

## DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

### SEPTEMBER 2020 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

*Most bidding forum problems are unicorns. They're unusual situations that you might face twice a decade, or they involve hands that fall in between the cracks of standard bidding systems. They're the ones that you scribble on a napkin and pose to friends after the session, or email to your friendly neighborhood MSC director (who always appreciates them.) But, if we're being honest, most problems we face at the table are more pedestrian. They're mules, not unicorns. They involve everyday decisions of judgment and/or tactics. Diamonds or notrump? Compete or sell? "If I get out for -100, might that beat a lot of -110s?" What makes bridge so fascinating is that you can get every unicorn problem wrong from now until the Minotaurs come home...but if you can get four of five of the bread-and-butter decisions right, you are one of the strongest players on the planet. This September, we're giving the unicorns the month off and giving the mules a well-deserved spotlight. It might be a mundane problem, but that doesn't mean it's easy.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

#### MATCHPOINTS, BOTH VULNERABLE

♠-985 ♥-AKQ753 ♦-K5 ♣-A10

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	Pass	1NT
?			

#### 1. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Pass	8	11	100
2♥	2	17	90
Double	2	6	80
3♥	0	2	70

*When we opened this hand, we had our rebid already picked out:*

BILL PORT: 3♥. I can't see how anything else can describe this hand to partner. The repeat of the initial heart bid shows six of those pumpers. And, the jump shows 17 or more points. I have 16 HCPs plus two doubletons; close enough in my book.

STEVE GIBBON: 3♥. One place to play, and extras. Offense or defense depends on the North hand.

*I'm pretty sure that if we rebid 3 ♥ now, defense will not be in our future. Not until the post-mortem, anyway. Partner might have something to say about why we contracted for nine tricks, vulnerable, opposite a twice-passed hand and between two bidding opponents. Granted that this is a five-loser hand, but under the circumstances, we rate to lose all five, and possibly more. If we want to compete, 2 ♥ gets our story across.*

*The bronze medal this month goes to:*

**MICHAEL SHUSTER:** Double. In order to beat this, we need partner to show up with a spade stopper or the ♦A. That makes us a favorite to go plus here. They are red, and it's matchpoints, so I'll shoot for +200. I'd bid 2 ♥ at IMPs.

**DOUGLAS DYE:** Double. Hoping to catch partner with a scattered five or six HCPs. He'll know what to do.

**MANOJ DEB-ROY:** Double. Indicates extra values and a desire to compete. With a minimum hand, partner should correct to 2 ♥.

*Well, not exactly. With a minimum hand -- which would be roughly a yarborough in this case -- and fewer than three hearts, partner should pull to a five-card minor if he has one. The double is penalty-ready, but it's not a command; we're simply saying we're too strong to defend 1NT undoubled. If our double was based on luscious hearts and an entry or two, we can correct two of a minor to 2 ♥ ourselves.*

**BILL BAUER:** Double. I earned 50 + 50 = 100 MSC points last month by doubling. So, why not double again? OK, you want my real reason: The double is penalty oriented. I am hoping for five heart tricks, one club trick and my partner winning a spade trick. +200 is more than any part-score we could make. If you have never eaten a double, then you don't double enough. If I had a dollar for every double I've eaten, I wouldn't be sitting in my study contemplating this problem, but rather I would be responding from my private island paradise.

*I'd be on the island next door. Bill and I would take turns hosting bridge tournaments. Come join us, won't you?*

*The race for the gold was a close one. Both pass and 2 ♥ garnered 19 votes. The difference in the scoring, of course, was the Panelists' lopsided preference. Let's hear from the silver medalist's worldwide fan club first.*

**STEVE WHITE:** 2 ♥. Almost certainly the wrong contract if we were looking at all four hands. -200 would not be surprising. Since the opponents can't see all four hands, I'm going to risk 2 ♥, hoping the opponents will buy the contract in something higher or that I can get out for -100. "Bidder's Game" and all that.

**KARL BARTH:** 2 ♥. I'm not expecting to be doubled, so this seems a sensible try. It'll also encourage partner to compete or double with a modest holding if the opponents don't go quietly.

**BOB GRINWIS:** 2 ♥. With West and East both bidding, partner probably does not have much. But, I still have a shot at eight tricks in hearts. I don't have enough to bid more unless partner wakes up.

**LEN HELFGOTT:** 2 ♥. If I knew they would play in 1NT, I might pass, but I'd rather get my second bid in before LHO bids 2 ♠.

RICHARD HARTZ JR.: 2♥. Trusting that East really has hearts stopped, they can probably make 1NT, maybe more, so I don't want to pass or double in case partner leaves it in. 2♥ is likely down one. If it's down two, I'll expect to have company.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 2♥. I must have a limited imagination because I can't imagine what else I could possibly choose.

*On this problem, judgment and tactics go hand in hand. Some 2♥ bidders are prepared to accept down one undoubted, hoping that it's marginally better than what the opponents can take on offense. Matchpoints is won and lost at the margins. Similarly, many were concerned that the opponents had a better spot in a minor, and these folks felt that 2♥ was a good way to keep them from finding it.*

**RICH ROTHWART:** 2♥. Passing could be right -- the chance of beating 1NT, combined with the chance of going down too many in 2♥, is significant. But, the opponents may well have a good minor-suit fit, or West may have six spades. I'll show my six strong hearts while I still can.

STEPHEN COOPER: 2♥. Let them look for their minor-suit fit at the three level. This is a case of bidding what I think I can make (if dummy's spade tricks don't get ruffed.)

BARRY COHEN: 2♥. I don't expect much from partner [*Considering it's often me, can you blame him?* - NS], and I expect a heart loser, but 2♥ is a good description of my hand. Let the opponents guess from there.

MARK KINZER: 2♥. This has the advantage of preempting 2♣ or 2♦ from LHO.

*From the D4MSC Dept. of Psychology:*

LEN HELFGOTT (cont.): 2♥. ...On the surface, this is similar to the common problem of what to do over the opponents' 1NT opener holding ace-king-queen-jack-seventh of a suit and out. Common lore is to pass at IMPs or if they are vulnerable. There are two differences here. First, the 1NT response strongly implies a heart stopper, whereas a 1NT opening bid does not. Second, on this problem, opener will likely act again with any unbalanced hand, or even any 5-4-2-2, whereas if East had opened 1NT, West will pass with many unbalanced or semi-balanced shapes such as 2=2=5=4. Still, an interesting problem.

LYNN HARRIS: 2♥. How many hearts is a rational East likely to hold? It should be jack-fourth, unless East is a good poker player. Perhaps I should not bid 2♥, but it is possible to make eight tricks on a diamond lead or with an entry to dummy.

*If we'd opened in a minor, I wouldn't be surprised if East's stopper turned out to be jack-third or worse. Over 1♥ or 1♠, not only is he likely to have jack-fourth, he could easily have, say, jack-ten-fifth. That's one reason I'm leery about bidding 2♥ here -- East has graciously warned us that trumps are almost surely not splitting and might be splitting terribly. It would be rude to ignore him.*

*Lynn went on to observe that, while he's not a fan of opening 1NT with this shape, had we done so, we might have shut East-West out. That's another psychological aspect to the problem -- can we assume that the auction has been the same at most other tables? These days, probably not.*

*Touching all of the 2♥ bidders' bases are:*

**MARK BOLOTIN:** 2♥. While I can probably beat 1NT, it's unlikely the auction will stop there. This makes it harder for them to find a minor-suit fit on which they might successfully compete to the three-level. Also, my bid makes it (slightly) easier for partner to judge what to do over a 2♠ bid. Even if East has four hearts, it's doubtful I'll go for a costly -200. My biggest concern is my spade holding.

**RICH ROWLAND:** 2♥. Partner couldn't raise or double. Hearts are unlikely to break. Partner is unlikely to hold a penalty pass when I have three spades. I've run out of reasons to go low.

*Those are all good reasons. But, we can go lower still.*

**JOHN JONES:** Pass. All red is the worst vulnerability for aggressive competition. Three low is the worst holding to have in the opponents' suit. RHO appears to have a stopper in my suit. Partner appears to have a poor hand. I have a good hand for defending against 1NT. Do I have to declare every hand? Pass looks clear to me.

**DAVE WACHSMAN:** Pass. The key to this hand is partner's inability to make a negative double or any constructive bid. Many Souths will bid 2♥ which could generate -200. I would rather go anti-field at matchpoints and go plus.

*Bruce Schwaidelson also guessed that he was going against the field by passing. Perhaps that's true, but only mildly so, and it's a three-way decision anyway. Passers who contemplated doubling include:*

**CONNIE GOLDBERG** (with RUI MARQUES): Pass. I expect to beat 1NT, but if I double, partner will likely bid two of a minor. My plan is to bid 2♥ if West rebids 2♣ or 2♦ and it's passed around to me.

**BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON:** Pass. I would love to double here, but unfortunately, I don't think it's penalty. I could bid a quiet 2♥. Game is very unlikely due to the spade holding, but I could bid 3♥ to encourage partner. That said, I expect to have a really good chance at beating 1NT, and if partner has anything to stop spades from running, we may get it for +200 or more. The auction may not be over, and I might find myself rebidding hearts on the next go-around.

*From the D4MSC Dept. of Mathematics:*

**PETE FILANDRO:** Pass. In many contexts, this nice-looking hand is worth a 3♥ jump or free two-bid. Here, however, partner has suggested fewer than 6 HCP (no raise or negative double), and I have a death holding in spades and a probable trump loser. Plus, I'm vulnerable. High card points? West has up to 17, East up to 10, so partner's HCP range is -3(!) to +5.

**ED SHAPIRO:** Pass. Chicken. If I'm lucky, I might go for -90 on defense rather than -100 (or more) on offense. I know that it's popular for advancer to bid 1NT on many balanced hands with neither a spade fit nor a sure stopper. If that's East's hand this time, maybe we have +200 coming our way, even if we might be able to score a partial.

**ANDY MUENZ:** Pass. Options are double, pass, and 2♥. Double is out because most of the time when it is correct in isolation, RHO will run to a safer spot. Here, passing seems right because, in all cases where you make the same number of tricks on offense or defense, you will get a better score defending. If the opponents were not vulnerable, it is probably better to bid.

RICHARD HARTZ: Pass. Whether defending 1NT or playing 2♥, I think I have six tricks in my hand. I don't think that partner can have more than one trick for me. If so, we can set 1NT but will not make 2♥. If not, we won't beat 1NT and 2♥ will be down two.

*I chose to pass, though I don't feel terribly strongly about it. 2♥ or double could be better. Here's the actual deal:*

NORTH	
♠	762
♥	84
♦	1096432
♣	J4
WEST	EAST
♠ AQJ103	♠ K4
♥ J	♥ 10962
♦ QJ7	♦ A8
♣ Q1085	♣ K9732
SOUTH	
♠	985
♥	AKQ753
♦	K5
♣	A6

*Even looking at all 52 cards, it's hard to say what's best. East will probably take eight tricks in notrump (South will be strip-squeezed on the fifth spade.) 2♥ by South might or might not be doubled, but it looks to be down one on a diamond lead, down two on anything else. Eleven tricks in clubs are cold, though declarer will have to play carefully after the defense starts with two rounds of hearts. Oh by the way, 4♠ is cold too, and unless North finds a diamond lead, an inspired West can even make five (South will be trump squeezed in the red suits.) Of course, North didn't have to be dealt that bad of a hand, and on other layouts any of the pass-double-2♥ troika could be the winning call. Bridge is a difficult game.*

*At the table, the opponents played in 3♣ making five (robot East crossed to its hand in spades at trick three to make the first trump lead towards the board, the rat) for what was a good N-S result.*

**BOB & JOANN GLASSON:** Pass. We like our chances defending 1NT with this hand and have difficulty seeing where we can take eight tricks declaring with the opponents announcing heart length.

**BILL SCHMIDT:** Pass. On a bad day, 2♥ might go for -200. If I pass, the worst that can happen is to be +100 when I could have been +110. Also, I don't want to push the opponents into 2♠ or three of a minor, probably making.

**PHILIP FREIDENREICH:** Pass. I think I might beat this. Why scare the opponents into a contract that they can make?

**DON DALPE:** Pass. This would be an easy decision at IMPs. At matchpoints, I might bid 2♥ some days, but not today.

*Yep. Even the day of the week counts as "tactics" sometimes. Last Word this month goes to:*

JOHNAN: 7♦. z3iRul hi guys: [virus-riddled URL redacted - Ed.]

*Oops! Yeah, it's true: some spammer managed to get past the Spam Thwarter on the D4MSC website this month. Don't worry, he got his comeuppance: 7♦ got a zero. That'll teach him! Sigh...every time you think you have something idiot-proofed, along come smarter idiots. The real Last Word goes to:*

**JAY APFELBAUM:** Pass. I have the wrong number of spades. There is a really good chance that I would make only six tricks on offense. Minus 200 is not a particularly appetizing result. In a notrump contract, I can at least establish my hearts. If partner has a spade stopper, we might even get a plus score. At worst, -90 if North has a spade stopper, though if he doesn't, East might make eight tricks for -120. Overall, -200 is a rather probable result if West has a good overcall. Too many risks in bidding and not enough upside.

*As I said in the intro, good matchpoint players get most of these tough decisions right. Eight of twelve panelists passed, and that's probably a good lesson for the rest of us. See you in October.*



*With three months to go in the 2020 D4MSC Challenge, Connie Goldberg and Bruce Schwaidelson remain tied at the top of the Panelists' leaderboard. Both have 700, with their dropped scores a 100 and a 90. Michael Schuster is 20 points back. For the Solvers, Chris Marlow remains perfect at 700 (drops: 100, 0), with Bill Schmidt at 690 (90, 80).*



*The District 4 Master Solvers' Club appreciates problem submissions of any sort. Our crack analytic staff can be reached at [d4msc@straguzzi.org](mailto:d4msc@straguzzi.org). Monthly problems plus our online submission form can be found at <http://d4msc.straguzzi.org/>*