

Was that Bid Forcing? - Part 2

Last month, we started focusing on the difference between forcing and invitational bids. This month we'll continue that discussion by going deeper into the topic. In particular, we'll focus on how the difference affects both our bidding and partners'. Let's quickly revisit the "forcing" scale we discussed last month:

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

While we focused mostly on distinguishing between hand types #2 and #4 last month, it can be useful to compare hand types #1 and #2 to see how it impacts our bidding. With hand type #1, we only need to bid to keep the auction alive. This allows us to describe our hand, including both shape and strength, without fear of getting passed out. And, when we run out of new things to say about our hand, we simply jump to game. On the other hand, with hand type #2, we have to actively make new bids if we want to keep the force on. As a result, any of these forcing bids requires us to have more than we've previously shown. Take the following auction:

North	East	South	West
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	2 ♥

If we're playing 2/1, then South's 2 ♣ bid is forcing to game. As we discussed a few month's ago, that means we can Pass here if our hand doesn't have a clear preference for offense or defense. Thus, any other bid we make (e.g. 2 ♠ or 3 ♣) means we have a preference for offense. And double becomes penalty oriented.

On the other hand, if we're playing Standard American, South's 2 ♣ bid is only forcing for one round. Since South will get another chance to bid, we can still Pass. But now it simply means that we don't have any extras. It also means that South is free to Pass, too. Granted, it's very unlikely, but it is possible. So, if we want to force the auction, we need to make a forcing bid: either 3 ♦ or 3 ♥. We also CAN'T force partner by bidding one of our suits: both 2 ♠ and 3 ♣ are just competing on this auction, NOT forcing.

So, if we need to make a forcing bid, what are some of the rules we should follow? While each auction is unique, there are a few general rules about forcing bids:

Forcing

- Bidding a new suit above a simple raise of your last bid (i.e. a reverse or a jump shift)

This is the first one that most players are introduced to. Since your second suit will be shorter than your first, partner will often want to go back to your first suit. But, in this case, they will have to go up another level. Compare these two auctions:

North South

1♥ 1♠

2♣

North South

1♦ 1♠

2♥

In the first auction, South can show a preference ♥ for by bidding 2♥. In most cases, she will have exactly 2♥ for this bid, otherwise she would have supported them immediately. On the second auction, she would need to go to 3♦ to show a preference for ♦. Because of this, North's bidding on the second auction shows extra strength, at least 17+ points.

- Bidding a new suit after you've agreed on a major

We talked about this one last week: if we've found an 8+ fit in a major, then we're NEVER going to try and find a better fit in another suit. So, any new suit is 100% forcing.

- Cue bidding opponent's suit

When the opponent's bid a suit, it usually shows 5+ of that suit. This includes both natural bids and conventions (e.g. Unusual 2NT which shows 5/5 in the minors). As a result, there is almost no chance that you will want to play in that suit. Even if your side has the other 8 cards in that suit, the bad trump split means that will almost certainly be better off in another suit or No Trump. Therefore, we can treat all of these cue bids by South as forcing:

North East South

1♥ 1♠ 2♠
1♥ 2♣ 3♣
1♥ 2NT 3♣

You'll generally want to agree what the meaning is (e.g. the first two show 10+ points and 3+♥, while the third can either show the same or a similar strength with 5+♠). But, regardless of meaning, it will be 100% forcing.

- Bidding a new suit after partner's made a weak bid

When partner makes a preemptive bid, she's saying two things: 1. I don't have a lot of points and 2. my hand may be worthless if my suit isn't trump. Therefore, you will need to have a VERY strong hand to bid a new suit, NOT just shortness in partner's suit. Consider the following hand:

♠ A K J 3 2
♥ A Q 10 7
♦ 10 9 8 7
♣ Void

You open 1♠ and partner, of course, bids 3♣. It may feel icky, but you need to PASS in tempo with this hand. Yes, you will likely go down in 3♣. But, how do you know you'll do any better in 3♥ or 3♦? Plus, if you bid one of those, partner's going to remember this lesson and put you in 4! When the opponents start doubling, you'll be looking at -800 or -1100. Instead, you should only bid on with something like this:

♠ A K J 7 2
♥ A K 10 7
♦ A Q 8 7
♣ Void

With this hand, you just need to find partner's outside length. Even 2♠ little might be give you a chance at 4♠!

- Many conventional bids

In some situations, there is very little chance that you will want to bid a particular sequence naturally. For example, consider this bidding sequence:

North South

1♥ 1♠

2♣

Given that North has placed 9 of his cards: 5+♥ and 4+♣, there is almost no chance that ♦ will be the final contract. So, there is pretty much no reason for South to bid 2♦ naturally. That is why most players today switch that bid to be forcing. By bidding 2♦ here, South says she has an opening hand, but isn't sure which game is right. It can also be used when South has a monster hand and is interested in slam. This convention is called **Fourth Suit Forcing**. All of these conventions also have this type of forcing bid:

- Drury - support for partner's major by a passed hand
 - Feature/Ogust - over partner's weak two bid
 - New Minor Forcing - bidding a new minor after a sequence 1Minor - 1Major - 1NT
 - XYZ - bidding 2♣ or 2♦ after a sequence 1X - 1Y - 1Z
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- Bypassing a bailout bid when partner forces us to bid

If partner has made you bid, there is usually a bid or two that says "I have nothing extra partner." Consider this sequence:

North South

2♣ 2♦

2♠

2♦ was a waiting bid, so it showed nothing. If we had bypassed it, by say bidding 2♥, we would have shown extras and been in a game forcing auction. After North's 2♠ bid, which is also 100% forcing (!), what do we bid if we have 0 points? 3♣ our second negative. If we bid anything else here, we're back to a game forcing auction. It is important to realize in these situations that bypassing the bailout bid is showing strength in the context of the auction. What does that mean? Well, in the above auction, partner is showing 22+ points. So, if we have as much as a King, then we have enough to force to game!

Non-forcing

Most of the non-forcing bids are just the reverse side of forcing bids.

- If a forcing bid is available, then any OTHER bid is non-forcing

These may seem a little but circular, but it makes more sense in a bidding context. So, consider the following sequence:

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

South's takeout Double forced partner to bid, which North obliged by bidding 2 ♣. Since North could have done this on 0 points, South needs extras to now bid 2 ♥. But, this bid is NOT forcing: it should show 17-19 points which is too much to simply overcall 2 ♥, but not enough to force to game. If South has a true monster, then she would cue bid 2 ♠ to force North to bid again.

- Making the bailout bid

If partner forces you to bid, then there needs to be a bid that says "Still nothing over here partner". For example, if North had bid 2 ♦ or 2 ♥ in the above auction, it would have only shown length in that suit, NOT points. Don't make the mistake of forcing partner to bid and then taking his response to show some points.

- Rebidding our suit
- Raising partner's suit

In both of these cases, our rebid DENIES game forcing values. Partner may still bid on, but is allowed to pass.

- Unless bypassing a bailout bid, bidding No Trump

When bid naturally, a No Trump bid puts a specific range on our hand with below game forcing values. Again, partner may still bid on, but is allowed to pass. So, the only time a No Trump bid is forcing is if it bypasses a bailout bid like this:

North	South
2 ♣	2NT

- Bidding game

Remember, the goal of a forcing bid is decide whether to stop in a partial score or not. If you bid to game, then there's no more forcing. That does NOT mean that these bids as closeouts. Consider this auction:

North	South
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1♥ 1♠

4♥

This bid shows 19 - 21 points, which is enough for game opposite South's 5+, and a self-supporting suit: either 8+ or a really strong 7, something like ♥AKQxxxx. But, what if South has closer to an opening hand? Then, she shouldn't pass, she should investigate for slam!

Quick Quiz

In each of these questions, the bidding starts the same. What is your bid with the following hands?

Is that bid forcing?

North South

1♥ 1♠

1.

♠ A J 7 2

♥ A K 10 7 3

♦ Q

♣ 10 7 2

Answer: You have 14 points and 4 ♠. So, your bid is clear: 2 ♠. Since this is a raise of partner's suit, it is NOT forcing,

2.

♠ 7 2

♥ A K 10 7 3 2

♦ Q J

♣ A 7 2

Answer: You have 14 points again, but only 2 ♠. But, you do have 6 ♥. Once again, your bid is clear: 2 ♥. Since this is a raise of your own suit, it is also NOT forcing,

3.

♠ J 2

♥ A K 10 7 3 2

♦ Q J

♣ A K Q

Answer: You have 20 points again, so you need to force to game opposite partner's 5+ points. But, you don't know which one:

- You only have 2 ♠, so raising partner's suit isn't an option
- Your ♥ aren't strong enough or long enough to insist on a 4 ♥ contract. To see this, picture partner with a void.

- Your ♦ aren't strong enough to bid 3NT

So, you're backed into the right bid: 3♣. Yes, partner will have the wrong picture of your hand (i.e. 5+♥ and 4+♣). But, it is forcing and does keep 4♥, 3NT and even 4♠ as possible landing spots.

4.

♠ J 2

♥ A K 10 7 3

♦ A J 2

♣ A Q 3

Answer: You have 19 points. With only 2♠, 5♥ and stoppers in the unbid suits, you have a clear 2NT bid: 18 - 19 flat hand. Since this limits your hand, it is NOT forcing. Yes, partner will likely bid again, but she's not forced to.

5.

♠ 2

♥ A K Q 10 7 3 2

♦ Q 6

♣ A K Q

Answer: You have 20 points, so your going to game opposite partner's 5+ points. That ♥ tells you where that game lies, so just bid 4♥. Since you've reached game, this bid is NOT forcing.

Bonus question: After your bid on #5, what would 4♠ by South mean? Would it be forcing?

Answer: Your 4♥ bid settled the trump suit. So, ANY bid by partner is looking for slam. In this case, a bid of 4♠ by South means:

- I have some values, since North's hand is capped at 21 since no 2♣ opener
- I have the A♠
- I am NOT strong enough to just blast into Blackwood with a 4Nt bid
- I may NOT have any support for North's ♥. That isn't required since South's bid says she has those covered

Examples would be:

♠ A K 8 6 2

♥ Void

♦ K 9 6 2

♣ 10 7 6 3

♠ A J 10 8 6 5 4 2

♥ 9 8

♦ K 6 2

♣ Void

In each of these auctions, decide which continuations are forcing:

1.

North South

1♥ 1♠

a. 3♠

b. 4♥

c. 3♣

d. 2♦

e. 2NT

Answer: Only c is forcing. A is raising partner's suit, so not forcing. With b, you've already bid game, so not forcing. E limits your hand to 18 - 19 points, so not forcing. Similarly, 2♦ limits your hand to 17 points, so not forcing. (Note: This one goes against the "new suit by unpassed hand is forcing" rubric, but is a more logical approach in my opinion.) That leaves 3♣ which is forcing because it is a jump shift.

2.

North South

1♥ 2♥

a. 2♠

- b. 4 ♥
- c. 3 ♣
- d. 4 ♦

Answer: Only b is NOT forcing: as above, it puts you in game. The others are new suits after South has set ♥ as trump. So, they are all forcing.

3.

North South

2 ♣

- a. 2 ♠
- b. 3 ♣
- c. 2 ♦
- d. 2NT

Answer: Only c is NOT forcing. Yes, partner will bid again after this, but that's because of his own bid, not your response. Since 2 ♦ is your default bid to North's forcing opener, all the other bids show real values. So, they ALL create a game force opposite North's 22+ points.

4.

North South

2 ♥

- a. 2 ♠
- b. 3 ♣
- c. 3 ♦
- d. 2NT

Answer: Under my approach, 2NT is a forcing bid: it either asks for a feature or for opener to describe his hand (i.e. Ogust). That means that all of these other bids are NOT forcing. This allows you to bid 3 ♦ with 7+ of them, a void in partner's ♥ and a weak hand. It does mean that you need two bids to show this type of hand (i.e. 2NT followed by 3 ♠):

♠ A K J 10 8 6

♥ Void

♦ A K 6 2

♣ K J 3

But, that's not a big deal since it will A. come up MUCH less often and B. still have a decent shot at making. With a middling hand (e.g. take away two of the Kings in the above hand), you just pass and hope the opponents get in trouble. (Note: Since this is different than the Standard American treatment: ALL of these bids are forcing there, this treatment requires an Alert for a - c.)

4.

North East South West

1♥ Double Pass

1♠ Pass 2♣

a. 2♠

b. 3♣

c. 2♥

d. 2NT

Answer: South had a forcing bid at her second turn: 2♥. So, that means that her actual bid of 2♣ is NOT forcing. It should show 17 - 19 points and 6+♣, or at least 5 very good ones.

Therefore, ANY bid by North here, even 3♣, is forcing. Specifically, it should show 7 - 9 points.

With more, you would have bid 2♥ first to show 10+ points.