

Competitive Bidding

Perhaps the most important attribute of good bridge players is how well they handle themselves in competitive auctions. When everyone at the bridge table is bidding it becomes a real battle. If the opponents are able to open the bidding before you've had a chance to do so, it's much harder for you and your partner to find exactly the right spot. It's now important to try and land on your feet. Thus when both sides are in the auction your objective should be to get the best score possible. (Note the difference between that and the best possible score.)

When the opponents have opened the bidding you not only WANT to be able to compete, you MUST compete. It is not necessarily to always look for or find a game but it's extremely important to find a playable partscore or to sacrifice if the opponents should happen to bid game. Since they got the first bid in they have a definite advantage; your goal just might be to get in their way thus making it hard for them to find exactly the right spot.

However, be aware that when the opponents open the bidding it is far more dangerous for you to bid. For example bidding just because you have an opening hand is not a good idea. You must change your strategy. Now it's probably only right to bid if (1) you have an extremely good hand, (2) you have a good suit and want to tell your partner what to lead, (3) you have a long suit (your side may have a good sacrifice available), and (4) you can make a takeout double to show all the unbid suits and request that partner pick a suit. But always remember to be extremely careful if you are vulnerable and the opponents aren't.

As you well know you do have some tools to use....(1) overcalling, (2) bidding NT, (3) making a t/o double, (4) making a jump overcall or a two-suited overcall of some sort. But think about one important thing before you decide to take action: Is your entry into the auction likely to help your side more than it helps the opponents? It truly is not right to always bid!

Listen carefully to the auction. Sometimes your supposedly good hand gets worse as the bidding progresses and sometimes it gets a lot better. This is the process of reevaluation and it is mandatory. For example, shortness in the opponent's suit is quite often a useful value once your side has found a trump fit, but be careful that both you and your partner don't overbid because of the shortness in one hand.

Another thing to keep in mind is that in some auctions there are suits that are considered dangerous to bid. For example in the auction 1♦ P 1NT, be extremely

careful before bidding 2♣. Similarly, after 1♦ by partner, 2♦ by your RHO, the major suits are dangerous if the opponents are playing Michaels Cuebids.

In competitive auctions you will not always be able to obtain a plus score. Often a small minus score will suffice. It is usually better to lose 50 or 100 points instead letting the opponents make 110 or 140. The Law of Total Tricks is a good guideline for when to bid and when to pass in a competitive auction. This very basic rule is that *in a competitive auction it is okay to bid to the level equal to your combined number of trumps.* If you are not familiar with this fundamental law, it might be wise to read Larry's Cohen book on the subject.

One of the simplest guidelines for competitive bidding is to (1) never let the opponents rest comfortably in the spot they wish to play in. If they think it's good for them, then it must be not good for you. Other competitive bidding rules include:

(2) Since finding a good fit is so important in a competitive auction, until a fit is found, any new-suit bid usually promises a 5-card suit and at least 8-9+ HCP's at the one level and 10+ at the two level. (With considerably emphasis on the +'s)

(3) Any notrump bid promises a stopper in the suit the opponents bid.

(4) Game is not your primary concern in a competitive auction but occasionally you would like to invite game. Since jump bids in competitive auctions are generally preemptive, cuebids, redoubles, non-jump new-suit bids at the two level or higher and 2NT all indicate at least invitational values.

(5) Once both sides have found a fit, the question that now needs to be answered is: Should we let the opponents have the contract, should we bid one more, or should we perhaps make a penalty double? Your decision here should likely be based on your distribution: (a) If you have an 8-card fit, you should always bid at the 2-level over the opponents (thus 2♠ over 2♥) and (b) you should usually go the the 3-level with a 9-card fit.

For example: Starting with your RHO, 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 3♥ ? Should you pass or should you bid 3♠? The quick and easy answer is: (1) With only three card spade support (an 8-card fit) you should either pass or make a cooperative double, and (2) with four card support (a 9-card fit) you should bid 3♠. Of course all these actions assume that you do have SOME values.

defense so you simply double....saying in effect that you are too good to just pass but are also unsure that bidding 3♥ is right. Likely the decision to pass or bid on is now in your partner's hands. Since this situation comes up quite often, it could well be advisable to adopt competitive doubles in your partnership.

A more specific competitive double is called a maximal double. This type of double is used in a competitive auction where the auction has become too crowded for any alternative approach to exchange information. For example:

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	2 ♥	2 ♠	3 ♥
?			

Using the Maximal Double, (a) South can sign-off in 3♠ by simply bidding 3♠, or (b) South can invite game by doubling East's 3♥ bid. Notice that there is no room for a game try using a new suit. Thus in competitive auctions, a distinction is generally made between auctions in which there is room for a game try and those in which there is no room. In the above example you will notice that the auction involves the opponents bidding a suit which is exactly one rank below your suit. If the suit of the opponents is not just one suit below the maximum suit, then other approaches can apply, and the Maximal Double is not necessary. For example the partnership agreement should probably be that any available side suit that can be bid constitutes a general game try. In the following auction 3♥ by South would be a game try saying nothing about hearts while 3♠ is simply competitive.

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	2 ♦	2 ♠	3 ♦
?			

As a friend of mine says: "Work, work, work." That's what competitive bidding is all about.

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