

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

DECEMBER 2017 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

*I love Christmastime. But, I have this gnawing feeling that I've forgotten something this year. Something really important that I'm going to be super-embarrassed to have overlooked. Did I get gifts for everyone on my list? Did I turn on the outdoor lights? Did I forget to Alert partner's overcall? Sigh.... Well, maybe it'll come to me before the end of the article. In the meantime, let's have a look at how our District experts coped with this month's difficult problem, and then we'll unveil the winners of the hallowed **2017 District 4 MSC Challenge**, in which we crown the top-bidding Panelist and Solver of the year.*

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-KJ8 ♥-AQ62 ♦-5 ♣-AK984

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

A. In your preferred methods, what would a 1NT rebid by South show?

TREATMENT	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
12-14 HCP, balanced	0	3	0
15-17 HCP, semi-balanced	2	5	0
18-19 HCP, balanced	8	18	0
♠ stopper w/source of tricks	1	6	0
Other	4	0	0

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean -- no more and no less!"

LEWIS CARROLL, "THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS"

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: (Note to Nick: How in the world can you score this problem if people are playing different methods?)

Steve White was also perplexed about the curiouser and curiouser wording of the first half of the problem. As you see from the table above, I never had any intention of scoring it. Question A was a simple, if surreptitious, polling question, meant to forestall any "Humpty Dumpty 1NT" responses: a bid that means just what you choose it to mean, no more and no less.

Levity aside, let's be frank: 1NT is a flawed but plausible option here almost irrespective of how you and your partner are playing it. Everyone agrees that it shows a spade stopper plus something extra. But, what's that something? An extra ace? An extra queen? An extra ace and queen? Extra tricks of some indeterminate form? Question A was included to smoke out this information from our respondents before they staked their ground on Question B. If our experts felt that 1NT was the least objectionable lie, well and good. It very well may be. But, they would have to declare up front as to how much and in what direction they were lying, so that I could properly score the second part of the problem. That's fair, right?

BILL BURNETT: 18-19 Balanced. Isn't this standard?

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 18-19 Balanced. Sometimes you'll have another hand-type that has similar trick taking potential.

Yes to both. Nothing stops you and your partner from agreeing to a different treatment, of course. But, in standard methods, after an opening bid, an overcall, and a pass by responder, opener's 1NT rebid shows 18 to 19 high-card points. This is true whether LHO or RHO produced the overcall.

With that said, it's also true that 1NT is a rebid that an expert South will often fudge. Partner couldn't dredge up a one-level response, so it's not like painting a detailed picture of his hand is opener's top priority. If it looks like 1NT will lead to the best available score, then definitely be damned! Michael said this a lot more succinctly than I just did. Also making that case in various ways were:

ANDY MUENZ: 18-19 Balanced. Most of the time, anyway. Occasionally it may show something else that can't be shown otherwise.

CONNIE GOLDBERG (with RUI MARQUES): Other. I was about to say 18-19 balanced, which is what I was taught when I first learned to play bridge. But, obviously there needs to be a somewhat wider range here, and you must include some unbalanced hands.

DON DALPE (with TOM WEIK): Other. Usually I'll have the 17+-to-19 balanced or semi-balanced hand. But, at matchpoints, I may have a good hand with a spade stopper and a source of tricks.

STEVE WHITE: 18-19 Balanced. Partner should act as though I have this hand-type, even though he'll know I may elect to rebid 1NT on slightly weaker hands as a "least-of-evils" call.

DANIEL DROZ: 18-19 Balanced. But in a weak notrump context, this sequence shows more like 17-19 HCP.

Playing their solo 1NT rebids a few points weaker are:

JAY APFELBAUM: 15-17 Semi-Balanced. With a stronger hand, I would double and then bid notrump.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 15-17 Semi-Balanced. As I play weak (12-14) opening notrumps, the rebid shows 15-17 HCP with the overcalled suit stopped.

This is, in fact, a nightmare auction for weak notrumpers, as they must open one of a suit with 15-17 HCP. The difficulty now is how to distinguish a 15-17 strong notrump

from an 18-19 super-strong one at a convenient level, because jumping to 2NT opposite a partner who couldn't squeak is not terribly appetizing.

Representing our final vocal contingent (none of the 12-14 HCP voters commented on their choice) are:

CHRIS MARLOW: ♠ Stopper with a Source of Tricks. Usually I'd expect opener to hold a balanced 18-19 HCP hand, but in these auctions, I prefer to give him some flexibility when holding extra strength. Especially at matchpoints, I cannot let the opponents play at the one-level if I have any reasonable alternative.

CATHY STRAUSS: ♠ Stopper with a Source of Tricks. And, moderately balanced, but unable to open 1NT for some reason. Most likely, a bit too strong.

Okay, all precincts have reported. Let's take stock.

The largest vote was for 18-19 balanced, and that's indeed the "book" meaning in a mainstream strong notrump system. All four of our "Other" advocates are under-cover 18-19 voters too, but they make it expressly clear that South has ample leeway in this auction. As it happens, anyone who chooses a 15-17 semi-balanced 1NT rebid here is lying a hair less than those who treat it as 18-19. Both can't wriggle free from the fact that a stiff baby diamond fits no definition of the word "balanced", but at least the South hand contains 17 nominal high card points. So, we'll say that anyone in these three camps who chooses 1NT in Part B of the problem will receive identical awards, since they're all lying to roughly the same degree.

Those who rebid 1NT to mean a spade stopper with a source of tricks, however, are showing a fundamentally different hand than the above conglomerate. The spade stopper is apparent, but the source of tricks isn't. If you moved the ♥Q to clubs, you'd have a textbook example. 1NT is its own species of fib as I see it, so it will be scored separately.

Finally, anyone who rebids 1NT to show 12-14 balanced needs to have their eye-glasses checked. Fortunately, no one did, but if so, they'd be scored separately too.

And now, finally, advent season is over. On to the real problem!

B. What call do you make?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
1NT (Strong)	8	11	100
2♥	4	8	90
Pass	2	3	80
2♣	1	2	70
Double	0	7	70
1NT (Tricks)	0	1	60

BILL BURNETT: Double. All options stink. I'll bid 2♥ over the inevitable 2♦ by partner. I'd pass at IMPs.

Well, I'm with Bill on his first point. There's nothing resembling a standout call. That's par for the course for a bidding forum problem, though. A secondary concern here is

how to proceed effectively while not getting our side into even deeper trouble. The celebrated First Rule of Holes is: "When you're in one, stop digging."

Hearing any number of diamonds from partner would seem to qualify as major excavation project. That doesn't deter a brave septet of Solvers, including:

KARL BARTH: Double. Partner already knows my clubs are better than my diamonds. So, I'll show my hearts and keep the bidding open. If it makes sense to bid again, I might show my spade stopper.

JIM MORRIS: Double. I don't want to lose the heart suit. I'll take my chances on a diamond bid by partner and correct to 2NT.

PHIL FREIDENREICH: Double. If partner bids 2♦, I'll bid 2♥.

DANIEL DROZ: Double. I am not interested in defending 1♠, so pass is out. 1NT gets the high-card strength right but has that big flaw in the singleton diamond; plus, not all my high-cards are necessarily working with the ♠KJx under the spade bidder. Partner could upgrade diamond length or even explore for a diamond contract if I now bid 1NT, and this will be a disappointment.

I'm pretty sure that a reopening double will get partner to upgrade his diamond length, too. My main concern with double is that partner will almost surely be unable to pass it, or to advance 1NT. It therefore limits the number of ways we can escape from The Hole. So does this:

ED SHAPIRO: 2♥. I hate to sell out at matchpoints. I hope my plentiful honor tricks will let me scramble a plus score. At least I'm showing length in both bid suits. (And yes, I saw that partner didn't make a negative double.)

DOUGLAS DYE: 2♥. Descriptive, and right on values. This should dissuade partner from bidding his long, weak diamond suit. Partner's failure to make a negative double does not preclude a heart part-score our way. In the worst case, partner takes a preference to 3♣, which should be playable.

JAY APFELBAUM (with HOWARD WACHTEL): 2♥. Just showing my distribution and strength. (*Howard described it as a "textbook reverse" -- Ed.*)

JOHN VOLPEL: 2♥. This shows the strength and shape quite well. Partner can retreat to clubs easily, if no other good option is available.

RICK OLANOFF: 2♥. Partner can escape in 3♣ if necessary, perhaps using Lebensohl (2NT as an artificial waiting bid after a reverse, usually showing weakness -- Ed.) to limit his strength. 3NT is still possible.

BOB GRINWIS: 2♥. Shows extra values. Cannot bid notrump as I'm a bit light for that and I have no diamond stopper. Double is also out with a singleton diamond.

There are several worthy points here. 2♥ nails our shape and strength. We needn't worry about putting down this dummy in a diamond part-score, possibly doubled. We might still belong in hearts. All that is true. Still, partner's lack of a negative double is a rather loud warning siren. Change the spades to ace-third and a low heart to the ♥J, and I'd feel a whole lot better about sailing on despite it.

Many 2♥ bidders are hoping to find safe harbor in 3♣ if partner lacks heart support. In that case, why not try to play in that strain a level lower? Making a detailed case for it is:

PETE FILANDRO: 2♣. First, let's eliminate the other possibilities. 1NT is out -- I am understrength, wrong-shaped, and can't handle a runout to diamonds. Double (usually the correct reopener with strong hands) is out -- my spade holding tells me partner is not waiting to convert to penalties, and his likely 2♦ bid leaves me unable to cope. 2♥ might be barely right on strength and shape, but by failing to make a negative double, partner has denied hearts or else has a terrible hand. His potential runout to 3♣ might put me dangerously overboard, vulnerable, with minimum shape, minimum strength, and poorly placed spade values. Finally, pass is out because partner could still have 8-10 HCP and been handcuffed at his first turn with no spade stopper and, say, 3=3=4=3 or similar shape. We might be on for 3NT, so we must "keep the ball in play".

This leaves only 2♠ which, if partner has a maximum handcuffed hand, can be described by a raise to 3♣ or a 2♠ cue-bid. If he has less, we'll be happy to have stayed low and to have encouraged a club lead if East becomes declarer.

BARRY PASSER: 2♣. Everyone who either bids 1NT or doubles deserves to hear 2♦ from partner (and 3♦ after your 2♥ clarification), followed by an opening lead through your king-jack of spades. No thanks!

Bill Foster, the third 2♣ bidder, made many of the same points as Pete and Barry. This happens to be my second choice, and it perhaps deserved to garner more than three votes. Its major drawback: you might still get to 2♣ from 1NT when it's right, but you can't get to 1NT from 2♣.

Which brings us to the plurality's choice: 1NT showing...um, whatever it was we decided in the first half of the problem. Ostensibly an 18-19 HCP balanced hand. Maybe a little weaker. Maybe not so balanced. Maybe both. Partner knows all this and gets to guess. Humpty lives. (Of course, if you choose 1NT at the table, you're going to bid it in tempo, right?)

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 1NT (Strong). If the opponents were vulnerable, I could see passing. I wouldn't double because I want to protect my spade holding, to say nothing of the trouble that could ensue. 1NT is the best overall picture of my hand.

CHRIS KAUFMANN: 1NT (Strong). 18-19 balanced, just as promised (*rolls eyes at self*).

KEN COHEN: 1NT (Strong). Balanced 18-19, or the equivalent.

BARRY COHEN: 1NT (Strong). Seems closest to what I actually have.

MARK BOLOTIN: 1NT (Strong). 'Balanced' is in the eye of the beholder. Some hands just don't fit one's bidding methods.

RICH ROTHWART: 1NT (Strong). Very close between 1NT and 2♥. If partner bids 2♦ over my 1NT, I guess I have to pass. 2♥ describes my shape better but gets us awfully high with no guaranteed fit. I wouldn't be shocked if a computer simulation showed pass to be the winning action.

ROSELYN AND SAUL TEUKOLSKY: 1NT (Strong). Partner doesn't have hearts. If I double, he's likely to bid diamonds. 1NT saves everyone time and trouble.

BILL SCHMIDT: 1NT (Strong). Very close between 1NT and double. I would have no rebid if partner takes out to 1♦ over a double. Since partner couldn't make a negative double, I'm going to hope that he doesn't have four hearts.

RUI MARQUES: 1NT (Strong). 1NT has the allure of protecting my spade holding. It's a small lie, but also the least risky action.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 1NT (Strong). I'm going to make the value bid, lying a bit about being balanced. I'd consider a 2♥ reverse if I weren't vulnerable.

JOANN AND BOB GLASSON (with LYNN HARRIS): 1NT (Strong). Doubling will get us to 2NT over partner's likely 2♦ reply. That's too high when partner couldn't take a call over 1♠.

STEVE WHITE: 1NT (Strong). It's a pretty good description -- a strong hand and a spade stopper. The good five-card spade suit adds some compensating value.

The sole 1NT bidder who chose "source of tricks" in Part A makes much the same case as his "strong & balanced" brethren:

CHRIS MARLOW: 1NT (Tricks). Double and 2♥ would seem to create a lot of problems if partner lacks a fit for the rounded suits, and letting the opponents play at the one-level isn't a winner at matchpoints. 1NT seems the safest compromise.

It's really hard to quarrel with 1NT. However, like Rich Rothwarf, I have a sneaking suspicion that the long-term winning call is:

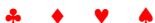
ANDY MUENZ: Pass. This is probably not going to be a popular choice, but there are several reasons to downgrade this hand. My spades are in front of the overcaller and strong enough to make it unlikely that partner made a penalty pass. Partner won't have four hearts or three clubs unless he is very weak. If he has a few points, he'll likely also have length in diamonds, which would make this a misfit that might be better off defending. Finally, if we keep the auction alive, the opponents might find their diamond fit, which could end up scoring more than spades if East is short.

TOM WEIK: Pass. No suitable bid, although 1NT is possible. That could be disastrous though when the opponents have diamonds and lead them, with RHO switching to spades when he gets in. East would seem to have some values; quite possibly he didn't bid because he's short in spades.

CATHY STRAUSS: Pass. I'm not thrilled with this, but I'm reluctant to bid 1NT because of the diamond singleton.

Andy touched on another reason why I think pass has merit. These days, North will find a call at matchpoints with pretty much any excuse. He certainly doesn't want the auction to continue 2♠ by East, passed back to him. If he has a smattering of points and even three clubs, he might have raised.

At the table, West overcalled on a four-card suit, and North had a 3=3=4=3 five-count, so pretty much anything South did would work out okay. We're all winners here. Oh, and for the record: Humpty Dumpty was pushed. Happy Holidays everyone, thanks so much for your participation in the D4MSC, and see you in 2018.



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/>

2017 District 4 MSC Challenge - Final Standings

Talk about a photo finish -- The Glassons slipped past Pete Filandro on the final set of problems to become the 2017 D4MSC Panelists Champions, with 960 points. Pete, whose 70 this month was dropped in favor of an 80 he had back in August, wound up in a four-way tie for second, just ten points back.

(Had Joann and Bob chosen 2♥ instead of 1NT this month, I would have had some Humpty Dumpty-sized egg on my face, not to mention a lot of apologizing to do. The Panelists' race would have ended in a five-way tie, and I forgot last January to specify a tiebreaker! Yikes. Anyway, going forward, ties will be broken by your best dropped score; aka your 11th-best award of the year.)

On the Solvers' side, Steve White finished the year strong to earn his first D4MSC title and a berth on the Panel for 2018. Dave Wachsman was a close second once again, tied with Mark Bolotin. 2016 champ Rui Marques will return to the Solvers' side after a strong showing as a Panelist; he was one of the quartet of runners-up.

Our 2017 Honor Roll of 900+ scorers:

Panelists

1. Bob & Joann Glasson	960
2t Connie Goldberg	950
Pete Filandro	950
Don Dalpe	950
Rui Marques	950
6. Michael Shuster	920
7t Douglas Dye	900
Ed Shapiro	900

Solvers

1. Steve White	960
2t Dave Wachsman	940
Mark Bolotin	940
4. Al Shrive	910
5. Bruce Schwaidelson	900



D4MSC CHALLENGE CHAMPIONS

	<u>PANELISTS</u>	<u>SOLVERS</u>
2015	Ray Raskin	Rick Olanoff
2016	Don Dalpe	Rui Marques
2017	J. & B. Glasson	Steve White