

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

SEPTEMBER 2018 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

Fans of the classic British TV series "Monty Python's Flying Circus" know that its theme song was actually an American composition: *The Liberty Bell March*, by John Phillip Sousa. The opening title sequence featured a surreal assortment of Terry Gilliam cartoons, moving in sync to the familiar melody, and always ending with a huge foot dropping from the top of the screen, squashing everything underneath it with a loud, corny, vaguely flatulent "splat". Which, um, pretty much sums up how Problem 1B this month went over with our District experts. The overwhelming vote for a slightly-shaded 2♠ reverse makes it so anticlimactic that we might as well get its discussion out of the way first. Then we can turn to Problem 1A, an afterthought of sorts that had no less of a lopsided vote, but which prompted a useful and educational discussion. Sigh...you know, I never wanted to be a bidding forum director in the first place. I wanted to be.....a lumberjack!

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

IMPS, NORTH-SOUTH VUL.

♠-AK43 ♥-82 ♦-AKQ52 ♣-63

South	West	North	East
1♦	Pass	1♥	2♣
?			

DOUBLE = 3-CARD HEART SUPPORT

B. What is your call?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
2♠	12	37	80
Pass	1	1	50
2♦	0	3	50
Double	0	1	40

Our respondents ate this problem for lunch, overwhelmingly ordering spam, spam, spam, spam, spam, 2♠, eggs, sausage, and spam. It goes without saying, I suppose, that one of the non-reversers is yours truly, else I wouldn't have posed the problem to the Club. Before we get to that, let's let the teeming millions have their say. First, the folks who have no qualms at all in reversing:

RICH ROTHWARTH: 2♠. I'm good enough for a reverse. I would have reversed if partner had responded 1NT.

TOM WEIK (with JOHN VOLPEL): 2♦. Showing my second suit and extra strength. Partner could easily have spades.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 2♦. I think this is automatic. Even if I weren't playing support doubles, 2♦ is descriptive. Even if you normally play reverses as being stronger than this, in competition, they can be a bit lighter.

ANDY MUENZ: 2♦. I have the strength (five losers, all prime cards) to bid out my shape. RHO didn't double so he's unlikely to have four spades, whereas partner could easily be four-four in the majors.

STEVE GIBBON, WALT BELL, JOHN JONES, and several others: 2♦. Tells my story well: 16+ HCP and five-by-four distribution.

DAVE WACHSMAN (with RICHARD HARTZ): 2♦. The 2♦ rebid accurately describes this hand while giving partner the knowledge perhaps to bid 3NT.

AL SHRIVE: 2♦. All my values are in my long suits. With controls, bid early and often to describe the hand.

BARRY PASSER (with BILL BURNETT and MARK KINZER): 2♦. Pretty much a perfect description. If partner rebids his hearts, I'll chance 4♥. [Burnett would raise 2NT to 3NT, too -- Ed.]

Among other members of this troupe: Bill Foster also notes "This auction may have some ways yet to go." Bill Port expects partner to note that he did not bid notrump, suggesting no stopper in clubs. Bruce Schwaidelson, whose response was similar to Andy Muenz's, observes that our next call might be the truly tough one. And, panelist Rick Rowland summed it all up in two words: "Pure hand."

Another 2♦ faction is aware that partner might play us for a bit more than this if we reverse, but they see no better option. I think their best representatives are:

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 2♦. Absent the interference, I'd have just bid 1♦, as 2♦ would promise game-forcing values. However, once they have overcalled 2♣, the reverse can be a shade lighter, and this hand qualifies. It's possible we'll be propelled too high, but such is life. There is a much greater chance that any lesser action will keep our side out of a good game, or see the wrong suit become trumps.

KARL BARTH: 2♦. I feel I'm a touch light, but 3♣ is available [if I held a super-strong hand.] I'm not bidding that, so how strong do I really need to be? The failure to bid 3♣ colors all the rest of our partnership actions. Now, partner's preference to 3♦ doesn't have to be forcing, because 3♣ is available to him as well. Ditto for a raise to 3♦. [Muenz made similar observations about the availability of 3♣ -- Ed.]

I admit grudgingly that this makes a lot of sense. I felt at the table that 2♦ overstated the hand, but the fact that we're in competition, and that our failure to cue-bid 3♣ helps limits our strength, makes the reverse much more attractive. C'est la vie.

BARRY COHEN: 2♦. This is a very nice hand. I'm only a point shy of a reverse, and I have no wasted values in clubs. 2♦ is a pretty good description.

RUI MARQUES: 2♦. Too much concentration of values for anything else.

ED SHAPIRO: 2♦. I'd like to have a little more playing strength, but I can't live with letting that petty interference run me out of my opportunity to get my good spades into the auction, while still letting partner bail into a red suit at the three-level.

DANIEL DROZ: 2♠. Perhaps I'm a point shy, but my suits are excellent. Given the competition, partner will be sympathetic to forgive my missing jack. Another way to say this: when I opened this hand, I planned to show diamonds and spades, and a measly 2♣ overcall will not stop me from doing so.

BILL SCHMIDT: 2♠. If partner had responded 1♠ and my majors were reversed, I'd have a normal, minimum 2♥ rebid. The only significant difference here is that partner can't rebid his suit at the two-level. But, I don't want to play in hearts anyway unless he has enough to rebid them at the three-level. If we're overboard, at least we're not vulnerable.

BOB GRINWIS: 2♠. I'd like to have another point or two, but if partner has clubs stopped, he can bid notrump and get at least five tricks from my hand.

BARRY DEHLIN: 2♠. Perhaps I should be a bit stronger to do this. But, 2♦ lies about both strength and distribution. I'll stick with the lesser lie.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 2♠. I think this shows extra values but not necessarily a game force.... Even if he believes it's a game force, partner might still bail us out with the likes of queen-fourth in spades plus the heart ace.

WALTER MITCHELL: 2♠. Partner could have four spades, and while South is a bit shy of the points normally needed to reverse, what other choice is there?

MARK BOLOTIN: 2♠. I assume we play lebensohl [2NT to suggest weakness; *Bruce Schwaidelson wonders if 2NT shouldn't be natural regardless in this auction -- NS*] over reverses in case partner needs to put on the brakes. In the unlikely event partner has a hand worth slam-exploration, I've bid where my values are.

RICHARD HARTZ JR.: 2♠. And then passing as soon as partner lets me.

One key issue that we should clear up is whether or not our reverse promises a below-game rebid, as it would if there were no interference. Bolotin implies that it does. Barth asserts that it does not -- partner should recognize that we might be a little light for our bid, and he has 3♣ available as a clear game-force if he needs one. That certainly sounds reasonable, but it's a topic worth discussing with your favorite partner. To be quite frank, "What do our bids mean if there's interference?" is the first question you ought to ask whenever discussing any new bidding methods or conventions. It might save you a lot of grief down the line, and besides, sometimes arguments are fun.

While you're at it, you might even discuss whether 2♠ itself ought to be forcing. No, I'm not kidding. The bots on BBO play competitive reverses like this as virtual-but-not-absolute forces. They'll pass if they have spade tolerance and utter garbage otherwise. Don't snicker: with a 3♣ cue-bid available to South if he happens to hold a monster, that treatment sometimes works out very well indeed.

STEVE WHITE: 2♠. Unless, that is, we had the agreement that double showed four spades rather than three hearts. After two spades, there may be uncertainty over what bids are forcing (including whether 2♠ itself is), but we may muddle through it even if this North and I have no definite agreements.

HOWARD WACHTEL: 2♠. This does not show significant extra values, because we are bidding spades at the cheapest level. Partner has not denied four spades.

On the bright side, there weren't too many complaints about the simplicity of the problem. Er....

TODD HOLES: 2♦. I think I'll bid what I have. Is this a problem?

DON DALPE: 2♦. Is this a misprint? When I opened 1♦, I had to be planning to rebid 2♦ on this auction. What am I missing?

Well geez, I didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition! In all seriousness, no, clearly the person missing something was me. When this problem arose in a team game a while back, I rebid a too-clever 2♦. My reasoning was that, at IMPs, playing in a minor vs. a major was largely irrelevant, a reverse would be an overbid, and if 2♦ were passed out, we'd be hugely unlikely to miss a game. I'll have all you naysayers know that I was right! We had no play whatsoever for any game; in fact, 2♦ was our last sure plus score. Even 3♦ might have failed despite partner's five(!)-card support. But, uh...that diabolical distribution also meant East-West were cold for game in clubs, which they duly bid and made. Perhaps if I'd reversed, the bad guys would have pulled in their horns. My second choice:

WILLIAM KILMER: Pass. If partner can't bid, then where is our fit?

PETE FILANDRO: 2♦. Partner knows we have shortish hearts. If she has the ten points we need for game, a reopening double or notrump bids are available. With weaker hands, since we are known to have at least four diamonds and are 80% to have five diamonds, she could balance with 2♦ even with only 8 HCP and a horror like 3=4=3=3.

Oh well, no need to beat a dead horse...or a dead parrot. Let's move on to the first half of the problem -- is this hand a 1NT opener?

A. As dealer, would you have opened 1NT instead of 1♦?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
No	13	36	20
Yes	0	5	10
Sometimes	0	1	10

We don't see much unanimity in the District 4 Master Solvers' Club, so this is something to behold. Every panelist voted no. None even expressed a hint of hesitation or self-doubt. Though it's become almost routine these days to see 5-4-2-2 hands opened 1NT at duplicate, there is a point when even top players draw the line. And, wherever that line is, this hand is on the other side of it. Here comes a parade of experts to explain why, in alphabetical order.

DON DALPE: No. With spades, I don't think I would pick 1NT at any form of scoring or any possible vulnerability conditions. In fact, unfavorable at IMPs, it seems to me that 1♦ is even more attractive.

PETE FILANDRO: No. Many will point to the defect of points concentrated in two suits, so I'll pile on with: there are no tens or nines (notrumpy-type cards), and, the concentrations are "pure" as opposed to broken (notrumpy) concentrations like ace-king-jack or ace-queen-jack.

JOANN & BOB GLASSON: No. The hand is too concentrated in two suits to open 1NT. If at least one of the doubletons had an honor card, we would open 1NT with this pattern.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: No. Aside from the two low doubletons, my hand has too much potential to open 1NT. Give partner four spades to the queen and an ace, and game is reasonable.

CRAIG ROBINSON: No. I am too old to open this totally suit-oriented hand with 1NT. Partner could have:

♠xx ♥AKx ♦J10xx ♣Axxx

...and the auction goes 1NT-3NT, with six diamonds odds-on to make, but you never even mentioned your suit.

RICH ROTHWARTH: No. Two flaws -- the two worthless doubletons.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: No. While the current auction is awkward, this hand did not rate to be difficult to bid starting with 1♦. In general, 5-4-2-2 is a suit-contract distribution. Unless the honor location is heavily weighted toward the short suits, e.g.:

♠Kxxx ♥Qx ♦KQTxx ♣AQ

...it is usually much more effective to bid such hands in a natural manner, starting with your longest suit.

ED SHAPIRO: No. Not even opposite a client.

TOM WEIK: No. I do open some hands with this distribution, but this would not be one of them. Extreme concentration of strength in my suits leads me to open my longest. Not a close call in my opinion. Partner should be the declarer of any notrump contract. (Honors in my doubletons could cause me to reconsider.)

STEVE WHITE: No. Certainly not with two weak doubletons. Almost certainly not with four spades, five of a minor, and one weak doubleton. Perhaps if the four-card suit were hearts and with only one weak doubleton.

Jay Apfelbaum, Melvin Lubart, and Rick Rowland round out our baker's dozen of No votes, without comment. There were a handful of Yes votes, and one Sometimes (at different vulnerability conditions or different forms of scoring), but their comments all boiled down to this:

WILLIAM KILMER: Yes. Because of this exact problem.

Fair enough, but I agree with Michael Shuster. Opening 1♦ really shouldn't have put us in any sort of difficult rebid position. The subsequent auction just happened to go as bad as it possibly could for us without anyone preempting. And, because the vast majority of MSC members are willing to trot out a shaded reverse to cope with problem 1B, then opening 1♦ appears to be the best way to go.

Last word this month goes to:

ED SHAPIRO (CONT.): No, 2♠. Can you subtract points from anyone who says, "It's where I live?"

Double Sigh...No one in the Club cited that well-worn phrase in his or her response, so I didn't even get that simple pleasure. I came up completely empty, not unlike a certain famous [British cheese shop](#).



*It's time for another update in the **2018 District 4 MSC Challenge**. With three problems to go, Panelist Tom Weik is still hanging on to a perfect score after his two lowest months have been dropped. But, a quartet of competitors are only 10 points behind, and really, every regularly-relying Panelist is still in the hunt. On the Solvers' side, there's a four-way tie at 690, with no fewer than 25 (!) Solvers within 50 points of the lead. So, it'll come down to these last three months. Hopefully your humble director won't choose any more dud problems like this month's. But, don't hold your breath.*

Panelists

1.	Tom Weik	700
2t	Connie Goldberg	690
2t	Rick Rowland	690
2t	Ed Shapiro	690
2t	Steve White	690
6t	J&B Glasson	680
6t	Michael Shuster	680
8t	Jay Apfelbaum	670
8t	Don Dalpe	670
8t	Craig Robinson	670
8t	Rich Rothwarf	670

Solvers

1t	Mark Bolotin	690
1t	Bill Burnett	690
1t	Leonard Helfgott	690
1t	Bruce Schwaidelson	690
5t	Barry Cohen	680
5t	Barry Dehlin	680
5t	Mark Kinzer	680
5t	Walter Mitchell	680
9t	Chris Kaufman	670
9t	Bill Schmidt	670
9t	Al Shrive	670



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/>