

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

NOVEMBER 2021 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

I have no idea where this month's problem came from. I found it in an old file on my computer named "suggestions.txt". Who sent it, the 52-card layout, and even the original form of scoring and vulnerability are all mysteries. If you recognize the problem and want to claim credit, let me know. If more than one person takes credit, we'll organize a duel at sunrise. Try finding that level of entertainment in any other bidding forum! Ahem. In the meantime, let's explore two relatively familiar themes: when to start with a takeout double rather than a simple overcall with a strong hand, and how much leeway to give partner after we forced her to take a bid.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

VIEW THE [D4MSC CONVENTION CARD](#)

MATCHPOINTS, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-A1087 ♥-AQJ876 ♦-- ♣-KQ9

South	West	North	East
		Pass	1 ♣
Double	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
?			

3 ♦ = VERY STRONG ♦ ONE-SUITER

4 ♦ = SPLINTER RAISE OF SPADES

1A. Do you agree with South's double?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Yes	11	24	20
No, prefer 1 ♥	2	13	10
No, prefer 2 ♣	0	1	10

I expected this vote to be much closer. The upper range for a simple overcall has been steadily rising over the years. That's sensible: most bidding systems prioritize showing length before strength, unless the hand is simply too strong to risk being passed out. Moreover, 'strong' auctions after a takeout double are notoriously nebulous and vulnerable to preemption. Overcall auctions are a lot simpler, and if you miss an occasional game because you have an extra queen-value, c'est la vie.

KARL BARTH: No, prefer 1 ♥. It's not an underbid to overcall here. This hand becomes strong once a fit is discovered. I like the idea of letting partner know I have a real suit of my own.

WILLIAM T. KILMER: No, prefer 1♥. With two- and three-card disparities between our suits, it's best to start with our longest one. We can back into spades or even clubs later. And if 1♥ gets passed out? Okay, fine.

LYNN HARRIS: No, prefer 1♥. It's better to treat this as a one-suited hand, especially as after a double, partner is likely to gravitate to a spade contract and we might not be able to show our hearts effectively.

STEVE WHITE: No, prefer 1♥. Double is acceptable, but 1♥ is better.

Some of the overcall advocates were worried about the other red suit.

ED SHAPIRO: No, prefer 1♥. Just getting my longest and strongest suit into the auction first. 1♥ will not tempt partner to bid many diamonds. I expect to have another chance to bid.

ANDY MUENZ: No, prefer 1♥. We have a void in an unbid suit, and while we are strong, we're not really strong enough to double and bid, especially since we have significant values in the opponent's suit.

STEPHEN COOPER: No, prefer 1♥. How do I explain a double to partner when he bids 5♦?.

You don't. You put down your four-loser dummy and dare partner to complain. This is similar to how Chuck Norris supposedly does not mow his lawn; he just stands on the porch and dares it to grow.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: No, prefer 1♥. This hand is both strong and complex. Starting with a takeout double makes sorting out strain more difficult on oddball shapes, and the hand is not so strong that I'd distort my own shape to try to avoid being passed out in 1♥. For what it's worth, I don't consider this a close decision. It is kind to call the double "loathsome".

Heh - if Michael only knew what the double called him behind his back, too. At any rate, I do think it's a close decision. I normally want a little more strength than this for a double-then-bid sequence, and I'd prefer a doubleton honor in diamonds in case partner, who may have suppressed a diamond preempt because his suit is too weak, elects to come slithering out of the weeds. 4=6=2=1 or 3=6=3=1 are the canonical shapes; 4=6=0=3 could turn into cannon fodder. But, with four spades and a strong heart suit to fall back on, a preparatory double is reasonable.

Pretty much all the doubblers fell into several general schools of thought, as represented by:

RICK ROWLAND (with DAVE WACHSMAN, JAY APFELBAUM, BILL BAUER, STEPHANIE FINE, BOB GRINWIS, MARK BOLOTIN, MANOJ DEB-ROY, BARRY PASSER and RICK OLANOFF): Yes. This hand is strong enough to double and then bid hearts.

CHRIS MARLOW (with BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON and RUI MARQUES): Yes. A little light on high-card points, but the shape, suit quality, and controls make up for that.

RICH ROTHWART (with JOH HEMMER): Yes. The auction has worked out well for us, as partner might have passed a 1♥ overcall.

PETE FILANDRO (with BILL SCHMIDT, BOB & JOANN GLASSON, and JOHN JONES): Yes. I can bid hearts next, but a double keeps spades in the picture.

Another answer to Stephen Cooper's rhetorical question:

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Yes. I'm okay with a double, especially since partner is a passed hand so it's unlikely that he will now bid 5♦. If he does, I will jump out the window; over lower diamond bids, I'll show my hearts.

At the other end of the optimism scale:

BARRY COHEN: Yes. If partner advances in spades, I can jump-raise. If he bids diamonds, I'm strong enough to bid hearts. And if he bids hearts, I'll buy a lottery ticket.

Dave Wachsman and Steve Gibbon observed that partner's pass covers a very wide range and his response to a takeout double will help narrow it down. Bill Bauer calls this a "Type II" double to his beginning students; presumably Type I is the garden variety, "I have support for the other three suits". John Jones is happy we are not playing Minimum Equal Level Conversions, a treatment with an unwieldy name and a not particularly witty acronym, either (minELC). In minELC, bidding the minimum number of hearts over partner's diamond advance would not show extra values. It would simply suggest that we doubled holding the other two suits.

The better than two-to-one margin nudged me to award an extra 10 points to the "Yes" voters in Part A. Upon reflection, I suppose I really don't want to risk that 1♥ will be passed out, as we have a respectable play for game opposite as little as:

♠ 932 ♥ K2 ♦ 65432 ♣ J32

Last Word for the first half of this month's set goes to:

DON DALPE: Yes. I guess I could have overcalled 1NT. I do have 16 HCP and a club stopper.

The way things are going, I wouldn't be surprised if that was legalized before long.

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

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♦	4	10	80
2♣	3	5	70
4♠	5	3	70
2♥	0	7	60
2♠	0	5	60
3♥	1	0	60
3♠	0	8	60

Uh...4♦?

RICK ROWLAND: 4♦. I'm never stopping short of game.

BOB GRINWIS: 4♦. Strong enough to force to game even opposite a bad North hand. We have four losers. Surely partner can take care of one.

Well, okay, but isn't 4♦ a slam try?

KARL BARTH: 4♦. This should clue partner in to our playing strength now that we've uncovered a fit. I'd be very surprised if partner cooperated, but the auction makes

the ♥K golden and the splinter says, "discount diamond cards". Partner should have a clear picture of what cards we need for slam.

BOB & JOANN GLASSON: 4♦. We are willing to commit this hand to game opposite partner's possible yarrow. We'll make a splinter bid to cater to the chance that partner has a perfecto.

PAUL D. & JILL J. AMER: 4♦. Partner doesn't need much for 4♠ to make. King-fourth of spades and out will do, and that might not be enough to get partner to raise any strong invitational sequence. Meanwhile, ♠KQxx and the ♥K makes six.

True. But surely 6♠ is unbiddable after partner could only bleat 1M♠ (M = "measly") to our takeout double. She needs quite a lot for slam to be odds-on.

JOHN JONES: 4♦. Close between this and 4♠. The splinter announces to partner that maybe we have a slam even though you couldn't bid more than 1♠ last round. ♠KQxx makes 6♠ reasonable because the heart finesse through the opening bidder rates to succeed. I'll cooperate by showing my club control if partner makes any move, but I am done if he retreats to 4♠.

TOM WEIK: 4♦. Partner has at least four spades. If he has ♠KQxx, or ♠Kxxxxx and nothing else, slam is a prospect. I can't just bid 4♠. The tricky part is what to call over partner's expected signoff. Bidding further would have no clear path and be very risky, yet slam is still possible.

BILL BAUER: 4♦. Seems obvious. The partnership belongs in 4♠ at a minimum, so why not show the diamond shortness? Over partner's expected signoff, I'll next bid 5♣. If partner has ♠KQxx(x) in spades, he might be inclined to bid slam.

Wow. That's about as aggressive as anyone can get with these cards.

DON DALPE: 4♦. If it were IMPs, I might bid 5♦, Exclusive Blackwood for spades. I am an optimist.

I stand corrected.

So, okay, all kidding aside, I expected a few votes for 4♦. I just didn't expect it would earn the top score. My surprise stems from a lifetime of reading the Bridge World's MSC and other top bidding forums. I've learned that the best players bid very aggressively in general, save for one common situation. At matchpoints, in a competitive auction, they tend to pull in their horns after having forced CHO to bid with what might be absolute garbage.

Not this month. The plurality of our Panelists considered this to be horn-pulling:

DAVE WACHSMAN: 4♠. I would rather choose the most likely contract than look for magic. While my losing-trick count is only four, a contract of 4♠ is not guaranteed.

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♠. Slam is unlikely. East probably has a spade trick and partner might need to lead towards our clubs twice. It's possible that partner could have three hearts, but a singleton is just as likely, and partner could have a fifth spade.

PETE FILANDRO: 4♠. The lack of diamond bids suggests (but does not guarantee) that partner has four diamonds. With, say, 4=2=4=3 and a 0-to-4 HCP rag, my philosophy is to bid the cheapest four-card suit as the least encouraging noise. Thus, I'll play partner for at least five spades or for 5-to-8 HCP, justifying my aggressive bidding.

ED SHAPIRO: 4♠. I can't construct a hand consistent with the auction (including the opponents' inaction) where partner doesn't have at least four spades. I don't see a good way to conduct a scientific auction, so I'll get pushy, giving the defense as little information as possible.

RICH ROTHWART: 4♠. We may belong in hearts, but even a jump to 3♥ might be passed when game in spades is making. Slam is unlikely; partner needs good spades plus the ♥K or ♣A.

To be fair, she doesn't quite need all that. Good spades are a must, but look how absurdly useful the lowly ♣J would be, which is why I included it in my earlier construction. No more worries about finding the entries to lead up to dummy's ♣KQ twice. And, as many of the 4♦ bidders stated or implied, if we're missing the ♥K, it rates to be onside; partner can use her spade entries for heart finesses.

MARK BOLOTIN: 4♠. Too many hands that would look like nothing to partner would be enough for game. While there's room for partner to have the perfect hand for slam, he could also have hands that might look perfect, but aren't.

Agreed. Over 4♦, how is partner to know that ♠Qxxxx and ♦A are terrible for slam, but ♠KQxx and ♣J might be enough? If we were using Void Splinters, we'd have a fighting chance. But a standard splinter could be a singleton or a void, and partner won't know which until we put down the dummy.

Even 4♠ feels hungry to me. Partner rates to have a few diamonds. The form of scoring might lead her to choose spades over diamonds, all else being equal. That 1♠ advance provides little actionable evidence as to where her points are located.

ANDY MUENZ: 3♠. Although I have a four-loser hand, I need to stay low. I have potentially wasted values in clubs and, more importantly, partner is going to over-value diamond honors. Imagine bidding 4♠ and having partner bid on (ugh!) with:

♠ Qxxx ♥ xxx ♦ AKxx ♣ xx

CHRIS MARLOW: 3♠. Considering the opponents' silence, partner is likely to have a few values, but I am concerned they may be wasted in diamonds. Maybe I should bid 2♠ at matchpoints to be safe, but my hand is too strong for that.

STEVE WHITE: 3♠. Giving partner a chance to stop below game with a bust. 2♣ is possible, but it gains versus 3♠ only when partner rebids 2♥, and partner will expect only three-card spade support in some continuations.

RICHARD HARTZ (with BARRY COHEN): 3♠. My points are well placed but partner may be broke. With anything resembling a positive hand, partner will bid game.

3♠ is a big bid in its own right. It commits us to taking nine tricks, vulnerable vs. not at matchpoints, when partner has indicated no values whatsoever. It will keep us out of a lot of hopeless games. Sadly, it will keep us out of a handful of good ones, too. As the Amers noted earlier, ♠Kxxx alone gives us a play, and partner might not raise with that if the rest of her hand looks hopeless. "All I have is the king of trump. Well, the ♣J too, as if that worthless card could possibly matter." Ouch.

This, I think, points to the crux of this increasingly annoying problem. We need to tell partner we have a "Type II" double. Normally we'd do this by bidding our long suit, hearts, but partner has crossed us up by advancing in our second suit, where we

are perfectly giddy to play. Many of us chose the takeout double over 1♥ in Part A specifically because our spades were so good. This is yet another application of the old adage, "be careful what you wish for, you might get it."

STEPHEN COOPER and STEPHANIE FINE, almost identically: 2♠. This is forward going. Partner should bid again with five spades and six points. Anything higher hangs partner for making a forced bid.

This saves room and protects the plus, but it will also miss many good games. These days, a raise to 2♠ doesn't necessarily show a whole lot of extras. It mostly just confirms to partner that, against all odds, she picked the right suit: we indeed have four-card support, plus enough strength that if she elects to bid on, possibly in competition, we won't panic. I'd routinely raise 1♠ to 2♠ with four spades and 14 hard-working HCP just to take the entire two-level away from the opponents.

Sigh... Anyone else have any ideas?

BILL FOSTER: 2♥. Partner was forced to bid and may have nothing. This shows about what I have, and it allows partner to further define her hand.

BARRY PASSER: 2♥. Given I felt I was too strong for 1♥ initially, it's time to show my suit. If partner can't bid over this, it's probably all we've got. Say he has:

♠ Jxxx ♥ xx ♦ Kxxxx ♣ xx

I like 2♥ more than 3♠, the prime alternative.

STEVE GIBBON: 2♥. Easy does it. Double then bidding a new suit perhaps sends the right message.

LYNN HARRIS: 2♥. It's hard to make up for our double, and also we are not sure where the club cards are. 2♥ is a reasonable compromise.

JOHN HEMMER: 2♥. I want to show a strong hand with a very good heart suit. If partner rebids spades, I will raise to game.

I don't like 2♥ much either. Which, uh, is especially embarrassing because it was my choice this month. At the time, I reasoned that this was a classic Al Roth situation; i.e., "If I can just get past this round...." I felt I'd be well positioned if anyone bid again, but upon reading everyone else's answers and reflecting on it: no, I wouldn't be. I can bid spades next to show a very strong, flexible hand, but partner will assume three-card support on this sequence, not four. She also won't suspect my diamond void and strong club fragment, the features that make the ♣FJ (F="Freaking") almost as valuable as the ♦FA on this crazy deal.

MANOJ DEB-ROY: 2♥. Slam potential with a big heart holding. This is forcing one round.

In standard methods, it's not forcing. In fact, neither is:

BILL SCHMIDT: 3♥. Followed by either 4♣ or 4♠. A 4♦ splinter is tempting, but it's more important to show the good heart suit, which is the basis for my push to game. If we have a slam, it will be primarily because of heart tricks, not my ability to ruff diamonds. Partner rates not to have the ♦A, so if I do splinter, he won't know whether or not we have a diamond loser. If we had an agreement that 2♥ was a one-round force, I'd choose that.

Once upon a time, double-then-jump in a new suit was universally forcing, and I imagine that a poll of tournament players would still find a lot of support for that treatment. Today though, most experts (and Bridge World Standard) use it as a super strong one-suited hand, but passable. A "Type IV" double, if you will. (Type III is a balanced hand too strong for a simple notrump overcall.) As North, I'd expect the likes of:

♠ A2 ♥ AQJ9872 ♦ AQ2 ♣ 2

Partner is expected to drive to game with any card that entertains even mild aspirations of taking a trick.

Only one plausible call remains. It was the first option that I ruled out on October 1st, when contemplating my answer. But -- curses! -- it might be best after all.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 2♣. Shows a big hand but does not confirm spades. Rather, it asks partner to describe his hand further. If he rebids spades, he'll likely have five of them; 3♠ will propel me towards slam, while 2♠ will get us to game. I expect he'll rebid 2♦, since he likely has as many or more diamonds than spades. Over that, I'll bid 3♥, which should be forcing since I doubled, cue-bid, and jumped (as opposed to merely jumping to 3♥ over 1♠.) *[This is how I understand it too - NS]*

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 2♣. It's either this or 3♥. It would be nice to know how we continue after a takeout doubler follows with a cue-bid. (Many experts use the next step to show a very bad hand, called a Herbert Negative.) I'll bid hearts next, as we're more likely to be able to survive diamond forces with hearts as trump, and we're also more likely to receive a favorable club lead if I'm declarer. If partner can't raise hearts, I'll admit to spade help.

WILLIAM T. KILMER: 2♣. A force is in order, but which? I'll take the cheapie instead of the 4♦ splinter, which I don't like using with a void. 4♠ is odds-on, but slam isn't impossible, so it's worth a look.

RICK OLANOFF: 2♣. A great partner will now bid hearts, but diamonds is more likely.

Great partners are hard to find. Here's a partnership blissfully on the same wavelength.

RUI MARQUES: 2♣. It's a running joke between me and Connie that I always tell her to cue-bid, no matter the situation. Here, the cue-bid actually allows for the auction to develop nicely. If North bids diamonds or notrump (or also cue-bids clubs), I can bid hearts and we can eventually get back to spades. If partner bids a major, we are sailing (hopefully smoothly.)

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 2♣. I plan to bid hearts next. If partner can't raise, I'll bid 4♠ and hope we can make it.

I play that takeout double-then-cue bid all but denies four-card support for advancer's suit, which is why I eliminated 2♣ quickly. That was a mistake. We have to lie about something, and this is as harmless of a fib as any. We get to hear at least one more bid from partner before committing to a direction. Whether a later spade bid by us shows three, four, twelve, or pi, we can always insist on the suit and partner will be in no position to overrule us.

Whoever submitted this problem, thank you very much. It was a good one. Last Word for Part B goes jointly to:

JIM EAGLETON: 2♣. What's not to like? Partner gets to (finally) show wasted values in diamonds. I get to bid hearts first, and we have lots of time to get to the wrong level in the wrong major.

MICHAEL SHUSTER (cont.): 2♣. I really think 3♥ is the best call, but I don't want to score 40 points so late in the year.

I'm giving Jim 10 extra points this month for truth in advertising. And yes, our 2021 wall calendar is running out of pages. Tune in December 1st when we finish out another year in the D4MSC.



*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/>*