



# Adventures in Bridge

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## *This Week in Bridge*

### **(294) Unbalanced Hand Slam Bidding**

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Level: 2

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#### **General**

When we are exploring bidding a slam in a suit contract (we have a fit) and one or both members of the partnership have an unbalanced hand, then we may be able to take 12 tricks (or more) with far fewer than the traditional 33 HCP used to bid slam. When re-evaluating our hand, adding shortness points is a useful method for upgrading our hand for slam; but not all shortness is equally valuable (a singleton opposite a holding like KQJ does not help partner reduce our losers in this suit). We need to develop a more sophisticated way of determining if the hands fit together well and if we should bid slam with a large fit and fewer than expected HCP. Here we look at how to develop these hand evaluation tools.

#### **Hand Evaluation – Working and Wasted Values**

When we have a large fit (and are going to play in a suit contract), when we declare the hand we will count our losers (doing so when we see the dummy and approximating them even before) and constructing a line of play for how to get rid of the losers from the hand that we decide to develop (usually the side with the long trump). We usually do this by using the supporting hand's assets (the short trump side, frequently the dummy) to cover our losers – by filling in our suits with honors or by providing shortness for us to use for ruffing. When we use shortness to ruff our losers, we strongly prefer to be ruffing small cards, not honors.

#### *Example 1*

- xxx    opposite    x    Great singleton.
- QJx    opposite    x    Not a good singleton.

We would much rather have three small cards opposite partner's singleton and have our 3 HCP in another suit. Since we are playing to lose one trick in this suit and ruff the next two, we would rather be ruffing our small cards than our honors.

We call these honors, opposite partner's shortness, *wasted values*. We call honors opposite partner's long suits *working values*. In these auctions where we have a large fit and shortness, we want to focus on how many working values we have, not how many total points.



Wasted values are not “worthless values” but they are not located in a good position and do not help us set up as many tricks as working values.

*Example 2*

♠ AKxxx	♠ Qxxx
♥ xx	♥ AKxx
♦ KQJ	♦ x
♣ xxx	♣ Axxx

On this hand we will lose one ♦ trick (the Ace, and then our other ♦ are winners) and still lose several ♣ tricks. We would also have only one ♦ loser if we switched our ♣ and ♦ holdings (losing the ♦A and then ruffing our other two ♦), but now we would have good honors in the ♣ suit, reducing our number of losers.

### **Making Use of Working and Wasted Values**

When we play in a notrump contract or if we play in a suit contract and both our hands are extremely balanced, then all 40 HCP are considered working values. We cannot ruff any of our losers. (We call this situation the “40-point deck”, because all 40 HCP are important). But when we discover a large fit and shortness in one of the hands, then some of the HCP may become wasted (not all the HCP are working).

*Example 3*

1♠     2NT\*  
3♥\*

Here we have a large ♠ fit and Opener has a singleton ♥ (at most), so the ♥KQJ are all wasted values. When opener has a singleton, then only 34 of the HCP are working values (40 HCP – 6 points of ♥KQJ = 34) – this is called a “34-point deck” situation.

*Note: If we have a large fit and someone has a ♥ void, then only 30 HCP are working values (40 HCP – 10 points of ♥AKQJ = 30) – this is called a “30-point deck” situation.*

When we consider bidding slam with a balanced hand, we usually want to have about 33 of the 40 HCP. That is 82.5% of the HCP (of the working points). But if we have a fit and a singleton, then we are in a “34-point deck” situation (34 working points), and having about 28 of these 34 points gives about the same percentage of working points (28/34 ~ 82+%). In this case having about 28 working points usually makes slam a good contract.



*Example 4*

♠ AQxxx	♠ KJxx
♥ x	♥ xxxx
♦ AQxx	♦ Kx
♣ Qxx	♣ AKx

Here partner has no wasted values opposite our ♥J. Thus, all 28 of our combined HCP are working values. 28 of the 34 working values is enough to make slam a good contract.

Similarly, if we have a fit and a void, then we are in a “30-point” deck (30 working points) situation and we can often make slam with about 25 of the 30 working points. (25/30 ~ 83+%).

*Example 5*

♠ AQxxx	♠ KJxx
♥ --	♥ xxxx
♦ AQxx	♦ Kx
♣ JTxx	♣ KQx

Here we have only 25 HCP, but because of our ♥void there are only 30 working points on the hand. Partner has no wasted values, so all 25 of our combined HCP are working. 25 out of 30 working points is enough to make slam a good contract.

When we have a large fit and both members of the partnership have shortness, there may be even fewer working values. Let’s take a look at an extreme example.

*Example 6*

♠ AQxxxx	♠ KJxxx
♥ --	♥ xxxx
♦ xxx	♦ –
♣ KJxx	♣ Qxxx

Here we have an enormous fit and only 20 working points (only the ♣ and ♠ honors are important because we each have a void). Then having 16 of the 20 working points is about 80% and as you can see that is enough for slam on this wild hand – 16 HCP slam!



## Conclusion

When we discover a fit (particularly a large one) and introduce shortness into at least one of the hands, 12 tricks can be produced much more often, even when we do not have as many HCP. The key becomes whether our honors are located in the proper location, opposite partner's losers (length), and not opposite partner's shortness. A good way to measure this is to try to determine how many working values exist on the hand (40, 34, 30, 28 – 2 singletons, ... 20 – 2 Voids) and then determine if we have about 83% (at least 80%) of these values. If you can make this calculation (how many working values there are and how many we have) from the distributional information you receive from the auction, then you will dramatically improve your slam bidding on these distributional or low HCP slam hands. Work on making use of this method of hand evaluation.