

Bidding in Competition - Part 2

Last month, we started our series on bidding in competition with a focus on low level bidding. This week we'll continue the discussion by focusing on mid-level decisions. In this case, we're focusing on how we continue the bidding after a sequence like this:

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♥	2♠

At this early stage of the bidding, we can have a wide range of hands that we would like to convey. Ideally, we would like to have a bid to uniquely describe each of these six options:

1. A hand with no extras: 12-14 points, 5♥
2. A little extra, so willing to compete for a part score: 15-16 points or 6♥+
3. A hand with enough extras to invite game: 17-18 points
4. A hand with enough extras to force to game: 19-21 points
5. A hand with slam aspirations: 19-21 points, extra length in ♥ and some shortness
6. A hand with a desire to penalize the opponents: not enough points for game, strength in ♠

Unfortunately, we often won't be able to describe all of these different options. So, we will often need to lump together different types of hands and then use subsequent bids to clarify which type we have. However, before we can do that, we need to understand a few basics of the auction so far. Specifically, the following four factors will impact the meaning of our next bid:

- Are we in a forcing auction? This could either be to game or for one round.
- Will partner get another bid if we Pass?
- Has partner limited her hand?
- Was the opponent's bid constructive or preemptive?

The first three items really go together here. So, let's consider a few bidding sequences:

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♥	2♠

North	East	South	West
1♥	1♠	2♣	Pass

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♣	2♦

North	East	South	West
		Pass	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♣	Pass

In the first auction, partner's 2♥ response limited her hand. So, we can't be in a forcing auction. While partner will definitely get another bid, we would want to Pass with the #1 hand and make some forward progress with the other types. In the second auction, partner is 1. an unpassed hand and 2. has bid a new suit. That makes her 2♣ 100% forcing. That same logic applies to the third sequence, too. But, notice the difference: in the third hand, West's bid guarantees that our partner will get another bid. So, that allows us to again use Pass to indicate the #1 hand. It also allows us to use Double, but we'll talk about that more later. With the second hand, partner probably won't get another bid if we Pass. Since her bid was forcing, that takes Pass out of consideration. It also means that we won't be able to distinguish between hand types #1 and #2: both will bid 2♥ in this auction. Finally, let's look at the fourth auction. On this one, partner initially passed. That means her 2♣ here is NOT forcing. In fact, we know quite a bit about her hand:

1. she has 10-12 points and 5+♣
2. she has 2 or fewer♥, otherwise she would have supported them
3. she likely doesn't have 4+♦, or she would have doubled instead
4. she either has shortness in♦ or doesn't have a♠ stopper since she didn't bid NT

Since you know all this about your partner's hand, you're in a much better position to drive to the right contract, which can include Passing. In the bridge literature, they describe this as being the **captain** of the hand.

Finally, the most common occurrence of hand type #6 is when the opponents have preempted your constructive auction. The bidding might look something like this:

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♥	3♠

If North has one of the strong hands (i.e. #3, 4 and 5), he can decide to move towards game on his own. Yes, #3 is a bit risky, but such is life when the opponents preempt. But, what if we don't have that hand? Then, we want to have the ability to punish the opponents for their impudence. That means we need to make a Double for penalty here.

For the rest of our discussion today, we're going to assume the following bidding sequence:

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♥	2♠

South's bid has limited her hand, which means we're the captain here. That also means we know what to do with hand type #1: just Pass. But, what about all the other types of hands we could have? Let's go through some of our possible bids.

3♣ / 3♦

You are usually going to use these bids with hand type #3: game invitational values. The exact meaning of the suit you pick will depend on your system. There are several options:

1. Second suit: I have 3+ in this suit
2. Help suit: I have 3+ in this suit, but they're not great (e.g. Qxx)
3. Short suit: I have 2 or fewer in this suit

You're free to pick whichever one you prefer: I usually prefer second suit. But, whichever version you play, you expect partner to bid game with a good hand for their 2♥: close to 9 points, matching length or strength, an extra trump. Without any of those, they just retreat to the part score (i.e. 3♥).

Note: If there is only one bid below your part score (e.g. West bids 3♣ instead of 2♠), then that intervening bid (i.e. 3♦) becomes a generic game invite. In that case, the bid says nothing about ♦. When there is no bid available (e.g. West bids 3♦ instead of 2♠), many partnerships play **Maximal Doubles**. Since this bid is very easy to forget (e.g. it applies if West bids 3♦, but not 2♠ or 3♣), you may want to wait on this convention. If you do decide to play it, it is alertable.

3♥

Since we've taken away hand type #3, we are free to use this bid for hand type #2. As a result, South is NOT expected to take any action over this bid regardless of how strong her hand is. The

only time she might bid is if East raises partner to 3 ♠. Even then, her 4 ♥ would be more of a preempt than a serious game try.

3 ♠

At this point, we're forcing to game, so we're talking hand types #4 and 5. Most partnerships play this as an invitation for South to bid 3 NT with a half a stopper or better (e.g. Qx or Jxx) in ♠. If South has that, she bids 3 NT. If she doesn't, then she retreats to 4 ♥. She can also retreat there if she has shortness in one of the minors. Since South only needs a half a stopper, North must also have something in ♠ for this bid. If North has really strong ♠, then he should bid...

3 NT

This is offering a second place to play. In many cases, this will end the auction, so it should only be done with hand type #4. It also suggests 1, and preferably 2, stoppers in ♠. North should also be relatively balanced and only have exactly 5 ♥: with more than that, you'll generally be better off ♥. This is only a suggestion: South can pull to 4 ♥ with the right hand, such as extra trumps. But, it is NOT an invitation to slam.

4 ♣ / 4 ♦

These bids also force to game. But, since we've bypassed 3 NT, they should only be used with hand type #5. Specifically, these bids show a **control** in the bid suit and slam interest. Without slam interest, just bid the game. (Note: This concept is called **fast arrival**.) To have a control, you don't expect to lose the first two tricks in that suit. So, you might have Axx or Kxx in the suit. You might also have a singleton or void in that suit. The goal is to avoid getting to slam when the opponents can cash the first two tricks and set you.

4 ♥

Like it's part score brethren, a direct bid of 4 ♥ shows a game going hand, with no interest in going further. Again, South is expected to Pass unless the opponents continue on to 4 ♠.

Quick Quiz

In which of these auctions would Pass specifically show hand type #1?

1.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♥ 3♣

Answer: Yes. With hand types #2 you would bid 3♥.

2.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♥ 3♠

Answer: No. If you bid on, you're forcing to game. So, you're forced to pass with both hand types #1 and #2. The power of preempts!

3.

North East South West

1♥ 1♠ 2♠ Pass

Answer: NO! 2♠ is a limit+ raise in your ♥ (see last month's lesson). That makes it 100% forcing. Pass tells partner: "I would like to play with someone else next week!"

4.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2NT¹ 3♣

¹Jacoby 2NT

Answer: Yes. Partner's Jacoby 2NT bid is forcing to game, but that DOESN'T mean we need to bid here. Opponent's interference ensures that our pass won't end the auction. So, use the more flexible Pass, rather than the 4♥ you would have bid without it, to show hand type #1. Maybe partner wants to double the interloper. Maybe she wants to investigate slam and can now do that below game. Maybe she'll jump to 4♥ herself. One thing we know she won't do: Pass.

5.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♣¹ 2♦

¹2/1 Game Force

Answer: Yes. Same idea as #4: partner's forcing bid doesn't mean we HAVE to bid here.

On each of these hands, the bidding has started like this:

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♥ 3♣

What is your bid with each of the following North hands?

a.

♠ 10 4

♥ 10 9 8 7 6 5

♦ K Q

♣ A K J

Answer: 3♥. Your ♣ are strong enough to think you're going to set this, so Double is out. You're not strong enough to invite game. But, the 6th ♥ is enough to compete to 3♥.

b.

♠ A 7

♥ Q 8 7 6 5

♦ 10 4

♣ A K J 10

Answer: Double! This is NOT takeout, its penalty since you've agreed on ♥. Looking just at your hand, you expect to take 4 ♣ and 1 ♠ trick, which would be a 1 trick set. You might even be able to establish some ♥ tricks to set them even more. On the other hand, it's not clear that you'll even be able to make 3♥ open partner's limited hand.

c.

♠ A 7 4

♥ K 10 7 6 5

♦ 4

♣ A K J 10

Answer: 3♦ - game invitational. Your hand is quite strong enough to force to game, but it's definitely worth investigation. The only bid available to do that is 3♦. Note: Second choice would be Double. The reason it's lower is that if you can set them 2 tricks in 3♣x, then partner will likely take you to game, which scores better when you make.

d.

♠ A K 4

♥ K Q 7 6 5

♦ 4

♣ A K J 10

Answer: 4♣. This is definitely hand type #5: if partner has a red Ace and the Q♠, not totally out of the question for her 2♥ bid, then you'll have a play for 6♥! Bring partner into the discussion by cue bidding your ♣ control. Note: DON'T show your ♦ control! Bid your controls up the line. Specifically, a 4♦ bid here would deny a ♣ control. That's not the case, so bid 4♣.

e.

♠ A 7 4

♥ K Q 7 6 5

♦ K 4 2

♣ A K

Answer: 3NT. You have enough to force to game, but which one? Bring partner into the decision by bidding 3NT. That tells partner you have 19+ points (check), only 5♥ (check) and stoppers in opponent's ♣ suit (check-check). This may not end the auction: partner can pull to 4♥ with unexpected length in another suit (e.g. 4+♥, void in ♦). Partner SHOULDN'T pull with shortness in opponent's ♣ suit since we've said we've got that suit taken care of.