

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

MARCH 2019 PROBLEM NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

While it's not every day that both sides offer to play in the same trump suit, it's not highly uncommon, either. With five-card majors now the norm, roughly one out of every twelve deals (depending on what web source you believe) is systemically opened in a three-card minor. Back in the nascent days of contract bridge, however, almost every opening suit bid showed four or more cards, making it much less likely that an opponent wanted to get too frisky in a suit his opponents had bid first. The upshot is that 'standard' bidding methods against this sort of overcall are something between murky and nonexistent. This month, let's see if the D4MSC can de-murk this situation a little. Un-murk? Down-murk? Whatever.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NEITHER VULNERABLE

♠-AKJ4 ♥-Q1085 ♦-J73 ♣-QJ

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
			Pass
1♦	Pass	1NT	Pass
Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass
?			

A. Playing with an unfamiliar expert partner, what would you expect a Double by South to mean?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Penalty-oriented	6	12	10
Takeout-oriented	4	21	10
Other	3	6	10

I'm channeling my inner Oprah here. "You get ten points! And you get ten points! And you, and you, and you get ten points!!" Ahem. The truth is, there was a very high correlation between the answers on part A and part B -- namely, if a respondent said that a double was for takeout now, then he or she was highly likely to double later. So, we'll wait until the second half of the problem to hand out meaningful awards.

In the meantime, let's all marvel at the fact that this very simple question about this very simple auction produced such a diverse set of opinions. None of the three choices received a majority vote. The takeaway here is that, if you haven't explicitly

discussed this auction with your partner, then you double here at your own peril. The most popular interpretation among the Panelists -- and, "popular" is relative -- was:

RICH ROTHWART: Penalty-oriented. I'm unlikely to have a takeout double, unless I'm 4=4=3=2.

Of course, on this particular hand, we are 4=4=3=2, but Rich is speaking in general terms. To reserve the double for takeout means we must be of exactly this shape and almost exactly this strength (because, with 15 points and a balanced hand, we'd have opened 1NT.) Putting the current problem aside, you might get to use a takeout double here twice per lifetime if you're lucky. Playing it as penalty, however, allows it to mean, "Partner, West has erred by coming into our auction. Let's skin the varmint." That won't happen often, but it'll come up much more often than a takeout double.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Penalty-oriented. With the 1NT hand so tightly defined and the known lack of a four-four fit, takeout doesn't make sense. But, is it such a stretch for us to have diamonds when we open the suit?

ANDY MUENZ (with BARRY PASSER): Penalty-oriented. If it's takeout, where are we taking out to? We have no eight-card major fit, and if partner had six clubs, he might have bid them over 2♦.

PETE FILANDRO: Penalty-oriented. Takeout makes no sense. Double should show three to four quick tricks -- a pair of ace-king combinations would be ideal.

DANIEL DROZ: Penalty-oriented. Partner has no four-card major and didn't bid 3♣ over 2♦, so there's a good chance he has two or more diamonds. If I have long, decent diamonds (e.g. king-queen-fifth) and some side tricks and shortness, why shouldn't I want to punish this?

JAY APFELBAUM: Penalty-oriented. Hard to imagine a different meaning. Partner does not have a major suit. We promised at least three diamonds and have limited the strength of our hand.

JOHN JONES: Penalty-oriented. The standard meaning here is penalties, whether it should be or not. I've bid a suit naturally and now the opponents are trying to play in that suit.

While I agree with pretty much all of this, I think there's an even clearer reason why a double ought to be played unambiguously as penalty. The only respondent to mention it was:

MICHAEL SHUSTER (CONT.): ...Perhaps we should also discuss what *partner's* double would have meant, as it impacts our decision on whether or not to balance.

True. I'm a firm (if lonely) believer that a partnership's treatment of any given double ought to be symmetrical. If your double means takeout in the direct seat, then so does mine in the balancing seat. If yours means penalty, moi aussi. Otherwise you can wind up in some truly absurd bidding situations; not to mention that my little brain can never remember seat-specific agreements like that.

Mind you, if you would play North's double of 2♦ as takeout (showing, say, 3=3=1=6 and essentially telling you, "I want to bid 3♣, but I don't want to step on your toes in case you have the double to end all doubles."), then I think it's fine to play South's double as takeout, too. But, I doubt very many pairs have that agreement.

Most would play North's double as penalty-oriented, expressing at a minimum, "This is our deal. I do not wish to defend two diamonds undoubled."

Let's see if our Takeout chefs can cook up a suitable counter-argument.

DAVE WACHSMAN: Takeout-oriented. Logic would suggest that if I double, I can tolerate a Moysian [*four-three - Ed.*] fit in either major. Partner is free to convert to penalties or to bid his six-card club suit.

STEVE WHITE: Takeout-oriented. This is very tough. The problem is that many expert partners will not have thought about this specific sequence and will conclude, based on somewhat similar situations, that it should be takeout-oriented (because of the balancing position.) But, if asked instead, "What is the *best use* of a double here?", then I've concluded, too slowly for a table choice: penalty-oriented.

DAN BOYE: Takeout-oriented. But, why would I come in?

BILL FOSTER: Takeout-oriented. Pick a major or bid your long club suit.

CHRISTINE SGRO: Takeout-oriented. Partner knows that diamonds are my longest minor, so I am looking for either of the majors.

SASTRY DASIKA: Takeout-oriented. I want partner to bid his better major or pass with diamond length.

RICHARD HARTZ JR.: Takeout-oriented. But if I'm honest, I want to see a green card come down.

LYNN HARRIS (with BILL SCHMIDT and BARRY COHEN): Takeout-oriented. My rule of thumb is that, if unsure what a double means, it should be takeout when it is in front of the opponents' length, but tending to penalty if behind it.

Pointing out that the entire takeout-vs-penalty debate is kind of moot is:

TOM WEIK: Penalty-oriented. I don't know if I've ever seen a penalty double in this auction. If you like your defensive prospects with diamonds as trump, why not pass rather than risk pushing them into a superior major-suit fit? On the other hand, I don't think I've ever seen a takeout double here either. It doesn't seem plausible that I'm looking for a four-three major suit fit, and if partner has clubs as it appears, I have just two of those.

If none of the above arguments strikes your fancy, but you're not willing forever to abandon a double in this auction, then perhaps DSI is for you. What's DSI stand for? Oh, you'll find out soon enough....

RICK ROWLAND: Other. I have a maximum. Do Something Intelligent.

KARL BARTH: Other. This is a classic Do Something Intelligent double. I guess that makes it more takeout than penalty if forced to choose, though it really means "I'm at the top of my range and I'm not ready to sell out."

STEPHEN COOPER.: Other. Do Something Intelligent! Not pure penalty nor takeout.

CRAIG ROBINSON: Other. DSI = Do Something Intelligent.

RUI MARQUES (with CONNIE GOLDBERG similarly): Other. Actually, it would be an invitation to a director call, because it will almost never be made in tempo. More seriously, my first reaction was "penalty", but after my second-round pass, it can

hardly be that. So, I'd call it a Do Something Intelligent double, showing a good hand for my auction thus far.

MARK BOLOTIN: Other. Do Something, partner. *[Mark omitted "Intelligent", but close enough. - Ed.]* West should have good diamonds sitting over me, so double shouldn't be penalty. North denied the majors, so how could it be for takeout?

WILLIAM PORT: Other. Bid Something!

I admit I took some editorial liberties with the capitalization, but those comments are otherwise mostly verbatim. Every "Other" adherent cited DSI in some form or another. I honestly wouldn't try a DSI double at IMPs, but at matchpoints, and particularly at these colors, okay. Defending a two-level undoubled part score when the bad guys have an eight-card fit (as they likely do here) is rarely lucrative and often very ugly. Matchpoints is all about pushing the opponents one level higher than they want to play...usually. Is this auction one of the rare exceptions? Let's find out as we move on to the second half of our problem.

A. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Pass	9	17	90
Double	1	17	80
2♥	3	2	70
2NT	0	2	60
3♦	0	1	60

Whoa! I expected exactly the opposite results: the Panelists would bend over backwards to find any call to get the opponents out of 2♦, while the Solvers would shrug and say "Meh, I have nothing better to do than let them play this." The D4MSC is a surprise a minute. Mind you, the passers spanned the gamut between those who give up philosophically...

TOM WEIK: Pass. I have no visibility as to any attractive contract for our side, nor to our defensive prospects. Sometimes, it's just right to pass!

CRAIG ROBINSON: Pass. I would double, but I'm guessing that partner, with his pass, has nothing to say. Perhaps 3♣ by North is a good save, but minus scores in general at matchpoints don't score well.

RICK ROWLAND: Pass. Soft defensive values make me okay with giving up –90.

KARL BARTH: Pass. +50 or –90 might not be a disaster. Who says we were going plus in 1NT?

ANDY MUENZ (with RICHARD HARTZ JR.): Pass. Not the ideal vulnerability to defend a two-level contract, but on a good day, nothing is making. A plus is better than a minus, and –90 in diamonds beats –100 in 1NT down two.

DANIEL DROZ: Pass. I'm certainly not doubling for penalty. I suppose I could take a stab at finding a four-three fit in a major by bidding 2♥, but on the whole, that seems too dangerous. Passing is just as good of a guess as bidding, and it makes me less of a culprit in the post-mortem.

JOHN JONES: Pass. I could bid 2♥, natural, and partner would know roughly what I have. Anything but pass is guessing, though. Even at all-white, the best vulnerability for competing, bidding here seems like threading a needle.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Pass. Partner had a chance to double 2♦ or to show his club suit, and he didn't. No action feels right. I'm passing and hoping for a spade lead.

...and those who pass with conviction, if that's not an oxymoron:

PETE FILANDRO: Pass. My first instinct was to pass, because my first two calls showed a balanced minimum and any further action would be masterminding. My second thought was also to pass, because East-West might have half the deck, I have the death holding in diamonds, and we may have no safety above 2♦.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: Pass. It's hard to see how we can go plus declaring. If partner had six clubs, he likely would have bid them over 2♦. Our hand has lots of defensive possibilities, so we will defend.

BARRY PASSER: Pass. We have no fit except maybe in 3♣. The LAW says, forget it!

STEVE WHITE: Pass. This is easy. Takeout-oriented or penalty-oriented, let them play it. They may not have an eight-card fit, and we almost certainly don't have a nine-card club fit.

Summing up for all the passers:

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass. All white at matchpoints really rewards aggressive bidding, so I've waffled back and forth on this quite a bit. I think partner will show up with 3=4 or 3=5 in the minors too often to risk balancing with a looming defensive minor-suit crossruff. Also, it's rare that the field will play a four-three fit here, so balancing puts the whole board at risk. A final consideration is that some partnerships today open this hand 1♣, and at those tables we can assume the auction will begin 1♣-(1♦/2♦), possibly leading to a poor five-two club contract our way. There's no reason to believe that defending diamonds is unusual.

Almost everyone else who commented made a takeout double in one form or another. Yes, even the 2♥ bidders, because all of them voted in Part A for either "penalty-oriented" or "DSI". In that context, the only way to make a takeout double of 2♦ is to do the taking-out yourself, to the cheapest available strain.

RICH ROTHWART: 2♥. It's usually not a good idea to sell out so low at matchpoints at this vulnerability.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 2♥. Because I expect we would have made 1NT, and because partner didn't double 2♦, I will protect (but only at this vulnerability and form of scoring.) To avoid torturing my partner, I'll bid 2♥ and hope we have a place to land.

DON DALPE: 2♥. I am hoping that my expert partner can figure it out.

RUI MARQUES: 2♥. Like the double, a Do Something Intelligent bid. Partner should figure out my approximate distribution and either pass with three hearts, bid 2♠ with three spades, try 2NT with a good hand, or retreat to his long club suit otherwise. I doubt this will be the majority view, but it should be. (25)

I'm pretty sure partner will field this one. Whether we have a safe-ish resting spot, as Connie frets, is another story. Incidentally, the fifth 2♥ bidder was yours truly, and it was the winning call in real life...but, if I am being honest, I had a wire of sorts on the board. It arose during one of the nutso Robot Race games on BBO, where I was the only human at the table. When a robot West bids 2♦ on this auction, the contract will make, end of discussion. The bots are extremely leery of bidding a suit that the opponents have bid first. Knowing that, and also knowing that defending a NV part-score is a waste of precious time, I bid 2♥ for takeout, my robot partner accurately corrected to 3♣ (on its 3=3=1=6 7-count), and it took eight easy tricks for -50 in under ten seconds. Don't try this at home, or at your local bridge club.

A sixth prospective 2♥ bidder decided against it because of the potential lead-directing implications. His take on 2♠, however, which nobody chose, seems right on the money to me:

STEPHEN COOPER: Pass. If the heart and spade honors were reversed, I might try 2♥, but I don't think I want a heart lead if the opponents bid on. I can't bid 2♠ because that would imply spades and clubs. West could have a very strong hand.

Taking it one step further...

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 2NT. Partner has no four-card major, so I expect she'll provide help in the minors.

By extension of Stephen Cooper's logic, if I were North, I'd treat South's 2NT as pass-or-correct to 3♣. I doubt that this is the right hand for that bid, but it's worth remembering. As for the by-the-book takeout doublers:

RICHARD HARTZ, SR.: Double. At IMPs, I would pass. Assuming partner interprets my double for takeout, we might end in a four-three major fit, or possibly 3♣ if he has long clubs. I am hoping for down one, undoubled!

BARRY COHEN: Double. I don't want to give up to 2♦, not vulnerable. We have at least half the deck, and partner's points are probably outside diamonds. I'm willing to have him bid a three-card major.

WILLIAM PORT: Double. Partner has already denied a four-card major. My guess is that this will elicit either 2NT or 3♣.

LYNN HARRIS (with BOB GRINWIS): Double. I expect West to have a good diamond suit. I'll pass whatever partner bids, or root for a spade lead if he passes.

BILL SCHMIDT: Double. I expect 2♦ to make more often than not, especially if partner takes out the double. I hope to get to a making contract or a -50 sacrifice.

I ran a quick simulation on this problem, which was inconclusive. Sometimes it's best to defend 2♦ undoubled; sometimes an offbeat takeout double (or takeout 2♥) worked better. The real risk comes when partner misinterprets your takeout or cooperative/DSI double as "I have this beat, partner; kindly go away." On that basis, unless you have a clear agreement, I suppose pass is the winning practical action.

BILL BAUER: Double. There's no clear-cut action available, but letting the opponents play 2♦ does not seem like it will score well. If partner has three diamonds, he will sit for the double; if he's short, he'll take it out.

CHRIS MARLOW: Double. I switched between pass and double several times. If partner has long, good clubs, then 3♣ will be okay. If he has a maximum and scattered values, defending 2♦ doubled could score well. With a minimum, perhaps partner pulls to the best Moysian fit. If he passes and they make it, it's only matchpoints and we will move on to the next board very quickly.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Double. West may have very long diamonds, in which case North probably has very long clubs. Or maybe not. I'll give North the choice to pass for penalty, or to bid 2NT or 3C according to her hand.

We'll wrap up this month with one our most unusual Last Words ever....

DAN BOYE: Pass.

Dan offered no comment, but his silence speaks volumes. Almost nobody in our district competes for a part-score at matchpoints as aggressively as our Prez Emeritus. If he's passing, I'm listening. See you next month.



*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/>***