

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

MAY 2017 PROBLEMS

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This month's diabolical Problem B arose several years ago. I hadn't presented it to the esteemed D4MSC before now because, alas, one had to go through Problem A to get there. I expected most of our Club experts to look askance on South's 1♦ response, and they did not disappoint. (Rest assured that 1♦ was 100% the correct call in the unusual context in which this deal arose, which I'll explain in the course of the article.)

Ultimately, I chose to use the problem because, let's face it, bridge is a game of errors: avoiding the ones you don't make and recovering from the ones you do. Besides, if 1♦ is the worst mistake you ever commit at the bridge table, you're either Eric Greco or completely delusional. Whether you look at this as an exercise in damage control, or as an opportunity to capitalize on a providential initial action, any problem that generates eight plausible answers must be a good one. To the forum!

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, EAST-WEST VULNERABLE

♠-AQ ♥-Q54 ♦-Q1032 ♣-A543

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
		1♣	Pass
1♦	1♥	2♦	3♥*
?			

* - PREEMPTIVE

A. Do you agree with South's 1♦ response?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
No	11	15	20
Yes	4	11	10

We won't dwell on this part of the problem for too long. Suffice it to say that, by better than a five-to-three margin, the Club rejected 1♦ in favor of grabbing notrump by the neck:

TOM WEIK: No. I wouldn't dream of bidding one diamond on this motley suit when I can more appropriately show a balanced hand with scattered high cards by bidding whatever number of notrump fits our partnership system. That would be 3NT in most of my partnerships.

CHRISTOPHER KAUFMAN: No. I guess I'm just a caveman, but I'd have bid 3NT: 12-to-14 points, no four-card major, end of story. This bid works out almost always in real life and almost never in bidding contests.

RUI MARQUES: No. Notrump looks better from our side. 1♦ is like walking on eggshells playing matchpoints. I would have bid 2NT if game-forcing; if not, three.

Joining this intrepid trio were more people than can be conveniently listed here, a whopping 26 in all. (Incidentally, this month's 41-person turnout is a new D4MSC record – ten tables plus one director. Thanks!) Most made some subset of the same points that Tom, Christopher and Rui covered: balanced hand, positional holdings, no four-card major, narrow strength range, partner is a doofus and cannot be trusted to declare properly. Well, okay, nobody actually came right out and said that last one, but c'mon: all of us are tournament bridge players. We all thought it.

Virtually everyone in the "No" group preferred either 2NT or 3NT, depending on which was forcing by partnership agreement. Ed Shapiro and Bruce Schwaidelson would have made an inverted 2♣ raise; Andy Muenz, Bill Burnett, and Bill Schmidt considered it. The intensity of disagreement spanned the gamut from "1♦ is certainly no crime" (Andy Purbrick) to "strongly disagree" (Connie Goldberg) to "not even close in my opinion" (Bob Browne). You get the idea.

1♦ did have its supporters, however.

PETE FILANDRO: Yes. With good clubs, I won't risk an immediate 3NT call in case we have a club slam. Plus, if partner has short hearts, we're likely down in 3NT while possibly missing a winning five clubs or five diamonds.

ROSELYN & SAUL TEUKOLSKY: Yes. The club holding isn't strong enough to bid 2♣. And, we would love to hear notrump from partner.

MARK BOLOTIN (joined by **AL SHRIVE** and **HOWARD WACHTEL**): Yes. There's no hurry to commit to notrump.

Pete's observation is not to be overlooked. Yes, by jumping in notrump, you can probably stop West from bidding a long heart suit...but, you can't stop him from leading them. Learning that hearts is a problem suit in the auction is no picnic. Learning it when a low heart hits the table and dummy comes down isn't one, either.

This deal arose in one of Bridge Base Online's twisted "\$1 Robot Reward" total-points tournaments. They're great fun, but they're barely bridge. You (South) and your robot partner get 15 minutes to accumulate as many points as you can against a pair of robots; your human competitors at other tables do the same. Boards are not duplicated, and time is money. Bidding any number of notrump here would have been an egregious error. 3NT looks like the sure-fire final contract, but you want your partner to play it if possible. The BBO robot may or may not be a better declarer than you, but it's way faster. And besides, if you'd bid 2NT or 3NT, you wouldn't have had the pleasure of grappling with the second half of the problem.

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

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
3♠	4	4	80
Double	2	8	70
4♣	1	7	60
5♣	2	2	60
5♦	3	1	60
3NT	2	1	50
4♥	1	0	50
4♦	0	2	50
Abstain		1	

Yikes! No action drew as much as 25% of the Club's vote. Some are willing to settle for a part-score, others drive to game, a few look for slam, and a large contingent is willing to defend. This problem is so contentious that our experts can't even agree on whether we're better or worse off for having responded 1♦ instead of in notrump.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Double. I have backed the partnership into a corner with my first bid. Partner does not yet know my strength, nor my club or diamond length. So, considering the vulnerability, I will make a DSI double (*DSI = Do Something Intelligent - NS*) to show that this is our deal, giving partner the next decision. I do not like bidding 3NT with only queen-third in hearts, and I feel I'm too balanced to bid 4♣ or even 5♣. If partner chooses to pass, I am happy to defend, though my club length might be a liability.

BILL SCHMIDT: Double. 1♦ was not my choice, but it worked out well. With only 17 total tricks, we should collect at least 500...and, if partner should pull, I'll know to bid 5♦.

Goldberg, Shapiro, and Lynn Harris also regret not having bid notrump immediately. Marques, Muenz, Rick Rowland, and Doug Dye think we're ahead of the field for having chosen 1♦.

About the only thing that most agreed on is that it would've been nice had I included a footnote or two as to what a double, or four of either minor, would mean. Well, yeah, I suppose I could have. But, the D4MSC is primarily meant as an educational feature for less experienced players and as an open forum for advanced ones. It's better to allow our District's experts to explain what methods they believe are best in difficult situations like this. Besides, my guess is that fewer than half of all regular duplicate partnerships have discussed what 4♣ or 4♦ would show here, and there would be a wide range of treatments even among those who have.

As for the double, forget it. There'd be no clear consensus even in expert circles. Don't believe me? In the recent Bridge World Standard 2017 poll, the foremost experts in America weighed in on this situation (the opponents have bid and raised a suit, partner is limited, doubler is not, and pass is clearly nonforcing), and they produced the following results:

- 10% for takeout
- 49% for cooperative-takeout

- 5% for cooperative-penalty
- 36% for penalty.

Um, okay. I think doubling here is reasonable at matchpoints, but I don't even know what "cooperative-takeout" means. Schwaidelson treats it as cards, Schmidt as optional, and then there's:

KARL BARTH (with **BILL BURNETT**): Double. Partner has a lot of minor suit cards. I have aces with a fit. It looks like my ♠A is a big card. But, beating 3♥ by two tricks beats every game, and my spades are good for defense. Do I think we have a slam? No. Partner's not loaded (no 2♥ call or splinter) so I'll shoot out trying to get six tricks in hearts if partner has no reason to pull the double, like a heart void or a weakish 4=6 in the minors. If partner pulls, then probably game in a minor is our best spot. 3NT is down off the top every time I bid it; no, thanks.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Double. To defend 3♥X. We may have a good shot at 5♦, but it's possible that partner has only three diamonds. Support doubles are not often used if responder's suit is a minor. Partner most likely has a singleton heart, so 3NT is unattractive. At these colors, a two-trick set is better than our side making game.

LAURA BRESLIND: Double. Asks partner to bid 3NT with a heart stopper.

STEVE WHITE: Double. This is further complicated by not knowing our agreements and whether North's 2♦ promised four, but I like double even if it did. Let's hope to be +200 (or possibly more) while 3NT doesn't make, or +500 if 3NT is making. Maybe I should be worried about what to do if partner pulls to four of a minor.

ANDY PURBRICK: Double. Easier at matchpoints. Nothing else appeals.

Two panelists also doubled, and both alluded to the 800-lb. gorilla in the room: would 4♣ be forcing? Would 4♦? Both? Neither? Depends on the weather?

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Double. I'm afraid that 4♣ is not forcing. It sounds like partner is 3=1=4=5, but she could be 3=2=4=4 or 3=2=3=5. More information about agreements in the minors would have been helpful.

RUI MARQUES: Double. Partner looks to have a stiff heart, clubs longer than diamonds, and fewer than four spades, so likely 3=1=4=5 or 2=1=4=6. Unless the heart is the ace or king, 3NT is out of the picture. In that case, we are ahead of all the pairs who bid 1♣-3NT if we play a successful part score. But, the double fit makes it tempting to bid a game. I ran a simulation, and 70% of the time 5♣ makes, against 58% for 5♦. When 5♦ makes, 5♣ also makes 92% of the time. When five of a minor makes, 3♥ goes down two between 53% and 59% of the time. All in all, and expecting 4♣ to be nonforcing, I go for 5♣, choice of games, but expecting partner to pass.

If you read carefully, it sounds like Rui started out doubling but talked himself into 5♣ by the time he finished his analysis. No fewer than three other respondents sent in an initial response and later changed their minds.

At any rate, everyone else chose to bid. For the "better late than never" crowd:

DON DALPE (joined by **RAY RASKIN** and **BOB GRINWIS**): 3NT. Since I would have been there earlier, and I declare much better than I defend, I want to play the normal contract. The bad guys know they are vulnerable and still bid 3♥ in a live auction.

Again, a very reasonable matchpoint action. Queen-third is a stopper, maybe two, if partner produces the stiff ace or king. It's also a stopper if the ♥AK are in East's hand, and maybe in West's too if East has no fast entry. Partner might even produce two hearts -- if West was ever going to overcall in a strong four-bagger, this is certainly the auction for it. Scraping together eight more tricks might be a challenge, though as little as king-third of spades and king-fifth of clubs could do it, and the ♠A on the side would produce a critical overtrick. And, if nothing else, you will have no shortage of company if the eminently normal 3NT goes down a trick or two. That Bob Hamman's favorite contract garnered only three votes is quite a surprise.

Everyone else had to make an immediate decision: bypass 3NT and commit to a minor suit contract (please don't tell me you think you can back into 4NT after this start) or stay low and wait it out. For those who ventured into the great beyond, the most popular choice was:

ED SHAPIRO: 4♣. Hating it, because a 1♦ response followed by a forcing club raise doesn't show a flat, spread-out hand. Trying for a number with a double, even at matchpoints, isn't my style.

ANDY MUENZ: 4♣. At matchpoints, I don't want to commit to the five level unless partner has extras. It looks like we've done well to keep out of the bad 3NT.

BILL FOSTER: 4♣. Looks like the opponents own the heart suit, so notrump is out. Partner's clubs should be longer than her diamonds, but unfortunately she will not realize that I hold a 14-count, so we could very well miss a minor-suit game. The heart queen is most likely useless.

BOB BROWNE (with **PHIL FREIDENREICH** echoing the double-fit aspect): 4♣. Ugh, they found their heart fit. 3NT doesn't look nearly as promising. We do seem to have a double fit; maybe five of a minor will make.

LYNN HARRIS: 4♣. Nothing else makes sense.

Which brings us to our next point of contention: is 4♣ forcing? Shapiro thinks it is. Muenz and Foster do not. Browne and Freidenreich aren't saying, but they imply that showing the double fit is at least highly encouraging. Let's see what their four-of-the-other-minor brethren say.

CHRIS MARLOW: 4♦. If West has the ♥AK, then most hands that make five clubs or five diamonds will make four or five notrump. Let's assume the top honors are split so that 3NT goes down, and that most of the field responds initially with some form of notrump. Then, four of a minor should be a very positive result. With extras, partner may continue to game (and we should then consider going on to slam.)

BILL PORT: 4♦. 4♣ would be my very close second choice.

If you ask me -- not that that's ever a good idea -- 4♣ should be forcing and 4♦ non-forcing. Diamonds are our only established fit, and it's vital to be able to compete in 'our' suit. 4♣ however must be forcing, because (a) we're unlimited, and a voluntary raise to four of partner's minor by an unlimited hand should be forcing except in very specific, agreed-upon auctions, and (b) if all we wanted to do was compete, we could just bid 4♦ and not torture partner. Though that's always fun.

Clearly, not everyone agrees with this logic -- see Connie and Rui just for starters. A few of the minor-suit game bidders say that they're bidding five in part to avoid a four-of-a-minor misunderstanding. That's practical. Now...which minor suit shall it be?

TOM WEIK: 5♣. This is a toughie! Could 3NT be right? Sure, and it seems better than 50% that West has both the ace-king of his suit. But if so, might not East have an entry; say, the ♦A? Plus, nowadays, overcalls are often light, increasing the odds a little that the heart tops are split. On the other hand, partner could have a singleton ♥A or ♥K. All in all, and without much confidence, I'm guesstimating that 3NT is a coin toss or a little better.

But wait! Might five of a minor have a better chance? Does partner typically open 1♣ or 1♦ with a minimum 4=5? Mine more often start with 1♦. Therefore, in this auction, there's a suggestion that partner has six clubs. He should have one heart at most, unless West overcalled on a four-card suit. Thus, a 2=1=4=6 hand like:

♠-Kx ♥-x ♦-KJxx ♣-KJxxxx

Opposite this, 5♣ seems a more likely make despite the spade duplication. A 4♣ bid could end the auction. Further, partner can expect two aces from me and might find a successful 6♣ bid with a heart void. So many issues to consider. So little time. *(This article would've been a whole lot shorter if I had just quoted Tom up front and then retired to watch the Phillies game. - NS)*

BARRY COHEN: 5♣. Seems to provide the right description of my hand. Too much to bid just 4♣.

RICK ROWLAND: 5♦. Good decision not to bid 3NT on the first round. Since partner had a support double available with only three diamonds, I play the four-four fit.

DOUGLAS DYE: 5♦. I will believe that my vulnerable opponents are within one trick of making their contract and that partner is short in hearts. Just being in diamonds might be good, as most pairs will be in 3NT which may be down off the top.

JOANN & BOB GLASSON: 5♦. We'd like to bid only 4♦, but that's not forcing in a competitive auction. We have a big double-fit, but we're choosing to play in diamonds instead of clubs so that our spade holding is protected from the opening lead. If partner has a perfecto, we might make a slam, but she could also have:

♠-Kx ♥-x ♦-AJxx ♣-KJxxxx

MARK BOLOTIN: 5♦. Sounds like partner has a singleton heart, perhaps 3=1=4=5. Give him 12-14 HCP in the other three suits and we probably have a second loser somewhere. Even if he has an ideal hand like

♠-xxx ♥-x ♦-AKJx ♣KQxxx

...there's no reason to stretch to bid six and hope that they don't have a club ruff. Our +420 would beat all the minus scores in 3NT and the +400's in 5♣.

There are many very worthwhile points in that last group of comments. I voted for 5♣, the safer game, but the logic for preferring 5♦ at matchpoints makes perfect sense. If your system includes support doubles for diamonds (BBO's do), you can be confident in reaching an eight-card fit. Most pairs, however, reserve them for the majors only. What fun if partner produces a 3=1=3=6 dummy with strong diamonds and ratty clubs.

Phew! Are we finally done? Nope, not yet. One very lively option is still out there, which not only drew the Panel plurality but whose advocates made a strong enough case for it that it earned the top score (though I confess it never even occurred to me at the table):

ROSELYN & SAUL TEUKOLSKY: 3♠. A forward-going bid looking for five or six of a minor. If partner is 3=1=4=5 with three little spades, he might otherwise not want to look for slam, even with the perfect holding of ♣KQ and ♦AK.

PETE FILANDRO (with DAVE MEYER): 3♠. I need to show slam interest and a spade control. If partner has a 3=1=4=5 or 2=1=4=6 minimum with all working cards (♦AK, ♣KQ), he can take over with a key-card ask. If he later bids 5NT pick-a-slam, or tries to sign off in clubs, I will correct to diamonds so that I can discard my potential spade loser on his long club.

CRAIG ROBINSON (with AL SHRIVE actively rooting for a surprise 3NT from North): 3♠. This could be an advance cue-bid or showing a spade stopper. Partner certainly has a lot of minor-suit cards.

RICK OLANOFF (with DAVE WACHSMAN and SAMUEL DORFMAN): 3♠. Probably headed towards a minor suit game, but no harm in trying this first.

Indeed there isn't. If partner has a high heart honor, he might even grant Al's wish and surprise us with 3NT. With a heart void, maybe we'll hear 4♥. With a sixth club, 4♣. There is still some ambiguity lurking, and there's always the risk after a bid like this that the auction might go off the rails. But, all things considered, 3♠ seems safe, and it keeps partner in the picture. It's probably better than guessing a game contract or risking rotting in four of a minor with three different games available.

Taking a solo flight:

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♥. We could easily make a slam in diamonds.

True, but 3♠ seems a better way to start. Still, Jay's 4♥ call has one big factor going for it: it is an unambiguous slam try, which might have nudged your über-dense silicon partner into bidding a cold six of either minor. North held something like:

♠-K53 ♥--- ♦KJ65 ♣KJ8765

Diamonds were three-two and no club ruff was available (East had the stiff plus the ♦A.) 3NT would take ten tricks on a heart lead, nine on a black-suit lead, and be down three if West was even more psychic than that creepy girl from Stranger Things and found the killing diamond lead, or a high heart followed by a diamond switch. In short, even after seven pages of erudite discussion and knowing all four hands, it's still not clear what the best call is, meaning this entire month was little more than an exercise in bridge torture. I love this job.



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/>