

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

JUNE 2019 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

June is here, and you know what that means. It's time to reveal the midpoint standings of the world-renowned **2019 District 4 MSC Challenge**! What's that? You think June means warm weather, summer vacations, trips to the shore, and our annual King of Prussia Regional? Hmph. Your priorities are messed up. Speaking of priorities, this month's problem asks: what's responder supposed to do in balancing seat with forward-going values after partner declines to make a Support Double? Is this situation analogous to Negative Doubles, where we're strongly encouraged to reopen with a double on any excuse? Or, should we chase our own contract and not worry about penalizing the opponents? Let's see what the Club thinks. Bring sunscreen.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NONE VULNERABLE

♠-K102 ♥-AQ9765 ♦-Q82 ♣-9

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

* - DOUBLE WOULD HAVE SHOWN 3 HEARTS

3♣ = GAME FORCE, BY AGREEMENT

A. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
3♥	3	23	100
Double	5	8	90
3♣	3	2	80
2♥	0	7	70
2♦	0	1	60
2♠	0	1	60
3♦	0	1	60

It's a Festivus miracle! Or whatever Seinfeld holiday comes in June! For just the second time in five years, the Panelists arrived at no majority consensus, but the Solvers did. 23 of 43 elected to invite game with 3♥, and that earned it the top award for the month. Its proponents made a clear and concise case for it, too.

CATHY STRAUSS: 3♥. Too strong for 2♥, but not quite strong enough for a game force.

I could probably make Cathy's comment the Final Word this month and go swimming, but it'd be an awfully short article if I did. So, let's carry on.

JIM HEMMER: 3♥. Not perfect, but I must show the sixth heart, and 2♥ would not show extra values.

BILL PORT: 3♥. When I responded 1♥, I promised only four. Bidding 3♥ shows both good values and probably six hearts.

STEPHEN COOPER (and RICHARD HARTZ SR., almost identically): 3♥. Begging. Partner, with a full opener and a doubleton heart, should raise to game. With a trap pass of clubs, he should bid 3NT. With a bad twelve and a stiff heart, he should pass and pray.

BARRY PASSER: 3♥. Let partner know that all I'm looking for is jack-low in support, and even ten-low may do. If he bids 3NT, he should have clubs well stopped.

BILL SCHMIDT: 3♥. With shaky heart quality and a known lack of three-card support, this hand isn't worth a game force. But, I can't bid only 2♥ with a stiff club.

BILL BAUER: 3♥. Partner's pass indicates no clear-cut action. That means South should just describe her holding -- six hearts, invitational values.

Though our Solvers rallied around the 3♥ flag, there were several Panelists on board too. As you'll shortly see, Rothwarf said it was his second choice, and Weik called the Double-vs.-3♥ decision "close". Choosing it outright were:

DAVE WACHSMAN: 3♥. Even though opener has at most two hearts, I need to show a good six-card suit with game-invitational values. Partner can bid 3NT with a club stopper and king-low of hearts. 3♥ tells our story in the most flexible way and permits partner to make the best decision.

PETE FILANDRO: 3♥. Unless partner has two hearts and can raise me, she'll need quite a bit of extra strength to make 3NT or 5♦. 3♣ is tempting, but by failing to show our six hearts, partner will often bid an inferior 3NT over that with, say, 3=2=4=4 or 3=2=5=3.

DON DALPE: 3♥. Knowing that it's matchpoints and that partner does not have three or more hearts has caused me to downgrade my opening hand. At bridge, I would always bid 3♣.

Hey kids! Can anyone describe the merits of 3♥ in one fifteen-letter word?

MARK KINZER: 3♥. It seems straightforward to invite.

CHRIS MARLOW: 3♥. The most straightforward call. There is no need to force to game when no clear fit has been found. 2♥ is a serious underbid, and 2♠ is a serious distortion.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 3♥. Seems straightforward. Partner should be able to figure out when to pass, bid 4♥, or bid 3NT.

STEVE WHITE: 3♥. A straightforward call, surely best if partner bids. Playing 3♥ as forcing isn't the best agreement, but this time, I wish it were forcing. If partner passes maybe game won't make.

Several 3♥ bidders did consider a reopening double.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 3♥. A bit awkward, but I think it's wise to let partner know about my six-carder. If the suit had more body, I would force to game; if it were shorter, I would double.

CHRIS KAUFMAN (cont.): 3♥. If I was supposed to double, so we can get +300 when we had no game... sorry not sorry.

STEVE WHITE (cont.): 3♥. Double is OK on overall values and could be the winner, but partner would not expect this much offense.

Of the alternatives, the one that garnered the most support, including a plurality of Panelists, was to keep all lines of advance open:

RICH ROTHWARTH: Double. 3♥ is my second choice, but doubling could win by having partner pass for penalties.

BARRY COHEN: Double. Not enough values for a game-force, but more than enough for a flexible double.

LYNN HARRIS: Double. Provides the most options for partner and me.

TODD HOLES: Double. Do something, partner.

My guess this month was to double, but I don't feel strongly about it. I agree that 3♥ is a perfectly swell alternative. Over 3♥, partner will visualize a hand similar to what we hold, except perhaps for slightly softer values (because we didn't reopen with a double.) There'll be no misunderstandings -- we can save our next bidding catastrophe for a later board.

Doubling carries no such guarantee. Negative Doubles and Support Doubles are ubiquitous these days, but they share a well-known flaw: if you have an old-fashioned penalty double, you're stuck. Often you have no choice but to pass and hope that your partner balances with a takeout double, which you will of course pass for penalties. The practical range for these 'protective' doubles is insane, both in terms of strength and shape. Sometimes they mean "Partner, I got the goods and this is our deal". Sometimes they mean "Partner, I have a perfectly normal takeout double and would like to compete further." Sometimes they mean, "Partner, my hand kind of stinks really, but on the off-chance that you made a trap pass, I'm doubling so that you don't throw your bidding box at my head." Sorting this out later isn't always a certain 15-letter word, which is why so many auctions of this nature go off the rails. If you think I'm exaggerating, have a look at the variety of proposed follow-up plans.

ANDY MUENZ: Double. Catering to partner wanting to penalize 2♣, with which I'm happy to cooperate. We have the bulk of the strength, even though we may end up defending against an eight-card club fit. If partner pulls the double, I'll bid 3♥ next.

TOM WEIK: Double. Close between this and 3♥. Double is flexible and takeout-oriented, because it allows partner, with known short hearts, to convert to penalties when holding good clubs. If partner now bids a suit, I'll bid 3♥ suggesting an invitational hand with six not-semi-solid hearts and some support for other suits.

MARK BOLOTIN: Double. I'll bid 2♥ over partner's expected 2♦. This leaves 3NT and all red-suit games (and even slams) in play.

RUI MARQUES: Double. Without diamond support, and without knowing if partner has heart support, 3♣ could get us into a world of pain. Double is more flexible. If partner bids 2♠, I'll bid 3♦. Over 2NT, I'll flip a coin but probably pass. Over 2♥, I'll invite game with 3♥; over 3♣, I'll bid 3♦. If partner passes, I'll take the +300 (I hope).

JOHN JONES: Double. Partner might have a penalty double that was thwarted by our support-double agreement. If North passes, we'll often score well. If he has four spades, a Moysian fit will play nicely. If he bids 2♦, I'll merely raise to 3♦ as I think it's wise not to drive to game opposite many minimum North hands.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: Double. We will reopen with a double in case partner's second suit is clubs. If North bids diamonds or spades, we'll bid hearts.

Double-then-hearts is my plan as well. But, hold on a sec. If partner is 4=2=4=3, is she supposed to continue 2♥ or 2♠? With 3=2=5=3 and no club stopper, 2♦ or 2♥? North has denied three hearts, so surely 2♥ would show a doubleton, perhaps honor-low. I think she should bid 2♠ with four, but that's not 100% clear. (After all, if South has four spades, he can bid 2♠ himself over 2♥.) She absolutely might prefer 2♥ on a minimum with five diamonds and two hearts, especially given the form of scoring. See what I mean? This is yet another bread-and-butter auction, but I'd wager that very few partnerships have discussed it detail.

One longtime Panelist who feels that he and his partners are on firm ground is:

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Double. There's almost no downside to the takeout double. If partner has clubs and passes, great. If he has four spades and two hearts, he should pull to 2♥, not 2♠. But, even if he does bid 2♠, the four-three fit rates to be fine. You'll have to decide whether to take another call if he bids 2♦ or 2♥, but I would.

Another D4MSC icon is less sanguine about what might transpire after a double. Shortly after this month's problem was posted, the Club director received an email:

From: Constance Goldberg
To: Nick Straguzzi
Subj: June problem

Hi Nick. I'm wondering what our methods are if we double, and partner pulls to 2♦. If we next bid 2♥ or 3♦, is that nonforcing, forcing one round, or forcing to game? Is 3♣ our only game-forcing continuation? What if partner bids 2NT -- would 3♦ then be forcing? Thanks - Connie

(*Gulp!*) I had to admit that I really wasn't sure, and that the uncertainty was a big reason I chose this as a problem. Furthermore, there were few online resources to guide us. [Standard American Yellow Card](#) doesn't use Support Doubles. [Bridge World Standard](#) does, but neither it nor [BridgeGuys.com](#) make any mention of follow-up sequences. Larry Cohen, who usually covers the ins and outs of every convention, also is silent, but he does include this cautionary advice on [his website](#):

Warning: In all my years of teaching experience, I've never seen a convention that causes more brain-freeze and confusion than Support Doubles. Players constantly forget to use them, forget to alert them, forget to realize partner has used them and forget the negative inferences. I recommend this convention only for players with strong concentration abilities who play frequently.

*For a convention that's probably not far behind Stayman and Blackwood in terms of popularity among tournament players, that's a pretty strong statement. But, as we've seen this month, they're not words to be taken lightly. My own guess is that, after a reopening double and (say) a 2♦ reply, 2♥ by South is nonforcing (constructive, six hearts or five strong ones, was willing to defend 2♦X if that's what partner chose), 2NT or 3♥ is *invitational* just as it would have been directly, a new suit is forcing one round (we're an unlimited responder, after all), and 3♣ is a game force. Anyway, after contemplating this for a few days, Connie came back with:*

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Double. With 11 HCP's and shortness in clubs, this seems pretty clear. With one more spade and one fewer heart, it would be classic. The bigger problem may be on the next round of bidding, if there is one.

If all of this is giving you a headache too, you might justifiably decide that it's not worth pursuing a penalty when you still have much to describe. If you think it's an invitational hand, 3♥ is peachy, but if you choose to treat it as a game-force, then:

KARL BARTH: 3♣. I toyed with doubling to protect partner. But, the vulnerability and the matchpoint scoring suggest we'll need to beat 2♦X by three tricks, and my hand isn't that defensively oriented. In fact, I really want our side to declare, thus the choices are 3♣ and 3♥. It looks like all my HCP's are pulling their weight, and it's tough to see how the stiff club could be bad.

RICK ROWLAND: 3♣. Keeps all strains in play.

JAY APPELBAUM: 3♣. This gives us maximum choice for the best contract.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 3♣. We should have the values for game. I hope we can find a suitable contract.

Matchpoint mavens often overbid slightly in situations like this, aware that finding the best strain is usually worth a few matchpoints no matter what. I'm not confident that'll work here, though. As Pete Filandro noted, if partner bids 3NT, we'd be sitting there with two more hearts than we've shown. A very practiced pair might agree that 3NT denies two-card heart support, with North's 3♦ a waiting bid to allow South to clarify his intentions.

Quite a few Solvers took the other celebrated matchpoint-maven approach: when in doubt, guarantee the plus.

BARRY DEHLIN: 2♥. Clearly right on length, but is it right on strength? If my MSC partner opens as light as I do in real life, I think it's fine. With West having shown some values, it's more likely North has a bare minimum than a hand that will make 3NT or 4♥. I'd probably take a different approach if this were teams, but it's not.

BILL FOSTER: 2♥. Not quite strong enough to explore for 3NT via a Western Cue-Bid. Neither the heart suit nor the point count is quite good enough for 3♥.

DANIEL DROZ: 2♥. With extra points or shape, partner usually would have bid something. His likely hand-type is a balanced minimum with at most two hearts. I dislike doubling as it feels slanted towards spades, and if I bid anything but hearts, partner may never know I have a fifth heart, much less a sixth. So, it's 2♥ or 3♥.

I dislike 3♥ for several reasons -- the hand is more flexible than that bid suggests, and it would be too high opposite a poor catch. 2♥ ought to be constructive: I'm bidding it fully aware that partner has at most two hearts, so I'm suggesting a good suit and not a hopeless hand. If partner passes, I doubt we'll make ten tricks.

BOB GRINWIS: 2♥. Pass is wimpy, and a jump is a little too aggressive. 2♥ is invitational showing six hearts.

Though the 2♥ bidders only get 70 points this month, they can take satisfaction that it was the winning bid at the table. Trumps split ungodly, but eight tricks were there via elopement for +110, beating the +100 you could've gotten by defending 2♦X. Partner had the 3=1=5=4 dog that many respondents feared. Actually, another contract that might have made was:

WILLIAM KILMER: 3♦. Double should tend to show four spades here. 2♦ isn't invitational. 2♥ is okay but not a full description. 3♣ is game-forcing, and I can't bid notrump. 3♦, however, is invitational, shows support lacking a club stopper, and doesn't deny spades or extra length in hearts, so yeah, that one.

That's everyone who commented. Final Word this month goes to our First Word, way back at the start of the article. If you're playing in a strong partnership with well-discussed agreements, I think Double is best. If not, then whatever 3♥ lacks in theory, it makes up for in practicality.



Halfway through the **2019 D4MSC Challenge**, Pete Filandro is the only Panelist who can still pitch a perfect game this year. He's at 400 with his two lowest scores dropped, though his fifth-best monthly total is an 80 should that become relevant. 2018 champ Tom Weik is at 390, along with Connie Goldberg and the Glassons. Don Dalpe, Craig Robinson, and Michael Shuster have 380.

A whopping five solvers, meanwhile, are perfect through six months, helped along by the scoring for the June problem. Mark Bolotin, Leonard Helfgott, Mark Kinzer, Bruce Schwaidelson, and Steve White all sit at 400. Ten points behind is a logjam comprising (deep breath) Bill Bauer, Stephen Cooper, Barry Dehlin, Jim Eagleton, Todd Holes, John Jones, Rui Marques, Andy Muenz, Rick Olanoff, Bill Schmidt, and Cathy Strauss. Nobody has a 100 among their dropped scores, so the standings rate to change substantially when we check in again in September.



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/>