

Beating The Experts At IMPs Part III
Explore, Explore, Explore
By Spencer Hurd

Have you ever said, Sorry, Partner, I bid too quickly? Most of us have. In the context of Throwing It Away, bidding (or taking a decision) without seeking information is a very common error. Here we consider the responsibility to avoid bidding too rashly.

In the following familiar auction, do you and your partner have methods or agreements?

You	Partner
1S	2S
?	

In 2/1 (Two Over One) or SAYC (Standard American Yellow Card), the 2S bid is mildly constructive. With weak hands, but hands with spade support, one uses the forcing 1NT followed by a return to 2S. Opener doesn't know that you have more than 2 spades and neither will the opponents.

Therefore, after a simple raise to 2S, don't rush to pass or to jump to 4S. *Consider an intermediate bid when you have an intermediate hand.*

The experts have many forward going bids which force only to 3S and which are game tries. You should play some of them or simple variations of them. For instance, you as opener might rebid as follows after a major suit raise:

Pass no apparent game opposite even a nice 9-point response.

2NT either natural (16-17 and semi-balanced with 5 spades, good stoppers) or inquiring with some other hand (and forcing in either case). This bid should be alerted: Not necessarily natural, and forcing one round.

3C some holding in clubs which could use help, a so-called help-suit game try.

3D same thing, a help-suit

3H a 4-card suit, natural. You expect a raise to 4H or a bid of 3S or 4S by partner.

(Of course, all these bids might show a very long second suit or a hand where you will eventually insist on game but we are concentrating on hands which are in-between and in which the final contract desirable is not obvious.)

Example hands (You opened 1S and partner raised to 2S.)

1. ♠KJ875 ♥AQT ♦852 ♣AQ - Bid 2NT. Many probably would have opened 1NT but things are going well. If partner raises to 3NT (probably 9 points with 3-3-3-4 shape) just pass. If he bids 3S, pass. If he bids three of a new suit (showing where his values are) bid game in spades unless he bids 3D in which case bid 3NT. Don't jump to 4S or 3NT (and certainly don't pass) with this hand. Explore and ask partner.
2. ♠KQJ875 ♥AT9 ♦8 ♣A62 - If you bid ssgt or short suit game tries (alertable), this is the hand for it and you will bid 3D. For the rest of us, something else is necessary. But the hand is too good to pass, and not good enough to jump to 4S (each is rash). I suggest **either** 3C or 2NT. The 3C bid is cheap and semi-natural and asks for help in clubs partner has room to bid 3D or 3H to be forward going but not going past 3S). Partner can't pass 3C you are committed to playing a spade contract. On the other hand, if you bid 2NT, you intend it as inquiring not natural (partner doesn't know which). You must listen to Partner's response and decide whether to stop in 3S or bid 4S. If he raises to 3NT, you will have to bid 4S on this hand (NEVER bid 3NT on blind auctions with a singleton it's bad matchpoints and horrible IMP bidding). If he bids 3C or 3H, showing where some of his values are, I would go to 4S. If he bids 3D, I would sign off with 3S.
3. ♠KJT85 ♥AQT3 ♦J5 ♣A3 - Pass is close, but I would make the value bid of 3H. I think this is best played as forcing to 3S at least (so partner can't pass 3H), and yes you might get overboard once in a while but you will be playing the same contract as the experts at the other table.
4. ♠KQT75 ♥AJT ♦8 ♣AK65 - Bid 3C. Slam is possible if the responder has a hand like this:
♠A843 ♥9 ♦765 ♣QJ743.
Opposite almost any raise to 2S, game is of course very likely, but jumping to 4S is rash. Explore you can't find a miracle slam-fit if you don't look for it. A possible auction with these cards:

You	Pard
1S	2S
3C	4C
4D	4H
4NT	5C*
6S	

* showing one key-card.

Notice honest cue-bidding will be unsuccessful. If you cue-bid 4H over Pard's 4C bid, he has little choice except 4S. But if you cue-bid your singleton (thecheapest bid possible) Pard has room to bid 4H. As you have the ace, you might wonder what he holds for his bidding, but he is slam bidding! On the same auction, Partner might hold
 ♠A843 ♥K97 ♦76 ♣Q743.

We can milk the hand

♠A843 ♥9 ♦765 ♣QJ743

for one more idea.

You	Pard
1S	2S
3C	4H

4H is a splinter bid showing support for clubs with heart shortness. Most unnecessary jumps are splinter bids in Flight A. Now slam is clearer and 6C is a good contract too.

5. ♠KQJxx ♥QJT ♦8 ♣AJ65 - Again, a pass is close, but you should bid 3C and hope your partner has Axx, Kxx, xxx, T9xx. With this, she responds with 3H (which would mean, I don't have quite enough to bid 4S but I do have a heart card.). And you can bid 4S. If Pard responds 3D, just bid 3S signing off.

6. ♠KQJxx ♥QJT ♦85 ♣AJ6 - Pass, compare with hand 5.

In all of these hands, notice what an advantage you have over others who do not play 1NT Forcing. They must raise to 2S on many hands less robust than in your system, and game tries would be risky opposite such lighter raises.

As an offshoot of all these ideas, look at this auction:

You	Pard
1S	1NT
2C	2S

The 1NT bid is forcing one round. Opener may have only a 3-card club suit. In theory, pard, for his return to spades, may have up to about nine points with usually 2 spades only. In theory, this is not a fit auction. However, most two-over-one players use this auction for many minimum raises which do not qualify for an immediate 2S bid. For example, these are all possibilities for Pard's hand:

- 6a. ♠Qxx ♥9 ♦J6532 ♣QJ3.
- 6b. ♠Qxx ♥976 ♦J7652 ♣Q3.
- 6c. ♠Jxx ♥K95 ♦7652 ♣QJ6. (about max)
- 6d. ♠876 ♥KQT9 ♦765 ♣743.
- 6e. ♠876 ♥T96432 ♦7 ♣A43
- 6f. ♠J976 ♥QT96 ♦7 ♣7432
- 6g. ♠Q76 ♥T943 ♦7652 ♣74

All of these are too weak for a direct raise to 2S in two-over-one.

Normally, opponents are well advised not to balance against auctions in which the opponents employ a forcing NT. If they haven't found a fit, why should you hunt for a fit at the 3-level? But opponents may well have a good fit on some of these hands! They may even have a game. Opener, with any minimum sort of hand, doesn't need to know if you have real trash with some spade support or a chunky nine count with only 2 spades. If 6g is an extreme case to you, well, it was bid against me by a player with over 50 thousand master points.

One principle is this: try to keep the bidding open despite the lack of high cards when you have a little support for opener's major suit.

A little warning. None of this applies to a 3rd seat 1S opening. We play a 1NT response to a third seat one spade as semi-forcing. This means opener will pass 1NT with all 12-13 point hands which have 5-3-3-2 distribution, and will pass with most 14 point hands which are of this type.

(mabcbridge)