

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

JUNE 2018 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

The calendar indicates that 2018 is nearly half over – the weather outside as I write this, not so much – and that means we're at the halfway point of our annual **District 4 MSC Challenge**. Six problems down, six to go, with your top ten scores of the year counting towards a chance at fame, honor, and fabulous prizes. The latter being two fabulous free session entries to a fabulous District 4 regional of your choice in fabulous 2019. Fabulous is relative. Anyway, midpoint standings are at the end of the article.

This month's problem is a familiar matchpoint dilemma. Stuck for an initial action, we're forced to lie a little bit one way or another at our first turn. The Club first deliberates the best way to fib, and then how to deal with the consequences of one particular fib in a bid-pass-double scenario on a later round. A "fab fib", as it were. Everything is fabulous. Off we go....

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NORTH-SOUTH VUL.

♠-J87 ♥-9843 ♦-AKQ5 ♣-Q5

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		1♦	1♥
2♦	2♥	3♦	Pass
?			

* - 11+ HCP, ONE-ROUND FORCE

3♥ = STOPPER-ASK, 3♠ = NATURAL, FORCING

A. Do you agree with South's 2♦ bid? If not, what call do you prefer?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Yes	13	33	20
No, Pass	0	5	10
No, Double	0	2	10
No, 1NT	0	1	10
No, 2NT	0	1	10

Bridge occasionally makes liars out of all of us, but here at the D4MSC at least, we're mostly one big happy fabulous family of liars. A free 2♦ bid here ostensibly promises a fifth diamond, but more than four-fifths of our members find ace-king-queen-low to be acceptable in a pinch. Summing up succinctly are:

JOHN HEMMER: Yes. It tells partner where I live.

JOHN JONES: Yes. I live there. It is easily the best I can do on this round. Pass would create future headaches.

"Bidding where one lives" is a popular philosophy these days, and 2♦ certainly feels like where our mail is getting delivered at the moment. Agreeing, though with varying degrees of hometown pride, are:

BARRY DEHLIN: Yes. I expect near-unanimity here, as 2♦ precisely shows the only two parts of my hand worth mentioning at this point: diamonds and strength.

MARK KINZER: Yes. What else?

DAVE WACHSMAN: Yes. This should deny a four-card spade suit while focusing attention on where my values are.

BILL BURNETT: Yes. If notrump is right, it should be played from partner's side. 2♦ also gets North off to a good lead if West declares in spades.

BILL SHARP: Yes. It's matchpoints.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Yes. It isn't ideal, but there's not another good option. 1NT from my side needs at least a ten-high suit. Pass leaves us nowhere. What else can I do?

BOB & JOANN GLASSON: Yes. What a hard hand! We reluctantly agree with 2♦, with pass a close second.

LYNN HARRIS (with **HOWARD WACHTEL**): Yes. My hand is too good not to act at my first turn. Whatever we choose has flaws.

DON DALPE (with **STEVE WHITE** and **BILL BAUER**): Yes. Seems like the least bad choice. I do have 11 useful HCP. I wish I had a fifth diamond, but what else comes close to describing my hand?

RICHARD HARTZ: Yes. Least of all evils. The quality of the suit compensates for the lack of a fifth diamond. No other bid seems as appealing.

BILL SCHMIDT: Yes. 1NT is my second choice.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Yes. At the table I might have tried 2NT or a negative double, but I think the creative 2♦ has its merits. If partner had been able to continue with 2NT (or 3NT), I would have been overjoyed.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Yes. Double is possible though, as I have an awkward hand.

Many top experts use a negative double in this sort of situation, despite the lack of a fourth spade. I'd guess that about 30% of The Bridge World's seminal Master Solvers Club would either choose to double or consider it approvingly. They must land on their feet more often than we average Joes and Jills. I know that if I ever tried it, I'd probably wind up alongside...

TOM WEIK: Yes. No call is perfect, and 2♦ seems acceptable. One alternative is a negative double, which brings back memories of twice playing in three-three spade fits with Meyer on similar auctions years back in Cherry Hill.

Pining for a simpler time:

ED SHAPIRO: Yes. Not much choice, given the messy follow-ups to a pass -- the only alternative acceptable to me. At one time you could show this hand by passing, then cue-bidding when partner balanced with a double. Today, however, opponents raise with nothing, so that auction might not arise.

I agree. I would pass if I felt I might be better able to describe this hand at my next turn. Here though, that's doubtful. Without primary support for partner's suit nor a real stopper in either major, I'm likely to have to bid these diamonds sooner or later. If I bid them sooner, I'm at least showing my true point count. If I bid them later, partner might still play me for a five-bagger...plus a king less. Disagreeing:

BILL FOSTER: No, prefer Pass. Partner will expect at least five diamonds if I bid 2♦. South is weak in the majors, so bidding notrump is out.

DANIEL DROZ: No, prefer Pass. I'm not sure if "prefer" is the right word here, but when I have no bid, I make no bid. I refuse to bid notrump without even the ♠10, I refuse to double with only three poor spades and a balanced hand, and I don't like free-bidding a four-card suit despite its lead-directing benefits. If we defend, I'm more likely to be on lead. This hand isn't a game-force opposite a minimum opener anyway, so I don't feel so bad about passing.

TED LEVY: No, prefer Pass. Partner is there to protect if West passes.

My partners will tell you that they have enough headaches playing with me as it is, without them having to worry about my passing near-game-forcing hands at the one level as responder. This reminds me of a wonderful passage in S.J. Simon's "Cut for Partners", his 1950 sequel to the consensus best bridge book ever written, "Why You Lose at Bridge". Futile Willie and the Unlucky Expert are preparing to face off in the first rubber against Mr. Smug and Mrs. Guggenheim. Their system discussion:

"Forcing two, partner?" Futile Willie said. "Four-Five, asking bids, Prepared Club, strong notrumps, Weak Threes, and I need protection."

The Unlucky Expert looked at him. But he didn't say it.

Anyway, two voices of dissent both make worthwhile points of interest:

ANDY MUENZ: No, prefer Double. I'd rather lie about a fourth spade on the one level than a fifth diamond on the two level.

BARRY PASSER: No, prefer 2NT. A better description of my shape and points than 2♦. Note that West has not supported hearts at this point.

That's very true. The second part of the problem is posed in the context of the opponents having a known eight-card fit. But, the first half is not. Bidding notrump with nine-fourth as a stopper is perhaps more palatable when the opponents may only have six or seven cards in the suit. I still don't care for it; it'd be really embarrassing to have to explain to partner how we lost the first five tricks in 3NT, all in the opponents' bid suit, despite him having laid down king-low in dummy for help.

B. With the auction as given, what is your call? If you choose Pass, what do you bid if the auction then continues (3♥)-pass-(pass)-?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Pass, then Double	7	18	80
Pass, then Pass	1	5	70
Pass, then 4♦	2	4	70
3♥	1	5	60
Pass, then 4♣	1	1	60
4♣	1	0	60
4♦	0	3	60
Pass, then 3♠	0	1	60
3♠	0	2	50
3NT	0	1	50
5♣	0	1	50
5♦	0	1	50

So basically, all three rounds of bidding on this deal are dilemmas for South. Round one was about choosing the best available lie. Round two is weighing whether to sit tight in a part-score or move towards game, and round three is determining what to do when the opponents decide they're not done pushing you around yet. After the board is finished, you get to choose between two doors, of which behind one is a lady and the other is a tiger. Oh, did I forget to mention I hired Monty Hall to be the D4MSC director this month?

Let's start with the minority who weren't settling for 3♦ in any case. We'll begin at the top, so to speak, and work our way back down.

MARK BOLOTIN: 5♦. I'm assuming that partner would have bid 2NT as a relay to 3♣ with a weak raise to 3♦. That gives him about 13 points in the black suits and a probable singleton heart. If North has enough for slam, he would have bid 3♥ and then pulled my presumed 3NT rebid.

Mark is alluding to the Good-Bad 2NT convention, which allows a partnership to differentiate strong vs. purely competitive three-level actions in a crowded auction.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 5♣. Partner's bidding indicates at least five clubs and probably four diamonds. I expect him to be void in hearts.

With or without Good-Bad 2NT, I think the game bids are pushy at matchpoints. If we can find the right strain on this awkward competitive deal, we should score well. Remember, assuming our three esteemed opponents' actions on this board are relatively normal, every South in the room is going through the same ordeal.

BILL SCHMIDT: 4♦. Partner could have ♠KQx ♥x ♦Jxxx ♣AKJxx, which is nearly laydown for game, so I can't pass. But if his clubs aren't that good, or West raised on a doubleton, 5♦ could be dicey.

So might 4♦, unfortunately. Partner thinks we have five, so he'll usually raise with three. So far, every action taken in this auction since the opening bid has come under pressure.

MELVIN LUBART: 4♦. I need to make a game-try. Partner is short in hearts and I have the ♣Q, a very useful card. Let partner make the decision.

As Don Dalpe points out later, partner ought to have very good clubs for his bidding.

BILL PORT: 3NT. Partner could hold five clubs to the ace-king, four diamonds, and two doubleton majors. It's worth a shot, although I admit it is a somewhat dubious contract. Can't be precise all the time, I guess.

It would be humorous if the opponents, believing you have a real heart stopper, furiously unblock their honors to the point where you take a heart trick to go along with four diamonds, three clubs, and the spade ace. Likely, no, but humorous, yes.

DAVE WACHSMAN (with BOB GRINWIS): 3♠. It's important to show the spade fragment, so partner can decide to call 3NT with a heart stopper and a partial spade stopper. Furthermore, it allows partner to better envision your hand.

Well, he knows we've denied four spades, but otherwise I don't think 3♠ shows this hand. I suspect he'd be more likely to envision: ♠AKx ♥xx ♦Axxxx ♣Qxx. Our best matchpoint game might even be 4♠ on a four-three fit. Partner wasn't obligated to show four so-so spades on his way to 3♦ after we failed to make a negative double.

If we're not going to pass 3♦, then I think the best way forward with this hand is:

PETE FILANDRO: 3♥. I can't pass in this classic "30-point deck" position. So, I'll ask for a heart stopper that partner doesn't have, in order to get her to bid out her shape. With 3=1=3=6, she'll bid 4♦, which I'll raise to five. With 3=1=4=5, she'll bid some number of diamonds; I'll raise 4♦ to 5♦. With 4=1=3=5, she'll bid 3♠, and I'll correct back to 4♦.

JOHN VOLPEL: 3♥. Go for the game!

KARL BARTH: 3♥. My ♣Q grew up, and even my ♠J is likely helpful. That makes this a very good hand in context. What does partner's hand look like? Even unexpected shapes like 4=1=4=4, 4=0=4=5, or 4=2=3=4 are still possible. Step One is to see what partner does over 3♥. It'll probably be 3♠, but if we do hear 3NT, there may be nine easy tricks. I thought about defending, just to see if all three top diamonds would cash. ☺

CATHY STRAUSS: 3♥. Partner is unlikely to have a heart stopper, but it's worth asking anyway. At worst, we should be safe at 4♦.

ANDY MUENZ: 3♥. Although partner is unlikely to have a heart stopper (unless it's the stiff ♥A), this still seems like the most flexible forcing bid. Partner can now bid 4♦ with length, 5♦ with extra values, 3♠ to punt, or a non-forcing 4♦.

JIM EAGLETON: 3♥. I'm going to give partner one more chance to find a heart void, sixth club, or other extra values. I plan to pass any minor suit rebid North makes.

At IMPs, I'd probably be with this group. Even at matchpoints, there's something to be said about giving ourselves the best opportunity to find the right strain. My concern though is that this feels like the sort of deal in which we have no "correct" strain: just seven-card fits in three suits and no stopper in the fourth.

Everyone else hoped to take their chances in 3♦, but that scoundrel West was having a bad hair day. Normally in a bid-pass-double situation, you tend to bid if you have more length in your side's suit than you've previously shown. Here, we have

less. As against that, normally you know at the point of the decision what strain is best for your side. Here, we don't. Isn't this fun?

DON DALPE: Pass, then 4♣. On the auction, it sounds like the bad guys have a nine-card fit, and I don't expect to beat 3♥ more than one trick. If I were North and opened 1♣, then offered a competitive diamond raise, I would have six clubs with either three or four diamonds. With three=five in the minors and a non-forcing hand, I would pass over 2♥. With four=five, and a hand unwilling to be in game opposite my partner's 2♦ call, I would have opened 1♦. And, with a good hand and four or more spades, I'd have bid 2♠ over 2♥.

All else being equal, I generally bid the same way as Don suggests with four=five in the minors. However, in this case I doubt I would open a horrific four-card diamond suit rather than a strong five-card club suit. I'd prefer to open 1♣ and, if partner responds in my singleton, rebid 2♣ and hope for the best.

TOM WEIK: Pass, then 4♦. Pass first because this unremarkable 12-point hand is unlikely to produce a five-level game opposite partner's minimum opener. 4♦ because the 3♥ venture by the opponents increases the possibility that North has four-card support. If partner has something like ♠Kx ♥x ♦Jxxx ♣AKxxxx, then I prefer to declare in diamonds. Partner might have opened 1♦ with four=five in the minors, and he would have bid 4♦ ahead of me if he had four diamonds and a heart void.

STEVE WHITE: Pass, then 4♦. Since I have only four diamonds, I prefer first to take my plus rather than invite a game. Next round is tougher, but 4♦ is likely to make and 3♥ doubled might not score as well.

BILL BAUER: Pass, then 4♦. South has little defense against hearts. Partner's points are in the black suits, so 4♦ should be a make.

A third option is to pass and then to compete with 3♣. This shouldn't be an offer to play, considering that both partners have studiously avoided showing a spade suit at every opportunity. It should be asking partner to pick a minor at the four level, thus suggesting secondary support for clubs. At least, I think that's what it would mean. Only Kathleen Del Corso chose it, and she's not saying.

ED SHAPIRO: Pass, then Pass. We're in a non-forcing auction, and I don't see any positives in bidding. Partner had a chance over 3♥ to do something opposite my limited hand, with heart shortness. I hope West bid 3♥ because he's looking at some diamond length and inferring shortness in his partner's hand, so we can beat it.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Pass, then Pass. I have eight losers and I don't know if my black honors are working. If my partner has seven losers, a minimum opening bid, that adds up to 15 losers. 24 minus 15 equals 9 tricks for our side. I won't bid any higher than the three level, especially red vs. white. I'll try to defeat 3♥.

RICHARD HARTZ: Pass, then Pass. Not sure whose hand it is, and I have defense against 3♥. If partner couldn't bid again, this may be our last chance for a plus score.

TED LEVY: Pass, then Pass. I bid my values with 2♦. Our eight-card fit [if we even have one - NS] is in diamonds, and I have no cover cards for partner's black-suit losers. They are getting a bad heart break. This is a hand for defending.

I concur, and I'll toss in another reason that the quartet above failed to mention: I'm too chicken to double, even at matchpoints. I doubt we're setting 3♥ more than one

trick terribly often. Doubling non-vulnerable opponents to turn +50 into +100 on a part-score deal isn't nearly as lucrative as doubling vulnerable ones to turn +100 into +200. It's a close call, and I concede that doubling in situations like this is a long-term winning action. My nervous system has its own agenda.

RICH ROTHWARP (with JOHN HEMMER): Pass, then Double. Partner's 3♦ call is not forcing. She may be 3=1=4=5 or 4=1=3=5 with 12 HCP. I have extra defense against 3♥, so I'll double.

RUI MARQUES: Pass, then Double. Who knows what's happening? Anyway, matchpoints says I go for the jugular. *[I agree, it's just that too often I wind up missing the opponents' and hitting my own. - NS]* My simulator's crystal ball says that 3♥ goes down two 70% of the time.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Pass, then Double. I passed 3♦ in part because I thought it unlikely that partner had short hearts and four-card diamond support. Knowing that partner has at least three diamonds makes me nervous about doubling, but not nervous enough to bid 3♠.

STEVE GIBBON: Pass, then Double. West pushing to 3♥ non-vulnerable tempts competition to 4♦, as the likelihood of partner having a heart void increases and spade honors in the West hand may reduce our losers. But, I go with our chances of defeating 3♥ doubled for 300 points. Distribution can make fools of us all, though....

BOB & JOANNE GLASSON: Pass, then Double. 3♦ may have been our last available plus score.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Pass, then Double. I'm not going to try to find the unlikely 3NT here, because 4♦ may not be safe. I'm ready to double their push to 3♥, however. The Law of Total Tricks is very much on our side: if partner is void in hearts, he can find another call; if not, there are 8+8=16 total tricks available.

CRAIG ROBINSON: Pass, then Double. This call is easy. I have been -530 before.

AL SHRIVE (with MARK KINZER): Pass, then Double. We were likely to make 3♦, so doubling is required to restore some equity. We'll most assuredly receive a similar seriously-below-average matchpoint score for -140 or -530.

What if we staged a bidding problem and an opening-lead problem broke out?

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass, then Double. I've waffled on this one a fair bit, but I think partner is going to turn up with 4=1=3=5 shape. He didn't splinter, thus he probably has only three diamonds. It's probably worth taking another call over 3♦ at IMPs (3♥, in case partner can bid 3NT), but at matchpoints, pass seems barely best.

Now that the opponents have offered partner a direct opinion over 3♥, and he passed, we can definitively rule out a sixth club or a fourth diamond. LHO might erroneously thought that his three-card diamond length pinpoints shortness in his partner's hand. All signs point to a multi-trick set in 3♥. You didn't ask, but I'm leading a trump.

BARRY DEHLIN: Pass, then Double. Maybe we have a game, but partner hasn't necessarily shown any extra strength, and eleven tricks seems a big reach unless and until he does. I'll lead a heart; partner can reach me in diamonds when he gets in so I can lead hearts again (and maybe again?)

JOHN JONES: Pass, then Double. 3♦ isn't forcing, so I'll first pass and try for a plus score at matchpoints. Doubling 3♥ is easy - I know what to lead (a diamond, hoping

to tap declarer) and how to direct the defense. Even if partner is void in hearts, we may have enough quick tricks.

BARRY COHEN: Pass, then Double. I have a minimum for my previous bidding, and I'm a diamond short. If I had that fifth diamond, I'd compete to 4♦. To double or not is a close decision, but it's matchpoints. I'll lead a heart.

DANIEL DROZ: Pass, then Double. This is just matchpoint greed, I suppose. At IMPs, I'd pass out 3♥. But, we have the balance of strength, and we may even score partner's singleton heart honor. Or perhaps I'm only doubling because I couldn't bring myself to answer Pass *three* times this month. I'm leading the ♣Q.

LYNN HARRIS: Pass, then Double. Even if partner is void in hearts, we should be able to generate enough tricks in the other three suits to beat 3♥. I'll lead a trump and keep leading them whenever I'm in.

Kudos to the heart leaders: the only sure way to set the contract is to pound away at the opponents' trumps early and often. Diamonds broke five-one (!) and clubs were one-four. Partner could make ten tricks in clubs on the six-two fit only if he were clairvoyant enough to play trumps by running his ten on the first round, finessing East's jack-fourth and pinning West's nine. Just another day at the office.

The doublers can take pride in achieving a tie for top. But, +50 turned out to be a good matchpoint score as well, because most North-South pairs got overboard. Final word this month goes to a bidder whose eternal optimism throughout this difficult multi-part problem is admirable.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Pass, then 4♦. Regarding the pass: game in either notrump or diamonds seems unlikely. Regarding 4♦: if partner can't double 3♥ to show values, then I don't think I can either. His pass might mean he has only three diamonds, but I'm going to play him for 3=1=4=5. He opened 1♣ instead of 1♦ because he has rebiddable clubs and (obviously) lousy diamonds. He passed over 3♥ because he wanted to give me a chance to double for +300. I'm hoping for +130 or -100 (no double, please) versus their +140 in 3♥. Whew, this was a tough one! I think all calls should receive a score of 100.

Wouldn't that be fabulous?



Five Panelists have perfect 400 scores through the first six months of 2018 (with their lowest two months dropped): Connie Goldberg, Craig Robinson, Ed Shapiro, Tom Weik, and Steve White. Six more are close behind at 390: Ken Cohen, Don Dalpe, Pete Filandro, the Glassons, Rick Rowland, and Michael Shuster.

Among Solvers, Bill Burnett, Barry Cohen, Chris Kaufman and Bruce Schwaidelson are all at 400; Samuel Dorfman, Leonard Helfgott and Walter Mitchell have 390. Nobody on either side has as many as five 100s.



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/>