round, this should show the gut-wrenching minimum that we hold.

DAN LOEB: 2NT. I'm forced to bid. I hope this suggests my diamonds are long.

CRAIG ROBINSON: 2NT. I don't like it, but what else can I do (other than cross Nick off my Christmas card list)?

Hey, I was West on this deal! And, serendipitously holding seven diamonds, I took nine tricks in 2♦X. Robot North and I could've taken roughly 15 tricks in any strain, including ones that haven't been invented yet, but that's another story. The one difference was that it was total-points scoring, not matchpoints.

In fact, it was Robot South's obvious distress that led me to choose the problem for the D4MSC. In situations like this, the bots will simulate hundreds of deals quickly, then choose the action that maximizes its double-dummy outcome. After a very long virtual huddle, South passed. Perhaps it too was hoping for -180 as the least of evils. On this particular deal, the unlikely winning action was:

PETE FILANDRO: 3♣. Partner is most likely 4=3=1=5. Holding five spades, he might have started with (a heavy) 1♠. Bidding either major rates to be a six-card fit, while clubs is at least an eight-card fit. Maybe even nine-card; how else would he bid:

♠AKxx ♥AKx ♦-- ♣Axxxxx

BARRY COHEN: 3♣. I'm playing partner for perhaps 4=3=1=5. I don't have enough points for 2NT. Sitting under the diamond bidder, there's no guarantee we can set 2♦. I have a ruffing value in spades. So, 3♣ it is.

LYNN HARRIS: 3♣. I doubt we can beat 2♦, and I think partner could have bid 2♠ with five. So, I'll bid my club suit.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 3♣. Partner is marked with at least five clubs and shortness in diamonds. This is our last chance to go plus.

To be clear, the USS Plus sailed hours ago. However, partner did have five strong clubs as many people inferred, and neither opponent could plausibly double 3♣. We'd probably have gone for -200. That's usually terrible at matchpoints, but it was better than the -280 available in 2♦X, or the -300 in 2NT. I didn't stop to note how 2♥ would have fared, but my hunch is that the 6-1 trump split might have put a damper on things.

That said, I think that passing here and taking your chances in 2♦X is the long-run winning action. Just like "evil", "winning" is relative. Last Word this month goes to:

JOHN HEMMER: Pass. If partner couldn't cue-bid 3♦, there's no game our way. My hand should be worth two, possibly three tricks on defense. If they still make 2♦, I get complaining rights!

John didn't actually write "complaining", but this is a family bidding forum. Thanks for all the responses and great comments, everyone. Stay safe, and we'll reconvene in November.



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/>