

Fifth Chair



Bidding Competitively Versus Silent Opponents

It nice to hear the opponents say pass each time they get a chance to bid. It makes your life easier to make game tries and to stay at a level where you can make your contract. But these days, and especially, in Duplicate where competitive bidding is the norm, and not the exception, you need to have methods to help evaluate your hands. These methods should provide you with the best chance to stay at a level you can make your contract or go set less than their contract. These methods can also be applied to Rubber Bridge, but it is not as effective because of the total point theory.

Many players today use LTC (losing Trick Count) and LoTT (Laws of Total Tricks) to help evaluate the hands. ***** LTC and LoTT come from the bridge book, "To Bid or Not to Bid (The LAW of Total Tricks), by Larry Cohen.***** (Should any of you want emails about this, please email me directly, tarsh1@mindspring.com)

Using these methods will help your side stay out of 3 and 4-level contracts everyone used to bid in the past. Many boards have been won/lost because of the tempo of the auction. Many opponents would bid just one more time because they had a fit, only to hear DOUBLE and get set 1 or more tricks.

How do you go about staying out of these contracts if you don't have LoTT or LTC experience. You use common sense. The flatter the shape of the hand, the lower your bid should be (or the more points you need to make the bid). The shapes of 4333, 4432 and 5332 offer very little ability to ruff losers. You should be very wary of these shapes. You need at least 2 more points to make the same bid as with hands containing a singleton or void. The more shape you have in your hand, the better the chance you have to make your contract and even game of Slam.

You open 1S on AKJxx x AJT9x Jx and your partner bids 2Ss. A game try with 3Ds should be made. If partner had bid 3Ss (limit raise), bid the game. If possible, hide the 2nd 5-card suit. The opponents will not know how to defend (usually until it is too late).

This is without any competition. What happens when the opponents think they can make a contract. Now, you and your partner may have to make bids you would not normally make. You may have to make an immediate raise on either suit quality or points which would not meet your normal standards. Suit qualities might be 3 small. Points might include being a little light or a little heavy for the bid.

How does partner know you made a bid you would not normally make? Your partner doesn't and shouldn't know by either your actions or tempo of the bid.

What you should bid may depend on which side has the master suit. If the opponents are bidding Spades, you may need to bid the 4-level to win the contract. How do you know if it correct to bid one more time? Your hand is the clue. If you have length in the opponents suit (4 cards), then your partner has (or should have) at most 1. What bid did partner make originally? If partner only raised you to the 2-level, partner is probably weak or only has 3 trumps. You may end up with 2 losers in their suit if they lead trumps. It may be better to defend and try to promote your hand through making declarer Ruff in the hand with long trumps. It is usually right to force them to the 3-level. Allowing the opponents to play a contract at the 2-level will normally lose the board. If you only have 2-3 cards in the opponents suit - BEWARE, you

probably have 2 quick losers and sometimes 3-losers. Can you afford to have that happen? If those are your only losers because you and your partner have all of your honors outside of their suit, then the opponents have helped you.

Use their bid to help you evaluate your hand. Do you have length in their suit which was bid and raised? Do you have any high card points in their suits? Do you have extra shape (another 5+ card suit or 6421 or 6430). These are the key to your next bid.

Now you must let partner bid their hand.. PLEASE do not assume you know what partner has for their bid. Let your partner bid their hand. Opponents do funny things. They sometimes overcall on a 4-card suit, and partners may raise on 2-card suits.

Make your bid knowing that your partner will have the worst hand possible for the bid. Bid a second suit for 2 reasons. The first is a game try. The second is for defensive purposes. Game tries are at the 3-level lower than your original suit.

Defensive bids are anytime you force the hand to game with your bid. If you just want to compete to the 3-level, rebid your suit.

How is this all changed when you have the master suit? Not too much except that you no longer have to go a higher level to win the contract. All of the new suit bids are game tries and any bid made which forces to game are defensive signals. When to double? And when are the doubles penalty versus competitive? Again, LoTT is very important here, but partnership agreement is even more important.. One easy method to use is if there are any suits between your suit and the opponents suit. If you are bidding in Spades and they are competing in Ds, and the auction proceeds as follows: 1S 2D 2S 3Ds, then Double is for penalty, 3Hs is a game try and 3Ss is competitive with little interest in bidding game. The bid of 3Hs says nothing about Hs, but says I have very little in Ds, but want to bid 4Ss if you have help in the outside suits (1 or both). If partner has D honors, the partner would be wise to bid 3Ss only.

If the auction goes 1S 2H 2S 3H Double, the double is a game try and partner can convert it to a penalty pass, bid 3Ss or 4Ss. There was no suit available to bid between Hs and Ss, so the Double becomes the only way to make a game try. Oh yes, PASS is a possible bid. You can let partner describe their hand. If your partner has longer trumps than expected or has a stronger hand, then partner can make the appropriate bid. Don't get caught up in the tempo of the bidding. Evaluate your hand each time it is your turn to bid again. Some players are fast thinkers and therefore fast bidders and some want to push you up 1 more level. Turn the tables. Slow the tempo down and make the best bid for your hand using information obtained from previous bids. There are many clues.

If you err and make the wrong decision, go back and look at the hand. Decide how the auction should have been. This needs to be done in agreement with you and your partner. The more hands you discuss (especially competitive ones), the more times you will win the board. And please remember that you will never be perfect. You just do the best you can and recognize that with your partnership bidding style, you will lose some boards. If you win just 60% of the battles, you are doing great. Two 60% games back-to-back will win many events.