

Another Two Tidbits

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Today's lesson features questions that arose from actual deals. The first question is about how to play a particular suit combination that happens frequently. The second is about how to choose your bid when there are two different bids that describe your hand. The answers are on the other side.

**As always, please don't look at the answers
until after the lesson!**

1. North (dummy)
 ♦ K 8 7 4
- South (you)
 ♦ Q 6 5 3

You (South) are the declarer in a No Trump contract. Your combined diamond suit is as shown above. (Could be any suit, of course.) Let's think about how many tricks you can take with this suit: Obviously, you can't possibly get four tricks because you don't have the Ace. But you're guaranteed of at least one trick. And if the outstanding diamonds are split 3 – 2, then you're guaranteed of at least two tricks. (The 3 – 2 split will happen approximately 63% of the time.) In some cases, you will even be able to get three diamond tricks. Of course, it might be easier if your spot cards in the suit were better, or if the opponents broke the suit for you. However, your spot cards are awful and the opponents don't cooperate. So you're left to play this suit on your own. How do you maximize your chances of taking three tricks with this suit?

2. You have the following hand:

♠ Q J 6
♥ A Q 7 6 3 2
♦ 7 6
♣ J 3

What do you bid with this hand if...

- a. your RHO deals and opens One Club?
- b. your partner deals and passes and then your RHO opens One Club?

1. Your best chance of getting three tricks with this suit is if one of your opponents has Ace – doubleton in the suit. This will happen about 25% of the time. Not great odds, but not insignificant. The question is, which opponent has the Ace?

If one of your opponents has opened the bidding or has doubled or has even overcalled, then that opponent rates to have the Ace. If the opponents were silent throughout the auction but one opponent has already shown up with a significant number of points, then the OTHER opponent rates to have the Ace. If you truly have no clues from the bidding or from the play so far, then just pick an opponent that you hope has the Ace.

Once you've "decided" who has the Ace, start by leading a low card THROUGH that hand and playing third hand high. If your guess is correct, then you will win the trick. Now return a low card and play LOW from the other hand, and hope that your opponent is forced to play the Ace.

For example: If you suspect that East has the Ace, then lead the Four from dummy. If East plays low, play the Queen from your hand. If your suspicion is correct and East has the Ace, your Queen will win. Now return the Three from your hand and play low from dummy, hoping that East has a doubleton and will be forced to play the Ace. If this is the case, then you can eventually win the third diamond with your King, and now your fourth Diamond will be good.

Similarly, if you suspect that West has the Ace, then start by leading the Three from your hand. If West plays low, play the King from dummy. If your suspicion is correct and West has the Ace, your King will win. Now return the Four from dummy and play low from your hand, hoping that West has a doubleton and will be forced to play the Ace.

2. You have a very good 6-card suit and a few outside points as well, so certainly enough to bid your Hearts. The question is, should you bid One Heart or Two Hearts?

A simple overcall (One Heart) typically shows 8 – 15 HCP and a good 5+ card suit. Most play that a jump overcall (Two Hearts) is preemptive, showing 5 – 11 HCP and a good 6-card suit - in other words, the same sort of hand with which you would open a weak Two bid.

The point is, there is considerable overlap between the requirements for the two bids. And this particular hand happens to satisfy both, which means that you could correctly bid either One Heart or Two Hearts. So which bid should you choose?

In case (a), your partner hasn't had a chance to bid so you have no idea what he has. And in fact, partner could have a big hand and game might even be possible. Therefore, in this case I would overcall One Heart, which uses less bidding space, in the hope that partner has a good hand. For example, partner might be able to cue bid Two Clubs, establishing a force while still keeping the auction at a low level. Of course, if your opponents continue to bid, you have the option of rebidding Two Hearts to show your 6-card suit.

In case (b), your partner is a passed hand, which means that you are very unlikely to have a game anywhere. Therefore, in this case I would make a jump overcall to Two Hearts, which uses more bidding space, in the hope of disturbing your opponents' bidding and making it more difficult for them to reach their best contract.

Neither bid is wrong in either case. But in the first case, you may not want to preempt your partner, while in the second case, you definitely DO want to preempt your opponents.