

## Bidding in Competition - Part 3

This week we're finishing our series on bidding in competition with a focus on game level decisions. In this case, we're focusing on bidding decisions after a sequence like this:

North	East	South	West
1♥	Pass	2♥	2♠
4♥		4♠	

At this late stage of the bidding, we've pretty well described our hand. So, now we're focusing on deciding between a few options:

1. Bidding on
2. Letting the opponents play their contract
3. Doubling opponent's contract
4. Letting partner decide what to do

Before we can make this decision, there are a couple of key factors we need to consider

- Are we bidding to make our contract or are we just preempting?
- Were we in a forcing auction?
- Will our next bid take us above game?
- Are we in the direct or pass out seat?

How we answer these questions will affect both what bids we have available. So, let's apply this process to the above bidding sequences:

### Are we bidding to make our contract?

South has made a limited bid: 6-9 points, 3+♥. Combined with the fact that North opened the bidding, the partnership has at least 18 points between them. As a result, there is no reason to preempt. So, his 4♥ bid is to play: typically, 19+ points. By that same rationale, East - West can't have more than 15 points between them. So, East's 4♠ bid is preemptive: she may have 5+♠ and 0 (!) points.

### Were we in a forcing auction?

North - South had already reached game, so there was no force on. Compare that to this auction:

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2NT<sup>1</sup> 3♠

<sup>1</sup>Alertable

South's 2NT bid was Jacoby: opening hand and 4+♥. So, it is 100% forceable to game. Just because West gets frisky doesn't mean our previous bids change their meaning. It just gives us new options! But, more on that later.

### Will our next bid take us above game?

In the first auction, South will have to bid at the 5 level if she wishes to compete. In the second auction, North has several bids, including 3NT and 4♥, at or below game. As a result, South needs a solid reason to bid on (e.g. a void in ♠, a really good 9 points, an extra trump) in the first auction. But, North can bid on with ANY hand on the second auction.

### Are we in the direct or pass out seat?

In both of these auctions, the bidder is in the direct seat. So, if they pass, their partner will still get a bid. This has important ramifications for the type and meaning of certain bids.

Clearly, these items aren't independent. For example, if your side is preempting, then there is no such thing as a forcing bid by either partner! Even so, it can be useful to go through the full list just to get used to the thought process. Once we've got those answers, we're ready to evaluate our options. So, let's start with the easy case: when our side is preempting. In that case, there are only a few things you can do:

1. Extend the preempt - in this case, the bidder just raises to the next available level (e.g. 5♠ on the first auction, 4♠ on the second). This should be done more on length (i.e. extra trumps, shortness in opponent's suit) than on strength, especially Queens and Jacks. Remember, you're expecting to go down when you preempt: the right length will help limit the damage. Also, you should only preempt once. For example, in the first auction, West made a regular overcall. So, she should feel free to bid 5♠ with the right hand. On the other hand, East's 4♠ was a preemptive bid. If he was willing to go to 5♠, then he should have done it right away! Doing otherwise just gives the opponents more time to communicate.

2. Double the opponents - this is 100% penalty: do NOT take this out! Take the first auction. If South continues the bidding with a 5♥ bid, we want West to be able to double for penalty in the unlikely situation that he's holding AK♥ and A♣. Both partners should remember that East could have 0 points, so West needs to be able to set the contract himself. Because of the big fit, West should also be hesitant to count on even 1 trick in their agreed upon suit.
3. Everything else - Pass. There are some cases where you want partner to lead a suit your void in, but there are too many conditions (e.g. one partner has an outside void and trump, the other partner's will be on lead) for us to worry about that situation in this series.

So, now let's turn to the more challenging case: when those pesky opponents interfere with our nice, tidy game auction. First, a key rule here that will affect our bidding: we don't let preempts play undoubled! That means in both of these auctions, either we keep bidding or they get doubled. If we bid to game expecting to make, then we're expecting to score at least +400, maybe +600 if we're vulnerable. If we let the opponents play undoubled, they've likely already won the hand! But Dan, what if I had a really weak opening hand? Then, don't open it next time. But, this time you did, so make sure they get doubled. Otherwise, you'll put a great strain on your partnership. With that background, let's turn to our options when we're in a forcing auction.

## Double

This is the easiest: it says I think we're going to score better on defense than offense. The key here is scoring, not setting: they preempted, so even they expect to go down! It's all about getting the best score. That means, if you're at good vulnerability (i.e. you're not Vul, they are Vul), you think it's more likely they go down 2 (for +500 for you) than you make your contract (for +400). If the vulnerability is reversed, then you're betting that they're likely to go down 4 (!) or more tricks. Paradoxically, this should mean that you make this bid with STRONGER hands when you can still bid game. To see why, consider the two previous bidding sequences. In the second sequence, we need to hold the opponents to only 5 - 7 tricks. That's unlikely if we have a bare 12 points. On the other hand, if South has a bare 6 points and 2♠, there's a solid chance that North - South can't make 11 tricks. So, South should double.

There are a few other things to note about this bid. First, as the above discussion points out, this is NOT a bid about strength in the opponent's suit. Instead, it's just a general belief that you're better off defending based on having the majority of the points in the deck. Second, this is a suggestion, not a command. If partner has the right hand (e.g. interest in slam), then he can reopen the bidding. Third, as a result, this bid suggests either exactly 2 of opponent's trump or wasted values in that suit. With a singleton or void in opponent's suit, you're typically better off on offense. With 3+ of that suit, partner's very likely to have a singleton or void. So, you should only

double if you have wasted values for offense in that suit (e.g. ♠ KJx in either auction). Finally, since this bid will typically be passed out, it shows no interest in slam.

### Pass

This is the one that advancing players often get wrong. In the direct seat of a forcing auction, this is a non-committal bid. So, in either of the auctions above, it tells partner: I don't know if we should play offense or defense, so you decide. For the first auction, you would make this bid with something like: ♠ Jx ♥ QJx ♦ Kxxx ♣ Jxxx. You're towards the top of your range, which is good for either. But, the flat shape and wastage in ♠ doesn't scream 11 tricks. So, let partner decide. If you are in the pass out seat, then this bid is NOT available! Partner's pass gave you the baton, don't make her regret it.

Two final notes here. First, this Pass is NOT alertable even though its forcing: it's just good partner bridge. Second, make sure you are in a forcing auction before you make a "forcing" pass. Consider this auction:

North	East	South	West
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥	2 ♠
3 ♥		4 ♠	

This is a very similar auction to the first one. The only difference is that North bids only 3 ♥, not 4 ♥, on his second turn. However, that makes a HUGE difference. In the first auction, North has freely bid game opposite a limited hand. That suggests a lot of extra strength. But, on this second one, his 3 ♥ is just competing for a part score. He can't know that East is going to jump to game behind him. So, he just has a little but extra. East may even be bidding expecting to make! So, in this auction, a Pass by South will likely end the auction.

### Cue bid a new suit

You've already agreed on a suit. So, the only reason to introduce a new suit is three fold. First, it shows an interest in slam. If you don't have slam interest, just raise to the next level without giving the opponents any additional information. Second, it says you're not worried about losing the first two tricks in opponent's suit. So, you could have a singleton or void. You could have the Ace or King. You could have 4 of them, which means partner is short in that suit. (Note: In this final case, you'll also want to have extra trump length to running into issues drawing trump later in the hand.) Third, whenever possible, this indicates first or second round control in the suit bid. Sometimes you don't have a choice. For example, if the opponents are bidding ♣ instead of ♠ on the first sequence then your only available cue bid will be 5 ♦. But, that is a rather rare exception.

### **Raise the trump suit**

This is more of a "none of the above" bid. Specifically, it says:

1. I don't think we should be playing defense
2. I think we're going to make this bid
3. I don't have any reason to think we're going to make slam

So, in most cases, this bid ends the auction. If the opponents are silly enough to keep bidding, don't be goaded into going to slam. Just double them and collect your telephone number!

### Quick Quiz

In which of these auctions is **Pass** a valid, forcing bid?

1.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♥ 4♣

Answer: No. South's bid is only a limit raise, so we're not in a forcing auction.

2.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♥ 4♣

4♥ 5♣

Answer: Yes. After West's preempt, North freely bid game. So, Pass by South would be forcing.

(Note: East is just continuing West's preempt: he is NOT bidding to make.)

3.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2♥ 4♣

4♥ 5♣ Pass Pass

Answer: No. South's Pass was forcing (see #2). If North passes here, South gets to find a new partner!

4.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2NT 4♣

Answer: Yes. South's bid was Jacoby 2NT (i.e. a game forcing ♥ raise). So, Pass by North would be 100% forcing here.

5.

North East South West

1♥ Pass 4♥ 5♣

Answer: No. South's bid was preemptive: 5+♥ and 0 - 6 points. So, Pass by North just says "Good job partner!"

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

North East South West

1♥ Pass 2 NT 4♣

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: 4♥. You're ♣ are not strong enough to ensure you can set the contract, so Double is out. Given you're extra trump length, you have a strong preference for offense. Finally, your lack of extras suggests this signoff bid.

b.

♠ A 7

♥ Q 8 7 6 5

♦ 10 4

♣ A K J 10

Answer: Double. You're expecting 5 tricks in the black suits since you're sitting behind South. You don't have enough to push for slam, so settle for punishing the pesky opponents!

c.

♠ A 7 4

♥ K 10 7 6 5

♦ 4

♣ A K J 10

Answer: 4♦. The singleton ♦ makes this hand worth a slam try. You can do that by bidding 4♦, which shows slam interest and first or second round control in ♦. Sounds like exactly what you have here.

d.

♠ A K 4

♥ K Q 7 6 5

♦ 4

♣ A K J 10

Answer: 4NT. All you need to know from partner is how many red Aces she has. If she's got 1, you'll stop in 6. With 2, you should confidently bid 7. With the highly unlikely 0, you'll stop in 5.

e.

♠ A 7 4

♥ K Q 7 6 5

♦ Q 4 2

♣ A K

Answer: 4♠. You've got enough to look, but not insist, on slam here opposite partner's opening hand. This bid tells you're partner multiple things about your hand:

1. I have slam interest - check!
2. I don't have first or second round control in ♦ since I bypassed 4♦ - check!
3. I DO have first, and probably second, round control in ♣, otherwise I COULDN'T have slam interest - check!
4. I have first round control in ♠ - check!