

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

APRIL 2019 PROBLEM NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

Normally for the April forum, I choose a problem that is befitting of April Fools' Day: a situation that's highly unusual if not impossible, or a deal that had a twist ending in real life. Last year, the auction suggested that there were 14 spades in the deck and your job was to figure out who was lying. Several D4MSC readers are still in therapy over that one. This year, we'll go with something more prosaic: we've shown a massive two-suiter, we know partner is near-broke (with even "near" being optimistic) ...and, lo and behold, we find out deep into the auction that our best strain might in fact be the fourth suit. How do we get this across to partner, who is sitting there desperate to pass at his first legal opportunity, if not sooner? Let's see how our District experts handled this April's annual bizzaro scenario. No fooling.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-AKQJ5 ♥-AK1054 ♦-Q106 ♣-

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

* - MICHAELS

A. What is your call at matchpoints?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♣	5	11	50
4♦	4	6	40
Pass	0	9	40
5♣	0	2	30
5♦	1	5	30
3♠	0	1	20
4♠	0	2	20
4NT	0	1	20
5NT	1	0	20
6♦	0	3	20

B. What is your call at IMPs?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
4♣	6	12	50
5♦	3	11	40
5♣	0	3	40
4♦	1	5	30
Pass	0	3	20
3♠	0	2	20
4♠	0	3	20
5NT	1	0	20
6♣	0	1	20

BARRY DEHLIN: I think your problems are harder this year, so...congratulations?

Thanks. Unfortunately, they're also getting harder to score. Of the 16 possible calls between pass and 6♦, the two halves of this month's problem drew votes for 11 of them. Only 3NT, 5♠, and any number of hearts attracted no backers. 4♣ received the top award both times by virtue of our longstanding Club rule: it received a plurality of votes amongst both Panelists and Solvers. After that, things got tough; I'll explain my tortured rationale behind the scoring as we go along.

First things first: how many diamonds is partner showing?

MICHAEL SHUSTER (with **CONNIE GOLDBERG**): ...Partner has diamonds. He isn't punting back to us with equal lengths in the majors. We asked him twice to pick a strain, and he picked diamonds....

DAVE WACHSMAN (with **KARL BARTH**): ...Partner clearly has six diamonds with little tolerance for the majors....

TOM WEIK: ...Why did partner bid diamonds? Wouldn't he have taken a preference with a major-suit doubleton? Perhaps he is 1=1=7=4, with the ♦J, or he chose to show a good-in-context diamond suit on ♦KJ9xxx rather than bid a two-card major....

WILLIAM FOSTER: ...Partner probably has at most two small cards in each major, with (hopefully) six or even seven diamonds....

PETE FILANDRO (with **MARK BOLOTIN**): ...I can't conjure a hand for partner that doesn't have at least six diamonds....

WILLIAM PORT: ...Partner must have a slew of diamonds....

Chris Kaufman, Barry Cohen, Rick Rowland, Rui Marques, Bruce Schwaidelson, and Barry Passer all implied that they expect North to have six or more diamonds. Connie Goldberg guesses six=four in the minors, two-one in the majors. Daniel Droz allows for 1=1=6=5. Chris Marlow, Len Helfgott, and Howard Wachtel consider 2=2=5=4 to be an unlikely worst-case scenario. You get the picture. Partner isn't bidding diamonds for his health. They may not be strong, but they sure as Sunday are long.

This presents an unexpected problem for our hero in the South chair. Thus far, we have promised precisely zero diamonds for our bidding. Our double wasn't a three-suited takeout of clubs; it simply showed the "strong" flavor of Michaels rather than

the "weak" one. (With an "intermediate" five-five hand, we'd presumably have over-called in spades and later tried to bid hearts.) Partner is telling us, "Look, chucklehead, I get it: you've got a big hand with both majors. Whoop-de-doo. I think our best strain might still be diamonds." And, he's probably right. I hate it when that happens.

Next issue: despite partner's intransigence, do we still want to take one more shot at getting to a major? Particularly at matchpoints, where the extra ten points per trick is so often the difference-maker? Maybe, say the following members:

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 4♠. Solid spade suit. No scientific way to go forward.

WILLIAM PORT: Pass (MPs) / 4♠ (IMPs). At IMPs, I am willing to try to get to a vulnerable game. The spades are self-supporting.

BOB GRINWIS: 3♠. Naming the better of my two suits.

STEPHEN COOPER: 4♠ (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). Hoping to find partner with 2=2=6=3 and a diamond honor at matchpoints. At IMPs, I'll show a moose but will pass partner's next bid. I hope partner will know to bid game with six diamonds and four points.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 4♣ (MPs) / 5♦ (IMPs). At matchpoints, I'll make one more try to get to 4♠. If partner is two=one in the majors and finally bids 4♠ out of frustration, that might be our best matchpoint spot. On the other hand, if she now bids 4♦ or 4♥, I will bid 5♦ to play it there. At IMPs, just six diamonds to the jack makes 5♦ our safest game.

BARRY DEHLIN: Pass (MPs) / 3♠ (IMPs). At matchpoints, I see no need to try for game. At IMPs, 3♠ probably sounds like I'm six=five in the majors, but I'm willing to live with that given the top four honors. I will likely pass partner's next bid.

RICH ROTHWART: 4♣. At both forms of scoring, I'm showing a great hand. At matchpoints, I will respect a bid of 4♥ or 4♠ by partner. At IMPs, I'll correct to 5♦ to indicate a slam try in diamonds.

Not everyone believed that trying to reach spades was worth the risk. Craig Robinson and John Jones fear getting tapped out in four of either major. Dave Wachsman expects diamonds to outscore spades in any case. Andy Muenz isn't interested in potentially running into a five-two (or, gulp, five-three) trump break. Chris Kaufman expects that if 4♠ is on, 6♦ will usually have a play. Anyway, because over 80% of the Club is committed to playing in diamonds, I downgraded spade bids in the scoring.

CHRIS MARLOW: 6♦ (MPs) / 6♣ (IMPs). Science, schmience. If partner has ♦KJxxxx of diamonds and out, we are practically cold for slam. If he has a terrible ♦Axxxx, we still have a play. If partner is worse and the opponents double, well, it's just another zero in the matchpoint world. I think 5NT would be pick-a-slam. At IMPs, I am less certain and look forward to reading the experts' responses.

RICK ROWLAND: 5NT. ♦KJxxxx of diamonds is enough to make slam playable.

KARL BARTH: 6♦ (MPs) / 5♣ (IMPs). At matchpoints, I want to beat the people who play game in a major. ♦Kxxxx might be enough. If partner has the ♦AK, we may even reach a making grand.

Blasting is certainly one way to avoid playing an ice-cold slam in a part-score. Several 4♣ cue-bidders lamented the fact that, having started with Michaels, it was going to

be exceedingly difficult to get partner to realize that king-jack-sixth of the fourth suit are all we need to take 12 tricks. Still, there may yet be a way to get that message through to North, and if you're determined to play slam come hell or high water, you can always jump to six later if you run out of forcing bids. So, I downgraded the immediate slam bids, too. I think I'll write a book: Downgrading for Fun and Profit.

What about the other extreme? Might we just want to camp out here in 3♦?

STEVE WHITE: Pass (MPs) / 4♦ (IMPs). At matchpoints, 3♦ should be a plus score. Game is against the odds. I don't expect North to have a three-card major. At IMPs, vulnerable, I'll give it one more try, letting partner know I have diamond support in the process.

RICHARD HARTZ SR.: Pass. North had an opportunity to bid over 3♣, but he passed. Now, forced to bid, he chose the cheapest available level and strain. Take the plus!

RICHARD HARTZ JR.: Pass. With a fortunate holding or lead, we could make game. But, I also see a realistic scenario where they take eight tricks off the top. At IMPs, I'm even more worried about paying a huge vulnerable penalty. So, I'm not going any farther.

BARRY COHEN: Pass (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). Partner knows I have a strong Michaels bid. He must be short in both majors and long in diamonds (and clubs), with no more than a couple of high-card points. I expect to make 3♦ and will take my plus at matchpoints. At IMPs, I'll take one shot at the vulnerable game bonus, but I'll pass if partner bids 4♦.

HOWARD WACHTEL: Pass (MPs) / 5♦ (IMPs). North is unlikely to have more than three HCP. Her 3♦ bid denied a three-card major. I would expect something like 2=2=6=3. Worst case, she's 2=2=5=4 with her only honor the ♠K in front of East's ace. I pass at matchpoints. At IMPs, depending on the state of the match, I'll risk jumping to a vulnerable game. Maybe North has the ♦K instead of the ♠K.

For what it's worth, I consider it to be razor-close at matchpoints between pass and 4♦. Ultimately, I went with the latter because I think if worse comes to worst, partner will more often than not be able to scrape together ten tricks in diamonds. At any rate, nine respondents passed at matchpoints and a couple of 4♦ bidders said they were close to doing the same, so I upgraded Pass in the scoring for Problem 1A. However, just three of 51 people gave up at IMPs, so I downgraded it for Problem 1B. It's not often you get promoted and demoted in the same day, but such is life here in the wacky D4MSC.

Speaking of 4♦, it drew a strong coalition of supporters at matchpoints, but fewer so at IMPs.

WILLIAM FOSTER: 4♦. If partner's diamonds are good enough, she'll go on to 5♦.

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♦. If North has diamonds, here is support. If he has equal lengths in the majors, he might bid 4♥ next.

LEN HELFGOTT: 4♦. Worth a shot at a diamond game opposite a suitable hand.

MARK KINZER: 4♦. I think we're simply too good to give up. This call should show my exact shape. The matchpoint alternative is 3♠, but 4♦ allows partner to cooperate. Pass is also a possibility at matchpoints, where plus scores are important.

CRAIG ROBINSON: 4♦ (MPs) / 5♦ (IMPs). If partner is short in both majors as it appears, I will get tapped out in four of a major. In diamonds, partner only needs to get rid of his clubs, which hopefully he can do by ruffing one or two in dummy and pitching a few more on my major-suit winners.

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: 4♦ (MPs) / 5♦ (IMPs). Just looking for a plus score at matchpoints. 4♦ allows partner to pass with a hand that is totally unsuitable for game. At IMPs, we can't afford to miss a vulnerable game, so we'll take the chance that partner has six or seven diamonds to at least the jack.

4♦ is actually quite a big bid, vulnerable at matchpoints. It's essentially telling partner, "For heaven's sake, bid game if you have even a whiff of a trick. I just committed us to take ten tricks, red vs. white, opposite what might be six diamonds and thirteen deuces." Mark too is correct: if North doesn't play us for this exact shape, the next thing that needs upgrading is our choice of partner.

Going one step further....

BARRY PASSER: 5♦. I give partner ♦J9xxx and out. Just enough for 5♦, as he says he's short in both majors and the opponents have all the clubs.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 5♦. Seems clear. Partner will bid six if he has the ace-king of diamonds, and if he doesn't, five is high enough.

Although I admit I didn't consider it, if we're going to bid a diamond game no matter what, perhaps a better way to do so is:

WILLIAM BAUER: 5♣. Partner, I have controls coming out my ears in three suits, plus three-card diamond support. You decide whether to play 5♦ or 6♦.

KARL BARTH (cont.): 5♣ (IMPs). At this point, partner must realize I have a big hand. Barring a specific agreement otherwise, 4♣ would sound like, "Darn it, pick one of my majors!", maybe a six-six hand. 5♣ sure does sound like a splinter, and look at that, I have diamond support and club shortness.

Bill Kilmer also chose 5♣, describing it as "Modified Exclusion Roman Key-Card Blackwood for diamonds." At any rate, there ought to be no mistaking 5♣ as showing primary diamond support, plus a club void (not that there's any room for a club in our hand on this sequence, but with some partners, it's always good to hammer the point home.) I thought so highly of 5♣ as a thoughtful alternative to 5♦ that I that I scored the two bids equally. Meaning, I upgraded 5♣...er, I downgraded 5♦...that is...aw, never mind. If I were any good at grading, I'd have become a teacher.

Which leaves us only with our plurality, the 4♣ contingent. Although it earned the top award, I'm really not much of a fan, for reasons that will shortly become clear.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: 4♣. Although North can be very weak, he could possess six or seven diamonds to the ♦K. I intend to cue-bid twice below 5♦ and hope we can make it if he passes. I hope my 5♣ cue-bid wards off a club lead, because I think that tapping dummy early may beat 5♦ if partner is 2=1=6=4 and very weak.

ANDY MUENZ: 4♣. Not sure of the best way to find out whether partner has either or both of the top diamonds, but this seems like the best way to start. Unless partner jumps in diamonds, I'll bid 5♦ next and hope it's read as a slam try needing help in trumps.

DAVE WACHSMAN: 5♦ (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). At IMPs, I'll elicit more information with a cue-bid. If partner jumps to 5♦, I will bid six with confidence.

TOM WEIK: 4♣. I'm too strong to stop....I expect to bid 5♦ over a 4♦ response, and if partner musters a jump to 5♦ on king-jack-sixth or -seventh, I'll bid 6♦.

RUI MARQUES: 4♣. Should paint a clear picture of the shape and strength. Partner will probably bid 4♦, and I will try again with 5♣. Will he evaluate

♠xx ♥Qx ♦KJxxxx ♣xxx

...as a monster and bid 6?

All this is well and good, but really now: is partner ever going to bid any number of diamonds here? 4♣ sounds to me more like "Pick a #5%& major already, you imbecile!" To be very frank, I'm not confident that partner's 4♦ reply ought necessarily to mean "I have even more diamonds than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Horatio." Rather, I fear it might mean, "I decline. You pick a major. Mine stink equally. I already told you I have diamonds."

To put this another way, what if our hand instead were:

♠AKJxxx ♥AQJ9xx ♦-- ♣x

...Wouldn't everyone bid 4♣ now? All we want to do is play game in whatever two-card major partner holds. If he's 1=1=6=5 or 1=1=7=4, we'll settle for the major with the stiff ten-spot, thank you very much. Perhaps you say you would (and should) have bid 4♣ last turn with that hand rather than double. True. But, it's really hard to fault any South player who chose to describe that freak via Michaels-then-double-then-cue bid. I mean, diamonds? Who'd worry that partner might think we're open to playing in diamonds on this sequence?

One Panelist offers a partial plan to distinguish between the six-six rock crusher and the 5=5=3=0 Flexible Flyer:

PETER FILANDRO: 4♣. My double showed a "strong" Michaels; the cue bid now shows a "very strong" Michaels. Partner, not knowing where I am headed, will bid 4♦ whether he has seven to the ♦9 or six or more to the ♦AK. If I then bid 4♥, I show a six-six moose, and partner picks a major. If I instead raise to 5♦, I show a hand like the one I hold. Partner passes with a yarborough and raises one level for each diamond key-card.

Pete's approach is more acceptable to my palate, though I'm still leery of treating partner's 4♦ as anything but a punt. Other Club members who are on Pete's wavelength to some degree include:

JOHN JONES: 4♣. I will follow this with 5♦. It's going to be really tough to get partner to believe that ♦KJxxxx is enough to make a slam, but this is my best try.

MARK BOLOTIN: 4♣. Partner will likely bid the better of his horrible majors, then I'll bid 5♦. That will have decent play opposite even six low diamonds and out. Hopefully he'll go on with more, not that there's a lot left for him to hold. If he bids 4♦ over 4♣, I might go to six myself at matchpoints, as North may have passed 3♣X with 1=1=6=5 shape.

DANIEL DROZ: 4♣ (MPs) / 5♦ (IMPs). Even ♦Kxxxxx offers a reasonable play for slam. I must make a try somehow. I don't know if there are many agreements in

this situation, so I'll bid 4♣ and follow with 5♦. I'm concerned that 4♣ sounds like "Pick a major, for the love of all that is holy," but when I come back with 5♦ I think my intentions should be clear.

Looks like this year, the April Fools' joke is on me. In the five years that I've written this feature, this was the first time I ever completely overlooked a particular call when I sat down to write the article, but I was ready to award it 110 points by the time I was through. Compared to the actual top answer, the 5♣ splinter just keeps looking better and better. You can be confident that even the densest North, including me, will figure that one out. 4♣, not so much.

JIM EAGLETON: 4♣: Wake up, partner. You're playing with Mr. Thwarter.

TODD HOLES: Pass (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). Worth a try at IMPs. I understand they pay a game bonus.

LYNN HARRIS: 4♣. We should be able to play game in one of my three suits.

RICK OLANOFF: 4♣. King-jack-sixth in diamonds is enough for slam.

Maybe the problem isn't with our last bid so much as our first?

ED SHAPIRO: 4♣. I've Michaels'ed myself into this corner. If we're playing the weak-strong treatment of Michaels, I'm supposed to know what my follow-up actions would be, and I don't think I do here. I hope the cue-bid shows this shape and will let partner take things from here. My second choice is to pass. Personally, my "strong" Michaels hands are more distributional; say, six-six.

I sympathize. I do think that starting with 2♣ was correct however, despite the torture chamber it led us to. For the record, North was 2=2=6=3 with the minor-suit jacks, but both majors split badly (spades in fact were five-one), so making any game would be quite a challenge. In total, 21 of 51 respondents changed their call between the two forms of scoring, a new D4MSC record. Final Word this month goes to a very fine end-to-end analysis, and not just because his two calls were mine, too:

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 4♦ (MPs) / 5♦ (IMPs). The main question that we need to answer is "How likely is partner to hold a high diamond honor?" But we must also ask ourselves "How likely is partner to evaluate correctly if we take an invitational action?" Given our 19 HCP, the opponents' opening bid, and the 3♣ advance which typically shows values, partner is unlikely to hold as much as a king. If we bid 4♦ (or 4♠), partner will likely pass. So, it's up to us to decide on a final contract.

Now, as to what partner has, let's be clear: we didn't show or imply diamonds with our double of 3♣. We would double 3♣ with any strong Michaels hand willing to defend, regardless of how our minors are distributed. Partner has diamonds.

How is game opposite 2=1=6=4 with the ♦J? They'll tap dummy at trick one. Partner won't be able to play a trump, so he'll have to play ace, king, and another heart, pitching a club, then ruff a club in dummy. Next, he can try the ♠AKQ to pitch the last club. If all that comes off without a hitch, he still needs to hold the trump losers to two.

At matchpoints, I'll bid 4♦, which is likely to make even in the worst cases. Partner might be inspired to accept the invite with a seven-bagger (or the ♦K). I'm mostly hoping to go plus vs. other tables who declare a major and get tapped out.

At IMPs, I'll gamble on 5♦, hoping partner holds something useful or that the lie of the cards is friendly.

PS -- I think starting with a Michaels 2♣ is a (minor) error. I'd double instead and plan to bid spades later if partner can't bid hearts. I think in general I'm best off trying to get to spades opposite equal majors.

Some bridge problems have no good solution. Thanks to everyone who tried to make sense out of this one. Maybe next April, I'll try posing a Texas Hold-Em problem. See you in May.



*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/>***