

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

JUNE 2026 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

We had high hopes when we picked up this month's South hand, but the auction has not unfolded as we hoped. Partner couldn't open, East did, West announced that the bad guys had the balance of points, and partner could only muster a belated jump, but at least it's in our best suit. The vulnerability is against us. What now? As usual, I don't have the foggiest idea what's right...at IMPs. At matchpoints, where the deal actually arose, I think that there's at least one and possibly two quite attractive calls that take advantage of the one thing that's gone in our favor so far. Did you, ahem, notice the footnote? Few people paid it much attention, but I think it's the key to unlocking the problem. The game is afoot, the D4MSC is on the trail, and the idioms are raining down like cats and dogs. Let's see where the clues lead.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

VIEW THE [D4MSC CONVENTION CARD](#)

NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-Q842 ♥-AQ54 ♦-- ♣-KQJ102

| South | West | North | East |
|--------|-------|-------|------|
| | | Pass | 1♦ |
| Double | Rdbl* | 3♣ | Pass |
| ? | | | |

* - 11+ HCP, NO FIVE-CARD MAJOR

A. What is your call at Matchpoints?

| ANSWER | PANEL | SOLVERS | AWARD |
|--------|-------|---------|-------|
| 4♣ | 7 | 5 | 50 |
| Pass | 4 | 7 | 40 |
| 3♦ | 2 | 1 | 30 |
| 5♣ | 2 | 6 | 30 |
| 3NT | 0 | 1 | 20 |
| 4NT | 0 | 1 | 20 |

"Watson, come here! We have a new case."

Uh, sorry Mr. Holmes. It's Watson's day off. The temp agency sent me to cover for him.

“Hmph. A rather scruffily-dressed gent, aren’t you? Well, no matter, you’ll have to do. What did you say your name was?”

You’d just butcher it. And don’t call my hoodie scruffy. You’re the guy still wearing a deerstalker hat after they’ve gone out of style nine times.

“Ah, another dreadfully rude American, I see. You breed like rabbits. Very well, then. Study this whist problem carefully. It was sent by Professor Moriarty, who has challenged me to find the best continuation for South.”

We call it ‘bridge’ now, Mr. Holmes. Whist went out with pantaloons and pocket watches. I think the problem is from one of BBO’s online robot tournaments, but for our purposes, assume that the deal arose in a good ACBL matchpoint game. North is an expert human player but not one we’ve partnered frequently, and the opponents are at least competent and possibly much better.

“Our partner was intoxicated when he bid 3♣, I presume?”

Doubtful. North knows what she’s doing.

“But there are not enough honors in a standard deck for the bidding to be truthful!”

Sure there are. 3♣ doesn’t show values, just playing strength. This isn’t a sequence that a casual partnership often discusses, and a few respondents did express some uncertainty, but most of the Baker Street Irregulars recognized that if North held a truly strong hand in context, perhaps because West psyched, she had a different way to inform us:

ED SHAPIRO: 4♣. I think that 3♣ preemptive over a redouble is pretty standard now, even at these colors, so I’ll boost it one more. Constructive raises go through a cue-bid.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON (with **JAY APFELBAUM**, **KARL BARTH**, **PHIL FREIDENREICH**, and **JOHN JONES** explicitly, and others implicitly): Partner is showing a weak hand with her jump after the strength-showing redouble.

“I see. The voguish customs of modernity. In whist, we did not bid so recklessly.”

Dude, in whist, you didn’t bid, period. The last card was dealt face up to set trumps. In bridge, you have to specify both the trump suit and how many tricks you intend to take. North is proposing to take nine tricks with clubs as trump, and given the unfavorable vulnerability, she must believe we can at least come close.

“A penalty could be quite costly, particularly if an opponent can double us.”

Not necessarily. It’s matchpoints, so our goal is simply to maximize our score, which could be a minus – maybe even a big minus. If we go for –500, that’s terrific if the other East-West pairs are bidding and making a diamond slam.

“Then let us hope that partner’s intrepid foray has already served us well. Any further action by us would be most dangerous.”

Perhaps. You’re certainly not the only person, real or fictional, who feels that way.

RICHARD J. HARTZ: Pass. I want to hear more from the opponents before making another decision. With this vulnerability, I do not want to give them a chance to double us and score more than their likely part score.

BILL BAUER: Pass. Unless we are playing with a pinochle deck, Partner has at most 3 HCP and likely fewer. At least we are in a good place and have a chance at a plus score. I do expect the opponents to compete, though, in diamonds to burst my bubble.

BOB GRINWIS: Pass. East-West must have at least 23 points and I have 14, so partner has next to nothing, or maybe the ♣A if East was a little light. 5♣ is tempting, but not at these colors.

ANDY MUENZ: Pass. Normally I like to preempt with a fit like this, but there are some big drawbacks here. First, we are outgunned in high cards and the vulnerability is not in our favor. We could easily be going for a bigger number than their potential plus score. Second, raising clubs makes it more likely that they will settle in diamonds, which is where we don't want them (especially if the redouble didn't deny a fit).

PHIL FREIDENREICH: Pass. I interpret partner's bid to mean that she has nothing but clubs. I'm worried about three or more losers in the major suits.

JIM EAGLETON: Pass. It would be great if both majors were distributed 4-4-4-1 so I could ruff four diamonds and make game. Going for a positive score at MP.

"Splendid! I shall ring up Moriarty and tell him we have solved his diabolical riddle."

Not so fast. I agree that passing is an attractive option, but even if I chose it, it doesn't necessarily mean I'm through bidding. There's virtually no chance the opponents are going to let us play 3♣. Some passers already have their follow-up plans ready.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Pass. We may make 5♣ if partner has one major-suit king, but the opponents may have a cheap save (or a possible make) in 5♦. So, I will pass, expecting the opponents to compete to 3♦, over which I will bid 4♣. If they bid 4♦, I'll bid 5♣, which might get doubled.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON (cont.): Pass. ...There aren't enough points to go around after a second seat opener and redouble for us to have game. We will compete to 4♣ over 3♦.

"I cannot countenance this strategy. We would be bidding dangerously high."

Well, okay, but then you're not going to like what the next group is proposing:

MARK BOLOTIN: 5♣. If partner is very weak, we probably can't beat 5♦. If partner is stronger, we have a shot at 5♣. Make them guess what to do.

STEVE WHITE: 5♣. Despite a slight risk that it's going for 500 or that 5♦ wasn't making, or even that they would have stopped at 4♦. I have a slight concern about whether partner will think this establishes a forcing pass situation at this vulnerability.

BARRY PASSER: 5♣. The real problem is what to do over West's 5♦, which is almost a given. I'll pass.

MARK COHEN: 5♣. On some days this makes, on others it keeps them out of their cold slam. Pard likely has six or seven clubs, maybe headed by the ace, but not much more. The opponents will be guessing what to do next.

JOHN JONES: 5♣. This is probably the opponents' deal, but we could be making 5♣, and it shouldn't be down more than two. Partner knew the vulnerability and

wouldn't expect this good of a catch. The opponents will have a hard time doubling 5♣ without establishing their diamond fit. I expect to defend 5♦ undoubled more often than not, and to beat it occasionally when partner has a trump trick or maybe one of the major-suit jacks.

Uh, Mr. Holmes, please put down that violin. I know that this sort of bidding is very upsetting to you, but it's just how things operate in the modern game. Opponents bid far too well these days to give them free rein. If the colors were reversed, or even just equal, I'd wager that 5♣ would have been a runaway winner. As John said, there's no way partner could anticipate we'd hold this good of a hand for clubs. Only the vulnerability and form of scoring stopped much of the Club from shooting out game. We'd all like to declare the cheapest undoubled club contract that the opponents will allow.

A couple of Panelists aren't sure that the opponents really have what they've shown, so they chose a strong rebid.

PETE FILANDRO: 3♦. It is time to tell partner that they are fooling around. If I had to guess, West has very few points and something like 3=3=7=0 or a similar hand with just one of those cards moved to clubs. My construction means partner must hold two or three spades, so we may have two fast losers or two slow ones.

T. CRAIG ROBINSON: 3♦. I think West has close to 10 support points for diamonds and his partner is likely 4=4=3=2. Partner has enough to beat 5♦, but let's check how many jokers are in this deck.

"Having seen what you and your cohort have suggested thus far, I would say that many more jokers are holding the cards rather than lying amongst them. The only conclusion is that there is no good solution to this problem, and that Moriarty has succeeded in confounding me, which was obviously his intent all along."

Hang on. There's one more option on the table, and I happen to think it's the best of the lot, at least at matchpoints:

DOUGLAS DYE: 4♣. I expect partner to be broke, but also to hold 9+ cards in the minors, thereby limiting our off-the-top losers to no more than three. Pass is surely safer, but it allows the opponents an easy 3♦ bid; moreover, if they try 3NT, I'll have a tough problem. Let them guess what to do at the four level.

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♣. It would not take a great deal for us to take ten tricks in a club contract. Partner rates to have two spades and two hearts. It is possible for us to have three tricks on defense. 4♣ might push the opposition into a game they cannot make.

STEVE O'BRIEN: 4♣. Pray East opens light.

"Is prayer now part of the modern bridge player's repertoire?"

We do whatever it takes. It's a hard game.

KARL BARTH: 4♣. My double was begging for partner to bid a major, yet I got a club bid, so there is some length there. That means the opponents are both short in clubs, so I pretty much have to raise. At matchpoints, I just want to go plus. If they let us play 4♣, I'll be delighted and I like our chances of making it.

BARRY COHEN: 4♣. If I give East and West 11 points each, partner is left with six clubs to the ace and nothing else. I don't think the bidding is over, so I'll bid 4♣ which I think we can make.

R. DAVID WALTER: 4♣. Given the vulnerability, par on this board is probably -400 in 3NT or 5♦. 3NT may produce overtricks; 4♣ eliminates that risk. At 5♣ doubled, -500 is a distinct possibility, so I think 4♣ is best.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 4♣. This is an interesting situation for many reasons, the first of which is: did partner know she was at unfavorable vulnerability when she bid 3♣ or did she find out afterwards? Assuming the former, she is known to have 3 or 4 points at most, so her club suit is perhaps seven cards to the ♣9, and she has no voids (the opponents do not have a nine-card fit in a major). If she is 1=1=4=7, 5♣ is a laydown. If she is somehow ace-sixth of clubs and 2-1 in the majors, we are still on for 5♣. The opponents don't yet know where they are going, so I am bidding 4♣, thinking it will make. If they wind up in 4♠, I am bidding 5♣, expecting it to make (I hope)!

BILL SCHMIDT: 4♣. The bidding tells us that partner must have something resembling:

♠x ♥x ♦xxxxx ♣Axxxxx.

She couldn't make a vulnerable jump without the ♣A, and she can't have any other high cards. The opponents' points are divided roughly 11-11, but they might find their double fit unless I raise. Neither are likely to have the extra values to compete at the four level. Even if we can make 5♣, +150 should be a good score.

I don't think North's hand has to be as shapely as Bill suggests, but it can't be too far off, and his analysis is solid. To paraphrase: I expect 4♣ to make most of the time, and if I don't like what happens next, I can judge to bid 5♣ which will occasionally make. Any plus score on this deal should be acceptable. Plus, I'm sure I know what Professor Moriarty was hinting at when he sent you the problem.

"A-ha! You are secretly in his employ, are you not?"

Please. You two are fictional. I have to deal with reality. Among other traits, winning matchpoint players look to exploit any advantage they might have compared to the rest of the field. In fact, the opponents have given us quite a valuable gift on this board.

"Turkish pipe tobacco?"

No – lousy methods. Did a sleuth with your legendary skills of observation not see the footnote? West's double denied a five-card major. Presumably that means 1♥ or 1♠ would have shown at least five, whereas for most partnerships, it would promise just four. That lets the opening side find a major suit fit efficiently.

I'm sure that the opponents' agreement works well on some boards, but not this one. Remember, it's matchpoints. East and West know it's nominally their deal, but they don't know their safety level or if they belong in a major. West might know about a diamond fit, but East has no clue. Assuming partner has the ♣A, neither opponent can have much in the way of extra values. Both are likely short in clubs, so even a four-three major-suit fit might seem acceptable in a pinch. Bill and Bruce touched on this, but the only Club member to give it full voice was:

ANDY MUENZ (cont.): Pass. ...Why not give them a chance to explore for a major where they may hope that I doubled with only three, and then find themselves with a poor split? I think it's unlikely that we make 5♣ despite the fit. And you know what's better than going down in 5♣ doubled? Setting four of a major. The Law of Total Tricks might suggest a big club raise at first glance, but there may very well be fewer tricks available on this hand due to the pair with most of the high cards also facing bad breaks on offense. Pass usually doesn't win bidding contests, but in my opinion, it has a lot going for it at the table.

Yes, it does. I still lean towards 4♣ because we have a decent chance to take ten tricks and it removes a full level of bidding room. Bidding 5♣, however, seems to me to be throwing away the advantage we gained from playing this particular board against this particular pair. Instead of setting them up to make a possibly wrong guess at a high level, we're unilaterally making a guess ourselves.

"Fascinating. I accept your Club's thoughtful analysis, and I will inform Professor Moriarty of our solution this evening when we meet for our weekly whist game."

Well, thank you Mr. Holmes, and I...uh, wait. You and Moriarty are whist partners? I thought you were sworn enemies.

"We are. Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

That's from The Godfather, not Sherlock Holmes.

"Many tenets are... dare I say it?... elementary. I believe it is your custom to end every D4MSC problem with a Last Word of sorts, so allow me to introduce the chosen one for Problem A. It illustrates that some sources of insight cannot be ignored except at one's own peril."

STEPHEN COOPER: 4♣. My wife, a non-bridge player, says that someone is lying. I have to cooperate, even if partner is preempting.

B. What is your call at IMPs?

| ANSWER | PANEL | SOLVERS | AWARD |
|---------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|
| 5♣ | 4 | 12 | 50 |
| Pass | 4 | 4 | 40 |
| 4♣ | 5 | 2 | 40 |
| 3♦ | 2 | 0 | 30 |
| 3♥ | 0 | 1 | 20 |
| 3NT | 0 | 1 | 20 |
| 6♣ | 0 | 1 | 20 |

While 4♣ drew a narrow plurality of the Panelists' votes at IMPs, nothing drew a majority. As per D4MSC by-laws, if the Solvers reached a majority on any action that also drew significant Panelist support, it would earn the top score. And, boy, they reached a majority all right – a clear-cut, boot-stomping, butt-kicking, you're-giving-this-50-points-Mr.-Director majority. I still prefer either pass or 4♣ at IMPs, but who am I to argue?

PHIL FREIDENREICH: 5♣ (Pass at MPs). We're vulnerable, but let's put pressure on East-West.

JIM EAGLETON: 5♣ (Pass at MPs). If partner has a king in the majors or two singletons, this should make.

MANOJ DEB-ROY: 5♣ (Pass at MPs). The opponents may have a huge diamond fit and, with virtually no club losers, are likely to be able to bid and make game and possibly slam.

STEVE WHITE: 5♣ (5♣ at MPs). Much clearer than in Problem A, in my opinion, since now –500 is not a big deal if 5♦ is making.

JOHN JONES: 5♣ (5♣ at MPs). This is even easier at IMPs. Doubled and down two versus their making a non-vulnerable game is not a major concern. When losing 3 IMPs is my practical downside, it's really not worth worrying about. This doesn't seem like the right scenario to get cute and bid hearts before retreating to 5♣.

BILL SCHMIDT: 5♣ (4♣ at MPs). Same reasoning as at matchpoints, with a twist. If we can take eleven tricks, we want to be in game.

I understand the logic behind bidding 5♣ at IMPs, but it still feels odds-against. I wish I had saved the full deal so that I could reveal what happened at the table. Unfortunately, I can only find the problem position. Perhaps that's just as well, as one deal would prove very little in this complex situation.

Virtually all of the IMPs vote-switchers gravitated towards 5♣. Here's a sampling of comments from those who stood their ground.

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♣. It would be very expensive to bid Five Clubs, get doubled, and go down one when 5♦ does not make.

STEVE O'BRIEN: 4♣. Partner is very weak. No reason to go for a big number.

DOUGLAS DYE: 4♣. This is tougher, as partner may have a useful card and greater shape to justify her jump at IMPs. Hopefully, she'll see 4♣ as encouraging enough to bid game if it's right.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 4♣. I think 4♣ puts East-West in a difficult position, so let them try to sort it out. They can't really double since that's penalty, but we could wind up making 4♣ doubled.

KARL BARTH: 4♣. Could we miss a game if I bid only 4♣? Sure, if partner has a singleton spade. I am not betting on that. But they could be on for four of a major or 5♦ despite my holdings. So, this could be a double game swing deal, and it might be hard for them to double.

PETE FILANDRO: 3♦. A 5♣ bid now would surely get a 5♦ save on my left, leaving us with a stab at 6♣ or a double. A slower approach (if West doesn't jam immediately) may let us get to 5♣ undisturbed because West may fear pushing us to a makeable slam.

ANDY MUENZ: Pass. Same logic as before. Also, I think I would bid 2♣ rather than doubling (regardless of scoring method). With a void in diamonds, it's not all that likely that I will be dropped in 2♣ and I can double next time for takeout.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Pass. Same as matchpoints, I'll "walk the dog", but it will probably work better at MPs.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: Pass. Even vulnerable at IMPs, we can't visualize a hand for partner that will produce a game.

Well, I can visualize a few, but almost all halfway likely constructions require the ♥K onside, plus on a few East-West might make 5 ♦. I think I'd just pass at IMPs and see what develops, but our Last Word for Problem B suspects I have something up my sleeve other than my arm:

BILL BAUER: Pass. Can't see what difference the form of scoring makes on this layout. Must be one of Nick's trick questions.

Moi? Nah. Not this month anyway. Maybe in July. See you then.



*At the halfway pole of the **2026 D4MSC Challenge**, defending Panelists champ Bruce Schwaidelson leads with 400 points after his lowest two monthly scores (a pair of 90s) are dropped. Mark Bolotin and Bill Schmidt are at 390, with a slew of people behind them. The lack of dud problems so far this year has kept scores down.*

Among Solvers, John Jones has 390 with Mark Cohen and Bob Grinwis tied for second with 380. Once again there is an enormous logjam immediately behind them. Even if you are not competing for the annual prize, I'd love to receive votes and comments from more readers each month. It's hard to crowdsource without a crowd.



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