

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

AUGUST 2019 PROBLEM

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These days, like many bridge lovers, I play mostly on the internet, attempting to match wits and occasionally outwit the robots on Bridge Base Online (and usually failing miserably.) Every so often though, I still show my ugly mug at a tournament. This June, at the urging of my friend Bharat Rao, we had a great time playing in a Regional Flight A/X Pairs game at Valley Forge, followed by the twilight side game because we felt we hadn't tortured each other enough during daylight hours. The evening session was when this month's nightmare arose, saddling me with one of the most distasteful problems I've ever encountered at the table. Were Bharat a bot, I'd probably still be cursing him out. Anyway, when I got home that night, I took down the D4MSC problem I'd originally planned for August and replaced it with this beauty. Well, what would YOU do?

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, BOTH VULNERABLE

♠-AK94 ♥-J863 ♦-- ♣-Q9873

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

* - 2♦ WOULD HAVE BEEN A WEAK-TWO

(2♥ = ONE-ROUND FORCE)

A. Do you agree with South's initial pass

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Yes	9	27	20
No, prefer 1♠	3	7	10

This was actually a bit closer than I expected. I've been known to overcall in a four-card major at the one level at matchpoints, especially opposite a passed partner. I personally reserve this for minimum-range hands in which I want the suit led, and I know comfortably what to do over any non-forcing action that CHO over there might take. Here, if partner bids 1NT, I'll put down the dummy; diamonds are his problem. If he bids 2♣, I can amuse myself with a raise to 3♣. If he raises spades, I'll pass and hope to make it. And if he advances with 2♦ - ruh-roh. I have no idea what to do over that. Thus, I won't (and didn't) overcall 1♠ with this hand. Disagreeing:

DON DALPE: No, prefer 1♦. I know that this is a scary bid because it could lead to a disaster, but I am doing it anyway.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: No, prefer 1♦. Had you asked whether it was acceptable to pass here, I would certainly say yes. But, I think 1♦ has a slight edge. In most of my partnerships, I use a top/bottom cue-bid in this situation, and I would have done so here if available.

BILL BAUER: No, prefer 1♦. I am generally not a proponent of four-card overcalls, but I'll infrequently do so at the one-level. If I should have to lay my hand on the table, I'll put a club in with my spades and say "whoops".

STEVE GIBBON: No, prefer 1♦. This will likely be my last bid.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: No, prefer 1♦. There's no perfect call. Passing risks never finding our spade fit. 2♣ with that suit is just too risky. I'm willing to try 1♦, expecting not to be buried by a passed-hand partner. I would not be critical of anyone who passes, though.

KARL BARTH (and **RUI MARQUES**, very similarly): No, prefer 1♦. Right out of Mike Lawrence's *Overcalls* book. My length in hearts implies partner will at least tolerate spades. The overcall gets the main feature of my hand off my chest.

Most of the Club went along with the pass, though a few at least gave some fleeting thought to 1♦. A sampling of opinions:

RICH ROTHWARTH (with **BOB AND JOANN GLASSON**): Yes. Partner is a passed hand, and we are red with length in an opponent's suit.

DAVE WACHSMAN: Yes. Partner's pass suggests that I should remain in listening mode for now and assess future action.

JAY APFELBAUM: Yes. Wrong distribution for any action.

ROSELYN TEUKOLSKY: Yes. Not strong enough for 1♦. I'd pass without agonizing.

ANDY MUENZ (with **BARRY PASSER**, **BOB GRINWIS**, and **HOWARD WACHTEL**): Yes. Not a strong enough hand or good enough suit to make a vulnerable overcall on a four-card suit or to bid 2♣. Double isn't worth mentioning

MANOJ DEB ROY: Yes. Being vulnerable with such unusual distribution, it is very wise to wait until you hear what sound partner makes.

BILL FOSTER (with **RICHARD HARTZ JR.**): Yes. Perhaps if not vulnerable, I would have tried a Michaels 2♥ bid, depending on unknown factors like how my game was going and who the opponents were. *[Bill Schmidt said 2♥ was his not-very-close second choice; Daniel Droz said he's had success doing it with this shape; John Jones sometimes uses 2♥ to mean 4+ spades and 5+ clubs. - Ed.]*

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Yes. All possible calls break some rule too much for my comfort level. There's nothing wrong with passing; we'll have a further chance to bid.

STEPHEN COOPER: Yes. I have a reputation for being crazy, but not *that* crazy.

CATHY STRAUSS (with **PHILIP FREIDENREICH**): Yes. I certainly won't risk a double because of the diamond shortness.

DANIEL DROZ: Yes. I like to have opening-bid strength before considering a four-card overcall. My hand does not strongly suggest offense, so pass is fine. 2♣ and

especially double are very unpalatable -- are you going to tell partner "Oops, I had all my hearts in with my diamonds?

But most of all....

MARK BOLOTIN: Yes. I have no call over the most likely advance, 2♦.

Yep. To be honest, I don't want to hear the word "diamonds" from any of my three opponents. Perhaps East-West are playing two-way Drury, so that LHO can't bid the suit naturally at the two-level even if he wanted to. When West instead passed, I felt pretty pleased with myself. If partner reopened with a double, or with 1♠ or 2♣, I'd have several good options. And, heh-heh, partner and I are playing weak-twins in diamonds, so surely he won't find a diamond bid now...um, wait. What is he reaching for? No! Put that 2♦ card back and step away slowly. PARTNER!!!...

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

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Pass	6	12	80
2♠	2	8	70
2NT	2	6	70
3♣	2	5	70
2♥	0	3	60

In situations like this, it's important to keep your head and think clearly. For example, within moments of the 2♦ bidding card hitting the table, I contemplated the option of fleeing the playing room, driving home, grabbing my passport, and using my cell phone to book a midnight flight to, say, Kyrgyzstan. But, I decided I probably couldn't do all that before the round was called. Pity.

Reasoning along the same lines:

BILL BAUER: Pass. Confronted with this dilemma at the table, I would call the director over and state that I had an unspecified emergency. Would he be so kind as to find a substitute for me? If the director saw through that ruse, my next choice would be to try an inadmissible takeout double. Failing that too, I would pass. This is a "fright" pass -- I'm afraid of getting into bigger trouble if I bid.

Bill's final point is no punch line. One of the oldest maxims in bridge is, "When fixed, stay fixed." While it doesn't feel likely that this auction will be duplicated at other tables, one never knows. Also unwilling to dig a deeper hole for themselves were:

DON DALPE: Pass. I think we might take more tricks in any strain other than diamonds. But, 2♦ has not been doubled yet, and it might not be.

LYNN HARRIS: Pass. Trying to correct a suit that you dislike is not good bridge. If they double 2♦, you can redouble.

BARRY COHEN: Pass. I'm concerned partner will rebid his diamonds if I bid 2♥. I don't want him to bid notrump, and I suspect he has fewer than four spades. 3♣ is tempting.

JUDITH STILLINGER: Pass. Partner has a distributional hand and may not have support for any of South's suits. If I bid, North might rebid diamonds. Then we'd be at the three level and still vulnerable. When you're in trouble, get out - *pass!*

RUI MARQUES: Pass. No perfect answer. After agonizing over 2♦, 3♣, and pass, I decided to take the low road. There's no guarantee we have a fit anywhere, and if I bid anything and partner repeats her diamonds, we will be in a world of trouble.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Pass. Let's hope partner has something like ♦Q1098xx and we get out of this fairly unscathed. Bidding on with this misfit seems like suicide in the -500/-800 range. 3♣ could work out if North is 2=2=6=3, but that's usually not how seeming misfits go.

STEVE WHITE: Pass. Anything else, except 2♠, is awful, even though it could work. Chances are good that partner has six or more diamonds.

A few respondents hoped that maybe, pretty please, West will bail us out of this if we give him the opportunity.

KARL BARTH: Pass. Maybe lefty will balance. Right now, defending looks like a great idea.

PETE FILANDRO: Pass. I expect my vulnerable partner to have about ten HCP. Perhaps she has something like ♦AKJxx, or a weak six-card (or even very weak seven-card) suit. If she has something like 7-2-2-2, what better spot is there? If she has a side three-bagger, how do I find it? Importantly too, if West keeps the auction open, they will often land in a contract that I will find quite pleasing.

If you are looking for a clear-eyed logical reason to stay put, two respected panelists are here for you.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass. Partner's passed-hand status does not preclude long diamonds. If he had four spades as well, he has an easy reopening double. And, partner saw that we were vulnerable when he balanced in an inflexible way.

There is something else going on here. LHO passed 1♥, so is very weak. Partner has at most 10 HCP. I have ten. That leaves RHO with either a balanced 18-count, in between a 1NT and 2NT opener, or an unbalanced hand in the 16-20 HCP range without a convenient bid over 2♦. Perhaps something like 3=5=4=1. In either case, he probably doesn't have six hearts, or he'd have rebid them. So, we can hope that LHO is something like 4=2=2=5. Maybe he'll bid a sporting 2♥ and rescue us.

JAY APPFELBAUM: Pass. *Trust partner!* A very long but poor-quality diamond suit is to be expected. Partner knows his 2♦ bid eliminated the chance to play in either 1♠ or 2♣.

Quite a few folks besides Michael drew an inference that partner has fewer than four spades. Otherwise, given that his long suit is diamonds and not clubs, he could have reopened with a double and corrected 2♣ to 2♦. That can't show extra values; he's a passed hand. This treatment known as an Equal-Level Conversion Double (ELCD), and many expert pairs use it in places beyond passed-hand reopening doubles.

RICH ROTHWARF: 2NT. Partner could have four spades and six diamonds, but she might have doubled and corrected 2♣ to 2♦ with that hand. I think that she has long, bad diamonds and fewer than four spades. Pass is a close second choice.

ANDY MUENZ: Pass. It's unlikely that partner has four spades, as he could have made an ELCD. 2♥ sounds like a diamond raise, so that's out. 2NT is not going to be a happy contract given that the points are evenly split and we have no long, strong suit. Perhaps 2♦ is our most playable spot...but, if LHO doubles and that is passed back around to me, I'll scramble with 2♥. Hopefully partner will take that as showing more clubs than spades.

CATHY STRAUSS: 2♥. I assume we are playing ELCD. Partner might have long diamonds and four *hearts*, which is why she didn't open 2♦. My cue bid should show a partial stopper and a desire to play in notrump.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Pass. If partner had four spades in addition to long diamonds, he should have doubled. Even if the partnership isn't normally playing ELCD, a passed hand can always double and then correct clubs to diamonds without showing extras. At the moment we are in deep doo-doo, but at least no one has doubled yet. West, or Divine Providence, can still save us...but I can't.

Even if you are a card-carrying adherent of the "You bid 'em, partner, you play 'em" school of thought, it really doesn't feel right to let partner rot in 2♦ at matchpoints. Yes, he might have perfectly adequate diamonds to play opposite a void, vulnerable, but was unable to open the bidding for some odd reason. Or, he might not. My guess is that he has 10 or 11 points with five good diamonds and is short in one black suit or the other. He's innocently balancing in his best suit, unaware of the size of the dung pile he just stepped into. We probably have a better strain. Guessing where to run is the tricky part.

Tom Weik: 2NT. Ugly! Very ugly! Pass seems to be the only alternative to 2NT. Neither figures to score well, but maybe I will get lucky and take four club tricks. (Another way to get lucky would be partner now bidding 3♣, but that's very unlikely.) Another consideration: The opponents appear to have half the deck but are not bidding very much, so maybe opener has a second suit of diamonds.

Howard Wachtel: 2NT. Partner may have only five diamonds, so I cannot pass. If we are to play in notrump, it's better for South to declare. *[True, mainly because the opponents might not discover our diamond void until after we've set up some tricks - NS.]* I don't like 3♣ with such a weak suit.

Barry Passer: 2NT. Showing a heart stopper and 11+ points. I may not make it, but it'll be better than 2♦. If 2NT is doubled, I'll try 3♣.

Bob Grinwis: 2NT. Seems like the best of a bunch of bad alternatives.

Craig Robinson: 3♣. I'll save you, partner! A five-zero diamond fit can't be right, whereas clubs has a chance of being right.

Bill Schmidt: 3♣. Since partner didn't open 2♦, we must be better off in a black suit. Since he didn't double 1♥, that better suit is probably clubs.

Steve Gibbon: 3♣. West's clean passes followed by East's willingness to sit for 2♦ leads me to a rare "save".

Philip Freidenreich: 3♣. Partner passed and then bid diamonds, suggesting five diamonds and fewer than four spades. I expect him to hold at least three clubs.

Stephen Cooper: 3♣. Partner might well be 3=2=5=3 with a 10-count. I will not leave him dangling in 2♦. There seems to be no better spot available than 3♣.

Oddly enough, of scrambling to 2♥, 2NT, and 3♣, I think I mildly prefer 2♥. It's awful, of course, but so is everything else, and I can pass whatever partner pulls out next, even if it's a handkerchief. If he rebids his diamonds, believing that I've shown support, oh well. How much rounder can one zero be? To be fair, either 2NT or 3♣ could work out, but they're bids that suggest direction. The only direction this hand has is "anywhere out of Diamondville".

Open up one eager eye, here's Mr. Brightside:

DAVE WACHSMAN: 2♠. Hoping that North will manifest some bridge logic. North knows I have some values for my advance. He will not expect five spades; I didn't overcall 1♠. Because I didn't bid 2NT, nor cue-bid, nor make a takeout double originally, he will expect little tolerance for diamonds. I expect partner to pass with three or four spades, bid 2NT with a heart stopper, or trot out a three-card (or longer) club suit otherwise. I love partners who can reason like that!

Hmm. Maybe. Partner has puzzled us by offering diamonds at the two-level when he couldn't bid the suit last round. Perhaps we should return the favor by bidding spades. Whether he'll draw the right inferences is an imponderable, but desperate times call for desperate measures.

MARK BOLOTIN: 2♠. Maybe partner will wonder why I didn't overcall 1♠. He might decide that my suit wasn't good enough; if so, he'll know to run to 3♣ without spade tolerance. I don't foresee this being pretty regardless of my action.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: 2♠. Partner might have a four-card major because he didn't open 2♦. We didn't overcall 1♠, so North, if she doesn't have four spades, should recognize that we are "moving along" and looking for another place to play.

DANIEL DROZ: 2♠. I'm guessing East has a nice diamond holding and is hoping West will double so he can leave it in for penalty. I suppose I could wait until then to run, but I don't love the prospect of playing 2♦ undoubled, either. 2♠ is better than 3♣ because it's matchpoints, the suit is of better quality, and eight tricks are easier than nine. I don't expect partner to bid again without a pretty wild passed hand.

JOHN JONES: 2♠. Passing feels wrong. 2♥ sounds like a limit raise of diamonds. Of the three other possible calls, 2♠ is the lowest.

MANOJ DEB ROY: 2♠. Any bid is better than playing in 2♦.

At the table, after ruling out an escape to Central Asia, I indeed chose 2♠. I confess that this was more out of panic than logic. I was pretty confident that partner would realize that I didn't have five of them (he did.) What I wasn't sure of then, and which I am still unsure of today, is whether North should infer that I was running for my life, or that I was making a constructive call with opening-bid values, four good spades, and diamond tolerance. Perhaps I was looking for a heart stopper for notrump but didn't want to imply primary diamond support by cue-bidding 2♥.

At any rate, the ordeal had a happy ending. The North hand was:

♠10752 ♥A ♦K975432 ♣2

Why didn't he double, relying on ELCD to extricate him if I bid clubs? Because he wanted no part whatsoever of defending 1♥ doubled with this hand, of course. That makes sense. 2♠ was a glorious contract; I even made an undeserved overtrick for a

top board when East, whose second suit was indeed diamonds, tried to cash the ♦A early on. Score one for dumb luck. Nonetheless, pass, which garnered a semi-majority of Panelists' support and a plurality of Solvers', earns the top score this month. And, if I am being honest, it's probably the long-run winning call, too.

The Hartzes, perhaps unwittingly, were participants in this month's craziness. They were sitting East-West in the session when this board arose, maybe one or two rounds after Bharat and I played against them. Neither seem to have recognized the problem, suggesting that whatever auction transpired at their table, it was something quite different. Here's what they independently came up with:

RICHARD HARTZ, SR.: 3♣. If partner did not open 2♦ or reopen with a double to show some spades, then he must have a few clubs for me.

RICHARD HARTZ, JR.: 2NT. Hopefully this will discourage further bidding.

Final Word this month goes to...

ROSELYN TEUKOLSKY: Pass. Horrible hand, no attractive options. My inclination is to get out as low as possible without being doubled. If my LHO doubles and it gets passed back to me, I'll redouble for takeout. Please note: this opinion is my own. You can't blame my husband.



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/>