

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

FEBRUARY 2018 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

I'm occasionally asked why our problem formats are often two-part questions, with the first question being, "Do you agree with South's actions thus far?" Mostly it's because I know that, if I don't give people the opportunity to vent about how bad South (usually, moi) habitually bids, they'll just do it on the 'main' problem. That tends to be a distraction. Once in a blue moon, however, we earn an unexpected bonus: The Part A problem/discussion turns out to be way more interesting than Part B's. Such is the case this month. Part B was relatively dull, but the Club made quite a nice meal out of the issues raised in Part A.

*Coincidentally, once in a midnight green moon, the Eagles make the Super Bowl. I only hope that turns out as well as Part A did. Incidentally, if you'd like to play for a championship in 2018 yourself, it's still not too late to join the **D4MSC Challenge** in March. Your top ten scores of the year put you in the running for fame, glory, and free District 4 regional entries, good no matter what color the moon is.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NONE VULNERABLE

♠-107 ♥-6 ♦-AK10965 ♣-AQJ2

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		2♠*	Pass
3♦	Pass	4♦	Pass
?			

* - WEAK TWO, AT LEAST 2 OF TOP 5 HONORS

A. Do you agree with South's 3♦ call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
No	9	22	20
...prefer 4♠	3	13	
...prefer 2NT (feature)	5	6	
...prefer 2NT (Ogust)	1	1	
...prefer other	0	2	
Yes	3	16	10

Ever hear the old joke about the dog who chased cars all his life, and when he finally caught one, he wondered, "Now what?" Welcome to the bridge equivalent. Yes, I was canine South. Yes, I bid 3♦ at the table. Yes, when my partner raised to 4♦, I just sat there going "Uh-h-h-h-...." North had made the rebid I presumably wanted

most to hear, yet I was totally paralyzed. I solved the problem by waiting until my partner and opponents died of boredom, but that's not really sustainable. You go through too many partners that way. Anyway, what does the Club think of the 3♦ call? For the approvers:

RICH ROTHWARF: Yes. Partner could have something magical, like:

♠AKxxxx ♥xx ♦xxxx ♣x

...where 6♦ is great.

ANDY MEUNZ: Yes. A lot really depends on partner's Weak Two style. If North is old-fashioned, I'd prefer just to bid 4♠ to minimize the information given to the opponents. With a more modern player, 3♦ works for me.

PETE FILANDRO: Yes. A 2NT ask is also reasonable. A feature like the ♣K or the ♠AKQ (partner replies 3NT) is music. But, 3♦ will get us a diamond raise with no feature, like ♦Qx or ♦xxx, which is also music.

KARL BARTH (with MARK KINZER): Yes. We have really good diamonds. If we catch a raise, we want to be in game. Hey, look -- we caught a raise!

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: Yes. Our first thought was just to bid 4♠ at matchpoints, but on further reflection, if partner has a perfecto, 6♦ is a great contract. *[The Glassons' example hand was identical to Rothwarf's, except they gave North the ♦Q too. Optimism! -- NS]*

AL SHRIVE: Yes. I'd rather explore for a diamond slam than a spade slam, where I would need partner to hold better spades than he ever does.

LYNN HARRIS: Yes. It worked out well. The only other bid I'd consider is 4♠.

BILL BAUER, HOWARD WACHTEL, DAVE WACHSMAN, DANIEL DROZ, ET. AL.: Yes. Provided that the partnership is playing a new suit as natural and forcing, of course.

Droz observes that he might be the only person remaining who checks the "New Suit NF" checkbox in the Weak Two section on his convention card. I didn't know that it was still there -- I actually had to pull out my own card to see. It's alertable, for what it's worth. Wachtel notes that a 3♥ response to a 2NT feature-ask doesn't leave us well placed for much of anything.

Note that some "Yes" voters treat this as a game-invitational hand, while others bid it wondering if we can somehow reach a diamond slam. If you're in either of those camps, meaning that you're unsure of level or strain, and you're trying to glean some useful information from partner, then I agree: 3♦ is the best investigatory call. Not everyone concurs.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: No, prefer 2NT (asking for feature). I plan to bid 4♠ if partner shows a minor-suit feature, and to invite game with 3♠ if he shows a heart feature. If he rebids 3♠, I'd probably raise to game unless partner was the frisky type.

ED SHAPIRO: No, prefer 2NT (asking for feature). We need more agreements than the problem conditions give us to bid this hand intelligently. *[Yeah, I know; more on this later -- NS.]* For me, two of the top five honors is inadequate for 2♠. So, unless I planned to take a wild shot at 6♦ over 4♦, I'd have started with 2NT. At least then, over 3♦, I'd know that partner had a maximum and a fit. Or, a simple, direct 4♠.

CRAIG ROBINSON (with JAY APFELBAUM): No, prefer 2NT (asking for feature). 3♦ appears to have worked well, but I think 2NT will work better more often.

BILL PORT: No, prefer 2NT (asking for feature). I wish one of the choices was "maybe". Over 2NT, partner can tell me if he's weak for his bid (by rebidding 3♠), in which case I will sign off in game. If he's stronger, I can ask for aces with 4♣, Gerber in my preferred methods.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: No, prefer 2NT (asking for feature). South has contrived a very interesting auction to get to a diamond slam opposite the likes of:

♠AKxxxx ♥xxx ♦Qxx ♣x

♠KQxxxx ♥Ax ♦xxxx ♣x

The problem is determining if partner has one of these perfect holdings. I think I'd ask for a feature first, then bid 4♦ forcing if partner shows a useful one. Otherwise I'll get to 4♠, which should be an excellent matchpoint spot.

STEVE GIBBON: No, prefer 2NT (Ogust). With partner holding a wide range of strength and spades, we must explore. A 3♠ response (strong hand, strong suit) gets a raise to 4♠. A 3♥ response (strong hand, weak suit) gets 5♦. How partner will feel about playing 5♦ over his 3♦ (weak hand, strong suit) reply will go unstated.

Shapiro wasn't the only person to raise objections over the wide-ranging Weak Two standards. Both Jim Eagleton and Barry Passer expressed dismay at partner possibly holding as little as ♠QJxxxx for a first-seat 2♠ bid. All I can say is, ah, North on this deal is one of our MSC respondents and...um.....look. I sympathize. But, there's an old story about Bess Truman being asked by a Washington dignitary to tell Harry not to exclaim "that's horse manure!" in meetings so often, because it sounded uncouth. Mrs. Truman gave her inquisitor an evil eye and replied drily, "Do you know how long it took me to get him to say 'manure'?" Similarly: Do you know how long it took me to get him to promise at least two of the top five honors for his nonvulnerable Weak Twos?? Enough said.

Steve White, who preferred an Ogust 2NT, considered passing as well. I expected pass to have attracted a few votes, but nobody went on the record for it. The rest of the "No" voters cut straight to the chase:

KEN COHEN: No, prefer 4♠. When partner bids 2♠, you are not interested in showing your minor or playing any contract other than spades. Bidding 2NT or 3♦ gives West a chance to bid hearts. So, why mess around? Quick arrival!

CHRIS KAUFMAN: No, prefer 4♠. The only time I'd want to explore slam is if partner held four diamonds. And, there's no way to know that for sure, because I'd expect him to raise diamonds with only three. So, I would have just bid the practical 4♠. Other calls might win you bidding contests, but 4♠ wins at the table in the long run.

Those two laid down the hammer so strongly and so succinctly that we could just stop here. But, let's give the rest of the team a say:

KEN COHEN: No, prefer 4♠. When partner bids 2♠, you are not interested in showing your minor or playing any contract other than spades. Bidding 2NT or 3♦ gives West a chance to bid hearts. So, why mess around? Quick arrival!

RUI MARQUES (with BILL BURNETT): No, prefer 4♠. With a singleton heart, I prefer just to bid what I think I can make. Slam is highly unlikely, and I don't want to entice the opponents into the auction.

PHIL FREIDENREICH: No, prefer 4♠. Majors over minors at matchpoints. There is no reason to believe that diamonds will play better than spades.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: No, prefer 4♠. We have an eight-card spade fit and the values for game. For slam to be in the picture, I would have to catch lightning in a bottle. It just isn't worth giving the opponents the extra information about my hand. On a great day, West won't pass over 4♠, giving us a much easier 'slam'...on defense.

BARRY DEHLIN: No, prefer 4♠. Given that queen-jack-sixth of spades and the ♣K gives a great play for game, I can't see stopping short of 4♠ regardless of what partner thinks about diamonds. So, why am I bidding 3♦?

BILL SCHMIDT: No, prefer 4♠. It's not IMPs, so I'm not thinking of slam. Why help the opponents with the opening lead?

MARK BOLOTIN: No, prefer 4♠. In all honesty, I would have bid 3♦ at the table. Now, I see it would be a mistake. I may have told East to give his partner diamond ruffs.

It's not every day that someone who makes a call at the table later says he disagrees with it in a bidding forum. With no clue what to do if partner raised my diamonds, I should have eschewed car-chasing and simply responded 4♠. Woof.

B. With the auction as given, what call do you make?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♠	10	25	80
4♥	1	3	60
4NT	0	4	60
5♣	0	3	60
5♦	1	3	60

We won't waste a whole lot of time on Part B. 70% of the Club signed off in game, many chiming in with some variation of either:

BILL BURNETT: 4♠. What I should have bid the first time.

...or...

BARRY COHEN: 4♠. While making game in diamonds might be more likely, this is matchpoints. 4♠ pays better than 5♦.

Still, there's one issue we need to address. Does South's slow sequence to 4♠ show slam interest, inviting partner to continue with useful-looking cards? Or, is it a full stop signoff? Our district experts are not all in agreement. Some will abide further bidding from partner:

RICH ROTHWART: 4♠. I already showed a good hand with diamonds. 4♠ is a suggestion, not a command.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: 4♠. Playing matchpoints, the slow route of introducing diamonds and then bidding 4♠ should show partner an interest in playing either 4♠ or 6♦. Maybe North will work out that ♠AKxxxx is the magic holding.

DANIEL DROZ: 4♠. It would be nice if 4♥ could be used to ask partner to choose between resting in a spade game and exploring for a diamond slam. But, we can't

make up the system as we go. Why didn't I just bid 4♠ to start if this is where we were always ending? In order of increasing plausibility: (A) partner might still make a diamond slam-try, (B) I wanted to keep 3NT in the picture, and (C) I didn't think that far ahead, but at least now I'm fairly certain we'll make 4♠ with the double-fit.

BILL SCHMIDT: 4♠. What I should have bid originally. Now the opening leader knows what I have. But, so does partner. If he has a perfect fit, he can make a slam try.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 4♠. I think I have described a hand with slam interest and spade tolerance (though my spades ought really to be stronger.) If partner really loves his hand, he can continue the auction.

Others, however, imply that 4♠ is a transfer to Pass:

PETE FILANDRO: 4♠. The major-suit game is better and safer. Anybody bidding 4NT or 5♣ has 'visions of sugarplums dancing', but sadly the holidays are over.

DOUG FISCHER: 4♠. If partner really has a Weak Two, then slam should not be there.

STEVE WHITE: 4♠. Seems very clear, given the matchpoint conditions. I expect some pairs to stop in a spade part-score, and I don't expect to beat them in 4♦. If 4♠ comes home, I should have a good score.

RUI MARQUES: 4♠. Oh, boy... Now it seems highly likely that partner is very short in clubs, and the opponents have a good heart fit as expected. It's strange that they haven't shown any signs of life yet. I'm not provoking them with 4♥. Pass is out of the question. I really don't see any alternative.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 4♠. I'm giving up on catching: ♠AKxxxx ♥x ♦xxxx ♣xx.

BARRY DEHLIN: 4♠. I like the idea of exploring for a slam when you can construct a *minimum* hand for partner that makes it cold. I can't do it here. He needs at least two high spades and a big card elsewhere, which is certainly not a minimum for a first-seat Weak Two. 4♠ is enough.

Attempting his best to straddle the two camps, tongue-in-cheek, is:

ED SHAPIRO: 4♠. In the post-mortem, if slam had been makeable, I can argue that my 4♠ bid showed that 3♦ had been a slam try, so I must have decent controls in the rounded suits. This is an argument I might lose on the grounds of practicality.

How to interpret our slow road to 4♠ is a matter of partnership agreement. I think that, if all of your game tries begin with 2NT, then yes: playing this sequence as a mild slam invitation makes sense. However, if 3♦ is forcing only to 3♠ (and is thus itself a game-invitation), then 4♠ needs to be a signoff. For all North knows, you needed to find that side-suit fit just for him to scrape up ten tricks.

A solid minority of respondents aren't settling for game just yet. The fact that they split evenly between three different paths, however, sort of dilutes their message.

JAY APFELBAUM (with AL SHRIVE espousing the exact bidding plan): 4♥. Might as well find out if partner has any other features. A diamond slam is possible. I'm foregoing a spade game and following with 5♣, hoping partner can bid the diamond slam with the ♠AK.

BILL BAUER: 4♥. I want to make it easy for partner to control-bid 4♠.

ANDY MEUNZ: 4NT. I'll commit to diamonds, but it doesn't hurt to check if we're off two aces.

BARRY PASSER: 4NT. If partner has an ace, I'll try 6♦. It might be cold on normal splits, or it might require a club finesse.

LYNN HARRIS: 5♣. Has to be a cue bid for diamonds.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 5♣. Allows partner to sign off in 5♦ lacking the major-suit aces.

Our final contingent prefers 5♦ to 4♠ on the old-fashioned notion that, matchpoints or not, a diamond game is more likely to make.

STEVE GIBBON: 5♦. This will have play opposite partner's indicated shapely maximum with a diamond fit.

HOWARD WACHTEL: 5♦. Taking North's hand to have eight losers, my hand has five losers for a total of 13. That suggests we can make 11 tricks with diamonds as trump, so I would hold my breath and raise to game.

JOHN VOLPEL: 5♦. This is optimistic enough. 6♦ would require just the right spade situation. 4♠ is unlikely if hearts are led.

I wouldn't call 4♠ "unlikely", but I agree with John: a spade game can get dicey in a big hurry if the opponents tap dummy and spades don't behave. I'm a 4♠ bidder because of the form of scoring, but it wouldn't shock me in the least if that contract went down while 5♦ rolls home. This is especially true if your partnership is the sort that aggressively opens nonvulnerable Weak Twos with five-card suits. Perhaps this problem would have been better at IMPs. Oh well, I'm going outside to play in traffic. See you in March.



A typo in the January MSC article made Connie Goldberg's answer puzzling as given. In fact, it should have read thusly:

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 3NT. ...Since I've denied as many as four spades (I would have bid 2♠ over partner's support double), North should logically be showing a partial **spade** stopper, although it helps to have discussed it...



Our District 4 MSC regulars continue to shine in those, ahem, "other" bidding forums. Joining Steve White (The Bridge World's 2017 MSC champ) is our own Ken Cohen, who won the ACBL Bulletin's 2017 "It's Your Call" contest. Congratulations, Ken! Now if the Eagles just win on Sunday, I'm willing to call the 2017 bridge/football season a sparkling success.



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/>