

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

OCTOBER 2018 PROBLEM

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October brings longer days, shorter nights, and, it would seem, harder problems to the hallow(een)ed District 4 MSC. After two straight months of lopsided votes, this one was a lot closer, as the Club grappled with a borderline four-level competitive decision.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, BOTH VUL.

♠-A982 ♥-A6 ♦-KJ10876 ♣-K

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| | | Pass | Pass |
| 1♦ | 3♣ | 3♦ | 4♣ |
| ? | | | |

B. What is your call?

| CALL | PANEL | SOLVERS | AWARD |
|--------|-------|---------|-------|
| 4♦ | 7 | 19 | 100 |
| 5♦ | 2 | 12 | 90 |
| 4♠ | 0 | 6 | 80 |
| Pass | 0 | 2 | 70 |
| Double | 0 | 2 | 70 |
| 4♥ | 1 | 0 | 70 |
| 4NT | 0 | 1 | 60 |

Well, at least we have no shortage of options this month. This is a pretty good hand, but the opponents have jammed the auction to the four level, vulnerable. We might try four of either major, but as the comments will show, it's not exactly unanimous as to whether that would be an offer to play or some sort of control bid. A double would presumably show "cards" (extra values and no clear direction) but doubling with a bare king in their suit takes nerves of steel and a tolerant partner. Or, one could just punt by bidding the appropriate number of diamonds, which in this case is clearly....

ED SHAPIRO: 4♦. Trying, for now, to go plus.

Actually, I was thinking more along the lines of....

TOM WEIK: 4♦. Partner doesn't need much to bid 4♦ -- ace-queen-fifth of diamonds and a singleton or doubleton club is adequate. Partner could have a little more than that (and is likely to, given the bid of only 4♣ by East.) Game for us is

possible but unlikely, so 4♦ seems enough. It's matchpoints, and I am simply trying for a plus score.

STEVE WHITE: 4♦. A likely plus score. Either 4♠ or 5♦ might make, but neither is likely to. The matchpoint conditions make double a possibility, but with the ♣K on-side, I'm not going to risk it.

Four diamonds? As in, one-two-three-four?

AL SHRIVE: 4♦. Plus 130 or minus 100, versus minus 130 at matchpoints, right?

ANDY MUENZ: 4♦. Most likely we are looking at 20 or 21 total trumps, so we should be safe competing to 4♦. With the poorly-placed ♣K, game in diamonds would require too perfect of a hand from partner.

RICHARD HARTZ: 4♦. With the ♣K probably worthless, I have enough to compete but not enough to insist on game.

But...but.....

RICH ROTHWARP: 4♦. We might be missing a game, or +200 against 4♣ doubled, but 4♦ ought to make. If double were a game try, that would be my choice, but I don't usually play maximal doubles at the four-level.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 4♦. I have two more diamonds than partner could expect, so I must take some sort of action. If I were willing to commit to game, then 4♠ (which I would gamble on at IMPs) would be better than 5♦. If partner holds bad spades, then even opposite a dead maximum game is terrible, e.g.:

♠xxx ♥KQx ♦AQxxx ♣xx

KARL BARTH: 4♦. I've been minus-710 before. I think that this hand is a real candidate for that score if I were to double. Maybe I'll even make 4♦. Partner shouldn't be bidding on total dreck, but then again, neither should East. "When in doubt, bid one more", so I do.

BARRY COHEN: 4♦. Long diamonds and only two tricks on defense.

Okay, HOLD IT!! (Ahem.) So, um, this discussion isn't going quite the way I anticipated. 4♦ picked up a clear majority of Panelist votes and a solid plurality of Solvers. It clearly earned its 100 award this month.

However, just for the record...should you ever be unlucky enough to be roped into a matchpoint event with me as your partner (and if so, you'd have far bigger problems than what call to make on any one particular hand; to wit, I passed out of turn twice at the Wilmington sectional last weekend), then I can assure you that the "appropriate" number of diamonds here is:

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 5♦. Very tough to judge since the auction is jammed, and I don't know my partner's tendencies or whose deal it is. If I bid only 4♦, and LHO bids 4♥ (he could be four-six or four-seven opposite a passed partner) or 5♣, I will be full of regret for having left myself the last guess. Whatever I do, I must do it in tempo.

MARK BOLOTIN: 5♦. With partner's likely ace-fifth of diamonds, it won't take much else to make game, even with my wasted ♣K. Plus, we may not have enough to beat 4♣, or even 5♣ if 5♦ goes down.

BOB GRINWIS: 5♦. What I think I can make. Partner needs to have some stuff to raise my minor at the three level, vulnerable.

JOHN HEMMER: 5♦. For all partner knows, I could have opened a three-card suit. *My sentiments exactly. To be fair, as some of you know, I'm much better at teams than at pairs, where I frankly stink even on days when I do pay attention to minutiae like who's the dealer. Better matchpoint mavens than me will make a courtesy raise to 3♦ on North hands like the one Tom Weik described (♦AQxxx and short clubs.) But, I wouldn't, not after a preempt anyway. If I'm freely raising my partner's minor-suit opening at the three-level, vulnerable, it'd be based on more than mere courtesy. Granted I might have the hand Michael Shuster constructed, in which case 5♦ is going down in flames. But, I might have the same hand with the majors reversed, in which case South has eleven tricks off the top.*

All this said, given the fact that our Panelists predominately think that 4♦ here is plenty, I would advise that you listen to them and not me. Let's hear more from the 4♦ camp.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 4♦. Might make exactly, might make an overtrick, might go down one doubled when we could have gone +200 against 4♣X. (*shrug*) When in doubt, put pressure on the opponents.

DAVE WACHSMAN (and BILL BURNETT, almost identically): 4♦. Partner is a passed hand and failed to make a negative double. My assessment is that game is unlikely and that 4♦ is an achievable contract. Should the opponents push on to 5♣, I will double. *[Burnett would bid 5♦ instead of 4♦ at IMPs - Ed.]*

PETE FILANDRO: 4♦. East's bid has actually been helpful. The auction suggests that partner is also short in clubs and holds at least five diamonds with less than invitational strength. I'll give partner the ♦A and a major-suit king, which leaves me with three losers except when partner has a doubleton spade. That's too small of a target for me to jump to game and risk a minus score. Doubling is not enticing either since, after partners presumed ♦A lead, 4♣X will make unless diamonds are one-one.

To be honest, I wouldn't bet my life that we can even set 5♣. There is clearly some highly skewed distribution around the table. Even when 5♦ fails, it might still be an acceptable matchpoint result, particularly because the opponents aren't terribly likely to double if we bid it immediately.

BARRY DEHLIN: 4♦. I have undisclosed strength, so I can't pass. I'm not strong enough to contract for an eleven-trick game across from a simple 3♦ raise, so I can't bid 5♦. And, I have no good way to find a still-possible spade fit while landing at a safe level, so I can't double or bid 4♣. The right call remains: 4♦. Lots of uncertainty here because partner can have a wide variety of holdings -- damn those pre-empts!

BILL FOSTER: 4♦. East is certain that his partner has a long club suit, but North is not yet certain that her partner, me, has a long diamond suit. Her failure to make a negative double suggests also that her major-suit lengths are limited. The auction may not yet be over.

BILL SCHMIDT: 4♦. I'm not worried about missing 4♣. Partner must have at least four hearts, thus fewer than four spades (no negative double). And, I'm not worried about missing 5♦. If partner can cover four of my six losers, he has enough to carry on to game.

The inference about North being likely to have heart length is valid. The "enough to carry on to game" part, not so much. Between the purely competitive nature of 4♦ and the fact that she is off three rather important key-cards, I can't see North ever being able to bid 5♦ intelligently. Allowing ourselves to be dragged there is a good way to get doubled. So, yeah, if we want to swing for the fences, now is the time.

WILLIAM PORT: 5♦. My partner believes we have reasonable play possibilities in diamonds. He neither bid a major nor made a negative double. We have an enormous fit, so let's try for a diamond game.

BARRY PASSER: 5♦. What I think we'll make. The opponents possibly have a double-fit for their aggressive bidding, so we might too. Partner could have, for example:

♠xx ♥Kxxxx ♦Axxxx ♣x

WALTER MITCHELL: 5♦. The ♣K is a lost trick, but the initial pass by East and the weak jump-shift by West indicate that North-South should be in game.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 5♦. A great hand for a maximal overcall double, were we to be playing them for minor-suit invitations at the four-level. Thus, I'm going high on this one. It doesn't take much from partner to give us a play.

CRAIG ROBINSON: 5♦. I want to bid 5♣ but it's unlikely a passed-hand partner can cover all but one of my losers.

RICHARD HARTZ, JR.: 5♦. I don't want to give the opponents any more information, and any dummy that makes 6♦ should have opened the bidding. I'm competing to 5♦ anyway, so I may as well go there now and hope to make. Maybe I'll get lucky and double 6♣.

Mind you, there are a few bids between 4♦ and 5♦, including the ever-popular four of either major. What would they mean in an auction as jammed as this one? A few Club members chimed in on this topic....

TODD HOLES: 4♦. 4♠ is tempting, but I'm afraid it may be interpreted as a slam move.

WILLIAM KILMER: 4♦. Facing a passed partner and against effectively-preempting opponents, I would use the following regardless of vulnerability or form of scoring: 4♦=Roman Key-Card "Minorwood"; 4♥ or 4♠=game suggestions (not control-bids); 4NT=slam invitational with some neat continuances; 5♣=first-round club control; 5♦=to play; 5♥ or higher=partner may require random drug testing in the future.

TOM WEIK (CONT.): 4♦. ...Could partner have a four-card spade suit? Would a negative double guarantee both majors, or might it merely indicate two places to play? These are both possibilities depending on the partnership's methods.

...and a few others did more than just chime:

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♥. The best way to find out if slam could make.

RUI MARQUES: 4♠. Forward going and perhaps the last chance to reach spades if partner is 4=1=5=3 or something similar. Opposite a perfect hand, we might even find a slam. "Show your pattern, the high-card points will take care of themselves."

RICK OLANOFF: 4♠. Partner might not hold enough hearts to have made a negative double last round. And, I like our chances if 5♦ if he lacks spades.

LYNN HARRIS: 4♠. It's matchpoints. Partner could have four-plus spades and have been unable to bid them last round. Without support, he should retreat to 5♦.

MARK KINZER: 4♠. 4♦ seems normal here but think about what partner might have. He'll always have at least five diamonds. He could easily have a four-card or even five-card major. Give him, say:

♠Kxxx ♥Kx ♦Qxxxx ♣xx

...and 5♦ is always down one, but 4♠ has a play.

Mark's construction needs three-two spades and either no defensive diamond ruff or a ruff with the three-card holding. There's also the delightful extra chance that West, with a diamond void (would 2=4=0=7 surprise anyone?), underleads his ♣A at trick one in the hopes of putting his partner in before trumps are drawn. Then, declarer's only remaining challenge is keeping a straight face while winning his stiff king.

Lastly, one might choose to bid nothing at all.

WALT BELL: Double. Hoping that partner will know what to do. It seems unlikely North has enough to make 5♦.

DANIEL DROZ: Double. Passionate followers of the Law Of Total Tricks will want to bid to the stratosphere, possibly 5♦ directly, as there seem to be at least 21 total tricks. But, I don't think so. The opponents are unlikely to bid to 5♣ even if it makes *[Grudgingly conceded - NS]*, and that might argue for passing. But, it's also easy to construct North hands where 5♦ is cold, or good defensive hands that might see 4♣ down multiple tricks when 5♦ fails:

♠Kxx ♥Kxx ♦Qxxxx ♣Qx

I want to make a game-try here to leave all options open. Obviously, my double is not truly a "maximal" double, but it should tell partner, "I have extras, please leave it in with good defense or pull with extra offense." Maybe he'll even pull it to 4♠ on a good day. But, if he leaves it in, he won't be disappointed with my two side aces.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Pass. It appears that the pack is close to being divided equally. All four-level contracts may fail. Or, if we count losers, South has six and North can have as many as nine, so our side would be expected to take nine tricks, not ten.

Thus endeth a pretty interesting problem discussion. I truly thought that 4♦ would be a popular but non-plurality choice, with the Club debating whether to bid 5♦ or make some sort of major-suit bid along the way. I certainly feel I learned something, which ultimately is what this feature is all about.

For what little it is worth, North (a BBO bot) at the table held:

♠KJ5 ♥J9752 ♦A952 ♣8

North's dilemma was originally going to be this month's MSC problem. 3♦ isn't exactly ideal with only four-card support, but it's not like Joe Robot over there had a lot of better options. West was 1=4=1=7 with the stiff ♣Q served up hot and fresh in the slot. Last word this month goes to a pair of the Club's distaff regulars:

CONNIE GOLDBERG (CONT.): 5♦. When I first saw this problem, my instinct was to bid 5♦, so I'll go with my gut.

CHRISTINE SGRO: 4♦. I usually make the wrong call in these situations. But, after much thinking, I decided that Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend.



*Panelist Tom Weik is two months away from pitching a perfect game in the **2018 D4MSC Challenge**, but a trio of contenders (Rick Rowland, Ed Shapiro, and Steve White) lurk just ten points behind should he stumble. On the Solvers' side, Bill Burnett and Leonard Helfgott are tied with 790 points. Bill has very slightly the upper hand in the race because his first dropped score is a 90 to Leonard's 80. Mark Bolotin, Barry Cohen, Barry Dehlin, and Bruce Schwaidelson are all at 780*



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/>