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This Week in Bridge

(261) Supporting Partner's Suit – Bid Early

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Level: 2

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General

When we have a fit for the suit that partner bids, one of our guiding principles for bidding is the *Law of Total Tricks* (LOTT - the simple version of this guideline is to compete to the level of the size of our fit). But because there are so many different sizes of fit and different strengths of hands, we do not always have the ability to show both our fit and values with one call. Many of the innovations in bidding theory over the last few decades have concerned constructing conventions that attempt to give us more ways to raise partner, especially in competitive auctions. When we have a relatively strong hand, we may need more than one bid to describe our hand entirely, but when we have a weaker hand it is important that we describe our hand as early as possible. In doing so we take away valuable bidding space from the opponents and force them to make the final decision. Let's look at some examples of how we apply the common advice of "support with support".

Raising Partner's Suit in Competition

When partner opens 1♥ or 1♠ and the next player makes an overcall (or a takeout double), with a weak hand we apply the LOTT and raise partner immediately – usually to the 3-level with 4-card support and the 4-level with 5-card support. But with a medium-valued hand of 7-9 points and 4-card support, we do not usually have a way to show our entire hand (both fit and strength) in one call. We must attempt to describe our hand using two different bids.

Example 1

1♠ 2♣ 2♠

This shows 6-9 points and 3+cards in ♠ (usually 3-4 cards). 2♠ is the bid we must make with these values, even though we hold 4-card support. We do not have a way to show our values and 4-card support in one call (a jump to 3♠ would show our 4-card support, but a weaker hand, 0-6 pts). If the opponents compete in the bidding further, then we can apply the LOTT and describe the size of our fit for partner by competing to 3♠.



Mixed Raises

In the above auction we did not have a way to show both 4-card support and 7-9 points, but in some auctions we have a way to show this entire hand in one bid. This bid is called a *Mixed Raise*.

Example 2

1♥ 1♠ X ___?

In this auction a *simple raise* to 2♠ shows 7-9 pts and 3-card support (sometimes 4-card). A *jump raise* to 3♠ shows 0-6 points and 4-card support. But if we have a mix of the two bids, 7-9 points and 4-card support, we would like to be able to show more trump than bidding 2♠ and more values than bidding 3♠. We can do this by making a *jump cuebid* of 3♥ as the Advancer. This shows 4-card support (applying the LOTT and taking the auction to the 3-level) and 7-9 points (more values than bidding 3♠). In this competitive auction we are fortunate to have a bid that shows our entire hand in one call.

Limit Raises

Sometimes we hold 5-card support for partner's Major suit and a hand that has about limit raise values and need to show both our length and strength. Let's look of an example of how to show this awkward hand.

Example 3

Partner opens 1♠, RHO overcalls 2♣, and we hold:

♠ AJxxx

♥ xx

♦ KQxx

♣ xx

Here if we apply the LOTT and bid 4♠, we massively undervalue the strength of our hand since a jump to 4♠ is a preemptive action, showing 5-card support and less than 8 HCP. In order to describe this hand, we need to use multiple bids. We start by making a cuebid of 3♣, showing a limit raise or better (LR+). This shows our values, and later we apply the LOTT and bid 4♠ if partner tries to stop short of game. Again, we do not have one bid to show both our fit and strength. We are forced to use two rounds of bidding to describe our hand.



Raising Partner's Preempt – No Check Raises

Whenever we can show our hand using one bid we should strive to do so. This is particularly true when partner opens the bidding with a preempt.

Example 4

When partner opens the bidding with 2♣, we should extend the preempt to the level to which we want to compete immediately – usually this means bidding 3♠ with 3-card support or 4♠ with 4-card supporting (applying the LOTT).

What we should not do is fail to apply the LOTT early and then attempt to compete in the bidding later. Do not try to buy the contract too cheaply; good opponents will not allow you to do so anyway.

Example 5

2♠	P	P	3♣
P	P	3♠	

This auction is sometimes called a “check raise” (pass and then raise). Try to avoid doing it! This bidding is bad strategically because it forces us to guess what to do last and it allows the opponents to exchange information, thus putting them in a more educated and cooperative situation for bidding over our 3♠ bid. Instead, if we raise to 3♠ immediately, we force them to guess last and to do so with as little information as possible.

Conclusion

Raising partner's suit is an important part of bridge. Partnerships often dedicate large amounts of their time to making agreements or learning conventions that help them show a fit. We strive to communicate both fit and values to partner as quickly as possible. In doing so we should make our decisions about how much we want to bid early in the auction and do so as quickly as possible. If you can learn to apply pressure and do so quickly, you will become a dangerous player who forces the opponents into difficult decisions. They will frequently get these wrong and you will profit from it.