

DISTRICT 4 MASTER SOLVERS CLUB

JUNE 2021 PROBLEM

NICK STRAGUZZI, DIRECTOR

There's partner, bravely coming in at the three-level over a first-seat preempt, vulnerable against not, with his LHO yet to speak. ~~Surely, he must have the goods, with both extra strength and length to justify such a risky entrance.~~ (Um, wait, let me check the calendar. It's 2021? Okay, scratch that previous sentence.) Surely partner has 13 cards and at least four diamonds, maybe five to the jack on a good day. Such is modern bridge, particularly at matchpoints. Meanwhile, we're in fourth seat with a rather decent hand, all things considered, and we need to decide how, or even if, to proceed. The fact that we have nothing remotely resembling a standout call is merely a secondary annoyance. Let's see how the Club navigates this mess.

METHODS ARE 2/1 WITH "WALSH"

MATCHPOINTS, NORTH-SOUTH VULNERABLE

♠-KQJ8 ♥-K732 ♦-Q9 ♣-1065

South	West	North	East
	3♣	3♦	Pass

?

4NT = RKCB (1430) FOR ♦ BY AGREEMENT

1. What is your call?

ANSWER	PANEL	SOLVERS	AWARD
3♠	6	8	100
Pass	2	11	90
4♣	2	8	80
4♦	2	5	80
3♥	0	4	70
3NT	0	2	70
4NT	0	2	70
5♦	1	3	70

RICK ROWLAND: 3♠. I hate everything. Too bad I can't double to show the majors.

Bill Bauer also lamented the unavailability of a negative double. I say, sheesh, you guys didn't even try. Maybe the opponents would have accepted it. Anyway, though admittedly not ideal, there's one call that will serve as a willing surrogate:

BOB AND JOANN GLASSON: 4♣. Gives partner room to show a four-card major suit. Partner will often have a six-four hand that is unsuitable for a takeout double. If not, we will play 5♦.

Exactly. Not that I want to tip my hand two paragraphs into the article, but 4♣ is my call too. It implies but does not guarantee diamond support, just game-going values. Partner is expected to bid out his hand naturally. Granted that game is no sure thing, but too bad. We've been preempted, and South has eleven points, all outside of clubs. That's good enough for government work. We have to give up on some outcomes; I choose to give up on 3NT, successful Moysian (four-three) major-suit games, and being able to stop below game when it's right to do so. Kindred souls:

CATHY STRAUSS: 4♣. Limit raise, asking partner to describe her hand more fully. Not perfect with only two-card support, but queen-low is not horrible. If she has a four-card major, she has space to bid it on the way to 5♦.

PAUL AMER: 4♣. Let's look for a major-suit fit and leave open the possibility of a diamond slam. Unfortunately, it means we must bypass 3NT, but I'm not sure how to find that.

MANOJ DEB-ROY: 4♣. Advising partner to choose game in a major or revert to 4♦.

MARK KINZER: 4♣. Too good to pass, no clear direction.

STEPHANIE FINE: 4♣. Cue-bid my strength.

JOE MILLER: 4♣. Responsive.

CHRIS MARLOW: 4♣. I hate these types of hands. I will cue-bid and pass the blame to partner.

I see nothing wrong with that. What are partners for, anyway?

BILL SCHMIDT: 4♣. Planning to pass partner's rebid and hope. I have too much to pass 3♦, and 4♣ is more likely to get partner to bid a major than a raise to 4♦.

To expound on Bill's point: 4♣ will get partner to bid an unambiguously natural 4♥ or 4♠. Over 4♦, he might intend four of a major as a slam try. (Pete Filandro and Tom Weik will have something to say on this subject later.)

Seven other calls attracted support. I suppose I should give their proponents a fair chance to change my mind. Let's start with the cheapest option.

CONNIE GOLDBERG: Pass. Tough problem. I'm glad it's matchpoints, because at IMPs I would feel I had to try to find game, even though I have no clear continuation. My second choice is 3♠, which might get me to 3NT and will probably fail better than 3♥ might. But having no firm conviction, I'm happy to pass.

MICHAEL SHUSTER: Pass. It's matchpoints, so I'll look for any port in a storm. If I knew which non-pass option would work best, I'd do that. At IMPs, I'd bid 3♠, because it's below 3NT and because if I catch a raise, the four-three fit is probably best. Not 3♥, where 4♥ rates to be a disaster unless partner can produce four of them. When choosing between awkward calls, ask yourself how you'd feel if partner raises your suit.

That is advice to remember.

STEPHEN COOPER: Pass. My second choice is 4♣, but all of my values are too slow.

BARRY DEHLIN: Pass. Yes, this feels timid, but I'm not confident that we have *both* a major-suit fit and enough strength to make game. I'd probably swallow my fears at teams.

RICHARD J. HARTZ: Pass. Let's not penalize partner for competing. If North has a hand strong enough for me to consider raising, or bidding a four-card major, he might have doubled.

WILLIAM BAUER III: Pass. My preferred calls weren't available: a negative double and a 3♣ stopper-ask. Thus, I pass. At least it's matchpoints. At IMPs, I would have to think for about an hour before making a call. I might bid 4♦, playing partner for at most one club, one major-suit ace, and six diamonds made solid by my queen.

BOB GRINWIS: Pass. I have too many losers to go on over a simple overcall. 3NT would be a consideration if I had a club stopper, but ♣1095 is not it.

LYNN HARRIS: Pass. Do not see why I should bid now.

JOHN HEMMER: Pass. The only other plausible call is 4♦. As it is matchpoints, I will pass and take the plus.

I don't think passing is a bad option at all. In fact, I think it's better than many of the alternatives. As John notes, you are virtually certain to wind up with a plus score. Plusses are good. Plusses are our friends. I once read a story of one mathematically-minded expert (I vaguely recall it being Billy Eisenberg) who had a favorite wager he'd make for spending money at the Nationals. Before any large pairs game with lots of sections and with boards scored across the field, he'd bet his sucker du jour that there would be no board in which a plus score was a zero or shared zero. He never had any trouble finding a taker. He also almost never lost.

The problem with passing is that you'll play in a minor-suit part score opposite a partner who made a vulnerable three-level overcall, and it's final. Could be right, but it seems a deep position to take. Perhaps my philosophy regarding this sort of overcall is too old fashioned.

BARRY PASSER: Pass. It's this or gamble 3NT. The latter is not as silly as it looks. At favorable vulnerability, opener usually doesn't have his bid. But, since I have no aces and may have to give up a diamond trick to run the suit, I'm not going to chance it. Forget 4♣ - nobody knows what that means!

Neither of our 3NT bidders supplied a comment, so Barry was conscripted involuntarily to carry that flag. 3NT at matchpoints is rarely silly, but here it would seem to require a parlay: we can run diamonds pronto, and the opponents can't (or don't) run clubs first. Bleah.

PETE FILANDRO: 4♦. I play 4♣ as invitational or better with a club control; 4♦ as invitational with no club control. Partner will go on with three aces and a king, even with the "death holding" of two low clubs. She'll also go on with one fewer ace plus a club control. By the way, four of a major now is natural and to play since I am limited.

I'm wary of that structure, because it seems to take away the most convenient way to state, "I have a good hand; I'm just not sure where we ought to play this." A salient point, however, is that if 4♦ is limiting and non-forcing, which is how I would expect

partner to treat it absent an agreement to the contrary, then 4♥ and 4♠ should be natural offers to play, rather than slam tries. I just hope my present CHO agrees.

JAY APFELBAUM: 4♦. Too many high cards to pass, but no aces or club stoppers. No room to see if partner has a club stopper. 4♦ is the best choice by far.

PHILIP FREIDENREICH: 4♦. I choose to support partner rather than bid spades on a four-card suit.

LEONARD HELFGOTT: 4♦. Unless you want to fib and bid your strong four-card spade suit, what alternative do you really have? But, perhaps 3♠ is best. I won't gamble 3NT here.

Incidentally, congratulations to Leonard who is currently serving a stint on the Bridge World's prestigious Master Solvers Club panel.

MARK BOLOTIN: 5♦. Hopefully, partner has at most one club. Six diamonds to the ace-king-jack, a major-suit ace, and a stiff club is a very realistic hand for partner. If partner has a third ace, too, then we missed our slam along with the rest of the field, but partner might have bid more than 3♦ with that hand.

TOM WEIK: 5♦. Good problem. My first impulse was to cue-bid 4♣, thinking that if partner holds a major, he can bid it. The problem, of course, is that 4♥ or 4♠ might be intended as control-bids. Plus, if he has six diamonds and four of a major, or the like, he could have doubled originally. So, I will bid 5♦ and hope that if he loaded with controls, he'll bid six.

Speaking of the Bridge World's MSC, panelists there routinely double 3♣ with the sort of hand Tom describes: six diamonds, four of a major, solid extra values. The ubiquitous comment is "Partner doesn't always jump in (the other major)!" Whether or not that plays a role in our problem this month, or if it pertains to how his 4♥/4♠ should be interpreted over our 4♣ advance, is left to the reader to decide.

That brings us to the Club members who advanced in a four-card major, because nothing else seemed better. Speaking for all of them, 3♥ and 3♠ bidders alike:

STEVE WHITE: 3♠. Sorting cards into suits correctly is tough.

Alas, that excuse doesn't fetch in our current all-online tournament world. I look forward to returning to face-to-face play, where my presbyopia can pull its full weight. (Barry Cohen, before every important tournament he and I have ever played: "For God's sake, Nick, don't forget your glasses!") Anyway, the hearts are cheaper, but the spades are much stronger. Which will it be?

RUI MARQUES: 3♥. I should have five hearts, but I'll take my chances in order to be better positioned to land in the right suit at the right level. If I advance 4♣, I would not know what to do over four of a major. If I advance 4♦, I bury the majors.

JIM EAGLETON: 3♥. I'm not excited about finding a four-four fit in the majors with a likely four-one split. If so, hopefully partner is playing in spades.

BILL FOSTER: 3♥. My regular partner and I play Fishbein [in which doubles of preempts are penalty oriented - Ed.], so 3♦ is takeout and does not promise diamonds but does promise at least an opening hand. Fishbein is very old and not played by many, but we consider it effective against opening three-bids.

Fishbein has never completely gone away, because the weaker that preempts get, the more attractive it is. Anyway, by a seven-to-two ratio, those who decided to get the majors into play chose to start with:

BRUCE SCHWAIDELSON: 3♠. I looked for the Abstain card but couldn't find it -- I thought it would be next to the Alert card. Anyway, there is no great call. The hand is clearly too good to pass, but our no-ace, no-five-card-suit situation leaves a guess. I am not going to venture beyond 3NT yet, so I'm going to use the flexible option of 3♠. If partner finds a 3NT rebid, whoopee!

ANDY MUENZ: 3♠. I don't like the idea of raising on a doubleton and having no semblance of a stopper eliminates 3NT. That leaves three of a major, and there are two reasons to choose spades over hearts. If partner has a club stopper, then based on our spade holding, it's more likely North will need us to provide a spade stopper for 3NT. Also, if partner raises on three, spades is the suit where ruffs in dummy are less likely to weaken our combined trump holding.

KARL BARTH: 3♠. This hand feels too helpful to let the bidding die. The only other choice I see is 4♦. I'm rooting for a good four-three fit, but if partner retreats to diamonds, my hand will not be a disappointment.

Bruce, Andy, and Karl all also lamented the inability to use the "Sorry partner, had a club in with my spades" excuse. Great minds think alike. Sinister ones, too.

RICH ROTHWART: 3♠. This could work out badly, but partner should have a good hand. 3NT from partner's side, or 4♠ on a four-three fit, might do very well. Pass is a close second choice.

DOUGLAS DYE: 3♠. Cheapest descriptive call. Leaves 3NT available if partner has a club stop. A Moysian spade fit might play very well in a pinch.

ED SHAPIRO: 3♠. Forcing, as is any below-game bid after a three-level overcall. At least if partner bids 3NT or 4♠, we might have a play for it. I don't know how we can get to hearts without committing a cue-bid in an unfamiliar partnership. Bidding 3NT is not my style, but passing is possible, as we tend to be very aggressive over preempts with shortness in their suit.

CHRIS KAUFMAN: 3♠. I think I have to try this. It's our best chance to get to 3NT or (gulp) 4♠, with 5♦ as a fallback. I hate to skip by the hearts, because partner could have four, but I can't risk him raising to 4♥ on only three; my weak hearts won't hold up.

DANIEL DROZ: 3♠. A classic situation where anything could be right. For me, the hand is not quite worth a game-force opposite many three-over-three overcalls I've encountered. It could be worth overbidding anyway to ensure reaching the right strain, via 4♣, but there's no guarantee partner will trot out his four-card major over it, and we will have lost 3NT forever. Raising diamonds could work, but I want to give a major a chance. 3♠ probably excludes hearts as a final strain, but over preempts, you can't have everything.

BARRY COHEN: 3♠. With my near opener, I'm compelled to find a bid. The best choice appears to be this. Partner may now be able to bid 3NT. The obvious downside is that he might raise with three spades, but we might still have a play.

Okay, time out. First, if partner rebids 3NT, is it really so clear to sit for it? With five or six diamonds and a club stopper, he might have overcalled 2NT if his strength was in range. A delayed 3NT would suggest to me that partner isn't all that eager to play in notrump, either because his hand is minimum or because his stopper is not terribly robust -- stiff ace, or maybe king-doubleton. If the latter, East is not blithely leading a club from ace-queen-jack-seventh in this day and age. That went out with Charles Goren; computer simulations all over the Internet have demonstrated conclusively how much of a long-term loser it is. I think it comes down to what Barry Passer opined earlier: North will often need to take nine fast tricks, and you're contributing precisely zero aces to the cause. (Curiously, though, the critical card in your hand might be that unassuming ♣10, if East has ace-queen-nine-seventh, North king-doubleton, and West jack-doubleton.)

Second, while I agree that 4♠ rates to play just swell on a seven-card fit, who says it's going to be even seven cards? There are a lot of North hands, a scary lot, in which partner will raise on a doubleton. After all, he's not going to suspect you busted out a four-bagger. Visualize him with ace-low of spades, six average (in context) diamonds, and two or fewer clubs lacking a stopper. Indeed:

ED SHAPIRO (cont.): 3♠. ...It wouldn't be shocking to find this problem is part of a poll on logical alternatives, perhaps focusing on a later action.

It's not, it's from a BBO worldwide matchpoint tournament. But, yeah, imagine that some put-upon South squirmed for 45 seconds before pulling out his 3♠ card as if it were a dead mouse. If North had a good 2=4=5=2 hand or the like and found a winning 4♦ (or 4♥) rebid, you couldn't blame the opponents for calling the director.

From the "What, Me Worry?" Dept.:

JOHN JONES: 3♠. It's amazing that we have had [only one murder](#) in bridge. I'd love to off West for that 3♣ bid. My first reaction was to pass, but I have too much. My spades are almost as good as a five-bagger, and if we end up in 4♠ on a four-two fit, it's not necessarily a disaster. Consider partner holding:

♠Ax ♥Qxxx ♦AKJxxx ♣x

...If spades split four-three, we might make eleven tricks.

100 points for the answer, zero for the prediction:

DAVE WACHSMAN: 3♠. I'm sure I will be the only 3♠ bidder, as most respondents are likely to choose a 4♣ cue-bid. My logic is to show spade values to enable partner to bid 3NT when he lacks the ♠A but has stoppers in hearts and clubs. I will raise 4♦ to five.

There aren't many months where the top score goes to a call that attracted under 25% of the vote, but this is one. I do understand the appeal of 3♠, particularly since a four-three (or, even a four-two) spade fit might play brilliantly if partner turns up with short clubs, running diamonds, and the all-important ♠A. I concede that finding a magic Moysian fit will be next to impossible if we start with 4♣ instead. I just hope that our 3♠ adherents concede that winding up in a contract where trumps split six-zero (or even worse) will also be next to impossible over 4♣. You pays your money and you takes your chances.

Last Word this month goes to:

WILLIAM T. KILMER: 5 ♦. There's a lot to say about what to do and not to do here, but in short: preempts work.

Yes, they do. In this case, a modest 3 ♣ struck gold. I hope we land on our feet. May West's computer crash during the play.



Some very sad news to report: Six-time national champion Richie Coren, who joined the D4MSC as a Panelist a few months ago, passed away in March. My condolences to his family and to his many, many friends across the bridge community.



There is now a link on the entry website to the semi-sort-of-official D4MSC Convention Card, which is maintained on BridgeWinners.com. For now, it's just a skeleton, but over time we'll collectively add to it. Let me know your thoughts.



As always at the end of the June article, let's take a midseason look at how the 2021 D4MSC Challenge races are shaping up. Scores are a bit on the low side this year, as we've had a few very difficult problems.

Among Panelists, three people have a perfect 400 after their two lowest scores are dropped: Rich Rothwarf, Bruce Schwaidelson, and Ed Shapiro. However, Rich has the inside track, as he's posted six 100's thus far. No other panelist has as many as five. Douglas Dye, Connie Goldberg, and Rick Rowland are all at 390.

Four Solvers have 400 official points so far: Mark Bolotin, Barry Cohen, Mark Kinzer, and Andy Muenz. Only Andy has a 100 in reserve. Stephen Cooper, Samuel Dorfman, Daniel Droz, and Steve White all have 390, and there are 16 more Solvers with 380 or 370 who are still firmly in the running.



*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/>*