

# Was that Bid Forcing? - Part 1

One of the things that many advancing players struggle with is identifying forcing bids. The toughest part is that which bids are forcing and which aren't depends both on your system (e.g. 2/1 and Standard American have slightly different forcing bids) and the bidding context. So, in today's lesson we'll try and demystify some of the confusion.

The first thing to note is that there is really a scale of "forcing" auctions.

1. Forcing to game
2. Forcing for one round
3. Expected to bid
4. Invitational
5. Expected to pass

When we're talking about deciding whether a bid is forcing or not, we're usually trying to decide between #2 and #4. However, it can be useful to understand the other types of auctions to remove them from consideration.

## Forcing to Game

We talked about this in our recent series on **Bidding in Competition**. In each of these auctions, the partnership is committed to game when playing 2/1:

North South

1♠ 2♣

1♥ 2NT

2♣ 2♠

As we discussed last month, there are only two options when you in one of these sequences: 1. You bid until you reach game or 2. You double the opponents bid. As such, ALL bids by the partnership after any of these starts are designed to find the best game contract and/or investigate for slam.

## Expected to Bid

This type of bid usually occurs when partner bids a suit they DON'T have. Each of these auctions is an example:

East South

1♠ Double

1♠ 2♠

With the takeout double (first auction), partner is saying she has an opening hand and shortness in ♠. In the second, she's bidding Michael's to show 5+♥ and 5+ in an unknown minor. In both cases, she wants us to bid one of her suit. So, why aren't these bids in category #2? Don't we have to bid here? In almost every case, you will oblige partner by bidding your best matching suit. However, there will be that rare exception. Consider the hand below:

♠ A K Q J 10 7 6 5

♥ 10 9

♦ 7 2

♣ 3

In any contract other than ♠, your hand is worth ZERO tricks! (Note: Your 8 plus East's presumed 5 means that BOTH partner and West should be void in ♠. So, there is no way for South to get to your hand!) On the other hand, in a ♠ contract, your trump holding is strong enough to draw East's trump. So, your hand is worth EIGHT tricks! Given that difference, your best bid with this wacky freak of a hand is Pass on both of these auctions.

### Expected to Pass

This type of bid comes up when partner is showing a minimum hand. Consider each of these auctions

North South

1♠ 4♠

North South

1♥ 2NT

4♥

In the first auction, South is showing a very weak hand: 5+♠ and 0 - 6 points. In the second, North's response to his partner's Jacoby 2NT bid shows a minimum opener. In both cases, there is no expectation that the bidding will continue. That doesn't mean the auction is over (e.g. South might have enough on the second auction to investigate slam) just that there is no force involved.

Now that we have those out of the way, we can turn to the interesting cases: forcing for one round versus invitational. Rather than memorizing a whole bunch of "rules" like "New suit by an unpassed hand is forcing.", I find it's better to go back to the basics of what bidding is about. Whatever system you play, its goals are simple: 1. Decide if we belong in a partial, game or slam contract and 2. Decide if we have 8+ cards in a major between the two hands. In most cases where there is some ambiguity about forcing or not, we are deciding between a game and a partial. (Note: If we're looking for slam, someone has probably already introduced a game forcing bid.) This leads to our first two rules:

1. Based on the auction, if partner's best hand and our worst hand is enough for game, then we need to bid.
2. If we've agreed on a major, then any other trump suit (i.e. not NT) is forcing.

Let's see how to apply these rules to a couple of auctions:

North South

2♣ ?

North has 22+ points. But, he could have as many as 37, which would be more than enough for game. So, this bid is 100% forcing.

North South

1♥ ?

By opening 1♥, North has limited his hand to 21 points. With more than that, he would have opened 2♣ (see above). That's not enough for game, so no force here. So, if South bids here, it shows points, NOT a dislike of ♥. Remember that the next time you're holding this "magical" hand:

♠ 7 6 5 3 2

♥ Void

♦ 10 9 8 7

♣ Q J 7 4

OK, super easy so far. So, let's kick things up a little here:

North South

1♦ 1♥

2♠ ?

Again, North didn't open 2♣, so he's limited to 21 points. His 2♠ bid, which is a reverse, did nothing to change that upper end. But, what about South? As we discussed above, since North's 1♦ bid wasn't forcing, South needs something to bid. In particular, her 1♥ shows 5+ points. Given that, South is forced to bid here since 21 + 5 is enough for game. (Note: The same logic would apply if South had bid 3♣ instead.)

Given that logic, now consider this auction:

North South

1♦ 1♥

1♠ ?

I recommend that you treat this auction as NOT forcing! Wait, what? That's a new suit by an unpassed hand?! Yes, but what is North's upper range? If he had 17+, he would have jump shifted. So, he has no more than 16 points. That, plus South's 5+, is nowhere near enough to force the bidding. To be fair, South will almost always bid in this situation. But, as we saw earlier, that doesn't mean this bid is forcing. Consider this hand:

♠ 7 6 5

♥ A J 7 6 2

♦ 10 9

♣ J 7 4

Your side may not even have the majority of the points here! Clearly, you don't have enough for game. So, why are you going to flail around to try and find something "better"? Who knows, West might even take you guys off the hook by bidding a balancing 2♣.

Now, let's see how finding a major suit fit impacts the bidding. Consider these three auctions:

North South

1♥ 2♥

2♠ ?

North South

1♥ 2♥

2NT ?

North South

1♥ 1♠

2♠ 3♣

?

In the first two hands, South's 2♥ confirms 8+♥: 5+ for North and 3+ for South. On the third hand, North's 2♠ does the same, although this time its 4+ for South and 4+ for North. As a result, North's 2♠ on the first hand and South's 3♣ on the last are game invites. You and your partner can decide how to play these (e.g. help suit, short suit), but they are game tries and so are 100% forcing.

North's 2NT, on the other hand, is not a new trump suit in the second auction. Instead, it's an offer of a second possible contract. Since South's 2♥ could be on as few as 5 points, this bid shows a flat 18 - 19 points. That's the same thing it would have shown if North had 1♠ bid instead. As a result, this bid is NOT forcing just like it wouldn't have been in this auction:

North South

1♥ 1♠

2NT ?

### Quick Quiz

In each of these auctions, identify which bids, if any, are forcing.

1.

North South

1♥ 2♥

3♥ 4♥

**Answer:** There were NO forcing bids in this auction

- A. 1♥ by North puts his range from 12 - 21; South's is 0+; 21 (bidder's max) plus 0 (partner's min) is not enough for game
- B. 2♥ by South puts her range from 6 - 10; North's is still 12 - 21; 10 + 12 = 22 isn't enough
- C. 3♥ by North puts her range from 16 - 18 (with 19+ he goes to 4♥); South's is 6 - 10; 18 + 6 = 24 isn't enough
- D. Just a type #5 bid

2.

North South

1♥ 2NT

3♥ 4♥

**Answer:** South's 2NT was the only forcing bid. Since that bid created a game force, North's 3♥ is a type #1 bid, not #2: South will keep bidding, but it was her own bid that created the force. 1♥ and 4♥ are the same as in the first hand.

3.

North South

1♣ 1♥

1NT

**Answer:** Only South's 1♥ is forcing. For that bid, South could have 5 - 28 points. (Note: She can't have more since North opened.) 28 + 12 for North's opening bid = 40 which is plenty for game. 1♣, like 1♥ from the previous hands, is limited by not opening 2♣. 1NT limits North's hand to 12 - 14 point. 14 + South's minimum of 5 = 19 which is not enough for game.

4.

North South

Pass 1♣

1♥ 1NT

**Answer:** None of these bids are forcing. Same logic applied to South's bid from hand #3. The only difference is North's bid: because he originally passed, his 1♥ is now limited to 5 - 11. 11 + South's minimum of 12 = 23 is not enough to make game.

5.

North South

Pass 1♣

1♥ 2♦

**Answer:** Only South's 2♦ bid is forcing. The first bids are the same as is hand #4. For South's 2♦ bid, she must have 17 - 21 points. 21 + North's minimum of 5 = 26 which is enough for game. So, it's a forcing bid.

In this next section, you'll be given the start of an auction. Decide which continuations are forcing.

(Note: We're assuming Standard American bidding.)

1.

North South

1♥ 1♠

?

- a. 2♥
- b. 3♥
- c. 3♠

**Answer:** None of these bids is forcing. South has 5+ points. So, the question is what is the range for North's hand after any of these bids? For 2♥, it's 12 - 15. For the others, it's 16 - 18. Neither of these is enough when added to 5 to make game. So, all 3 bids are non-forcing.

2.

North South

1♥ 2♥

?

- a. 3♥
- b. 2NT
- c. 2♠

**Answer:** Only 2♠ is forcing. We saw in the first hand of the previous section that here 3♥ by North would just be invitational. Since South's 2♥ indicates that the partnership has 8+♥ (i.e. North's 5+ for the opener and South's 3+ for the raise), 2♠ must be forcing. What it means (e.g. help suit game try) is up to your partnership, but it's 100% forcing regardless. 2NT, on the other hand, is just suggesting an alternative place to play. That bid would show 18 - 19 points. Since 19 + South's minimum of 5 is not enough for game, it is NOT a forcing bid.

3.

North South

1♥ 1NT



?

- a. 3♦
- b. 2NT
- c. 2♠

**Answer:** 3♦ and 2♠ are forcing here. With either of these bids, North's maximum stays at 21. That plus South's 5+ is enough to make game, so they are forcing. 2NT, on the other hand, is just like in the previous hand: 18 - 19 points and non-forcing.

3.

North South

1♥ 2NT

?

- a. 3♥
- b. 3♦
- c. 4♣

**Answer:** Even though South **MUST** bid after any of these continuations, **NONE** of these bids is forcing. Specifically, since South's Jacoby 2NT created a game force, there is no need for additional forcing bids.