

# DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

## OCTOBER 2019 PROBLEM NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

Normally for October's edition of the D4MSC, I present a particularly nightmarish scenario in honor of Halloween. Given the difficult series of problems that the Club has already faced this year, I felt that continuing this tradition would be whatever is the opposite of "gilding the lily" ("oversalting the wound?") Thus, here's what one might term the first-ever D4MSC Anti-Problem: a perfectly delightful state of affairs in which our hero South holds an outstanding hand and has no shortage of attractive options. How best to tell partner that we have primary support for his suit and a massive source of tricks, and that we are incoherently happy to play a substantial contract? Everything is sunshine and babies and puppies this October! Until you see what happened at the table to the #1 answer, that is. Cue the scary music.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

### MATCHPOINTS, NONE VULNERABLE

♠-KJ83 ♥-AKQJ42 ♦-6 ♣-84

<u>South</u>	<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>
1♥	Pass	1♠	2♣
?			

(DOUBLE = 3-CARD SPACE SUPPORT)

(3♣ = GAME FORCE, ANY SHAPE)

(4♣, 4♦ = SPLINTER RAISES)

### 1. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♦	7	18	100
3♠	5	11	90
4♠	0	6	80
3♣	0	5	80
4♥	0	1	70

Splinter raises are one of the first conventions that a novice bridge player learns. A double-jump shift shows four-card support for partner, extra values in context, and shortness in the named suit. It paints a narrow picture of the hand, plus it puts to use a bid that would otherwise rarely be utilized. Perfect, no?

Well, maybe not always. When I first learned bridge from a yellowed 1960s-vintage Goren book, back in my high school days, there was one other requirement: a splinter guarantees the ace or king in every unbid suit. The theory was that, after a splinter,

*partner would often be interested in slam, and he could be confident you would deliver controls and fitting high cards in whatever side suit he needed them.*

*This extra detail has apparently gone by the wayside in the past 50 years. I can't find hide nor hair of it in modern textbooks or bridge websites. Did it play a role on this real-life deal? Do you think the problem would be here if it didn't?*

*Let's start with a sampling of our 4♦ splinterers, if that's a word. They range from the, uh, "perfectly" content:*

**PETE FILANDRO:** 4♦. Shows four or more spades and about 19 support points. Perfect! 4♠ shows the same strength without shortness. 3♣ followed by spades shows jump-shift strength, 20-23 support points. 3♠ is invitational and does not do the hand justice. Most heart contracts will play a trick worse if partner has four spades since there is no discard for our club(s), and partner's ♣AQ or ♣Kx will be vulnerable to the opening lead.

**BARRY DEHLIN:** 4♦. Could just be me, but this seems much easier than the usual D4MSC problem, as I think 4♦ is just about perfect. I think I have a hand just strong enough for the game-force, but no stronger. My partner will know my distribution within a card or two. We are putting the strong hand on lead in case partner has a finesseable club card. What's not to like?

**CHRIS KAUFMAN:** 4♦. Seems clear. Similar to bidding 3♣, except it shows off the diamond shortness -- perfect.

**WILLIAM KILMER:** 4♦. A little light, but everything is perfect.

*...to the slam chasers...*

**TOM WEIK:** 4♦. I can't not bid game when it takes so little from partner to make ten tricks. I want to play in spades, not hearts, to have the heart suit available to pitch North's losers, and to protect partner's possible ♣K. I may as well show my diamond shortness in case North has the right hand for slam, e.g.:

♠AQxxx ♥xx ♦Axxx ♣Kx.

**CATHY STRAUSS:** 4♦. With a great heart suit and good honors in spades, game seems right, and if partner has the right hand, slam may be possible.

**RICK OLANOFF:** 4♦. This should help partner decide if we are likely to have a slam.

**RUI MARQUES:** 4♦. 3♣ does not necessarily show support, and I might be getting into a pickle with it. 4♦ puts us in game as I want, in the right strain to protect a potential club stopper in partner's hand, and maybe in slam territory if partner has a suitable hand.

*...to the highly confident...*

**CRAIG ROBINSON** (with JOHN HEMMER and BARRY COHEN nearly verbatim): 4♦. This is the best description of this hand.

**WILLIAM BAUER:** 4♦. Won't this be the consensus bid, except for the most creative bidders? Besides showing a worthless singleton diamond, there is an inference that the South hand has two (or more) clubs by virtue of not splintering with 4♣. It never occurred to me that I might want to stop in a spade part-score.

**CHRIS MARLOW:** 4♦. Good support, shortness, and slam interest. If I am not going to splinter here, I do not see the point of the convention.

...to advocates who express a hint of doubt...

**RICH ROTHWARF:** 4♦. Not with great conviction. 4♥ could work out better if partner has ♠Axxx and a slow diamond trick or two.

**DANIEL DROZ:** 4♦. I think that I am willing to force to game, even though we may not make it. Partner needs so little:

♠Q10xx ♥x ♦Axxx ♣xxxx

...is ample, I think, but North would hardly be accepting any invitations. His spades could be terrible, I suppose, like four to the ten, but since he has no heart honors, he is a bit less likely to also hold no spade honors. On the way, I may as well tell partner as clearly as possible that if there is a slam, I need a club control, and that any secondary honors in diamonds are to be downgraded. The splinter takes care of (most of) that.

**BOB AND JOANN GLASSON:** 4♦. Not the traditional high cards for opener's splinter, but the hand has a huge source of tricks in hearts so since we would bid 4♠ anyway, we might as well tell partner about our shortness.

**STEVE WHITE:** 4♦. Yes, it's a slight stretch. I would be happier if I had the ♠Q as well, to be sure we want to be in game. I'm not promising a club control. If I had one, it would eliminate my concern that I should only bid 3♠, but that heart suit is an excellent source of tricks.

**ANDY MUENZ:** 4♦. Seems the most descriptive bid with this monster. Unfortunately, with hearts as our long strong suit, we can't just jump to four of that suit to really describe our hand, as we could if it was a minor.

**LEONARD HELFGOTT:** 4♦. Heavy for 3♠, light for 4♦, but the playing strength and suit point to the latter.

...to one Panelist who seemed to be playing three-dimensional chess.

**DAVE WACHSMAN:** 4♦. The splinter confirms the spade fit while showing a game-forcing hand with four to five losers (Losing Trick Count at work). Furthermore, it directs partner's attention to the black suits as the opener does not have a one-loser club suit. This bid correctly involves partner in the decision-making process.

*The part about the "one-loser club suit" puzzled me, so I emailed Dave for clarification. He replied: "Nick - I meant that if opener had a one loser holding in the over-caller's suit, he should cue-bid that suit (clubs in this case) to allow partner to cue-bid diamonds. In this hand, the diamond splinter would tend to deny a one-loser club suit." Fair enough.*

*Anyway, Pete's definition of the various sequences to raise partner here makes sense, and it's hard to fault anyone who chose to splinter. Spades will often play better than hearts, the great playing strength would seem to make up for the relative lack of high-card points, and while our trumps could be better, king-jack-eight-low is hardly unacceptable. The only real flaw is that low doubleton club.*

*There are two other ways to guarantee getting to game in spades. The direct, no-nonsense way:*

**MARK BOLOTIN:** 4♠. If partner is strong, I want to explore slam with 3♣ or 4♦. However, that makes it too easy for LHO to come in. If partner is weak, I want to

jump to 4♠ to make it harder for them to find their sacrifice (or game). We can still find some of our slams when partner can bid over 4♠.

STEPHEN COOPER: 4♠. If you know what the contract should be, bid it. This hand lacks the high card values to cue-bid 3♣ or to splinter. With no minor suit defense, you do not want the opposition to exchange information (or to give them the information with a splinter).

TODD HOLES: 4♠. 3♠ is too timid. The diamond splinter, while tempting, may imply a club control. And I'm not sure what 3♣ accomplishes (though maybe a subsequent jump to 4♠ would show this hand). So, I'll go with the efficient jump to game and hope that partner plays the heck out of it.

*He (or she) will. North of the D4MSC might drive us crazy with his bidding sometimes, but he's a card-play virtuoso. We don't let just anyone in this club, you know. Anyway, the other road to game involves taking the circuitous route:*

WALTER BELL: 3♣. Let's give partner a chance to describe his hand.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 3♣. I don't want to waste bidding space by splintering.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 3♣. I am going to force to game with this hand even though game is not assured. I'm also not sure yet whether to play in hearts or spades, which is why I am not splintering. I will let partner's next call help me figure it out. Slam is unlikely given the 2♣ overcall, but you never know.

THEODORE LEVY: 3♣. Too good to splinter.

*That brings up another matter about the evolution of the splinter raise. Back in the day, opener's splinter showed the World's Fair, and maybe a side ticket to Disneyland. Today, many expert pairs play it as a strong but limited bid -- enough support points to play game but denying a near-2♣ opening powerhouse. (Note that Pete Filandro implies this in his suggested structure.)*

*Surprisingly, just two Club members chose to emphasize the rock-solid heart suit as trumps.*

MARK KINZER: 4♥. My trump suit will play just as well as spades and can handle a bad break much better.

MANOJ K. DEB-ROY: 3♥. Solid six-card heart suit. Absolute game force, strong slam interest. If partner bids 3NT next, you come back with 4♠ showing strong spade support. With two aces, partner must explore for slam.

*I would play 3♥ as showing extra values and a very good suit, but not a game force, with or without the intervention.*

*Which leaves us with the rather large contingent who chose merely to invite game with this powerhouse. Who could be so timorous? Well, there's...*

BILL SCHMIDT: 3♠. Not quite good enough to insist on game.

*...and...*

JAY APFELBAUM: 3♠. A bit conservative. We could miss a game if partner has a weak hand with strong spades. Game will make if partner has a reasonable hand. He is likely to accept with long spades.

*...along with...*

**ED SHAPIRO:** 3♠. This is real, with no suggestion of preemption, despite competition. Lack of controls, especially in clubs, makes me not want to do more.

**RICH EVANS:** 3♠. Inviting with a five-loser hand, but we're already too high if partner only has quacks.

**RICHARD J HARTZ, SR.:** 3♠. A trick short of forcing to game. How good is partner's response?

*...not to mention...*

**CONNIE GOLDBERG:** 3♠. The 2♣ overcall has dampened my enthusiasm. It may be right to play in hearts, but knowing I'm getting a club lead makes spades more attractive. If it were IMP's, I might still bid 4♠. I also think it might help to be "at the table", where you might be able to pick up some vibes.

**BOB GRINWIS:** 3♠. Showing support for partner and a good hand.

**BILL FOSTER:** 3♠. Game probably makes if partner has as little as the ♠AQ, so a slight overbid seems justified. The opponents are likely to sacrifice in five of a minor, I suspect, so a tough decision may come on the next round of bidding.

**BARRY PASSER:** 3♠. If partner was dealt ♠AQxx of spades and out, I should have bid something else. But in all other cases, the invitation is spot on.

**LYNN HARRIS:** 3♠. A value bid from my hand. If partner has ♠AQ42, we have a very good chance of making 4♠, barring a very bad trump split.

*...oops, nearly forgot...*

**DON DALPE:** 3♠. Only at matchpoints. I would bid 4♠ at bridge unless I was looking for a swing, in which case I would bid 4♦.

*...and finally, there's me. When I held the South cards in one of Bridge Base's daylong robot tournaments, I considered 3♣ and 4♦ but ultimately decided, like Connie and others, that the two baby clubs were a bad omen. The BBO robots rarely pass three-of-a-major invitations anyway, and when they do, they're usually right. The auction proceeded (Pass)-4♠-(All Pass). North took ten easy tricks with:*

♠10986 ♥5 ♦AK9875 ♣K3

*...losing the ♣A and two trumps (West's only points were the ♠Qxx). We trudged on to the next deal. Surely a flat board, no?*

*As it happens: no. Plus 420 earned a massive matchpoint score, close to 90%, and it wasn't until later when I browsed the traveler that I saw what had happened. At every table where human South splintered with 4♦, robot North trotted out Old Black. You might find this questionable with just four weak trumps, as I do, but put yourself in partner's, uh, virtual shoes. Where were South's points? Not in diamonds. Strong hearts were a given, but South would need several more working cards before he held book values for a game-forcing splinter. Of the four top spades and the ♣A, North no doubt placed South with at least three. In fact, given that a splinter usually showed (and, at one time, required) working values in the other side suits, the ♣A probably seemed a lock to be in South's hand, nicely complementing North's ♣K. A similar misfortune struck those who cue-bid 3♣ and followed with 4♠.*

*North mistakenly felt that the partnership had five-level safety. South's splinter was fine on playing strength, but it was quite light in high-card strength, and that was something a robot partner was unable to visualize. I suspect a lot of flesh-and-blood partners would go wrong too. The moral of the story: if you believe that the South hand is acceptable for a splinter raise of spades, you had better be sure that your partner agrees. The issue isn't whether or not you can make 4♠. It's whether you can stop there when ten tricks is the limit.*

*Earning our Final Word this month is a panelist who ties up the annual Halloween problem in a neat little orange and black bow:*

**MICHAEL SHUSTER:** 3♠. I'm aware that this is not game, and I expect to make game. But 3♠ does a very positive thing -- it agrees trumps at a level where we can still cue-bid. 3♣ colors any future spade bid as a grope, possibly even on a doubleton (and if partner bids 3NT over 3♣, how are we to sort out the club issue?) 4♦ with a solid source of tricks on the outside and no control in a side suit is, in my opinion, a poor call (but go ahead and give it the top score, I'm sure it will be popular.) And as a kicker, partner won't often pass 3♠, yet much of the time he does pass, we will not take ten tricks.

*Yep. If partner passes 3♠, taking exactly nine tricks would be such a treat. Enjoy October; see you on All Saints' Day as we hit the homestretch of the 2019 contest.*



*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/>*