

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

NOVEMBER 2018 PROBLEM

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The accursed opponents are interfering in "our" auction again, and this time they have the audacity to do so despite unfavorable vulnerability. Are we going to let them get away with this? Of course not! Do we all agree on what we're going to do to thwart them? Of course not! Which, um, is the whole purpose behind a bidding forum. This month's two-parter produced a solid majority vote for both halves of the problem...and your humble director even agrees with the first half's results. The second, not so much. While we take a look at the penultimate problem of the year, keep in mind that the 2018 finale (and the one that will likely decide the winners of the D4MSC Panelists & Solvers Challenge) is on the website, and it's a nasty bid-pass-double-lead one. Good luck to our participants and Happy Thanksgiving to all!

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

EAST-WEST VULNERABLE

♠-KQ7 ♥-4 ♦-A6432 ♣-AQJ4

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

* - NEGATIVE

DBL. = EXTRA VALUES, NO CLEAR BID;

3NT = TO PLAY; 4♥ = STRONG SPADE RAISE

A. What is your call at matchpoints?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Double	9	22	50
4♣	2	6	40
3♠	1	5	30
4♠	0	3	20
5♣	0	3	20
4♥	0	2	20
Pass	0	0	10

B. What is your call at IMPs?

CALL	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
Double	9	20	50
4♦	2	9	40
3♠	1	5	30
Pass	0	4	30
5♣	0	2	20
4♥	0	1	20
4♠	0	0	10

For many years, the Nebulous Cue Bid (NCB) was a staple of bidding contests, particularly the Bridge World's eminent Master Solvers' Club. Strong hand, competitive auction, no stopper in their suit, no primary support for partner's suit, passing is out of the question? Easy! You'd trot out an NCB and count on your expert partner sitting North to field it with aplomb.

Frankly, this tactic always worked better on paper than in real life. NCB's often put a lot of pressure on partner. When North is fictional, you don't have to suffer the consequences of his follow-up call, nor do you have to worry that, after being on the receiving end of too many NCB's, he'll corner you in the restroom at the next hospitality break and beat you senseless with a bottle of hand soap.

Lately the trend has been away from Nebulous Cue Bids and towards Nebulous Doubles (aka "Cards" Doubles or Action Doubles, if you prefer) when available. Mid-level competitive doubles when the opponents have a likely or known fit aren't for penalty; they're just a bleat at partner to say "This is our deal, but I don't know what to bid. Do something intelligent!" To be fair, these are valuable tools. A double is always the cheapest available call, whereas an NCB often gobbles up more bidding space than we can afford, as it would in this month's problem. Cards Doubles also allow a partnership to assign clear, focused meanings to competitive cue bids. Here, 4♥ is available to show unambiguous spade support plus slam interest, although we're perhaps a trump short for that treatment to do us any good. And, of course, for better or for worse, Nebulous Doubles can always be passed for penalty, whereas Nebulous Cue Bids are passed only out of spite when partner is really ticked off at you and the restroom is out of hand soap.

So, is this the right hand for a not-quite-takeout/not-quite-penalty double? Well, we do have extra values, though just barely. We also have one fewer heart than we'd prefer, in case partner elects to leave it in, plus secondary support for his suit that we haven't yet mentioned. At matchpoints, bleah, I'd double but I wouldn't be thrilled about it. At IMPs, I'd find a different call. I expected a good chunk of the Club to agree with me, but as you see, at either form of scoring, the leading choice was:

RICH ROTHWARP: Double. Caters to a variety of possibilities, including partner's passing. If partner bids four of a minor, I'll bid 4♠.

TOM WEIK: Double. Seems clear. It's flexible, and I certainly have extras. If partner holds three hearts, she knows this is my likely pattern.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Double. Extra values and no clear bid is a good description of my hand. If partner bids 3♠, I will raise. If he bids four of a minor at matchpoints, it depends with whom I'm playing whether I will pass or raise. At IMPs, we will play game in whatever strain partner chooses. If my partner and I were not using this treatment for a double, I'd bid 4♥.

JAY APFELBAUM: Double. Too strong to pass, no good bid.

CRAIG ROBINSON: Double. Denies four spades, implies support for spades and clubs. What could be better? At IMPs, the right bid is usually the right bid; I'm not worried about -730.

Neither are most of our panelists. Maybe I worry too much. My concern is simple: the opponents are trying to contract for nine tricks, vulnerable against not, when I hold 16 points and 3.5 quick tricks. They're going to hold extra points or shape, or both, for this cheekiness. That means my partner cannot be sitting with the World's Fair over there. He probably has some shape too, and if so the most likely type is that he has extra length in spades; maybe five to the jack and about eight points. Doubling may saddle him with a brutal decision, which he'll occasionally get wrong. At pairs, oh well, suck it up partner; it's just one board. At teams, -730 on a part-score deal often means "Sayonara, match." Acknowledging the possibility that partner's spade count might not stop at four:

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: Double. Takeout-oriented, showing extra values. Game in either minor might make with as little as two kings in partner's hand. Double also caters to partner having long spades without the values to bid 2♠.

DANIEL DROZ: Double. This might be the most complex problem of the calendar year. There are a lot of reasonable choices, and for once they mostly look good instead of bad. I intend to start with a double, because it has two huge potential plusses. One, partner could leave it in with a surprising defensive hand (maybe he has ace-third of hearts and a diamond singleton) for +500. Two, partner might rebid 3♠ with a fifth spade; e.g.

♠Jxxxx ♦Axx ♣Qxxx ♣x

...allowing me to raise to a really comfortable spade game.

ED SHAPIRO: Double. I'm not familiar with this treatment, but it seems to describe the hand rather well. If partner bids 3♠, I have an easy raise to game. Partner should not have anything worth near to a game force and five spades, because not bidding 2♠ immediately would be a crime. If partner passes the double at either form of scoring, I'm not concerned. My partners take out takeout doubles unless they have a very good reason not to.

Fair enough. To be honest, I would expect partner to bend over backwards to take out the double at IMPs. At matchpoints, there's nothing wrong with shooting for a magic +200 if you believe game is unlikely. Thus, although he was the only Panelist to double at IMPs but not at matchpoints, maybe our defending Solvers champion has it right with his contrarian view:

STEVE WHITE: 4♣ (MPs) / Double (IMPs). I'd prefer to double at matchpoints if I knew partner would pull, but at this vulnerability, he'll be sorely tempted to sit, and that will too often be wrong. There's some danger that 4♣ will be passed out. At

IMPs, double is a standout. Partner will not pass on a close choice. We're therefore very likely to play in our correct strain (and I will raise whatever he chooses to game.)

Todd Holes also doubled at IMPs alone. Joining me in the vice versa contingent were:

DON DALPE: Double (MPs) / 3♦ (IMPs). I have extras and the best bid is not clear to me, but at IMPs, I choose a call that does not risk 3♥ doubled making. (It does have other risks, however.)

HOWARD WACHTEL: Double (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). I play that double is responsive here, showing the minors. I do have extra values, but at IMPs I would be worried about partner leaving it in, so I choose the more cautious 4♣. 5♣ is an option too, but over 4♣ partner might bid four of a red suit, allowing me to offer 4♠.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: Double (MPs) / Pass (IMPs). At matchpoints, I have to compete, so pass is out. Partner is likely looking at a few hearts, so he already knows I don't have a stack. I've noticed that when I raise my partner's major with short trumps, it only works out about a quarter of the time. So, I have to double, and if we end up -730, that's matchpoint life. At IMPs, I can't risk losing the match on one board.

Everyone else who chose to double stuck with it through thick and thin. Many also chimed in about what they'll do next round if partner takes out the double as expected.

BARRY COHEN, WILLIAM KILMER, MARK KINZER, and MARK BOLOTIN: in tight harmony: Double. Extras and no clear bid -- that's me. This is the best option at all forms of scoring. [Mark B. adds that if partner converts the double for penalties, at least he won't have to stew over his next bid. - NS]

KARL BARTH: Double. Seems clear at matchpoints, because partner can't really pick any call that would make us uncomfortable. At IMPs, I might be hanging partner for making a light negative double, but the fact remains that he did so at the two-level. He should either have shape or decent values. Double is preferable to 4♣ because I do not want to preclude a 3♦ rebid by North on five to an honor.

BARRY PASSER: Double. At this vulnerability, the opponents might have a ten-card fit. We have a fit somewhere too, and I'll let partner bid it.

ANDY MUENZ: Double. This looks to be our deal. Doubling caters to partner having five-plus spades without enough strength to bid them at the two level, or four spades plus a heart stopper, or his just having a second suit to show. The bigger question is what to do next round if partner makes a below-game rebid. I might bid game at IMPs but pass at matchpoints.

BARRY DEHLIN: Double. Partner needs to know that this is our deal even if she has a minimum. Any non-heart strain might be our best spot. Double leaves them all in play while catering to a vulnerable penalty as well. I am passing any rebid by partner at matchpoints but carrying on to game at teams.

KATHY CREVELING: Double. For penalty...if my partner passes, that is.

JEFF RUBEN: Double. "Extra values, no clear bid" is a perfect description of my hand. Partner should have values for his two-level negative double. This keeps 3NT in play.

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: Double. I need to know more about partner's hand. Partner has at least four spades and who knows what else; he's limited only by his initial pass. If he leaves the double in, I am prepared to defend.

JOHN JONES and BILL SCHMIDT, invoking the F-word.: Double. The most flexible call. When I don't know what the best strain is, I like to involve partner. [John will raise 3♦ to 4♦ at both forms of scoring; Bill only at IMPs. - NS]

JONATHAN BRILL: Double. Intended for takeout, but partner is free to pass. 4♣ is a reasonable alternative, but it would take 3♠ out of the picture. Partner should bid spades over the double if he has five or more.

Jonathan raises an important matter of partnership discussion. Is partner obligated to bid 3♦ if he has five or more, even if they are five low with a decent three-card heart holding? If so, then doubling is more attractive. Anyway, if none of the good arguments above sway you, there's always the Socratic approach espoused by:

BOB GRINWIS: Double. By process of elimination. I can't bid 3♦ with only three of them, and I can't bid 3NT with a low singleton heart. I'm not quite strong enough for a 4♥ cue-bid.

Though the double earned a clear majority at both forms of scoring, about two-fifths of the Club chose to do something else. The plurality choice was 4♣, but curiously just two people -- Lynn Harris and Bill Sedlis -- chose 4♣ at both matchpoints and IMPs. Everyone else, me included, liked 4♣ at only one or the other.

RUI MARQUES: 4♥ (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). I don't like 4♥, but at matchpoints I prefer to lie a bit about my strength and play in spades. At IMPs, with too much for 3♠, not really enough for 4♥, and no stopper for 3NT, it looks like I'm left with 4♣.

BILL FOSTER: 4♣ (MPs) / Pass (IMPs). 4♣ says, "I'm good, but I have fewer than four spades. I have both minors -- your call!" At IMPs, I'll deny four spades and leave the decision to partner; hopefully this is forcing. [I wouldn't play it as such. - NS]

WALT BELL: 3♠ (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). Hoping for +140 at matchpoints. At IMPs,...

♦Axxx ♦xx ♦QJx ♦Kxxx

...isn't too much to ask for.

BILL BAUER: 4♠ (MPs) / 4♣ (IMPs). The heart ruffs in 4♠ will be taken in the short trump hand, hopefully allowing declarer to keep control of the trump suit. 4♠ rather than 3♠ to show the extra values. At IMPs, I want to play the safest game and not necessarily the highest-scoring. 4♣ keeps three strains for game in play.

There will always be a few players looking to play in a major at matchpoints come heck or low water, and this problem was no exception. Should it be 3♠ or 4♠?

RICHARD HARTZ, SR.: 3♠. I may be playing in a four-three fit, but at least I will be ruffing hearts in the correct hand. I assume that East-West have some values to compete to the three level at this vulnerability. If partner has a few worthless hearts and extras elsewhere, she should raise to game. Otherwise, 3♠ is our limit.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 4♥ (MPs) / 3♠ (IMPs). I'll be aggressive at matchpoints, but conservative at IMPs because we are not vulnerable.

WALTER MITCHELL: 3♠. With the treatment given for a double, it would not show three spades. Partner needs to be clear that I have support for his suit.

JOHN HEMMER: 3♠ (MPs) / Pass (IMPs). I'll try the Moysian fit at matchpoints. I doubt they can make 4♥. I'll double it if I get the chance.

I happen to think that a Pass here is underappreciated, particularly at matchpoints. Partner still has a turn coming. If we can make nine tricks in spades or ten tricks anywhere else, there's a good chance he'll take some action (and remember, he has a Cards Double available too.) If not, we can defend 3♥ vulnerable, which might be our only available plus. If both sides were red, I suspect we'd have seen more passers. At any rate, if you are going to bid some number of spades, our final panelist to be heard from this month explains why that number ought to be three, not four.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: 3♦ (MPS) / 4♦ (IMPs). I expect to be able to scramble nine tricks in spades, even against a bad trump break. +140 will outscore any lurking +130s. If we are making game in spades, it might not be necessary to bid it because +170 could be a winning score. At IMPs, it could be easier to take eleven tricks in a minor than to take ten in spades. Partner's double does not imply clubs, so 4♣ by me shows extra values. If the auction allows, I'll try 4♠ next.

Just four clubs? That's not enough for:

DAVE WACHSMAN: 5♦. Denies four spades or a heart stopper and conveys that five of a minor should be a reasonable contract. I have a five-loser hand. With a sixth loser, I'd bid only 4♣. At IMPs, I'm even more confident of bidding 5♣, because an unsuccessful double of any heart contract could easily lose a short match.

This must've been a pretty good problem because it set a new D4MSC record: five different respondents changed their minds after sending in their initial answers. Last word this month goes to a Club member who stuck to his guns despite doubts:

DANIEL DROZ (CONT.): Double. ...Something in my head keeps telling me to bid 4♣ instead. I'm not changing my answer, but I am wondering why I have this thought that won't go away.

Not to worry. Partner, who was 6=3=2=2 with the jack-ten-nine-eight of spades and king of diamonds, wasn't sitting for 3♥X anyway. Par was +420 in 4♦, though only a few pairs got to game and even fewer collected +200 against a heart partial.



A quick word about the December problem: you will first be asked for your call in a five-level competitive action. You may choose to bid, pass, or double. If you bid anything, you're done for the month and can go wrap gifts and drink eggnog in whatever order you prefer. If you pass or double, you'll need to answer Part B of the set, which will ask for your opening lead after the auction continues with all passes. Got that?



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/>