



Bridge- The Next Level

Week 38 –
Sacrificing

What is SACRIFICING?

Sacrificing is bidding a contract that you don't really expect to make, either

1. Because you think the penalty for going off is less than the opposition will score by playing and making their contract.
2. Because you want to push the opposition higher, to make it harder for them to make their contract.

For example, If the opposition are bidding in hearts, and your partner makes a spade overcall, and the opposition bid confidently to 4♥, you might decide to overcall 4♠, not expecting 4♠ to be makeable.

You have made life difficult for the opposition. Do they bid on to 5♥, and risk going down when 4♥ was making, or do they double your 4♠?

This is when both sides need a strong grasp of the scoring, to help decide.

This is a key reason why we all need to be familiar with the scoring! And vulnerability is crucial.

If the side bidding hearts is non-vulnerable, they will score **420** for making 4♥. If you are vulnerable, and bid 4♠, and they double you (which they should, if they're not going to bid 5♥) then the penalty for going down is

1 off: 200

2 off: **500**

3 off: **800**

So your bid of 4♠ is a dodgy prospect – you need to make 9 tricks or your sacrifice is a bad idea! If you only make 8, you're going for -500, against -420 for the opposition making 4♥ (or perhaps -450 for 4♥ +1; it matters not).

And even that assumes that their 4♥ is going to make at least 10 tricks.

If the vulnerability is the other way about, they will score **620** for making 4♥. Assuming they double your 4♠, the penalty for going down non-vulnerable doubled is

1 off: 100

2 off: 300

3 off: 500

4 off: **800**

So your sacrifice is working, if you make at least 7 tricks in 4♠ 
(only of course if their 4♥ would have made!)

The forcing pass

What if you are faced with the opposition overcalling your game contract, just like the situation above, except this time it's your 4♥ that the opposition have overcalled 4♠.

You, and probably your partner, are pretty sure the contract should be your side's, but the opposition have stolen it. You think 4♠ is probably going down, but perhaps by only a trick or two, and even if you double it's a poorer score than your game contract if you can make 5♥.

But you're unsure from your hand what's best. What to do?

The forcing pass

You can PASS the opposition overcall round to partner, effectively saying “you decide”.

Partner then must either double, or bid 5♥. What she must not do is pass their 4♠ and let them steal your contract undoubled.

So your pass in this situation is called a forcing pass: it forces partner to make a call, either to double or to bid on.

Lower level sacrifices

Sacrificing is a bit easier at part-score level, for two reasons.

- 1 A lower level contract is more likely to be makeable than a game contract – you need to make fewer tricks.
- 2 The opposition are less likely to double you for penalties: for example, say you overcall an opposition 2♥ with 2♠, hoping to either do better than their 110 (for 2♥ making 8 tricks), or to push them up to 3♥. If they double your 2♠ they are doubling you into game: if your 2♠ makes, you score the game bonus, just as if you'd made 10 tricks in 4♠. Doubling 2 of a major (or 3 of a minor) for penalties doubles the contract into game, so the risk-reward is somewhat skewed against doubling.

But you should still be cautious when the vulnerability is against you.

In duplicate bridge, if the opposition at every other table is making 2♣ or 2♦, they're scoring +90. So if at your table you overcall 2♥ or 2♠, and go 1 down undoubled, your 1 off vulnerable gives the opposition +100: a likely top for them, and a likely bottom for you.

It is vital to pay attention to how the scoring works.

-100 is a bad result if the opposition stood to make 90 for 2♣ or 2♦, but a good result if they stood to make 110 for 2♥ or 2♠.

In duplicate bridge, that 10 points either way can make all the difference between a bottom and a top.

How gung-ho should I be about sacrificing?

It's good bridge to be aggressive when the vulnerability is in your favour, and when the bidding is at a low level,

but

caution is generally the best policy, if the bidding is at a high level, and the vulnerability is against you.

It's a statement of the obvious that a sacrifice bid does not pay off if you are left to play (doubled, of course), unless

- your penalty score for going down is less than they would have scored by making their contract.

AND

- the opposition were actually going to make their contract!

Beware of the “phantom sacrifice” : the situation where you make a sacrifice bid, go off, and then find the opposition contract wasn't making anyway. It's often not easy to judge.

But that's not to say you should always avoid making frisky bids!

There are some circumstances when it can pay off- as we'll see in a moment.

Have we any other tips to help us decide whether to sacrifice, or to let the opposition play in their contract?

Assess your hand in terms of defensive assets (features that give you a better chance of taking tricks in defence) and assets that would be worth more if your side is declaring. If you are short in their suit, a long solid suit of your own is likely to be near worthless in defence – declarer will be trumping those. So your inclination would be to bid on.

If your values are scattered in several suits, your hand is probably better in defence.

Pay attention to the bidding – what partner has bid (or not bid!) – and the route the opposition have taken to reach their contract. If they have got there reluctantly, especially if forced by overcalling by your side – then defence might be the better option.

If you are going to sacrifice, do it boldly, and in one go- don't take two bites of the cherry.

Don't give the opposition the chance to exchange more information, and don't appear doubtful – you are far more likely to be doubled if you do.

Late sacrifices are generally a bad idea - the opponents have no sensible option other than to double. Advance sacrifices are much better – because now there is a good chance the opponents will bid on (eg bidding 5♠ over your 5♦). And if they do bid on, your sacrifice bid can never lose. It will break even if 5♠ makes; and gain a big dividend when 5♠ is one down.

Here are three auctions in progress – the bidding is not yet finished.

How would you rate West's decision making, out of 10?

No1	West	North	East	South
		1♥	2♦	2♥
	3♦	4♥	Pass	Pass
	5♦	?		

How would you rate West's decision making, out of 10?

No1	West	North	East	South
		1♥	2♦	2♥
	3♦	4♥	Pass	Pass
	5♦	?		

I'd give West 0/10. She has taken the dreaded two bites of the cherry. If she intended bidding to 5♦, she should have bid it the first time.

No2

West

North

East

South

Pass

4♠

4♦

Pass

5♦

?

Pass

Pass

No2	West	North	East	South
			4♦	Pass
	Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass
	5♦	?		

3/10. West has delayed raising partner. The reasoning is understandable – she hoped her partner’s opening pre-empt of 4♦ would buy the contract, but now North has had the chance to bid 4♠, she is regretting giving the opposition a chance to get into the auction.

No3

West

North

East

South

1♥

2♦

2♠

5♦

?

No3	West	North	East	South
		1♥	2♦	2♠
	5♦	?		

10/10 to West.

A classic advance sacrifice, hoping North, with as yet undisclosed spade support, will bid 5♠. If she does, West's 5♦ bid can't lose. If 5♠ is making, there is nothing lost, and if it's making 10 tricks, the 5♦ bid is a huge win.

Frisky bids

A bid we would call “frisky” is one which is basically unsound, but you’re relying on the fact that the opposition don’t know that, and there’s a lot to gain by making the bid. Here’s an example, which I’ve taken from Andrew Robson’s book “What Should Have Happened”:

♠ 10 8 6 5	♠ K Q J 3	♠ 9 4 2
♥ A J	♥ 8 7 4 2	♥ 6 3
♦ 9 7	♦ 10 8 3 2	♦ A K Q J 5
♣ Q J 10 9 8	♣ K	♣ 7 4 2
	♠ A 7	
	♥ K Q 10 9 5	
	♦ 6 4	
	♣ A 6 5 3	

Dealer South, NS vulnerable

♠ K Q J 3
 ♥ 8 7 4 2
 ♦ 10 8 3 2
 ♣ K

♠ 10 8 6 5
 ♥ A J
 ♦ 9 7
 ♣ Q J 10 9 8

♠ A 7
 ♥ K Q 10 9 5
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ A 6 5 3

♠ 9 4 2
 ♥ 6 3
 ♦ A K Q J 5
 ♣ 7 4 2

South is dealer, NS vulnerable

	West	North	East	South
				1♥
	Pass	3♥	Pass	4♥
	Pass	Pass	Pass	
	Contract 4♥ by South.			

Nothing remarkable here. A routine 4♥ contract.

West would almost certainly lead ♣Q, when declarer has an easy ride. She wins K♣, and plays on spades, discarding her two losing diamonds from hand on the spades. The 4th spade is ruffed, and opposition take A♥, but that's 11 tricks and game made +1.

♠ K Q J 3
 ♥ 8 7 4 2
 ♦ 10 8 3 2
 ♣ K

♠ 10 8 6 5
 ♥ A J
 ♦ 9 7
 ♣ Q J 10 9 8

♠ 9 4 2
 ♥ 6 3
 ♦ A K Q J 5
 ♣ 7 4 2

♠ A 7
 ♥ K Q 10 9 5
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ A 6 5 3

South is dealer, NS vulnerable

	West	North	East	South
	Pass	3♥	4♦ !!	1♥
	Pass	Pass	Pass	4♥
Contract 4♥ by South.				

But watch what happens if East makes a “frisky” intervention of 4♦, desperate for a diamond lead. She risks the unsound ♦ bid, and bids it **CONFIDENTLY**. South can’t know that 4♦ would go 4 off, so makes the natural game bid of 4♥.

Now West, on lead, leads ♦9, which she’d never have found without her partner’s bid. East cashes two top diamonds and leads a 3rd top diamond. Declarer is now sunk. If she ruffs low, West over-ruffs with J♥ and has the A♥ for the setting trick. If she ruffs high with the Q♥, West just discards, and her J♥ is promoted. (Can you see that- why West mustn’t overruff Q♥ with the A♥? If she discards, she now holds AJ over declarer’s K, and her A♥ and J♥ must each take a trick.)

South is 1 down, all because East chose to make a frisky bid.

Let's practice these ideas by playing some hands.

Any questions?

